

Euthyphro : plato

Philosophy



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In seeking to answer the underlying question of what defines piety/holiness, Plato presents the quandary that Socrates finds himself; charged with the capital crime of impiety. In representing this situation, Plato hinges his discussion upon the back and forth between Euthyphro and Socrates as the two men discuss what typifies piety and how it is represented within the world. The following analysis will briefly engage a discussion of the highlights of the work as well as seek to draw a level of inference with regards to what, if any, final definition of holiness/piety can be drawn from the back and forth discussions of these two men. In the beginning of the work, Socrates is shocked that one could take their father to trial on charges of manslaughter; deeming it to be so far outside the conventions of the law and of society that it is almost incomprehensible morally and/or judicially. Euthyphro, on the other hand, focuses on the piety of the son and courage that he must have had in order to perform such an action; refering the fact that a universal belief in goodness and the justice of the rule of law overcame even the strict moral dictates of respect. Exemplifying Socratic irony, Socrates states that he wishes to learn from Euthyphro concerning piety so that he might use this to defend himself against the trial that awaits him (Reed, 2013). The conversation that follows between the two develops, expands and allows the reader to come to a more full and informed understanding of how logical thought concerning piety and/or holiness can be informed as a result of the trial of Socrates; the situation that of course prompted the entire work to be written in the first place. The central question that is asked is ultimately what defines piety. Socrates understandably seeks such a definition due to the fact that he is forced to defend himself on charges of impiety and reasonably seeks something of a universal dictum and/or definition that he can use as a

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means of defending himself against the charges made. In search of this “universal paradigm” for defining goodness and holiness, Socrates and Euthyphro have a conversation and debate that discusses various aspects of piety/holiness. The first argument that is put forward by Euthyphro offers the understanding that piety is represented in the exemplification of the son taking his father to trial for manslaughter. Socrates understandably appreciates this; however, he rejects it due to the fact that it a piety cannot be defined by a pious action alone. As such, Euthyphro offers Socrates a second definition; namely that, “Piety is what is pleasing to the gods”. Socrates enjoys and appreciates this definition initially as well; however, this of course leads to the regression of the fact that it is difficult for mankind to know what is pleasing to the gods and the gods themselves even disagree with regards to what is pleasing. Likewise, Socrates pushes Euthyphro a bit further for a more universal and easily applicable definition of what piety and/or holiness means in such a context As a means of offering yet another exemplification/definition, Euthyphro states that in order to categorize this in the way that Socrates desires, it must be necessary to view the argument as whatever all the gods love is pious and whatever all the gods hate is impious. Socrates answers this by introducing what he refers to as the Euthyphro dilemma; namely questioning whether what is pious is loved by the gods based upon the fact that it is pious, or is it pious based upon the fact that it is loved by the gods. Likewise, the fourth definition is offered; stating that piety is a direct outgrowth of justice. This fourth definition deviates from the others due to the fact that it is presented not by Euthyphro but by Socrates. Most interestingly, piety and holiness have gone from what can be defined and understood from the gods to what can be defined and

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understood based upon the law of man (Mounce, 2013). This naturally references the ultimate debacle that Socrates finds himself in. Due to the fact that Socrates finds it impossible to know the will and likes/dislikes of the gods, the only measurement for piety/holiness that he can reasonably incur is with regards to the virtues of the man-made laws of justice and goodness. The final discussion comes full circle as Euthyphro yet again references the degree and extent to which the gods approval and "like" define piety. This occurs just before Socrates is due to appear before his tribunal facing the charges of impiety. The inability of these two men to come to a level of understanding and mutual agreement with regards to what defines piety/holiness is indicative, as it was intended to be, of the situation that Socrates faced. Few individuals, other than Socrates himself, were willing or able to come to a realization that piety/holiness was a difficult topic to define and seeking to charge an individual upon a crime of impiety ultimately digressed into a situation in which personal views of what defined it would come to be the deciding factors (Sharpe, 2010). What is referenced by these altering, yet keenly inter-related definitions, is the fact that piety/holiness is a difficult concept to pin down in a universal sense. Rather than running the reader through a list of definitions that are ultimately flawed and leaving one to determine that one particular definition of piety is best suited towards understanding piety/holiness in a universalist sense, Plato instead delineates that piety/holiness is something of a relative concept and cannot likely be understood by any mere mortal. Stopping far short of saying that a level of moral relativity defines the world in which we live, Plato instead intimates that the foolishness of the entire situation hinges upon the fact that it is ultimately unfair that anyone should be tried for a crime of impiety due to

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the fact that no clear definition of it exists and any human understanding, which has thus far been reasonably well presented, falls short of working in a universal context. References Mounce, D. (2013). Euthyphro dilemma. *The British Journal Of General Practice: The Journal Of The Royal College Of General Practitioners*, 63(611), 293. doi: 10. 3399/bjgp13X668131 Reed, R. (2013). Euthyphro's Elenchus Experience: Ethical Expertise and Self-Knowledge. *Ethical Theory & Moral Practice*, 16(2), 245-259. doi: 10. 1007/s10677-012-9335-x SHARPE, M. (2010). Uncovering Euthyphro's Treasure. *Helios*, 37(1), 23-48.