

Examining "progress" in the euthyphro dialogue

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Socrates and Euthyphro don't come up with a clear definition on piety by the end of the Euthyphro, but this does not entail a lack of progress entirely, as a conclusion is not inherently fruitful, nor is it Socrates' style to settle for any conclusion unless it contains thoroughly well-examined knowledge. In this paper, I am defining philosophical progress as an indefinitely ongoing development of ideas involving re-examination of old ideas and the formation of new ones. Framing " progress" this way assumes that examination of knowledge is valuable in and of itself, and based on this assumption, I argue that progress in the Euthyphro is clearly demonstrated as the paradigms used to analyze piety are challenged and redefined throughout the passage.

Socrates generally searches for essential truths - he continually asks Euthyphro to give him the " meat" of an idea rather than basing his argument around its context. At the time, the religious ideas of a priest such as Euthyphro were widely held across Athens and rarely questioned as ruthlessly as Socrates, and his work of doing influenced others to also examine life critically. In particular, Socrates' methods of critical thinking are so valuable to Western philosophy as a whole because of the systematic methods he uses to examine ideas. He criticizes logical fallacies used by Plato, such as using anecdotal evidence (using the example of prosecuting a wrong-doer to represent piety as a whole), overgeneralization, and inherent contradiction (" piety is what the gods love").

Generalizing " what is pleasing to the gods" is bad because gods don't agree, bad generalization also because it doesn't suggest how piety is measured, then Euthyphro dilemma boils down an essence of contradiction,

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makes it clear that the essence of something being right isn't addressed and it is a highly abstracted and undefined concept, the nature of gods is that they don't need to be benefitted by man - referring to function of piety. Euthyphro not having a conclusion is typical for Plato's early dialogues. The act of making Euthyphro consider his own thoughts is progress for Socrates - maybe start by talking about Socrates' personal progress and how he is fulfilling the oracle.

Socrates made progress by making people question themselves and then making an impression of philosophy. Clarifying a problem or contradiction shows the nature of what is left to be analyzed. Clarifying what something is not may not shed light on an answer, but it does lead to a slightly clearer understanding of a topic in abstraction. The introduction of questions are as fruitful as the invention of new ideas, as they redefines the paradigms by which the problem is being framed and introduces new possibilities of answering it. Examining the very nature of the reasoning being used counts as progress as well. Socrates consistently points out that Euthyphro's reasoning is circular when he speaks of piety.

One could argue that progress couldn't exist without working towards some sort of goal or specific value. When discussing progress of knowledge, this question is raised: how can intellectual development exist unless there is an absolute kind of knowledge which is worked towards - isn't it all this conjecture just speculation otherwise, if nothing of this nature can ever be proven right? Why discuss piety if its essence seems hard to define? Whether or not an "absolute" definition of piety exists is relevant to Socrates'

personal fulfillment in his quest for divine knowledge, but irrelevant to progress made in the discussion.

Assuming absolute truth does not exist, the psychological drive to live with a coherent picture of reality is fulfilled by the pursuit of knowledge. Assuming the existence of absolute truth, the expansion of knowledge expands the pool of ideas anyways, making it statistically more probable that we will eventually come to the correct idea if it exists. If absolute incorrectness can exist, it remains valuable to discussion since "wrong" ideas create a need for re-examination. Regardless, the act of seeking out knowledge is valuable in and of itself only if living, and therefore living "well", is considered valuable. And, if we can prove that living isn't valuable and any philosophical reasoning is null, then it requires philosophical reason to come to that conclusion; either way, the quest for knowledge is functional, if not fruitful. The alternative is to base our decisions on unexamined knowledge, which could lead to disastrous results if the reasoning behind them is faulty. (My personal opinion is that the state of being alive is, and should be, important to humans because it is all we can possibly experience, and human life is improved if we assign personal value to being alive.)

Therefore, the discussion of piety can be fruitful without attaining the goal of an absolute definition. Philosophical progress can (and does) occur in analysis of this dialogue today only because progress was made in the work itself, as Socrates defined and analyzed Euthyphro's ideas according to a system of logic that well outlived him. Though philosophy is incomplete indefinitely as human knowledge expands, the act of re-examining our thoughts around topics such as morality is hugely beneficial to human life.

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