Crito

Plato

Translated by Benjamin Jowett*

SOCRATES. Why have you come at this hour, Crito? It must be quite early.

CRITO. Yes indeed.

SOCRATES. What is the exact time?

CRITO. The dawn is breaking.

SOCRATES. I wonder why the keeper of the prison let you in.

CRITO. He knows me, because I often come, Socrates; moreover, I have done him a favor.

SOCRATES. And have you just arrived?

CRITO. No, I came some time ago.

SOCRATES. Then why did you sit and say nothing, instead of awakening me at once?

CRITO. Why, indeed, Socrates, I myself would rather not have all this sleeplessness and sorrow. But I have been wondering at your peaceful slumbers, and that was the reason I did not wake you. I wanted you to be out of pain. I have always thought you happy in the calmness of your temperament; but never did I see the like of the easy, cheerful way in which you bear this calamity.

SOCRATES. Well, Crito, when a man has reached my age, he should not get upset at the prospect of death.

CRITO. And yet other old men find themselves in similar misfortunes, and age does not prevent them from getting upset.

SOCRATES. That may be. But you have not told me why you come at this early hour.

CRITO. I come to bring you a message which is sad and painful; not, as I believe, to yourself, but to all of us who are your friends, and saddest of all to me.

SOCRATES. What! I suppose that the ship has come from Delos, on the arrival of which I am to die?

CRITO. No, the ship has not actually arrived, but she will probably be here today, as people who have come from Sunium tell me that they saw it there; and therefore tomorrow, Socrates, will be the last day of your life.

SOCRATES. Very well, Crito; if such is the will of the gods, that's fine. But I believe that there will be a delay of a day.

CRITO. Why do you say this?

SOCRATES. I will tell you. I am to die on the day after the arrival of the ship?

CRITO. Yes, that is what the authorities say.

SOCRATES. But I do not think that the ship will be here until tomorrow. I get this from a dream which I had last night, or rather only just now, when you fortunately allowed me to sleep.

CRITO. What was the dream?

SOCRATES. I saw a woman, fair and beautiful, dressed in white. She came to me and said:

> "Socrates, the third day from now you shall go to Phthia."

CRITO. What a strange dream, Socrates!

SOCRATES. There can be no doubt about the meaning, Crito, I think.

CRITO. Yes, the meaning is only too clear. But, my beloved Socrates, let me ask you once more to take my advice and escape. For if you die I shall not only lose a friend who can never be replaced, but there will be another evil: people who do not know you and me will believe that I might have saved you if I had been willing to give money, but I did not care. Now, can there be a worse disgrace than this—that I should be thought to value money more than the life of a friend? Because people will not believe that I wanted you to escape and that you refused.

SOCRATES. But why, my dear Crito, should we care about the opinion of the people? Good men, and they are the only persons who are worth considering, will think of these things truly as they happened.

CRITO. But don't you see, Socrates, that the opinion of the people matters, as is evident in your own case, because they can do great evil to any one who has lost their good opinion?

SOCRATES. I only wish, Crito, that they could—for then they could also do great good, which would be excellent. But the truth is, they can do neither good nor evil. They cannot make a man wise or foolish and whatever they do is the result of chance.

*The original text was edited to enhance legibility.

CRITO. Well, I will not argue with that. But please tell me, Socrates, whether you are not acting out of regard to me and your other friends. Are you not afraid that if you escape we may get into trouble for having stolen you away and lose either the whole or a great part of our property or that even something worse may happen to us? If this is your fear, be at ease. In order to save you, we ought surely to run this, or even a greater, risk. So listen to me and do as I say.

SOCRATES. Yes, Crito, that is one fear that I have, but by no means the only one.

CRITO. Fear not. There are persons who at no great cost are willing to save you and bring you out of prison. Their demands are not excessive. A little money will satisfy them. My means, which, I am sure, are plenty, are at your service, and if you have reservations about spending mine, there are strangers who will give you the use of theirs. One of them, Simmias the Theban, has brought a sum of money for this very purpose and Cebes and many others are willing to spend their money too.

I say therefore, do not for this reason hesitate about making your escape, and do not say, as you did in the court, that you would find it hard knowing what to do with yourself if you escape. People will be glad to have you in other places where you may go. There are friends of mine in Thessaly, if you would like to go there, who will value and protect you and no Thessalian will give you any trouble. Nor can I think that you are justified, Socrates, in betraying your own life when you might be saved. This would be playing into the hands of your enemies.

Moreover, you would be betraying your children, because instead of bringing them up and educating them, you leave them and they will be left on their own. If they avoid the usual fate of orphans, that will only be due to their good luck. No man should bring children into the world who is unwilling to persevere to the end in their nurture and education. But you are choosing the easier way out, I think, instead of the better and more courageous one that would be chosen by those who seek virtue in all their actions, like yourself.

Indeed, I am ashamed not only of you, but all of us who are your friends, when I consider that this entire business of yours will be attributed to our lack of courage. The trial should have never happened and it should not have happened the way it did. But in the end, the most absurd part of the whole affair is that it will seem to have been permitted by us, through cowardice and lack of resolution—by us, who might have saved you, as you might have saved yourself, if we had been good for anything, given that there was no difficulty in escaping. As if we couldn't see how disgraceful and miserable all of this will be for us as well as you.

Make your mind up then, or rather have your mind already made up, for the time of deliberation is over. There is only one thing to be done, which must be done, if at all, this very night, and which any delay will render impossible. I ask you therefore, Socrates, to be persuaded by me and do as I say.

SOCRATES. Dear Crito, your willingness to help is invaluable, if you are right; but if you are wrong, the greater the willingness, the more out of place it is. Therefore we ought to consider the matter carefully. I am and always have been one of those who want to be guided by reason, whatever the reason may be which upon reflection appears to be the best. And now that this misfortune has happened, I cannot put away the reasons which I have before given, the principles which I have up until now followed and respected and I still do. Unless we can find other and better principles in this case, I am certain not to agree with you, not even if the power of the masses could inflict more imprisonments, confiscations, deaths, frightening us like children.

But what would be the best way of considering the question? Shall I return to your old argument about what people think? Sometimes what people think should be taken into account, but at other times, as we were saying, it should not be. Were we right in maintaining this before I was condemned? Has the argument which once looked strong now proves to be just talk—a vain amusement only? That is what I want to consider with your help, Crito. Whether, under my present circumstances, the argument appears to be in any way different. Whether it should be accepted or not. The argument, which, as I believe, is maintained by many who assume to know such things, was that the opinions of some people should be listened to, but the opinions of others should not. Now you, Crito, are an impartial person who is not going to die tomorrow—at least, there is no real chance of this and you are therefore not liable to be deceived by the circumstances in which you are placed.

Tell me then, whether I am right in saying that some opinions, and the opinions of some people only, should matter, and other opinions, and the opinions of other people, should not matter. I ask you whether I was right in claiming this?

CRITO. You were certainly right.

SOCRATES. That good opinions should be listened to, but bad opinions should not?

CRITO. Yes.

SOCRATES. And the opinions of the knowledgeable are good, and the opinions of the ignorant are bad?

CRITO. Of course.

SOCRATES. And what was the analogy we used? Is the gymnast supposed to care about the praise and criticism

and opinion of everyone, or of one person only—his physician or trainer, whoever that is?

crito. Of one person only.

socrates. And he ought to worry about the criticism and welcome the praise of that one only, and not of others?

crito. That is clear.

socrates. And he ought to live and train, and eat and drink in the way which seems good to the expert who has understanding, rather than according to the opinion of the masses?

crito. True.

socrates. And if he disobeys and disregards the opinion and approval of the expert, and regards the opinion of the many who have no understanding, will he not suffer harm?

crito. Certainly he will.

socrates. And what will the harm be, what will it affect, in the person who does not listen?

crito. It will affect the body. That is what is destroyed by the harm.

socrates. Very good. But isn't this true, Crito, also of other things which we could mention? In the matter of just and unjust, fair and unfair, right and wrong, which are the subjects of our present discussion, should we fear and follow the opinion of the many, or the opinion of those who have understanding? Shouldn't we value and respect their opinion more than that of everyone else? If we don't follow their advice, don't we damage and destroy that part of us which can be improved by justice and injured by injustice? Or is this all wrong?

crito. Certainly not wrong, Socrates.

socrates. Take another example. If, acting on the advice of people who have no understanding, we destroy that which can be made better by healthy things and made worse by unhealthy things—that is, the body—would life still be worth living?

crito. No.

socrates. And would life still be worth living, if the higher part of us is destroyed—the part that is improved by justice and corrupted by injustice? Do we suppose this part, whatever it may be, is inferior to the body?

crito. Certainly not.

socrates. More important, then?

crito. Far more important.

socrates. Then, my friend, we should not care about what the masses will say about us. We should care only about what those who have understanding of justice and injustice will say and what the truth will be. You were wrong when you suggested that we should listen to the opinion of the many on justice and injustice, right and wrong, good and bad.

But now of course you will say, "but the many can kill us."

crito. Yes, Socrates, that's clearly the case.

socrates. Yes, it is. But I am still surprised that the old argument is as strong as ever. And now I would like to know whether we can say the same of another argument—that the most important thing is not to live, but to live a good life?

crito. Yes, that also holds.

socrates. And a good life is equivalent to a just and honorable life—does that also hold?

crito. It does.

socrates. From these premises I proceed to argue the question whether I ought or ought not to try and escape without the consent of the Athenians. If I am clearly right in escaping, then I will make the attempt; but if not, I will abstain.

The other considerations you mention—about money and loss of character and the duty of educating children—I'm afraid are only the opinions of the masses who would be as ready to bring people back to life, if they were able, as they are ready to put them to death—and with as little reason.

But now, since we need to follow where the argument leads us, the question that remains is whether it would be right to escape and let others help the escape by paying them. If it would be wrong, my death or any other suffering which may result from my remaining here must not be allowed to enter into the calculation.

crito. I think that you are right, Socrates. How should we proceed?

socrates. Let us consider the matter together. You either refute me if you can, and then I will be convinced. But if not, my dear friend, stop repeating to me that I ought to escape against the wishes of the Athenians. I really want to be persuaded by you, but not against my own better judgment. And now consider my first point and do your best to answer me.

crito. I will do my best.

socrates. Do we say that we should never intentionally do wrong? Or that there are some ways in which we may act unjustly and other ways in which we should not? Or is acting unjustly, as we have often said in the past, never in any way good or right? Can all our former claims, after the last few days, be thrown away? Have we, grown men at our age, been earnestly talking with one another all our life only to discover that we are no better than children? Or should we accept, despite the opinion of the many and regardless of the consequences, the truth of what we have always claimed: that injustice is always wrong and it is bad for the person who acts unjustly? Should we accept this?

crito. Yes.

socrates. Then we must do no wrong?

crito. Certainly not.

socrates. Not even when we are wronged can we act unjustly in retaliation, despite what many people think,

because we must never act unjustly.

crito. Clearly not.

socrates. What about harming people, Crito, should we ever do that?

crito. Surely not, Socrates.

socrates. How about harming people in retaliation, when we are harmed by them first—which is what most people say we should do? Is that just or unjust?

crito. Unjust.

socrates. Is that because harming people is not different from treating them unjustly?

crito. That is correct.

socrates. In that case, we should never act unjustly in retaliation nor harm anyone no matter how we've been treated by them. But make sure, Crito, that you really mean what you are saying. For this opinion has never been held, and never will be held, by most people and there is no common ground between those who agree and those who do not. Each side necessarily regards that other side's opinion with contempt. So you too must think very hard about it. Do you agree that it is never right to act unjustly, or act unjustly in retaliation, or when you are harmed, defend yourself by harming people by retaliation? Can that be the premise of our argument? Or do you reject it? I have held this for a long time and it is still my opinion. But if you have a different opinion, let me hear what you have to say. But if you stand by what we said earlier, then I will proceed to the next step of the argument.

crito. You may proceed, because I have not changed my mind.

socrates. Then I will proceed to the next step, which may be put in the form of a question. Should a man do what he admits to be right or may he do something else?

crito. He ought to do what he thinks is right.

socrates. But if that is true, what follows? In escaping from prison against the will of the Athenians, do I wrong anyone? Or rather do I not wrong those whom I ought to wrong the least? Do I not desert the principles which were accepted by us to be just? What do you say?

crito. I cannot answer, Socrates, because I don't know.

socrates. Then consider the matter this way. Suppose that I am about to run away (or whatever we want to call it), and the laws and the state come and ask me:

"Tell us, Socrates," they say, "what are you doing? Are you trying by this act to destroy us—the laws and the whole state, as far as it is in your power? Do you think that a state can exist and survive in which the decisions of law have no power, where they are ignored by citizens?"

What will be our answer, Crito, to such questions? Anyone, and especially a clever rhetorician, will have a good deal to say about the evil of ignoring the law and the verdicts made in the courts. Perhaps we could respond, "Yes, but the state has treated us unjustly and made an unjust verdict." Suppose I say that?

crito. Very good, Socrates.

socrates. But suppose the laws say, "And was *that* our agreement with you? Or was it to abide by the verdicts of the state?" And if I were to express astonishment at their saying this, the laws would probably add:

"Don't be surprised by our question, Socrates. Answer it. You are in the habit of asking and answering questions. Tell us what complaint you have to make against us which justifies you in attempting to destroy us and the state? Did we not bring you into existence, for a start? Your father married your mother by our aid and begat you. Do you have any objection against those of us who regulate marriage?"

None, I should reply.

"Or against those of us who regulate the system of upbringing and education of children in which you were trained? Were not the laws, who are in charge of this, right in commanding your father to train you in music and gymnastics?"

They were right, I should reply.

"Well then, since you were brought into the world and nurtured and educated by us, can you deny in the first place that you are our child and slave, as your fathers were before you? And if this is true, you are not on equal terms with us; nor can you think that you have the right to do to us what we are doing to you. Would you have any right to strike or reproach or do any other unjust act to a father or to your master, if you had one, when you have been struck or reproached by him, or received some other injustice from them?"

"You would not say this? And because we think it is right to destroy you, do you think that you have any right to destroy us and your country in return, as far as you can? And would you, who is so concerned with virtue, say that you are justified in this?"

"Has a philosopher like you failed to discover that your country is more to be valued and far more sacred than a mother or father or any ancestor, and more important in the eyes of the gods and men of understanding? That your country should be revered, placated when angry—more than your father—and either persuaded to think again, or obeyed? That you should quietly accept whatever treatment—beating, perhaps, or imprisonment—it decides you should receive? And if it takes you to war, to be wounded or killed, that is what you should do and that is what is right. You should not retreat or desert, whether in battle or in a court of law, or any other place, but you must do what your state orders you. Or you should change its opinion on what is just. Just as you may do no violence to your father or mother, much less may you do violence to your country."

What answer shall we make to this, Crito? Do the laws speak truly or do they not?

crito. I think that they do.

socrates. Then the laws will say: "Consider, Socrates, whether you wrong us by your attempt to escape. Not only have we brought you into the world, nurtured and educated you, given you and every other citizen a share in every good that we have to offer, but we have even granted you and every Athenian the right that if you do not like us when you have come of age, you may go where you please and take your goods with you. None of us laws will forbid it or interfere with you. Anyone who does not like us, the laws and the state, and who wants to go to a colony or to any other city, may go where he likes, and take his goods with him. But anyone who has seen the way in which we keep justice and administer the state, and who remains here, has entered into a contract that he will do as we command him. And if he disobeys us, he wrongs us in three ways: first, because in disobeying us he is disobeying his parents; second, because we are the authors of his education; and third, because he made an agreement with us that he will obey our commands, and he neither obeys them nor convinces us that our commands are wrong. We do not rudely impose our commands, but give the alternatives of obeying or changing our mind. That is what we offer. These are the sort of accusations to which you, Socrates, will be exposed if you carry out your plan to escape. You, of all Athenians."

And if I asked them why me in particular, the laws will justly reply that I, above other people, have acknowledged the agreement with them. "Socrates, there is clear proof," they will say, "that we and the city were not displeasing to you."

"Of all the Athenians, you have been the most constant resident in the city, which, since you never leave, you seem to love. Unless you were on military service, you never left either to see the games or any other place, except once when you went to Corinth. You did not travel as other men do. You had no desire to know other states or their laws. Your affections did not go beyond us and our state. We were your special favorites, and you acquiesced in our government. This is the state in which you begat your children, which is a proof of your satisfaction. Moreover, you could have, if you wanted, accepted exile at the trial—the state which refuses to let you go now would have let you go then. But you pretended that you preferred death to exile and that you were not afraid of death. Now you seem to have forgotten these fine sentiments by paying no respect to us, the laws, and by doing what only a miserable slave would do, running away and turning your back upon the agreements that you made as a citizen. Answer the question: have you agreed to be governed by us for real, or in word only?"

How shall we answer that, Crito? Must we not agree?

crito. There is no help, Socrates.

socrates. Otherwise, they will say: "You, Socrates, are breaking the covenants and agreements which you have freely made with us, not in any haste or under any compulsion or deception. You had seventy years to think about them, during which time you were at liberty to leave the city, if we were not to your satisfaction or if our covenants appeared to you unfair. You had your choice. You might have gone either to Lacedaemon or Crete, which you often praise for their good government, or to some other Greek or foreign state. However you, above all other Athenians, seemed to be so fond of the state, or, in other words, of us her laws (for what good a state would be that has no laws?), that you never ventured out. Even people who are lame, or blind, or crippled in some other way spend more time away from Athens than you. And now you would run away and break your agreements. Don't do that, Socrates, if you take our advice. Do not make yourself ridiculous by escaping."

"For just consider, if you break the agreement and put yourself in the wrong in this way, what good will that do either to yourself or to your friends? It is fairly certain that your friends will be driven into exile and deprived of citizenship or lose their property. As for yourself, Socrates, if you go to one of the neighboring cities—like Thebes or Megara, both of which are well-governed—you will come to them as an enemy. Their government will be against you and all patriotic citizens will look at you with suspicion as a subverter of the laws."

"You will also confirm the verdict of the judges of you. Someone who destroys the laws is more likely to corrupt the young. Will you then flee from well-governed cities and all virtuous people? Is life worth living on these terms? Or will you talk to them without shame, Socrates? But what will you say to them? The same that you said here about virtue and justice and institutions and laws being the best things among men? Would that be decent of you? Surely not. But if you go away from well-governed states to Crito's friends in Thessaly, where there is great disorder and anarchy, they will be charmed to hear the tale of your escape from prison, told with ludicrous particulars of the manner in which you were wrapped in a goatskin or some other disguise that people wear when they run away. Will they also remind you that in your old age you violated the most sacred laws from a miserable desire of a little more life? Perhaps not, if you keep them in a good mood, but what if things turn sour? You will hear many degrading

things. You will live, but how? As the flatterer and servant of men? And doing what? Eating and drinking in Thessaly, having gone abroad in order that you may get a dinner. And where will be your fine sentiments about justice and virtue then?"

"Say that you wish to live for the sake of your children, that you may bring them up and educate them—will you take them to Thessaly and deprive them of Athenian citizenship? Is that the benefit which you have in store for them? Or are you under the impression that they will be better cared for and educated here if you are still alive, although absent, because your friends will take care of them? Do you think that if you are in Thessaly they will take care of them, but if you are in the underworld, they will not take care of them? If they who call themselves your friends are truly your friends, they surely will."

"Listen, then, Socrates, to us who have brought you up. Think not of life and children first and of justice afterwards, but of justice first, so that you may be justified before the princes of the world below. Neither you nor anyone dear to you will be happier or nobler or more just in this life or in another, if you do as Crito suggests. Now you can depart in innocence, a sufferer and not a wrongdoer. A victim—not of the laws, but of the people. But if you leave, your return injustice for injustice, harm for harm, you break the covenants and agreements which you have made with us, and you wrong those whom you ought least to wrong—yourself, your friends, your country, and us, the laws. We will be angry with you while you live and the laws in the world below will receive you as an enemy. They will know that you have done your best to destroy us. Listen, then, to us and not to Crito."

This is the voice I seem to hear murmuring in my ears, like the sound of the flute in the ears of the mystic. That voice, I say, is humming in my ears, and prevents me from hearing any other. And I know that anything more which you may say will be vain. Yet speak, if you have anything to say.

crito. I have nothing to say, Socrates.

socrates. Then let us follow the will of the gods.