

Example of critical thinking on how the concept of wisdom affects socrates in eut...

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



In “Euthyphro,” one of Plato’s early dialogues, Plato describes the meeting between Euthyphro and Socrates near the king-archon’s court and proceeds to record their conversation about piety. Piety is a virtue that is often interpreted as religious devotion or spirituality. While piety in contemporary society usually means devoting God to gain good graces or seek forgiveness, piety was considered in a wider context by Greek philosophers, so it was a virtue that allowed a person to respect social order, religious order, and display devotion to others. Piety is directly influenced by the development of practical wisdom because practical wisdom was considered the source of all other virtues. Although Euthyphro’s arguments define piety, Socrates’ has to develop practical wisdom to understand Euthyphro’s arguments because it is not possible to understand them through ethical skills or intellect alone. Practical wisdom helps develop individuality because it allows individual judgments, expressions, experiences, and consistent righteousness, but Socrates failed to develop practical wisdom in his conversation with Euthyphro because he believed that metaphysics was based purely on intellect.

After their greeting, Euthyphro explains that he is prosecuting his father for murdering one of his relatives, but he supports his action because it is pious, and he is confident in his ability to distinguish pious and impious acts (Plato 5a). Socrates considers Euthyphro a great man because he possesses enough knowledge in religion to be confident that his action is holy, so he expresses his desire to become Euthyphro’s disciple under the assumption that he will be able to defend himself against the accusations of impious conduct once he learns the definition of piety. However, it is possible to

notice that Socrates focuses on developing a logical definition while Euthyphro is not concerned with defining piety through intellect because he apparently knows it through practical experience, so Socrates undermines the first argument by stating that prosecuting someone is an example rather than an absolute definition of piety.

The development of their arguments leads to Socrates asking Euthyphro whether the pious is loved by the gods because it is pious, or whether it is pious because it is loved by the gods (Plato 10a). Many contemporary theists concerned with the philosophy of religion indicate that this is a troubling dilemma because it presents a paradox (Lawson 38). However, it is also possible to dismiss that same argument as a false dilemma. For example, Hartshorne developed a model that defines perfection as relative in human concepts, so divine experiences cannot be translated to physical experiences, and if Hartshorne's rejection of impassability is applied to "Euthyphro's dilemma," it will be possible to understand piety as a divine experience that does not suit Socrates' desire to present it as a human experience (Lawson 58).

Towards the end of the dialogue, Socrates believes that Euthyphro's arguments provide only examples of piety, but he feels deprived of understanding its essence (Plato 11a). However, it becomes obvious that it is not possible to convey all practical experiences through verbal communication, so the dialogue ends in a paradox without a clear definition on piety (Plato 16a). From the beginning of Plato's "Euthyphro," it is obvious that Euthyphro is not a theoretical philosopher. Instead, he has an

abundance of practical wisdom that allows him to make good judgments in different situations and under different circumstances. Although it is not possible to convey practical wisdom through theoretical arguments, it is noticeable that Socrates was deeply affected by his conversation with Euthyphro because he loses patience and asks for the truth about piety directly (Plato 16a). In the end, Socrates considers that he will not be cleared of Meleteus and his indictment because he failed to understand piety, but he begins to see the impulsive nature of his behavior and considers that he might have indulged in his philosophical innovations through ignorance (Plato 16a). That can be considered the first step to self-criticism and acquiring a different perspective that is required to learn through practical experience rather than theoretical analysis. However, that is the only visible progress Socrates displays in self-criticism to obtain a higher degree of practical wisdom and individuality.

The dialogue in “Euthyphro” is built on three arguments that Euthyphro uses to explain the difference between pious and impious. However, Socrates objects to every argument because he considers them self-contradictory, and he is not satisfied with arguments that cannot be comprehended without the intellect (Lawson 35). That was an incorrect approach because it is evident that many arguments, including the “Euthyphro dilemma,” are based on false reasoning. Even Euthyphro accuses Socrates at one point that he is shifting his arguments to prove that Euthyphro’s argument is false (Plato 11a). That is surprising because Socrates considered practical wisdom the highest value of the soul. However, he also considered the soul

completely rational, so his understandings were limited to intellectual reasoning (Devettere 87). Despite his statements, Socrates displayed poor practical applications of wisdom in his arguments, so it is possible to conclude that the soul does not consist of intellectual reasoning alone.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that Socrates did not develop authentic virtues. He had developed ethical skills, but Aristotle claimed that skills are restricted, and that authentic virtues cannot be obtained through skills or intellectual reasoning alone (Devettere 129). In contrast to Socrates and his arguments, Euthyphro's argument is simple and straightforward. Socrates cannot comprehend that gods care about human behavior, but it is obvious that if the gods are righteous in their nature, they will appreciate the same behavior in humans (Frame, "Euthyphro"). Although Frame claims that the obstacle to Socrates' understanding of piety was the nature of Greek gods, the principle of piety remains the same, and Socrates overlooked Euthyphro's explanation that unified the gods in deciding between pious and impious acts to make the religion appear closer to monotheism ("Euthyphro"). A simple change in perspectives would have allowed Socrates to observe Euthyphro's argument as a valid definition of piety.

However, that does not mean that Socrates had to develop faith to understand the definition of piety. The concept of piety is often linked to religion in contemporary society, so it is often possible to mistake piety with faith. Several rationalist views oppose faith because they claim that faith is useful only when people substitute partial emotions for evidence, and that faith exists only where evidence is lacking (Russel 216, 233). From a

scientist's perspective, Dawkins argues that faith is based on personal opinions and that it is possibly distorted, but it cannot be considered a valid trait because it cannot be reliable, consistent, predictive, or subject to peer review ("Is Science a Religion?"). However, piety was a concept that was not limited to religion, so it is not possible to correlate it only with faith.

Although faith does not require evidence, contemporary physics is beginning to discover smaller particles, and it is possible that physics will one day discover the smallest subatomic particles that would reveal the functioning of all gross matter, and those particles could be correlated to God if they influence the fundamental development of gross matter (Poythress, "The Mind of God"). That possibility still remains a speculation, but other philosophical concepts on virtues reveal that practical wisdom is considered the highest virtue that affects all other virtues. It affected both faith and piety because both virtues are the result of developing practical wisdom. However, because the nature of virtues is not theoretical, Socrates could not understand or develop virtues because he was focused only on intellectual reasoning and lacked self-criticism.

Before making definite judgments, it is important to define whether acquiring the definition of piety would have been beneficial for Socrates and his individuality, or whether it would have hampered his individuality because it required a different approach to understanding virtue development. Socrates could be considered one of the first anarchists in the world along with Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. Lao Tzu claimed that individual well-being is the goal of the entire society, but the social institutions that hampered individuality

development should be removed, and Chuang Tzu claimed that humanity does not need governing because order can be achieved only without interference and with focus on individual purposes (Rothbard 45-46). In contrast to those viewpoints, Socrates was also a rebel who considered that self-development is the only valid purpose in life. However, Socrates observed everything in an isolated context and failed to engage in self-criticism. He also observed everything through intellectual reasoning, and it is possible that he hampered his own development by restricting his ability to understand and develop authentic virtues.

If an individual does not possess the ability to observe both negative and positive personal qualities, it is not possible to engage in self-development. For example, Socrates acknowledged Euthyphro as his teacher, but he never attempted to understand his teaching. He only attempted to prove that he is correct by debating against Euthyphro's statements. Rather than developing individuality, Socrates remained a rebel against external influences that threatened his worldviews. That can be considered stubbornness, but it cannot be considered individuality because it does not encourage personal development. While Euthyphro attempted to help Socrates by bringing his arguments as close to intellectual reasoning as possible, it was not enough because Socrates relied too much on intellectual reasoning, so he failed to observe Euthyphro's teaching objectively and understand his own fallacies.

Despite the fact that virtue ethics faces criticisms from various other schools of thought, it is evident that the development of all virtues develops individuality. Because all virtues are developed through practical wisdom,

practical wisdom is the main virtue that develops individuality. A common objection against virtue ethics deals with cultural relativism. From one perspective, it should not be possible to strictly define which virtues are important for self-development because concepts of desirable and undesirable traits vary across cultures. However, Goodman proposes that cultural differences cannot interfere with some universal moral standards (87). In fact, all cultures across the world value similar traits, such as compassion or wisdom, so cultural differences cannot account for common virtues that define a human being as an individual. Therefore, it is obvious that practical wisdom increases the individual's ability to make personal, righteous, and independent choices without external pressure from social and political institutions.

When Euthyphro leaves, Socrates is disappointed because he believes that Euthyphro did not share all of his knowledge. Socrates had high hopes that Euthyphro would enlighten him and that he would conceive the meaning of piety because he wanted to use that definition during the trial in which he was accused of impiety (Plato 16a). However, Socrates here displays one more fallacy. He relies on an intellectual clarification of a trait that surpasses the limitations of empirical and logical reasoning. It is possible to develop practical wisdom only through personal insights and practical experience, so Socrates could not gain anything from debating with Euthyphro about piety. Although Socrates apparently seems like an individual because he defies traditions and institutions, he lacks the ability to engage in self-criticism in

the manner he criticizes arguments proposed by others that expand beyond intellectual boundaries.

Although several mystics and philosophers have addressed the issues of social interferences that harm the harmonious development of individuality, it is possible that Socrates was not harmed by society. Instead, he was unable to accept different viewpoints because he considered his intellectual concepts absolute. Although being an individual means having a clearly defined set of beliefs, Socrates built them only on intellectual reasoning with no personal experience. Because Socrates was unable to change his perspective in his conversation with Euthyphro, he missed the definition of piety as he struggled to undermine Euthyphro's metaphysical reasoning with intellectual reasoning. At the end of "Euthyphro," Socrates engaged in self-criticism, but that was the limit of his individuality development because he did not leave his intellectual boundaries and accept that his viewpoint on the intellectual nature of the soul might have been incorrect and limiting to his development of authentic practical wisdom.

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