

# Plato's *Crito*

“The most important thing is not  
life, but the good life”

# Plato's *Crito*

- This is the final in the trilogy (after *Euthyphro* and *Apology*)
- After Socrates is sentenced to death, a religious vessel makes its way to Delos, an island sacred to Apollo (the same god that spoke through the Oracle in the last dialogue)
  - During this sacred journey, done annually, it's consider impious to put anyone to death, so Socrates has been waiting for a month in prison and the ship is just about finished with its voyage

# Crito

- Crito is one of Socrates' oldest and dearest friends.
- He's also one of the wealthiest men in all of Athens (and that's saying something). He's the proverbial Mr. Moneybags.



# Prison Break!

- Crito comes to visit Socrates in prison with a plan of action! He's going to break Socrates *out* before it's too late!



# Prison Break!

- Crito has bribed the guards; the doors are open and they'll look the other way as Socrates escapes.
- He's also set up a new home for Socrates away from Athens, in another city-state called "Thessaly"

# Prison Break!

- Crito rushes in to get Socrates, thinking he's certainly going to want to escape! But!!! .... Will Socrates take this last chance to save his own life?????

# *The Crito*

- The essence of the dialogue is this:
  - Crito must convince Socrates that it is the just/right thing to do, to escape, and if he fails to convince Socrates, Socrates will remain in prison and die in a couple of days

# What to Consider While Reading

- In King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," he explicitly states: "One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty" as an integral part of his civil disobedience



# Civil Disobedience

- King also states the following in his “Letter” on the topic of self-purification before engaging in civil disobedience:
- “We began a series of workshops on nonviolence, and we repeatedly asked ourselves: ‘Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?’ ‘Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?’”
  - To these points, King was directly inspired by Socrates and *this particular text*

# What to Look for While Reading

- Keep a close eye out for the following topics covered here in light of King's "Letter":
  - (1) what does it mean to "accept" punishment, even if it doesn't seem just
  - (2) why is it important to *be* punished if you engage in civil disobedience?
  - (3) ought we consciously to break the laws of our society?

# The Initial Attempt

- Crito is shocked when Socrates is reluctant to escape. The clock is ticking. Crito makes an initial attempt to convince Socrates: “if you die, it will not be a single misfortune for me. Not only will I be deprived of a friend, the like of whom I shall never find again, but many people who do not know you or me very well will think that I could have saved you if I were willing to spend the money.”

# The Initial Attempt

- In other words: Crito would lose his best friend *and* people that don't Socrates or Crito very well would *never* believe a man would willingly remain in prison rather than escape and they'd just assume that Crito was too cheap to bribe everyone and get his friend out of prison. It would give Crito a bad reputation, the same sort of thing that troubled Socrates so much in *The Apology*.

# The Initial Attempt

- Crito says: “Surely there can be no worse reputation than to be thought to value money more highly than one’s friends, for the majority will not believe that you yourself were not willing to leave prison while we were eager for you to do so.”
- Remember: in the *Apology*, Socrates explicitly stated that people should *never* value money above living a noble and good life, so it makes sense what Crito is saying to Socrates.

## Quick Aside: Why Money Can't be the Ultimate Goal of Life

- Aristotle, Plato's famous student, wrote one of the greatest texts on ethics of all time called *The Nicomachean Ethics*. In it, he deals with his precise issue. Here's his argument:

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- The ultimate goal in life must be *ultimate*, meaning, it can't be a means to some other, higher goal.
- So we ask: why do we want money?  
What's it *for*?

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- We like money because...
  - We can use it to buy things
  - We can have security
  - We can raise a family
  - We can have peace of mind
  - Etc.



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- So money is always *for* something else.
  - Money (means) --> buying things (goal)  
raising a family (goal)  
peace of mind (goal)  
etc.

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- And peace of mind/buying things/raising a family are all *means* to an even *higher* end: happiness.
- Money is thus always *only* a means to something else, which in turn is a means to something else, until at last you reach happiness, the only goal that has no purpose except itself
- Thus: money cannot be the ultimate goal in life because it's not even a goal at all!

# Quick Aside: Friendship

- In the same book, Aristotle talks a lot about the importance of friendship which was a critical part of Greek philosophy. Friends *help* us become better people and live a better life. That is, *if* we find the right kind of friend. Aristotle notes three kinds of friendship:

# 3 Types of Friendship

- (1) Friends of Utility
  - You're someone's friend (or he/she is *your* friend) only because he/she has something useful to you
    - That dude you know with a car so you can get off campus. That's literally the only reason he's your friend
      - This is a poor kind of friendship

# 3 Kinds of Friendship

- (2) Friends of pleasure
  - These are friends that don't make you a better person, nor are they useful to you, you just like them around because you find it pleasurable
    - That lunatic who always gets drunk at parties and does shots up his nose, you find it hilarious so you keep him around
    - That attractive one...you know the one...friends with benefits, etc.
      - This is likewise a poor kind of friendship

# 3 Kinds of Friendships

- (3) Genuine Friends
  - Genuine friends, the only kind of good friends, are those that *challenge* you to become better. You see them do something amazing, succeed in some epic way, and it inspires you to do *even better*, and they help you to succeed. Then when you do even better, this, then, inspires *them* to do even better than *you*, and you help them achieve *that* goal, etc., in an endless spiral of mutual self-betterment working in concert with your friend

# Back to the *Crito*...

- So Crito was worried about what people will say about him (he's cheap, he's a bad friend, he loves his money more than his friends, etc.) if Socrates doesn't escape prison with him. Socrates responds: "my good Crito, why should we care so much for what the majority think? The most reasonable people, to whom one should pay more attention, will believe that things were done as they were done."
  - A good life lesson: who *cares* what the majority think? Justice, truth, honor...these should matter more. Bow *not* to peer pressure! Live a good life!

# But Doesn't the Majority Have the Power?

- Crito says: but Socrates, “one must also pay attention to the opinion of the majority. Your present situation makes clear that the majority can inflict not the least but pretty well the greatest evils if one is slandered among them.”
  - In other words: Socrates, the majority condemned you to death. Clearly we *should* take them seriously.



# But Doesn't the Majority Have all the Power?

- But Socrates replies: “would that the majority could inflict the greatest evils, for they would then be capable of the greatest good, and that would be fine, but now they cannot do either. They cannot make a man either wise or foolish, but they inflict things haphazardly.”
  - Socrates longs for a democracy (a government run by the people, the majority) that is fair and just, but Athens isn't there yet and he's lamenting the ineffectual way the democracy governs.
    - Sound familiar?

# What's the *just* thing to do?

- Crito says: “I do not think that what you are doing is just, to give up your life when you can save it...moreover, I think you are betraying your sons by going away and leaving them, when you could bring them up and educate them. You thus show no concern for what their fate may be.”
- Socrates: “we must therefore examine whether we should act in this way or not...I cannot, not that this fate has come upon me, discard the arguments I used...I value and respect the same principles as before”

# Life vs. the Good Life

- Socrates: “examine the following statement...that the most important thing is not life, but the good life....and the good life and the just life are the same.”
  - If it is found to be *just* that I escape from prison, even though the Athenians haven't acquitted me, I'll go. In other words, if we can say it's just for me to break the law of Athens by breaking out of prison, I'll do it.
    - You're worried about my kids, Crito, that's sweet, but if their father ends up doing something unjust, that is not a good father for them to have, for the good life is the just life and that's the only life worth having

# Here's the Argument:

- S: “do we say that one must never in any way do wrong willingly?”
- C: We do.
- S: “so one must never do wrong willingly.”
- C: Certainly not.
- Then Socrates asks...what about in revenge?  
Can I harm someone who has first harmed me?

# Revenge?

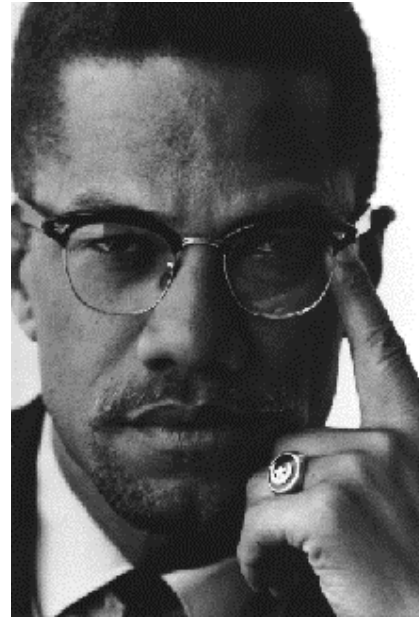
- We've already answered that question, however: if one must never do harm willingly, and revenge would be to do harm willingly, we must, therefore, never take revenge on those who have harmed us first.

# King vs. X

- “We must accept blows without retaliating”



- “Be peaceful, be courteous, obey the law, respect everyone; but if someone puts his hand on you, send him to the cemetery.”



# Who Would Socrates Be Harming?

- Answer? Athens.
- “if we leave here without the city’s permission, are we mistreating people whom we should least mistreat?”
- “do you not, Socrates, by this action intend to destroy us, the laws, and indeed the whole city? Do you not think a city would be destroyed if the verdicts of its courts have no force?”

# What has Athens Done for You?

- Before the verdict, Athens...
  - (1) Raised his parents
  - (2) Raised Socrates
  - (3) Educated Socrates
  - (4) Protected Socrates
  - (5) Allowed Socrates to flourish
  - (6) Now it's raising Socrates' kids

Does this all mean nothing all of a sudden?



# What You Can (and Cannot) Do When You Encounter a Law You Don't Like

- Let's say you live in the city-state of Nashville. If you encounter a law you don't like, what are some things you can do about it?

# What You Can (and Cannot) Do When You Encounter a Law You Don't Like

- For Socrates, you *can*:
  - (1) Leave (nothing prevents you from finding a new home with laws you're more comfortable with)
  - (2) Legally persuade the lawmakers to change the laws

But! One must never *break* the law, for that would be harming Athens, and one must never do harm willingly

# Conclusion: Remain in Prison

- (1) Socrates is old and will die soon anyway, why prolong life a little longer by giving up his values at the last minute? The good/just life > preserving his own life if it becomes a wicked life
- (2) Socrates could have chosen exile at his trial; why do illegally now what he could have done legally a month ago?
- (3) Why would Thessaly take him? In what way would he enter this new place?
- (4) Hypocrisy: he couldn't philosophize (live the examined life) any longer for how can he discuss virtue and honor and justice when he's no longer virtuous or honorable or just himself, and the unexamined life is not worth living.

# Mo' money, Mo' problems

- In *fact*, St. Augustine (whom King also references in his “Letter”), one of the greatest Christian philosophers of all time, went a step further and said money is a *terrible* way to try to achieve happiness. Happiness, he argued, comes with a certain peace of mind. Thus, you should only *desire* things that are eternal, not temporary, that is, things that can't be taken away from you against your will (Goodness, Wisdom, God, etc.). If you desire money above all else, and money can be easily taken from you, you'll never have peace of mind, no matter *how* much money you have, because at any moment you can, theoretically, lose it all (i.e., lose what you care about most)