

## Excerpt from Plato's *Euthyphro*

### Background:

Philosopher Socrates (“Soc.”) encounters a priest Euthyphro (“Euth.”) outside of a courthouse. Socrates is on the way to his own trial, which results in his being put to death. Euthyphro, on the other hand, is on the way to sue his own father for murdering a servant. Socrates confronts Euthyphro outside of the courthouse, learns about this situation, and infers (somewhat sarcastically) that Euthyphro must really know what it takes to be *pious* (i.e. *morally good, holy, etc.*). Anyone with enough moral conviction to sue their own father must, after all, know what is right and what is wrong! Euthyphro agrees—as a priest, he *does* know what it takes to be pious. In response, Socrates asks Euthyphro to define the nature of *piety*. This excerpt occurs halfway through the dialogue, after Euthyphro has settled on the definition *that x is pious (morally good, holy, etc.) just in case x is loved by the Gods and x is impious (morally bad, unholy, etc.) just in case x is hated by the Gods*. This prompts Socrates’ famous **Euthyphro Dilemma**: is something pious *because* the Gods love it, or do the Gods love it *because* it is pious?

### Excerpt:

Euth. Yes, I should say that what all the gods love is pious and holy, and the opposite which they all hate, impious.

Soc. Ought we to enquire into the truth of this, Euthyphro, or simply to accept the mere statement on our own authority and that of others? What do you say?

Euth. We should enquire; and I believe that the statement will stand the test of enquiry.

Soc. We shall know better, my good friend, in a little while. The point which I should first wish to understand is whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods.

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Euth. I do not understand your meaning, Socrates.

Soc. I will endeavour to explain: we, speak of carrying and we speak of being carried, of leading and being led, seeing and being seen. You know that in all such cases there is a difference, and you know also in what the difference lies?

Euth. I think that I understand.

Soc. And is not that which is beloved distinct from that which loves?

Euth. Certainly.

Soc. Well; and now tell me, is that which is carried in this state of carrying because it is carried, or for some other reason?

Euth. No; that is the reason. Soc. And the same is true of what is led and of what is seen? Euth. True.

Soc. And a thing is not seen because it is visible, but conversely, visible because it is seen; nor is a thing led because it is in the state of being led, or carried because it is in the state of being carried, but the converse of this. And now I think, Euthyphro, that my meaning will be intelligible; and my meaning is, that any state of action or passion implies previous action or passion. It does not become because it is becoming, but it is in a state of becoming because it becomes;

neither does it suffer because it is in a state of suffering, but it is in a state of suffering because it suffers. Do you not agree?

Euth. Yes.

Soc. Is not that which is loved in some state either of becoming or suffering?

Euth. Yes.

Soc. And the same holds as in the previous instances; the state of being loved follows the act of being loved, and not the act the state.

Euth. Certainly.

Soc. And what do you say of piety, Euthyphro: is not piety, according to your definition, loved by all the gods?

Euth. Yes.

Soc. Because it is pious or holy, or for some other reason?

Euth. No, that is the reason.

Soc. It is loved because it is holy, not holy because it is loved?

Euth. Yes.

Soc. And that which is dear to the gods is loved by them, and is in a state to be loved of them because it is loved of them?

Euth. Certainly.

Soc. Then that which is dear to the gods, Euthyphro, is not holy, nor is that which is holy loved of God, as you affirm; but they are two different things.

Euth. How do you mean, Socrates?

Soc. I mean to say that the holy has been acknowledged by us to be loved of God because it is holy, not to be holy because it is loved.

Euth. Yes. Soc. But that which is dear to the gods is dear to them because it is

loved by them, not loved by them because it is dear to them. Euth. True.

Soc. But, friend Euthyphro, if that which is holy is the same with that which is dear to God, and is loved because it is holy, then that which is dear to God would have been loved as being dear to God; but if that which dear to God is dear to him because loved by him, then that which is holy would have been holy because loved by him. But now you

see that the reverse is the case, and that they are quite different from one another. For one is of a kind to be loved cause it is loved, and the other is loved because it is of a kind to be loved. Thus you appear to me, Euthyphro, when I ask you what is the essence of holiness, to offer an attribute only, and not the essence-the attribute of being loved by all the gods. But you still refuse to explain to me the nature of holiness. And therefore, if you please, I will ask you not to hide your treasure, but to tell me once more what holiness or piety really is, whether dear to the gods or not (for that is a matter about which we will not

quarrel) and what is impiety?