

CONTEXT:

1. This early dialogue by Plato takes place outside the court (Royal Stoa) of Athens around 399 BC. This account is primarily a search for a proper definition of a universal and logical standard of piety. This dialectical dialogue or exchange interacts with ethics, social and political philosophy, and philosophy of religion. Central subject: Reverence; piety; holiness. The word for piety or the pious (*"hosios"*) is not to be thought of as an attribute of divinity, but as something that is in accord with divine law as given to people by the gods. "Godliness" (*"eusebeia"*) is also used in the text. Both words are used in such a way that expresses compliance with divine order. Socrates, in particular, is looking for a standard of piety that is able to distinguish or identify all instances of piety. So, Socrates is not merely looking for examples of piety. Rather, he is looking for the essence of piety in a definitional, abstract sense. Said differently, he is looking for the essential character or the "form" (*"eidos"*; *"idea"*) of piety.

2. The context of this early dialogue involves Socrates (BC 470-399) and Euthyphro, whose name means "straight-thinker." Socrates, who was Plato's teacher, was already known for his serious search for definitions by questioning others and use of irony. Euthyphro is a "professional priest" whose expertise is in the areas of ritual and piety. Socrates is called to the court to account for charges of piety made against him by Meletus, one of the nine magistrates who possesses legal oversight over religious matters. Socrates is the defendant in his own trial. In the case of Socrates, charges involve for (1) corrupting the youth (2) inventing new Gods, and (3) blasphemy against the old gods; he failed to follow religious dictates of the city. On the other hand, Euthyphro charges and seeks to prosecute his own father for the accidental death (manslaughter) of a servant who was accused of murder (3e-4d). Father had failed to take care of his worker against the elements. Euthyphro not only believes he is not only taking the right course of action against his father, but also justifies his obligation with his special knowledge of piety. He wants to "cleanse" himself/family from the stain of murder because murder was a violation of the divine law. And second, because it is just to prosecute any one who do wrong. Thus, Socrates sets the stage as if Euthyphro is the teacher whereas Socrates is the student. But Socrates uses Euthyphro's own reasoning to show him that knowledge arises when we explain and defend our answers. Thus, Socrates seeks to learn what reverence is from Euthyphro in order to use that type of special knowledge in his own trial.

OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction: 2a-5c
 - A. Charge against Socrates: 2b
 - B. Euthyphro's charge: 3e
 - C. Central Question: What is Piety? 5d
- II. Attempts to arrive at proper definition of piety: 5d-14
 - A. What I am doing now: 5d
But piety does not have proper form: 6d-e
 - B. Piety is what is loved by Gods 7a
But gods love & hate same things: 8a
 - C. Piety is what all the gods love: 9e
But: Euthyphro dilemma: 9e
 - D. Interlude: 11c-12d
Suggestion by Socrates: Piety is part of justice: 12d
 - E. Piety is a type of justice which looks after the gods: 12e. What does "caring mean"?
 1. Tending aimed at benefit (13a)?;
 2. Tending aimed at serving the gods to help them achieve some final goal (13d)?
 3. Bilateral trading (14c)?
- III. Dialogue ends with Euthyphro abruptly leaving: 15d

PLATO'S EUTHYPHRO: WHAT IS PIETY?

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THE SEARCH FOR THE ESSENCE OF PIETY: HOW DOES ONE PROPERLY DEFINE PIETY?

Argument # 1: Euthyphro: Piety is persecuting any religious offender regardless of the person (6d). Divine law requires to prosecute the offender. We are following the example of the gods (e.g., Zeus & other gods punishing their own parents). Argument is rejected by Socrates since there are many other pious deeds other than persecuting religious offenders (6d); it lacks comprehensiveness & does not answer the essence of piety.

Argument # 2 Euthyphro: "What is dear to the gods is pious, what is not impious?" (7a). But this argument is rejected because reverence & irreverence would apply to the same things (8ab) because different gods consider different things to be just, beautiful, ugly, good & bad, placing themselves at odds with one another (7e; 8ab). In other words, the gods themselves contract themselves; differing gods have different likes & dislikes. Thus, these differences lead to ambiguity regarding what is & what is not pious. What Euthyphro needs is a complete consensus from among all the gods.

Argument # 3a: Socrates: What property do all holy deeds have in common? Euthyphro's response: "The pious is what all the gods love, and the opposite, what all the gods hate, is the impious" (9e) Thus, piety is what all the gods love! He associates piety with "what all the gods love."

Argument # 3b: Socrates: Two cannot be equivalent: Here we have Euthyphro's Dilemma (11ab): X = Do the gods love piety because it is pious or Y = Is it pious because they love it? In contemporary form: *is something good because God wills it? Or does God will something because it is good?*

Suggestion # 4: Euthyphro (12d): Piety is a type of justice which looks after the gods. "Piety is a species of the genus justice?" Socrates: What does it mean to "look after the gods"? If gods are gods, then they are omnipotent. They do not need our assistance to care for them. Does looking after the gods mean "caring for the gods?" (13c)

Suggestion # 5: Euthyphro (14e): Piety is a type of bilateral trading with the gods: We sacrifice to them & they answer our prayers. Sacrifices gratify the gods. Piety involves prayer & sacrifice. Socrates: There is no significant difference between gratifying the gods & declaring that piety is what is approved by the gods. Thus, we are back in argument # 3b. Has piety been reduced in a sense to an act of trade? Is piety merely what the gods like, "honor, esteem, and favor?" (15a).

Is argument 3b a true two horned dilemma?

If we say that x is good because God wills it, **then what is good is arbitrary.** God could will that rape is good and we would be morally obligated to rape one another. In other words, is something good because God wills it? Then the good is arbitrary.

If we say that God wills x because it is good, **then what is good or bad is independent of God.** In other words, does God will something because it is good? Then it is a moral value independent of God.

Euthyphro is a false dilemma:

Third alternative: God wills x because by His very nature He is good. God is the sum-total of His infinite perfections. Thus, by his own Person, God is the standard of goodness. His divine commands are expressions that flow from His infinitely perfect nature. Therefore, moral values are not independent of God because God's own nature necessarily defines what is good. William Lane Craig writes:

So moral values are not independent of God because God's own character defines what is good. God is essentially compassionate, fair, kind, impartial, and so on. His nature is the moral standard defining good and bad. His commands necessarily reflect His moral nature. Therefore, they're not arbitrary. When the atheists demands, 'If God were to command child abuse, would we be obligated to abuse our children?' he's asking a question like, 'If there were a square circle, would its area be the square of one of its sides?' So, the Euthyphro dilemma presents us with a false choice, and we shouldn't be tricked by it. The morally good/bad is determined by God's nature, and the morally right/wrong is determined by His will. God wills something because He is good, and something is right because God wills it. ~ William Lane Craig, *On Guard* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 136.