

Euthyphro

The dialogue is a conversation between Socrates (S) and Euthyphro (E) on the subject of piety. At the start of the dialogue, E sees S next to the courthouse and asks him why he's there. S answers that he has been indicted by Meletus, accused of corrupting young men and creating new gods (this is a reference to S's "divine sign") while not believing in the old gods (see *Apology*). S then asks E why he has come to court. E answers that he has come to prosecute his own father for murder. The facts of the case are complicated, and make it difficult to see where piety and justice lie (4c-d). On the one hand, E's father (call him "F") caused another man's death, and it is generally considered pious to prosecute murderers. On the other hand, (i) the man F killed was himself a killer, (ii) F did not cause the victim's death directly (he bound the victim hand and foot and threw him in a ditch, as a result of which the victim died of hunger and cold), and (iii) it is generally considered impious to prosecute (or otherwise shame) one's own father. S asks E whether he has no fear of having acted impiously in bringing his own father to trial. E answers that he has "accurate knowledge" of piety and impiety, and so does not fear having acted impiously. S asks E (facetiously, as quickly becomes clear) to teach him what piety and impiety are, for S realizes that such knowledge might enable him to answer Meletus's accusations. E's first attempt at defining piety is to say that it is "to do what I am doing now, to prosecute the wrongdoer" (5d). But S points out that "there are many other pious actions" (6d), and wants to know what (form) it is that makes all pious actions (including actions that do not involve prosecution) pious, so that he may look upon it as a model to determine, of any given action, whether or not it is pious (6d-e). E then provides a second definition, which may be restated as follows:

(D2) The pious = what is loved by the gods = the god-loved.
The impious = what is hated by the gods = the god-hated. (7a)

At this point, S launches an attack on (D2) (7a-8b), that will eventually result in E's tweaking (D2). Here's one way to represent S's criticism of (D2):

1. The pious = the god-loved, and the impious = the god-hated. (D2)
2. The gods disagree enough to be enemies. (7b) (See Homer)
3. When humans disagree enough to be enemies, this is because they consider different things to be just, beautiful, and good. (7b-d)
- So, 4. When gods disagree enough to be enemies, this is because they consider different things to be just, beautiful, and good. (7d) [3: by induction]
- So, 5. The gods consider different things to be just, beautiful, and good. (7e) [2, 4]
6. One loves whatever one considers to be just, beautiful and good, and one hates whatever one considers to be unjust, ugly, and bad. (7e)

- So, 7. The same things are god-loved and god-hated. (8a) [5, 6]
8. If *the F = the G*, then 'F' and 'G' are intersubstitutable *salva veritate*. (implicit)
- So, 9. The same things are pious and impious. (8a) [1, 7, 8]
- So, 10. The pious and the impious are the same. (implicit) [1, 9]
11. The pious and the impious are opposites. (7a)
12. Opposites are not the same. (7a)
- So, 13. The pious and the impious are not the same. (7a) [11, 12]

Contradiction at 10 and 13. So at least one of 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 11, and 12 must be false.

E's response to this argument is to claim that "on this subject no gods would differ from one another" (8b), and, after a short discussion (8b-9d), E "corrects" (D2) as follows:

- (D2)* The pious = what is loved by **all** the gods = the god-loved.
 The impious = what is hated by **all** the gods = the god-hated. (9d-e)

This correction enables E to avoid the contradiction to which (D2) led. [Question: How?] But it lands him in hot water yet again. S now proceeds to attack (D2)*:

1. A carried thing is carried because it is being carried. (10b)
 2. A led thing is led because it is being led. (10b)
 3. A seen thing is seen because it is being seen. (10b)
- So, 4. An affected/changed thing is affected/changed because it is being affected/changed. (10c) [1, 2, 3: by induction]
5. It is not true that a carried thing is being carried because it is carried. (10b)
 6. It is not true that a led thing is being led because it is led. (10b)
 7. It is not true that a seen thing is being seen because it is seen. (10b)
- So, 8. It is not true that an affected/changed thing is being affected/changed because it is affected/changed. (10b) [5, 6, 7: by induction]

9. A loved thing is an affected/changed thing. (10c)
- So, 10. A loved thing is loved because it is being loved. (10c) [4, 9]
- So, 11. It is not true that a loved thing is being loved because it is loved. (10c) [8, 9]
- So, 12. The god-loved is god-loved because it is being god-loved. (10d) [10]
- So, 13. It is not true that the god-loved is being god-loved because it is god-loved. (10e) [11]
14. The pious is being loved because it is pious. (10d)
15. It is not true that the pious is pious because it is being loved. (10d)
16. If *the F = the G*, then 'F' and 'G' are intersubstitutable *salva veritate*. (implicit)
17. The pious = the god-loved. (9d-e) (D2)*
- So, 18. The god-loved is being (god-)loved because it is god-loved. (10e-11a) [14, 16, 17] {substitute "god-loved" for "pious" in 14}
- So, 19. The pious is pious because it is being (god-)loved. (11a) [12, 16, 17] {substitute "pious" for the first two instances of "god-loved" in 12}

There are two sets of contradictions here: one at 13 and 18, and one at 15 and 19. So at least one of 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 14, 15, 16, and 17 must be false.

The dialogue continues with E offering more (ultimately unacceptable) definitions and predictably ends in perplexity (*aporia*): S takes himself to have shown that E does not know what the pious and the impious are (15d-e).