

PLATO'S "EUTHYPHRO"

I. Socrates and Euthyphro meet at the Porch of King Archon

EUTH. What has happened, Socrates, to make you leave your accustomed pastimes in the Lyceum and spend your time here today at the King's Porch? You can hardly have a suit pending before the King, as I do.

SOC. In Athens, Euthyphro, it is not called a suit, but an indictment.

EUTH. Really? Someone must have indicted you. For I will not suspect you of indicting someone else.

SOC. Certainly not.

EUTH. But someone you?

SOC. Yes.

EUTH. Who is he?

SOC. I do not know the man well, Euthyphro. It appears he is young and not prominent. His name, I think, is Meletus. He belongs to the deme of Pitthus, if you recall a Pitthean Meletus with lanky hair and not much beard, but a hooked nose.

EUTH. I have not noticed him, Socrates. But what is the charge?

SOC. Charge? One that does him credit, I think. It is no small thing for him, young as he is, to be knowledgeable in so great a matter, for he says he knows how the youth are being corrupted and who is corrupting them. No doubt he is wise, and realizing that, in my ignorance, I corrupt his comrades, he comes to the City as to a mother to accuse me. He alone seems to me to have begun his political career correctly, for the right way to begin is to look after the young men of the City first so that they will be as good as possible, just as a good farmer naturally looks after his young plants first and the rest later. So too with Meletus. He will perhaps first weed out those of us who blight the young shoots, as he claims, and afterwards he will obviously look after their elders and become responsible for many great blessings to the City, the natural result of so fine a beginning.

EUTH. I would hope so, Socrates, but I fear lest the opposite may happen. He seems to me to have started by injuring the City at its very hearth in undertaking to wrong you. But tell me, what does he say you do to corrupt the youth?

SOC. It sounds a bit strange at first hearing, my friend. He says I am a maker of gods, and because I make new ones and do not worship the old ones, he indicted me on their accounts, he says.

EUTH. I see, Socrates. It is because you say the divine sign comes to you from time to time. So he indicts you for making innovations in religious matters and hales you into court to slander you, knowing full well how easily such things are misrepresented to the multitude. Why I, even me, when I speak about religious matters in the Assembly and foretell the future, why, they laugh at me as though I were mad. And yet nothing I ever predicted has failed to come true. Still, they are jealous of people like us. We must not worry about them, but face them boldly.

SOC. My dear Euthyphro, being laughed at is perhaps a thing of little moment. The Athenians, it seems to me, do not much mind if they think a man is clever as long as they do not suspect him of teaching his cleverness to others. But if they think he makes others like himself they become angry, whether out of jealousy as you suggest, or for some other reason.

EUTH. On that point I am not very anxious to test their attitude toward me.

SOC. Perhaps they think you give yourself sparingly, that you are unwilling to teach your wisdom. But I fear my own generosity is such that they think I am willing to pour myself out in speech to any man--not only without pay, but glad to pay myself if only someone will listen. So as I just said, if they laugh at me as you say they do at you, it would not be unpleasant to pass the time in court laughing and joking. But if they are in earnest, how it will then turn out is unclear--except to you prophets.

EUTH. Perhaps it will not amount to much, Socrates: Perhaps you will settle your case satisfactorily, as I think I will mine.

SOC. What about that, Euthyphro? Are you plaintiff or defendant?

EUTH. Plaintiff.

SOC. Against whom?

EUTH. Someone I am again thought mad to prosecute.

SOC. Really? Has he taken flight?

EUTH. He is far from flying. As a matter of fact, he is well along in years.

SOC. Who is he?

EUTH. My father.

SOC. Your father, dear friend?

EUTH. Yes, indeed.

SOC. But what is the charge? What is the reason for the suit?

EUTH. Murder, Socrates.

SOC. Heracles! Surely, Euthyphro, the majority of people must be ignorant of what is right. Not just anyone would undertake a thing like that. It must require someone quite far gone in wisdom.

EUTH. Very far indeed, Socrates.

SOC. Was the man your father killed a relative? But, of course, he must have been—you would not be prosecuting him for murder in behalf of a stranger.

EUTH. It is laughable, Socrates, your thinking it makes a difference whether or not the man was a relative, and not this, and this alone: whether his slayer was justified. If so, let him off. If not prosecute him, even if he shares your hearth and table. For if you knowingly associate with a man like that and do not cleanse both yourself and him by bringing action at law, the pollution is equal for you both. Now as a matter of fact, the dead man was a day-laborer of mine, and when we were farming in Naxos he worked for us for hire. Well, he got drunk and flew into a rage with one of our slaves and cut his throat. So my father bound him hand and foot, threw him in a ditch, and sent a man here to Athens to consult the religious adviser as to what should be done. In the meantime, my father paid no attention to the man he had bound; he neglected him because he was a murderer and it made no difference if he died. Which is just what he did. Before the messenger got back he died of hunger and cold and his bonds. But even so, my father and the rest of my relatives are angry at me for prosecuting my father for murder in behalf of a murderer. He did not kill him, they claim, and even if he did, still, the fellow was a murderer, and it is wrong to be concerned in behalf of a man like that—and anyway, it is unholy for a son to prosecute his father for murder. They little know, Socrates, how things stand in religious matters regarding the holy and the unholy.

SOC. But in the name of Zeus, Euthyphro, do you think you yourself know so accurately how matters stand respecting divine law, and things holy and unholy, that with the facts as you declare you can prosecute your own father without fear that it is you, on the contrary, who are doing an unholy thing?

EUTH. I would not be much use, Socrates, nor would Euthyphro differ in any way from the majority of men, if I did not know all such things as this with strict accuracy.

SOC. Well then, my gifted friend, I had best become your pupil. Before the action with Meletus begins I will challenge him on these very grounds. I will say that even in former times I was much concerned to learn about religious matters, but that now, in view of his claiming that I am guilty of loose speech and innovation in these things, I have become your pupil. “And if, Meletus,” I shall say, “if you agree that Euthyphro is wise in such things, then assume that I worship correctly and drop the case. But if you do not agree, then obtain permission to indict my teacher here in my place for corrupting the old--me and his own father--by teaching me, and by chastising and punishing him.” And if I can not persuade him to drop charges or to indict you in place of me, may I not then say the same thing in court that I said in my challenge?

EUTH. By Zeus, if he tried to indict me, I would find his weak spot, I think, and the discussion in court would concern him long before it concerned me.

II. Socrates requests a definition of the holy.

SOC. I realize that, my friend. That is why I want to become your pupil. I know that this fellow Meletus and no doubt other people too pretend not even to notice you, but he saw through me so keenly and easily that he indicted me for impiety. So now in Zeus’s name, tell me what you confidently claimed just now that you knew: what sort of thing do you say the pious and impious are, with respect to murder and other things as well? Or is not the holy, just by itself, the same in every action? And the unholy, in turn, the opposite of all the holy--is it not like itself, and does not everything which is to be unholy have a certain single character with respect to unholiness?

EUTH. No doubt, Socrates.

SOC. Then tell me, what do you say the holy is? And what is the unholy?

EUTH. Well, I say that the holy is what I am doing now, prosecuting murder and temple theft and everything of the sort, whether father or mother or anyone else is guilty of it. And not prosecuting is unholy. Now, Socrates, examine the proof I give you that this is a dictate of divine law. I have offered it before to other people to show that it is established right not to let off someone guilty of impiety, no matter who he happens to be. For these same people worship Zeus as the best and most righteous of the gods. They agree that he put his own father in bonds for unjustly swallowing his children; yes, and that that father had in his turn castrated his father for similar reasons. Yet me they are angry at for indicting my father for his injustice. So they contradict themselves: they say one thing about the gods and another about me!

SOC. I wonder if this is why I am being prosecuted, Euthyphro, because when anyone says such things about the gods, I somehow find it difficult to accept? Perhaps this is why people claim I transgress. But as it is, if even you who know such things so well accept them, people like me must apparently concede. What indeed are we to say, we who ourselves agree that we know nothing of them. But in the name of Zeus, the God of Friendship, tell me: do you truly believe that these things happened so?

EUTH. Yes, and things still more wonderful than these, Socrates, things the multitude does not know.

SOC. Do you believe there is really war among the gods, and terrible enmities and battles, and other sorts of things our poets tell, which embellish other things sacred to us through the work of our capable painters, but especially the robe covered with embroidery that is carried to the Acropolis at the Great Panathenaea? Are we, Euthyphro, to say those things are so?

EUTH. Not only those, Socrates. As I just said, I shall explain many other things about religion to you if you wish, and you may rest assured that what you hear will amaze you.

SOC. I should not be surprised. But explain them another time at your leisure. Right now, try to answer more clearly the question I just asked. For, my friend, you did not sufficiently teach me before, when I asked you what the holy is; you said that the thing you are doing now is holy, prosecuting your father for murder.

EUTH. Yes, and I told the truth, Socrates.

SOC. Perhaps. But, Euthyphro, are there not many other things you say are holy too?

EUTH. Of course there are.

SOC. Do you recall that I did not ask you to teach me about some one or two of the many things which are holy, but about that characteristic itself by which all holy things are holy? For you agreed, I think, that it is by one character that unholy things are unholy and holy things holy. Or do you not recall?

EUTH. I do.

SOC. Then teach me what this very character is, so that I may look to it and use it as a standard by which, should those things which you or someone else may do be of that sort, I may affirm them to be holy, but should they not be of that sort, deny it.

EUTH. Well if you wish it so, Socrates, I shall tell you.

III. Euthyphro's first definition: the holy is what is loved by the gods

EUTH. Then what is dear to the gods is holy, and what is not dear to them is unholy.

SOC. Excellent, Euthyphro. You have now answered as I asked. Whether correctly, I do not yet know--but clearly you will now go on to teach me in addition that what you say is true.

EUTH. Of course.

SOC. Come then, let us examine what it is we are saying. The thing and the person dear to the gods is holy; the thing and the person hateful to the gods is unholy; and the holy is not the same as the unholy, but its utter opposite. Is that what we are saying?

EUTH. It is.

SOC. Yes, and it appears to be well said?

EUTH. I think so, Socrates.

SOC. Now, Euthyphro, we also said, did we not, that the gods quarrel and disagree with one another and that there is enmity among them?

EUTH. We did.

SOC. But what is that disagreement which causes enmity and anger about, my friend? Look at it this way: If you and I disagreed about a question of number, about which of two sums is greater, would our disagreement cause us to become angry with each other and make us enemies? Or would we take to counting in a case like that, and quickly settle our dispute?

EUTH. Of course we would.

SOC. So too, if we disagreed about a question of the larger or smaller, we would take to measurement and put an end to our disagreement quickly?

EUTH. True.

SOC. And go to the balance, I imagine, to settle a dispute about heavier and lighter?

EUTH. Certainly.

SOC. But what sort of thing would make us enemies, angry at each other, if we disagree about it and are unable to arrive at a decision? Perhaps you cannot say offhand, but I suggest you consider whether it would not be the just and unjust, beautiful and ugly, good and evil. Are not these the things, when we disagree about them and cannot reach a satisfactory decision, concerning which we on occasion become enemies--you, and I, and all other men?

EUTH. Yes, Socrates. This kind of disagreement has its source there.

SOC. What about the gods, Euthyphro? If they were to disagree, would they not disagree for the same reasons?

EUTH. Necessarily.

SOC. Then by your account, my noble friend, different gods must believe that different things are just--and beautiful and ugly, good and evil. For surely they would not quarrel unless they disagreed on this. True?

EUTH. You are right.

SOC. Now, what each of them believes to be beautiful and good and just they also love, and the opposites of those things they hate?

EUTH. Of course.

SOC. Yes, but the same things, you say, are thought by some gods to be just and by others unjust. Those are the things concerning which disagreement causes them to quarrel and make war on one another. True?

EUTH. Yes.

SOC. Then the same things, it seems, are both hated by the gods and loved by the gods, and would be both dear to the gods and hateful to the gods.

EUTH. It seems so.

SOC. Then by this account, Euthyphro, the same things would be both holy and unholy.

EUTH. I suppose so.

SOC. Then you have not answered my question, my friend. I did not ask you what same thing happens to be both holy and unholy; yet what is dear to the gods is hateful to

the gods, it seems. And so, Euthyphro, it would not be surprising if what you are now doing in punishing your father were dear to Zeus, but hateful to Cronos and Uranus, and loved by Hephaestus, but hateful to Hera, and if any of the other gods disagree about it, the same will be true of them too.

IV. Interlude: The bases of disagreement.

EUTH But Socrates, surely none of the gods disagree about this, that he who kills another man unjustly should answer for it.

SOC. Really, Euthyphro? Have you ever heard it argued among men that he who kills unjustly or does anything else unjustly should not answer for it?

EUTH. Why, people never stop arguing things like that, especially in the law courts. They do a host of wrongs and then say and do everything to get off.

SOC. Yes, but do they admit the wrong, Euthyphro, and admitting it, nevertheless claim they should not answer for it?

EUTH. No, they certainly do not do that.

SOC. Then they do not do and say everything: for they do not, I think, dare to contend or debate the point that if they in fact did wrong they should not answer for it. Rather, I think, they deny they did wrong. Well?

EUTH. True.

SOC. So they do not contend that those who do wrong should not answer for it, but rather, perhaps, about who it is that did the wrong, and what he did, and when.

EUTH. True.

SOC. Now is it not also the same with the gods, if as your account has it, they quarrel about what is just and unjust, and some claim that others do wrong and some deny it? Presumably no one, god or man, would dare to claim that he who does a wrong should not answer for it.

EUTH. Yes, on the whole what you say is true, Socrates.

SOC. But I imagine that those who disagree--both men and gods, if indeed the gods do disagree--disagree about particular things which have been done. They differ over given actions, some claiming they were done justly and others unjustly. True?

EUTH. Certainly.

SOC. Come now, my friend, teach me and make me wiser. Where is your proof that all gods believe that a man has been unjustly killed who was hired as a laborer, became a murderer, was bound by the master of the dead slave, and died of his bonds before the man who bound him could learn from the religious advisers what to do? Where is your proof that it is right for a son to indict and prosecute his father for murder on behalf of a man like that? Come, try to show me clearly that all the gods genuinely believe this action right. If you succeed, I shall praise you for your wisdom and never stop.

EUTH. Well, I can certainly do it, Socrates, but it is perhaps not a small task.

SOC. I see. You think I am harder to teach than the judges, for you will certainly make it clear to them that actions such as your father's are wrong, and that all the gods hate them.

EUTH. Very clear indeed, Socrates, if they listen to what I say.

V. Second definition: the holy is what is loved by all the gods

SOC. They will listen, if you seem to speak well. But here is something that occurred to me while you were talking. I asked myself, "If Euthyphro were to teach me beyond any question that all the gods believe a death of this sort wrong, what more have I learned from Euthyphro about what the holy and unholy are? The death, it seems, would be hateful to the gods, but what is holy and what is not do not prove to be marked off by this, for what was hateful to the gods proved dear to the gods as well." So I let you off on that point, Euthyphro. If you wish, let all the gods believe your father's action wrong and let all of them hate it. But is this the correction we are now to make in your account, that what *all* the gods hate is unholy, and what *all* the gods love is holy, but what some love and some hate is neither or both? Do you mean for us now to mark off the holy and the unholy in that way?

EUTH. What is to prevent it, Socrates?

SOC. Nothing, at least as far as I am concerned, Euthyphro. But examine your account to see whether if you assume this, you will most easily teach me what you promised.

EUTH. But I would certainly say that the holy is what all the gods love, and that the opposite, what all the gods hate is unholy.

SOC. Well, Euthyphro, should we examine this in turn to see if it is true? Or should we let it go, accept it from ourselves or anyone else without more ado, and agree that a thing is so if only someone says it is? Or should we examine what a person means when he says something?

EUTH. Of course. I believe, though, that this time what I say is true.

SOC. Perhaps we shall learn better, my friend. For consider: is the holy loved by the gods because it is holy? Or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?

EUTH. I do not know what you mean, Socrates.

SOC. Then I will try to put it more clearly. We speak of carrying and being carried, of leading and being led, of seeing and being seen. And you understand in such cases, do you not, that they differ from each other, and how they differ?

EUTH. I think I do.

SOC. Now, is there such a thing as being loved, and is it different from loving?

EUTH. Of course.

SOC. Then tell me: if a thing is being carried, is it being carried in consequence of the carrying, or for some other reason?

EUTH. No, for that reason.

SOC. And if a thing is being led, it is being led in consequence of the leading? And if being seen, being seen in consequence of the seeing?

EUTH. Certainly.

SOC. Then it is not because a thing is being seen that the seeing exists; on the contrary, it is in consequence of the seeing that it is being seen. Nor is it because a thing is being led that the leading exists; it is in consequence of the leading that it is being led. Nor is it because a thing is being carried that the carrying exists; it is in consequence of the carrying that it is being carried. Is what I mean quite clear, Euthyphro? I mean this: if something comes to be or something is affected, it is not because it is a thing which is coming to be that the process of coming to be exists, but rather, in consequence of the process of coming to be it is a thing which is coming to be; and it is not because it is affected that the affecting exists, but in consequence of the affecting, the thing is affected. Do you agree?

EUTH. Yes.

SOC. Now, what is being loved is either a thing coming to be something or a something affected by something.

EUTH. Of course.

SOC. And so it is as true here as it was before: it is not because a thing is being loved that there is loving by those who love it; it is in consequence of the loving that is being loved.

EUTH. Necessarily.

SOC. Then what are we to say about the holy, Euthyphro? Is it loved by all the gods, as your account has it?

EUTH. Yes.

SOC. Because it is holy? Or for some other reason?

EUTH. No, for that reason.

SOC. Then it is loved because it is holy, not holy because it is loved?

EUTH. It seems so.

SOC. Moreover, what is loved and dear to the gods is loved because of their loving.

EUTH. Of course.

SOC. Then what is dear to the gods is not the same as holy, Euthyphro, nor is the holy the same as dear to the gods, as you claim: the two are different.

EUTH. But why, Socrates?

SOC. Because we agreed that the holy is loved because it is holy, not holy because it is loved.

EUTH. Yes.

SOC. But what is dear to the gods is, because it is loved by the gods, dear to the gods by reason of this same loving; it is not loved because it is dear to the gods.

EUTH. True.

SOC. But if in fact what is dear to the gods and the holy were the same, my friend, then, if the holy were loved because it is holy, what is dear to the gods would be loved because it is dear to the gods; but if what is dear to the gods were dear to the gods because the gods love it, the holy would be holy because it is loved. But as it is, you see, the opposite is true, and the two are completely different. For the one (what is dear to the gods) is of the sort to be loved *because* it is loved; the other (the holy), because it is of the sort to be loved, *therefore* is loved. It would seem, Euthyphro, that when you asked what the holy is, you did not mean to make its nature and reality clear to me; you mentioned a mere affection of it--the holy has been so affected as to be loved by all the gods. But what it really is, you have not yet said. So if you please, Euthyphro, do not conceal things from me! Start again from the beginning and tell me what sort of thing the holy is. We will not quarrel over whether it is loved by the gods, or whether it is affected in other ways. Tell me in earnest: what is the holy and unholy?

VI. Second interlude: Socrates and Daedalus

EUTH. But, Socrates, I do not know how to tell you what I mean. Somehow everything I propose goes round in circles on us and will not stand still.

SOC. Your words are like the words of my ancestor, Daedalus. If I had offered them, if I had put them forward, you would perhaps have laughed at me because my kinship to him makes my words run away and refuse to stay put. But as things are, it is you who put them forward and we must find another joke. It is for you that they refuse to stand still, as you yourself agree.

EUTH. But, Socrates, the joke, I think, still tells. It is not I who makes them move around and not stay put. I think you are the Daedalus. If it had been up to me, they would have stayed where they were!

SOC. Then apparently, my friend, I am even more skillful than my venerated ancestor, inasmuch as he made only his own works move, whereas I, it seems, not only make my own move but other people's too. And certainly the most subtle feature of my art is that I am skilled against my will. For I really want arguments to stand still, to stand fixed and immovable. I want that more than the wealth of Tantalus and the skill of Daedalus combined. But enough of this. Since you seem to be lazy and soft, I will come to your aid and help you teach me about the holy. Don't give up; consider whether you do not think that all the holy is necessarily just.

EUTH. I do.

VII. On requirements for definitions

SOC. Then is all the just holy? Or is all the holy just, but not all the just holy--part of it holy, part something else?

EUTH. I don't follow you, Socrates.

SOC. And yet you are as much wiser than I am as you are younger. As I said, you are lazy and soft because of you wealth of wisdom. My friend, extend yourself: what I mean is not hard to understand. I mean exactly the opposite of what the poet meant when he said that he was "unwilling to insult Zeus, the Creator, who made all things; for where there is fear there is also reverence." I disagree with him. Shall I tell you why?

EUTH. Yes, certainly.

SOC. I do not think that “where there is fear there is also reverence.” I think people fear disease and poverty and other such things--fear them, but have no reverence for what they fear. Do you agree?

EUTH. Yes, certainly.

SOC. Where there is reverence, however, there is also fear. For if anyone stands in reverence and awe of something, does he not at the same time fear and dread the imputation of wickedness?

EUTH. Yes, he does.

SOC. Then it is not true that “where there is fear there is also reverence,” but rather where there is reverence there is also fear, even though reverence is not everywhere that fear is: fear is broader than reverence. Reverence is part of fear just as odd is part of number, so that it is not true that where there is number there is odd, but where there is odd there is number. Surely you follow me now?

EUTH. Yes, I do.

SOC. Well then, that is the sort of thing I had in mind when I asked if, where there is just, there is also holy. Or is it rather that where there is holy there is also just, but holy is not everywhere just is, since the holy is part of the just. Shall we say that, or do you think differently?

EUTH. No, I think you are right.

SOC. Then consider the next point. If the holy is part of the just, it would seem that we must find out what part of the just the holy is. Now, to take an example we used a moment ago, if you were to ask what part of number the even is, and what kind of number it is, I would say there it is number with equal rather than unequal sides (i.e. divisible by two). Do you agree?

EUTH. Yes, I do.

SOC. Then try in the same way to teach me what part of the just is holy, so that I may tell Meletus to wrong me no longer and not to indict me for impiety, since I have already learned from you what things are pious and holy and what are not.

VIII. Third definition: the holy is ministry to the gods

EUTH. Well, Socrates, I think that part of the just which is pious and holy is about ministering to the gods, and the remaining part of the just is about ministering to men.

SOC. That appears excellently put, Euthyphro. But there is still one small point left; I do not yet understand what you mean by “ministering.” You surely do not mean that ministering to the gods is like ministering to other things, though I suppose we do talk that way, as when we say that it is not everyone who knows how to minister to horses, but only the horse-trainer. That is true, is it not?

EUTH. Yes, certainly.

SOC. Because horse-training takes care of horses.

EUTH. Yes.

SOC. And it is not everyone who knows how to minister to dogs, but only the huntsman.

EUTH. True.

SOC. Because huntsmanship takes care of dogs.

EUTH. Yes.

SOC. And the same is true of herdsmanship and cattle?

EUTH. Yes, certainly.

SOC. And holiness and piety minister to the goes, Euthyphro? Is that what you are saying?

EUTH. Yes, it is.

SOC. Now, is not all ministering meant to accomplish the same thing? I mean this: to take care of a thing is to aim at some good, some benefit, for the thing cared for, as you see horses benefited and improved when ministered to by horse-training. Do you not agree?

EUTH. Yes, I do.

SOC. And dogs are benefited by huntsmanship, and cattle by herdsmanship, and similarly with other things as well--or do you think ministering can work harm to what is cared for?

EUTH. No, by Zeus, not I.

SOC. But rather is beneficial?

EUTH. Of course.

SOC. Now, does holiness, which is to be a kind of ministering, benefit the gods? Does it improve them? Would you really agree that when you do something holy you are making some god better?

EUTH. No, by Zeus, not I.

SOC. I did not think you meant that, Euthyphro. Far from it. That is why I asked you what you meant by ministering to the gods: I did not believe you meant such a thing as that.

EUTH. Yes, and you were right, Socrates. I did not mean that.

SOC. Very well. But what kind of ministering to the gods is holiness?

EUTH. The kind, Socrates, which slaves minister to their masters.

SOC. I see. Holiness would, it seems, be a kind of service to gods.

EUTH. Quite so.

SOC. Now, can you tell me what sort of product service to physicians would be likely to produce? Would it not be health?

EUTH. Yes.

SOC. What about service to ship-builders? Is there not some product it produces?

EUTH. Clearly it produces a ship, Socrates.

SOC. And service to house-builders produces a house?

EUTH. Yes.

SOC. Then tell me, my friend: What sort of product would service to the gods produce? Clearly you know, for you say you know better than anyone else about religious matters.

EUTH. Yes; and I am telling the truth, Socrates.

SOC. Then in the name of Zeus, tell me: What is that fine product which the gods produce, using us as servants?

EUTH. They produce many things, Socrates, excellent things.

SOC. So do generals, my friend, but still their work can be summed up quite easily. Generals produce victory in war. Not so?

EUTH. Of course.

SOC. But what about the many excellent things the gods produce? How does one sum up their production?

EUTH. I told you a moment ago, Socrates, that it is difficult to learn accurately how things stand in these matters. Speaking freely, however, I can tell you that if a man knows how to say and do things acceptable to the gods in prayer and sacrifice, those things are holy; and they preserve both families and cities and keep them safe. The opposite of what is acceptable to the gods is impious, and this overturns and destroys all things.

IX. Fourth definition: the holy is an art of prayer and sacrifice

SOC. You could have summed up the answer to my question much more briefly, Euthyphro, if you had wished. But you are not eager to instruct me; I see that now. In fact, you just came right up to the point and turned away, and if you had given me an answer, I would by now have learned holiness from you. But as it is, the questioner must follow the answerer wherever he leads. So what do you say the holy and holiness is this time? Knowledge of how to pray and sacrifice?

EUTH. Yes.

SOC. Now, to sacrifice is to give to the gods and to pray is to ask something from them?

EUTH. Exactly, Socrates.

SOC. Then by this account, holiness is knowledge of how to ask from and give to the gods.

EUTH. Excellent, Socrates. You have followed what I said.

SOC. Yes, my friend, for I am enamored of your wisdom and attend to it closely, so naturally what you say does not fall to the ground wasted. But tell me, what is the nature of this service we render the gods? You say it is to ask from them and give to them?

EUTH. Yes, I do.

SOC. Now, to ask rightly is to ask for things we need from them?

EUTH. Certainly.

SOC. And again, to give rightly is to give in return what they happen to need from us? For surely there would be no skill involved in giving things to someone that he did not need.

EUTH. You are right, Socrates.

SOC. So the art of holiness would be a kind of business transaction between gods and men.

EUTH. Yes; if it pleases you to call it that.

SOC. Why, nothing pleases me unless it happens to be true. But tell me, what benefit do the gods gain from the gifts they receive from us? It is clear to everyone what they give, for we have nothing good they have not given. But how are they benefited by what they get from us? Or do we claim the larger share in the transaction to such an extent that we get all good from them, and they nothing from us?

EUTH. But, Socrates, so you think the gods benefit from the things they receive from us?

SOC. Why, Euthyphro, whatever could these gifts of ours to the gods then be?

EUTH. What do you suppose, other than praise and honor and as I just said, things which are acceptable.

SOC. Then the holy is what is acceptable, Euthyphro, and not what is beneficial or loved by the gods?

EUTH. I certainly think it is loved by the gods, beyond all other things.

SOC. Then, on the contrary, the holy is what is loved by the gods.

EUTH. Yes, that beyond anything.

SOC. Will it surprise you if in saying this your words get up and walk? You call me a Daedalus. You say I make them walk. But I say that you are a good deal more skillful than Daedalus, for you make them walk in circles. Or are you not aware that our account has gone round and come back again to the same place? Surely you remember in what went before that the holy appeared to us not to be the same as what is loved by the gods: the two were different. Do you recall?

EUTH. Yes, I recall.

SOC. Then do you not now realize that you are saying that what is loved by the gods is holy? But the holy in fact is something other than dear to the gods, is it not?

EUTH. Yes.

SOC. Then either we were wrong a moment ago in agreeing to that, or, if we were right in assuming it then, we are wrong in what we are saying now.

EUTH. It seems so.

X. Conclusion

SOC. Let us begin again from the beginning, and ask what the holy is, for I shall not willingly give up until I learn. Please do not scorn me: Bend every effort of your mind and now tell me the truth. You know it if any man does, and, like Proteus, you must not be let go before you speak. For if you did not know the holy and unholy with certainty, you could not possibly undertake to prosecute your aged father for murder in behalf of a hired man. You would fear to risk the gods, lest your action be wrongful, and you would be ashamed before men. But as it is, I am confident that you think you know with certainty what is holy and what is not. So say it, friend Euthyphro. Do not conceal what it is you believe.

EUTH. Some other time, Socrates. Right now I must hurry somewhere and I am already late.

SOC. What are you doing, my friend! You leave me and cast me down from my high hope that I should learn from you what things are holy and what are not, and escape the indictment of Meletus by showing him that, due to Euthyphro, I am now wise in religious matters, that I no longer ignorantly indulge in loose speech and innovation, and most especially, that I shall live better the rest of my life.