CHARACTERS

Socrates

Crito

SCENE—The Prison of Socrates

Socrates
Why have you come at this hour, Crito? Is it not still early?

Crito
Yes, very early. . . .

Socrates
I wonder that the jailer was willing to let you in.

Crito
He knows me now, Socrates; I come here so often, and besides, I have given him a tip. . . . I purposely did not wake you, for I was anxious not to disturb your repose. Often before, all through your life, I have thought that your temperament was a happy one; and I think so more than ever now when I see how easily and calmly you bear the calamity that has come to you. . . .
Socrates
[But tell me why are you here so early?

Crito
I am the bearer of sad news, Socrates; not sad, it seems, for you, but for me and for all your friends...

Socrates
What is it? Has the ship come from Delos, at the arrival of which I am to die?

Crito
No, it has not actually arrived, but I think that it will be here today, from the news which certain persons have brought from Sunium, who left it there. It is clear from their report that it will be here today; and so, Socrates, tomorrow your life will have to end.

Socrates
Well, Crito, may it end well. Be it so, if so the gods will...

Crito
But, O my good Socrates, I beg you for the last time to listen to me and save yourself. For to me your death will be more than a single disaster; not only shall I lose a friend the like of whom I shall never find again, but many persons who do not know you and me well will think that I might have saved you if I had been willing to spend money, but that I neglected to do so. And what reputation could be more disgraceful than the reputation of caring more for money than for one’s friends? The public will never believe that we were anxious to save you, but that you yourself refused to escape.

Socrates
But, my dear Crito, why should we care so much about public opinion? Reasonable men, of whose opinion it is worth our while to think, will believe that we acted as we really did.

Crito
But you see, Socrates, that it is necessary to care about public opinion, too. This very thing that has happened to you proves that the multitude can do a man not the least, but almost the greatest harm, if he is falsely accused to them.
Socrates
I wish that the multitude were able to do a man the greatest harm, Crito, for then they would be able to do him the greatest good, too. That would have been fine. But, as it is, they can do neither. They cannot make a man either wise or foolish: they act wholly at random.

Crito
Well, as you wish. But tell me this, Socrates. You surely are not anxious about me and your other friends, and afraid lest, if you escape, the informers would say that we stole you away, and get us into trouble, and involve us in a great deal of expense, or perhaps in the loss of all our property, and, it may be, bring some other punishment upon us besides? If you have any fear of that kind, dismiss it. For of course we are bound to run these risks, and still greater risks than these, if necessary, in saving you. So do not, I beg you, refuse to listen to me.

Socrates
I am anxious about that, Crito, and about much besides.

Crito
Then have no fear on that score. There are men who, for no very large sum, are ready to bring you out of prison into safety. And then, you know, these informers are cheaply bought, and there would be no need to spend much upon them. My fortune is at your service, and I think that it is adequate . . . And therefore, I repeat, do not shrink from saving yourself on that ground. And do not let what you said in the court—that if you went into exile you would not know what to do with yourself—stand in your way; for there are many places for you to go to, where you will be welcomed. If you choose to go to Thessaly, I have friends there who will make much of you and protect you from any annoyance from the people of Thessaly.

And besides, Socrates, I think that you will be doing what is unjust if you abandon your life when you might preserve it. You are simply playing into your enemies’ hands; it is exactly what they wanted—to destroy you. And what is more, to me you seem to be abandoning your children, too. . . . It seems to me that you are choosing the easy way, and not the way of a good and brave man, as you ought, when you have been talking all your life long of the value that you set upon human excellence. For my part, I feel ashamed both for you and for us who are your friends. . . .
Socrates
My dear Crito, if your anxiety to save me be right, it is most valuable; but if not, the greater it is the harder it will be to cope with. We must reflect, then, whether we are to do as you say or not; for I am still what I always have been—a man who will accept no argument but that which on reflection I find to be truest. I cannot cast aside my former arguments because this misfortune has come to me. . . . I am anxious, Crito, to examine our former argument with your help, and to see whether my present circumstance will appear to me to have affected its truth in any way or not; and whether we are to set it aside, or to yield assent to it. Those of us who thought at all seriously always used to say, I think, exactly what I said just now, namely, that we ought to respect some of the opinions which men form, and not others. Tell me, Crito, I beg you, do you not think that they were right? For you in all probability will not have to die tomorrow, and your judgment will not be biased by that circumstance. Reflect, then, do you not think it reasonable to say that we should not respect all the opinions of men but only some, nor the opinions of all men but only of some men? What do you think? Is not this true?

Crito
It is.

Socrates
And we should respect the good opinions, and not the worthless ones?

Crito
Yes.

Socrates
But the good opinions are those of the wise, and the worthless ones those of the foolish?

Crito
Of course.

Socrates
You are right. And, Crito, to be brief, is it not the same in everything? And, therefore, in question of justice and injustice, and of the base and the honorable, and of good and evil, which we are now examining, ought we to follow
the opinion of the many and fear that, or the opinion of the one man who understands these matters (if we can find him), and feel more shame and fear before him than before all other men? For if we do not follow him, we shall corrupt and maim that part of us which, we used to say, is improved by justice and disabled by injustice. Or is this not so?

Crito
No, Socrates, I agree with you.

Socrates
Now, if, by listening to the opinions of those who do not understand, we disable that part of us which is improved by health and corrupted by disease, is our life worth living when it is corrupt? . . . Is life worth living with the body corrupted and crippled?

Crito
No, certainly not.

Socrates
Then is life worth living when that part of us which is maimed by injustice and benefited by justice is corrupt? Or do we consider that part of us, whatever it is, which has to do with justice and injustice to be of less consequence than our body?

Crito
No, certainly not.

Socrates
But more valuable?

Crito
Yes, much more so.

Socrates
Then, my good friend, we must not think so much of what the many will say of us; we must think of what the one man who understands justice and injustice, and of what truth herself will say of us. And so you are mistaken, to begin with, when you invite us to regard the opinion of the multitude concerning the
just and the honorable and the good, and their opposites. But, it may be said, the multitude can put us to death?

**Crito**
Yes, that is evident. That may be said, Socrates.

**Socrates**
True. But, my good friend, to me it appears that the conclusion which we have just reached is the same as our conclusion of former times. Now consider whether we still hold to the belief that we should set the highest value, not on living, but on living well?

**Crito**
Yes, we do.

**Socrates**
And living well and honorably and justly mean the same thing: do we hold to that or not?

**Crito**
We do.

**Socrates**
Then, starting from these premises, we have to consider whether it is just or not for me to try to escape from prison, without the consent of the Athenians. If we find that it is just, we will try; if not, we will give up the idea. . . .

**Crito**
I think that you are right, Socrates. But what are we to do?

**Socrates**
Let us examine this question together, my friend. . . .

**Crito**
I will try.

**Socrates**
Ought we never to act unjustly voluntarily? Or may we act unjustly in some ways, and not in others? Is it the case, as we have often agreed in former times, that it is never either good or honorable to act unjustly? . . .
Crito
Certainly not.

Socrates
If we ought never to act unjustly at all, ought we to repay injustice with injustice, as the multitude thinks we may?

Crito
Clearly not.

Socrates
Well, then, Crito, ought we to do evil to anyone?

Crito
Certainly I think not, Socrates.

Socrates
And is it just to repay evil with evil, as the multitude thinks, or unjust?

Crito
Certainly it is unjust.

Socrates
For there is no difference, is there, between doing evil to a man and acting unjustly?

Crito
True. . . .

Socrates
Then, my next point, or rather my next question, is this: Ought a man to carry out his just agreements, or may he shuffle out of them?

Crito
He ought to carry them out.

Socrates
Then consider. If I escape without the state’s consent, shall I be injuring those whom I ought least to injure, or not? Shall I be abiding by my just agreements or not?
Crito
I cannot answer your question, Socrates. I do not understand it.

Socrates
Consider it in this way. Suppose the laws and the commonwealth were to come and appear to me as I was preparing to run away (if that is the right phrase to describe my escape) and were to ask, “Tell us, Socrates, what have you in your mind to do? What do you mean by trying to escape but to destroy us, the laws and the whole state, so far as you are able? Do you think that a state can exist and not be overthrown, in which the decisions of law are of no force, and are disregarded and undermined by private individuals?” How shall we answer questions like that, Crito? Much might be said, especially by an orator, in defense of the law which makes judicial decisions supreme. Shall I reply, “But the state has injured me by judging my case unjustly?” Shall we say that?

Crito
Certainly we will, Socrates.

Socrates
And suppose the laws were to reply, “Was that our agreement? Or was it that you would abide by whatever judgments the state should pronounce?” And if we were surprised by their words, perhaps they would say, “Socrates . . . what complaint have you against us and the state, that you are trying to destroy us? Are we not, first of all, your parents? Through us your father took your mother and brought you into the world. Tell us, have you any fault to find with those of us that are the laws of marriage?” “I have none,” I should reply. “Or have you any fault to find with those of us that regulate the raising of the child and the education which you, like others, received? Did we not do well in telling your father to educate you in music and athletics?” “You did,” I should say. “Well, then, since you were brought into the world and raised and educated by us, how, in the first place, can you deny that you are our child and our slave, as your fathers were before you? And if this be so, do you think that your rights are on a level with ours? Do you think that you have a right to retaliate if we should try to do anything to you? . . . [D]o you think that you may retaliate in the case of your country and its laws? If we try to destroy you, because we think it just, will you in return do all that you can to destroy us, the laws, and your country, and say that in so doing you are acting justly—you, the man who really thinks so much of excel-
lence?” . . . What answer shall we make, Crito? Shall we say that the laws speak the truth, or not?

Crito
I think that they do.

Socrates
“Then consider, Socrates,” perhaps they would say, “if we are right in saying that by attempting to escape you are attempting an injustice. We brought you into the world, we raised you, we educated you, we gave you and every other citizen a share of all the good things we could. Yet we proclaim that if any man of the Athenians is dissatisfied with us, he may take his goods and go away wherever he pleases; we give that privilege to every man who chooses to avail himself of it, so soon as he has reached manhood, and sees us, the laws, and the administration of our state. No one of us stands in his way or forbids him to take his goods and go wherever he likes, whether it be to an Athenian colony or to any foreign country, if he is dissatisfied with us and with the state. But we say that every man of you who remains here, seeing how we administer justice, and how we govern the state in other matters, has agreed, by the very fact of remaining here, to do whatsoever we tell him.

...“Are we right, or are we wrong, in saying that you have agreed not in mere words, but in your actions, to live under our government?” What are we to say, Crito? Must we not admit that it is true?

Crito
We must, Socrates.

Socrates
Then they would say, “Are you not breaking your contracts and agreements with us? And you were not led to make them by force or by fraud. You did not have to make up your mind in a hurry. You had seventy years in which you might have gone away if you had been dissatisfied with us, or if the agreement had seemed to you unjust. . . . And now will you not abide by your agreement? If you take our advice, you will, Socrates; then you will not make yourself ridiculous by going away from Athens.”
Be sure, my dear friend Crito, that this is what I seem to hear, . . . and the sound of these arguments rings so loudly in my ears, that I cannot hear any other arguments. And I feel sure that if you try to change my mind you will speak in vain. Nevertheless, if you think that you will succeed, speak.

**Crito**
I have nothing more to say, Socrates.

**Socrates**
Then let it be, Crito, and let us do as I say. . . .