A Map of Euthyphro (ΕΥΘΥΦΡΩΝ)

Euthyphro is a combination of εὐθύς (euthys), which means straight, and also sincere or direct (and perhaps blunt), and the verb φρονέω (phroneô), which means to think, to reason, or to understand. Hence, Euthyphro means something like ‘straight thinker’, or ‘Mr. Right-Mind’.¹

2a–3e Opening; the charges against Socrates: corrupting the young men and inventing new gods.

3e–4e Euthyphro’s murder case against his own father; he assumes he knows about what is holy (τὸ ὅσιον, to hosion) and unholy (τὸ ἀνόσιον, to anosion).

5a–d Irony: Socrates wants to be Euthyphro’s pupil (μαθητής, mathêtes): what is holiness or piety?

5d–6c First answer: holiness is prosecuting a criminal; the gods and their disputes are examples.

6c–e But the examples are not explanatory. Socrates wants to know what makes actions holy or pious in general, or as such (ἐκεῖνο αὐτὸ τὸ εἴδος ὃς πάντα τὰ ὅσια ὅσια ἐστίν; ἐφησάθα γάρ ποι μὴ ἵδει τὰ τε ἀνόσια ἀνόσια εἶναι καὶ τὰ ὅσια ὅσια).²

7a–8e Second answer: holy is what is agreeable to the gods. But what is approved by the gods varies, just as there is human disagreement over what is just (δίκαιον, dikaion) or good (ἀγαθὸν, agathon). Problem: according to the first definition, an action may be holy and not holy at the same time.

9a–e Third answer: what all gods approve is holy, and what all gods disapprove is unholy (ἐίναι τὸ ὅσιον δὲ ἂν πάντες οἱ θεοὶ φιλῶσων, καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον, δὲ ἂν πάντες θεοὶ μισῶσων, ἀνόσιον).³

10a–11a The ‘dilemma’: is the holy approved by the gods because it is holy; or is it holy because it is approved? (ἅρα τὸ ὅσιον ἐστιν φιλεῖται ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν, ἢ ὅτι φιλεῖται ὅσιόν ἐστιν;).⁴ Put differently, is the reason or cause for the gods’ approval that the holy is holy, or is the gods’ approval the reason or cause for the holy being holy? There are two ideas here. (a) Some action A is holy because the gods approve it, which means that it is the divine approval that makes A holy. (b) The gods’ approval of A because A is holy, in which case what is holy is indepen-

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² Transliteration: ekeino auto to eidos hó panta ta hosia hosia estin? Ephêsta gar pou mia idea ta te anosia anosia einai kai ta hosia hosia?
³ Transl.: eina to hosion ho an pantes hoti theoi phileita, kai to enantion, ho an pantes theoi misôsin, anosion.
⁴ Translit.: ana to hosion estin phileita hypò tôn theôn, ê hoti phileita hosion estin?
dent of divine approval. Comparison: if we carry a stone, it is (something) carried because we carry it. So, the stone is being carried because it gets carried by us. But it seems wrong to say that the stone gets carried because it is being carried, i.e. because we carry it. Likewise, we do not see the stone because it is seen; rather, it is seen because we see it. It is being seen because it gets seen; not: its gets seen because it is seen. (The Greek is very hard to translate.) Related to (b), the real question concerns the essence (οὐσία, ousia) or nature of piety. That nature has to be established independently of any divine act of approval and disapproval.

11b–d  Euthyphro complains: there is no progress in the clarification. Irony: the straight thinker goes in circles.

11e–12e  Socrates now asks: is everything holy also just (δίκαιον ἐναι πᾶν τὸ ὅσιον, dikaion einai pan to hosion), and is everything that is just holy (πᾶν τὸ δίκαιον ὅσιον, pan to dikaion hosion)? Analogy: shame and fear. Result: the holy is part of the just, or a kind of justice.

12e–13d  Fourth answer: holy is the part of justice that concerns looking after, or caring for, the gods (τὸ μέρος τοῦ δικαίου ἐναι ἔσσεβες τε καὶ ὅσιον, τὸ περὶ τῶν τῶν θεῶν θεραπείαν). ‘Looking after’ x aims at improving x. Problem: but then being pious or holy improves the gods.

13d–e  Fifth answer: ‘therapeia’ is more like service (ὑπηρετική; ‘hupêreteo’ means to serve, obey, or help) to the gods. Analogy: service to the doctor, shipbuilder and builder. Socrates: what do the gods accomplish if we serve them? (Perhaps also: what is it that the gods could not do without our service?)

13e–14c  Answer: many good things (πολλὰ καὶ καλά, polla kai kala). Sixth answer: holy is knowing how to act such as to gratify or please the gods. Piety is the ‘science’ (ἐπιστήμη, epistêmê) of sacrifice and prayer.

14c–15b  Problem: sacrifice is donating, and prayer is requesting. So, piety is a trading skill (ἐμπορικὴ τέχνη, emporikê technê): what we need from the gods, and what they need from us. But what do the gods gain from these transactions? Answer: gratification or grace (χάρις; charis).

15b–d  So, the holy is what the gods find gratifying. Problem: holy is what the gods approve. Ironically, the discussion comes full circle (see dilemma).

15d–16a  Socrates wants to begin again, for Euthyphro surely would not accuse his father if he did not know what piety is. But Euthyphro dashes off.

5  οὐδὲ διότι φερόμενον, φέρεται, ἀλλὰ διότι φέρεται, φερόμενον (oude dioti pheromenon, pheretai, alla dioti pheretai, pheromenon). For experts: ‘φέρεται’ is the middle of the verb ‘φέρω’ and hence means ‘it carries (itself), it is carrying’, which Waterfield translates as ‘gets carried’. ‘φερόμενον’ is the corresponding participle, and thus means ‘is being carried, is carried’, which Waterfield renders as ‘being carried’.

6  Translit.: to meros tou dikaioou einai euusebes te kai hosion, to peri tên tôn theôn therapeian.