

Socrates in Prison

by Sanderson Beck

(based on Plato's Crito)

Characters:

Socrates

Crito

Scene: Inside the prison of Athens at dawn. Socrates is sleeping in his cell, as Crito sits waiting for him to wake up. Suddenly, Socrates opens his eyes and sees Crito.

SOCRATES: Why have you come so early, Crito? What time is it?

CRITO: Dawn is breaking.

SOCRATES: I'm surprised the prison guard let you in.

CRITO: He's used to me now, Socrates, on account of my coming so often; besides I have done something good for him.

SOCRATES: Did you just come, or was it some time ago?

CRITO: Quite a while ago.

SOCRATES: Why didn't you wake me up right away, instead of sitting there in silence?

CRITO: No, by Zeus, I wouldn't do that, Socrates; I only wish I weren't so sleepless and depressed. I've been marveling at how pleasantly you sleep, and I didn't wake you up on purpose so that you could continue so pleasantly.

You've always had a happy disposition, and especially now in your present misfortune, you bear it so easily and mildly.

SOCRATES: Surely, Crito, it would be a mistake at my age to resent it if I must die now.

CRITO: That doesn't prevent others of your age in such misfortune from resenting their fate.

SOCRATES: That's true. But why did you come so early?

CRITO: To bring you a message, Socrates, not hard for you as it seems, but to me and all your friends both hard and heavy.

SOCRATES: What is it? Has the ship arrived from Delos, upon whose arrival I must die?

CRITO: It hasn't arrived yet, but it will today according to reports from some who saw it at Sunium, and by force tomorrow will be the end of your life.

SOCRATES: Good Crito, if this is the will of the gods, so be it. Yet I don't

think it will come today.

CRITO: What makes you think that?

SOCRATES: I must die on the day after the ship comes in.

CRITO: That's what the authorities say.

SOCRATES: Then I don't think it'll come today, but tomorrow. I infer this from a dream I had last night, and it was lucky you didn't wake me up.

CRITO: What was the dream?

SOCRATES: A beautiful and good-looking woman clothed in white came to me and called to me saying, "Socrate , 'On the third day you'll come to fertile Phthia.'"

CRITO: A strange dream, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Actually it seems clear to me, Crito.

CRITO: Very clear, apparently. But dear Socrates, even now you can still be saved, if you'll be persuaded by me. If you die, for me it's not just one misfortune, apart from losing a companion I could never replace, it will also seem to many who don't know us well that I could have saved you if I'd spent the money. Now what reputation could be more shameful than that--- to make money more important than friends? For many won't believe you weren't willing to escape even though we were eager to get you out of here.

SOCRATES: Why care about what many think? For the reasonable, who are more worth considering, will think this was done as it actually was.

CRITO: But don't you see, Socrates, it's necessary to care about the opinion of many. These very circumstances show that many can accomplish great evil if they're prejudiced against someone.

SOCRATES: If many could accomplish great evil, then they could also do great good; but they can't make one either wise nor unwise, but they do whatever happens by chance.

CRITO: That may be so, Socrates, but tell me this: aren't you thinking about me and our friends, that if we helped you escape from here, the informers would cause trouble for us, and we'd be forced to lose our property or much money or suffer something else in addition? For if this is your fear, relax; it's right for us to risk this danger to save you, and if necessary even greater than this. So obey me, and don't do anything else.

SOCRATES: I'm considering this, Crito, and many other things.

CRITO: Then don't be afraid, for surely it's not much silver, which some would take to save you and get out of here. Don't you see that the informers may be easily bought? My money is at your command--- which I think is enough; and if out of some concern for me you don't think mine should be spent, foreigners here are ready to spend theirs; Simmias the Theban has provided enough silver; and Cebes is also ready, and many others. So don't

hesitate to save yourself, and don't be disagreeable about what you said in court, that if you went away you wouldn't know what to do. For wherever you go they will love you; if you wish to go to Thessaly, I know people there who will make much of you and offer you safety so that no one in Thessaly will bother you. Besides it doesn't seem right to me, Socrates, to give yourself up, when you might be saved; you're trying to bring such things on yourself as even your enemies who want to destroy you. Also you'd be abandoning your children, whom you could bring up and educate, but leaving them behind they'll do whatever chances, which will probably be what orphans do in destitution. Either one shouldn't have children, or one should take care of raising and educating them. You seem to be choosing the laziest way, when you should choose as a good and courageous man, just as you have said all through your life that you really care about virtue and education. So I'm ashamed both for you and for us, your friends. It will seem that we acted cowardly in this affair. First, in how the case was brought into court and tried, and then this, as if a mockery of the affair will seem to have been lost to us because of our cheapness and cowardice. It will appear we didn't save you, nor did you save yourself, which was possible with just a little help from us. Therefore, Socrates, see that these things are not both bad and shameful for you and for us. But decide now, or rather there is no time to decide, but only to have already decided, and there is only one decision; for everything must be done this coming night. And if we delay, it can no longer be done. So by all means, Socrates, obey me, and don't do anything else at all.

SOCRATES: Dear Crito, your eagerness is worth much, if it should prove to be correct; but if not, then the greater it is, the harder. So we must look at whether I should do this or not; since not only now but I have always been one who obeys the logic which by reasoning appears best. And the arguments I made before can't be rejected now just because this has happened to me, and they appear nearly the same to me. Unless we have better arguments in the present, you know that I shall not yield to you, not even if the current power of the crowd could frighten us like children by threatening us with imprisonment and death and confiscation of money. So how can we look at this most reasonably? Should we first take up this argument about opinions, that intelligence must hold to certain opinions; or was it correct before I was condemned to die, but now do we find it was just for the sake of argument, and was it in truth play and nonsense? Crito, I'm eager to examine together with you, whether it's different since I am here, or the same, and whether we should say goodbye to it or obey it. It was argued, I think each time, by those arguing, that some opinions are worth more than others. Before the gods, Crito, is this argued correctly? For you who are outside the human probability

of having to die tomorrow and are not swayed by that, consider if it seems adequately argued to you that not all the opinions of people should be honored. What do you say? Is this not argued correctly?

CRITO: Yes, correctly.

SOCRATES: Then should not the good ones be honored, and not the bad ones?

CRITO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And aren't the good ones those of the wise, and the bad those of the unwise?

CRITO: Of course.

SOCRATES: Then does the practicing athlete pay attention to the praise and blame and opinion of everyone, or only to the one who is a trainer or physician?

CRITO: Only to the one knowledgeable.

SOCRATES: Then we should not be afraid of the blame of many, but esteem the praise of the knowledgeable one.

CRITO: Clearly.

SOCRATES: But will disobeying this one while honoring the opinions of many who have no understanding lead to injury?

CRITO: Of course.

SOCRATES: And what kind of injury comes to the disobedient and into what parts of one does it extend?

CRITO: Clearly into the body; for it ruins it.

SOCRATES: You argue correctly, Crito. Then is it also not true concerning right and wrong, shame and honor, good and bad, which we're considering, should we obey the opinion of many and fear it, or of the one who has understanding who should be respected more than all the others? If we don't follow that one, we'll injure and ruin what is made better by justice and ruined by injustice. What do you think?

CRITO: I believe it, Socrates.

SOCRATES: So if what is improved by health and ruined by disease is destroyed by obeying the opinion of those not aware, is it still livable for us when it is ruined?

CRITO: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: And that's the body, isn't it?

CRITO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Is what is ruined by wrong and benefited by justice less important than the body?

CRITO: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: But it's more important?

CRITO: Much more.

SOCRATES: So we shouldn't consider what many will say, but what the one who is aware will say about justice and wrong and truth itself. So at first you brought this in incorrectly, introducing the opinion of many for us to consider. But then, some might say, the many can kill us.

CRITO: That's also clear, Socrates, and would be said.

SOCRATES: True; but admirable one, this argument we discussed still seems to me the same as it was before; let's see if it still holds for us or not, that it's not living that is best, but living well.

CRITO: It still holds.

SOCRATES: Then from this agreement we must look at whether it's right for me to try to escape from here without permission of the Athenians, or not; and if it appears to be right, let's try; but if it isn't, let's dismiss the idea. Now what you say are considerations about spending money and opinion and supporting children, are really speculations, Crito, of those many who easily kill and would bring to life again, if they could, without intelligence. However, since the argument compels us, we must consider whether we shall act justly in paying money and thanking those who let me escape, or whether in truth it would be wrong to do this. If these actions appear wrong, we must debate not whether I must stay here and quietly die but whether to suffer anything at all before wronging.

CRITO: I think you speak well, Socrates; but let's see what we should do.

SOCRATES: Good friend, let's look together, and if you can contradict anything I'm saying, do so, and I will obey you. If not, then stop already saying so often to me the same argument, that I should escape from here without permission; since I value doing these things with your approval, but not unwillingly. Now see if the beginning of the investigation seems reasonable to you and try to answer as best you can.

CRITO: I'll try.

SOCRATES: Do we say that in no way are we to wrong intentionally, or may we wrong in some ways, but not in others? Or is it never good to wrong, as we have often agreed before? Are we to throw out these earlier agreements, Crito? Or above all is it as we said then, whether many say so or not, and whether we must suffer even harder things, nevertheless is not injustice both bad and shameful to the wrong-doer in whatever way it happens? Did we say this or not?

CRITO: We said it.

SOCRATES: Then we must never wrong.

CRITO: Of course not.

SOCRATES: Nor retaliate against wrong, as many think, since we must never

wrong.

CRITO: Apparently not.

SOCRATES: Then doing evil actions against the evil, as many do, is just or not just?

CRITO: It is not just.

SOCRATES: For doing evil to people is no different than wronging.

CRITO: You say the truth.

SOCRATES: Then one must not retaliate nor do evil to any person, no matter what one may suffer from them. Make sure, Crito, in conceding this you don't agree in a way contrary to your opinion. For I know this is held and will be held by few. Thus those who believe this and those who don't on this have no common decision, but seeing each others' decisions, by force of this they condemn each other. So look very carefully at whether you agree with this, and let's begin with the decision here, that it's never correct to do wrong or retaliate or having suffered evil to avenge by returning evil; or do you stand aside and not agree from the beginning? For it seems to me thus both before and still now; but if it seems any other way to you, tell me. But if you're holding to it as before, listen to the next point.

CRITO: I'm holding to it and agree with you; so say it.

SOCRATES: Should one do what one has agreed is just, or should one deceive?

CRITO: One should do it.

SOCRATES: So consider what comes out of this. By our escaping from here, not obeying the state, are we doing evil to anyone or not? Are we holding to what we agreed was just or not?

CRITO: I have no answer, Socrates, for I don't understand.

SOCRATES: Look at it this way. If we're about to run away from here, the laws and community might come and ask: "Tell us, Socrates, what have you in mind to do? Is this another action you are planning to destroy our laws and the entire state as far as you are concerned? Or do you think a state may exist and not be overturned in which court rulings have no strength, but by private people they are made ineffective?"

What shall we say to this, Crito? For an orator could say much on behalf of the laws, which direct that court judgments be effective. Or shall we say to them, "The state wronged us and did not judge our case correctly"? Shall we say this, or what?

CRITO: Yes, by Zeus.

SOCRATES: But what if the laws should say, "Socrates, was this agreed to by you and us, to abide by the verdicts which the state judges?" And if I were surprised by what they were saying, perhaps they might say, "Socrates, don't

be surprised, but answer, since you like to question and answer. What fault do you find with us and the state that you are attempting to destroy us? First did we not give you birth and was it not through our security that your mother and father conceived you? Do you complain about the laws of marriage?"

"I don't complain," I would say.

"What about those concerning education? Or was it not well directed by the appointed laws to have you instructed in music and gymnastics?"

"It was well," I would say.

"Fine. Then born, raised, and educated, were you not our offspring and slave? Do you think justice is equal for you and for us, and whatever we may attempt to do to you, do you think it is just for you to do this back? Justice was not equal for you toward your father and toward a master, if you happened to have one, so that whatever was suffered, might be done back to them, or hearing bad things to talk back or being struck to strike back, and so on. Will this be so toward your country and the laws, so that if we try to destroy you thinking it is just, you too will try to destroy us laws and the country, and will you say doing this is acting justly, the one who in truth cares about virtue? Or don't you see that more than parents and family the country is honorable and revered and holy both among the gods and intelligent humans? Mustn't she be revered and more yielded to and humored when the country is angry than when a father is? Shouldn't you either persuade her, or do what she orders? You should suffer whatever she directs to be suffered, keeping quiet, and if beaten or imprisoned or brought to war to be wounded or killed, these must be done. Justice is like this, not yielding nor retreating nor abandoning one's duty, not only in war and in court but everywhere one must do what the state and the country order, or persuade her what is natural justice. To be violent is neither holy to mother nor father, and even much less to one's country?"

What shall we say to this, Crito? Are the laws telling the truth or not?

CRITO: It seems so to me.

SOCRATES: "Look now, Socrates," perhaps the laws would say, "if what we say is true, what you're now attempting to do to us isn't just. We gave you birth, nurtured and educated you, provided fine things to you as a citizen, and proclaimed permission for any Athenian whom we don't please that one is allowed to take one's things and go away wherever one wants. None of our laws stand in the way nor forbid this, if anyone wishes to go to a colony or move your home. But those of you who remain having seen how we judge cases and administer the state, we say they have agreed with us to do what we order. In that case, one not obeying we say wrongs us, because having agreed with us to obey one neither obeyed nor persuaded us to change, if we were not doing what is right, for we offer these two alternatives. We say you'll be liable

for these responsibilities, if you do what you have in mind, Socrates, and you not least of the Athenians, but especially."

Then if I should say, "Why so?" Perhaps they might justly reproach me because I among the Athenians especially agreed.

For they could say, "Socrates, we have much evidence that we and the state pleased you; for you stayed home more than all other Athenians. You must have been particularly pleased, not going out of the city for festivals except once to the Isthmus of Corinth, nor anywhere else, unless on military service. Nor did you travel anywhere like other people, nor did you want to know other states and laws, but we and our state were enough for you. So strongly did you prefer us and our politics that you even produced children here. Furthermore in your trial you could have proposed the sentence of exile, if you wished, which now you're attempting against the state's will, then you could have done that with its permission. But then you were proud and not upset if you must die, and preferred, as you said, death before exile. Now you're ashamed of those words, and do not respect us laws, trying to ruin us. You're acting like the meanest slave would act, trying to run away in violation of contracts which you agreed to with us as a citizen. So first reply to this, whether we're telling the truth saying you agreed to be a citizen by your actions and not by word, or is it not true?"

What shall we say to this, Crito? Shouldn't we agree?

CRITO: By necessity, Socrates.

SOCRATES: "Aren't you then breaking these contracts with us," they could say, "which were not agreed to by force nor deception nor decided in a short time, but over seventy years in which you could have left, if you didn't like us and the agreements weren't just? But you preferred neither Sparta nor Crete, which you say have good laws, nor any other state, but you went abroad less than the lame and blind. So you were pleased with the state and its laws, for who could like a state without liking its laws? And now aren't you holding to the agreements? You will, if you're persuaded by us, Socrates ; and you'll not make yourself ridiculous in exile.

"For by transgressing and making these mistakes, what good are you doing for yourself or your friends? For it's pretty clear your friends would be risking exile and loss of citizenship or property; and if you go to a nearby state, Thebes or Megara--- for both have good laws--- you go as an enemy, Socrates , and those who care for their state will despise you thinking you are a corrupter of the laws, and you'll confirm the opinion of the judges so that they'll think correctly the verdict was just; for whoever corrupts the laws may seriously be thought a corrupter of the young and of thoughtless people. Then will you avoid civilized states with good laws? And doing this then will life be

worthwhile for you? Or will you approach them and not be ashamed to discuss the arguments you made here, Socrates, that virtue and justice are most valuable for people, along with the institutions and laws? Don't you think your business would appear unseemly? One would think so. However, you may leave these places and go to Thessaly with Crito's visitors, where disorder is the greatest. Perhaps they would enjoy hearing with laughter of your running away from prison in a disguise, wearing skins or altering your dress like runaways do; but that an old man, probably with little time left, dared to want life so shamelessly he broke the laws, will no one say it? Maybe if you don't bother anyone, Socrates, but otherwise you'll hear much unworthy of yourself. You'll live inferior to all people and as a slave. What will you do feasting in Thessaly as though you went there for a banquet? And where are our arguments about justice and virtue? Yet you may wish to live for the sake of the children, so that you may raise and educate them. But will you take them into Thessaly to educate them, making them strangers so that they can enjoy that? Or maybe not that, but if they're raised without you will your being alive help them in any way? For your friends will have to take care of them. If you journey to Thessaly will they take better care of them than if you were to journey to Hades?

"But Socrates, be convinced by us who raised you, don't make children nor life nor anything else more important than justice. When you go to Hades you may argue all this in your defense to those ruling there; for by doing these things it doesn't seem to be better for you here nor for any of the others nor will it be better when you arrive there. But now you go away wronged, if you do go away, not by us the laws but by the people. If you escape, you shamefully return bad actions with bad actions, break your contracts with us, and do evil to those whom you least should do so--- yourself, your friends, your country and us. In that case, we shall be angry with you while you live, and our brothers, the laws in Hades, will not receive you kindly, knowing that you attempted to destroy us, as far as you could. So don't let Crito persuade you to do what he says rather than what we say."

My dear friend Crito, understand this is what I hear and in myself the sound of these arguments rings, and it makes it impossible to hear any others; but realize, as it seems now to me, if you argue against these, you will speak in vain. Yet if you think you might accomplish anything, say it.

CRITO: But, Socrates, I have nothing to say.

SOCRATES: Let it be then, Crito, and let's act this way, since this is the way God leads.

