

Euthyphro

Plato

From Past to Today's Lecture

- Past Lecture on *Antigone*
 - We discussed several moral issues in the play, e.g. Is Creon's law wrong?
 - We also discussed some ways of affecting audiences' views on moral issues
 - E.g. Theatre, Film, Political Speeches
 - In contrast to theatre, film and political speeches, we identified one philosophical method, namely giving arguments or reasons
- Objectives for Today
 - Objective 1: discuss one more philosophical method (Socratic Method)
 - Objective 2: introduce the idea of God and Religion as basis for morality (piety)

Socrates and Plato

- Socrates (469-399 B.C.): practiced philosophy with Athenian citizens and eminent travelers passing through Athens
- *Euthyphro* is written by Plato
 - *Euthyphro* is one of five dialogues that deals with the trial of Socrates and events leading to Socrates' execution
 - Socrates was executed by the Athenian court for corrupting the youth and inventing new Gods
- Teacher-Student Lineage: Socrates → Plato → Aristotle

Religion and Morality

- One way to understand morality/ ethics is on the basis of religion
- *Euthyphro* is about the concept of piety (religious duty, holiness)
 - The concept of piety is central to Greek religion and monotheistic religion
 - Ancient Greek religion was polytheistic (belief in more than one God)
 - Monotheistic religions (belief in one God); e.g. Judaism, Christianity, Islam
- Judeo-Christian morality (10 Commandments):
 - (1) Thou shalt have no other gods before me
 - (3) Thou shalt not take the name of God in vain
 - (6) Thou shalt not kill
 - (7) Thou shalt not steal
 - (10) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's
 - If someone violates the commandments, they are said to be impious or unholy

Plato's *Euthyphro*

- The dialogue is set on the steps of the Athenian law court
 - Socrates is at the law court having been charged with inventing new Gods
 - Euthyphro is at the law court to charge his own father with murder
- Specific Issue: Is it pious for Euthyphro to prosecute his own father in the circumstances described?
- Deeper issue: What is piety? An answer to this question will provide an answer to the specific issue.
- This dialogue is an illustration of the Socratic Method , one philosophical method

The Circumstances of Charge

- Euthyphro: “The man who is dead was a poor dependent of mine who worked for us as a field labourer on our farm in Naxos, and one day in a fit of drunken passion he got into a quarrel with one of our domestic servants and slew him. My father bound him hand and foot and threw him into a ditch, and then sent to Athens to ask of a diviner what he should do with him. Meanwhile he never attended to him and took no care about him, for he regarded him as a murderer; and thought that no great harm would be done even if he did die. Now this was just what happened. For such was the effect of cold and hunger and chains upon him, that before the messenger returned from the diviner, he was dead. And my father and family are angry with me for taking the part of the murderer and prosecuting my father. They say that he did not kill him, and that if he did, dead man was but a murderer, and I ought not to take any notice, for that a son is impious who prosecutes a father. Which shows, Socrates, how little they know what the gods think about piety and impiety.” (Euthyphro)
- Note: this is a highly complicated set of circumstances

Socratic Method (Dialectic)

- Two participants
 - (A) – the person who claims to know something
 - (B) – interlocutor i.e. the critic (usually Socrates)
- Socratic Dialectic
 - Step 1: (A) proposes definition
 - Step 2: (B) objects to definition [Back to Step 1: (A) must revise definition]
- Socratic Dialectic goes on until a definition is found without any objections
OR it stops without discovery of an adequate definition

Philosophical Definitions

- Central to Socratic Dialectic are philosophical definitions
- The definitions proposed must meet certain requirements
- Four Requirements of Philosophical Definitions from *Euthyphro*
 - R0) A definition must be complete i.e. without counter-examples
 - R1) A definition must be general i.e. not a list of things
 - R2) A definition must not entail contradictions
 - R3) A definition must be clear
- Let's look at how proposed definition can violate these requirements

Exercise: Definition of bachelor

- Let's look at a definition of bachelor. Note that each attempt at a definition of bachelor that has a counter-example is incomplete: **it violates Requirement 0**, so it must be revised
- Attempt 1: a bachelor = an unmarried male
 - Counter-example: priests are unmarried males, but they are not bachelors
- Attempt 2: a bachelor = an unmarried male with an intention of marrying
 - Counter-example: Charlie Sheen is a bachelor but he has no intention of marrying
- Attempt 3: a bachelor = an unmarried male with an intention of dating
 - Counter-example: James Bond; he is a bachelor but he is not interesting in dating
- Definition 4: a bachelor = an unmarried male with an intention of having sex
 - More counter-examples: ??? [and so on...]

Euthyphro's 1st Attempt

- “I say the pious is to do what I am doing now, to prosecute the wrongdoer, be it about murder or temple robbery or anything else, whether the wrongdoer is your father or your mother or anyone else; not to prosecute is impious”
(Euthyphro) 5b
- This attempt at a definition of piety ***Violates Requirement 1:*** the definition is not general: we want to know what the concept of *piety* is; not some examples of piety

Euthyphro 2nd Attempt

- **Definition 2:** Piety is what is dear to (loved by) the gods. 7a
 - This definition does not violate requirement 1; it does not give a list
- **Problem:** in polytheistic religions, sometimes the same things are loved by some Gods but hated by others; if what the Gods love is in conflict, who are we supposed to follow?
- **Example**
 - Zeus loves the idea of killing Agamemnon
 - Poseidon hates the idea of killing Agamemnon
 - So, killing Agamemnon is pious (because loved by Zeus)
 - So, killing Agamemnon is impious (because hated by Poseidon)
 - So, killing Agamemnon is both pious and impious
 - This is a **CONTRADICTION!!!** The same thing cannot be both pious and impious.
- Euthyphro's 2nd attempt **violates requirement 3:** it entails a contradiction

Euthyphro's 3rd Attempt

- **Definition 3:** Piety is what is loved by **all the gods** (9e)
- The problem that Socrates raises is called **Euthyphro's Dilemma**
- I will set this definition and Socrates's objection aside; the discussion is complicated and will set us far afield. Socrates does find a way to reject it.

Euthyphro 4th Attempt

- Piety = the part of justice (morality) that is concerned with the care of Gods
- Question: what does “care of Gods” mean?
- "care of" = providing some benefit for the Gods
 - It is absurd to think that we can benefit the Gods; they don't need us to care for them
- "care of" = service as in a slave's service toward a master.
 - Doctors achieve the service of health; Generals achieve victory in battle. What service do Gods want from us? Euthyphro cannot say. If he doesn't know what service the Gods want, then he can't be a servant to them – he can't care for the Gods, if he doesn't know what service they want.
- The fourth attempt **violates requirement 4**: the concept “care of” is not clear; Socrates and Euthyphro try to make it clearer but neither version works

Aporia

- Aporia = a state in Socratic Dialectic where no satisfactory definition is reached
- This is the state that Socrates and Euthyphro find themselves in at the end of the dialogue. Euthyphro has proposed a number of definitions and all have been rejected.

Discussion

- If a satisfactory definition was not discovered, does that mean that the Socratic method is useless?
- Who is arrogant? Euthyphro in prosecuting his own father? Or Socrates in continuing to question?

Value of Philosophical Method

- What is the value of the Philosophical (Socratic) method?
 - After practicing Socratic Method, we know at least what piety is not: it is not the four definitions given, so that's new knowledge that we didn't know before
 - We come closer to an accurate definition; Euthyphro's definitions (and understanding) seem to improve as the dialogue goes on.
 - As a result, we are less likely to do what Euthyphro did and persecute his father
 - And, there is a hope that a satisfactory definition will be eventually given
- Philosophical investigation makes us wiser even though we may never have an exactly satisfactory definition of piety or morality.

Legacy of Socratic Dialectic

- Socrates continued to question Athenians on many other concepts: friendship, love, beauty, justice, courage.
- Plato used this method in his own writings
- This is the predominant method of philosophical investigation today, in conversation and in academic journals