

PARALLEL TRIALS: THE DRAMATIC STRUCTURE OF PLATO'S *EUTHYPHRO*

Two trials frame the argument of Plato's *Euthyphro*: Meletus' prosecution of Socrates and Euthyphro's prosecution of his own father. The first case deals with an alleged pollution within the *polis*, the other with an alleged pollution within the *oikos*.¹ Setting up the details of these two trials takes up almost one third of the whole dialogue.² Socrates' trial is of course well known, and Plato uses the reader's familiarity with its fatal result as recounted in his *Apology* to dramatic effect in the *Euthyphro*. But what *should* surprise the reader of this dialogue is the amount of detail Plato includes concerning the circumstances of Euthyphro's father's alleged crime. In this article I suggest that Plato includes these dramatic details of Euthyphro's prosecution of his father³ to establish a very exact parallel with Meletus' case against Socrates. The literary drama establishes this parallel to suggest that the two elderly defendants are in fact innocent, and that the two young prosecutors are guilty of the very charges they have laid against their elders.⁴ Though the parallels between the two situations have often been noted,⁵ the rigour and exactness of Plato's analogy have not been fully appreciated.

¹ Note the suggestion in Euthyphro's final definition that true piety will preserve both *oikos* and the *polis*: τὸδε μέντοι σοι ἀπλῶς λέγω, ὅτι εἴαν μὲν κεχαρισμένα τις ἐπίστηται τοῖς θεοῖς λέγειν τε καὶ πράττειν εὐχόμενός τε καὶ θύων, ταῦτ' ἔστι τὰ ὅσια, καὶ σφῆζει τὰ τοιαῦτα τοὺς τε ἰδίους οἴκους καὶ τὰ κοινὰ τῶν πόλεων (14b2–5).

² See M. McPherran, 'Justice and pollution in the *Euthyphro*', *Apeiron* 35.2 (2002), 105–27, at 105.

³ On the legal status of Euthyphro's case, see I. Kidd, 'The case of homicide in Plato's *Euthyphro*', in E.M. Craik (ed.), *Owls to Athens: Essays on Classical Subjects Presented to Sir Kenneth Dover* (Oxford, 1990), 213–21. Kidd argues, against D. MacDowell, *Athenian Homicide Law in the Age of the Orators* (Manchester, 1963) and others who contend that Euthyphro's case would not be permitted by law, that Euthyphro *could* legally initiate a *δίκη φόνου* on behalf of his servant, because of his legal position as *πελάτης* in Euthyphro's house. See Kidd 213 nn. 1–2 for the relevant literature on the topic, as well as the more recent A. Tulin, *Dike Phonou: The Right of Prosecution and Attic Homicide Procedure* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1996).

⁴ See L. Versényi, *Holiness and Justice: An Interpretation of Plato's Euthyphro* (Washington, DC, 1982), 25, 40.

⁵ M. McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park, PA, 1996), 31–6, outlines the analogy most fully of any interpreters. See also his excellent comments in McPherran (n. 2), 117 on what he calls the '*sine qua non* of any adequate interpretation': 'the dialogue's obvious pairing ... of Meletus – a seeming advocate of "traditional partialities" – with Euthyphro. Socrates, then, should be compared to Euthyphro's father; for like Euthyphro's father, Socrates is elderly (*Euthyphro* 3a), "goes to each Athenian like a *father*, persuading each to care for virtue" (*Ap* 31b; my emphasis), and yet now finds himself indicted by a younger man on the grounds of piety (5a–b). This analogical connection argues in turn that we are to pair Meletus' formal charge of corruption with Euthyphro's informal charge of pollution.' Apart from McPherran, interpreters do not explore the connection between Socrates and Euthyphro's father. On the parallel between the two cases more generally, see Kidd (n. 3), 214–15; D. Anderson, 'Socrates' concept of piety', *JHPH* 5 (1967), 1–13. More commonly, readers attentive to the significance of the trials for the argument of the *Euthyphro* simply notice the way Plato sets up Euthyphro

That a parallel exists between the characters in the dialogue is clearly the view of one of the main characters himself. Euthyphro evidently sees himself as having a great affinity with the character of Socrates. At 3b5–c5, he identifies his own prophetic abilities with Socrates' *δαιμόνιον*, compares the prosecution of Socrates for theological innovation with the ridicule he experiences when speaking of divine matters in the assembly and, using a first personal plural pronoun, bemoans how the many *φθονοῦσιν ἡμῖν πᾶσι τοῖς τοιούτοις* ('are jealous of all people such as us', 3c3–4). As far as Euthyphro is concerned, both he and Socrates belong to a kind of theological elite whose special insight into the divine set them apart from the crowd and free them from customary morality.⁶

Plato makes it clear that despite his self-identification with Socrates, Euthyphro is more of a character foil to Socrates than a likeness. Socrates claims to have no knowledge, while Euthyphro is confident of his own certain religious wisdom. Socrates is full of a *φιλανθρωπία* (3d7) which causes him to pour out naturally whatever he thinks to anyone at all, while Euthyphro guards his wisdom jealously, since it is this mysterious religious knowledge that distinguishes him from the unwashed masses (4e9–5a2). Socrates is like a foreigner in the courts, while Euthyphro is confident in his ability to win any case regardless of its particular circumstances (5b8–c3). Socrates actually seeks to distinguish himself from Euthyphro, referring to *ὑμῖν τοῖς μάντεσιν* ('you prophets', 3e3), a group to which Socrates does not belong. While Socrates distances himself from any identification with Euthyphro, the reader is clearly encouraged to see convergences between the two young prosecutors, Meletus and Euthyphro. Both are referred to as being relatively unknown and unrecognized (for Meletus see 2b7–c1; for Euthyphro, see 5c4–8), in contrast to the constant attention Socrates has inadvertently drawn to himself. Most importantly, for both Meletus and Euthyphro, the act of prosecuting suggests a confident knowledge of the terms of their charges: what it means to corrupt and improve the youth, what is the nature of piety and impiety (4e4–8).

In response to Socrates' shock at a son's prosecution of his father for murder, Euthyphro offers the following account of the circumstances of the father's crime:

ἐπεὶ ὁ γε ἀποθανὼν πελάτης τις ἦν ἐμός,⁷ καὶ ὡς ἐγεωργοῦμεν ἐν τῇ Νάξῳ, ἐθήτευν ἐκεῖ παρ' ἡμῖν. παρονήσας οὖν καὶ ὀργισθεὶς τῶν οἰκετῶν τιμῶν ἡμετέρων ἀποσφάττει αὐτόν. ὁ οὖν πατὴρ συνδήσας τοὺς πόδας καὶ τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ, καταβαλὼν εἰς τάφρον τινά, πέμπει δεῦρο ἄνδρα πευσόμενον τοῦ ἐξηγητοῦ ὅτι χρεΐη ποιεῖν. ἐν δὲ τούτῳ τῷ χρόνῳ τοῦ δεδεμένου ἀλιγῶρει τε καὶ ἡμέλει ὡς ἀνδροφόνου καὶ οὐδὲν ὄν πράγμα εἰ καὶ ἀποθάνοι, ὅπερ οὖν καὶ ἔπαθεν ὑπὸ γὰρ

as similar to Meletus and a character foil for Socrates. See e.g. Versényi (n. 4), 40; J. Hoopes, 'Euthyphro's case', *CB* 47.1 (1970), 1–6.

⁶ There is considerable controversy about whether the character of Euthyphro should be understood as representing a traditional or an idiosyncratic and sectarian religious viewpoint. On this issue, see W.D. Furley, 'The figure of Euthyphro in Plato's dialogue', *Phronesis* 30.2 (1985), 201–8. See McPherran (n. 2), 111 for a list of interpreters on both sides of the issue. My own view is that Euthyphro does not doubt the authority of traditional religious beliefs and customs, but as a prophet he has direct and privileged access to the will of the gods beyond them.

⁷ See Kidd (n. 3) 219–220 for an excellent suggestion about how to read this phrase as 'though, as a matter of fact, the murdered man was a *πελάτης* of mine.' For Kidd, in response to Socrates' question about whether the *πελάτης* was *ἀλλότριος* or *οἰκεῖος*, Euthyphro is amused that the distinction should even matter to him, but notes that even if this distinction did matter, his status as *πελάτης* justifies the prosecution.

λιμοῦ καὶ ῥίγους καὶ τῶν δεσμῶν ἀποθνήσκει πρὶν τὸν ἄγγελον παρὰ τοῦ ἐξηγητοῦ ἀφικέσθαι.

Though, as a matter of fact, the dead man was my dependent, and when we were farming in Naxos he served us there for hire. He became drunk and angry and slit the throat of one of our household slaves. So my father bound his hands and feet and threw him down into a ditch, then sent a man here to inquire from the religious adviser what must be done. During that time he had little esteem and care for the bound man, since he was a murderer, and it made no difference if he died, which indeed he did. He died from hunger, cold and his bonds, before the messenger returned from the religious adviser. (4c3–d5)

Of course the primary reason why Euthyphro's prosecution so scandalizes Socrates, Euthyphro's relatives and the majority of Athenian citizens is its violation of the fundamental law of the *oikos* which demands that the blood relation, and especially the father, be treated with reverence by his offspring far beyond what is owed to other individuals.⁸ Yet beyond this violation of one's obligation to the family and its divinities, there are several details in Euthyphro's account cited above which either suggest his father's innocence, or at the very least introduce ambiguities into the question of the father's guilt – ambiguities reminiscent of the moral complexity of a Greek tragedy:⁹

- 1) the victim was himself a drunken murderer deserving of punishment;
- 2) the father did not actively kill the victim – the *direct* causes of death were internal or natural (hunger) and external or environmental (cold), while the father's actions – binding the servant's hand and feet – merely facilitated these direct causes and therefore were only indirectly responsible for the death;
- 3) the binding of the servant was not done with the intention of killing him, but rather of ensuring he did not escape while the gods were consulted about the proper course of action.¹⁰

Euthyphro defends himself against the charge that a son should not prosecute his father with the plausible¹¹ argument that it makes no difference εἴτε ἀλλότριος εἴτε οἰκεῖος ὁ τεθνεώς, ἀλλ' οὐ τοῦτο μόνον δεῖν φυλάττειν, εἴτε ἐν δίκη ἔκτεινεν ὁ κτεῖνας εἴτε μή, καὶ εἰ μὲν ἐν δίκη, εἴαν, εἰ δὲ μή, ἐπεξιέναι, εἴανπερ ὁ κτεῖνας συνέσσιός σοι καὶ ὁμοτράπεζος ἦ ('whether the dead man was a stranger or a relative, but it is necessary to look out for this alone, whether the killer kills justly or not. If so, let him go, if not, prosecute, even if the killer shares your hearth and table', 4b7–c1).¹² Against the other reasons for considering Euthyphro's

⁸ For some references to this idea in Plato, see McPherran (n. 2), 108 n. 5.

⁹ On the possible implicit references in *Euthyphro* to tragedy, see R.B. Egan, 'Tragic piety in Plato's *Euthyphro*', *Dionysius* 7 (1983), 17–32; D. Rohatyn, 'The *Euthyphro* as tragedy: a brief sketch', *Dialogos* 9 (1973), 147–51; Versényi (n. 4), 34–40.

¹⁰ In case this question of intention seems anachronistically imposed on ancient Greek jurisprudence, consider Socrates' own words in the *Apology*: τῶν τοιούτων [καὶ ἀκουσίων] ἁμαρτημάτων οὐ δεῦρο νόμος εἰσάγειν ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ ἰδία λαβόντα διδάσκειν καὶ νοουθετεῖν, *Ap.* 26a2–4.

¹¹ In a qualified sense this is a perfectly Socratic principle – whatever Socrates' relation to his interlocutor and whatever social role he occupies, he must be subjected to the cross-examination and prosecution of the elenchus.

¹² See also 5d8–e2 on this point.

action to be unjust, Euthyphro argues that although his father was not the direct cause of death and although his intention was not to kill him, he simply did not exhibit sufficient care or concern for the well-being of the bound man. Euthyphro's father gave primacy to what the gods demanded – the well-being of the bound man was secondary to his fear of contravening the will of the gods – and so he did nothing until the divine will was made manifest through the *ἐξηγητής*. This question of sufficient care for one's fellow human being will be important for understanding the concluding scene of the dialogue.

There are two aspects to the charge against Socrates emphasized in *Euthyphro*:

- 1) Socrates corrupts the youth;
- 2) Socrates does not believe in the old, traditional gods, and makes up new gods.

Meletus, on this account, prosecutes on behalf of two groups of victims in order to protect them: the young men and the traditional gods.¹³ The literary drama of the *Euthyphro* focusses on responding to the first part of the charges laid against Socrates – his alleged corruption of the youth.¹⁴ The stance of his accusers relative to this charge is generally a conservative one – customary Greek beliefs, once embraced unquestioningly by Athenians, especially their youth, are being undermined by Socrates' asking his interlocutors about their reasons for holding these beliefs. The question of whether this kind of questioning should be permissible or not is brought up indirectly by Socrates in relation to Euthyphro's third definition: *οὐκοῦν ἐπισκοπῶμεν αὐτὸ τοῦτο, ὃ Εὐθύφρων, εἰ καλῶς λέγεται, ἢ ἐῷμεν καὶ οὕτω ἡμῶν τε αὐτῶν ἀποδεχόμεθα καὶ τῶν ἄλλων, ἐὰν μόνον φῆ τίς τι ἔχειν οὕτω συγχωροῦντες ἔχειν; ἢ σκεπτόμεν τί λέγει ὁ λέγων;* ('Then shall we not examine this, Euthyphro, whether it is true, or shall we let it pass, and accept it both from our ourselves and from others, if someone simply says something, agreeing that it is so? Or is it necessary to examine what the speaker says?', 9e4–7). Meletus and his fellow accusers would answer: 'you should simply let customary opinions pass, you should not subject them to rational investigation'. The prophets, like Euthyphro, would proclaim that in so far as something is pronounced by his prophetic infallibility, it should be accepted without examination. In contrast, for the philosopher, one is duty-bound to examine everything said.

What then is the parallel between Euthyphro's murder prosecution against his father and the charges against Socrates, who has killed no one? Though Socrates is not accused of killing any human being, he is being accused of destroying the youth's belief in customary ethical and religious opinions. From the conservative perspective of his accusers, Socrates is a revolutionary who calls into question principles so fundamental to Greek society that they should remain unquestioned.

¹³ While the charges of corrupting the youth are answered through the dialogue's literary structure, the charges of impiety are answered through its philosophical argument. See my "Philosophical piety in Plato's *Euthyphro*", forthcoming.

¹⁴ As McPherran (n. 2), 120 notes, the alleged corruption of Socrates is to be compared with the alleged pollution of Euthyphro's father. There is a qualified sense in which Socrates is indeed a corruption in the *polis*, and that Euthyphro's father is a source of pollution in their *oikos*. But both Socrates and the father are themselves responding to an existing contamination (contradictory and unexamined opinions in the souls of his interlocutors and the murder of the household slave by the *πελάτης*) which they are trying to purify.

The conservative character of the charges against him comes out most clearly in the *Meno* in an exchange between Socrates and Anytus, another of his accusers (*Meno* 89e9–95a1). Socrates there asks Anytus to whom should a young man go to learn virtue concerning the governance of *oikos* and *polis*? When Socrates brings up the possibility that it is the sophist who properly teaches this virtue (since it is the sophists who claim to sell this knowledge), Anytus regards the suggestion as unspeakable (*Meno* 91c1). The sophists, argues Anytus, do exactly the opposite: they corrupt otherwise virtuous youth. Anytus ascribes the continued success of sophists like Protagoras to a widespread madness that has infected these youths, their permissive parents and their irresponsible cities.

For Anytus, the vast majority of Athenian citizens are virtuous, and they did not acquire their virtue through abstract speculation; they acquired this virtue through the transmission and preservation of customary knowledge from one generation of Athenians to the next. From this conservative viewpoint, the content of virtue is fully present in the way things have always been done in Athens. Any rational inquiry into the reasons *why* what has always been believed to be right is right destabilizes the only source of ethical life, and makes the human being the measure of what is. From this conservative perspective there is no difference between Socrates and a sophist: both measure traditional opinions by their own reason, drawing the clear objectivity of custom into a whirlpool of subjectivity, and destroying the possibility of a common ethical life in the process. The questioning rationality of Socrates and the sophists is a pollution, a *μίασμα* in the language of the *Euthyphro* (4c1), that should be eradicated from the city by any means necessary. Socrates is seen in this light as a kind of figurative murderer – a destroyer of customary beliefs concerning both the nature of the gods and the traditional virtues and duties of a Greek citizen.

This is the core of the parallel between the two criminal cases. Socrates' destruction of these customary opinions about divine and human matters through dialectical questioning should be juxtaposed with Euthyphro's father's murder of the servant. By destroying customary opinions and replacing them with no positive knowledge, Socrates destroys the very basis of practical activity in the *polis*. On what basis are the youth to be expected to act, given that their customary views on what is good, noble and generally virtuous have been undermined and destabilized? They have been, to push the image, bound hand and foot by Socrates so that they have no basis for action.

Recall the important questions about whether the death of Euthyphro's dependent should be considered a murder at all: first, the victim was drunk and out of control, having himself already committed atrocities; second, the father's actions were merely the indirect cause of the man's death; and third, his intention was not for the man to die, but to rectify his injustice in accordance with the will of the gods. These translate into the following questions that I would argue are absolutely central to the Platonic consideration of the significance of Socrates.

Firstly, is Socrates reacting against the customary virtue of the youth, or rather against the reckless subjectivist (and potentially violent) spirit that has taken hold of them and made any return to unquestioned adherence to tradition impossible for them? Characters like Meletus and Euthyphro act without knowledge or even reflection upon the grounds of their actions – this passionate, irrational behaviour is a kind of intoxication. More generally, are the youth, in the clutches of this subjectivist revolution, not already decadent, reckless and intoxicated? Socrates is

deeply concerned that Euthyphro is acting impulsively and unreflectively,¹⁵ without pausing to deliberate upon whether this prosecution is in accordance with the divine will.¹⁶

Secondly, does Socrates himself destroy these customary beliefs by showing his interlocutors that they do not know what they thought they knew, or is it rather that the paralysing effects of Socratic ignorance leave them particularly vulnerable to corruption, and offer them no positive knowledge upon which to order their lives? Is it that, being paralysed through Socratic refutation, they are left vulnerable to the corruption of their virtue by the internal force of their desires (hunger) or the external force of sophistic manipulation (cold), that these direct causes are indirectly facilitated by the bonds Socratic refutation places on them?

The question of whether Socrates is the direct or indirect cause of the destruction of customary beliefs arises out of Euthyphro's frustration with Socrates' refutations of his definitions of piety. Socrates famously destabilizes his definition of the pious as what all the gods love through a paradox: is the pious pious because it is loved by the gods, or is it loved by the gods because it is pious? In the face of this problem, Euthyphro is at a loss to offer any further suggestions for a definition. He puts the blame for this paralysis squarely on Socrates' methods:

ἀλλ', ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐκ ἔχω ἔγωγε ὅπως σοι εἴπω ὃ νοῶ· περιέρχεται γάρ πως ἡμῖν αἰὲ δ' ἂν προθάμεθα καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλει μένειν ὅπου ἂν ἰδρυσώμεθα αὐτό ... τὸ γὰρ περιεῖναι αὐτοῖς τοῦτο καὶ μὴ μένειν ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ οὐκ ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ ἐντιθείς, ἀλλὰ σύ μοι δοκεῖς ὁ Δαίδαλος, ἐπεὶ ἐμοῦ γε ἕνεκα ἔμμενεν ἂν ταῦτα οὕτως.

But Socrates, I am not able to tell you what I am thinking. For somehow what we lay down always goes around and does not want to remain where we establish it ... For I am not the one who puts this circulating around and not remaining in the same place into them, but it seems to me you are the Daedalus, since on my account they would have stayed put. (11b6–8; 11c8–d2)

Does Socrates destabilize Euthyphro's views because they are inherently unstable, or are Euthyphro's views destabilized because of what Socrates does with them? Structurally, this question is identical to Socrates' paradox: is the pious pious because the gods love it, or do the gods love the pious because it is pious? The question in both cases is the following: is the cause of the effect properly in the agent or the patient?

Was Euthyphro's father the cause of the death or only an indirect facilitator? Is Socrates the cause of the destruction of the customary views of the Athenian youth or merely an indirect facilitator? On this question hinges the verdict both of the father's case and that of Socrates. If the views are in themselves stable and true, and Socrates destroys them without providing anything to replace them, then he is a pollution destructive of the city that should be purified. If the views are in themselves unstable, then Socrates is not the cause of the destabilization, but merely the indirect catalyst of their fleeing away.

Thirdly, is Socrates' intention in subjecting their opinions and traditional beliefs to rational scrutiny really the destruction of these beliefs? Socrates makes it clear

¹⁵ These are the very charges laid against Socrates, that he *αὐτοσχεδιάζει* and *καινοτομέει* (see 3b5, 16a2) about divine things.

¹⁶ See 5b, 4e, 15d.

that this is not in fact his intention. When Euthyphro accuses him of deliberately destroying his views through his dialectical prowess, Socrates replies:

καὶ δῆτα τοῦτό μοι τῆς τέχνης ἔστι κομψότατον, ὅτι ἄκων εἰμὶ σοφός· ἐβουλόμην γὰρ ἂν μοι τοὺς λόγους μένειν καὶ ἀκινήτως ἰδρῦσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ πρὸς τῇ Δαιδάλου σοφίᾳ τὰ Ταντάλου χρήματα γενέσθαι.

And this is the most clever aspect of my art, that I am unwillingly wise. For I want your words to remain and to stand unmoved more than I want to obtain the wisdom of Daedalus and the wealth of Tantalus. (11d6–e1)

The third objection to Euthyphro's prosecution is that the father's intention was simply to wait patiently for the divine will to be revealed before acting, and he did not intend killing the *πελάτης*. Does Socrates *intend* to destroy the traditional beliefs of the Athenian youth he dialectically cross-examines? Recall the *Meno*, when, at the end of the dialogue, Socrates takes up the image of Daedalus relative to this question of the mobility and stability of his interlocutor's opinions. There he argues that from the perspective of practical activity, there is no difference between true opinion and true knowledge. But it is not for nothing that he seeks to destabilize opinion. These opinions, as long as they stay, are just as good as knowledge, but they can run away – if confronted by the questioning sophistic spirit from without or the influence of desires from within. Changing true opinion into true knowledge can ensure that it will not be lost when investigated or opposed by alternative views.

According to this formulation, Socratic questioning is only a provisory destabilization of true customary opinions, for the ultimate sake of regrounding them upon rationally understood foundations. The goal of philosophical inquiry is the stabilization of true opinions and genuine wisdom already contained in ethical and religious customs as *θεία μοίρα παραγιγνομένη ἄνευ νοῦ* ('obtained by divine lot without understanding', *Meno* 99e6). In this case, Socrates would not be considered a pollution, a foreign invader destroying the city, but rather as Euthyphro suggested at the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates would be the very heart or 'hearth' (*ἔστίας*) of the city (*Euthyphr.* 3a), essential to its very identity and continued existence. Socrates' intention in his quest for stable definitions of ethical concepts is not the destruction of traditional ethical life. Until these are made clear, there is a real possibility that his dialectic might further weaken the hold of customary morality on his young interlocutors, though this consequence is not only unintended, but is opposed to what motivates him.

Finally, the actions of both Euthyphro's father towards his victim and Socrates towards his young interlocutors are guided by a prior obligation to the divine which supersedes any immediate obligations from one human to another. Unsure of what to do in the face of the man's vicious action against his slaves, the father simply neutralizes him so that he cannot get away or do any further damage, and sends a messenger to consult an interpreter of the will of the gods. I am suggesting that Euthyphro's father is not the only one who, not knowing how to act in accordance with the will of the gods, immobilizes his victims in order to consult the divine oracle for practical guidance. Socrates, in the face of his self-conscious ignorance, consults oracles for practical guidance in order to avoid transgressing the divine. Euthyphro brings up Socrates' *δαιμόνιον* early in the dialogue. In the *Apology*, Socrates repeatedly claims that his entire philosophical activity is based on

obedience to his personal *δαιμόνιον*, to the oracle and to Apollo. One might even argue that the search for the *ἰδέα* or *εἶδος*¹⁷ of piety beyond opinion is a quest to reveal the divine truth beyond merely human custom.¹⁸ Thus the activity of both older men in immobilizing and ultimately imperilling their victims is inspired by a concern not to transgress the divine will.

The concluding scene of the dialogue completes the reversal of the trials. Euthyphro had accused his father of murder through lack of care and attention to the needs of his bound victim. From the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates makes explicit what hangs in the balance of his discussion with Euthyphro – his very life. If Euthyphro can teach him what true piety is, he will be able to defend himself against Meletus' charges. Yet while claiming to know the nature of the pious, Euthyphro flees the shameful indictment of his ignorance by Socrates by demonstrating a total lack of care for Socrates. When Socrates insists that they continue their quest for the essence of piety, Euthyphro replies: *εἰς ἀθις τοῖνυν, ὦ Σώκρατες· νῦν γὰρ σπεύδω ποι, καί μοι ὦρα ἀπιέναι* ('Another time, Socrates, for I am in a hurry now to go somewhere, and it is time for me to go', 15e3–4).

Without any knowledge of the pious, Socrates is left unable to defend himself against his charges. Consider his closing words in the dialogue:

οἶα ποιεῖς, ὦ ἑταῖρε. ἀπ' ἐλπίδος με καταβαλὼν μεγάλης ἀπέρχῃ ἦν εἶχον, ὡς παρὰ σοῦ μαθὼν τὰ τε ὅσα καὶ μὴ καὶ τῆς πρὸς Μέλητον γραφῆς ἀπαλλάξομαι, ἐνδειξάμενος ἐκείνῳ ὅτι σοφὸς ἦδη παρ' Εὐθύφρονος τὰ θεῖα γέγονα καὶ ὅτι οὐκέτι ὑπ' ἀγνοίας αὐτοσχεδιάζω οὐδὲ καινοτομῶ περὶ αὐτά, καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸν ἄλλον βίον ὅτι ἄμεινον βιωσοίμην.

What a thing you are doing, friend! You leave, casting me down from a great hope which I had, that after learning from you the pious and the impious I would escape Meletus' indictment, after showing him that I had already become wise concerning divine matters from Euthyphro, and that I no longer extemporize or make innovations about these things out of ignorance, and further that I would live better for the rest of my life. (15e5–16a4)

Euthyphro's neglect is to be contrasted with the numerous references to Socrates' attentiveness to and concentration upon every last word spoken by his interlocutors, his unwillingness to give up on conversation until the goal is reached.¹⁹

In contrast to this care, Euthyphro has left Socrates, so to speak, tied up and thrown in the ditch to die. The word Plato uses for the father's throwing into the ditch at 4c7, and Euthyphro's throwing Socrates down from his high hopes, is the very same: *καταβαλὼν*. Such neglect of one's fellow humans to the point of allowing their death is far worse than the actions of Socrates towards the youth or the father towards Euthyphro's dependent, since both of these occur through attentive dedication to one's duty to the divine.

In escaping his conversation with Socrates and neglecting his obligation to seek the truth, Euthyphro shows himself to be not only impious but, by analogy, guilty of the very act for which he prosecutes his father: leaving a human being for dead by neglecting what he needs to survive (compare *ὠλιγώρει τε καὶ ἡμέλει* at

¹⁷ For reference to *ἰδέα* in the dialogue, see 5d3–4, 6d11–e1, 6e3; for reference to *εἶδος*, see 6d10–11.

¹⁸ See my 'Philosophical piety in Plato's *Euthyphro*', forthcoming.

¹⁹ See, for example, 14c3–d6, 15c11–d2.

4d1–2). Plato seems to be suggesting that it is only by devoting proper attention to τὰ θεῖα, as exemplified by Socrates and Euthyphro's father, that proper care for other human beings will follow.²⁰

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