

Euthyphro and failure of definition



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In the Euthyphro, Socrates and Euthyphro contemplate over what is piety. What makes something pious and what makes something impious, that's the question throughout the text, but it all comes down to the value of a definition. In the end it's uncertain whether piety is even defined and agreed by both sides. Socrates though develops criteria of a definition and ethical values on his own in the process of questioning of piety. Socrates talks about value conflicts and whether or not there is a resolution to them.

The first question asked about piety from Socrates, Euthyphro says " Very well, I say that what's pious is precisely what I'm doing now: prosecuting those who commit an injustice, such as murder or temple robbery" (Cohen, Curd, and Reve 102). Euthyphro first claim is incomplete form of definition. Socrates rejects Euthyphro's claim. Socrates says " You see my friend, you didn't teach me adequately earlier when I asked what pious was, but you told me that what your'e doing is pious, prosecuting you father for murder" (Cohen, Curd, and Reve 103). It has to be applicable or common to all purposes, conditions, or situations, which is universal. I agree with Socrates' because Euthyphro's claim is more of an example, rather a definition. A book could be a cook book but you wouldn't say a cookbook to define what a book is because it wouldn't make any logical sense and frankly not universal. In order for a definition to be real, it must contain essence, the characteristic something has to happen to be that kind of thing, and a model, a standard basis of comparison. Socrates says " Then teach me what the characteristic itself is, in order that by concentrating on it and using it as a model" (Cohen, Curd, and Reve 103). A proper definition should have a characteristic that is used every time you define that something, and if does not contain that

characteristic then it isn't that something. A model is simply just a comparison of what it is and its opposites. Euthyphro says " In that case: what's loved by the god is pious and what's not loved by the gods is impious" (Cohen, Curd, and Reve 103). In the beginning of text, Euthyphro mentioned that the gods quarrel therefore Socrates says " And haven't we also said that the gods quarrel, and differ with one another, and that's mutual hostility among them" (Cohen, Curd, and Reve 103). If the god's differ, then they all don't agree. Pious can be god-loved and god-hated, because gods do differ and don't all agree. Just like human beings, gods can have conflicts and become enemies if they're not settlement. What's right and wrong shouldn't be determined by gods and religion because value conflicts can occur between gods or within a religion. Socrates supports my claim by saying " Then the same things, it seems, are both hated and loved by the gods, and so the same things would be both god-hated and god-loved" (Cohen, Curd, and Reve 104). Euthyphro says " But Socrates, I think that on this point, at least, none of the gods do differ- that anyone who has unjustly killed another should be punished"(Cohen, Curd, and Reve 105). Even if the gods do agree that murder is wrong, they still do disagree on something. Gods find themselves in value conflicts in which someone's beliefs/ethics in right and wrong contradicts with other beliefs/ethics. When a criminal is indicted, they are not fighting whether what they did is right and wrong, they simply just denying acting unjustly. By denying to act unjustly, their simply trying to do lesser their punishment. Socrates says " So they don't argue that someone who acts unjustly should not be punished, though they do, perhaps argue about who acted unjustly, what his unjust action consisted of, and when he did it." The facts of the case are what's

questioned and argued about in court cases. Right and wrong is not stable when it comes to opinions; people use more of their own opinions and values to determine what's right and wrong. When people relate to their own opinions of what's right and wrong, value conflicts can occur and lead to no resolution. People can believe in absolutism, which believe certain actions are absolutely right or wrong, regardless of other contexts such as their consequences or the intentions behind them. Euthyphro easily would like to accept pious and impious they way he defined it but Socrates continues to question and use logical contradiction. Just because something is agreed though doesn't make it morally right. Socrates insist though if pious is really what's god-loved and impious is god-hated he said " Consider the following: is the pious loved by the gods because it pious? Or is it pious because it's loved" (Cohen, Curd, and Reve 106)? Both Socrates and Euthyphro agree that god's love pious because it's pious, but yet in the earlier statement made by Euthyphro he believed what's god-loved is pious. It simply doesn't make sense because each contradicts itself and doesn't define piety. If gods love lying than it's pious, if gods love murder it's pious, and if the gods love anything it's pious, that statement is just to abstract. Euthyphro then define piety as being holiness. What exactly makes someone holiness? The question in the texts is being questioned by another question. Holiness is believed by Euthyphro to be tending to the gods. Socrates says " Then if piety is tending to the gods, does it benefit the gods and make the gods better" (Cohen, Curd, and Reve 111)? What exactly does the god benefit from humans? Horse trainers tend a horse and make it faster, a farmer tends farm to grow the plants, and a dog trainer tends a dog so it can act more appropriately. Euthyphro is unable to give a clear answer to Socrates of what

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the god's benefit from humans but says " the things that are pleasing to the gods in prayer and sacrifice—those are the ones that are pious" (Cohen, Curd, and Reve 112). Praying is simply asking the gods and sacrificing is giving to the gods. Socrates says " So, on that account, piety would be knowing how to ask from the gods and how to give to them" (Cohen, Curd, and Reve 112)? If the gods give us stuff we benefit from, what can humans possibly give them to their benefit? I believe it's more of a trade, but I feel what we give them is not equal to what they give us. Socrates says " Then piety, Euthyphro, would be a sort of expertise in mutual trading between gods and men" (Cohen, Curd, and Reve 113). But like I said, I don't believe they can benefit from humans, and that we get the better out of the trade. Socrates brings up " But how are they benefited by what they receive from us? Or do we get so much the better of them in the trade that we receive all our goods things from them while they receive nothing from us" (Cohen, Curd, and Reve 113). It's unclear what the gods benefit from. Euthyphro says " What else do you think but honor and reverence" (Cohen, Curd, and Reve 113). Honor and reverence is what the gods benefit from us through trade. Pleasing the god's is simply honor and reverence, and honor and reverence being from sacrificing, piety can be claimed to be beneficial to gods. I feel there it's not relevant to say what benefits someone ultimately is loved by someone, that's because my right and wrongs is more developed through opinions and values. But Socrates says " So is the pious pleasing to the gods, Euthyphro, but not beneficial to them or loved by them"(Cohen, Curd, and Reve 113). Euthyphro replies " No, I think that's its in fact the most loved of all" (Cohen, Curd, and Reve 113). Pious is now again what is loved by the

gods. In previous statements, that what's loved by the gods can't be used to define piety because it contradicts itself with the presentation of conflicts.

Piety is still undefined. The Euthyphro ends where it begins, with no clarification of piety. Socrates continually reject Euthyphro's claims because he applied his mind to the matter in many ways to find the truth compared and followed ethical relativism, while Euthyphro was more absolutism, in which he already established his own truth and rather than questioning, he accepted what he believed in. Throughout the text there wasn't full clarity what pious and impious. For a definition to be accurate, it has to be universal, a model, and have essence. If Euthyphro didn't know full clarity he would of never ventured to prosecute his own father. Socrates questioning lead to answers, but not the one he wanted. Socrates found out about ethical values of relativism and absolutism. People shouldn't set their right and wrongs based on gods and religions, because gods disagree amongst themselves. Socrates doesn't leave the reader with any insight on how to resolve value conflicts but gives more insight on understanding them and how value conflicts develop. I believe the Euthyphro is actually a value conflict. It ends with no agreement just like a conflict of value.