EUTHYPHRO

Plato

Abridged by H. Gene Blocker

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CHARACTERS

SOCRATES

EUTHYPHRO

SCENE—The Hall of the King

Euthyphro
What in the world are you doing here... Socrates? Why have you left your haunts in the Lyceum? You surely cannot have a suit before him, as I have.

Socrates
The Athenians, Euthyphro, call it an indictment, not a suit.

Euthyphro
What? Do you mean that someone is prosecuting you...?

Socrates
Yes...; [Meletus.]

Euthyphro
[W]hat is he prosecuting you for?
Socrates
What for? He . . . is going to accuse me to the state . . . of corrupting his friends. . . .

Euthyphro
But how, tell me, does he say that you corrupt the youth?

Socrates
In a way which sounds absurd at first, my friend. He says that I am a maker of gods; and so he is prosecuting me, he says, for inventing new gods and for not believing in the old ones.

Euthyphro
I understand, Socrates. It is because you say that you always have a divine guide. So he is prosecuting you for introducing religious reforms; and he is going into court to arouse prejudice against you, knowing that the multitude are easily prejudiced about such matters. Why, they laugh even at me, as if I were out of my mind, when I talk about divine things in the assembly and tell them what is going to happen; and yet I have never foretold anything which has not come true. But they are resentful of all people like us. We must not worry about them; we must meet them boldly. . . .

Socrates
And what is this suit of yours, Euthyphro? Are you suing, or being sued?

Euthyphro
I am suing.

Socrates
Whom?

Euthyphro
A man whom people think I must be mad to prosecute. . . .

Socrates
Who is he?

Euthyphro
He is my father. . . .
Socrates  
What are you prosecuting him for? What is the accusation?

Euthyphro  
Murder, Socrates.

Socrates  
Good heavens, Euthyphro!... Was the man whom your father killed a relative of yours? But, of course, he was. You would never have prosecuted your father for the murder of a stranger?

Euthyphro  
You amuse me, Socrates. What difference does it make whether the murdered man were a relative or a stranger? The only question that you have to ask is, did the murderer kill justly or not? If justly, you must let him alone; if unjustly, you must indict him for murder, even though he share your hearth and sit at your table. The pollution is the same if you associate with such a man, knowing what he has done, without purifying yourself, and him too, by bringing him to justice. In the present case the murdered man was a poor laborer of mine, who worked for us on our farm in Naxos. While drunk he got angry with one of our slaves and killed him. My father therefore bound the man hand and foot and threw him into a ditch, while he sent to Athens to ask the priest what he should do. While the messenger was gone, he entirely neglected the man, thinking that he was a murderer, and that it would be no great matter, even if he were to die. And that was exactly what happened; hunger and cold and his bonds killed him before the messenger returned. And now my father and the rest of my family are indignant with me because I am prosecuting my father for the murder of this murderer. They assert that he did not kill the man at all; and they say that, even if he had killed him over and over again, the man himself was a murderer, and that I ought not to concern myself about such a person because it is impious for a son to prosecute his father for murder. So little, Socrates, do they know the divine law of piety and impiety.

Socrates  
And do you mean to say, Euthyphro, that you think that you understand divine things and piety and impiety so accurately that, in such a case as you have stated, you can bring your father to justice without fear that you yourself may be doing something impious?
Euthyphro
If I did not understand all these matters accurately, Socrates, I should not be worth much—Euthyphro would not be any better than other men.

Socrates
Then, my dear Euthyphro, I cannot do better than become your pupil and challenge Meletus on this very point before the trial begins.

* * *

Now, therefore, please explain to me what you were so confident just now that you knew. Tell me what are righteousness and sacrilege with respect to murder and everything else. I suppose that piety is the same in all actions, and that impiety is always the opposite of piety, and retains its identity, and that, as impiety, it always has the same character, which will be found in whatever is impious.

Euthyphro
Certainly, Socrates, I suppose so.

Socrates
Tell me, then, what is piety and what is impiety?

Euthyphro
Well, then, I say that piety means prosecuting the unjust individual who has committed murder or sacrilege, or any other such crime, as I am doing now, whether he is your father or your mother or whoever he is; and I say that impiety means not prosecuting him. And observe, Socrates, I will give you a clear proof, which I have already given to others, that it is so, and that doing right means not letting off unpunished the sacrilegious man, whosoever he may be. Men hold Zeus to be the best and the most just of the gods; and they admit that Zeus bound his own father, Cronos, for wrongfully devouring his children; and that Cronos, in his turn, castrated his father for similar reasons...

Socrates
Then you really believe that there is war among the gods, and bitter hatreds, and battles, such as the poets tell of, and which the great painters have depicted in our temples...
Euthyphro
Yes, Socrates, and more besides. . .

Socrates
I dare say. . . At present please try to give a more definite answer to the question which I asked you just now. What I asked you, my friend, was, What is piety? and you have not explained it to me to my satisfaction. You only tell me that what you are doing now, namely, prosecuting your father for murder, is a pious act.

Euthyphro
Well, that is true, Socrates.

Socrates
Very likely. But many other actions are pious, are they not, Euthyphro?

Euthyphro
Certainly.

Socrates
Remember then, I did not ask you to tell me one or two of all the many pious actions that there are; I want to know what is characteristic of piety which makes all pious actions pious. You said, I think, that there is one characteristic which makes all pious actions pious, and another characteristic which makes all impious actions impious. Do you not remember?

Euthyphro
I do.

Socrates
Well, then, explain to me what is this characteristic, that I may have it to turn to, and to use as a standard whereby to judge your actions and those of other men, and be able to say that whatever action resembles it is pious, and whatever does not, is not pious. . .

Euthyphro
Well, then, what is pleasing to the gods is pious, and what is not pleasing to them is impious. . .
Socrates
Come, then, let us examine our statement. The things and the men that are pleasing to the gods are pious, and the things and the men that are displeasing to the gods are impious. But piety and impiety are not the same; they are as opposite as possible—was not that what we said?

Euthyphro
Certainly. . . .

Socrates
Have we not also said, Euthyphro, that there are quarrels and disagreements and hatreds among the gods?

Euthyphro
We have.

Socrates
But what kind of disagreement, my friend, causes hatred and anger? Let us look at the matter thus. If you and I were to disagree as to whether one number were more than another, would that make us angry and enemies? Should we not settle such a dispute at once by counting?

Euthyphro
Of course. . . .

Socrates
Then what is the question which would make us angry and enemies if we disagreed about it, and could not come to a settlement? Perhaps you have not an answer ready; but listen to mine. Is it not the question of the just and unjust, of the honorable and the dishonorable, of the good and the bad? Is it not questions about these matters which make you and me and everyone else quarrel, when we do quarrel, if we differ about them and can reach no satisfactory agreement?

Euthyphro
Yes, Socrates, it is disagreements about these matters.

Socrates
Well, Euthyphro, the gods will quarrel over these things if they quarrel at all, will they not?
Euthyphro
Necessarily.

Socrates
Then, my good Euthyphro, you say that some of the gods think one thing
just, the others another; and that what some of them hold to be honorable or
good, others hold to be dishonorable or evil. For there would not have been
quarrels among them if they had not disagreed on these points, would there?

Euthyphro
You are right.

Socrates
And each of them loves what he thinks honorable, and good, and just; and
hates the opposite, does he not? . . . Then the same thing is hated by the gods
and loved by them; and the same thing will be displeasing and pleasing to
them.

Euthyphro
Apparently.

Socrates
Then, according to your account, the same thing will be pious and impious.

Euthyphro
So it seems. . . . But on this point, Socrates, I think that there is no difference
of opinion among the gods: they all hold that if one man kills another
unjustly, he must be punished.

Socrates
What, Euthyphro? Among mankind, have you never heard disputes whether
a man ought to be punished for killing another man unjustly, or for doing
some other unjust deed? . . . Do they admit that they have done something
unjust, and at the same time deny that they ought to be punished, Euthyphro?

Euthyphro
No, indeed, that they do not. . . .
Socrates
Then they do not disagree over the question that the unjust individual must be punished. They disagree over the question, who is unjust, and what was done and when, do they not?

Euthyphro
That is true.

Socrates
Well, is not exactly the same thing true of the gods if they quarrel about justice and injustice, as you say they do? Do not some of them say that the others are doing something unjust, while the others deny it? . . .

Euthyphro
Yes.

Socrates
Come, then, my dear Euthyphro, please enlighten me on this point. What proof have you that all the gods think that a laborer who has been imprisoned for murder by the master of the man whom he has murdered, and who dies from his imprisonment before the master has had time to learn from the religious authorities what he should do, dies unjustly? How do you know that it is just for a son to indict his father and to prosecute him for the murder of such a man? . . .

Euthyphro
I could make that clear enough to you, Socrates; but I am afraid that it would be a long business. . . .

Socrates
While you were talking, it occurred to me to ask myself this question: suppose that Euthyphro were to prove to me as clearly as possible that all the gods think such a death unjust, how has he brought me any nearer to understanding what piety and impiety are? This particular act, perhaps, may be displeasing to the gods, but then we have just seen that piety and impiety cannot be defined in that way; for we have seen that what is displeasing to the gods is also pleasing to them. So I will let you off on this point, Euthyphro; and all the gods shall agree in thinking your father’s action wrong and in hating
it, if you like. But shall we correct our definition and say that whatever all the
gods hate is impious, and whatever they all love is pious; while whatever
some of them love, and others hate, is either both or neither? Do you wish us
now to define piety and impiety in this manner?

Euthyphro
Why not, Socrates? . . .

Socrates
Now consider this question. Do the gods love piety because it is pious, or is
it pious because they love it?

Euthyphro
I do not understand you, Socrates.

Socrates
I will try to explain myself.

... 

[W]hat do we say about piety? Is it not loved by all the gods, according
to your definition?

Euthyphro
Yes.

Socrates
Because it is pious, or for some other reason?

Euthyphro
No, because it is pious.

Socrates
Then it is loved by the gods because it is pious; it is not pious because it is
loved by them?

Euthyphro
It seems so.
Socrates
But, then, what is pleasing to the gods is pleasing to them, and is in a state of being loved by them, because they love it?

Euthyphro
Of course.

Socrates
Then piety is not what is pleasing the gods, and what is pleasing to the gods is not pious, as you say, Euthyphro. They are different things.

Euthyphro
And why, Socrates?

Socrates
Because we are agreed that the gods love piety because it is pious, and that it is not pious because they love it. Is not this so?

Euthyphro
Yes.

Socrates
And that what is pleasing to the gods because they love it, is pleasing to them by reason of this same love, and that they do not love it because it is pleasing to them.

Euthyphro
True.

Socrates
Then, my dear Euthyphro, piety and what is pleasing to the gods are different things. If the gods had loved piety because it is pious, they would also have loved what is pleasing to them because it is pleasing to them; but if what is pleasing to them had been pleasing to them because they loved it, then piety, too, would have been piety because they loved it. But now you see that they are opposite things, and wholly different from each other. For the one is of a sort to be loved because it is loved, while the other is loved because it is of a sort to be loved. My question, Euthyphro, was, What is piety? But it turns out that you have not explained to me the essential character of piety;
you have been content to mention an effect which belongs to it—namely, that all the gods love it. You have not yet told me what its essential character is. Do not, if you please, keep from me what piety is; begin again and tell me that. . . .

**Euthyphro**
But, Socrates, I really don’t know how to explain to you what is in my mind. Whatever statement we put forward always somehow moves round in a circle, and will not stay where we put it . . .

**Socrates**
I will do my best to help you to explain to me what piety is, for I think that you are lazy. Don’t give in yet. Tell me, do you not think that all piety must be just?

**Euthyphro**
I do.

**Socrates**
Well, then, is all justice pious, too? Or, while all piety is just, is a part only of justice pious, and the rest of it something else?

**Euthyphro**
I do not follow you, Socrates.

... 

**Socrates**
Well, then, this is what I meant by the question which I asked you. Is there always piety where there is justice? Or, though there is always justice where there is piety, yet there is not always piety where there is justice, because piety is only a part of justice? Shall we say this, or do you differ?

**Euthyphro**
No, I agree. I think that you are right.

**Socrates**
Now observe the next point. If piety is a part of justice, we must find out, I suppose, what part of justice it is. . . .
Euthyphro
Well, then, Socrates, I should say that righteousness and piety are that part of justice which has to do with the careful attention which ought to be paid to the gods; and that what has to do with the careful attention which ought to be paid to men is the remaining part of justice.

Socrates
And I think that your answer is a good one, Euthyphro. But there is one little point about which I still want to hear more. I do not yet understand what the careful attention is to which you refer.

...[H]as not all care the same object? Is it not for the good and benefit of that on which it is bestowed? For instance, you see that horses are benefited and improved when they are cared for by the art which is concerned with them. Is it not so?

Euthyphro
Yes, I think so. . . .

Socrates
Then is piety, which is our care for the gods, intended to benefit the gods, or to improve them? Should you allow that you make any of the gods better when you do a pious action?

Euthyphro
No indeed; certainly not. . . .

Socrates
Good. Then what sort of attention to the gods will piety be?

Euthyphro
The sort of attention, Socrates, slaves pay to their masters.

Socrates
I understand; then it is a kind of service to the gods?

Euthyphro
Certainly.
Socrates
Can you tell me what result the art which serves a doctor serves to produce? Is it not health?

Euthyphro
Yes. . . .

Socrates
Then tell me, my good friend: What result will the art which serves the gods serve to produce? . . .

Euthyphro
There are many notable results, Socrates.

Socrates
Well, then, what is the principal result of the many notable results which the gods produce?

Euthyphro
I told you just now, Socrates, that accurate knowledge of all these matters is not easily obtained. However, broadly I say this: if any man knows that his words and actions in prayer and sacrifice are acceptable to the gods, that is what is pious; and it preserves the state, as it does private families. But the opposite of what is acceptable to the gods is sacrilegious, and this it is that undermines and destroys everything. . . .

Socrates
[S]o tell me, what is it that you mean by piety and impiety? Do you not mean a science of prayer and sacrifice?

Euthyphro
I do.

Socrates
To sacrifice is to give to the gods, and to pray is to ask of them, is it not?

Euthyphro
It is, Socrates.
Socrates
Then you say that piety is the science of asking of the gods and giving to them?

Euthyphro
You understand my meaning exactly, Socrates. . . .

Socrates
Then, to ask rightly will be to ask of them what we stand in need of from them, will it not?

Euthyphro
Naturally.

Socrates
And to give rightly will be to give back to them what they stand in need of from us? It would not be very skillful to make a present to a man of something that he has no need of.

Euthyphro
True, Socrates.

Socrates
Then piety, Euthyphro, will be the art of carrying on business between gods and men?

Euthyphro
Yes, if you like to call it so.

Socrates
But I like nothing except what is true. But tell me, how are the gods benefited by the gifts which they receive from us? What they give is plain enough. Every good thing that we have is their gift. But how are they benefited by what we give them? . . .

Euthyphro
But do you suppose, Socrates, that the gods are benefited by the gifts which they receive from us?
Socrates
But what are these gifts, Euthyphro, that we give the gods?

Euthyphro
What do you think but honor and praise, and, as I have said, what is acceptable to them.

Socrates
Then piety, Euthyphro, is acceptable to the gods, but it is not profitable to them nor loved by them?

Euthyphro
I think that nothing is more loved by them.

Socrates
Then I see that piety means that which is loved by the gods.

Euthyphro
Most certainly. . . .

Socrates
Do you not see that our statement has come round to where it was before? Surely you remember that we have already seen that piety and what is pleasing to the gods are quite different things. Do you not remember?

Euthyphro
I do.

Socrates
And now do you not see that you say that what the gods love is pious? But does not what the gods love come to the same thing as what is pleasing to the gods?

Euthyphro
Certainly.

Socrates
Then either our former conclusion was wrong or, if it was right, we are wrong now.
Euthyphro
So it seems.

Socrates
Then we must begin again and inquire what piety is. I do not mean to give in until I have found out. Do not regard me as unworthy; give your whole mind to the question, and this time tell me the truth. . . .

Euthyphro
Another time, then, Socrates. I am in a hurry now, and it is time for me to be off. . . .