

# The Aporia of Divine Economy vs. the Socratic Ideal of Service: A Close Reading of the Fifth *Elenchus* in Plato's *Euthyphro*

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My concern in this paper<sup>1</sup> is not to engage the substantial literature on Plato's *Euthyphro* or the *Apology*. Nor will I tackle directly the ethical and theological implications put to us perennially by the "Euthyphro dilemma."<sup>2</sup> Rather, I invite my readers to join me in a thought experiment. Plato's dialogues follow Socrates from the porch of the king-archon (*Euthyphro*), to the *dikastérion* where he is tried for impiety (*Apology*), to the prison cell in which he prepares to take his own life (*Phaedo*). By the time Socrates is arguing the immortality of the Soul, though, the narrative has left behind an instructive foil for Socrates' own soul: the misguided Euthyphro himself, the Athenian religious professional<sup>3</sup> who meets Socrates at the very threshold of the latter's final sacred act.

But what if Euthyphro had not parted ways with Socrates on the steps of the *dikastérion*? What if, instead, he had paralleled the gadfly's course into the courtroom, taking a seat among the assembly? Would Euthyphro have cast his stone with those who condemned Socrates on the count of impiety? Or would his dialogue with Socrates have occasioned a change of heart? In this paper I attempt to supply a rationale—one endogenous to the original text of the *Euthyphro* itself—for my claim that Euthyphro would indeed have voted to convict Socrates at trial.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Nancy Evans, Professor of Classics at Wheaton College, Massachusetts for her invaluable assistance during the preparation of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> For a very brief introduction to these issues, see John Hare, "Religion and Morality," from *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2010 ed. (Stanford, Calif.: Metaphysics Research Lab, Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/religion-morality>.

<sup>3</sup> Hare, "Religion and Morality."

Euthyphro's conception of piety (*tò hósion*), the basis on which he would presumably make a legal decision in Socrates' case, is only intelligible within a holistic reading of the five *elenchi* (refutational exchanges) that figure into the rhetoric of the dialogue. Euthyphro advances five different definitions of piety and Socrates interrogates each in turn. In section I, I outline the first three *elenchi* and what McPherran calls the "aporetic interlude" between the third and the fourth. In so doing, I explain why my hypothetical scenario invoking Euthyphro's role at Socrates' trial puts in question the sense in which this dialogue is "aporetic"—or, better, how my approach raises the issue of for whom it is aporetic. Section II analyzes the rhetorical situation of the fifth *elenchus* in a close reading of Greek text at *Euthphr* 14d6-15b6. In concert with intertextual evidence from the *Apology*, the fifth *elenchus* flushes out Euthyphro's traditional understanding of the Olympian gods as cooperative participants in an economy or commerce of goods. We shall see that Euthyphro clings to this problematic paradigm for *tò hósion* even in the midst of aporia, and I will show that there is good reason to believe that his stolid dogmatism would have persisted even unto the verdict at Socrates' trial. Finally, I argue in section III that we may infer Socrates' own radical view of piety from his elenctic treatment of Euthyphro's proposed definitions.

## I.

When Socrates meets Euthyphro on the porch of the king-archon, the latter indicates that he has come to press charges of impiety against his father.<sup>4</sup> Given Euthyphro's own legal agenda and Socrates' impending trial, Burns writes, "if *anyone* is confident that he knows the meaning of 'impiety,' Euthyphro is; and if anyone is interested in finding out what it means, Socrates is."<sup>5</sup> To the end of instructing Socrates, his self-appointed pupil,<sup>6</sup> Euthyphro, offers four successive definitions of *tò hósion*

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<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Steven A. M. Burns, "Doing Business with the Gods," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (June 1985), 312.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 5a4.

which, together with their Socratic refutations, form the first four *elenchi*. Here, in telegraphic form, is a rendering of these definitions:

- E1. The pious consists in those actions (e.g., Euthyphro's prosecution of his father) done in obedience to divine will. (5d9–6d4)
- E2. The pious is what is dear to the gods. (7a1–8b5)
- E3. The pious is what is dear to *all* the gods. (Socrates' refutation presents the well-known "Euthyphro dilemma": either something is (a) pious because it is loved by the gods or (b) loved by the gods (god-beloved) because it is pious. 9e1–11b5)<sup>7</sup>

Euthyphro then admits, "I have no way of telling you what I have in mind,"<sup>8</sup> since each proposed definition so far has proved intractable. From here through 11e1, Socrates embarks on what McPherran calls the "aporetic interlude"—aporetic because Euthyphro has demurred with a claim to have reached a conceptual impasse. Socrates likens Euthyphro to Daedalus and the former's propositions to the locomotive mischief of the latter's statues.<sup>9</sup> Euthyphro then attempts to pin on Socrates the Daedalian elusiveness of an adequate definition of piety. To be fair, Socrates has to this point "overwhelmed Euthyphro with his idiosyncratic principles of proper definition" and a fair share of acerbic jests.<sup>10</sup> With both Euthyphro and Socrates "profess[ing] a desire to find stable proposals" about piety, however, the aporetic interlude serves a conciliatory role.<sup>11</sup> It reaffirms an earnest ethos behind the stinging Socratic irony that, nevertheless, continues into the fifth *elenchus*—where, I contend, we get the clearest implications of Socrates' own view of what constitutes an acceptable account of piety. Before that refutation, however, comes a series of inchoate definitions to the effect that:

- E4. The pious is the part of justice that has to do with a kind of care toward or ministering to (*therapeía*) the gods (12e5–14a8).

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<sup>7</sup> For concise treatment of the Euthyphro dilemma as a genuine dilemma, see Burns, 317–19.

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 11b6.

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 11b9–c5.

<sup>10</sup> Mark L. McPherran, "The Aporetic Interlude and Fifth Elenchus of Plato's *Euthyphro*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 25 (Winter 2003), 7.

<sup>11</sup> McPherran, 10–11.

Because each *elenchus*—the four that I have listed so far and, as we shall see, the fifth also—terminates in inferences that Socrates shows to be untenable, it is often thought that *Euthyphro* offers no conclusive conception of piety attributable to Socrates. For this reason, Platonists have traditionally classed *Euthyphro* among the so-called “aporetic” dialogues.<sup>12</sup> I join several recent commentators in rejecting this classification on the grounds that a positive Socratic conception of piety may yet be reconstructed from the *elenchi*, however inconclusive they might be.<sup>13</sup> Scholars who have mounted this challenge have typically taken Socrates’ remarks at the end of the fourth *elenchus*<sup>14</sup> to be decisive. The standard rebuttal to an aporetic reading of the dialogue infers that Socrates must have known what piety is, since he mourns that Euthyphro was on the brink of giving a satisfactory account of piety.<sup>15</sup> Just as Euthyphro is about to characterize a definitionally adequate form (*eidós*) of “the many fine things that the gods achieve,”<sup>16</sup> however, he “turns away” (*apotrápou*), toward specific instances of piety (i.e., prayer and sacrifice) that bring about public and private goods.<sup>17</sup> My contention is that a close reading of a slightly later passage in the Greek text, the much-neglected fifth *elenchus* (excerpted here in 14d6–15b6),<sup>18</sup> brings into relief the differences between what Euthyphro thinks of the gods’ work (*tò ergón*) and Socrates implied (positive) view of the same. Although that final *elenchus* too will result in aporia, I will show that it is a *local* aporia, one that ensnares Euthyphro’s arguments but has no purchase on the implied view of Socrates.

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<sup>12</sup> Burns, 311.

<sup>13</sup> See Burns, 311, and David M. Parry, “Holiness as Service: *Therapeia* and *Hyperetike* in Plato’s *Euthyphro*,” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 28, no. 4 (December 1994), 529. For an extensive bibliography of recent literature taking this argumentative tack, see Parry, 529, n. 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Euthphr* 14b9–c5

<sup>15</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14c1–4.

<sup>16</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14b7–8.

<sup>17</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14a9–b5; Parry, 530.

<sup>18</sup> See appendix for my translation of *Euthphr* 14d6–15b6.

## II.

Back in the fourth *elenchus*, Socrates drew out Euthyphro's implication that the pious is the part of the just concerned with the care (*therapeía*<sup>19</sup>) of the gods, more precisely, a care that is a kind of service (*hê hypêretiké*).<sup>20</sup> According to McPherran,

Socrates shapes his elenctic investigation of [Euthyphro's] new, fifth account of piety so as to address the still unresolved issue of piety's nature as postulated by the fourth definition: that is, the identity of the chief product of the gods that we assist them to produce and, thus, the kind of *non*-therapeutic service to them that piety would be.<sup>21</sup>

To this end, Socrates significantly reverts at the beginning of the fifth *elenchus* to "service"-talk in a new key. Socrates asks Euthyphro not about *hê hypêretiké*, but about one of its morphological variants: *hê hypêresía*, a feminine noun related to *ho hypêrêtês*.<sup>22</sup> Xenophon, a contemporary of Socrates, uses *ho hypêrêtês* as a quasi-verbal noun meaning "help *in a work*" with the objective genitive (e.g., *érgou*).<sup>23</sup> While there is no objective genitive at 14d6, the mere fact that *ho hypêrêtês* can govern the genitive<sup>24</sup>—unlike the earlier formulation, *hê hypêretiké*, which governs the directional dative ("service *to/toward*")—suggests that the object taking of this noun is prepositional—neither direct nor directional.<sup>25</sup> Put another way, *ho hypêrêtês* indicates a kind of service that "helps" a prepositional object in some sort of work. Since the noun avoids taking an accusative of person, the "verbalness" of the noun is by all accounts intransitive. In light of Euthyphro's intransigent "turn away" from identifying the sort of divine work in which human piety is serviceable, Socrates' emphasis of a clearly intransitive notion of service (in *ho hypêrêtês*) proposes something positive about the *structure* of that service. The fifth *elenchus*, therefore, presupposes a form of service that is non-affecting (at least directly) and non-

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<sup>19</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 12e6.

<sup>20</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14d7.

<sup>21</sup> McPherran, 19–20.

<sup>22</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14d6.

<sup>23</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, 1889 ed., s.v. "hypêrêtês."

<sup>24</sup> "Helper [*in a work*]" differs from the model *hê toũ paĩdos paidotrophía*, "the nurturing of a child," because the implied "work" is the indirect object of "help," whereas the "child" is a direct (albeit prepositional) object of "nurture" and therefore transitive.

<sup>25</sup> I return to the semantic feature of directionality vs. stasis in section III.

directional. This form is implicitly opposed to the *transitive* articular infinitives of *aiteîn* and *didónai* that Socrates correctly attributes to Euthyphro's notion of service.<sup>26</sup>

Socrates makes this juxtaposition more explicit at 14d7: “[W]hat is this service... [*intrans.*]? You say it is to ask for [*trans.*]...and to give to [*trans.*]”?<sup>27</sup> Just what is Socrates getting at by shifting “service” into the intransitive and then recapitulating Euthyphro's transitive definition of service as asking and giving?<sup>28</sup> Let us first note the sort of “asking” on which Socrates and Euthyphro have agreed. *Aiteîn* denotes a begging, a demanding, a craving, and as a verb takes two accusatives: (a) the things *asked for* (accusative of thing) and (b) the person they are *asked from* (accusative of person).<sup>29</sup> If piety (*tò hósion*) is, in part, to ask for something (*aiteîn*), it is reasonable to suggest that, insofar as it “begs” the form of piety that Socrates is imputing to Euthyphro,<sup>30</sup> values the *desideratum* in parity with the *person* from whom it is desired. In other words, Socrates proposes that for Euthyphro, the pious *desiderator* (man) does not make a value distinction between what he desires—e.g., “[the preservation of] private houses and public affairs of state”<sup>31</sup>—and from whom he desires it (the gods). “What is this *service* to the gods”<sup>32</sup> is thus a loaded question, though Euthyphro is oblivious—or, else, indifferent—to the ultimatum it poses. “Take me to task on my equivocation between *ho hypêrêtês* and *aiteîn*,” Socrates seems to admonish, “or else equate the intransitive with the transitive, which is to say, treat the gods as value-equivalent with things.” Yet Euthyphro simply condones this equivocation, this objectification of the gods in an economy of goods to be procured.

<sup>26</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14d1–2.

<sup>27</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>28</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14c8–9.

<sup>29</sup> Liddell and Scott, s.v. “aitéô.”

<sup>30</sup> Recall the indirect discourse here, set off by *phês* (Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14d7).

<sup>31</sup> The original reads *sôizdei tà toiaûta tous te idíous oíkous kai tà koinà tôn póleôn* (Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14b4–5).

This reference and all subsequent references to *external* translations of the *Euthyphro* are to Plato, *Euthyphro*, in *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, ed. and trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev. John M. Cooper, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14d6.

So much for the syntactic equivocations on the notion of *tò hósion* as *aiteĩn*. Yet what about *tò hósion* as *giving* (*didónai*)?<sup>33</sup> By inquiring not only about “giving” but, qualifying that, about “giving rightly” (*didónai orthôs*),<sup>34</sup> Socrates again prompts Euthyphro to reflect on his as of yet unaltered position. Here the subtext seems to read, “Is it actually giving (*didónai*) rightly<sup>35</sup> at all to *bring presents* (*dôrophoreĩn*) to someone when that someone is a god?”<sup>36</sup> With this slide in connotation from the earnest offering of *didónai* to the bribery and trinket exchange of *dôrophoreĩn*,<sup>37</sup> Socrates grants Euthyphro yet another opportunity to abjure his mounting economization of divine service—and yet the pigheaded “teacher” does not. Under the weight, presumably, of his stolid dogmatism, Euthyphro plows on, impervious to the expediency implicit in *dôrophoreĩn*.<sup>38</sup>

Euthyphro then accedes to the claim that the giver would not be *skillful* (*ou...technikón*) if he were to present in return (*antidôreĩsthai*) things for which the gods have no need.<sup>39</sup> This is a particularly telling admission from Euthyphro. “Skill” (*hê téchnê*) denotes craft or efficacy in the “means whereby a thing is granted.”<sup>40</sup> If an act—here, giving to the gods—can properly be modified by the adverbial predicate “skillful” (*technikón*), it necessarily follows that that act is a means to some end. Euthyphro apparently sees nothing amiss in the instrumentality that his brand of *dôrophoreĩn* connotes. He is likely accustomed to this idiom of utility;<sup>41</sup> mutual need is, after all, the impetus behind *quid-pro-quo* exchanges,<sup>42</sup> both among merchants at market and among priests at temple.<sup>43</sup> It comes as little surprise,

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<sup>33</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14d7.

<sup>34</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14e1.

<sup>35</sup> Note the emphatic placement of *orthôs* after the verb.

<sup>36</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14e1–4.

<sup>37</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14e1–3; Liddell and Scott, s.v. “*didómai*,” “*dôrophoréô*.”

<sup>38</sup> In light of this spatial metaphor, Socrates’ use of *orthôs* may be a pun on the obstinate *straightness* of the “path” that Euthyphro is taking through the argument, despite Socrates’ every appeal to veer off into contestation.

<sup>39</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14e1–3.

<sup>40</sup> Liddell and Scott, s.v. “*téchnê*.”

<sup>41</sup> See *deĩtai* in Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14e4.

<sup>42</sup> See *antidôreĩsthai* in Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14e2.

<sup>43</sup> One need only look to the cache of votive offerings to Athena in the Parthenon to justify this comparison between commercial and sacerdotal interests.

then, that Euthyphro assents, if somewhat listlessly, to Socrates' equation of the pious with the "art of conducting business transactions" (*hê emporikê téchnê*).<sup>44</sup>

From here to the end of the fifth *elenchus*, it is clear that Socrates and his readers are complicit in the dramatic irony that unfolds as their counterpart, Euthyphro, again and again fails to detect any cognitive dissonance in Socrates' increasingly provocative prompts. As Burns observes, this section is thick with irony, and Euthyphro is slow to comprehend it.<sup>45</sup> For Euthyphro, it is business as usual that a *do-et-des* arrangement (*aiteĩn/didónai*) would redound to the mutual benefit (*hê ôphelía*, connoting "profit," "advantage," "gain"<sup>46</sup>) of gods and men. It is simply an artifact of a happy imbalance in trade (*hê emporía*<sup>47</sup>) that man's gifts to the gods (*tà dôra*)—his worship, honor, and gratitude—are as unabashedly exploitive as bribes.<sup>48</sup> Other commentators have cited the inadequacy of Euthyphro's instrumental model for *tò hósion*, on which petitionary prayers (asking) and sacrifices (giving) are seen as so many "business transactions."<sup>49</sup> Burns, for example, points out that sacrifice, unlike forms of attending that take human beings as their objects, does not render unto gods what they need (for they need nothing); it is a giving up of something we, as givers, need and therefore value.<sup>50</sup> This distinction certainly eludes Euthyphro, but it presupposes something even more basic to a reconstruction of the Socratic view implicit here.

The gods *do not* need (i.e., *ôpheleĩsthai*, "have use for"<sup>51</sup>) anything from humans.<sup>52</sup> Being themselves perfectly *eudaímôn*, the gods do not stand to gain from the "gifts" of prayer and sacrifice

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<sup>44</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14e6–8.

<sup>45</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 323.

<sup>46</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14e10.

<sup>47</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 15a3.

<sup>48</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 15a8–10; Liddell and Scott, s.v. "tò dôron."

<sup>49</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14e5.

<sup>50</sup> Burns, 323.

<sup>51</sup> I think my translation of *ôpheleĩsthai* as "have use for" is preferable to Grube's "are benefitted by," because the former dissociates what is useful (and therefore instrumentally good) from what is beneficial and not necessarily instrumentally good. Even so, both imply a "making better" that cannot apply to the gods.

<sup>52</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 15a8–9. Or so Socrates would have to believe, perhaps by begging the question in favor of perfectly *eudaímôn* gods. See McPherran, 28.



any kind of happiness.<sup>53</sup> And, curiously, Euthyphro has already conceded as much in alleging (a) that pious prayers and sacrifice are gratifying to the gods;<sup>54</sup> (b) that the gods do not stand to benefit from our gifts;<sup>55</sup> and (c) that it is not artful to give gifts that meet no needs of their recipient(s).<sup>56</sup> Given Euthyphro's admissions (a)–(c), he contradicts himself when he claims, at 15a8–9, that the worship, tokens of honor, and gratification that the gods get from us are in some way needed. He tries to resuscitate the notion of a gratitude that man offers to the gods (*cháris*),<sup>57</sup> which naturally pleases the gods in the sense of courting their favor (*kecharisménon*).<sup>58</sup> Perhaps Euthyphro's perversity on this point owes to his view that piety must be, if anything, an artful sort of transaction that “knows the market.”<sup>59</sup>

Catching Euthyphro in this contradiction, Socrates attempts a last-ditch rhetorical move in order to induce Euthyphro to commit *reductio ad absurdum* and bring this fifth *elenchus* to a close. If gods are analogous to clients at market, then what is merely pleasing to them is less useful—and thus, on Euthyphro's value scheme, less valuable—than what they love or hold dear. If an Athenian religious professional like Euthyphro knows the market optimally well, he will naturally offer his clients the most useful or valuable goods that it is within his skill to provide. The *mántis*<sup>60</sup> knows that the customer-gods are always right; he is directed, transitively, toward affecting them so as to bring about receipt of things that are publically and privately useful for human beings (*tà chrēmata*). Therefore, when Socrates asks whether piousness is what is pleasing to the gods, not what is beneficial or dear to them,<sup>61</sup> Euthyphro is committed to saying, as indeed he does, that piety (as superlatively pleasing to the gods) is “of all things [...] most dear to them.”<sup>62</sup> By sliding from what is pleasing to the gods to what is loved by them,

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<sup>53</sup> McPherran, 22.

<sup>54</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14b2.

<sup>55</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14e10–15a6

<sup>56</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14e1–3.

<sup>57</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 15a10.

<sup>58</sup> Liddell and Scott, s.v. “charízdomai.”

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14e5–6.

<sup>60</sup> “Prophet,” a term Socrates ascribes to Euthyphro at Plato, *Euthyphro*, 3c3.

<sup>61</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 15b1–2.

<sup>62</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 15b3

presumably because it pleases them, Euthyphro fails to detect the qualitative difference between, on the one hand, what is pleasing (*prophilés*)<sup>63</sup> and directionally courts another's favor and, on the other, what is dear (simply *phílon*) and redounds, intransitively, to love.<sup>64</sup>

Once Euthyphro claims that "god-gratifying powers and sacrifices" are loved by the gods, Socrates needs only to substitute "the pious" for these observances in order to prove that Euthyphro has committed a fatal reduction of piety to what is absurd.<sup>65</sup> The definition of piety as what is loved by the gods has already been refuted in the third *elenchus*, where Socrates gets Euthyphro to concede that the pious and the god-loved are not the same, but different.<sup>66</sup> As Socrates hereupon informs him,<sup>67</sup> Euthyphro has come full circle to his previously invalidated proposition about the pious.<sup>68</sup> So it is that Euthyphro's traditional understanding of the Olympian gods has remained static throughout the dialogue, ineluctably bound to the notion of piety as a commercial exchange driven by men's coaxing of personally and socially advantageous *goods* (*tà agathá*)<sup>69</sup> from placated gods.

### III.

To conclude, I shall try to draw out a reconstruction of Socrates' implied view of piety based on the foregoing analysis of Socrates' elenctic argumentation against Euthyphro's dogmatic instrumentalism. We may suppose, from his alleged expertise in spiritual matters,<sup>70</sup> that Euthyphro is a member of the sacerdotal establishment in early fourth-century Athens. With an abrupt departure from dialogue with Socrates,<sup>71</sup> this prominent civic figure turns<sup>72</sup> from a volatile debate on the king-archon's porch to the intellectually predictable environs of the *stoá*, where merchants hawk and sell and buyers

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<sup>63</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 6d10.

<sup>64</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 15b2.

<sup>65</sup> McPherran, 22–23.

<sup>66</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 10e10–11b5, 15c1–2.

<sup>67</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 15b7ff.

<sup>68</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 15b6–c3.

<sup>69</sup> See Plato, *Euthyphro*, 15a4.

<sup>70</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 5a, 6bff.

<sup>71</sup> Which occurs soon after the fifth *elenchus*, 15e3–4.

<sup>72</sup> See *apetrárou*, as Socrates charges; Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14c1.

bustle and buy. Here there is motion; he need not stay still too long, for his work—the advancement of his house’s cachet and of the city’s affairs<sup>73</sup>—has him ever pleasing others, whether he is conciliating statesmen or offering up the votives he esteems “dear” to the gods. Though he may have denied it at the end of the fifth *elenchus*, Euthyphro sees his activity, above all, as pleasing to the gods (*prophilés*).<sup>74</sup> The compounding of *philós* with *pros-* carries a pronounced sense of directionality, of motion from one place to another, as befits an economy of trade. In short, the notion of divine love for Euthyphro is in every sense—morphologically, ethically, and theologically—shot through with a quantitatively optimized economy that seems to say, “What can be gained? What must be given? What is so dear to the buyer-gods as will induce their giving lavishly to the city? At the end of the day, with Olympus pleased, what capital will we have garnered from trade?”

For such a venal prophet as Euthyphro, exchange with the gods is but a means to personal and civic ends. In the end, though, the pursuit of “things one needs or uses” (*tà chrēmata*)<sup>75</sup> haunts Euthyphro’s divine economy. His calculations—like the bad faith with which he departs the dialogue—usher in a self-defeating aporia: the more he seeks, the less satisfying are the goods he receives in return (*tà agathá hā antidōreĩtai*). Giving (*dōrophoreĩn*) leads to increase but also to indebtedness as the returns come rolling in, creating a vicious circle of commercial trading. For *tà agathá* are good only for some purpose; these desiderata of Euthyphro’s piety are always instruments that find their intrinsic value depreciated once even better goods (*tà ámeinson agathá*) arrive at market, and so on forever.

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14b4–5.

<sup>74</sup> See Plato, *Euthyphro*, 6e10.

<sup>75</sup> Liddell and Scott, s.v. “chrēma.”

In contrast, for one so inspired as Socrates by divine presence—by that abiding voice that calls so softly that it drowns out the cries of commerce and politics<sup>76</sup>—for such a man, divine exchange is an end in itself:

[A]s I say to you, “Wealth does not bring about excellence, but excellence brings about wealth and all other public and private blessings for men.”<sup>77</sup>

Such excellence is possible once Socrates approaches the Divine Other with humility, a desire to obey,<sup>78</sup> and to stand still and listen in those moments when the mercantile Euthyphro would prattle and prod, sing *paean*s and supplicate. Reciprocity emerges in the interstices of shared presence with the divine, wherein that which is *absolutely* good—the wisdom and truth that require no price comparison and no cost-benefit analysis—comes to instill the soul (*psychê*).<sup>79</sup> This does not happen all of a sudden or gratuitously; for Socrates, the soul is cultivated by virtue of elenctic philosophizing, itself “a pre-eminently pious activity.”<sup>80</sup> Being the gadfly involves the sort of “sacrificial gifts of time, pride, and conventional goods”<sup>81</sup> that enable the donor to help the gods in the never-ending work (*ho hypêrêtês*) of perfecting the donor’s own (recipient) soul.<sup>82</sup> A bond of friendship forms in this work, and a love (*philia*) that is content to stand rapt for hours on the roadside saves the human soul from wickedness and injustice.<sup>83</sup> The pleasing blessings (*tà agathá*)<sup>84</sup> that Athens desires may yet come, but these do not occasion an aporia *à la* Euthyphro because they supervene on what is true<sup>85</sup> and excellent (*hê areté*),<sup>86</sup> and not vice versa. Excellence inheres in divine reciprocity; it stands in infinite qualitative distinction to

<sup>76</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 31c-d. This reference (33–34) and all subsequent references to the *Apology* are to Plato, *Apology*, in *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, ed. and trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. John M. Cooper, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 20–42.

<sup>77</sup> Plato, *Ap.*, 30b. See Grube, 32–33.

<sup>78</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 29b.

<sup>79</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 29e–30b.

<sup>80</sup> McPherran, 29.

<sup>81</sup> McPherran, 29.

<sup>82</sup> For more on the notion that service is importantly reflexive, see Parry, 535.

<sup>83</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 40b.

<sup>84</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 30b.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Socrates’ *parenesis* at Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14e8: “Ah, but to *me*, nothing is pleasing if it chances to be untrue.”

<sup>86</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 30b2–3.

even the greatest goods (*tà mégista agathá*) extracted from the divine economy. Socrates' *hê areté* is a self-validating subject, gendered and organically whole, whereas Euthyphro's *tà agathá* are mere contingent objects, neutered and atomistically plural.

Had Euthyphro been attentive to his equivocations on *aiteĩn* and *didónai*; had he come to terms with Socrates' corrective foils of intransitive service (*hê hypêrétês*) and uncompounded love (cf. *philón*) to his own transitive transactions (*hê emporikê*) and pleasing calculations (*prophilós*)—indeed, had he stood still before, and amenable to, Socrates' solicitous prompts, perhaps he would not have hastened off at dialogue's end, presumably to cast a “guilty” vote.<sup>87</sup> Euthyphro's piety is, in the end, extrinsic. For him, *tò hósion* is inexplicably bound up with a Realpolitik that equates the pleasing (*prophilós*) with the morally good, never to question whether the good and the true<sup>88</sup> cannot itself engender—*a fortiori*, whether excellence alone can engender—the pleasing and the useful (i.e., *tà agathá*). That revolutionary Socratic notion of piety as intrinsically excellent, as intransitive, as reciprocity among divine friends,<sup>89</sup> alas, is lost on Euthyphro, the chief exponent of traditional Athenian piety.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 15e.

<sup>88</sup> i.e., *hê areté*, which is “such as to be loved,” *oíon phileĩsthai*. See Plato, *Euthyphro*, 11a5.

<sup>89</sup> See Plato, *The Symposium*, in *The Symposium and the Phaedrus: Plato's Erotic Dialogues*, ed. and trans. William S. Cobb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 48 and 211c.

<sup>90</sup> For a discussion of the extent to which Euthyphro is a “mouthpiece for traditional Athenian religion,” as opposed to a carefully keyed narrative device, see McPherran, 4.

## Appendix: Original Translation of *Euthphr 14d6–15b6*

SOCRATES. ...But tell me, what is this service<sup>91</sup> to the gods? You say it is to ask<sup>92</sup> and to give to them?

EUTHYPHRO. I do indeed.

SOC. To beg *rightly* would be to ask<sup>93</sup> from them those things we need, wouldn't it?

EUTH. What else?

SOC. And, conversely, to give<sup>94</sup> *rightly* is to present to them, in return, those things they need from us? For it wouldn't be in any way skillful<sup>95</sup> if one were to bring someone presents<sup>96</sup> that were in no way needed.

EUTH. You speak the truth, Socrates.

SOC. Might the pious, then, be a certain art of conducting business transactions<sup>97</sup> between gods and men?

EUTH. Trading skill, yes, if it's pleasing to you to call it that.

SOC. Ah, but to *me*, nothing is pleasing if it chances to be untrue. But tell me, what actually is the benefit<sup>98</sup> of these gifts the gods receive from us? What they give to us is obvious to all; for we have nothing good that they haven't given to us.<sup>99</sup> But from the gifts that they receive from us, what benefits *them*? Or do we have such an advantage over them in this trade<sup>100</sup> that we receive all goods<sup>101</sup> from them, while they receive nothing from us?

EUTH. Do you think, Socrates, that the gods have use for the things they receive from us?

SOC. Well, if not, Euthyphro, what then would these gifts<sup>102</sup> from us to the gods be?

EUTH. What do you think they'd be, besides worship and tokens of honor and the very thing I just now mentioned,<sup>103</sup> namely, gratification?<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *hê hypêresía*; also: help *in a work*, with objective genitive; *intrans.*

<sup>92</sup> as in, for *things* (acc.) from person (acc.); *trans.*

<sup>93</sup> *aiteîn*

<sup>94</sup> *didónai*

<sup>95</sup> *technikón*

<sup>96</sup> *dôrophoréô*

<sup>97</sup> *hê emporiké téchnê*

<sup>98</sup> *hê ôphelía*

<sup>99</sup> i.e., *unless* they have given it to us

<sup>100</sup> *tên emporían*

<sup>101</sup> *tà agathá*

<sup>102</sup> *tà dôra*

<sup>103</sup> i.e., in *Euthphr 14b2*

<sup>104</sup> *cháris*

SOC. So the pious, then, is what's pleasing<sup>105</sup> to the gods, not what's beneficial or dear<sup>106</sup> to them?

EUTH. I think of all things it is most dear to them.

SOC. So then the pious is, once again, what is dear to the gods.

EUTH. Most certainly.

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<sup>105</sup> *kecharisménon*

<sup>106</sup> *tò phílon*

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