Euthyphro

PLATO

c. 428–348 BC

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Εὐθύφρων

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited



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Euthyphro · Plato (c. 428–348 BC)

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INTRODUCTION

On his way to answer the charges that will lead to his death, Socrates meets Euthyphro, a religious expert so sure of himself that he is prosecuting his own father for murder. Socrates asks him a simple question: what is piety?

The conversation produces one of the most famous questions in philosophy: is something pious because the gods love it, or do the gods love it because it is pious? Euthyphro never finds his footing, and neither, quite, does anyone since.

Euthyphro

Outside the court of the King Archon, 399 BC.
Socrates and Euthyphro try, and fail, to define piety.

EUTHYPHRO [2a] What's new, Socrates, that you've left your usual haunts in the Lyceum and are spending your time here now, around the King's Porch? Surely you can't have a case before the King as well, the way I do.[1]

SOCRATES Well, Euthyphro, the Athenians at least don't call it a lawsuit—they call it an indictment.[2]

EUTHYPHRO [2b] What's that? Someone has indicted you, it seems. I won't accuse you of indicting someone else.

SOCRATES No, I haven't.

EUTHYPHRO Then someone else has indicted you?

SOCRATES Exactly.

EUTHYPHRO Who is he?

SOCRATES I don't really know the man myself, Euthyphro. He seems to be young and unknown. They call him Meletus, I think. He's from the deme of Pitthus—if you can picture a Meletus of

1 The King Archon was the Athenian magistrate in charge of religious matters, including charges of homicide and impiety; his office was the King's Porch in the marketplace. The Lyceum was a gymnasium outside the city walls where Socrates often spent his time.
2 In Athenian law a *dikē* was a private lawsuit brought by the injured party, while a *graphē* was a public prosecution that any citizen could bring.

Pitthus with straight hair, not much of a beard, and a bit of a hooked nose.[3]

EUTHYPHRO I can't picture him, Socrates. But what indictment has he [2c] brought against you?

SOCRATES What indictment? Nothing shabby, I'd say. For someone so young to have grasped such an important matter is no small thing. He says he knows how the young are corrupted and who is corrupting them. He may well be something of a wise man. He has spotted my ignorance and how I'm corrupting people his own age, and now he's going to the city to accuse me, like a child running to its mother. In fact he seems to me the only one of our politicians [2d] who is starting out correctly. It's correct to care for the young first, so that they turn out as good as possible—just as a good farmer naturally cares for the young plants first, and after that for the rest.

And so Meletus, perhaps, is first [3a] clearing out those of us who, as he says, blight the young shoots. After that he'll obviously turn his care to the older people and become the source of very many great goods for the city—which is the likely outcome, at any rate, for someone who starts from such a beginning.

EUTHYPHRO I wish he would, Socrates, but I'm afraid the opposite will happen. It seems to me that by trying to wrong you he is simply starting to harm the city at its very hearth. But tell me, what does he say you do that corrupts the young?

SOCRATES [3b] Strange things, my remarkable friend, at least on first hearing. He says I'm a maker of gods: it's for making new gods and not believing in the old ones that he has indicted me, so he says.

EUTHYPHRO I understand, Socrates. It's because you say the divine sign comes to you from time to time. So he has brought this indictment on the ground that you're making innovations in religion, and he's coming to court to slander you, knowing that

3 A deme was a local district of Attica; every Athenian citizen was registered in one.

such things are easily slandered before the many. It's the same with me: 3c whenever I say something in the Assembly about religious matters and foretell the future for them, they laugh at me as if I were mad. And yet nothing I've predicted has failed to come true. Still, they're jealous of all of us who are like that. But we mustn't worry about them; we have to meet them head-on.[4]

SOCRATES My dear Euthyphro, being laughed at is perhaps no great matter. The Athenians, it seems to me, don't much mind if they think someone is clever, so long as he doesn't teach his wisdom. But if they think he's 3d making others like himself, they get angry—whether out of jealousy, as you say, or for some other reason.

EUTHYPHRO On that point, then—how they feel toward me—I'm not at all eager to find out.

SOCRATES Perhaps that's because you seem to make yourself scarce and to be unwilling to teach your wisdom. But I'm afraid that, because of my love for people, they think I pour out whatever I have to anyone at all—not only without charging a fee, but happy to pay extra if anyone is willing to listen to me. Now, if, as I was just saying, they were going to laugh at me, as 3e you say they laugh at you, it wouldn't be unpleasant to spend our time in court joking and laughing. But if they're going to be serious, how it will turn out is unclear—except to you prophets.

EUTHYPHRO Well, perhaps it will come to nothing, Socrates. You'll handle your case as you see fit, and I think I'll handle mine.

SOCRATES And what is your case, Euthyphro? Are you defending or pursuing it?

EUTHYPHRO Pursuing.

SOCRATES Whom?

EUTHYPHRO 4a Someone I'm thought mad, once again, for pursuing.

4 Socrates claimed that a divine sign, a kind of inner voice, came to him from time to time to hold him back from something he was about to do.

SOCRATES What? Are you pursuing someone who can fly?

EUTHYPHRO Far from flying—he happens to be quite an old man.

SOCRATES Who is he?

EUTHYPHRO My father.

SOCRATES Your own father, my good man?

EUTHYPHRO Certainly.

SOCRATES And what is the charge? What is the case about?

EUTHYPHRO Murder, Socrates.

SOCRATES Heracles! Surely, Euthyphro, most people have no idea how this could ever be right. I don't think just anyone 4b could do it rightly—only someone already far advanced in wisdom.

EUTHYPHRO Far advanced indeed, by Zeus, Socrates.

SOCRATES Is the man your father killed one of your relatives, then? Obviously he must be. You surely wouldn't prosecute him for murder on behalf of an outsider.

EUTHYPHRO It's ridiculous, Socrates, that you think it makes any difference whether the dead man was an outsider or a relative, and not that the only thing to watch for is whether the killer killed justly or not. If justly, let him be; if not, prosecute him—even if the killer shares your hearth 4c and your table. For the pollution is just the same if you knowingly associate with such a person and don't purify yourself and him by bringing him to justice. As it happens, the man who died was a laborer of mine; when we were farming on Naxos, he worked for us there for hire. Well, he got drunk, lost his temper with one of our household slaves, and cut his throat. So my father bound him hand and foot, threw him into a ditch, and sent a man here to ask the religious adviser what 4d should be done.[5] In the meantime he

5 The religious advisers (*exēgētai*) were official interpreters of sacred law at Athens, consulted on matters such as purification after a killing.

paid little attention to the man lying bound and neglected him, since he was a killer and it was no great matter if he died—which is just what happened. Hunger, cold and the bonds killed him before the messenger got back from the adviser. And that is exactly why my father and the rest of my relatives are angry: because I'm prosecuting my father for murder on behalf of a killer. He didn't kill him, they say; and even if he had killed him outright, the dead man was a killer, so one shouldn't concern oneself on behalf of such a person—since it's impious, [4e] they say, for a son to prosecute his father for murder. They have a poor grasp, Socrates, of how the divine stands regarding the pious and the impious.

SOCRATES But you, Euthyphro—by Zeus!—do you think you know so precisely how things stand with the divine, and with what's pious and impious, that, if things happened as you say, you're not afraid that in taking your father to court you might turn out to be doing something impious yourself?

EUTHYPHRO I'd be no use at all, Socrates, and [5a] Euthyphro would be no different from the mass of people, if I didn't know all such things precisely.

SOCRATES Then, my remarkable Euthyphro, isn't the best thing for me to become your student, and to challenge Meletus on these very points before the indictment comes to trial? I could tell him that even in the past I always thought it important to know about divine matters, and that now, since he says I'm going wrong by improvising and innovating about the divine, I've become your student. "And if, Meletus," I'd say, "you agree that Euthyphro [5b] is wise in such matters, then consider that I believe correctly too, and don't take me to court. But if not, bring your suit against that teacher of mine before you bring one against me, for corrupting the old—me and his own father: me by teaching me, and his father by admonishing and punishing him." And if he won't listen to me and won't drop the case, or indicts you in my place, shouldn't I say in court the very things I challenged him with?

EUTHYPHRO Yes, by Zeus, Socrates—if he tried to [5c] indict me, I think I'd find where he's rotten, and there'd be much more talk in court about him than about me.

WHAT IS THE PIOUS?

Euthyphro defines piety as prosecuting wrongdoers, then as what the gods love, and Socrates finds problems.

SOCRATES And that's just why, my dear friend, knowing this, I'm eager to become your student. I know that other people, and this Meletus too, don't even seem to notice you, whereas me he has seen through so keenly and easily that he has indicted me for impiety. So now, by Zeus, tell me what you were just insisting you know clearly: what sort of thing do you say the pious and the impious are, [5d] both regarding murder and in other matters? Or isn't the pious the same as itself in every action? And isn't the impious, in turn, the opposite of everything pious, but like itself, so that everything that is going to be impious has a single form with respect to its impiety?

EUTHYPHRO Absolutely, Socrates.

SOCRATES Then tell me: what do you say the pious is, and what the impious?

EUTHYPHRO Well, I say the pious is exactly what I'm doing now: prosecuting whoever does wrong, whether by murder or temple robbery or any other such offense, whether it happens to be your father [5e] or your mother or anyone else at all; and not prosecuting is impious. Look, Socrates, at what strong evidence I'll give you that this is the law—evidence I've already given others that this is the right way for things to be done: you mustn't let the impious person off, whoever he happens to be. People themselves believe that Zeus is the best and most just of the gods, [6a] and yet they agree that he bound his own father for unjustly swallowing his sons, and that his father in turn castrated his own father for similar reasons. But they're angry with

me for prosecuting my father when he does wrong. So they contradict themselves, both about the gods and about me.[6]

SOCRATES Is this, Euthyphro, the reason I'm being prosecuted—that whenever someone tells such stories about the gods, I somehow find them hard to accept? That, it seems, is why someone will say I'm going wrong. Now, if you too share these beliefs, you [6b] who know about such things so well, then it seems we must accept them as well. For what can we say, when we ourselves admit we know nothing about them? But tell me, by Zeus, god of friendship, do you really believe these things happened this way?

EUTHYPHRO Yes, and things still more amazing than these, Socrates, which most people don't know.

SOCRATES And do you believe there really is war among the gods, and terrible hostilities and battles and many other such things—the kind the poets tell of, and that [6c] good painters have used to decorate our sacred objects, and in particular the robe that is carried up to the Acropolis at the Great Panathenaea, which is covered with such embroidery? Are we to say these things are true, Euthyphro?[7]

EUTHYPHRO Not only those, Socrates. As I said just now, I'll tell you many other things about the gods too, if you like, and I'm sure you'll be astounded to hear them.

SOCRATES I wouldn't be surprised. But you can tell me those some other time, when we have leisure. For now, try to answer [6d] more clearly what I asked you just now. You didn't teach me adequately before, my friend, when I asked what the pious is. You told me that what you are doing now is pious—prosecuting your father for murder.

EUTHYPHRO And what I said was true, Socrates.

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6 In myth Cronus castrated his father Uranus and swallowed his own children; Zeus escaped, overthrew him, and bound him.

7 At the Great Panathenaea, Athens' four-yearly festival of Athena, a newly woven robe embroidered with the battle of gods and Giants was carried in procession up to the Acropolis for her statue.

SOCRATES Perhaps. But, Euthyphro, you say many other things are pious too.

EUTHYPHRO So they are.

SOCRATES Then do you remember that this isn't what I asked you to do—to teach me one or two of the many pious things—but to teach me that form itself by which all pious things are pious? For you said, I think, that it is by one form [6e] that impious things are impious and pious things pious. Or don't you remember?

EUTHYPHRO I do.

SOCRATES Then teach me what this form itself is, so that by looking to it and using it as a model, I can say that whatever you or anyone else does that is like it is pious, and that whatever is not like it is not.

EUTHYPHRO Well, if that's what you want, Socrates, that's how I'll tell you.

SOCRATES That is certainly what I want.

EUTHYPHRO Well then: what is dear to the gods is pious, and [7a] what is not dear to them is impious.

SOCRATES Splendid, Euthyphro. Now you've answered in just the way I was looking for. Whether it's true, I don't know yet—but obviously you'll go on to show me that what you say is true.

EUTHYPHRO Certainly.

SOCRATES Come, then, let's examine what we're saying. A thing loved by the gods, and a person loved by the gods, is pious; a thing hated by the gods, and a person hated by the gods, is impious. And the pious is not the same as the impious, but its complete opposite. Isn't that so?

EUTHYPHRO It is.

SOCRATES And does that seem well said?

EUTHYPHRO [7b] I think so, Socrates. That is what was said.

SOCRATES And wasn't this said too, Euthyphro: that the gods are at odds, and disagree with one another, and that there is hostility among them toward one another?

EUTHYPHRO Yes, it was said.

SOCRATES But disagreement about what, my good man, produces hostility and anger? Let's look at it this way. If you and I disagreed about number—which of two amounts was larger—would our disagreement about this make us enemies and angry with each other? Or would we turn to counting and quickly [7c] settle matters like that?

EUTHYPHRO Of course.

SOCRATES And if we disagreed about larger and smaller, we'd turn to measuring and quickly put an end to our disagreement?

EUTHYPHRO That's right.

SOCRATES And by turning to weighing, I suppose, we'd settle a question about heavier and lighter?

EUTHYPHRO Of course.

SOCRATES Then what would we have to disagree about, and be unable to reach a decision on, to become enemies and angry with each other? Perhaps you don't have an answer ready, but as I name them, [7d] see whether they are these: the just and the unjust, the fine and the shameful, and the good and the bad. Aren't these the things we disagree about, and can't reach a satisfactory decision on, so that we become enemies of one another, when we do—you and I and everyone else?

EUTHYPHRO Yes, Socrates, that's the disagreement, and it's about these things.

SOCRATES And what about the gods, Euthyphro? If they disagree at all, wouldn't they disagree about these same things?

EUTHYPHRO Necessarily.

SOCRATES [7e] Then on your account, my noble Euthyphro, different gods consider different things just, and fine and shameful,

and good and bad. For surely they wouldn't be at odds with each other if they didn't disagree about these. Right?

EUTHYPHRO You're right.

SOCRATES And what each of them considers fine and good and just, they also love, and they hate the opposite?

EUTHYPHRO Certainly.

SOCRATES But the same things, as you say, some consider just [8a] and others unjust; and it's in disputing about these that they are at odds and at war with one another. Isn't that so?

EUTHYPHRO It is.

SOCRATES Then the same things, it seems, are both hated by the gods and loved by them, and the same things would be both hated by the gods and loved by the gods.

EUTHYPHRO So it seems.

SOCRATES So by this argument, Euthyphro, the same things would be both pious and impious.

EUTHYPHRO It looks that way.

SOCRATES Then you didn't answer what I asked, my remarkable friend. I wasn't asking what happens to be one and the same thing, both pious and impious. Yet what is loved by the gods is also hated by the gods, it seems. [8b] So, Euthyphro, as for what you're doing now in punishing your father, it wouldn't be at all surprising if in doing it you're doing something dear to Zeus but hateful to Cronus and Uranus, and dear to Hephaestus but hateful to Hera—and the same with any other gods who disagree with one another about it.[8]

EUTHYPHRO But I think, Socrates, that on this point at least no god disagrees with any other: that someone who kills another unjustly must pay the penalty.

8 Hera threw her son Hephaestus out of Olympus, and in one story he took revenge by trapping her in an enchanted throne.

SOCRATES Really? Among human beings, Euthyphro, have you ever heard anyone [8c] argue that someone who kills unjustly, or does anything else unjustly, need not pay the penalty?

EUTHYPHRO Why, they never stop arguing that, in the courts and everywhere else. They do a great deal of wrong, and then say and do everything to escape the penalty.

SOCRATES But do they admit doing wrong, Euthyphro, and then, while admitting it, still say they needn't pay the penalty?

EUTHYPHRO No, not that.

SOCRATES Then they don't say and do everything. This, I think, they don't dare say or argue—that if [8d] they really do wrong, they needn't pay the penalty. Rather, I think, they deny doing wrong. Isn't that so?

EUTHYPHRO That's true.

SOCRATES So they don't argue that the wrongdoer shouldn't pay the penalty. What they argue about, perhaps, is who the wrongdoer is, and what he did, and when.

EUTHYPHRO That's true.

SOCRATES Then isn't the same thing true of the gods, if they are at odds about just and unjust things, as your account has it—some saying that others do wrong, and others denying it? For surely, my remarkable friend, no one, whether god or [8e] human, dares to say that the wrongdoer need not pay the penalty.

EUTHYPHRO Yes, what you say is true, Socrates, at least in the main.

SOCRATES But I think, Euthyphro, that those who dispute—both humans and gods, if gods do dispute—dispute about each particular thing that was done. Disagreeing about some action, some say it was done justly, others unjustly. Isn't that so?

EUTHYPHRO Certainly.

SOCRATES [9a] Come then, my dear Euthyphro, teach me too, so that I can become wiser. What evidence do you have that all the gods consider that man to have died unjustly—a hired laborer

who became a killer, was bound by the dead man's master, and died from his bonds before the man who bound him could learn from the advisers what should be done with him—and that it's right for a son to prosecute his father and denounce him for murder on behalf of such a man? Come, try to show me something [9b] clear on this: that all the gods, beyond any doubt, consider this action right. If you show me adequately, I'll never stop praising you for your wisdom.

EUTHYPHRO But perhaps that's no small task, Socrates—though I could certainly show you quite clearly.

SOCRATES I understand: you think I'm slower to learn than the jurors, since obviously you'll show them that such things are unjust and that all the gods hate them.

EUTHYPHRO Very clearly, Socrates—provided they actually listen to me.

SOCRATES [9c] Oh, they'll listen, if you seem to be speaking well. But while you were talking, a thought struck me, and I'm turning it over in my mind: "Suppose Euthyphro taught me, as convincingly as you like, that all the gods consider a death like that unjust. How would that bring me any closer to learning from Euthyphro what the pious and the impious actually are? This deed, it seems, would be hated by the gods. But that turned out just now not to be how the pious and its opposite are defined, since what was hated by the gods proved to be loved by them too." So I'll let you off on that point, Euthyphro. If you like, let's say all the gods [9d] consider it unjust and all of them hate it. But is this the correction we're now making to the account—that whatever all the gods hate is impious, and whatever they love is pious, while whatever some love and others hate is neither or both? Is that how you want us to define the pious and the impious now?

EUTHYPHRO Well, what's to stop us, Socrates?

SOCRATES Nothing's stopping me, Euthyphro. But look to your own part: see whether, if you take this as your starting point, you'll find it easiest to teach me what you promised.

WHAT ALL THE GODS LOVE

Socrates asks whether the pious is loved by the gods because it is pious, or pious because loved.

EUTHYPHRO 9e Well, I'd say that the pious is what all the gods love, and its opposite, what all the gods hate, is impious.

SOCRATES Then shall we examine this in turn, Euthyphro, to see whether it's well said? Or shall we let it go, and simply accept what we ourselves say, and what others say too, agreeing that a thing is so as soon as someone claims it is? Or should we look into what the speaker means?

EUTHYPHRO We should look into it. Still, I do think this is well said now.

SOCRATES 10a We'll soon know better, my friend. Consider this: is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved?

EUTHYPHRO I don't know what you mean, Socrates.

SOCRATES Well, I'll try to put it more clearly. We speak of something being carried and something carrying, something being led and something leading, something being seen and something seeing. You understand that in all such cases the two are different from each other, and how they differ?

EUTHYPHRO Yes, I think I understand.

SOCRATES And isn't there also something being loved, and, different from it, something doing the loving?

EUTHYPHRO Of course.

SOCRATES 10b Then tell me: is a carried thing a carried thing because it's carried, or for some other reason?

EUTHYPHRO No, for that reason.

SOCRATES And a led thing is a led thing because it's led, and a seen thing a seen thing because it's seen?

EUTHYPHRO Certainly.

SOCRATES So it isn't because it's a seen thing that it's seen; on the contrary, it's a seen thing because it's seen. Nor is it led because it's a led thing; it's a led thing because it's led. Nor is it carried because it's a carried thing; it's a carried thing because it's carried. Is it clear, Euthyphro, what [10c] I'm trying to say? What I mean is this: if anything comes to be, or is affected by something, it doesn't come to be because it's something coming to be; it's something coming to be because it comes to be. And it isn't affected because it's something affected; it's something affected because it's affected. Or don't you agree?

EUTHYPHRO I do.

SOCRATES And isn't a loved thing also either something coming to be or something being affected by something?

EUTHYPHRO Certainly.

SOCRATES Then this case is like the earlier ones: it isn't because it's a loved thing that it's loved by those who love it; it's a loved thing because it's loved?

EUTHYPHRO Necessarily.

SOCRATES [10d] So what do we say about the pious, Euthyphro? Isn't it loved by all the gods, according to your account?

EUTHYPHRO Yes.

SOCRATES Because it's pious, or for some other reason?

EUTHYPHRO No, for that reason.

SOCRATES So it's loved because it's pious; it isn't pious because it's loved?

EUTHYPHRO It seems so.

SOCRATES But surely it's because the gods love it that a thing is a loved thing—a thing loved by the gods.

EUTHYPHRO Of course.

SOCRATES Then what's loved by the gods is not the same as the pious, Euthyphro, nor is the pious the same as what's loved by the gods, as you claim. The one is different from the other.

EUTHYPHRO [10e] How so, Socrates?

SOCRATES Because we agree that the pious is loved for this reason, that it's pious, and not that it's pious because it's loved. Isn't that so?

EUTHYPHRO Yes.

SOCRATES Whereas what's loved by the gods is a thing loved by the gods because they love it—by the very fact of being loved. It isn't because it's a thing loved by the gods that they love it.

EUTHYPHRO That's true.

SOCRATES But if they were the same, my dear Euthyphro—what's loved by the gods and the pious—then if the pious were loved because it is [11a] pious, what's loved by the gods would also be loved because it is a thing loved by the gods; and if what's loved by the gods were a thing loved by the gods because the gods love it, then the pious too would be pious because it is loved. As it is, you see that the two are related in opposite ways, as things entirely different from each other. The one is lovable because it is loved; the other is loved because it is lovable. It looks, Euthyphro, as though when you were asked what the pious is, you didn't want to reveal its essence to me, but only told me something that happens to it: the pious has this happen to it, that it's loved by all [11b] the gods. But what it is, you haven't said yet. So, if you don't mind, don't hide it from me. Tell me again from the beginning what the pious is—whether it's loved by the gods or has anything else whatever happen to it, since we won't quarrel about that. Just tell me, and be generous about it: what are the pious and the impious?

EUTHYPHRO But Socrates, I don't know how to tell you what I have in mind. Somehow whatever we put forward keeps moving around on us and won't stay where we set it down.

SOCRATES What you're saying, Euthyphro, looks like the work of our ancestor [11c] Daedalus. If I were the one saying these things and putting them forward, you might well tease me that it runs in the family: my creations in words run away too and won't stay

where anyone puts them. But as it is, the proposals are yours, so we need a different joke. They won't stay put for you, as you can see for yourself.[9]

EUTHYPHRO But I think what's been said needs pretty much the same joke, Socrates. I'm not the one who gave these things their habit of moving around and not staying in the same place. [11d] You're the Daedalus, if you ask me; as far as I'm concerned, they'd have stayed where they were.

SOCRATES Then it looks, my friend, as if I've outdone the great man himself at his craft, and by this much: he made only his own works move, while I, apparently, make other people's move as well as my own. And the neatest trick of my craft is that I'm wise against my will. I'd much rather have my arguments stay put and stand fixed than have Tantalus' riches on top of [11e] Daedalus' wisdom. But enough of that. But since you seem to me to have gone soft, I'll join you in the effort myself and show you how you might teach me about the pious. Don't give up too soon. See whether you don't think that everything pious is necessarily just.[10]

EUTHYPHRO I do.

PIETY AS A PART OF JUSTICE

Socrates suggests piety is part of justice, and Euthyphro calls it the care of the gods.

SOCRATES Then is everything just also pious? Or is everything pious [12a] just, but not everything just pious—part of it pious, and part something else?

EUTHYPHRO I can't follow what you're saying, Socrates.

SOCRATES And yet you're younger than me by no less than you're wiser! But as I said, you've gone soft from the riches of

9 Daedalus was the legendary craftsman whose statues were so lifelike that they ran away unless tied down. Sculptors claimed him as their ancestor, and Socrates' father was said to have been a stonemason.
10 Tantalus, a legendary king, was proverbial for his wealth.

your wisdom. Come on, my good friend, exert yourself. It isn't even hard to grasp what I mean. What I mean is the opposite of what the poet said, the one who wrote: "Zeus, who did this, who brought all these things to be, / [12b] he will not rebuke; for where there's fear, there's shame as well." Now I disagree with this poet. Shall I tell you where?[11]

EUTHYPHRO Please do.

SOCRATES I don't think that "where there's fear, there's shame as well." Many people, it seems to me, who fear diseases and poverty and lots of other things like that are afraid of them, but feel no shame at all about the things they fear. Don't you think so too?

EUTHYPHRO Certainly.

SOCRATES But where there's shame, there's fear as well. Is there anyone who feels shame about some act and is embarrassed by it, who isn't at the same time frightened [12c] and afraid of getting a reputation for wickedness?

EUTHYPHRO Yes, he's afraid.

SOCRATES So it isn't right to say "for where there's fear, there's shame as well." Rather, where there's shame, there's fear as well, but it's not true that wherever there's fear there's shame. Fear, I think, covers more ground than shame. Shame is a part of fear, just as odd is a part of number: it's not the case that wherever there's number there's odd as well, but wherever there's odd there's number as well. You follow me now, I take it?

EUTHYPHRO Certainly.

SOCRATES Well, that's the sort of thing I was getting at back there when I asked whether, where [12d] there's the just, there's the pious as well. Or is it that where there's the pious there's the just as well, but where there's the just there isn't always the pious, since the pious is a part of the just? Shall we say that, or do you think otherwise?

11 The lines come from the *Cypria*, a lost early epic attributed to Stasinus.

EUTHYPHRO No, that's how it is. I think you're right.

SOCRATES Then look at what comes next. If the pious is a part of the just, then it seems we have to find out what part of the just the pious would be. Now if you were asking me about one of the things we mentioned just now—say, what part of number the even is, and what sort of number it turns out to be—I'd have said it's the number that isn't scalene but isosceles. Don't you think so?[12]

EUTHYPHRO I do.

SOCRATES [12e] Then you try to teach me in the same way what part of the just is pious, so that we can tell Meletus to stop wronging us and indicting us for impiety, since by now we'll have learned properly from you what is reverent and pious and what isn't.

EUTHYPHRO Well, Socrates, this is what I think: the part of the just that is reverent and pious is the part concerned with the care of the gods, while the part concerned with the care of human beings is the rest of the just.

SOCRATES And I think you put that well, Euthyphro. But [13a] there's still one small thing I need, since I don't yet understand what care you mean. Surely you don't mean care of the gods in the same sense as care of other things—for we do use the word that way. We say, for instance, that not everyone knows how to care for horses, only the horseman. Isn't that so?

EUTHYPHRO Certainly.

SOCRATES Because horsemanship is the care of horses.

EUTHYPHRO Yes.

SOCRATES And not everyone knows how to care for dogs either, only the huntsman.

EUTHYPHRO Right.

12 That is, a number divisible into two equal parts, like a triangle with two equal sides, rather than into unequal ones.

SOCRATES Because the huntsman's craft is the care of dogs.

EUTHYPHRO [13b] Yes.

SOCRATES And the cattle-driver's craft is the care of cattle.

EUTHYPHRO Certainly.

SOCRATES And piety and reverence are the care of the gods, Euthyphro? Is that what you're saying?

EUTHYPHRO It is.

SOCRATES Now doesn't all care achieve the same thing? Something like this: it aims at some good and benefit for the one cared for. You see, for instance, that horses cared for by horsemanship are benefited and become better. Or don't you think so?

EUTHYPHRO I do.

SOCRATES And dogs, I suppose, by the huntsman's craft, and [13c] cattle by the cattle-driver's, and everything else in the same way. Or do you think care aims at harming what's cared for?

EUTHYPHRO By Zeus, I don't.

SOCRATES At benefiting it, then?

EUTHYPHRO Of course.

SOCRATES Then is piety too, since it's care of the gods, a benefit to the gods, and does it make the gods better? Would you really agree that whenever you do something pious, you make one of the gods better?

EUTHYPHRO By Zeus, I would not.

SOCRATES I don't think that's what you mean either, Euthyphro —far from it. That's exactly why I asked [13d] what on earth you meant by care of the gods: I didn't think you meant that sort.

EUTHYPHRO And you were right, Socrates. That's not the sort I mean.

SOCRATES Very well. But then what sort of care of the gods would piety be?

EUTHYPHRO The sort, Socrates, that slaves give their masters.

SOCRATES I see. It would be a kind of service to the gods, it seems.

EUTHYPHRO Exactly.

SOCRATES Then could you tell me this: service to doctors—what result does it serve to produce? Health, don't you think?

EUTHYPHRO I do.

SOCRATES [13e] And service to shipbuilders? What result does it serve to produce?

EUTHYPHRO A ship, obviously, Socrates.

SOCRATES And service to housebuilders, I suppose, a house?

EUTHYPHRO Yes.

SOCRATES Then tell me, my excellent friend: service to the gods—what result would it serve to produce? You obviously know, since you say you know more about divine matters than anyone.

EUTHYPHRO And what I say is true, Socrates.

SOCRATES Then tell me, for Zeus' sake: what is that magnificent work the gods produce, using us as their servants?

EUTHYPHRO Many fine things, Socrates.

SOCRATES [14a] So do generals, my friend. Still, you could easily tell me the main one: they produce victory in war. Isn't that right?

EUTHYPHRO Of course.

SOCRATES And farmers too, I think, produce many fine things. Still, the main thing they produce is food from the earth.

EUTHYPHRO Certainly.

SOCRATES Well then, of the many fine things the gods produce, what's the main one?

EUTHYPHRO I told you a little while ago, Socrates, that [14b] it's a big job to learn exactly how all these things stand. But I'll tell you this much simply: if someone knows how to say and do

what gratifies the gods when he prays and sacrifices, those are the pious things, and things like that preserve both private households and the public life of cities. The opposite of what gratifies them is impious, and that overturns and destroys everything.

TRADING WITH THE GODS

Piety as knowledge of sacrifice and prayer becomes trade with the gods, and the argument circles back.

SOCRATES You could have told me the main point of what I was asking far more briefly, Euthyphro, if you'd wanted to. But you're not [14c] keen to teach me—that's clear. Just now, when you were right on the point, you turned aside. If you'd given that answer, I'd already have learned piety well enough from you. But as it is —since the lover has to follow his beloved wherever he leads— what do you say the pious and piety are this time? Isn't it a kind of knowledge of how to sacrifice and pray?

EUTHYPHRO It is.

SOCRATES And isn't sacrificing giving gifts to the gods, and praying asking things of the gods?

EUTHYPHRO Very much so, Socrates.

SOCRATES [14d] Then on this account piety would be knowledge of asking from the gods and giving to them.

EUTHYPHRO You've grasped what I said perfectly, Socrates.

SOCRATES That's because I'm in love with your wisdom, my friend, and I keep my mind on it, so nothing you say will fall to the ground. But tell me, what is this service to the gods? You say it's asking them for things and giving things to them?

EUTHYPHRO I do.

SOCRATES Now wouldn't asking correctly be asking them for the things we need from them?

EUTHYPHRO What else?

SOCRATES [14e] And giving correctly, in turn, would be giving them back the things they happen to need from us? It would hardly be skillful, I suppose, to bring someone gifts he has no need of.

EUTHYPHRO That's true, Socrates.

SOCRATES So piety would be a kind of trading skill, Euthyphro, between gods and humans.

EUTHYPHRO Trading, if you like that name better.

SOCRATES I don't like any name better unless it happens to be true. But tell me, what benefit do the gods actually get from the gifts they receive from us? What they give [15a] is plain to everyone, since we have nothing good that they don't give us. But what do they gain from what they get from us? Or do we get so much the better of them in this trade that we receive all good things from them and they get nothing from us?

EUTHYPHRO But Socrates, do you think the gods benefit from what they receive from us?

SOCRATES Well then, what on earth could these gifts of ours to the gods be, Euthyphro?

EUTHYPHRO What do you think, other than honor, tributes and —as I was saying just now—gratification?

SOCRATES [15b] So the pious is gratifying to the gods, Euthyphro, but not beneficial or dear to them?

EUTHYPHRO I think it's the dearest thing of all to them.

SOCRATES So once again, it seems, this is the pious: what's dear to the gods.

EUTHYPHRO Absolutely.

SOCRATES Then when you say this, will you be surprised if your words don't seem to stay put but go wandering off? And will you blame me for being the Daedalus who makes them wander, when you yourself are far more skillful than Daedalus and make them go round in a circle? Or don't you notice that our argument has gone round and come back [15c] to the same place?

You remember, I'm sure, that earlier the pious and what's loved by the gods turned out not to be the same but different from each other. Or don't you remember?

EUTHYPHRO I do.

SOCRATES Then don't you realize that now you're saying that what's dear to the gods is pious? And is that anything other than what's loved by the gods? Or isn't it?

EUTHYPHRO It certainly is.

SOCRATES So either we were wrong to agree earlier, or, if we were right then, we're wrong to propose this now.

EUTHYPHRO It seems so.

SOCRATES Then we have to go back to the beginning and examine what the pious is, since I won't willingly lose heart before I learn it. 15d Don't brush me aside. Give it your full attention in every way you can and tell me the truth now, more than ever. You know it if any human being does, and like Proteus you mustn't be let go until you tell me. If you didn't clearly know the pious and the impious, there's no way you'd ever have taken it upon yourself to prosecute your elderly father for murder on behalf of a hired laborer. You'd have been afraid of the gods, afraid of the risk that you weren't doing it rightly, and you'd have been ashamed before people. As it is, I'm sure 15e you think you know clearly what is pious and what isn't. So tell me, my excellent Euthyphro, and don't hide what you think it is.[13]

EUTHYPHRO Some other time, then, Socrates. I'm in a hurry to get somewhere right now, and it's time for me to go.

SOCRATES What a thing to do, my friend! You're going off and dashing the great hope I had: that I'd learn from you what is pious and what isn't and get free of Meletus' indictment, by showing 16a him that I'd now become wise in divine matters thanks to Euthyphro, that I no longer improvise and innovate

13 Proteus, a shape-shifting sea god, had to answer his captors' questions if they held on to him through all his transformations.

about them out of ignorance—and, above all, that I'd live the rest of my life better.