

# *Euthyphro*

Plato

# From Past to Current Lecture

- *Antigone*
  - We discussed several moral issues, e.g. Is Creon's law wrong?
  - One suggestion at the end of the play was that Creon violated divine law
    - The Gods say that everyone **should** be given proper burial rites
    - Creon law says Polynices **should not** be given proper burial rites
  - We also discussed means of affecting audiences' views on moral issues
    - Theatre, Film, Political speeches
    - arguments or reasons as part of a philosophical method; and their advantages
- Objectives for Today
  - Aim 1: another component of philosophical method: definitions
  - Aim 2: introduce the idea of God and Religion as basis for morality (piety).

# Beginning

- *Euthyphro* is written by Plato
  - *Euthyphro* is one of five dialogues that deal 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
- Socrates (469-399 B.C.): practiced philosophy with Athenian citizens and eminent travelers passing through Athens
- Teacher-Student Lineage: Socrates → Plato → Aristotle

# Religion and Morality

- *Euthyphro* is about piety (religious duty), and this is a way of understanding morality
- Ancient Greece was polytheistic (belief in more than one God)
- Piety or Holiness are relevant to monotheistic religions (one God) i.e. Judaism, Christianity, Islam
- Judeo-Christian morality (10 Commandments): some rules against impiety
  - (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
- Can Religious Morality tell Antigone or Creon what to do?

# Euthyphro's Charge Against his Father

- “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 )

# Structure of Plato's *Euthyphro*

- Poetic Setting
  - The dialogue is set on the steps of the Agora
  - Socrates is at the Agora had been charged
  - Euthyphro is there to charge his own father
- 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.
- The dialogue is an illustration of the Socratic Method, one philosophical method

# 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) proposes an objection to the definition
  - Step 3: assessment of objection
    - EITHER (A) replies by showing how the apparent objection is not; back to Step 2
    - OR (A) concedes that the definition is flawed; back to Step 1
    - OR a satisfactory definition is found with no objections; FIN
- Goal: a definition that has no objections
- Social; one engages in inquiry with another human being

# Philosophical Definitions

- What is a definition?
- Plato's *Euthyphro* is a pedagogical dialogue intended to teach the reader how to do philosophy
- Central to the philosophical method are philosophical definitions
  - Philosophical definitions are not dictionary (lexical) definitions
  - Often lexical definitions are circular; R0) A definition must not be circular
- Four Requirements of Philosophical Definitions from *Euthyphro*
  - R1) A definition must be general i.e. not a list of things that are
  - R2) A definition must be complete i.e. without counter-examples
  - R3) A definition must not entail contradictions
  - R4) A definition must be clear

# Euthyphro's 1<sup>st</sup> 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*
- *Violates Requirement 1*: the definition is not general: we want to know what the concept of *piety* is; not some examples of piety

# Exercise: Definition of `bachelor`

- a bachelor = an unmarried male
- If we find a counter-example then the proposed definition is incomplete and violated Requirement 2 (Incompleteness)
- Counter-examples:
  - Toddler boys are unmarried males but they are not bachelors; Revision: ?
  - The Catholic Pope is an unmarried male, but he is not a bachelor; Revision: ?

# Euthyphro 2<sup>nd</sup> Attempt

- **Definition 2:** Piety is what is dear to (loved by) the gods. 7a
- **Problem:** in polytheistic religions the same things are loved by some Gods but hated by others;
- Example
  - Zeus loves the idea of killing Agamemnon
  - Poseidon hates the idea of killing Agamemnon
  - So, killing Agamemnon is pious (according to Zeus)
  - But, killing Agamemnon is impious (according to Poseidon)
  - So, killing Agamemnon is both pious and impious
  - This is a CONTRADICTION!!! The same thing cannot be both pious and impious.
  - The definition violates requirement 3 (contradiction)
- If what the Gods love is conflicting, who are we supposed to follow?

# Euthyphro's 3rd Attempt

- **Definition 3:** Piety is what is loved by **all the gods** (9e)
- Objection:
  - (a) Is it loved by the Gods because it is pious? Or
  - (b) Is it pious by the Gods because it is loved? 10a
- Socrates objects that Euthyphro's definition is of the form (b) not (a).
- It describes an effect, or piety as having something happen accidentally to it.

# Euthyphro 4<sup>th</sup> Attempt

- Piety = the part of justice (morality) that is concerned with the care of Gods
- Question: what does “care of Gods” mean?
- "care of" = tending as in tending horses or sheep; aims at benefit.
  - It is absurd to say that we are pious in order to benefit the gods. [counter-example]
    - How could anything we do benefit the Gods?
- "care of" = service as in a slave's service toward a master.
  - Service enables the thing served to achieve a fine end; but this is absurd to say about our service to the gods. Can we really help God out, the way a servant can help a master out?
- So, concept ‘care of’ is not clear to be used in a definition
- Problem: violates requirement 4

# 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 refuted.
- The suggestion is: why prosecute your own father because he is impious, if you don't know what piety is; acting on the basis of ignorance. Euthyphro is prosecuting his father based on confused ideas about piety and right/wrong
- Socrates' mission: question and expose Athenians who thought they knew
- This kind of boldness and confidence about one's own 'knowledge' is something Socrates sets out to correct.

# Discussion

- If a satisfactory definition was not discovered, was the Socratic method illuminating in any way?
- What do you think of Socrates' attitude throughout the Dialogue? Is Socrates arrogant or is Euthyphro?

- Socrates apparently did this all his life
- Questions people who were supposed to experts:
  - Military Generals on *courage*
  - Poets on *love*
- Plato adopted this method; wrote many dialogues on *virtue, justice, friendship, love, courage*
- Philosophy today goes on in roughly this way, although mostly in academic journal
- Socrates' discovery: that these are not experts; they don't know what these notions are;

# Value of Philosophical Method

- Socrates does not propose a definition of his own
- What is the value of the Philosophical (Socratic) method?
- We know at least what piety is not: it is not any of the four definitions given, so that's new knowledge – we know what doesn't work.
- We are less likely to do what Euthyphro did.
- We come closer to an accurate definition; Euthyphro's definitions (and understanding) seem to improve as the dialogue goes on.
- And, there is a hope that a definition will be given
- Also, note that we wouldn't say that, before the dialogue started, Socrates and Euthyphro were equally wise about piety – Socrates surely knew more about it, even though he himself does not have a final solution.
- Philosophical investigation makes us wiser even though we may never achieve its ultimate end

# A (simple) Scientific Method

- Does a horse leave the ground when in full gallop?
- Prior to the invention of slow motion photography (1878), no one knew the answer.
- This method, and others like it, seems to be incapable of answering the question of who is right or wrong;
- This very simple scientific method is use tools at our disposal to observe the events we want to investigate
- But, we cannot use this method to investigate philosophical topics: good, wrong, beauty,



# Hierarchy of Subjects Matter

- Car Mechanics

- A car mechanic has to know about car pumps, brakes, and procedures for making repairs.
- But, a car mechanic doesn't have to know much about physics, even though the laws of physics govern all of his actions. To do his job, the car mechanic (implicitly) presupposes the laws of physics and carries on with his job.

- Physics

- A physicist, on the other hand, has to know quite a bit about physics. Although he may not know much about the size, weight and acceleration rates of Ferraris, he will know that  $\text{acceleration} = \text{force} / \text{mass}$ .
- What the physicist knows is more general, abstract, and perhaps less practical than what the car mechanic knows.
- Knowledge about physics does not presuppose knowledge about car mechanics – to know a law of physics [physics more fundamental]

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- Doctor: the nurse tells
  - you

# Philosophical Schools in Athens

