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Plato's euthyphro pages 1-190

Addendum to Hauptli Lectures at Euthyphro Plato copyright © 2015 Bruce W. Hauptli Select this link for a newer version of this file. 1. Euthyphro Introduction: Although it is often claimed that this dialogue is set on the steps of the court building as Euthyphro and Socrates go into their respective processes, in their introduction to the process and execution of Socrates: Resources and Controversies, Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith argue that: ... Euthyphro recounts the interview Socrates has while waiting in the king's office for Archon to make his court date.... This dialogue gives us a picture of the socratic process of elenchus (rebuttal). A look at piety is advanced by Euthyphro, and Socrates subjects it to critical analysis. Socrates is, of course, willing to accept only legitimate, substantiated claims. But Euthyphro advances the claim to the knowledge he justifies due to his special position (as a theologian). He claims to know (what piety is) and Socrates shows he doesn't know it. Think of the apology-Socrates is testing to see if Euthyphro knows.... If Euthyphro doesn't know, how does Socrates show him he doesn't know? Stanley Cavell points out that: Socrates gets his adversaries to withdraw their definitions not because they don't know what their words mean, but because they know what they mean (their words) and therefore they know that Socrates led them into a paradox. Here we have a problem that Plato's name is centrally concerned-how is it possible to learn? Euthyphro comes to no positive conclusion as to the nature of piety. In fact, it does not even reach the second of the three phases of the Plato dialectical process (aporia [confusion, negativity or inconclusiveness]). As the dialogue ends, it is clear that Euthyphro is angry with Socrates, but still believes he has special knowledge when it comes to piety. Why does the dialogue not go beyond the first phase? Euthyphro is not a philosopher! [The name is used to indicate a character trait property – not a profession]. Here, therefore, is a valuable result of dialogue – it points out that the process of socratic dialectics requires a sincere desire for truth. Steven Nathanson argues that we can see something central about Plato's commitment to the ideal of rationality in this dialogue: there are many questions that could be raised about the way Socrates questions Euthyphro and about the criterion of knowledge that Socrates envisions. However, I want to focus on the impression he gave readers about the characters of dialogue and the connection between this impression and the ideal of rationality. Plato argues that, although Euthyphro has strong views and is willing to act on them, he is unable to provide a justification either his beliefs or actions on his basis. Although he is right that his father should be prosecuted, his trust is still misplaced because he lacks a rational basis. Although Euthyphro's beliefs may be true, he has no reliable reasons to think that it's true. Once Socrates reveals a lack of justification for his beliefs, it's irrational and irresponsible for Euthyphro to continue to hold on. -Cf., in this context, Plato's socrates' speech at the end of the dialogue (15e-16a). Note that while the dialogue does not reach a satisfactory dialectical solution, it is said that Euthyphro suggests that he is going to continue the procedure described by Socrates (although he does not seem to have a rational justification for it). The dialogue shows that the consequence of not reaching aporia is that one can act on his ignorance, and the consequences (both for himself and for others) can be terrible! Dialogue also introduces us to Plato's form doctrine – the introduction of imagination and the clear ization of what he takes as the objective nature of these things. The difference between random and basic properties is also introduced and its tie with the forms is explicitly. For Plato, the forms are objective, basic, immutable, and transcendent. Another important aspect of the dialogue is that it portrays Socrates on the brink of his process and represents his attitude or frame of mind—he is not affected. Notice what the accused-on is continuing as he prepares to go to court! As part of the dialogue we find the difference between something that is good because the gods approve of it and the gods approve of something, because it's good—remember it whenever you read about God or the gods in Plato! His forms (their objectivity) are beyond god(s)- tie it to talk about forms. Here a comment from George Sher, in his Meaning of Moral Language, is worthy of note: many [now] believe that what makes the act right is just the fact that God approves of it, or commands us to execute it. However, this theory-divine command theory-is often said to be vulnerable to the objection that was first advanced by Plato. As Plato argues in [Euthyphro], if acts like theft and murder are only evil, because God forbids them then God cannot ban such acts because they are wrong. In that case, God's commands are simply arbitrary. Because it is unclear how arbitrary orders might have authority, Plato concluded that we should reject the divine theory of command. Not all proponents of the theory of God's command, of course, believe that Sher is right here, but I think it correctly captures Plato's concern— and it's important to remember that by the time Plato writes, the concerns aren't with orders. deity, but with those large numbers of such. As we read Crito, we come to see that there is some special obligation that individuals owe their parents in ancient Greece. Richard Kraut confirms this: Laws rely on the assumption, widespread in ancient Greece, that while there is no general objection to violence and killing, attacks on their parents are absolutely forbidden. In a footnote, Kraut continues: the special inviolability of the parents has been built into the legal system. While the normal punishment for assault in Athens was fine, it was much more serious-deprivation of rights when the victim was the parent or grandparent of the accused. This, of course, means that Socrates' miracle at Euthyphro's certainty as to the correctness of his case is even more understandable. When thinking about the phrase what the gods love, should we consider what Mark McPherran claims in his Does Piety Pay? Socrates and Plato for prayer and sacrifice: ... it is important to note that sacrificial activity [in ancient Greece] was often not so much aimed at obtaining specific goods or evil as maintaining an ordered relationship with the gods and ensuring their general good will, a kindness that (was generally agreed) could not be reliably influenced by such activity. Given his commitment to the idea that the only real (or at least most important) good is virtue (and that the object of goodness depends on its wise, virtuous use), Socrates must reject the purely merciful tendencies of popular religious practice—namely those who rest on incorrect assumptions that sacrificial objects are themselves god-appreciated, and that our requests for specific material gains and physical protection will carry considerable weight to the gods. Rather, Socrates' gods cannot care for any material sacrifices as such, and whether a specific request will be granted depends on whether the gods' doing so will further the overall good. In short, it would be wrong to assume that Socrates' (or Plato's, or Plato's Socrates') view of piety and what the gods love is like euthyphro's (or typical Atenian). 2nd Text: 2-4 Euthyphro and Socrates meet and it is proven that Socrates has been charged, while Euthyphro has accused his father of murder. [A servant kills a slave in drunken rage and Euthyphro's father ties the servant up, throws him into a ditch, and sends for the priest advice on what needs to be done with him. By the time the answer comes from the priest, the servant will die. Euthyphro is now prosecuting his father for murder (against the will of his family).] 4e Euth: But their (Euth father, relatives) thoughts of divine attitude to piety are evil, Socrates. Soc: Since Zeus, Do you think that your knowledge of the divine, and piety and impiety, is so accurate that when those things happen, as you say, you have no fear that you acted impiously to bring your father to justice? 5d Soc: What is Piety? Euth: ... The pious thing is to do what I do now (blame my father). After all, Zeus punished his father. -6a Soc: I find these things and others (e.g. war between gods) hard to believe. -6d Euth: Such things (and others) happen to the gods! -Socrates is in disbelief, but he continues by asking for the nature (common characteristic-form) of piety. What is the common characteristic or form)-in early dialogues are considered immanent (later they are considered transcendent). -6e Keep in mind then that I did not offer to tell me one or two of the many pious actions, but that form itself that makes all pious actions pious, for you agreed that all pious actions and pious and all pious actions are pious through one form.... 7a Euth: What is precious to god is pious. Soc: Well done, but let's see what you mean so we can see if it's true. -7b Have you stated that the gods war among themselves, what are the themes of difference that cause hatred and anger? -7c Surely do not have a war on objective things like size, weight and measure of things? -7d The things about whose differences cause hatred and anger, sure, are disagreements about... only and unfair, beautiful and ugly, good and bad. Aren't these topics of difference about which, when we are unable to come to a satisfactory decision, you and I and the other men become hostile to each other whenever we do? --Note that it is precisely these subjects, of course, which philosophers would practice their dialectical activities on. Moreover, it is precisely these topics on which Socrates and other Athenians disagree (with the results of anger and hatred, at least on the part of others). It is Plato Socrates' assertion that if we approach these topics rationally, we will have no real opportunity to resolve our disagreements, except by force. Euthyphro, on the one hand, and the Socrates and Euthyphro family (and, as I noted, the other Athenians), on the other hand, disagree about what is and requires piety. Note that Euthyphro is ready to go to court and force the issue, while Plato's Socrates would settle disagreements using a reasoned dialectical. --7e But then, the same can be pious or pious depending on God! --- Is Socrates in trouble here? At 6a above he asks if the gods have done the kinds of things that Euthyphro says they did (war with each other, etc.), but now (7e) he says they do so. Note: the argument that is used by spaces or basic ideas and comes with a problem is a stronger argument against an opponent than one that relies on spaces that the opponent may not accept [contrast internal and external criticism]. 8c Euth: On this subject (piety of blaming my father), no God would disagree. 9c Soc: Even if we could fix it, we would be closer to the definition of piety. We have only set out so far that what all gods love is pious, what everyone hates is pious, and what they differ on is not one. 10a Is he piously loved by the gods because he is pious, or is he pious because he is loved by gods? -Here it distinguishes between basic and random characteristics. -10c Various examples are offered that tilt us to the conclusion that piety is loved by the gods because it is pious. -Cf., Grube footnote: it gives in a nutshell a point of view from which Plato never left. Whatever the gods may be, they must, by their nature, love the law, because it is right. They have no choice in this matter. This separation of the dynamic power of the gods from the ultimate reality, this setting of absolute values over the gods themselves was not as unnatural for the Greek as it would have been for us. The gods who ruled on Olympus were not creators, but creatures. As in Homer, Zeus must listen to the balance of necessity, so the platonic gods must be consistent with the eternal range of values. He didn't create them, he can't change them, he really can't wish for it. --Although I think that Grube is correct in part of what he claims here, I think he overseamates the extent to which fellow Athenians would find what Plato says to be understandable. While we have little problem accepting the idea of the eternal, immutable, objective laws of nature, it was not something they would consider clear or acceptable. They attributed gods to superior powers over the deity of men, but their conception of deities was distinctly anthropomorphic— their gods behaved as humans do, and disobeyed the eternal, immutable laws of nature. Plato's suggestion that the gods would only be good if measured up to some independent, objective, immutable standard would make Leas most believe that he did, indeed, worship something other than the gods of his city. 11a-b Soc: But then, Euthyphro, you have an undefined piety for me. His love making by the gods is a random and additional characteristic – the wave was not given form or common characteristic. Another Plato does something unusual (at least for Plato from the first euthyphro dialogues, an apology, and Crito, for example), offering a start for definition, rather than (simply) criticizing the definition offered by others. It shows us something about what (soon) Plato is taking out of piety to be! 11e Soc: Is everything that is pious necessarily just? Yes. Is that all that's pious? Not. So, pious is part of just-what part? -12e Euth: Pious and pious is part of the law that deals with the care of the gods; while the care of men is an essential part of justice. -13a-d Soc: What kind of care? -14-15 Euth: Slaves to masters, sacrifices and prayers, honor, message, gratitude. These things are most expensive for the gods. 15b Soc: We came full circle. Now you say that pious is what the gods love. But we have already agreed that the fact that the gods love the pious is a random trait, and what we want is form. Let's start over. 15e Euth: Other Times Socrates! 15e-16a Note the irony in Socrates Plato's closing statement--this is important for the apology, and meletus' accusations against him: -What to do, my friend! By going [now] you overthrew me out of the great hope I had that I would learn from you the nature of the pious and pious, and thus escape Meletus' indictment by showing that I had gained wisdom in divine things from Euthyphro, and my ignorance would no longer cause me to be sloppy and resourceful about such things and that I would be better off for the rest of my life. (end) 3. Concluding comments on Euthyphro: In her culture of humanity: The classic defense of reform in liberal education, Martha Nussbaum argues that: Socrates questions generals about courage [Laches], friends about friendship [Lyssa], politicians about self-restraint [Charmides], religious people about piety [Euthyphro]. In any case, it asks to know whether they can provide good and coherent reasons for what they are doing, and in any case it turns out that they were not reflexive enough. Socrates shows them that demand for reasons has an impact on what they actually choose. This demand is now beginning to seem not an idle luxury amid power struggles, but an urgent practical necessity. In her Plato at the Googleplex: Why Philosophy Doesn't Go Away, Rebecca Goldstein argues that: the argument Plato has socrates to make in Euthyphro is one of the most important in the history of moral philosophy. When he connects with another of Plato's claims, and that the actions of man are virtuous only if he can provide a reason for his being so, euthyphro argument shows the need for moral philosophy. We humans have to justify our path to morality, otherwise we won't get there at all. Relying on fiat, even if they come from a high, will not allow us to achieve an understanding of virtue. Any advance in our moral understanding: progress that would take us some distance over time from slaves abusing, captured – killing, executing philosophers, Athens, which held up as the very standard of areté was made on the basis of an argument Plato put in the mouth of a man awaiting hearing on charges of impiety and corruption of young people. This moment in Socrates' life, as Plato did it, is important enough to step away from him and think. It affects an issue that is always hovering-over this book [hers] because it tracks the sources of philosophy as we know it, and that's a question of the progress of philosophy. If they evaluate what ancient Greek philosophers did only in terms of Thales and co., then of course we can conclude.... But that's to focus on just one type of question.... It is to ignore Plato's argument that since religious authority cannot answer these questions, we should better get to work formulating reasons that make the right actions right and wrong actions wrong. It's ignoring the work that has since been done, not just on prescriptive ethics issues, but on normative issues of epistemology, work that needs to be talked about rationally at all. It ignores the conclusions to which philosophy-jeers freely help themselves, certainly when they speak in the name of rationality. [14] Comments: (click on the note number to return to the text for the note) Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith, Introduction to the Process and Performance of Socrates: Resources and Controversies (NY: Oxford U.P., 2002), pp. 1–13, p. 11. Stanley Cavell, Do We Have to Mean What We Say?, in His Must We Mean What We Say? Book of Essays (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1969), pp. 1-43, p. 39. Steven Nathanson, The Ideal of Rationality (Atlantic Heights: Humanities, 1985), p. 4. Note also that when you confront a singular ('God'), as opposed to plural ('gods'), you cannot assume that the deity mentioned is any of those you may be generally familiar with. The deity of the religions of Abraham (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) was not one of those commonly worshipped in ancient Greece! George Sher, Meaning of Moral Language, in His Ethics: A Basic Reading in Moral Philosophy (Third Edition) (N.Y. Routledge, under review for publication in 2011). Richard Kraut, Socrates and State (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1984), pp. 48-49. Mark McPherran, Is Piety Valid? Socrates and Plato on prayer and sacrifice, in the process and execution of Socrates: Sources and controversies, eds. Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith (NY: Oxford U.P., 2002), pp. 162-190, p. 171. The article originally appeared in Reason and Religion in Short-Circuit Philosophy, by Eds Nicholas Smith and Paul Woodruff (NY: Oxford U.P., 2000), pp. 89-114. The fringe links to the pages in the text refer to platoon's collection of works (Platonis opera [Geneva: 1578]) edited by the famous printer and humanist time called Henri Estienne (1528-1598), also known latinized version of his name: Stephanus. This edition's pagination has become a standard method of identification and referring to Plato. In his Gorgias (507a5-b4) Plato also argues that piety is part of justice. Better, I believe he'll show us. Martha Nussbaum, The Cultivation of Humanity: A Classic Defense of Reform in Liberal Education (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1997), p. 25. [14] Rebecca Goldstein, Plato on Googleplex: Why Philosophy Doesn't Disappear (NY: Pantheon, 2014), p. 306. Return to the PHH

