

Euthyphro

Plato

Rendered in blank verse by Rob Bocchino

Euthyphro approaches the king-archon's court, where he is to prosecute a case. He is surprised to see Socrates there.

Euthyphro. What's happened, Socrates, to make you leave
The places that you usually haunt
In the Lyceum, coming here instead
To spend your time at the king-archon's court?
I can't believe the reason is that you
Are prosecuting someone, as I am,
Before the king-archon?

Socrates. The Athenians
Do not refer to what I'm doing here
As prosecution. Rather, it is called
Indictment, Euthyphro.

Euthyphro. What's this you say?
It must be someone has indicted you;
For I cannot believe that you will say
You're here to bring a case against another.

Socrates. Indeed, that's so.

Euthyphro. So there is someone else
Who's brought a case against you?

Socrates. Yes.

Euthyphro. Who's that?

Socrates. Myself I do not know him, Euthyphro.
Apparently he's young and is unknown.
I think I've heard them call him Meletus.
His home is in the Pitthean deme; and so
If you know anyone called Meletus
From there, whose hair is long, whose beard is short,
Whose nose is rather beak-like, that is he.

Euthyphro. I do not know him, Socrates. What is
The charge he's brought against you?

Socrates. What's the charge?
One that I deem is not ignobly brought;
For it's worth noting when a man his age
Claims knowledge of a subject so important.
He says he's figured out the ways in which
The young men of our city are corrupted;
And more than that, he claims that he can prove
Which man is guilty of corrupting them.
He must be wise: he sees my ignorance,
He says, corrupting fellow citizens;

He brings a claim against me to the city
 As if he were reporting to their mother.
 Of all our public men, I think that he
 Is just the one who starts the proper way;
 For it is right to seek above all else
 To make the young as good as possible,
 Just as a farmer who is any good
 Bestows his care upon the youngest plants
 Before he tends the others. Meletus
 In just this way clears out the ones of us
 Who harm the youngest shoots (or so he says);
 Then later he will tend the older ones.
 I think he'll give great blessings to the city.
 This seems a likely outcome when one starts
 As he has.

Euthyphro. I'd be glad if that were true,
 O Socrates; however, I'm afraid
 The opposite is likely to occur.
 It seems to me, by going after you,
 He harms our city, striking at its heart.
 Please tell me, what does he believe you've done
 To make him say that you corrupt the young?

Socrates. The things he claims I do are really strange.
 He says I'm a creator of new gods;
 That I, believing in the gods I've made,
 Reject the older ones; that, for their sake,
 He has indicted me. That's what he says.

Euthyphro. I think I understand this, Socrates.
 You claim that you have access to a sign
 That is divine; and so he's brought this claim
 Against you as a man who seeks new ways
 Of practicing religion; and he's here
 In court to slander you, because he knows
 That he can easily misrepresent
 The things you do to the assembled crowd.
 I've seen the same reaction in my case.
 Whenever I'm addressing the assembly
 And touch on subjects that might seem divine
 And seek to tell the future, they all laugh
 And tell me I am crazy; yet not once
 Have I foretold a thing that didn't happen.
 They're jealous of the ones who have this power.
 I think one shouldn't heed them; it is best
 To stand one's ground and meet them face to face.

Socrates. Dear Euthyphro, perhaps one may endure
 Such laughter, and it doesn't matter much;
 For the Athenians don't mind a man
 They think is clever, just so long as he
 Does not impart his wisdom to another;
 But if they see him influencing others
 To think as he does, they react in anger;
 The anger comes from envy, as you say,
 Or from some other reason.

- Euthyphro.* Certainly
I have no eagerness to test their feelings
Towards me in connection with this matter.
- Socrates.* Perhaps to them you're unavailable,
Unwilling to teach others of your wisdom;
But I'm afraid that I enjoy discussions
With people, so they think that I give out
To all whatever I might have to say;
I do it without charging any fee;
Perhaps, they think, I'm eager to reward
My listeners. If it were their intent
To laugh, as you have said they laugh at you,
There'd be no harm; they'd spend their time in court
In laughing and in jesting. But if they
Are serious, the outcome is less clear —
Except to future-seers like yourself.
- Euthyphro.* Perhaps it will be nothing, Socrates.
I'm sure that you'll defend as you think best,
As I'll present my case as best I can.
- Socrates.* What case are you presenting, Euthyphro?
And for the prosecution or defense?
- Euthyphro.* The prosecution.
- Socrates.* Who is the defendant?
- Euthyphro.* Someone, they say, I'm crazy to pursue.
- Socrates.* Is that because he'll easily escape?
- Euthyphro.* The opposite is true: he's very old.
- Socrates.* Who is it?
- Euthyphro.* It's my father.
- Socrates.* My dear sir!
Your father is the one you'll prosecute?
- Euthyphro.* That's right.
- Socrates.* What is the subject of the case?
What is he charged with?
- Euthyphro.* Murder, Socrates.
- Socrates.* Good heavens! Euthyphro, most men would not
Agree it's right to prosecute that case.
It seems that none could do a thing like this,
Unless he were, in wisdom, far advanced.
- Euthyphro.* Yes, Socrates. By Zeus, I think that's so.
- Socrates.* Can I assume the man your father killed
Is one of your relations? Or is that
Too obvious? For why would you pursue
Your father for the killing of a stranger?
- Euthyphro.* I find that it is silly, Socrates,
For you to think it makes a bit of difference
Whether the victim is a relative
Or is a stranger. All that one should ask
Is, "Was the killer's action justified?"
If it was just, then let him go; if not,

Then prosecute. For if he shares your hearth
 And table, then your act is just as bad
 As his if you keep company with him
 And fail to rid yourself and him of filth
 By bringing him to justice. Here the victim
 Was one of my dependents: when we farmed
 In Naxos, he was with us as a servant.
 In drunken rage he killed a household slave.
 At this my father bound him hand and foot
 And threw him in a ditch; he sent a man
 To Athens, telling him to ask the priest
 What should be done. As that was happening
 He gave no thought or care about the servant
 Except, "This man's a killer. If he dies,
 It is no matter." And in fact he died
 From hunger and from cold and from his bonds
 Before the answer from the priest came back.
 My father and my other relatives
 Are angry that I've brought a murder case
 Against my father, and on the behalf
 Of one who'd killed; my father hadn't killed him,
 They say; moreover, even if he had,
 The dead man is a killer who does not
 Deserve a thought. They say it is impious
 To prosecute one's father for a murder.
 But their conception of the attitude
 The gods adopt towards impiety
 And piety is wrong, O Socrates.

Socrates. Whereas, by Zeus, your knowledge, Euthyphro,
 Of the divine, and of impiety
 And piety, you think, is accurate;
 So that, when all has happened as you say,
 You have no fear that it might be impious
 To prosecute your father as you wish?

Euthyphro. I hardly would be useful, Socrates,
 And Euthyphro would not exceed most men
 In wisdom if I did not know the truth
 Of all such things.

Socrates. I think it most important,
 O Euthyphro my admirable friend,
 That I become your student. For I'll challenge,
 Regarding my indictment, Meletus
 About these very matters, saying that,
 I've always thought that knowing the divine
 Was most important, so I want to learn.
 He says I recklessly create new concepts
 About the gods, so I've become your pupil.
 I'll tell him, "Meletus, if you agree
 That Euthyphro is one who knows the truth
 In all these matters, then you should as well
 Consider me to have the right beliefs,
 And not bring me to trial. If you do not
 Think this is so, then prosecute my teacher,
 Instead of me; for he is the corrupter

Of older men, of me and of his father:
He teaches me and seeks to punish him.”
If Meletus does not agree, does not
Discharge me or start prosecuting you,
I’ll say these things again when I’m in court.

Euthyphro. That’s right, by Zeus, O Socrates! If he
Indicted me, I think that I would find
The weak points of his case; the talk in court
Would be of Meletus and not of me.

Socrates. I realize this and so, for just this reason,
I want to be your pupil, my dear friend.
It seems some men, not least this Meletus,
Do not take notice when they look at you.
But I stand out so sharply in his sight
That he indicts me for ungodliness.
But tell me now, by Zeus, what you just now
Maintained you clearly knew: What kind of thing
That godliness and ungodliness are,
Regarding murder and in other things.
Or is the pious not identical
In every action, the impious act
The opposite of what is like itself,
So that what is impious has one form
And one appearance of impiety?

Euthyphro. Most certainly it is one, Socrates.

Socrates. Then tell me, Euthyphro, what is the pious,
And what is the impious, do you say?

Euthyphro. I say the pious is what I do now:
To prosecute the criminal. The crime
May be a murder, temple robbery,
Or anything. I say it doesn’t matter
Who is the criminal, your father, mother,
Or anyone: to fail to prosecute
Is impious. Observe this, Socrates:
I’ll cite the law in proof of what I say.
As I’ve explained to other men before,
Such actions are correct, for they disfavor
Ungodly persons, whoso they may be.
These people all themselves believe that Zeus
Is best and is most righteous of the gods;
And they agree he bound his father up
For swallowing his sons without just cause,
That he unmanned his father for this reason.
These selfsame people are the very ones
Complaining when I prosecute my father
For what he’s done. They contradict themselves
In speaking of the gods and of my actions.

Socrates. Yes, Euthyphro, this is the reason why
I stand as a defendant in my case:
I can’t accept the claims like this they make
About the gods. I’m sure that this is why
They’ll tell me I do wrong. But now if you,
Who know about these claims, believe they’re true,

Then I too must believe in them, it seems.
 For what am I to say, except I know
 That I myself lack knowledge of these matters?
 I ask you: Tell me, by the god of friendship,
 Do you in fact believe these claims are true?

Euthyphro. Yes, Socrates; and more surprising things
 Of which most citizens are ignorant.

Socrates. Do you believe in war among the gods,
 Hostilities and battles, all the things
 The poets tell, and all the sacred stories
 Spun out by writers, and depicted on
 The robe belonging to the goddess, which
 Is carried up to the Acropolis?
 Should we believe these stories, Euthyphro?

Euthyphro. Yes, Socrates; and, as I said just now,
 I will, if you request, say other things
 About the gods that will make you amazed.

Socrates. Of course I'm not surprised; but you can tell
 These tales some other time when we are free.
 For now, I'd like to be more clear about
 What I asked you a little bit ago;
 For, my dear friend, you were not adequate
 In teaching me when asked what "pious" meant.
 Instead you told me that what you do now,
 To prosecute your father's crime, is pious.

Euthyphro. In this I spoke correctly, Socrates.

Socrates. Perhaps. However, I think you'll agree
 That there are many other pious actions.

Euthyphro. There are.

Socrates. Then bear in mind: I did not ask
 To hear of one or two of many actions
 That we consider pious; rather I
 Was asking of the form itself that makes
 All pious actions pious. You agreed
 That all impious actions are impious,
 And pious ones are pious through one form;
 Or do you not remember saying this?

Euthyphro. I do.

Socrates. Then tell me of the form itself,
 So I may look upon it and may say,
 With it as model, any act by you
 Or by another of that kind is pious;
 Or, if not of that kind, that it is not.

Euthyphro. If that is what you're asking, Socrates,
 Then I will tell you.

Socrates. That is what I want.

Euthyphro. In that case, what the gods hold dear is pious.
 Impiety is just what they do not.

Socrates. That's splendid, Euthyphro! Now you have answered
 According to the question that I asked.

The answer may be true or it may not.
I don't know yet; however, I believe
That you'll proceed to show me it is true.

Euthyphro. I will.

Socrates. All right, examine what we mean.
An action or a man the gods hold dear
Is pious; while if hated by the gods,
That action or that man must be impious.
They're not the same; they are quite opposite,
The pious and impious. Is that right?

Euthyphro. Indeed it is.

Socrates. The statement seems correct?

Euthyphro. I think so, Socrates.

Socrates. We've also said
The gods are in a state of discord, they
Contend among each other, Euthyphro,
That they have enmity against each other.
Has that also been said?

Euthyphro. Indeed it has.

Socrates. What subjects cause their hatred and their anger?
Let's look at it like this. If you and I
Disputed, as to numbers, which is greater,
Would we be angry and be enemies,
Or would we simply count and thus resolve
The difference that we had?

Euthyphro. Of course we'd count.

Socrates. Again, were you and I to disagree
About which is the greater number, we
Would turn to measurement, and cease to differ.

Euthyphro. That's so.

Socrates. About the heavier and lighter,
We'd weigh the items and would reach accord.

Euthyphro. Of course.

Socrates. So on what subject could we differ
So that we would be angry, would be hostile
Towards each other if we failed to reach
A settlement? Perhaps you do not have
An answer right away; consider this.
What of the just and unjust, beautiful
And ugly, good and bad? Are these not those,
The subjects for which difference causes rancor,
So that when we can't find a way to reach
Agreement, you and I, indeed all men,
React with anger and hostility?

Euthyphro. Those are contentious subjects, Socrates.

Socrates. Now what of gods who argue, Euthyphro?
If gods are disagreeing, don't we think
These subjects are the ones they fight about?

- Euthyphro.* I certainly agree it must be so.
- Socrates.* But then according to your argument,
Good Euthyphro, the gods are not consistent:
The different ones consider different things
As just, or beautiful, ugly or good
Or bad; for how is it that they are fighting
If they discuss these concepts and agree?
- Euthyphro.* You're right.
- Socrates.* And each likes just what he believes
Is beautiful or good or just, and hates
The opposite of that?
- Euthyphro.* I think he does.
- Socrates.* You say now that the same things that are just
To some gods are by others held unjust;
And as they fight about these matters they
Are in a state of strife. Is that not so?
- Euthyphro.* It is.
- Socrates.* The same things, then, at once are loved
And hated by the gods; and so these things
Are god-loved and god-hated.
- Euthyphro.* That seems likely.
- Socrates.* These things would all be pious and would be
Impious also, on this argument?
- Euthyphro.* I fear that this is so.
- Socrates.* So you did not
Provide an answer, you astounding man,
To what I asked. I did not ask you what
Same thing at once is pious and impious;
But it appears that anything the gods
May love is also something that they hate.
It would not, therefore, be a bit surprising
If your intended action, punishing
Your father, were a pleasing one to Zeus,
But not to Kronos or to Ouranos;
Or it were pleasing to Hephaestus but
Were not to Hera; so with other gods
Who differ with each other on this subject.
- Euthyphro.* In answer, Socrates, I say no gods
Would differ on this subject: they'd agree
Whoever has unjustly killed someone
Should pay the penalty.
- Socrates.* Well, Euthyphro,
Have ever you heard someone say, of one
Who's killed or has done something else unjust,
That he should not be made to pay the price?
- Euthyphro.* Of course I have! This happens all the time,
In court and out in public. Many men
Will do a wrong and then say anything
In order to avoid the penalty.

- Socrates.* Do they agree their actions, Euthyphro,
Are wrong, and do they say, in spite of this,
That they should not be punished?
- Euthyphro.* No, they don't.
They don't agree with that.
- Socrates.* So let's not claim
They say or do just anything. For they
Refrain from saying this: they don't assert
That they should be absolved of punishment
For doing wrong; instead, I think that they
Deny their acts are wrong. Is that not so?
- Euthyphro.* That's true.
- Socrates.* Then they do not dispute that one
Who's done a wrong deserves his punishment;
Instead they disagree on who did wrong,
On what he did and when.
- Euthyphro.* Yes, you are right.
- Socrates.* Does not the gods' experience agree,
If, as we say, they argue with each other
About the just and unjust in the way
That you maintain? Some claim a wrong is done,
While others disagree; but none of them
Asserts that anyone who's done a wrong
Should go unpunished.
- Euthyphro.* Yes, I think that's so,
According to the main point, Socrates.
- Socrates.* And those who disagree, both men and gods,
Dispute each action, if indeed the gods
Engage in disagreements as we say.
Some say an act is just, while others call
That selfsame act unjust. Is that not so?
- Euthyphro.* It is indeed.
- Socrates.* Come now, dear Euthyphro,
And tell me so my wisdom can increase,
What proof you have, in view of which you claim
A man was killed unjustly who became
A murderer while he was in your service,
Was tied up by the master of his victim,
And died while in his bonds before the one
Who bound him got an answer from the priest
Regarding what was right for him to do,
And that a son does right to prosecute
His father on behalf of such a man.
Please show me, if you can, a sign the gods
Agree with you this act is in the right.
If you can give a proof that's adequate,
I shall extol your wisdom without end.
- Euthyphro.* Perhaps this is no light task, Socrates.
And yet I think a proof is possible.
- Socrates.* You must believe my wits are duller than
The jury's; for I know you'll show them that

The killing was unjust, and that the gods
All hate such actions.

Euthyphro. I will show just that,
If only they will listen, Socrates.

Socrates. They'll listen if they think you teach them well.
A thought, though, came to me while you were speaking.
Examining it now I ask myself,
"If Euthyphro shows me without a doubt
That all the gods believe this death unjust,
What more is there that I have learned from him
Of piety and of impiety?
This act, it seems, is hated by the gods;
And yet the pious and impious are
Still not defined, for things the gods abhor
Are also, as we've argued, things they love."
But I will not insist upon this point.
Assume, then, if you will, that all the gods
Agree with you the killing is unjust,
So that they hate it. Is this what we say
In our discussion now, that what the gods
All hate is thus impious, what they love
Is pious, what some love and others hate
Is neither or is both? Is this how you
Believe we should proceed when we define
What's pious and impious?

Euthyphro. What is there
That says we may not do this, Socrates?

Socrates. For my part I see nothing, Euthyphro.
But you must ask yourself: Do you believe
This answer will most readily convey
What you have promised that you'll teach to me?

Euthyphro. I'm certain when I tell you that the pious
Is what all gods love, and the opposite,
What all the gods abhor, is the impious.

Socrates. Then let's again examine whether that
Is sound. Or should we rather let it pass?
If one of us, or someone else, asserts
A thing is true, do we accept its truth?
Or should we study what the speaker means?

Euthyphro. We'll study it, of course; and yet I think
The statement is a good one.

Socrates. We shall soon
Know better whether what you say is true.
Consider this: Is something that is pious
Loved by the gods because it is that way?
Or is it pious just because they love it?

Euthyphro. I don't see where you're going, Socrates.

Socrates. I'll try to clarify my explanation.
We speak sometimes of something being carried,
And other times of something carrying;
We speak of something that is being led

And something else that's leading; and we speak
Of something being seen and something seeing.
You understand these things are different?
You see as well the ways in which they differ?

Euthyphro. I think I do.

Socrates. There's something being loved
And something loving, and the two are different.

Euthyphro. Of course.

Socrates. Then tell me why something that's carried
Is being carried. Is it that someone
Is carrying it? Or some other reason?

Euthyphro. No, that's the reason.

Socrates. And what's being led
Is so because someone is there to lead it;
And what is being seen is being seen
By virtue of the person there who sees it.

Euthyphro. That's true.

Socrates. It's not the case that someone sees it
Because it's being seen; instead of that,
It's being seen because of one who sees it.
Nor are we wont to say that someone leads it
Because it's being led; instead we say
It's being led because of one who leads it.
Nor does a person carry any object
Because it's being carried; there exists
Instead someone who carries it, and so
It's being carried. Is my meaning clear
To you, O Euthyphro? Let me say this:
When we say of a thing, "coming to be,"
We say this just because it comes to be,
And not the opposite. And when we say
That something is affected, we believe
This is because of something that affects it,
And not the opposite. Do you not agree?

Euthyphro. I do.

Socrates. What's being loved is either that
Which comes to be or something that's affected?

Euthyphro. That's certain.

Socrates. The behavior is the same
As with the things just mentioned: what is loved
Is not that way because it's being loved;
Instead it's being loved because it's loved
By those who love it?

Euthyphro. Necessarily.

Socrates. What then are we to say about the pious,
O Euthyphro? It must be something loved
By all the gods, in view of what you say?

Euthyphro. It is.

Socrates. And do we say that it is loved
For being pious, or another reason?

Euthyphro. There is no other reason.

Socrates. So it's loved
Because it's pious, and it's not the case
It's pious for the reason that it's loved?

Euthyphro. That's true, apparently.

Socrates. Because it's loved
By all the gods, it's being loved and so
Is dear to them?

Euthyphro. Of course.

Socrates. The god-beloved
Is therefore not the same thing as the pious,
O Euthyphro, nor can the pious be
The same as what is god-beloved, as you
Assert; instead these two are different.

Euthyphro. How is that, Socrates?

Socrates. Well, we agree
The pious is beloved for being pious,
But is not pious for its being loved.
Is that not so?

Euthyphro. Yes.

Socrates. On the other hand,
The god-beloved is so because it's loved
By all the gods. The fact of being loved
Yields that result; but it is not the case
It's loved because it's god-beloved.

Euthyphro. That's so.

Socrates. But now if it were true the god-beloved
And pious were the same, dear Euthyphro,
And it were true the pious thing were loved
Because it's pious, then the god-beloved
Would, too, be loved because it's god-beloved;¹
While if the god-beloved were god-beloved
By virtue that it's loved by all the gods,
The pious would be pious, too, because
Of this: it's something loved by all the gods.²
These concepts, you observe, are opposites:
One thing³ is loved because of what it is;
The other's⁴ what it is, something that's loved,
Because it's loved. Therefore I am afraid,
O Euthyphro, that when you heard me ask,
"What's piety?" you didn't try to make
Its nature clear to me; instead you gave
An attribute or quality of it:
To wit, the pious has the quality
Of being loved by all the gods; but you

¹ In other words, if the gods love x because x is pious, and if "pious" means "loved by the gods," then the gods love x because x is loved by the gods. This is the opposite of what they said above.

² In other words, if x is loved by the gods because the gods love x , and if "loved by the gods" means "pious," then x is pious because the gods love x . Again this is the opposite of what they said above.

³ I.e., the pious.

⁴ I.e., what is loved by the gods.

Still haven't told me what the pious is.
 Now, if you would, don't hide a thing from me.
 Please tell me once again from the beginning:
 What is it, piety? Whether it's loved
 By gods or has some other quality —
 Let's not dispute this point — please tell me what
 You say the pious and impious are.

Euthyphro. But Socrates, it seems that I cannot
 Convey to you the thoughts I have in mind;
 For anything we say just goes around,
 Refusing to stay put where we have placed it.

Socrates. Your statements, Euthyphro, put me in mind
 Of Daedalus, my ancestor. If I
 Were making them, perhaps you would make fun
 And tell me, "Socrates, just like your kin,
 You run away instead of staying put."
 These propositions, though, are yours; and so
 We need a different jest. They won't stay put,
 You say, for you. You don't say this of me.

Euthyphro. I think this jest can serve us, Socrates.
 For I am not the one who makes our thoughts
 Go round and fail to stay in the same place.
 It's you who are the Daedalus; if it
 Were up to me, I'd keep them where they are.

Socrates. I'm cleverer, it seems, than Daedalus
 In how I use my skill, my friend; for he
 Could move only the things he made himself,
 But I can move not only mine, it seems,
 But others' also. And the smartest part
 Of how I use my skill is that I'm clever
 In ways I don't intend. I'd rather see
 Your statements firmly planted in the ground
 Than I'd possess the wealth of Tantalus
 Or rival Daedalus in cleverness.
 And yet, enough of this. I think you make
 Unnecessary difficulties. Just
 Like you, I hope that we can find a way
 That I can learn of piety. I won't
 Give up before you do. See if you think
 That what is pious must also be just.

Euthyphro. I think so, yes.

Socrates. So is it then the case
 That all that's just is pious? Or perhaps
 While pious things are just, not everything
 That's just is pious; rather some just things
 Are pious and some not?

Euthyphro. I do not follow
 What you are saying, Socrates.

Socrates. Yet you
 Are younger than I am, and that much wiser.
 I think the difficulties you create
 Are products of the wisdom that you have.

Collect yourself, dear sir: What I have said
Should not be hard to fathom. I maintain
The opposite of what the poet wrote:
“You do not wish to say the name of Zeus.
He did it; he’s the reason that things grow.
For where there’s fear, there shame exists as well.”
I disagree. Now shall I tell you why?

Euthyphro. Please do.

Socrates. All right. I’m not inclined to think
That “where there’s fear, there shame exists as well.”
I think instead that many people fear
Disease and poverty and other things;
They fear these things, but they are not ashamed
Of fearing them. Or do you disagree?

Euthyphro. I do agree.

Socrates. But where there’s shame there’s fear.
For is there anyone who feels ashamed
And feels embarrassment at anything
Who does not also fear that others may
Perceive that he is wicked?

Euthyphro. Certainly
That man’s afraid.

Socrates. So it’s not right to say
That “where there’s fear, there shame exists as well.”
Instead let’s say where shame is, there is fear;
For fear is more expansive than is shame
In what it covers. Shame’s a part of fear
In just the way that being odd is part
Of number, so it isn’t true that where
There’s number there is oddness, but that where
There’s oddness there is number. Do you follow?

Euthyphro. I do.

Socrates. This is like what I asked before.
I asked if where there’s piety there’s justice,
But where there’s justice it need not be true
That piety exists; the property
Of being pious is a part of justice.
Shall we adopt this, or a different claim?

Euthyphro. Let’s say it; what you said seems right to me.

Socrates. Then see what’s next: If it is true the pious
Is part of what is just, we must, it seems,
Find out what part of what is just it is.
Now if you asked about what we discussed,
What part of number is the even, say,
And what that number is, I would respond
It is the number that one can divide
In two parts that are equal, not unequal.
Or don’t you think so?

Euthyphro. Yes, I think that’s true.

Socrates. In this way please explain to me what part
Of just the pious is, so that we may

Prevail on Meletus to stop the wrong
 He does against us by indicting me
 And saying I'm ungodly, since I've learned
 From you to know what's godly and what's pious,
 And what is not.

Euthyphro. It seems, O Socrates,
 The godly and the pious is the part
 Of justice that's concerned with godly care,
 While that pertaining to the care of men
 Is just the other part.

Socrates. You seem to me
 To put that very well, but still I need
 More information. I do not know yet
 What's meant by saying "care," for you do not
 Mean care of gods like care of other things,
 As when we say that many don't know how
 To care for horses, but the breeder does.

Euthyphro. That is the way I mean it.

Socrates. So by care
 Of horses you refer to breeding them?

Euthyphro. I do.

Socrates. Nor is it true that everyone
 Can care for dogs, although the hunter can.

Euthyphro. That's true.

Socrates. So hunting is the care of dogs.

Euthyphro. Yes.

Socrates. Raising cattle is the care of cattle.

Euthyphro. Quite so.

Socrates. While piety and godliness
 Is caring for the gods, O Euthyphro.
 Is that what you are telling me?

Euthyphro. It is.

Socrates. Care has, it seems, in each case this effect:
 Its purpose is the good and benefit
 Of what is cared for, as when breeders care
 For horses, who derive a benefit,
 Becoming better. Do you not agree?

Euthyphro. I do.

Socrates. So dogs derive a benefit
 From breeding, just as cattle do from raising,
 And similarly in the other cases.
 Or do you think the purpose of the care
 Is harming what is cared for?

Euthyphro. No, by Zeus.

Socrates. It aims to benefit what's given care?

Euthyphro. Of course.

Socrates. Then is it true that piety,
 The care of gods, exists to benefit

The gods and make them better? Do you think
That acting piously improves the gods?

Euthyphro. By Zeus, I don't.

Socrates. Nor do I think that this
Is what you meant — far from it — but that's why
I asked you what you meant by care of gods.
I did not think you meant this kind of care.

Euthyphro. Right, Socrates. I don't mean care like that.

Socrates. All right. But then what kind of care of gods
Amounts to piety?

Euthyphro. Well, Socrates,
The kind of care that slaves take of their masters.

Socrates. I understand. It's like a kind of service
That's given to the gods.

Euthyphro. That's what I think.

Socrates. Now what of giving service to the doctors?
What goal does this advance? Achieving health,
Do you agree?

Euthyphro. I do.

Socrates. And what of service
To shipbuilders? What goal does it advance?

Euthyphro. Well clearly, Socrates, to build a ship.

Socrates. And what of house builders? Does serving them
Advance the building of a house?

Euthyphro. It does.

Socrates. Then tell me, my good sir: What is the aim
Advanced by giving service to the gods?
It's clear that you must know this, since you claim
Of all men you know most of the divine.

Euthyphro. In that I tell the truth, O Socrates.

Socrates. So tell me then, by Zeus: What worthy aim
Do gods achieve, by using us as servants?

Euthyphro. What aim? Well, many fine things, Socrates.

Socrates. And so do generals. Nonetheless, my friend,
It seems their main concern is victory
In war. Is this not so?

Euthyphro. Of course it is.

Socrates. The farmers, too, achieve fine things, I think.
But what they do is mainly to produce
Food from the Earth.

Euthyphro. Quite so.

Socrates. Well then, how would
You summarize the things the gods achieve?

Euthyphro. I told you, Socrates, not long ago:
It takes hard work to apprehend these things
Precisely. But to make a simple claim,
I say that if a man knows what to say
And what to do that's pleasing to the gods

In prayer and sacrifice, the things he does
 Are pious actions, and that they preserve
 Both private houses and public affairs.
 The opposite of pleasing acts like this
 Are the impious ones that overturn
 And ruin everything.

Socrates. You could have said
 In many fewer words, if you had wished,
 Exactly what I asked, O Euthyphro.
 But you don't want to teach me; that is clear.
 You were about to do so, but you stopped.
 If you had carried on, I should by now
 Have learned from you enough so I could say,
 "At last I know the truth of piety."
 At all events, he who loves inquiry
 Must follow his beloved where it leads.
 Once more, then, I will ask: What do you say
 That piety and that the pious are?
 Are they a knowledge of the way to pray
 And sacrifice?

Euthyphro. They are.

Socrates. To sacrifice
 Means give the gods a gift; whereas to pray
 Means begging from the gods?

Euthyphro. Yes, Socrates.

Socrates. It follows from this claim that piety
 Means knowing how to give the gods a gift
 And how to beg from them.

Euthyphro. You understand
 Quite well what I have said, O Socrates.

Socrates. And that's because I'm focused on your wisdom.
 I concentrate upon it, so no word
 You speak is lost by falling to the ground.
 But tell me: What's this service to the gods?
 Is it to beg from them and give to them?

Euthyphro. It is.

Socrates. To beg correctly is to ask
 The gods to give us what we need?

Euthyphro. What else?

Socrates. To give correctly is to give them what
 They need from us; for it would not do well
 To give a gift to anyone who does
 Not need it.

Euthyphro. That's true, Socrates.

Socrates. It seems
 That piety must be a sort of skill
 That men use in their trading with the gods?

Euthyphro. Yes, call it trading, if that's what you like.

Socrates. There's nothing that I like, but what is true.
 But tell me, what's the benefit the gods

Derive from gifts we give them? What they give
 To us is obvious for all to see.
 For us there is no good we don't receive
 From them; but what's the benefit they gain
 By what we give them? Or is it the case
 That we have such advantage over them
 In trading that they give us all these blessings,
 Receiving nothing from us in return?

Euthyphro. Do you suppose, O Socrates, the gods
 Enjoy a benefit from what we give them?

Socrates. What is the purpose of our gifts to them,
 If not to give a benefit?

Euthyphro. What else
 Than honor, reverence, and gratitude,
 As I just said?

Socrates. The pious, Euthyphro,
 Is pleasing to the gods but doesn't give
 A benefit? It isn't dear to them?

Euthyphro. I think of everything in fact it is
 Most dear to them.

Socrates. So once again we see
 The pious is just this: dear to the gods.

Euthyphro. Most certainly.

Socrates. Will you now be surprised
 To find your arguments have moved about
 Instead of staying put? Will you complain
 That I am Daedalus who makes them move,
 Although you are the one with greater skill
 Than Daedalus, and move them in a circle?
 Or don't you realize that our argument
 Has gone around, returning to its start?
 You must remember that before we said
 The pious and the god-beloved were not
 The same, but were in fact two different things.
 Or do you not remember this?

Euthyphro. I do.

Socrates. Do you not realize then that you now say
 That what the gods hold dear is just the pious?
 Is this the same as god-beloved or not?

Euthyphro. It is the same.

Socrates. So either we were wrong
 When we agreed before; or we were right
 And now we're wrong.

Euthyphro. The statement seems correct.

Socrates. So let's go back, investigate again
 What is the pious, as I won't give up
 Before I've learned this. Please don't think I am
 Unworthy; rather focus your attention
 And let me know the truth. If any man
 Knows this, you do; I must not let you go,

Like Proteus, before you've spoken it.
If you had no clear knowledge of these things,
Of piety and of impiety,
You never would have dared to prosecute
Your aged father as a murderer,
While taking up the grievance of a servant.
Fear of the gods would have dissuaded you
From risking that this action might be wrong,
And that you might feel shame before men's eyes.
However, I'm aware that you believe
You have clear knowledge of impiety
And piety. So tell me, Euthyphro.
Don't hide from me the knowledge that you have.

Euthyphro. Perhaps some other time, good Socrates.
I'm in a hurry now, and I must go.

Socrates. All right, but you have dashed my hopes, my friend!
I thought that I could learn from you about
The nature of the pious and impious
And so escape from Meletus's charge
By showing him that I'd acquired wisdom
About these matters from you, Euthyphro;
That I no longer would be ignorant
And carelessly inventive in these matters,
And thus throughout my life would be improved.

References

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