

How Crito Might Have Rejoined

By Thomas Jovanovski*

SOCRATES: I warn you that, as my opinion stands at present, it will be useless to urge a different view. However, if you think that you will do any good by it, say what you like.

CRITO: No, Socrates. I have nothing to say.

SOCRATES: Then give it up, Crito, and let us follow this course, since God points out the way.

— Plato, *Crito* 54d

Plato's overarching and seemingly unabashedly explicit purpose of his entire Socrates-featured — not to say -dominated — dialogue-form corpus is to put forth Socrates' side of any argument in a singularly positive light. While, granted, this asymmetry is at times disrupted by the rather strong appearances of such then-leading erudite and social lights as Parmenides, Thrasymachus, and Glaucon, Plato inclines toward portraying Socrates' interlocutors as virtually reflexively assenting to what the latter maintains, or proposing toothless, undeveloped, in a word, *pro forma* differing opinions. Conversely, Socrates is (literally) unfailingly rendered as more composed and amiable than, and as intellectually superior to, everyone else; it is he who normally determines the direction of, leads, and wins nearly every debate; and he either adroitly converts his counterparts to his side or even reduces them to silence. Not surprisingly, therefore, after perusing any of Plato's dialogues wherein the participants arrive at no clear understanding of the subject under discussion, the reader is left with the distinct sense that this is, fundamentally, Socrates' personal, but nevertheless sublime, failure. As Plato quotes Socrates intimating about as much in the concluding paragraphs of the *Charmides*: “I have been utterly defeated, and have failed to discover what that is to which the lawgiver gave this name of temperance or wisdom” (175b) (italics mine).

Aside from extending and expanding his effort to promote Socrates' philosophical thought, Plato might be said to have had a parallel aim for bringing at least some of his texts into being. In the *Crito*, for example, we detect his resolute attempt to secure in us an enduringly favorable impression of the historical Socrates as a man of post-standard values, a man who not only generously dispensed advice on how we ought to conduct ourselves, but also lived and died in accordance with it. Here he is described as so noble that despite the unjust verdict and sentence against him, he rejects an almost guaranteed escape from jail and permanent relocation. A more scrupulous analysis of the recorded discussion than we are likely to encounter in the secondary literature, however, should reveal Socrates' decision to stay put as at once too tenuous and insufficiently challenged to pass for a fertile enough soil whereupon that sort of impression might flourish. On the contrary, Crito's relatively obliging response to Socrates' decision than,

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considering the consequential circumstances, perhaps most of us would have expected, gives rise to the suspicion that Plato might have intentionally left the dialogue less than complete.

Plato further attenuates Socrates' explanation of his decision to fully submit to the sentence against him by resorting to what would in (mainly Western) courts of law pass for a case of leading-the-witness. This technique is hardly as striking in the *Crito* as it is in, say, the *Meno*, where Socrates is *merely assisting* an uneducated slave into *recalling* the solution to a geometrical puzzle by implicitly inviting him to reply in the affirmative to questions that invariably point to the correct answer. Still, in the *Crito* we once again observe Socrates setting the course of the discussion, and treating his visitor as basically a sounding board. Though we might accept such an exchange in texts whose object is to instruct instead of inquire, we must reject it in the *Meno*, where we are underwhelmed by Plato's illustration of the veracity of a cardinal element in Socrates' model. We ought to just as promptly reject the same sort of exchange in the *Crito*, which in the eyes of many stands as close to an intimate look into Socrates' character as we might get.

Viewed from another vantage point, my appraisal of Socrates' dialectical method and of Crito's function in the original dialogue might seem misguided. Bearing in mind Plato's outline of interlocutors in other works of his, it is true that one could accurately predict Crito's status as a foil before so much as laying eyes on a single word of the text by the same name. Yet, it seems equally true that one might well espy something else at play here, Plato's stylistic inclination notwithstanding. After all, it is plausible to regard Crito's weak proposal and even weaker rejoinder to Socrates' declination as the best we ought to expect from a hardly philosophically minded, a practical man of the world who has found himself very near the nucleus of a quickly unfolding cluster of events. In the absence of evidence that would have favored or negated either one of these alternatives, we might take a middle path by treating the original work as a narrative in dire need of more conceptual balance between the two speakers.

A glance, therefore, at the probable origins of Plato's dialogue might provide us with some justification for deciding to undergird Crito's side of the debate. Should we regard the *Crito* as, ultimately, an historical document; as an imagined but nevertheless ethically illuminating work of philosophy; as part of Plato's focused attempt to enframe the historical Socrates within a martyr's halo; or as an amalgam of some or all of these? The alternatives, it seems, are three: (i) That the discussion Plato recounts occurred just about precisely as he has recorded it; (ii) that while such a meeting did indeed take place, he permitted himself creative license to modify, to add, or to subtract from what either or both of the speakers said; and (iii) that such a meeting is entirely Plato's invention, that is, his means of turning Crito into a synthetic representative of Socrates' supporters, and therefore the most credible voice for their consensus to rescue him. Insofar as the *Crito* was made available in Athens at a time when perhaps most of its citizens' memories of Socrates and of his better known interlocutors were still relatively fresh, and insofar as we might identify no *Crito*-contemporary literature which exposes the conceptions Plato attributes to Socrates as factitious or unreliably embellished;

insofar, moreover, as the dialogue-provided evidence indicates that none besides the two speakers witnessed the exchange, and insofar as Plato might be said to have made it his mission to characterize Socrates as a champion and exemplar of moral and civil obligation and commitment, we would be right to select the last alternative as the one closest to the truth.

However, insofar as we could not be certain that his account faithfully reproduces what he either witnessed or heard about whether from primary or secondary sources, we might maintain that Plato ought to have felt obligated to present Crito as a more cogent speaker. Nor am I necessarily intimating that he should have done so in order to preempt the possible notion that with the same text he set out to depict Socrates as a martyr, or in order to allay the subterranean suspicion that Socrates latently wished to commit what is nowadays widely referred to as suicide by proxy. Besides making for a more engrossing read, Plato should have reinforced Crito's side because philosophical *integrity* demands that one be careful not to effectively condemn one's own counterargument by garnering praise and approval for having overpowered a much weaker argument.

In the succeeding pages, then, I attempt to raise Crito's philosophical acumen and proficiency by recasting his initial proposal and by injecting, as it were, a liberal dose of intellectual testosterone into the possible rejoinders he, I imagine, might have offered to Socrates' merely ostensibly persuasive reasons for unreservedly submitting to the laws' admonishment of him. Hence, first, and for no more than referential purposes, I present a faithful discussion-style sketch of Plato's original text, and following that I reconceive the same meeting entirely within its original course and perimeters.

1. Plato's *Crito* is a conversation that concerns Socrates' multi-pronged explanation for his refusal to escape from jail in the wake of an unjust verdict and sentence against him. The meeting starts with Socrates waking up in his jail cell and expressing surprise to see Crito sitting by him so early in the morning, with Crito, in turn, expressing admiration at how calmly Socrates is able to sleep in the face of his imminent execution. By this time, Socrates had been imprisoned for about a month; he would have been executed earlier, had the ship from the island of Delos — sent there on an annual religious mission — not been absent for that period, during which no prisoner executions were permitted. A day earlier, the returning ship had been spotted from the Greek mainland, so Crito expects it to arrive in Athens the next day, with Socrates' execution taking place shortly thereafter. However, recalling a prophecy he saw in a dream the night before, Socrates is convinced he will live at least one day longer than that.

Crito urges Socrates to escape as soon as possible, before such a venture becomes nearly impossible later on. In addition to losing an old friend, Crito is perturbed that he will likely be rebuked by most of those who know him — unaware of his covert attempts to the contrary — for not buying that friend's freedom. Nor must Socrates worry either about life on the outside, as all that has already been arranged by Socrates' sympathizers and admirers, or about those involved in the plot, for even if somehow discovered, none of them would suffer more than the slightest of punishments. Most importantly, Crito adds, Socrates has a duty to his family, and especially to his young children, to remain alive as long

as possible. If, on the contrary, he refuses to escape, he would be selecting the easier, indeed, the *cowardly* road instead of the manlier one.

Unimpressed by such a blatantly emotional appeal, Socrates replies to Crito's offer thus: We agree that it would be wiser to value and praise the opinions of some, say, good men, while discounting those of bad men. If so, would it, similarly, not be better for one training in, for example, gymnastics to esteem and adhere to the counsel regarding food, drink, and practice provided by a professional trainer in gymnastics, while avoiding the beliefs offered on the same subject by the non-professional majority? Crito concurs. In that case, Socrates continues, to the extent that questions relating to justice are of much greater weight than those relating to the body, we would do well to dismiss the views of the many concerning questions of what is good and evil, or honorable and dishonorable, and to cleave to the advice given us by those few who have a clear grasp of what is right and fair. Neither ought we to be overly anxious about the views of the many when there arise issues of life and death; for while it is true that the many have the power to kill us, we should be less concerned with mere life than with the good and principled life.

Most inexcusably, Socrates insists, by escaping, he would be flouting the Athenian constitution and laws, and would therefore be turning himself into an enemy of the state. Not necessarily, Crito retorts, for any and all responsibility Socrates is convinced he has to the latter's legal system would have been rendered void by the unjust verdict and even worse sentence it returned against him. Perhaps so, Socrates concedes; irrespective of the circumstances, however, he has always refused to meet evil with evil, and he is not about to undermine that personal standard now. Besides, has not his entire life effectively been one long affirmation of the rightness and validity of the letter and spirit of Athens' laws? By freely consenting to live and work in Athens, did he not, simply put, implicitly strike up a covenant with it to unconditionally obey every one of its laws and regulations? In fact, he had a decades-long opportunity to remove to any other city that would have had him, and yet at no time did he betray the remotest interest to live apart from Athens.

But even if Socrates did decide to escape, how much better could he fare anywhere else when most of the citizens of any city would likely cast suspicious glances at him as at once a potential subverter of their laws and corrupter of their youth? No less likely, he would be mercilessly ridiculed for running away like a coward while praising justice and counseling virtue. On the other hand, by bravely facing death in Athens, he would leave this world as a victim of unjust individuals, and not of laws.

Crito (reluctantly) yields to these remarks, and the dialogue closes.

2. We might gain a more comprehensive survey of the direction, the force, perimeters, and, not unimportantly, the *flavor* of both sides of the conversation if we present them in a conscientiously summarized dialogue form, as I have done just below. In what follows, however, I have dispensed with the morning greetings and rather small talk between the two friends, insofar as that exchange adds basically nothing to their respective positions.

Actually, my summary comprises only a trace of that sort of language; and properly so, I think, insofar as my aim here is to provide not much more than a reference background, a set of signposts that would illuminate the way for, and clearly identify the boundaries of, my reconceived dialogue:

CRITO: I entreat you to escape before it becomes too late, Socrates; for if you refuse, not only will I have lost a dear friend, but also perhaps most of those who know us in and out of Athens will think that I could have rather easily saved you, had I only been willing to part with my money.

Nor should you worry about your property or about your upkeep, since there are many I know who will be only too glad to assist you wherever you decide to resettle. Please, then, weigh my offer carefully, Socrates, and bear in mind that if you choose not to escape, you will be — besides bringing a great loss to all of us, your friends and admirers — condemning your children to live as orphans, which means that you will be taking the easier and, indeed, the less manly way.

SOCRATES: I'm touched by your appeal, Crito. Nevertheless, you know that I've always been a man guided by reason; so, unless you offer more telling grounds for what you wish me to do, I shall have to decline. For I will not have my actions repudiate my words and principles whereby I have lived for so long.

As for the many, I urge you not to take their views to heart. You and I agree that it is better to accept the opinion of some, and not that of others — better to appraise the opinion of the wise as good, while rejecting that held by the unwise as misleading and even potentially harmful. For example, he who would devote himself to training with the aim of becoming a competitor in gymnastics would surely do better to abide by the advice, praise, and analysis of an acknowledged trainer in gymnastics, while paying practically no attention to the advice, praise, and analysis of the ordinary populace. Would you not concur, Crito, that had our aspiring gymnast decided to do otherwise, he would risk ruining his body?

CRITO: Indeed, I could hardly concur more.

SOCRATES: We would be prudent, then, to apply the same norm to issues regarding justice and injustice, or good and evil; that is, adhere not to the view held by the many, but to that offered by the man of understanding. Actually, the counsel on these and thematically similar matters advanced by the majority could well turn out to be even more deleterious than their advice on gymnastics, insofar as in the former they would be effectively assisting us in corrupting something incalculably more important and honorable than the body.

CRITO: Yes, Socrates, that sounds clearly true.

SOCRATES: If so, Crito, instead of feeling anxious about the collective opinion of the many concerning our behavior, we ought to worry about what the man of understanding might say on the same subject. Let us, accordingly, see whether I would or would not be behaving justly if I were to leave my jail cell without an official permission:

Would you not agree with me that it is never right and proper to return wrong for a wrong, an injury for an injury, or an evil for an evil?

CRITO: I should more than merely agree with that, Socrates. You know me well enough to be aware that this is a standard whereby I've consistently attempted to live my life.

SOCRATES: Yes, I only wished to make certain that nothing has recently occurred in your life that might have changed your attitude toward that standard.

Yet, this is an idea held and practiced by a small host of individuals, and hardly a principle whereby the majority of any people either of us knows tends to behave.

CRITO: Granted, Socrates, but what exactly is your point here?

SOCRATES: What I mean, Crito, is that if I were to run away from here, I would surely be injuring those whom I ought never to wrong in the slightest. To illustrate, let us imagine the laws and the state coming to inquire the justness of my escape, since I am convinced that I have been wronged by an unjust verdict:

Would your escape, Socrates, they might ask, not be breaking your contract with us? After all, did we not make possible all the social antecedents that led to your birth, nurture, education, and training for life?

Yes, I would have to answer.

In that case, Socrates, could you properly deny that you are in effect our child, and that, accordingly, you ought to think of our country as being higher, and that you ought to value it as holier, than any of your ancestors, including either of your biological parents? Can you cogently deny that when she deems it right to punish us, we really must endure it in silence, even when we disagree with her verdict? Likewise, they might continue, when she leads us into battle, ought we not to follow unquestioningly even at the pain of death?

Answer me, Crito, would the laws be speaking rightly, or would they not?

CRITO: I must concede that they would be speaking rightly.

SOCRATES: Then the laws might add:

Think of the grave injury your running away would be causing us, Socrates. Any citizen of adult age may, after having become fully familiar with us, and after considering his condition within the city's social and legal framework, voluntarily decide to leave us and, together with all his possessions, emigrate to wherever he pleases without the least amount of objection from us laws. He, on the other hand, who has come to know us well, and who has lived within the city's boundaries, he has, in a most important sense, entered into an implicit contract with us that he will abide by whatever we might command him. Accordingly, he who disobeys us must be declared unjust for no less than three reasons: First, because he is disobeying his parents; second, because we are the ones who sponsored his education; and third, because he is neither obeying us nor attempting to convince us in what sense our commands should be seen as unjust.

If at this point, Crito, I were to ask why the laws and the state had decided to put me through such questioning, I imagine them retorting thus:

As a most consistent resident of Athens, Socrates — indeed, as one who has not only hardly ever traveled beyond its walls, but also chosen to conceive and raise his children there — you have, undoubtedly, recognized and accepted that agreement. Finally, note that in accordance with your rights as a citizen, at your trial you were invited to fix your own penalty at banishment, but you refused to do so. Yet, now, disregarding these and related considerations, Socrates, now, as only a miserable slave would do, you are about to run away from the compact you, as a free citizen, implicitly drew up with us.

How, then, would we respond to such a charge by the laws and the state, Crito? Would we not have to pronounce their questioning of me as true and correct?

CRITO: Indeed, Socrates, the laws would be right to confront us in the way you just sketched.

SOCRATES: In fact, the laws might easily add more along the same lines:

Socrates, they might say, you had at least seven decades within which to decide whether to remain in Athens or move to any Hellenic or foreign republic, and yet

suddenly, now, when the verdict in the wake of the legal charges brought against you did not go according to your liking — now you are making ready to break the covenant you made with us at your leisure, under no compulsion or haste. Come, take our advice, Socrates; face your punishment as you really ought to, and make not yourself ridiculous by running away.

Nor, the laws could add still further, would your escape help your friends any more than it would help you. Besides the fact that your accomplices would likely be banished and their property confiscated, the legal authorities of whichever city you might resettle will, most assuredly, look upon you as an enemy or at least a potential subverter of *their* laws as well. As for Crito's connections in Thessaly, even if you managed to be accepted there by regaling its citizenry with stories of how cleverly you escaped from jail, would there be no one to remind you of your shamelessness in breaking the most sacred of laws for a few more years of life? Perhaps not, presuming you could maintain them in good humor; that is, by being a mere flatterer and servant of all sorts of people.

As, moreover, for Crito's idea that you ought to stay alive for your children's education, might you be so deluded as to think that they would be better educated as foreigners in Thessaly, if you were to take them with you, than they would be here, in Athens? Wouldn't your friends, presuming they're really your friends, look after them whether you're in Thessaly or in the next world?

In a word, Socrates, think not of life nor of your children first, and of justice as an afterthought, but of justice first. Depart with a clear conscience as a sufferer and a victim of men, and not of laws. If, on the other hand, you run away, and so return evil for evil, breaking your contract with us, the ones who deserve least of all to be wronged, then we shall be angry with you for as long as you will live. Moreover, our brethren, the laws in the underworld, will at some inevitable point, receive you as an enemy, since they will know that you attempted to destroy us.

It is voices much like these, Crito, that keep murmuring in my ears, and prevent me from heeding any counsel to the contrary. Nevertheless, do feel free to speak if you, have anything more to say on the matter.

CRITO: No, Socrates, I have nothing to say.

3. While punctiliously formulating the *Crito* into a veritable celebration of Socrates as a man of extraordinary scruple and civic probity, Plato virtually, if unwittingly, attenuates its promising influence by turning it into an unnecessarily and unconvincingly one-sided conversation. To somewhat counterbalance this endeavor at early image-making, in the dialogue I reconceive below I reinforce Crito's initial proposal and rejoinder in each of the following principal themes: (i) Socrates' conception that any counsel offered by the man of reason ought to be appraised as superior to any other advanced by the ordinary majority, since, after all, the man of reason is invariably more prudent than the populace at large; (ii) the laws' insistence that by merely continually residing in Athens, Socrates, whether he was conscious of it or not, effectively entered into an implicit contract with the city's constitution; and (iii) the laws' added claim that if he escapes from jail, they would have no alternative but to condemn and eternally persecute him for violating that contract as, aside from an act of personal irresponsibility, a calculated venture to weaken Athens' established legal and cultural order.

(i) Socrates' reliance upon, and security he perceives in, the advice he is certain he would have received from the man of reason might be said to precipitate

more confusion than insight in several respects: First, a close examination of the section where Socrates exhorts Crito to, with rare and cautious exceptions, expose a chronically suspicious ear toward any majority-harbored opinion should reveal that he does so not because there is anything intrinsically faulty about any such consensus, but largely because it originates with, or mirrors the values and standards of, the majority. Nor might we infer otherwise when — whether we are reading his counsel for the first time or reflecting upon it for no less than the ninth time — Socrates strains credulity when he, on the one hand, attempts to persuade us to regard the majority as misguided *because* it would counsel one to run away from the punishment decreed by an unjust court verdict; while, on the other, holds that we ought to heed the man of reason precisely *because* he would likely counsel the same individual to unreservedly (or servilely) submit to the punishment required by that verdict. Unsurprisingly, in the dun light of his severe — nay, axiomatically incongruous — recommendation, likely most of us would feel hard pressed to decide whether to look upon the man of reason as the source of some ineffable, perhaps even divinely inspired wisdom, or indeed . . . a fool.

Second, Socrates effectively intensifies our suspicious, squinted side-glances at anyone who would counsel thus. Aside from indicating that the typical man of reason would have to be unquestionably wise, he appears to think it unnecessary to explain any of the other important characteristics and intellectual qualifications surely every man of reason would have to have before we declare his kind capable of playing such a socially consequential role. More than this, Socrates should have, by his own account, seen it as an exercise in futility to attempt to identify even a single individual, let alone an entire class, of that caliber. After all, as he had testified at his trial, not only did his resolute, Diogenes-like search to lay eyes upon the countenance of anyone wiser than himself produce none such, but the same process fortuitously unmasked the ones he had earlier regarded as wise to be woefully incognizant of their ignorance even in the very subjects they were widely thought of as experts.

Third, if — despite his publicly repeated concession that he is neither wiser than anyone nor, aside from stone carving, trained in any profession — Socrates turns out to be correct about the course of action any man of reason would have advised him to take, then we should infer that at the time of his meeting with Crito he must have been a man of reason himself. How else might he have acquired so clear and panoramic a survey of the collective mind of such an intellectually and morally superior cohort? As implied by the oracle's answer to Chaerephon's fateful question and by Socrates' search, Socrates might, in fact, have been the *only* man of reason around. In either case, what matters is that he seems to have reached his decision to remain in jail in keeping with nothing but his own counsel. This produces a curious quandary: If, as he insists, he makes no claim upon wisdom, and yet seems to be on a par with the man of wisdom; if, that is, Socrates, a member of the populace might actually pass for a man of reason, should we not, then, allow for the possibility, and perhaps likelihood, that other, just as ordinary (though, for good measure, let us say mature and established) citizens, like wrestlers, raiment makers, or blacksmiths, could equally successfully climb up to the same social and moral rung? And if we allow for this possibility, then why

characterize the man of reason as standing apart from, instead of together with, the majority? Would we not be closer to the truth to dismiss any such distinction as arbitrary and imaginary? Simply put, would we really be off target to regard the man of reason as, essentially, an unimportant, and perhaps even intentionally misleading, notion in the *Crito*?

Fourth, Plato appears indifferent to the discrepancy he creates between the *man of reason* and conceptual analogues we find in some of his other texts. As we learn from, say, the *Republic*, it is not the just man who could most competently assist friends while injuring enemies when it comes to, for instance, treating illnesses and preserving health, but the physician; and, likewise, the architect who would be clearly better at designing, while the mason better at erecting, buildings than the just man (332d-333e). We note the same vein of reasoning in the *Ion*, wherein Socrates sarcastically holds that only he who has detailed knowledge of a specific profession could rightly critique anyone's analysis of that profession's products or practitioners (539e-540d).

But what if — in contrast to the just man in the *Republic* and the rhapsode in the *Ion* — the man of reason in the *Crito* happens to be genuinely different? What if, let us suppose, we had noticed that the advice he offers on all manner of legal issues tends to closely and frequently overlap that given by any working jurist? Ought we not, then, to hold the man of reason in no lower esteem than we tend to do the jurist? The answer to these questions is twofold: (a) If the overlap between their respective counsels markedly exceeds what might be reasonably taken for sheer chance, then we might infer that the two must have had the same sort of training, or that the man of reason must have made the law his avocation. In either case, the two would be virtually indistinguishable from each other. If so conflated, however, we would have to aim an equally jaundiced eye at both — at the jurist for returning or for supporting an invidious verdict against Socrates, and at the man of reason for not only concurring with that verdict, but even reinforcing the jurist's insistence that Socrates suffer the full punishment required by that verdict. Conversely, (b) unless the man of reason could effectively pass for a jurist in disguise, that is, for someone capable of explaining all the inherent nuances and implications of any existing law and advising accordingly, Socrates could identify no really compelling motive for sooner accepting advice offered him by any man of reason than advice whose origins might be squarely traced to the ranks of the majority.

(ii) Plato makes us aware of no explicitly adduced objections by Crito to Socrates' appointment of the man of reason to the status of a guarantor of fairness and sapience, and hence to a seal of approval of Socrates' decision to remain in jail. Nevertheless, it seems as though Plato himself might have harbored some reservations concerning the amount of influence the man of reason could exercise upon the readers' acceptance of Socrates' decision as being the right one. For though his view on the subject coincides with that held by the legal class at large, the man of reason is no jurist; indeed, to the extent that he is playing only an intermediate role, around him we might still detect the aroma of his common origins. It is, therefore, in an effort to undergird not only Socrates' supra-plebian decision, but also the man of reason's presumed approval of it, that Plato appeals

to what he thought would pass for the most widely respected chorus of voices in Attica, Athens' laws. And the resultant irony could have been no more striking than had Socrates been quoted as having declared thus: It is correct and proper that I fully honor the counsel given me by the very laws on whose basis — and with whose (involuntary) complicity — I was unjustly convicted and sentenced to die.

Even so, for the sake of analytic wholeness we might cast our critical gaze beyond these considerations to examine the substance of the dialogue's succeeding theme. Once we focus upon Socrates' imagined insistence by the laws, that by continually residing in Athens he effectively affirmed and accepted a clearly implied, albeit unwritten, contract between himself and the city's constitution, our effort should ultimately reveal that their position is, essentially, as unpersuasive as the following analogy: Let us suppose that X and Y reside on an island, that they have been close neighbors since they were children, and that there exists over them no law higher than their consistently friendly disposition toward each other. Let us further suppose that one day X decides to presently move from the island after a few members of Y's family — maliciously misinformed by some other islanders that X was having a potentially socially destructive influence on the children of the whole island — began to knowingly, willfully, and ceaselessly produce and release poisonous gases directly toward X's house.

Curiously, according to a professional assayer commissioned by X, the chemical structure of these gases is such that they become quite harmless, and even undetectable, anywhere beyond X's property. And while most of the islanders concur that X would be wise to promptly move away, Y insists that X is obligated to remain precisely where he is, and tolerate whatever might emanate from Y's house. After all, insofar as he was free to permanently leave the island at any time prior to the release of the gases in question, but never did, X effectively entered into an implicit agreement with Y to remain on the island; and this irrespective of the fact that no discussion about any such contract ever took place between them, and though had he known about it, X would probably have rejected any such categorically binding arrangement.

Let us, still further, suppose that touched by the sheer wickedness of the situation, we encourage X to move away as soon as possible, and attempt to convince him that he and his family could comfortably reside for the rest of their lives with friends of ours on any nearby island. How, then, would we reply when — certain as he is that he would be rejected as less than a good neighbor in his new surroundings — X dismisses our offer, and rather half-heartedly asks us for our interpretation of Y's contract claim? Would we not say that, insofar as Y attempts neither to restrain nor even to pro forma condemn his relatives' actions, X is left with no choice but to leave the island? Worse, would we not be perplexed and disappointed once we heard X insisting that Y is, ultimately, correct about what he says, and that, still worse, X has already decided to stay put, though the situation is likely to culminate with his death? For reasons too obvious to explain here, one could, surely, no sooner identify any clearer moral sway in the laws' unilaterally known and accepted contract with Socrates, than one could in Y's imagined relationship with X in our preceding illustration.

(iii) When juxtaposed with the character we thought we had distilled from Plato's other dialogues, perhaps the Socrates of the *Crito* ought to, in a sense, surprise us less with his decision to stay in jail than with his unwillingness to, for at least philosophical purposes, mount even a perfunctory argument against the consensus he is certain exists between the man of reason and the laws of Athens. His positive bias toward the man of reason notwithstanding, had Plato been somewhat more consistent in speaking through Socrates' mouth, he would have undoubtedly downgraded the man of reason to sheer superfluity — presuming he would have had Socrates refer to the latter at all.

Socrates' yawning silence in response to their admonishment of him might be said to grant the laws practically full discretionary power to misrepresent their own (whether intentional or not) complicity in his case; and, of course, when they aver that he ought to think of himself as, ultimately, a victim of men, they could most cogently be interpreted as doing precisely that. Upon closer inspection, however, we observe that he could well have objected not only to this, but also to one more crucial consideration:

(a) The laws' contention that Socrates ought to hold men, and not the legal system of Athens, responsible for the injustice against him is, at best, scarcely true, and at worst, fundamentally misleading — with the truth residing much closer to the latter. For insofar as these same men achieved their aim not in a kangaroo court but through legal channels and in a public forum, we would have to attach most of the culpability to the organs and elements which conferred legitimacy and power upon that injustice, the laws themselves. If so, the laws' ominous advice to Socrates that he remain in jail might be taken as being either irrelevant to the case, or as reflecting a misunderstanding of his accusers' role, or, still, as having been inspired by basically self-serving motives. If violation of any given law might indeed be rightly thought of as a strike against the whole of the legal system, then surely any goal-driven, conscientiously undertaken legal malpractice would have to be perceived from the same angle. Had the laws and their appointed guardians been a bit more vigilant, they could not but have noticed that while the concerned prosecutors *qua* prosecutors were acting within the letter of the law, they were clearly violating its spirit. Instead, therefore, of vilifying him, the laws ought to have urged Socrates to escape, and thus strike against those who, in their recognized capacity, had decided to abuse the very constitution they swore to serve and protect.

To cast the preceding observations in a somewhat stronger language, much of the success of Socrates' accusers rests with the Athenian jurists who found it superfluous to make provisions for precluding the sort of court-approved miscarriage of justice that the laws now think socially necessary to defend. Since, undoubtedly, Socrates' case was not the first but merely a part of a string of such abuses, these jurists and, by extension, the laws must have been already familiarized with the problem. Insofar, then, as they could have no less easily appeared to, and rebuked, their practitioners, but chose not to do so, Socrates might have voiced his indignation in terms similar to the following: Laws, had you behaved with the fairness we, the Athenian people, have vested in, and expect from, you — by, for example, ensuring that your officers found the body of

evidence against me as tenuous as you know it to be — today I would have been at home or mingling in the agora, instead of languishing here, weighing all the reasons in support of and against running away. Ironically, and most tragically, laws, when you threaten me with eternal persecution while defending the injustice perpetrated against me, what you are, in effect, intimating is that you have *become* the mouth and instruments of precisely the injustice we appointed you to defend us all against.

(b) Socrates might have also expressed surprise at the laws' apparent ignorance of elementary human psychology, or, more specifically, the motivational factors of human conduct. In fact, he might have pointed to their ignorance as an implicit impetus to jurists to foment or at least allow still more legal mischief. Nor, as functional constituents of a culture wherein the method of training animals was routinely employed, did Socrates or the laws need to study Thorndike's Law of Effect so as to grasp the parental parallel of shaping one's behavior: How curious, laws, he might have announced with a long face and raised eyebrows, that you seem unaware of this fundamental child-rearing criterion, namely, once a child goes unpunished for any unacceptable action, he will likely repeat that action in similar situations. Correspondingly, you would henceforth preclude much legal impropriety in your name if you presented yourselves to the overseeing officials in my trial, and sternly threatened each of them with punishment in an ascending order of severity for any future unfair verdicts in their court. And then, laws, as if to underscore your displeasure with the verdict against me, you might inform them that, immediately thereafter, you will be visiting me in my jail cell for the purpose of urging me to escape as soon as possible . . . and with the clearest of conscience.

Intensifying Socrates' lack of any such retort is Plato's evident reluctance to either permit Crito to pose, or have Socrates say absolutely anything that could be construed as an answer to, the following pressing question: If, Socrates, the laws were to rebuke you for no more than contemplating an escape, then instead of unconvincingly asking for my help in formulating a reply to them, why not tell me how *you* think you might have gone about answering them? What? You might, you say, have uttered nothing in response, as their words would sound true to you? How peculiar, my dear friend that you, a tenacious stone turner, an indefatigable questioner of men, and a seasoned midwife of ideas, would suddenly fall silent, and this in the face of so jarring a paradox — the laws attempting to compel a just man into submitting to the full extent of an unjust verdict!

While these and thematically related questions will remain unaddressed by Plato's Socrates, Crito's objections and replies in my reconceived dialogue (just below) should make for a more absorbing read. In contrast to Plato's dull Crito — actually, *obsequious* might be a more apt adjective — here I introduce a more vibrant, a flesh and blood, as it were, perspicacious, and redoubtable, yet respectful, interlocutor. Nor, I dare say, would it be an exaggeration to observe that following the opening few pages in the original text Crito's participation becomes practically superfluous, such that Plato might have deleted him thereafter, with the resultant monologue by Socrates sustaining no conceptual loss at all. My Crito puts in no similarly minimal-returns, low-profile appearance, but promptly establishes himself as an intellectual force of the first order. Moreover, unlike

Plato's version of him, he is hardly carried by the discussion's inertia, but exhibits the kind of refreshing rigor and precision that are indispensable for keeping Socrates' back against his jail cell's wall.

4. My conception of Crito's likely retorts and rejoinders to each of the seminal reasons Socrates adduces for remaining in jail conforms to the original dialogue's progression. Nor, of course, have I altered the discussion's final resolution; on the contrary, to reflect the informal sense of the relationship between the two old friends, I have taken care to retain not only much of their small talk, but also some of their expressions of surprise:

SOCRATES: My goodness, Crito, you're here already? What time is it?

CRITO: Indeed, I am, Socrates; and it's just before dawn.

SOCRATES: Have you been here for a while? By the way, how is it that the jailer didn't block your entry?

CRITO: Yes, I've been here for a while. As for the jailer, not only does he know me as a regular visitor by now, but he also owes me a favor.

SOCRATES: I see. So, tell me, why didn't you awaken me as soon as you came in instead of quietly sitting by my bed?

CRITO: Oh, I could do nothing of the sort, Socrates, and certainly not after seeing you sleep there so placidly. I wanted you to remain comfortable for as long as possible, especially now, in the face of the calamity approaching not only you, but also your family and all the rest of us, your friends and admirers. Yet, I must say, how wonderful it is to see you calmly putting up with your . . . misfortune.

SOCRATES: On the other hand, Crito, how unseemly it would be for me or for anyone of my age to be filled with anxiety about having to die.

CRITO: Not necessarily, Socrates. Actually, I've heard of other people no less old than you who, finding themselves in circumstances similar to yours, have very much resented being put to death.

SOCRATES: This is true. At any rate, why have you come so early?

CRITO: The reason for my coming at such an early hour, old friend, and I shudder as I'm about to utter it, is to bring you tidings of the most unpleasant sort. I've come to inform you that the ship from Delos — the day after whose return you're to be executed — has been sighted not far from Athens, and will probably be docking in later on today.

SOCRATES: Well, if it pleases you, Crito, the ship, it seems to me, will not get here today, but at some point tomorrow. You see, just last night, I had a dream in which a beautiful, graceful woman, dressed in white, appeared to me and said: It is on the third day hence, Socrates, that you will arrive in fertile Phthia.

CRITO: Hmmm . . . what a strange dream, Socrates; ultimately, however, whether the ship comes in today or tomorrow, unless you attend to my plea that you escape from here (and I mean today), the horrid sentence hanging over your head will surely be carried out. I beg you, therefore, to look with favor upon what I'm about to propose; otherwise, aside from losing an irreplaceable friend, most of those who don't know either of us well will, from what I've been able to glean thus far, believe that I could very well have saved you, had I only been willing to part with my money. Once they hear the truth, many more, I believe, will think it incredible that while some of us attempted our best to persuade you to escape, you steadfastly refused to be swayed.

SOCRATES: Perhaps so, Crito, but, really, why should we worry about what the many, or even the majority, might think? What matters is that the decent few, or those worthier of our respect and attention, will likely decide that all the legal proceedings regarding my case were correctly handled in the way they were handled, and that, accordingly, justice prevailed as it ought to have.

CRITO: *I*, Socrates, would not be so dismissive of the majority, as your current circumstance reveals the iridescence of evils and injury it is, collectively speaking, capable of wreaking.

SOCRATES: While what you observe, Crito, clearly does *appear* so, I still maintain that the ordinary majority lacks the power to do either harm or good. I'm convinced that, considered as an aggregate, the majority would prove itself quite impotent had it, let us say, undertaken to make anyone wise or stupid.

CRITO: Think of the majority as you will, Socrates; at the moment, I can only hope that your critical appraisal of its opinions and abilities is not intended to mask your worry about any repercussions I and some others might face, assuming we're ever discovered to have assisted you in your escape. For if so, not only are we morally entitled to run any risk we wish, but the likelihood of us being caught is patently low. There are many I know personally, including foreigners currently staying in Athens, who are ready and willing to help you relocate to any city of your choice. Simmias of Thebes, to mention at least one, has brought money with him specifically for this purpose. Moreover, I have friends abroad, as for example in Thessaly, who will provide you with complete safety and security for the rest of your natural life.

SOCRATES: Indeed.

CRITO: Think of it carefully, Socrates, since if you decline my offer, you would be in no wise treating yourself differently from the way you have been, or would be, treated by your enemies. Besides, you would be condemning your sons to live as orphans, instead of looking after their upbringing and education through to the end, and would thus be taking the easier and . . . well, the less manly course of action. There is simply no alternative, Socrates — you must escape today, so I implore you to do as I'm suggesting before it gets to be too late.

SOCRATES: Your enthusiasm and concern for me, dear friend, are most stirring. As you're undoubtedly aware, though, I've always been a man guided by reason, and one who has made it a personal policy not to take advice from friends, unless, of course, upon reflection, their advice turns out to be the best direction to follow. Accordingly, providing you can identify no more compelling motives and justifications for what you're exhorting me to do as soon as possible, I would have to reject your offer, for I will not permit my actions to repudiate the principles by which I've lived so long. At the same time, insofar as I'd much rather secure your assent to my decision than act against your wishes, perhaps we would do well to inquire into your proposal after all.

CRITO: I wish we would, Socrates, but we really should start now. Dawn, as you can see, is about to break upon us, and unless we hurry, the new day could make it more difficult to attempt an escape, presuming we decided to do so.

SOCRATES: Fine, Crito; let us commence by addressing your unease about the majority's circulating consensus surrounding my case: Serious thinkers have, typically, counseled that whereas some views are deserving of respect, other views ought to be held in lower esteem, and still other ones entirely ignored. I have long thought of this as a sound advice, and regard it as prudent today as I did decades ago. What is your impression of it?

CRITO: Yes, Socrates, I agree that it is a sound advice.

SOCRATES: Would we not, in that sense, do well to appraise the opinions offered by the wise as good, while those offered by the foolish as bad, and as even potentially dangerous?

CRITO: Clearly so.

SOCRATES: Analogously, Crito, would you not also agree that he who has decided to train in gymnastics would be prudent to accept the recommendations, praise, and criticism of a recognized trainer in gymnastics, while honoring not at all the advice, praise, and criticism he hears from the general public?

CRITO: He certainly would, Socrates.

SOCRATES: A gymnast in training would thus shape not only his exercise plan and pattern, but also his eating, drinking, and even sleeping schedules so that they would correspond to the advice of the expert, and by no means to the advice of the populace, would he not?

CRITO: It would surely be foolish for him to do the opposite.

SOCRATES: For were he to do the opposite, our gymnast would, evidently, face the risk of ruining his body.

CRITO: Evidently.

SOCRATES: In that case, Crito, we might go a long way toward resolving debates on such issues as good and bad or just and unjust if, instead of proceeding from one example to another, we expressed the principle intimated by our gymnast illustration in the form of a question whose answer could be hardly plainer: Should we heed and be guided by the opinion of the general public, or should we heed and be guided by the advice of the one with expert knowledge of the subject?

CRITO: As you said, Socrates, the answer to that question could be hardly more transparent. In a word, we would be wise to value, and to conduct ourselves in conformity with, the expert's advice.

SOCRATES: With reference to our gymnast in training analogy, therefore, our bodies would tend to improve with healthy actions, while they would likely be injured by unhealthy ones. Would you confirm or deny such an inference?

CRITO: I would confirm it.

SOCRATES: You say this, and please correct me if I'm misunderstanding you, Crito, because life is obviously better with a healthy body than with a body whose health has been exhausted and wrecked.

CRITO: Obviously.

SOCRATES: But if our lives are made miserable by having to put up with a sickly body, would we not be infinitely more miserable if had we to put up with the moral part of our being damaged, that is, the part of us which is made better by right actions and ruined by unjust behavior? Or are you of the opinion that this part of us is less important than the body?

CRITO: Not at all less important, Socrates; on the contrary, it's much more precious than the body.

SOCRATES: This is fine and good, my dear fellow; however, by agreeing with me you're also, please remember, implicitly conceding the opposite of your earlier claim. What you're now conceding is that we'd be better off to act not on the basis of the opinion advanced by the populace, but on the basis of that offered by an acknowledged expert in right and wrong, just and unjust, the one authority who understands and represents the truth, namely, the *man of reason*.

As for your point that the majority could easily harm or kill us at will, yes, it surely could; but this neither changes the crux of our current inquiry, nor negates what I'm

hoping you would readily agree with — that what matters is not merely to live, but to live well, or, more precisely, to live rightly and honorably.

CRITO: I agree that we could do no better than to live our lives justly and honorably, Socrates. This is the reason I have come to persuade you to run away from here, and there with at least partly *balance*, if not quite rectify, this injustice wrought against you.

SOCRATES: My decision on what you're inviting me to do, Crito, will rest on the answer we must, next, provide to the question of whether it would be right for me to leave here without official permission. If reason leads us to decide that escape is indeed the best course to follow, I promise you we shall do so without delay. If, on the other hand, reason reveals that it would be more appropriate for me to stay put, I beg you to stop all further attempts at persuading me otherwise.

CRITO: I understand.

SOCRATES: The motives you have proposed to me, such as raising money for my rescue, accommodations for me abroad, and bringing up children — those, Crito, are ideas and values held by the majority of the general public, the ones who would kill or, had it been possible, bring people back into existence with the same equanimity and indifference to reason. At the moment, I am much less concerned with the opinion I would hear from thinkers of that ilk than I am with the question to which our discussion points, namely, Shall we be behaving correctly by paying money and by being grateful to those who have raised those funds, or shall we be behaving wrongly? I am preoccupied with that question, for the possibility that I shall have suffered a great wrong by remaining in jail would, ultimately, amount to very little in contrast to the risk of having acted wrongly by escaping.

CRITO: Oh, how admirably you phrased your concern, Socrates. Even so, I'm certain it would be entirely in order for you to also address the question of what, as your current circumstance demands, we *ought to do* here from.

SOCRATES: That is, Crito, assuming my current circumstance demands that we pursue a different course from the one you already know I have in mind. Let us, now that we have started, further inquire into what you're proposing, and if you decide to challenge any of my claims and inferences, I'll listen carefully to your ideas and attempt to respond accordingly. After all, as I said a moment ago,

I would rather secure your approval of my plan than act in contradiction to your convictions. This, then, is what I propose that we lay down as the starting point of our inquiry; so, answer my questions as best you know.

CRITO: But . . . before we proceed with your point, Socrates, might we not briefly revisit our discussion of the uselessness, and even potential danger, of heeding the majority's opinion concerning questions of fairness and justice?

SOCRATES: If you so wish, Crito, though I was under the impression we had settled that part of your proposal, as you yourself seemed to imply with your affirmative answers to my questions.

CRITO: That's undoubtedly the impression I did convey, Socrates, I agree.

Having conceded as much, I must insist that you elicited my affirmative answers to your questions only insofar as we examined the subject from your vantage point. Let us now, I suggest, take another look at the subject, this one from my angle, and then decide which one of us is closer to the mark.

SOCRATES: So be it, Crito, let us see what you have in mind.

CRITO: To return to your insistence that you would not have your actions repudiate the standards whereby you have always lived your life, every one of us, your friends and admirers, is aware of your rectitude and personal honor. At least some of us,

however, are also of the opinion that you have nurtured and developed these personal traits to a fault.

SOCRATES: Really, Crito, how could this be? One, as I see it, might be no more rightly faulted for being *too* honorable or *too* conscientious than for being *too* just or *too* fair or *too* honest, or do you disagree?

CRITO: One might certainly be rightly faulted for being too honorable and too honest, Socrates, especially if he knowingly and willfully puts these traits in the service of any campaign which aims to (unjustly) achieve his utter ruin. This is, essentially, what you're doing here and now: Excepting your enemies and detractors, practically everyone familiar with your case is persuaded that both the laws and all the involved jurists let you down at your trial in a host of ways. It is from that perspective that, as I said moments ago, following your execution, the majority — not knowing any better — will likely first blame me for not attempting to secure your freedom, and then, after hearing the truth, find it unbelievable that it was you who refused to escape even when freedom was eminently attainable. Had they been privy to our present discussion, I believe that most Athenians would have entirely approved of my advice to you.

SOCRATES: Your point, Crito, intimates to me that perhaps we ought to retrace our steps, so we can determine the reason my gymnast in training analogy has failed to allay your anxiety regarding the majority's possible criticism of you:

Tell me, did we not agree that our budding gymnast would be wise to accept the advice, the praise, and criticism of a recognized professional trainer in gymnastics, while resolutely rejecting the advice, the praise, and criticism of the majority of the ordinary public?

CRITO: We did.

SOCRATES: Did we not, on the basis of this parallel, decide that instead of worrying about what the majority might appraise as just or unjust, it would be better to be anxious about what the man of reason, the man who has grasped the nature of justice and injustice, might say on the matter?

CRITO: Yes, Socrates, we agreed on that as well. Nor, in principle, could I disagree with your notion that, if anyone, it is the man of reason, the expert in right and wrong, whom we ought to consult on questions of justice and injustice, and honor and dishonor. At the same time — and to the extent that I'm hoping it might influence your decision to escape from here — I must point to what seems to me to be an inconspicuous, yet fundamental, discrepancy in your argument.

SOCRATES: A discrepancy of fundamental significance, Crito?

CRITO: I think so, Socrates, though if it turns out that I'm right in having espied such an inadvertence in what you've said, I'm certain it could be ascribed to nothing other than your having been imprisoned here for nearly a month now, a distress that would try any man's patience and mental acuity.

SOCRATES: Whether that or something else, my excellent friend, is quite irrelevant, since the truth demands its own. Speak, therefore, and if we decide that within the bosom of my argument there does, in fact, reside a telling discrepancy, then I'll not only be grateful to you for having revealed it to me, but will also ask you to assist me in rectifying it.

CRITO: Very good. Perhaps I might begin by inviting you to cast your mind back to a lengthy discussion I've heard you had some time ago at a feast hosted by Polemarchus and his father, Cephalus, with some of the other guests, most notably Thrasymachus of Chalcedon and Ariston's two elder sons, Glaucon and Adeimantus. Do you recall the event?

SOCRATES: I should say I do, Crito. Incidentally, while you're right to characterize it as *lengthy*, that discussion, now that you've reminded me of it, turned out to be philosophically fruitful on a variety of themes.

CRITO: And what a treat, Socrates, it must have been to hear how, much like a seasoned wrestler, you skillfully addressed all the objections and challenges from those around you. At any rate, was I also informed correctly that of all the topics under consideration at that event, it was the notion of justice that attracted most of the participants' attention?

SOCRATES: It was.

CRITO: In that case, you'll probably further recall what, in an attempt to put it into focus, Polemarchus said on that subject?

SOCRATES: Here, Crito, you must be a bit more specific, since, if I'm not mistaken, aside from reaffirming his father's rather casually stated idea of the nature of justice, Polemarchus added a few other, related conceptions of his own.

CRITO: If I'm rightly recalling my second-hand information, he urged that justice means to benefit friends while harming enemies. To this, you responded by saying that, if so, justice could be rather easily, albeit inadvertently, perverted. For insofar as we might misread one's traits and tendencies, and thus simultaneously become friends with individuals who are bad and enemies with individuals who are good, we would be in effect benefiting persons who ought to be harmed while harming persons who ought to be benefited.

SOCRATES: Yes, and would you not concur that such a mistake regarding people has been rather frequently made by many of us, Crito?

CRITO: Undoubtedly so, Socrates. But, you see, if we could be so mistaken about our friends, some of whom we have known for years, what guarantee do we have that we would be any better at deciding whom to rely upon as men of reason?

Is it not, more specifically, possible to identify someone as a man of reason on the basis of his training, yet be really mistaken about his ability and effectiveness as a practitioner of that training?

SOCRATES: It is possible.

CRITO: So, you do allow for exceptions in the reliability and soundness of the advice provided by the men of reason, do you not?

SOCRATES: Of course I do, Crito, as even men of reason are only human, not divine.

CRITO: Ahhh, what you just said reminds me of another discussion of yours I've heard about, this one with Euthyphro, the theologian, who was at the time pressing murder charges against his father. Did you not then observe that — if Hesiod, Homer, and a whole assortment of theologians have correctly informed us — no lesser beings than the gods themselves frequently differ on the question of whether certain acts are right or wrong?

SOCRATES: I did.

CRITO: Within our own realm, even professionals such as physicians — whose training is grounded in empirical research and established standards — disagree amongst themselves not only about diagnoses, but also about the course of treatment for the same illness. Equivalently, instead of insisting that the legal man of reason would approve of your decision not to escape, you would, I think, have spoken more accurately had you said that while some of his kind would approve of your decision, others might disapprove of it.

SOCRATES: That sounds reasonable enough.

CRITO: Hence, if the ones we have decided to heed as men of reason turn out to be less than what they appeared to us initially, then, clearly, accepting and acting on

their advice would be just about as misleading and potentially injurious as taking the advice of the majority of the populace.

SOCRATES: In isolated cases of that sort, yes — nevertheless, in contrast to the many, the men of reason tend to be superior in character and in education.

As a general rule, whenever we correctly refer to one as a man of reason, we are normally referring to someone whose advice is virtually invariably useful, reliable, and good; that is, a man of discernment, insight, and the ability to judge what is right and lasting. The majority of the populace, on the other hand, neither behaves nor reasons on the basis of reflection and calculation, but on the basis of, mostly, emotion and caprice. Surely, both of us, men of advanced age as we are, Crito, have witnessed numerous examples of precisely this sort.

CRITO: We have.

SOCRATES: When, then, I say that we ought to worry about how the man of reason might evaluate our decision to leave here without official approval, I'm really referring to the *composite profile* of the men of reason. The parallel of this point, I believe, is what you yourself are implying when you speak of the opinion held by the general public. If so, I should be no less correct to say that the *typical* man of reason would approve of my decision to stay put where I am, than you would be to think that the *ordinary* citizen, the one who has no special or vested interest in my case, would either blame you for not attempting harder to secure my freedom, or find it incredible that it was I who decided not to escape when I relatively easily could have.

CRITO: Your description, Socrates, sounds right and fair when we apply it to actors taken as collective units, or as statistical averages. Since neither you nor Euthyphro injected such a point in your discussion, I can only presume that the gods, being so remarkably different from one another, could not be properly thought of as such an average.

SOCRATES: No, the gods could not be thought of as such an average.

CRITO: Having concurred that not quite every man of reason is of equal usefulness, or equally worthy of our respect and attention, let us next take a look at the sort of knowledge the typical man of reason would have to possess. Insofar as in your earlier analogy you point to the gymnastics trainer as at once a man of reason and an *expert*, I'm presuming that besides being wise, any man of reason would have to have graduated from a professional school or to have completed a special series of tutorial sessions.

SOCRATES: To be certain, Crito; after all, any wise but professionally untrained man might be abler than the ordinary citizen to, for example, explain why no society could long exist without a legal system in place, or explain in what respects any society could improve its quality of life if it established for itself a medical or an educational system. Unless, however, that same man were trained in the law codes, he could speak with no more competence on any legal proceedings than he could on what treatment to prescribe for specific illnesses, or clearly explain what the laws of grammar or of mathematics are, providing he was trained neither in medicine nor in linguistics.

CRITO: Besides having detailed knowledge of the scope of each law, the man of reason would have to be able to espy each law's various susceptibilities, latent implications, and also potential improvements and amends.

SOCRATES: What do you mean, Crito?

CRITO: Well, aside from being able to explain why no convicted prisoner ought to escape from jail, he should be able to quickly distinguish between a fair and an unfair verdict. He should, moreover, know how to effect all the necessary changes so as to

preclude any future unfair verdicts, and, still more, be capable of promptly stopping or reducing the severity of all unfair or excessive punishments. Otherwise, our man of reason would surely be as useless and potentially injurious as would, say, any physician who could hardly distinguish between one illness and another, yet prescribed the same treatment irrespective of the different symptoms, and urged each patient to adhere to that treatment regardless of whether it helped him or even made him worse. Any legal man of reason, then, who would counsel us to fully abide by a verdict regardless of whether we've been convicted fairly or unfairly, would be not only giving us the wrong advice, but in certain cases even reinforcing a miscarriage of justice.

SOCRATES: Whom, then, or what class of professionals would you put forth as proper representatives of the *legal* men of reason?

CRITO: None but legislators and politicians, Socrates, or those whose job it is to formulate, to pass, and to interpret the laws of the land. Insofar as some of them have spent years and others even decades weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each law they pass, it is reasonable to infer that they should be the most qualified to provide the ultimate word on such matters?

SOCRATES: Nor could it be otherwise, Crito.

CRITO: You can see how closely my example parallels your claim that only a professional trainer in gymnastics could supply the best advice to those who have decided to dedicate themselves to that sort of a career, can you not?

SOCRATES: I can.

CRITO: Now, if I might draw your attention, Socrates, to the main factor that first began the attack upon your reputation: In an effort, as you stated at your trial, to substantiate for yourself the truth of the oracle's revelation to Chaerephon, namely, her claim that there was no one wiser than you — did you not for a while go about questioning and cross-examining those, amongst them legislators and politicians, whom you had previously looked upon as wiser than you?

SOCRATES: I did.

CRITO: And was it not you who eventually discovered, and told everyone who would listen, that following your questioning process, those same legislators and politicians turned out to be not only not wiser than anyone else, but that they were, in fact, even less wise than you?

SOCRATES: Yes, Crito, what you say is true.

CRITO: Was it not you who also said that though neither the legislators and politicians, on the one hand, nor you, on the other, had any wisdom to boast about, you were at least conscious of your own ignorance, while they were quite unaware of theirs? Did you, Socrates, so testify at your trial or did you not?

SOCRATES: I did, indeed.

CRITO: Our remarks and concessions, then, Socrates, could have hardly rendered more conspicuous the fundamental discrepancy I referred to earlier, the discrepancy upon which your decision to stay put rests. Specifically, while before your trial you dismissed legislators and politicians as unwise, and thus implicitly depicted their views and judgments concerning questions of justice and fairness as less than reliable, today you turn about and praise them as men worthy of the highest esteem. Nor did you, until several days following your trial, ever signal such a striking change in your appraisal of them.

SOCRATES: My dear man, when at my trial I said I had found legislators and politicians to be less deserving of their wide reputation for wisdom, I meant that their *practical intelligence* has tended to be generally overestimated — not that they are devoid of the knowledge they are required to have in order to fulfill their professional

obligations. Granted, my depiction of my discovery might have sounded a bit more severe than I intended it. Still, I would no sooner advise that they be undervalued as men of reason in their own professions than I would urge that mathematicians and trainers in gymnastics be undervalued in *their* respective disciplines. Nor, of course, would it make sense to advocate any such notion; for if we saw the authors and administrators of these standards and social controls as less than qualified to determine what should pass for justice and fairness, then to whom would we appeal as arbitrators in legal disputes?

CRITO: Right . . . which prompts me to inquire: When you decided against escaping from jail, would I be correct to presume that you arrived at that decision by yourself, without assistance from even a single legal man of reason?

SOCRATES: You would be correct to presume so, yes.

CRITO: Then, Socrates, your argument in support of that decision has just become significantly more perplexing and tenuous than I thought it seemed at first glance. In opposition to your publicly and repeatedly declared insistence that you have no claim to wisdom, whether great or small, now we must, on questions of law, justice, and fairness, point to *you* as the embodiment of the man of reason. In fact, you might as well have said that your decision not to escape is right because you are a man of reason, and that you are a man of reason because you arrived at the correct decision on the matter.

SOCRATES: Honestly, Crito, how merciless you are toward an old man, and at such an early hour of the day. I am presuming that you will at some point let me know what has instigated this line of questioning; nevertheless, I remain certain that you have hardly exposed me as a latent legal expert.

CRITO: My more immediate aim, Socrates, is by no means to, as you put it, *expose* you as any sort of legal expert, but to draw to your attention something whereof you yourself appear unaware: When, as you observe, the man of reason would likely pronounce correct your disagreement with the majority's opinion on the question of whether you ought or ought not to escape, what you are, in effect, intimating is that you are on a par with the man of reason; for if you were not, you could not have been so clear about his positive assessment of your decision to stay put. And yet, unlike those who have been educated in the scope and function of our city's laws, you are but a part of the same non-legally trained majority whose consensus you seemingly perfunctorily dismiss. In keeping, then, with your own analogy and resultant principle, if you, as neither a gymnast nor a trainer thereof, would forbear from offering advice to any budding gymnast, why would you, as neither a legislator nor a politician, deem yourself any more capable of deducing precisely how the legal man of reason might interpret any court proceeding and resolution, let alone what he would assert about your trial, fraught as it was with arguably the most questionable sorts of accusations? With these considerations in mind, Socrates, we could not but select one of two likelihoods: First, by virtue of your lack of legal training, your claim that the man of reason would nod approvingly at your decision not to escape stands as no better than an unqualified conjecture. And, second, if you, as a rather typical member of the non-legally trained majority, really *are* competent to predict and appraise the soundness of the legal pronouncements of any man of reason, then, by extension, we ought to look upon the majority's opinion and advice regarding your verdict as not an iota less reasonable and legitimate than either your opinion or that advanced by any legal expert. If so, I dare say, Socrates, you would be hard put to identify even a single genuinely compelling reason for

preferring to follow the advice you imagine you would receive from your composite man of reason over the one you are already hearing from the majority.

SOCRATES: By Zeus, Crito, I must say that until just a moment ago you had me virtually persuaded that I really ought to moderate my disposition toward the majority. And I might have gone about doing precisely that had I not noticed the shadow your twofold inference casts over this important distinction: Whereas my being consistently led by reason does not necessarily mark me as an expert on Athens' constitution and laws, it does nevertheless decisively separate me from the great multitude of my fellow citizens, or those who incline to live under the robust influence of passion and caprice.

CRITO: That *is* undeniably so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then, Crito, you, if anyone, should understand that though I stand between the majority and the legal men of reason, I stand closer to the latter than the former. In that respect, my prediction of how they might view my present circumstance could not be properly characterized as . . . an *unqualified conjecture*. Insofar as, correspondingly, you have misidentified the existence of a conceptual continuum between me and the majority, I must also reject your inference that one might heed the majority's collective opinion as no less sound than either mine or that advanced by the legal experts.

CRITO: Conversely, Socrates, there are seemingly ordinary individuals, as say, horse trainers and bridle makers — persons not too remarkably different from you, a stone cutter — who are equally guided by reason, and thus stand no further away from the legal experts than do you; and yet they and the majority share the same attitude toward the court's judgment against you. So, bearing in mind these intellectually sober men's contribution to, and reinforcement of, the majority's consensus, should you not be at least somewhat more hesitant and restrained in your rejection of what the majority thinks about your current situation?

SOCRATES: Not necessarily, Crito, for with respect to their interpretation of my situation, you're mistaken to think that these *sober individuals*, as you call them, stand close to the legal men of wisdom. To illustrate: Would you not agree with me that, collectively speaking, the primary object of legislators and political leaders is to preserve the state and the social order?

CRITO: I would.

SOCRATES: Which is why, as we agreed a few minutes ago, had any of these advocates and guardians of the law been with us at the moment, they would have undoubtedly counseled me to remain right where I am. To the extent, on the other hand, that your sober individuals consciously and willfully contradict these experts — and thus necessarily, if implicitly, encourage lawlessness — we could not rightly claim that they possess much legal acumen, our acknowledgement of, and respect for, their practical wisdom notwithstanding. I have already pointed out that, on the whole, the wise man's opinion tends to be more reliable than that of the common man, but not necessarily more reliable than that of the expert — and especially not when addressing matters on which the expert is an expert whereas the wise man is not. Awareness of his limitations, and therefore the tendency to abstain from offering opinions, regarding technical issues must be a natural component of the wise man's character. So, while, let us say, we might sooner accept the wise man's opinion on how to design and build a temple than we would that offered us by any common and untrained individual, the wise man would prove himself a fool were he not to defer to a professional architect, providing one were part of the decision-making process. Simply put, Crito, as reflective as I've consistently been in reaching my important decisions, I'm certain the majority opinion you have faced me with this morning

deserves no further consideration, for reasons that, again, my gymnast in training analogy has already demonstrated.

CRITO: Forgive me, dear friend, for being so bold and direct, but this is a time that I think requires nothing less. You see, what I fear is that irrespective of whether we locate you somewhere between the untrained majority and the legal men of reason, or even counted you as one of the latter, we really ought to train a suspicious eye toward your gymnast analogy. For from where I stand, it seems to have from practically the start of our current discussion introduced more confusion than clarification.

SOCRATES: Pray, Crito, how so?

CRITO: I know you've always resorted to the use of analogies in order to illustrate your side of any argument, Socrates; and while most of these have been on target, this particular one, from what I can see, appears to be falling obviously short of it. To put it into perspective, and you will of course correct me if I have misunderstood its meaning, the crux of your analogy is this: It seems axiomatically true that one would be gravely mistaken to abide by the advice and guidance of the majority regarding his training in gymnastics, instead of abiding by the advice and guidance of a recognized trainer. If so, we would be just as mistaken to accept and act on the basis of the majority's opinion regarding the fairness and implications of specific court judgments, instead of accepting and acting on the opinion regarding those same judgments offered by a recognized legal expert. Is this not, basically, what you have in mind, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Basically, yes. So, what sort of a defect do you think you've detected in this parallel?

CRITO: In a word, Socrates, we might point to, at best, the most superficial of parallels between the two halves of your analogy: One would, unquestionably, do well to solicit and closely follow the advice of a recognized gymnastics trainer while preparing to become a gymnast, just as one should, say, solicit and follow the advice of a horse trainer when preparing horses for a show competition. But do you really believe that we might treat questions concerning the nature and consequences of justice and injustice the same way we might treat questions regarding men training in gymnastics, or questions regarding the training of show horses? What I mean is that while there tends to be relatively little disagreement among trainers in either of the latter two disciplines about dietary and exercise regimens, and while we can fairly easily measure whether gymnasts or horses in training are or are not physically progressing, we would find it difficult to point to similarly clear standards or measurements concerning justice or the medium through which justice is served, the laws.

SOCRATES: Well, I, for one, have always thought that few, if any, are the analogies whose two halves perfectly reflect each other. To the extent, however, that any analogy has revealed the essence of the point which has inspired it, would we not have to say that it has, as it were, done its job?

CRITO: I suppose so, Socrates; insofar, however, as your gymnast analogy points to an incidental instead of an essential parallel between the two halves, it, I'm convinced, is rendering your explanation more confusing than revealing.

SOCRATES: Hmmm . . . upon second thought, I suppose I can understand your objection to my analogy. Fair enough, Crito; still, your serious opposition to my claim that when facing legal questions and issues we ought to give precedence to the analyses of legal experts, sounds not only odd, but even — counterintuitive. After all, if, as you are holding, we could indeed rely upon the majority's opinion concerning

such matters, then why has, to my knowledge, every existing republic thought it quite practical and expedient to create and fully maintain an entire class of legislators, judges, and a variety of legal practitioners? Why not, if what you're claiming is correct, settle every legal disagreement on no more than the majority's consensus? Or to synthesize all my conceptual reservations into a single question:

What is the ultimate basis for your belief that we would find it useful to accept the majority's understanding of the nature of justice, fairness, and honor?

CRITO: My ultimate basis, Socrates, is an historical fact, indeed, a truism, namely, that justice, fairness, and honor are all social constructs, and that, hence, none of them would exist without the majority's adoption and preservation of the collection of values, customs, and standards to which each refers. In this respect, Protagoras, it seems to me, was right when he declared that, "Man is the measure of all things." Granted, it is wise men that in most cities have authored laws, and similarly wise leaders who endeavor to maintain the resultant climate of justice.

Yet, might any laws remain in effect had the majority not given its quiet consent by not raising a revolution either against them or against their creators? Since the answer to this question could not be clearer, instead of ignoring or rejecting the opinion of the many, you would do better to appeal to them as the highest arbiters of what is widely recognized as right and wrong, or just and unjust.

SOCRATES: And with that, Crito — unless I've misunderstood something — you just came full circle to at once exonerate and reinforce my decision to stay put. Here you are, urging me to escape when you ought to be commending me for adhering to the very laws which, by your own hypothesis, most Athenians have adopted and are actively maintaining even as we speak. In fact, to the extent that my decision honors the technical side of the laws prized by the legal experts, and the social control side championed by all political leaders, you would do better to point me out as an exemplar of good citizenship, instead of attempting to talk me into breaking the law.

CRITO: Ironically, Socrates, it is this sort of adherence, or, as some might call it, inflexibility, which pits you against the majority's opinion. Whenever any law, as, for example, the one on whose basis you were convicted, has so clearly failed the accused, and there is simply no time within which the majority could legally either nullify the verdict or somehow mitigate the requisite punishment, the most effective alternative would be to appeal to the majority's consensus on how to more immediately respond to the injustice in question.

SOCRATES: I see.

CRITO: Even a relatively muted but large-scale opposition to injustice, as the one we're witnessing in your case, can play a legally corrective and culturally revivifying role as can any actively destructive one. Worry not, therefore, Socrates, that your escape might precipitate uncertainty and unrest where stability and order ought to prevail, for it might very well turn out to be the sort of catalyst that tends to energize our legal system's continuing process of self-correction.

SOCRATES: Er . . . I remain unconvinced by your argument, Crito. To the extent that, as I have already said, the populace is largely guided by emotion and whim, its majority could be hardly relied upon to bring forth even comparatively minor but helpful adjustments, let alone radical but justifiable changes, in existing laws. I agree that when left to its devices, the majority invariably desires the good; its judgment, however, of what is genuinely good for it is not quite as enlightened. So, what is right and acceptable for the majority today could easily become awful and offensive tomorrow, and I'm sure I need not tell you that much of what most of us regarded as vile and loathsome yesterday is all the rage today.

CRITO: This is precisely why only a moment ago I referred to Protagoras' idea of humankind as the ultimate setter of all legal and social standards.

SOCRATES: And, at least in that sense, you were right to do so, Crito. My larger point, however, remains unaltered; that is, precisely because the majority's opinions are so capricious and thus unpredictable, we ought to abide by that which tends to be much longer lasting and thus reliable. Tell me, would you within such a mercurial social context expect the majority's view of what sorts of behavior are right, honorable, and just to be more stable than its views of what is or ought to be trendy and fashionable?

CRITO: No . . . I don't think I would; in fact, it appears that the two views would rather closely parallel each other in their magnitude of social change.

SOCRATES: This is why, old friend, every citizen must know that, as a society, we might either maintain peace and potentially prosper with the laws, or be caught in a vortex of unrest and quite possibly perish without them. Whatever shortcomings you think you have espied in my gymnast analogy notwithstanding then, the essence of my original assertion remains intact, namely, that the majority is no wiser at resolving legal dilemmas than it tends to be at correctly addressing difficulties native to any discipline wherein the majority is not an expert.

CRITO: How curious, Socrates; it's just become apparent to me that neither you nor I have been speaking in circles as much as we've been speaking past each other. I should, accordingly, never forgive myself if I did not make one final effort to convince you that the populace is in at least one important respect *intrinsically* qualified to not only judge the fairness of any verdict, but also competently speak on most sorts of non-technical legal tensions and imbalances.

SOCRATES: A fresh approach, Crito? All right . . . I'm listening.

CRITO: Yes, and let me put it this way: While the majority of the populace and experts in any discipline you care to mention would likely differ on questions of methods and procedures, both sides nevertheless agree on the ultimate results which that discipline aims to attain. While, therefore, the majority and physicians might disagree on how to treat, let us say, a serious intestinal disorder, both sides insist that they have the same object in sight, health. Likewise, while the majority and legislators might disagree on how to interpret the evidence presented in court, they nevertheless agree on the need for, and on the main goal of, the legal system and of each law, namely, the attainment of justice and fairness.

Though in this respect we would be correct to see each discipline as being of roughly equal significance to human activity at large, there are at least two factors which implicitly depict the legal profession as fundamentally different from any of its sistren. What I am referring to is the character and origins of the interpretive disagreement between its practitioners and the populace. First, virtually everyone is convinced that he harbors an instinctive sense of right and wrong, and of justice and fairness, a type of extraordinary sense we cannot detect in such disciplines as medicine, mathematics, or . . . gymnastics. This explains why, as we might infer from their corresponding responses, children as well as adults have a good grasp both of having been wronged and of having perpetrated a wrong. Second, each of the two camps seems to have a rather proprietary feel for the laws, the sort of feel that is clearly absent in any other discipline.

SOCRATES: A *proprietary feel* for the law? Why . . . what exactly might you have in mind, my dear fellow?

CRITO: What I mean is that within the realm of legal interpretation, each camp has staked out a territory of its own, such that while the experts concentrate largely on the

letter and implications of any given law, the majority tends to train its attention on the moral and ethical variations and possibilities of that same law. Hence, the difference between opposing camps regarding legal issues and camps debating issues in any other profession could be hardly more stark: The majority in the former — conscious of its collective power to not only determine cultural morality, but also change any law or do away with any legal system at will — is convinced of its correctness even when its consensus entirely contradicts existing laws. Nor is this lost on legislators at large, which explains their nearly constant anxiety about the prevailing general mood and attitude. There is, Socrates, I think, another, let us call it an ancillary consideration that points to the majority's opinion of your case as being worthy of our approval: To the extent that our republic — surely better than any other Greek city or province — has been flourishing within the total social context approved of, and preserved by, most of our citizens, it seems reasonable to think of the latter as possessing a special understanding of perhaps the entire spectrum of social and ethical matters. If so, instead of ignoring their consensus in question, we might heed it as perhaps the highest (non-divine) standard of right and wrong available to us.

SOCRATES: I must congratulate you, Crito, for presenting so solid a reply to my decision to stay put. But even if I were to change my long-standing regard of the majority, there is, you see, another, a more telling reason, revealed to me by a chorus of voices I've heard many times speaking in unison, against any attempt by me to leave here without official permission.

CRITO: A *chorus* of voices, Socrates? At your trial, you mentioned a voice you've been hearing since childhood, a voice that frequently steers you away from certain actions, yet one that never commands you to do anything specific. Yet now you're referring to a whole host of such voices.

SOCRATES: Yes, a chorus whose message, which I've been hearing since the conclusion of my trial, sounds clear and, so far as I can make out, irrefutable.

CRITO: Might you share this message with me, or would you rather not?

SOCRATES: I should like that very much, Crito; for, again, I'd rather convince you of the rightness of my decision than act against your will.

CRITO: Wonderful; but I must again ask, Socrates, that as we proceed, you take into consideration just what we ought to do presently.

SOCRATES: In that case, dear friend, we would do better to examine the problem together. Lend me your attention, and if you successfully challenge my arguments, I promise to reconsider your offer; if, on the other hand, your challenge falls short, then be a good fellow, and stop trying to deflect me from the course I've decided to follow.

Attend, therefore, to what I say, and answer my questions as best you know.

CRITO: I'll attempt to do exactly that, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Let us, then, approach our inquiry with the following as our foundational premise: Do you or do you not agree that one ought never willingly to do wrong, or would you say that wrongdoing and acts of injustice are contingent upon circumstances? Do you, as I've known you to have all these years, Crito, still believe that regardless of prevailing popular opinion and available options, willful injustice is never honorable, and that doing wrong is invariably bad for the actor?

CRITO: Yes, I still believe that.

SOCRATES: To put it more strongly, Crito, we ought to refrain from doing wrong or cause injury as a retaliation even against the man at whose hands we have suffered severe or evil treatment. I have always believed this; but think well before responding as to whether you share this belief with me.

CRITO: I am in no disagreement with you, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And you say this, Crito, do you, because you perceive no clear distinction between retaliating against someone and intentionally wronging him?

CRITO: Precisely.

SOCRATES: Surely you would promptly let me know if you in any sense disagree with me on this point, Crito, would you not?

CRITO: Yes, Socrates, of course I would; on this point, however, I, again, concede my full agreement with what you say; so, please proceed.

SOCRATES: Answer me, then, this question: Ought one invariably to keep his promises and honor his covenants, assuming they are right and good, or would one do better to infringe and violate them?

CRITO: One ought always to keep and honor his promises and covenants.

SOCRATES: By your own admission, therefore, if I leave here without official permission, I would have to be thought of as not only causing injury by not honoring my agreement with the rest of society, but also of causing injury to an institution against which bringing injury is least justifiable.

CRITO: Would you be a bit more specific, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Perhaps I could illustrate my point as follows: Let us suppose that just as we were about to leave here, the laws and the constitution of Athens confronted us and asked: Have you really examined the repercussions of what you're about to do, Socrates? Surely you understand that by running away you are not only robbing us, the laws, of our vested authority, but also upsetting and subverting the republic's sovereignty, do you not? After all, could any city exist long if its jurisdiction were disregarded and nullified by private citizens?

How might we answer such questions, Crito, and many similar ones? Would I be correct to say, Yes, laws, my intention is precisely that, to destroy you, for it was none but you who made it possible that I be unfairly convicted? Is that what you would advise me to say, Crito?

CRITO: Upon my word, Socrates, you and I seem to have misunderstood each other. When a moment ago I concurred with you that we would be wrong to act in vengeance even against those who have done us harm, I thought you were speaking of real human individuals, not human-created phenomena personified.

Let us not, I beg you, confuse people with any of their creations, irrespective of the fact that the latter frequently emphasize and echo elements and inclinations in the former's character. If you would forgive me for pointing out the obvious whereas human beings are clearly conscious, willful, and operative, none of their products might be properly described with any such adjectives. Simply phrased, when one says that a law *demand*s or *proscribes*, what we normally take him to mean is that the law *behaves* so through the intentions and actions of its creators or enforcers, and even its detractors and abusers. Knowing now what you had in mind when you turned our discussion in this direction, I disagree that you would be harming the laws of Athens by running away. On the contrary, when your enemies twisted the evidence against you, and thereby succeeded in having you convicted of crimes you did not commit, it was they who willfully acted in clear contradiction to fairness and justice; it was they who first struck against the laws. If, then, the laws did indeed decide to appear in order to scold you at all, they would, it seems to me, have to scold you for still languishing here instead of breathing the air of freedom.

SOCRATES: I could, as you say, Crito, walk out of here in order to satisfy my conscience. Still, knowing that I was unjustly convicted hardly alleviates my underlying anxiety that by escaping I would be, aside from repaying a wrong with a

wrong, harming those whom I ought never to harm in the slightest. And did we not just concur that it is never right to repay evil with evil?

CRITO: We did indeed, Socrates; but let us not, I beg you, misunderstand our agreement on that question as implying that we must also concur on even such merely ostensibly similar scenarios as the one you just described. From my angle, leaving here without official permission would rightly constitute neither an act of vengeance against anyone — including those who had you unjustly convicted — nor a repudiation of any of the laws of Athens. On the contrary, by escaping, you would be evading the ultimate consequence of a wrong that was done you *in the name of the law*, and therewith releasing the laws — yes, releasing them — from having to further compromise their nature and integrity. To continue with your personification of them, we all take it as a given that the laws invariably wish to act *as laws*, fairly giving protection or meting out punishment within their assigned perimeters, following a properly reached verdict. If, irrespective of the majority's opinion of your verdict, you insist on facing your executioner in a few days hence, you would be effectively *compelling* the laws to carry out the same punishment they should, in accordance with their nature, wish to avoid. Moreover, whether intentionally or not, your decision seems to be only abetting the same group of individuals who brought you to this state.

SOCRATES: Your charge, dear friend, has not infrequently crossed my mind; and while it is true that, as you say, my decision to decline your offer might be interpreted as unwittingly assisting my enemies, I am more concerned with the social and moral circumstances which dictate that I accept the punishment I've been given. After all, is it not true that the jury reached the verdict against me in conformity with established legal procedures? More than that, could we cogently deny that to violate those standards would amount to a repudiation of our nation itself? Don't you think that if everyone had behaved in such a manner, civilized existence as we know it would ultimately become impossible?

CRITO: I agree, Socrates, that we must respect the procedures not an iota less than we ought to respect each law's letter and spirit, insofar as neither would be of any practical consequence or even so much as make sense without the other. But you, I'm afraid, are thinking of something other than this. Insofar as I do not hear you say that it would be better to correct or somehow balance even a clearly unfair verdict, what you appear to be intimating is that you and all those unjustly pronounced guilty and punished accordingly, might be seen as an understandable and *acceptable loss* — not to say a sacrifice — toward a greater good. Don't you see that your decision leaves the objective observer no choice but to see you as no more a preserver than a corrupter and even destroyer of Athens' laws?

SOCRATES: By Zeus, Crito, how you speak.

CRITO: Forgive me, old friend, for my rather indelicate tone with which I have addressed you this morning. Yet, as I observed a minute ago, we are now at a juncture that requires both a candid and urgent voice. Moreover, as you yourself have frequently said, we ought to follow the road to the truth regardless of how or whom it might discomfit. As to your point, I think I instinctively understand and appreciate this larger, social concern of yours; at the same time, I must concede that I am in no sense persuaded that we might rightly characterize as civilized any society whose citizens would accept and abide by unjust verdicts as well as they would accept and abide by just ones. If any such society deserves to be referred to as *civilized* in the true sense of that term, then, I ask you, precisely how different, for those unjustly tried and convicted, would an uncivilized society be?

SOCRATES: For virtually everyone of those (comparatively few) unjustly convicted individuals, even the most orderly and civilized society would, I could hardly deny it, appear chaotic and uncivilized. From the state's angle, on the other hand, I must reemphasize what seems to me to be a truism: If a large enough host of its citizenry were to brazenly dishonor the laws — and, yes, within these ranks I also count all the unjustly convicted ones who would at the earliest opportunity attempt to flee from jail — social existence would be infinitely less pleasant. Actually, I might fortify my response by addressing your preceding objection from a parallel vantage point: Unless you tell me otherwise, I'll presume that the person who related to you my sketch at Polemarchus' banquet of what I thought, and still think, might pass for an ideal polity, did so in fair detail. If so, might you also recall being told a related point and important qualification I made following Glaucon's repeated and rather insistent invitation that I say whether the kind of society I sketched could be translated into reality?

CRITO: Perhaps for the sake of accuracy and coherence you would remind me, Socrates.

SOCRATES: What I answered, Crito, is that, insofar as virtually anything in practice is less perfect than its ideal, even the best structured city could not but — and in spite of its founders' most conscientious efforts — turn out to be inferior in contrast to its corresponding blueprint. In fact, as I showed in the latter half of that discussion, the highest ideal city we might conjure up would itself invariably comprise at least some, whether latent or foreseen, faults and weaknesses. But if the society composed of the most disciplined sort of citizens we might imagine would itself be threatened by various problems, think how much more vulnerable to dissolution would be any real society we might produce with the ordinary sort of citizens we meet daily — Hellenes though most of them would be. Just think, then, in relation to what you're now inviting me to do, how quickly and deeply our own society would suffer if, as I said, a large enough aggregate of its citizenry were to brazenly dishonor its established laws.

CRITO: Of course there can be no question, Socrates, that if a significant part of the citizenry showed disregard for the laws, social existence could not but become an unpleasant experience. Yet honoring unjust verdicts as well as just ones for no purpose other than that of maintaining large-scale order could no less likely eventually lead to widespread disrespect for the laws on whose basis those verdicts were derived. If so, the disorder of which you're so apprehensive could be hardly precluded when the laws' authority is misapplied or abused.

SOCRATES: Not necessarily, Crito, and especially not when one is raised with the notion that nobody stands above the law. The result of such an upbringing would be not only preservation of the social order and respect for the laws and the constitution, but also a reaffirmation of the contract that implicitly exists between the laws and the citizens.

CRITO: Er . . . what? A *contract*, you say? Suddenly, dear friend, I'm not at all sure I'm following your course of reasoning.

SOCRATES: To illustrate, let us imagine that, as we were getting ready to leave here, the laws and constitution of Athens confronted us, and said: Well, well, Socrates, has it not occurred to you that you are, in an important sense, destroying us, the laws and the state, by not honoring the court's verdict against you? To such a question, I suppose, I could well respond, Yes, in fact I should hardly mind it if my running away from here destroyed you all, insofar as it was you that permitted the jury to bring a faulty judgment against me. But, really, did such a provision ever exist

in the agreement between you and us, Socrates? Did you not until just now abide by any and all judgments the state brought forth? More to the point, was it not through our authority that your parents were married and begot you? Yes. Did you ever have any complaints concerning the laws relating to marriage and to children's upbringing, including education, or are you grateful for what they ensured for you? For that I am, indeed, most grateful, I should have to answer. Insofar, then, as it was our measures and provisions which no less than ensured your existence, Socrates, the laws might retort, you could in no wise rightly regard yourself as our equal; on the contrary, you would have to see yourself as our child and servant. Hence, you would be hardly more justified to retaliate against us now than you would have been at any time in the past; that is, had you as a youth ever thought of rebelling against your parents, or as a worker against your employer. To the extent that you were never allowed to answer back to your parents or to your employer, why would you expect to have such a right against your country and its laws — yes, even when we have decided to execute you in the belief that it is just and right to do so? Or have you forgotten that your country is much more precious and worthy of honor than either your parents or your employer? I have not at all forgotten that, I would have to answer. Then, Socrates, unless you could persuade us, the laws, otherwise, you have no alternative but to do precisely as we demand of you, and to submit to whatever punishment we dictate. Insofar as it is a sin to demonstrate violence against your parents, it is, by extension, a far greater sin to inflict violence upon your country. Likewise, unless you can persuade your country otherwise, you have no alternative but to submit to whatever it orders, whether it be flogging or imprisonment or sending you to war wherein you might well be wounded or even killed. If faced with such questions and objections, Crito, might we cogently deny that what the laws say is true?

CRITO: Its compelling message notwithstanding, Socrates, I must admit to having the same sort of misgivings about this allegory of yours as I did about your gymnast analogy. I agree that the laws' main function could be seen as paralleling the natural function of parents, since both aim toward our good — parents toward our individual good, laws toward our collective good. But that, from my angle, is just about the full extent of your parallel; for though both of them not infrequently make mistakes, parents can correct their blunders — and I've known some who have apologized for their defective judgments and thus repaired their relationship with their children — while laws are essentially incapable of, and, in the light of your description, ought to be unwilling to attempt any such reconciliation. Incidentally, if my memory is not failing me, you yourself might have voiced a similar point. As I recall, several years ago, Hippocrates, the son of Apollodorus and the brother of Phason, somewhat excitedly related to a group of us a meeting you had recently had with none other than Protagoras. At that meeting — and see if this squares with your memory of the event, Socrates — you, reportedly, said (in passing) that books are capable neither of asking nor of answering questions, but of no more than incessantly repeating the same claims. Is that, basically, how you recall this part of your conversation?

SOCRATES: Yes . . . I think it is.

CRITO: Correspondingly, then, while parents can (and all good ones do) learn how to be better parents from their mistakes, laws merely keep making the same mistakes, without having learned much, if anything, from them. As for the laws' claim that it is a sin for one to rebel against his parents, and a far greater sin to strike against the state, surely that could not be invariably true. After all, who would seriously disagree that it would be most acceptable to rebel against, for example, an abusive father, and no less acceptable to strike against a tyrannical government. And rightly so, Socrates,

as obedience to any recognized wrong could be best and most promptly rectified by us, the citizens. Hence, by leaving here, you just might awaken enough of the Athenian population to take another, perhaps a longer look at the same laws that made it possible for you to be convicted on such relatively tenuous charges.

SOCRATES: That might be exactly as you say, Crito, but perhaps we ought to hear what else the laws could say to us as we're making ready to leave my cell without official approval: Let us see, I imagine them continuing with their objection, whether we are right in insisting that your leaving here has the potency to harm us. Consider, Socrates, the following standard that applies to every free citizen of Athens, including you: Irrespective of the fact that we have brought you into the world and permitted you access to everything good we have to offer, once you reached adulthood and fully understood your city's political and legal structure, you could well have gathered your property and moved to any other country that would have accepted you. To the extent that, despite your knowledge of how we administer justice, you decided to stay precisely where you were born and raised, we feel vindicated in presuming that you have effectively decided to do whatever we tell you to do. Hence, anyone who disobeys us, the laws and the Athenian constitution, would have to be pronounced guilty not simply because we are his parents and guardians, but also because he makes no clear attempt to persuade us to modify our decision, presuming we are actually at fault. These, Socrates, are the charges on which you would have to be judged, if you continue with your plan to escape here, and would likely be found and declared one of the guiltiest amongst your fellow citizens. And they would be right to speak in this way, Crito, since none I can think of might be said to have struck a more binding contract with the laws than did I. As I imagine them continuing, The fact that, except for a military campaign or two, Socrates, you never crossed Athens' borders — indeed, not only did you never travel outside it to, say, attend a festival or visit anyone, but you never showed the slightest interest in becoming acquainted with any other country or constitution — indicates that you must have been exceedingly satisfied with us and with our city. Perhaps decisive proof of your satisfaction with our city is the fact that you chose to beget and raise children therein. Still more, after being pronounced guilty a few weeks ago, you could have proposed banishment as a counter-penalty, and would have with the city's permission done precisely what you're now preparing to do without it. At that time, you claimed to prefer death to banishment, and yet at the moment, by running away from your contract to live and function as a law-abiding citizen, you're behaving no better than the most servile of servile persons. Answer us, Socrates, are we or are we not speaking the truth when we insist that at least in deed, if not quite in word, you did, quite consciously and willingly, undertake to reside in our city as a citizen wholly obedient to our dictates? So, what say you, Crito? How do you think I might respond to the laws, were they to confront me with questions of this sort?

CRITO: Well, insofar as you've resisted every rationale I've offered this morning, Socrates, it appears likely that you would equally promptly dismiss any response I might suggest to the laws' remonstrance you just sketched. Even so, in the light of your zest and appetite for this sort of exchange, and in a still further attempt to buttress the rightness and propriety of my position with respect to your case, perhaps I ought to suggest a possible response after all.

SOCRATES: Very good, Crito; I should very much like to hear what you have in mind.

CRITO: What I have in mind, Socrates, is this: I concede that, at first blush, the laws' objection to your escape would in probably most people's eyes appear as an

argument of the decisive sort. Upon some reflection, however, I suspect that at least some of these same people might infer that, by remaining silent while being rebuked by the laws, you would have missed an opportunity to draw to the laws' attention a self-misperception or two of theirs: Laws, you might have said confidently, I'm surprised that despite your wisdom and experience with all sorts of injustice you have thought it important to reproach *me* instead of confronting and shaming those who unfairly brought charges against me *in your name*. Might it be true, laws, that you really do deem it proper and acceptable for innocent people to suffer the consequences of unjust verdicts, and this simply because they were found guilty in accordance with established court proceedings? If anything, you yourselves should protest against, and even call for the removal from your ranks of, every one of your kin that would allow unfairness of any sort.

SOCRATES: But, Crito, what about the contract between the laws and me? Surely the citizens' obedience to the laws demanded by an agreement of that sort would necessarily overwhelm any actual or implicit discrepancies and imbalances between the two parties.

CRITO: I think not, Socrates, for you might have answered that claim thus: If, laws, my decision to hardly ever leave Athens might, in fact, pass for a contract between you and me, then bear in mind that I entered into such an agreement with the expectation that *as laws*, you would be acting in accordance with your essence, which is to arrive at a fair judgment in every disputation brought to the archon's docket. Nor might my expectation be appraised as excessive, since, by definition any contract between two parties remains binding for only as long as both parties maintain their moral obligations. To the extent, however, that in my case you quite knowingly failed to preclude the miscarriage of justice — and hence behaved as something other than laws — you failed to honor your responsibilities indicated in our agreement, and therefore rendered its letter and spirit null and void. As for your claim, laws, that by being disobedient, any citizen must be declared guilty of not only striking against his ultimate parents and guardians, but also of not attempting to persuade you otherwise, I must disagree on both counts. First, at no point have you, laws, given me any indication that you could or would change the verdict against me; on the contrary, even now you merely insist that whether I do or do not agree with the verdict, I would prove myself a good citizen only by going along with it. Yet, any person who has been truly unjustly found guilty in a court of law, has, I am convinced, the natural right to attempt in some respect to balance the score against those who have so mistreated him. We have no choice but to recognize this as nothing less than a natural right; after all, except for the most timid and fearful amongst them, even animals tend to strike against abusive keepers. Not surprisingly, children, also, tend to struggle against, and even strike or bite, their parents if these tend to act as abusers. With respect to your charge, laws, that I never before questioned your integrity, yes, what you say is true; but that, you see, is because I never before had to appear in court, and therefore had no good reason to suspect you might not carry out the very task which made you possible in the first place. Had such an occasion arisen before, and had the same or a similar verdict been returned against me, it is likely that I would have attempted to escape from jail as I mean to do now. So far as I can see, Socrates, the rejoinder I'm suggesting closely conforms to a notion that, again, if I correctly recall hearing it, you yourself advanced during the same event to which both of us have referred, the discussion during and after the banquet at Polemarchus' house.

SOCRATES: Could you be a bit more specific, Crito?

CRITO: I'll try, Socrates. From what I remember, and you will of course correct me if the facts are at all different, at that gathering you had an exchange on the concept of justice with Thrasymachus, just as you did with Cephalus and Polemarchus right before. Is that not right?

SOCRATES: That's right.

CRITO: When then Thrasymachus pointed out that none but the tyrant — or the most unjust individual that could without accountability extract the greatest advantage from the citizenry — the tyrant who would have a happier life than the wholly just man, you countered with the following analogies: If the basic function of, for example, the eye is to see, that of the ear to hear, and that of the pruning dirk to trim vine branches, then each organ's or instrument's correct and effective discharge of its proper function must be understood as its virtue or excellence. To the extent, therefore, that no organ or instrument could function well without its corresponding virtue, the tyrant's soul could perform hardly any better at management and deliberation or live well and happily when deprived of any soul's proper virtue, namely, justice. Is this a fair sketch of your exchange with Thrasymachus, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Yes, Crito, I think you've pretty much captured the essence of what Thrasymachus and I said on the subject at the time.

CRITO: And is your notion of virtue still a principle you would apply to the functionality of man-made creations?

SOCRATES: It is.

CRITO: Then, Socrates, I'm perplexed by your inadvertence or choice to quietly exclude Athens' constitution and laws from your principle's scope.

SOCRATES: How do you mean this, Crito?

CRITO: If you would apply your virtue principle to social and political constructs, as you claim we might apply it to everything from inanimate objects such as appliances to nothing less consequential than the soul itself, then, my old friend, you could still further address your imaginary critics and objectors as no more than poor reflections of what they've so long professed to be: Laws, you might point out, insofar as you have, at least in my case, revealed yourselves incapable of invariably performing your intended and most important function, that is, reaching a fair and impartial, evidence-based verdict, I simply could not in good conscience show you any more respect than I would show any implement bereft of its virtue. On the contrary, insofar as you're exhorting me to accept the punishment prescribed by an unjust verdict, I'm afraid I will henceforth have to regard some, if not all, of you as easily worse than, say, a dysfunctional sense organ, or perhaps a defective implement which I could easily discard. In that manner, Socrates, and in none other, it seems to me, is how you might have best addressed Athens' constitution and laws.

SOCRATES: Even if I were to so answer, Crito, the laws might easily add something like the following to their continuing objection: Socrates, I can imagine hearing them, you are about to break the covenant you made with us under neither compulsion nor haste. You've had no less than seven full decades within which to decide whether to remain in Athens or move to any Hellenic or foreign state, yet you never so much as contemplated the possibility of doing so; in fact, we repeat, you have left the city no more frequently than any lame or blind individual tends to do. Accept, therefore, our advice, Socrates, face your punishment as you ought to, and do not make yourself ridiculous by escaping. Nor, I imagine the laws adding still further, would this breach of faith in any sense benefit your friends any more than it would help you; for once discovered and caught, they will likely lose their citizenship or at least have their property confiscated. As for you, Socrates, undoubtedly most of the patriotic citizens

of, for example, Thebes or Megara, or, indeed, any well governed city you might remove to, will look upon you as no less a possible subverter of *their* laws than of us, the laws of your city. Moreover, by escaping, you will have unwittingly (and perhaps entirely) allayed at least some of your jurors' persistent suspicion that the verdict they returned against you might have been unfair. As a destroyer of the social order, they would now likely infer, you must have been correctly charged with exercising a deleterious influence upon the young. Speak, Socrates, the laws would surely demand, what would you do following your escape from here? If you decided to avoid well-governed republics, and run away to any less well-governed cities, do you really think that your quality of life would be as good as it has been here? And have you thought of how you would communicate with the citizens of these places? Would you still maintain, as you consistently did as a free man in Athens, that goodness and integrity and laws and institutions are the highest and most valuable expressions of the human race? And if you did indeed have the temerity and impudence to do this, have you no fear that your words would sound hollow and utterly unconvincing in the face of what you did here by running away? How would I answer the laws, Crito, if they were to confront me in this way?

CRITO: Er . . . well . . . what your question intimates to me, Socrates, is that clearly nothing I've said this morning has inspired you at all to view my offer with an approving eye. So, please don't be irritated with me when I tell you that, as our discussion has progressed, I've gradually formed the impression that thus far I've been simultaneously addressing two similarly minded opponents, with you implicitly taking the side of the laws.

SOCRATES: Indeed, Crito; and on what grounds, pray tell, are you basing this impression of yours?

CRITO: On two considerations, Socrates, namely, (a) that you — without any evident doubts about the cogency of the possible objections you imagine the laws could raise against your escape — have from their angle, and with a rather sympathetic tone, battled every one of my suggestions of how you might have retorted; and (b) that you have hinted at no wish to merge our efforts, yours and mine, toward answering those same objections.

SOCRATES: What a strange twist, Crito; after all, asking you to suggest how I might address and perhaps refute the laws' various objections is precisely what I thought I was doing. At any rate, be good about it, and tell me how you think I might proceed toward answering their last objection.

CRITO: Insofar as I have, in an important sense, already pre-suggested a whole host of such retorts, let me, basically, reaffirm the principal points I put to you a short while ago. You could well say this: Please, laws, attempt not to distress me with the possibility that my friends and supporters might face any hard financial or legal consequences. You see, I have it on good authority that, aside from the likelihood that they would not be discovered, each of them has already weighed that potential danger, and yet no one has been deterred from wishing to be an accessory to my escape. Moreover, laws, I am hardly persuaded by your notion that the majority of the patriotic citizens of any city to which I might remove would likely look upon me as a potential subverter of *their* laws. While it is true that, at worst, some of these might label me a *coward* — a characterization that, I dare say, hardly anyone who is aware of my participation in some of Athens' military campaigns would believe, and thus a label that could not but quickly wither in use — it is more probable that I would be viewed there in much the same way I am nowadays seen here by most of the Athenian people, namely, a just man attempting to save his life from a miscarriage of justice. To expect otherwise, laws, you might continue, would

intimate that if any of these citizens ever found themselves in anything resembling my current situation, they would virtually reflexively accept the verdict and sentence against them, and meekly, without the slightest of objections face their (undeserved) punishment. I ought to add, Socrates, that while, as I have already conceded, nations filled with citizens of that sort are *in theory* possible, I have yet to hear of any *existing* Hellenic cities peopled with more than a few, exceptional citizens of that caliber. Or, more to the point, surely the overwhelming majority of the citizens of any of the cities I've mentioned as places to which you might relocate could be hardly described as at all approaching that ideal.

SOCRATES: From what I can make out, Crito, the laws' aim in referring to the populations of these other cities would not be to imply that they tend to be any more morally upright than is our population in Athens; in fact, they are not. Rather, it would be to show that the quality of my life among them would suffer in the face of their censure of my attempt to prolong my old age at the expense of diminishing the laws' vested authority. As for your idea that by escaping I'd be to some degree balancing the wrong my false accusers have committed, this is what I hear the laws saying to me in response: Of course, Socrates, you might decide to live with Crito's friends in Thessaly. If so, you would do well to bear in mind that this is a land of incivility and laxity. In the light of that fact, while you might succeed in regaling some of its citizens with stories of how, in disguise, you easily slipped away from prison, be prepared for those many others who would frequently humiliate you in public for greedily clinging to life at the expense of violating the most stringent of laws. As for the claim that you ought to remain alive so that you might raise and educate your children, answer us, Socrates, do you sincerely believe they would be better off as foreigners in Thessaly, providing you were to take them there? Alternatively, ask yourself, why exactly would your friends educate them better with you alive in Thessaly, but not so well with you in the next world? Shouldn't your friends, presuming they really are your friends, do an equally good job in either case? What about that and a legion of similar questions the laws might pose, Crito? Ought not my friends, if indeed they are friends of mine, raise and educate my children whether I'm alive or dead?

CRITO: And they, including me, would surely be only too glad to do so, Socrates, irrespective of whether you're dead in Athens or alive anywhere else. When I first mentioned the care and education of your sons, what I had in mind was more than to adduce still another factor that might persuade you to merely go on living. My goal in bringing it up was to urge you to reflect more than once before ultimately deciding to leave such a consequential responsibility to anyone when you yourself could discharge it better and much closer to your liking. The laws' aim, on the other hand, is to, I'm convinced, mislead you — yes, mislead you — into thinking now that that responsibility would be assumed by some of your friends, you might depart for the next world with a clear conscience. You see, to your friends and supporters, Socrates, your continued (physical) existence would in and of itself represent something irreplaceably valuable: The sheer knowledge that you're breathing the same air, seeing the same sun, and hearing much the same news as do we, would keep providing us with the moral strength and confidence it does even now; for though you would not be amongst us, you would still be *with us*. For us, you would stand as the same symbol and anchor as any country's aged leader whose mere existence continues to define his people's historical identity and collective consciousness.

SOCRATES: Hmmmm . . . I always knew you to be a wise man and a most reliable friend, Crito, but, I must admit, I cannot recall you ever having mounted so telling an

argument on any topic as you have today. Having conceded as much, I still cannot say that you've succeeded either in overturning or in attenuating the laws' objections to my leaving here without first securing the proper permission to do so. In fact, I can still hear them addressing me with the voice of authority, yet a voice intermingled with urgency and alarm: Listen to us, your guardians, Socrates, I hear them exhorting me, and think not more of your children or of life or of anything other than of what is right. Only so might you enter the next world with a clean list of accomplishments, and face the authorities there with confidence while pleading with them to rule in your favor. Remember that if you escape, neither you nor any of your helpful friends would be better for it in this or in the next world. If, conversely, you heed our counsel, and act accordingly, you will proceed herefrom not as a victim of us, the laws, but of actions taken against you by your fellow men. In a word, Socrates, if you dishonor yourself by running away, and thus return evil for evil by violating your implicit contract with us, the ones whom you ought never to injure, then know that you will not only be the target of our anger for as long as you are alive, but that you will also at some point have to face the grave displeasure of the laws in that other world, as they will know that you attempted your best to destroy us, their brethren and sistren. Follow, therefore, not Crito's advice, Socrates, but ours. This, Crito, is what I'm hearing the laws emphatically speaking in my ear. So powerfully does their unified voice resound in my head that I can no longer hear the other side. Most importantly, they have so convinced me of the correctness of their position that it would be entirely futile to attempt to change my decision — though, again, if you think you might succeed, say what you will.

CRITO: In that case, Socrates, instead of besetting you any further with my contradictory if, from my angle, well-intentioned pleas, perhaps I ought to leave you to your thoughts and reflections, now that the day when we shall have to say our final good-byes is drawing nigh. I thank you profusely, old friend, for putting up with me at such an infelicitous time, though, insofar as you're allowing me an opportunity to say still more, I must — and I promise this to be a rather brief and concluding aside — I must point out something surprising and disappointing about what you just told me you heard the laws say to you.

SOCRATES: *Surprising* and *disappointing*, you say, Crito? In that case, please . . . go on, tell me what that might be.

CRITO: What is surprising, disappointing, and *ironic*, Socrates, is that the laws, the very ones which, until now, have insisted that it is never right to return evil for evil, would themselves threaten you with an uninterrupted succession of ill-treatment at their hands for having disobeyed them; worse yet, they promise that the same treatment would continue unmitigated in the next world as it did in this one. If so, I, for one, can discern no alternative but to infer that the laws have somehow misperceived, or perhaps consciously inverted, the order and unequal partnership in the implicit contract between them and us, the citizens. More to the point, if either of our parties ought to yield and show deference to the other, it would have to be the opposite of what they are urging. Hence, dear friend, you would have been fully justified to retort thus: Laws, you warn that you and your otherworldly relatives would collectively answer my disobedience to your authority with eternal persecution of me. Speaking, as you well know me, with the voice of one who has never shrunk from the truth, laws, your threat suggests that you have somehow forgotten your own nature, namely, that your assigned authority and even existence are both of the most precarious sort. For insofar as, whether directly or through their chosen officials, it is none but the citizens who determine the perimeters and power of each law they pass and establish, it is none but the citizens who could do away with any or all of you . . .

and *at will*, too. Instead, therefore, of threatening me, or anyone who decides to actively oppose the sting of injustice done him in your name; instead of reflexively favoring even unfair legal verdicts — and thus flouting an indispensable moral principle you've been invested with by the citizenry — verdicts that have already met with obvious disfavor in the public's eye, take care not to raise the majority's ire, for if you did, you would be only sowing the seeds of your own destruction. That, Socrates, I think is how you might have most appropriately addressed the laws immediately following their threat to you with eternal punishment.

SOCRATES: Are you, then, changing your mind from what you said a bit earlier, Crito? Are you now suggesting that you find it allowable for one to return evil for evil, or, in my case, allowable to run away from an unfair, but nevertheless *legally* reached, verdict? Did you not, moreover, earlier concede that any society would be likely to suffer devastation once most of its citizens decided to disobey the established laws?

CRITO: My view, Socrates, regarding the impropriety of returning evil for evil, and my fear of the grave social effects that normally arise when the majority of any city's population decides to keep ignoring its government's laws, remain as firm as ever. You know, before setting out to see you this morning, I felt rather confident that I would at some point manage to convince you not to misinterpret my offer to spring you from jail either as an appeal to return evil for evil, or as a popular declaration of war against the laws of Athens. Since, evidently, I have failed to do so, perhaps I can put a closure to my offer with this observation: While both of us have always had a close relationship with the free men of our city, would you not agree that within the preceding month, or so, I've been on closer terms with them than have you?

SOCRATES: Yes.

CRITO: Would you not further agree that while you, as well as anyone, have had a good grasp of their overall mental and moral inclinations, or as these existed before your trial, I have a better understanding of their general consensus regarding your trial and verdict than do you?

SOCRATES: Of course I would.

CRITO: In that case, Socrates, please believe me when I tell you that, as I have already said more than once, other than your accusers and their supporters, few, if any, Athenians would look upon your escape as anything but an attempt to at least somewhat counterbalance a wrong. Besides, who knows how many tens of thousands of convicted individuals have by now escaped throughout the world, and yet you'd be hard pressed to point to the collapse of even one society's legal system specifically as a result of such behavior. Why, then — and I only ask this rhetorically — have you permitted the laws to so easily convince you that your escape would *by itself* be powerful enough to cause their wholesale collapse? Why, indeed, when you know well enough that they are speaking from a fully gratuitous perspective? No, Socrates, instead of thinking that it could significantly weaken our system of laws, you'd be more correct to believe that your escape would provide the Athenian people with some emotional release and comfort that at least the consequences of an unjust court verdict would have been denied expression. Nor, finally, when contemplated from an objectively moral perspective, might your escape be properly characterized as a wrong, let alone an evil. To the extent that their respective intentions separate them from each other, no well-measured reaction to a wrong action carries the same (if it indeed carries any) culpability as the action itself. In fact, the only condition we might attach to the reaction is that it be neither an over-reaction nor a misguided reaction. Thus, for example, while our society's most appropriate reaction to a

correctly convicted murderer — that is, one pronounced guilty in the light of incontrovertible evidence and following a lengthy process of deliberation by the jury — would be to execute him with the greatest of readiness, the reaction becomes unacceptable, and even evil, once we over-react by also executing his family, or by eradicating his home village. Correspondingly, dear friend, insofar as it would neither precipitate the end of our city nor of its established laws; insofar, that is, as it would seem to be the most measured reaction to such a gross miscarriage of justice, your running away from here would likely be condemned neither by the majority nor by the man of reason. And I've already said enough on the laws' objections and threats.

SOCRATES: Well . . . well . . . I've always known you to be no less a man of reason than a faithful friend, Crito; and I've already expressed my admiration for your eloquence and inspired endeavor to deflect me from my decision to stay put. Nevertheless, I could not but also concede that the collective voice of Athens' constitution and laws sounds louder and simply more persuasive than anything you've said thus far. Even so, speak if you think you have anything more to add on the matter.

CRITO: I'm not sure there is much of anything more I *could* add, Socrates. Your decision to abide by the verdict against you appears to be firmly made up, such that any further discussion would be simply futile. So, no . . . no, Socrates, I have nothing more to say.

SOCRATES: In that case, Crito, let us follow the course I am already on, the course brightly illuminated not only by the laws, but by God himself.

Having arrived at the end of our reconceived dialogue, we are now in position to note how and in what respects Plato might have, had he so desired, portrayed his Crito livelier in temperament and much sharper in intellectual acuity. Not surprisingly, when juxtaposed to each other, the dissimilarity between my version of Crito and Plato's is so impressive that had, I dare say, the historical Socrates spoken with my Crito and by the conclusion of their conversation still insisted on presently meeting his executioner, then we could not but have turned a more sympathetic ear to those who continue to advance the suicide by proxy hypothesis. Accordingly, the best and perhaps the only persuasive explanation or excuse Socrates might have offered for abiding by his sentence is either that Crito was indeed as passive as he is depicted to have been or that the dialogue is an unadulterated fabrication by Plato.

Whether entirely invented or closely conforming to the narrated meeting, Plato's dialogue appears to fly in the face of one of Socrates' intellectually energizing tenets. In sharp relief to Socrates' self-characterization as a *midwife* of ideas and "many admirable truths," in the *Theaetetus* (150b-e), in the *Crito*, Plato describes his teacher as confused about, or as either shirking or even consciously contradicting, his self-imposed maieutic duty. Specifically, instead of attempting to assist Crito into, say, refining his reasons for proposing that Socrates escape from jail, or assist him in crafting a formidable answer to the Athenian constitution and laws' personified condemnation of escape as an option to which he might resort, Socrates undermines — indeed, virtually derisively dismisses — every one of Crito's justifications for his initial offer.

I have already pointed out that any criticism of Plato would have to be pronounced unfair if with the *Crito* he had in mind to no more than relate a

discussion that occurred nearly precisely as he committed it to text. Yet, even with the *Apology* at the head of his corpus notwithstanding, how many students of philosophy have tended, or still tend, to look upon Plato as an (incidental) historian or as Socrates' amanuensis? Insofar as in his *Memorabilia* Xenophon describes some of the same conversations and interlocutors we find in Plato's dialogues, there can be hardly any doubt that both authors refer to actual events. Insofar, however, as Xenophon's Socrates sounds positively prosaic and far less intellectually agile in contrast to Plato's, we would have to infer either that Xenophon, an historian and a military general, is less informative of a writer, or that, as it appears more likely, Plato must have meticulously crafted every one of his dialogues before making them publicly available. So, in the process of aiming a brighter and more favorable light upon Socrates' side of most of his recorded arguments, Plato would have not only more than occasionally buttressed Socrates' notions against effective critical analysis, but also, and probably just as frequently, reinforced or even invented some of his interlocutors' widely interspersed insights and critical objections.

As to why, in that case, Plato did not see fit to similarly undergird Crito's original proposal and rejoinders to Socrates' declination, we would probably never know. In the absence of any such evidence, my earlier claim, namely, that the dialogue by the same title might have been brought into being in order to produce in us an abidingly favorable image of the historical Socrates as a man of post-standard values, sounds most plausible. Actually, there might very well be another, unintended factor for whose sake we might conveniently excuse the *Crito's* extra-philosophical *raison d'être*: Henceforth, we might repeatedly look behind Plato's corpus for an alternative library of dialogues we could distill into existence. As students of his philosophical legacy, it is, as it ought to be, our duty to examine his conceptions from various vantage platforms so as to see what novel conceptions they might yield — and this, again, within the original perimeters of each text. In a word, henceforth we might likewise consider Plato's work from the margins, *from the side*, from the perspective of the other, largely ignored *dramatis personae* who comprise his philosophical world. If it is true that, as Nietzsche, with a nod to Socrates, observes sententiously, "One seeks a midwife for his thoughts, another someone to whom he can be a midwife; thus originates a good conversation" (*BGE* Part Four 136), then we could stand as no worthier successors to Plato than by continuing the task which even he at times did not entirely realize. Then again . . . might he have consciously left that task incomplete, that is, with the very aim which inspired the preceding pages?

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