

# Euthyphro



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PLATO

Plato was born to an aristocratic family in Athens, Greece. He was well-educated and excelled as a wrestler. Historical accounts suggest that Plato traveled extensively in his youth, likely to Italy, Egypt, Sicily, and Cyrene (present-day Libya). When Plato returned to Athens at the age of 40, he founded the Academy, widely considered to be the first formal university in Europe. Students at the Academy included the philosopher Aristotle. Plato died at the age of 80 or 81, after having written over 25 philosophical works. Plato's writings are considered central to the field of philosophy and remain highly influential to this day. Plato's teacher Socrates features as the protagonist in most of Plato's works.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The *Euthyphro* is most often contextualized against the trial and execution of Plato's teacher Socrates in 399 B.C.E., primarily in virtue of Socrates's philosophies about the gods and his influence on the youth of Classical Athens (which was founded in 508 B.C.E and dissolved in 322 B.C.E). These events had a profound influence on Plato's life, thinking, and works. The trial and execution of Socrates likely prompted Plato to consider the ethical status of Athenian society. Plato's dialogues typically address conventional aspects of ethical behavior—or “virtues”—that were recognized by the culture in Athens at the time. These included justice, modesty, piety, and temperance. The dialogues explore what these virtues might amount to when they are the subject of rational inquiry, rather than the result of accepted dogmas or conventions. This is why dialogues like the *Euthyphro* often pit a presumed local expert (who voices conventionally accepted views of the time) against the probing rational inquiry of Socrates. The dialogue form (or “dialectic” form, as Plato called it) doesn't offer explicit manifestos or theses about the virtues in an ethical society. Rather, the form encourages each reader to engage in the activity of reasoning, so that they can contemplate the same questions for themselves.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The *Euthyphro* is the first in a four-part series of dialogues that reference the trial of Plato's teacher, Socrates. It is followed by the *Apology*, which documents Socrates's defense against the charges during his trial. Third comes the *Crito*, in which Socrates argues from his prison cell that he would rather face death than commit the immoral act of escaping from prison.

The final dialogue in the series is the *Phaedo*, which is set in the final hours of Socrates's life and addresses the themes of death and the immortality of the soul. These dialogues, along with the *Meno* (which also features one of Socrates's accusers from the *Apology*) are often published together. They illustrate the method of Socratic reasoning through Socrates's voice, as he systematically questions and dissects definitions for various ethical concepts, such as piety, justice, and virtue. Beyond helping to capture the Socratic method of philosophical inquiry and learning, Plato also developed his own school of thought, Platonism, epitomized in works such as the *Republic* and the *Symposium*, which influenced other Greek philosophers like Cicero and Plutarch in their writings. His thoughts about ethics, government, and human nature have even served as the basis for modern dystopian works, such as George Orwell's *1984*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Lois Lowry's *The Giver*.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Euthyphro
- **When Written:** 380 B.C.E.
- **Where Written:** Athens
- **When Published:** 380 B.C.E.
- **Literary Period:** Classical
- **Genre:** Philosophical dialogue
- **Setting:** Classical Athens
- **Climax:** Euthyphro becomes frustrated with Socrates's penetrating questions about the nature of piety and abruptly ends the conversation, leaving Socrates unsatisfied.
- **Antagonist:** Euthyphro
- **Point of View:** Third person, dialogic transcript

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Mixed Bag.** Since the majority of Plato's works are written as dialogues featuring the voice of Socrates, it is often difficult to discern where Socrates's philosophizing ends, and where Plato's begins. One thing that this rhetorical device allows Plato to achieve is a certain level of distance from the claims of the text, as his perspectives can only be inferred, since they are never explicitly stated. This may be in part because Socrates was tried and executed for his own views, so the structure protects Plato from suffering any sort of similar punishment.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Socrates bumps into Euthyphro, a young prophet, on the steps of the magistrate's court in Athens, Greece. Both men are at

the courthouse for actions that relate to the concept of piety, which is the central subject of the dialogue. Euthyphro is prosecuting his father for acting impiously in letting a murderous slave who he had bound and thrown in a ditch die from neglect. Socrates is responding to an indictment by Meletus that he has acted impiously in spreading ideas that are irreverent toward the Athenian gods to impressionable youths. Feigning ignorance, Socrates suggests that Euthyphro teach him what he knows about the nature of piety, so that he may be better able to defend himself at court. What follows, however, is a conversation in which Euthyphro suggests five possible definitions for piety, each of which Socrates exposes as flimsy with his probing.

Nearly all of Euthyphro's definitions collapse into claims that associate piety with the gods' actions, desires, or wishes, but Euthyphro is unable to fully describe what exactly these might be, or why certain actions fulfil his criteria. He circles around his own arguments, which Socrates sarcastically compares to the moving statues of **Daedalus**. Euthyphro realizes Socrates has argued him into a corner by goading Euthyphro into agreeing that the nature of piety is static (meaning it doesn't change, like the gods' whims or differences of opinion) and knowable (unlike the gods' desires). He is incapable of producing a logically sound definition for piety. Feeling irritated, Euthyphro abruptly ends the conversation and walks away, pretending to be late, leaving Socrates unsatisfied.

Through the dialogue's conclusion, Plato implies that perhaps nobody in Athens (including Socrates's accusers) can articulate clearly and defensibly what piety is. At the very least, notions of piety and impiety that invoke the gods—again, much like Meletus's charge against Socrates—come up short.

Socrates's accuser might also lack a clear understanding of the concept. Socrates was a real historical figure, though all that is known of him is passed on through Plato's writings, so it is not clear how much of the Socrates we see through Plato's homage to Socrates aligns with the historical figure and his actual views.

**Euthyphro** – The dialogue's antagonist, and title character. Euthyphro is a prophet and religious authority who boasts of significant knowledge about piety and other such religious concepts, but ultimately exposes his ignorance through his encounter with Socrates. Euthyphro bumps into Socrates outside the court house and explains that he is there because he is charging his own father with "impiety" for letting a murderous slave die from neglect while he was imprisoned by Euthyphro's father. The name Euthyphro means "straight thinker." This is an inside joke for the reader, since Euthyphro reveals himself as anything but straight thinking as he muddles through various definitions for piety, growing increasingly irritable as the dialogue progresses. Euthyphro is presented as a somewhat pretentious figure who relies on vague concepts like "the gods' wishes" in his attempt to persuade Socrates that he has a clear understanding of piety and impiety, the latter being the crime he is charging his father with. Realizing he has been exposed by Socrates as frazzled pupil rather than wise teacher in this exchange, he abruptly ends the dialogue with the line, "is that the time? I must dash," leaving Socrates unsatisfied. Euthyphro serves as an implicit metaphor for the characters (like Meletus) who are charging Socrates with impiety despite lacking a defensible definition of the concept.

**Meletus** – A political figure who has no dialogue in the text but is mentioned in passing as the character who is charging Socrates with corrupting the youths of Athens with ideas that are "impious" towards the Athenian gods. It is implied through the dialogue that the powerful people in Athens, Euthyphro and Meletus included, lack a clear concept of "piety," and therefore are likely unjustified in placing Socrates on trial.



## CHARACTERS

**Socrates** – The protagonist of the *Euthyphro*. The real Socrates was an influential philosopher in Classical Athens. Socrates is believed to have lived from 470 B.C.E. to 399 B.C.E., when he was tried and executed for charges of "impiety"—specifically, hubris against the gods, and corrupting the youth of Athens with his unconventional ideas. Socrates is depicted by Plato as a witty and piercingly rational thinker who teaches the other characters (most often depicted with irony as the "knowledgeable" characters) through a method of sustained questioning, rational dissection, and suggesting definitions for various concepts. In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates explains to Euthyphro that he is being tried for "impiety" by Meletus, before Socrates and Euthyphro proceed to discuss the nature of piety. Feigning ignorance about the concept, he asks Euthyphro for "advice" that he may leverage for his upcoming trial. As the dialogue ensues, it is clear that Euthyphro's thinking about the concept is muddled and unclear. The dialogue ends without a conclusive definition, implying that



## THEMES

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### THE NATURE OF PIETY

The *Euthyphro*, like Plato's other early dialogues, contains a failed attempt to successfully define a concept (such as justice or virtue) by way of a discussion between Socrates and another character. In this case, Euthyphro—a presumed local expert on all things righteous—discusses the nature of "piety" at length with

Socrates on the steps of the Athenian magistrates court. Both men are at the courthouse to address impiety: Euthyphro is prosecuting his father for causing the death of a murderous slave, whilst Socrates is being charged with spreading ideas that are irreverent towards the gods. Socrates suggests, with typical irony, that he is ignorant on such matters and might perhaps learn a thing or two from Euthyphro on the subject. The joke on Euthyphro, however, as he ends up being schooled by Socrates. Throughout their conversation, Euthyphro offers five possible definitions for piety, which Socrates questions and undermines in turn, until Euthyphro abruptly ends the conversation in frustration. Socrates's criticisms imply that he thinks the nature of piety is universal, unchanging, independent of the gods' desires, and knowable—but not easily discovered.

Euthyphro suggests that piety is punishing people who have done wrong, but Socrates argues that this example doesn't say anything more universal about piety that would apply to other situations. Even though his family believes otherwise, Euthyphro is convinced that he is acting piously by prosecuting his father, because the gods have done similar things. Euthyphro argues that Zeus bound his father Cronus for swallowing his children, and Cronus also castrated his own father Uranus for "similar reasons." Socrates argues that this merely offers an example of a pious action. He's not looking for an example, but a universal definition of piety that will let him pick out all pious actions, no matter what the scenario. In response, Euthyphro suggests that piety is what matters to the gods, and impiety is what does not. However, Socrates argues that the gods often disagree, so an action that pleases one god but irks another isn't definitively pious. Since the gods don't always agree, it's quite likely that Euthyphro's decision to prosecute his father can be both pious (because Zeus is pleased) and impious (because Cronus and Uranus are displeased) at the same time. It won't do for something to be pious to one god (or person) but not to another because Socrates is looking for the unchanging essence of piety.

Euthyphro then suggests that piety isn't just what some gods value, but what "all the gods love." So, impiety is what is "all the gods hate." Socrates argues that this still fails to show what piety is because knowing *that* something is loved by the gods doesn't explain *what* that thing is. Instead, he convinces Euthyphro that being "god-loved" is merely something all pious things have in common. Socrates poses a dilemma: is something pious because the gods love it, or do the gods love it because it is pious? He argues it seems strange to say that the act of loving something "changes" it into something pious, even if that love is emanating from a god. A similar dilemma might be something like: is something beautiful because a person finds it attractive, or does the person find it attractive because it's beautiful? Socrates thinks it seems strange to say that finding something attractive changes it from something ugly into something beautiful. Similarly, he thinks it's odd to say that something

becomes pious just because it is loved. So it must be the case, Socrates argues, that the gods love something because it already is pious. In other words, the gods detect piety in that thing, and that's why they love it. Socrates therefore contends that Euthyphro is confusing "an affect or quality" of pious things with the thing that elicits the response of being "god-loved." In characterizing the feelings of the gods as mere responses to piety, Socrates is claiming that the nature of piety is constant and true, independent of any being's feelings about it.

Euthyphro's fourth and fifth definitions hinge on notions of caring for, or servicing, the gods. Socrates argues that both of these ideas require knowledge that is inaccessible to humans, namely knowledge of the gods' intentions and desires. What he seeks, in contrast, is a definition of piety that is knowable. Socrates and Euthyphro agree that since humans are not in control of the gods, "caring" for the gods is not the same as "caring" for animals, or plants, or things that humans are in control of. Euthyphro suggests that caring for the gods is more like the kind of care slaves have for their masters. Socrates contends that slaves are able provide this sort of "care" by servicing their masters' specific aims (such as winning wars, or growing crops). So Euthyphro suggests that the gods' aims or desires are met by praying and offering sacrifices. He offers these actions as his fifth definition of piety. Socrates argues that praying is really more like begging the gods, but sacrifices are gifts offered to the gods. But this is hardly a fair trade, as humans don't know what gifts the gods want. Euthyphro becomes frustrated because he cannot claim to know what ineffable things the gods need or desire. Once again, Socrates distances his idea of piety from the desires of the gods since these are unknowable.

In peppering Euthyphro with questions about the nature of piety, Socrates—and, by extension, Plato—steers the reader away from a definition that relies on the changeable and ineffable desires of the gods (or on anybody else's, for that matter), and towards one that is universal, unchanging, and discoverable through meticulous rational inquiry. This view of piety aligns with Plato's theory of forms, which is more fully realized in later dialogues such as [Phaedo](#) and the [Republic](#).



### WISDOM, ACTION, AND JUSTIFICATION

In Plato's *Euthyphro*, the title character Euthyphro explains that he is prosecuting his own father for murdering a slave that murdered another slave in a drunken rage. Euthyphro's father bound the murderous slave and left him in a ditch whilst waiting for official advice on what to do with the slave. In the meantime, the slave died from hunger, exposure, and his bonds. Euthyphro is pressing charges because he believes his father acted impiously in virtue of causing the slave's death. Socrates, meanwhile, is at the magistrates' court because Meletus is charging him with impiety for corrupting youths with ideas that are irreverent

towards the gods. Despite all these declarations of impiety, Plato—by way of Socrates—implies that one's actions aren't justified as "pious" unless they have a philosophical understanding of piety.

Socrates asks Euthyphro for a definition of piety under the tongue-in-cheek guise of needing one to defend himself in his own case against Meletus, who rests his charge against Socrates on some notion of irreverence against the gods' wishes. Euthyphro, too, associates piety with the gods' wishes, but he is unable to satisfy Socrates with a concrete definition that fleshes out what this exactly means. When Euthyphro tries to associate piety with whatever the gods "love" or "desire," or what "pleases all the gods," Socrates pushes him to say exactly what such a thing could be. But every time Euthyphro tries to offer tangible examples, he runs into problems. When Euthyphro says the gods would approve of prosecuting one's father because some gods have done "similar things," Socrates argues that other gods might disapprove—this means Euthyphro can't say for sure that "all the gods definitely believe this action to be right." When Euthyphro suggests that offering sacrifices to the gods, or acting with "honor" and "reverence" to the gods services godly needs, Socrates argues that humans can't be sure what the gods aim to do, and what, therefore they need to accomplish such aims. Euthyphro agrees that it "is a considerable task to acquire any precise knowledge of these things." Both prosecutors associate piety with the gods' desires or wishes, but the dialogue shows that it's difficult to know exactly what these are—without this wisdom, it is impossible to justify what exactly defines a pious or impious action.

Socrates believes the overall problem with associating piety with something that the gods love rests in the fact that godly wishes or desires are not something humans can possibly know. Socrates raises this point with characteristic irony: "If you had no clear knowledge of piety and impiety you would never have ventured to prosecute your old father for murder on behalf of a servant. For fear of the gods you would have been afraid to take the risk lest you should not be acting rightly, and would have been ashamed before men but now I know well that you believe you have clear knowledge of piety and impiety. So tell me, my good Euthyphro, and do not hide what you think it is." With this, Socrates begins to flesh out the idea that one can't act piously if they do not have the knowledge of what, exactly, piety is.

The dialogue suggests that a charge of impiety is justified if the prosecutor knows, exactly, what piety is. Based on Euthyphro's several failed attempts at defining piety in a way that satisfies Socrates, it's clear that he doesn't understand piety on a more fundamental level. Euthyphro simply feels he is being pious. He may, in fact, be acting piously, but without the ability to offer an explanation of what piety is, he cannot prove it. Since none of Euthyphro's attempts to associate piety with the gods and their aims, wishes, or desires have escaped scrutiny, Plato is implying

that Euthyphro's charge against his father is not justified, and neither—by extension—is Meletus' charge against Socrates. In other words, an action cannot be pious unless the person committing the action can articulate "clear knowledge of piety and impiety." More broadly, Plato implies that any action (for example, acting "lovingly" or "virtuously") cannot be justified without wisdom of the concept (such as "love" or "virtue") that the action relies on.



## THE SOCRATIC METHOD

In Plato's *Euthyphro*, Socrates attempts to elicit a definition for piety out of Euthyphro, whom he bumps into on the steps of the courthouse. This is not merely an exercise in intellect, for both men will be addressing charges of impiety in their respective cases. In characteristic form, the dialogue proceeds with Socrates posing as the student, who seeks to be educated by Euthyphro, a presumed expert on such matters. Of course, what really transpires through their exchange is that Euthyphro is schooled by Socrates. Socrates is teaching by asking questions that subtly lead Euthyphro through a path of reasoning that will eventually educate Euthyphro about the nature of piety, and not the other way around. The dialogue thus illustrates the "Socratic method" for the reader. Since Euthyphro abruptly ends the conversation and Socrates is left without a satisfactory answer, Plato is implicitly encouraging the reader to can pick up where Euthyphro leaves off and pursue the question in similar fashion. Plato's implication is that learning comes from a place of curiosity and questioning (or, philosophical wonder). Similarly, teaching is not about telling students the answers, but directing curiosity toward reasoned inquiry.

Every time Socrates asks Euthyphro a question, he is in fact teaching Euthyphro what was problematic about Euthyphro's previous answer, and guiding Euthyphro's reasoning toward his own idea of what piety must be. When Euthyphro offers a definition of piety, Socrates asks questions that expose contradictions in Euthyphro's claims. For example, Euthyphro suggests that piety is what the gods love, but Socrates argues that the gods often disagree, so what is loved by one god might be hated by another. Socrates pushes Euthyphro for more answers that avoid such contradictions. For example, after admitting that the gods might disagree, Euthyphro modifies his claim to suggest that piety is only what all the gods love. Socrates leads Euthyphro through a path of reasoning that is constructed by Euthyphro's attempts to self-correct the errors in his previous answers. By answering Socrates's questions, Euthyphro has argued himself away from his own intuitions about piety: that it has something to do with reverence towards the gods wishes, which can change, might not be consistent across cases, and might not even be knowable. Because of Socrates's clever teaching method, Euthyphro inadvertently

argues himself towards acknowledging that piety must be universal, unchanging, and knowable, which is what Socrates intentionally leads him to think.

The dialogue ultimately ends without an answer about the nature of piety that satisfies Socrates. But this conclusion does not imply that Socrates has failed. Rather, it illustrates what kind of teaching and learning Plato thinks will lead to the answer. Plato is not implying that the question “what is piety?” can’t be answered. In fact, Socrates’s reasoning has moved the conversation closer to an answer, without completing the inquiry. Socrates’s questions are intended to furnish the reader with two things. First, curiosity about the nature of piety. Second, a method for testing potential ideas the reader might come up with. By engaging the reader in Socrates’s unfinished debate with Euthyphro, Plato aims to leave the reader in a state of philosophical wonder about the nature of piety. Plato, as teacher, remains true to this method in the content of the dialogue. He does not offer the reader—or learner—an answer to the question “what is piety?” but a method for reasoned inquiry that will perhaps attain an answer. Plato thus illustrates that teaching isn’t about telling students the answers, but prompting them to wonder, and guiding their wonder to fruition through Socratic inquiry.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### DAEDALUS



Socrates invokes his ancestor Daedalus as a metaphor for Euthyphro’s suggested definitions of the nature of piety. Daedalus who was known for enabling his statues to move. Socrates implies that, like Daedalus’s statues, Euthyphro’s definitions won’t stand “still” for rational scrutiny. Socrates means that Euthyphro’s definitions are slippery, or circular in their logic, and metaphorically move around the argument, collapsing into each other without saying anything concrete or substantive. Euthyphro retorts that Socrates’s reasoning reminds him of Daedalus, but here the implication is that Socrates’ questioning has spun Euthyphro around in a circle, meaning it has confused him. Socrates picks up on this line, responding with witty irony that he has, in fact, embodied Daedalus’s moving statues, since what “moves” are not only ideas that he has created, but other people’s beliefs and ideas, which are evolved by his reasoning.

## Euthyphro Quotes

☞ EUTHYPHRO: [...] He seems to me to start out by harming the very heart of the city by attempting to wrong you. Tell me, what does he say you do to corrupt the young?

SOCRATES: Strange things, to hear him tell it, for he says that I am a maker of gods, and on the ground that I create new gods while not believing in the old gods, he has indicted me for their sake, as he puts it.

**Related Characters:** Socrates, Euthyphro (speaker), Meletus

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 3

### Explanation and Analysis

This exchange, offered at the outset of the dialogue, explicitly states why Socrates is at the courthouse, and sets the stage for the topic of discussion in the dialogue. Meletus is charging Socrates with spreading irreverent ideas about the gods to the young and impressionable youths of Athens. The indictment communicates (to the reader) the accepted social conventions about piety in Athenian society that Plato will question. Namely, the assumption that acting piously has something to do with the gods. Euthyphro’s claims about piety also center on this notion, but this idea is systematically dismantled as inadequate by Socrates as the dialogue progresses. Euthyphro’s sympathy with Socrates’s predicament implies that the indictment may not be justified, and prompts the reader to wonder if Socrates is being treated fairly. Thus, the question of morality and pious versus impious behavior is raised early on in the readers’ mind. Since Socrates’s only crime was engaging in free thought and conversation, the reader must decide whether or not this case really constitutes impious behavior. Defining what exactly piety is, then, is essential to making sense of Socrates’s charges and serves as the foundational task for the dialogue.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Hackett edition of *Plato: Five Dialogues* published in 2002.

●● EUTHYPHRO: [...] The victim was a dependent of mine, and when we were farming in Naxos he was a servant of ours. He killed one of our household slaves in drunken anger, so my father bound him hand and foot and threw him in a ditch, then sent a man here to inquire from the priest what should be done. During that time he gave no thought or care to the bound man, as being a killer, and it was no matter if he died, which he did. Hunger and cold and his bonds caused his death before the messenger came back from the seer. Both my father and my other relatives are angry that I am prosecuting my father for murder on behalf of a murderer when he hadn't even killed him, they say, and even if he had, the dead man does not deserve a thought, since he was a killer. For, they say, it is impious for a son to prosecute his father for murder. But their ideas of the divine attitude to piety and impiety are wrong, Socrates.

**Related Characters:** Euthyphro (speaker), Socrates

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 5

### Explanation and Analysis

Early in the dialogue, Euthyphro explains why he is charging his own father with murder, and the reader learns that Euthyphro's indictment is (like Meletus's indictment) also related to the concept of piety. The quote functions in three important ways. First, the situation that Euthyphro vividly describes is designed to peak the reader's curiosity and draw them into wondering about who is right and wrong in this case. For Plato, curiosity is an essential part of philosophical reasoning. This passage thus primes the reader to enter the correct frame of mind for the inquiry that follows. Second, Plato introduces a second situation for the reader to consider when thinking about the nature of piety. This foreshadows Socrates's focus on seeking a universal (rather than situation-dependent) definition of piety. Third, it indicates that both prevailing attitudes about piety *and* the justification of actions based on such attitudes are under scrutiny.

●● SOCRATES: [...] So tell me now, by Zeus, what you just now maintained you clearly knew: what kind of thing do you say that godliness and ungodliness are, both as regards murder and other things; or is the pious not the same and alike in every action, and the impious the opposite of all that is pious and like itself, and everything that is to be impious presents us with one form or appearance insofar as it is impious?

EUTHYPHRO: Most certainly, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Tell me then, what is the pious, and what the impious, do you say?

**Related Characters:** Euthyphro, Socrates (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 6

### Explanation and Analysis

Socrates and Euthyphro have finished explaining why each of them has business at the courthouse, and Euthyphro has just agreed to share his views about piety with Socrates. Socrates now raises the central question that the dialogue will focus on. In this passage, Plato establishes in clear and explicit terms the dialogue's main topic of inquiry: the nature of piety. Socrates's framing of the question is important as it is clear he is after a universal definition of piety, meaning one "form" (or claim about what piety is) that will apply across all situations in which piety might come up. His method of questioning Euthyphro is important, as it exemplifies the Socratic style of inquiry that Plato portrays in several of his philosophical works. In probing Euthyphro to come up with his own definition by leading him through logical questions, Socrates will essentially act as a teacher whose goal is for his student to formulate his own wisdom, rather than merely feeding Euthyphro an answer that is devoid of any true, fundamental understanding of piety.

●● EUTHYPHRO: I say that the pious is to do what I am doing now, to prosecute the wrongdoer, be it about murder or temple robbery or anything else, whether the wrongdoer is your father or your mother or anyone else; not to prosecute is impious. And observe, Socrates, that I can cite powerful evidence that the law is so. I have already said to others that such actions are right, not to favor the ungodly, whoever they are. These people themselves believe that Zeus is the best and he unjustly swallowed his sons, and that he in turn castrated his father for similar reasons.

**Related Characters:** Euthyphro (speaker), Socrates

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 5

### Explanation and Analysis

Right after Socrates has posed the question about piety that frames the dialogue as an inquiry into the nature of piety, Euthyphro swiftly offers his first definition. Euthyphro suggests that piety is prosecuting wrongdoers (which is exactly what he is doing by raising charges against his father), and impiety is failing to do so. To defend his first definition, Euthyphro draws on similarities between his indictment of his father and two stories about gods who also punished their fathers for acting unjustly. Euthyphro's explanation is indicative of his strategy throughout the dialogue. He consistently leans on the presumed actions, wishes, or desires of the gods to justify his definitions. Meletus too, is relying on some notion of hubris against the gods to ground his claim that Socrates has acted impiously by spreading ideas about philosophical curiosity and logical reasoning. This contrasts directly with Socrates's inquisitive method throughout the dialogue, as his aim is to use a logical process of critical questioning that will lead to a *universal* definition of piety, rather than a subjective one. Euthyphro's association of piety with some or other activities of the gods (and Meletus's too, by association) is the central notion that Socrates will systematically dismantle as the dialogue progresses.

☞☞ SOCRATES: Bear in mind then that I did not bid you tell me one or two of the many pious actions but that form itself that makes all pious actions pious, for you agreed that all impious actions are impious and all pious actions pious through one form, or don't you remember?

EUTHYPHRO: I do.



SOCRATES: Tell me then what this form itself is, so that I may look upon it and, using it as a model, say that any action of yours or another's that is of that kind is pious, and if it is not that it is not.

EUTHYPHRO: If that is how you want it, Socrates, that is how I will tell you.

SOCRATES: That is what I want.

EUTHYPHRO: Well then, what is dear to the gods is pious, what is not is impious.

**Related Characters:** Euthyphro (speaker), Socrates

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 6-7

### Explanation and Analysis

Just after Euthyphro has offered his first definition of piety (namely, prosecuting wrongdoers), Socrates swiftly rejects the idea, on grounds that that Euthyphro has merely described one example of piety, but it's clear that there are many other types of behaviors that might also be count as pious. This passage is important because it indicates that Socrates thinks the nature of piety is universal. This means he is after one definition that will that will help someone clearly distinguish all cases of pious behavior from all cases of impious behavior. This is an early example of the Socratic method at work. Socrates takes Euthyphro's suggestion as a starting point, explains why there is a problem in the reasoning, reframes the question to narrow in on kind of definition he seeks, and prompts Euthyphro to offer a second, refined definition. Thus, Euthyphro is offering definitions as if he were the one educating Socrates with his knowledge. But Socrates is in fact the one educating Euthyphro by using questions that push him to reason more carefully through his claims. Socrates's use of the term "form" here is also important, as Plato develops this idea in later dialogues into a theory about abstract, pure, and true versions of concepts that underscore reality, again hearkening back to the idea of universal definitions.

☞☞ SOCRATES: But you say that the same things are considered just by some gods and unjust by others, and as they dispute about these things they are at odds and at war with each other. Is that not so?

EUTHYPHRO: It is.

SOCRATES: The same things then are loved by the gods and hated by the gods, and would be both god-loved and god-hated.

EUTHYPHRO: It seems likely.

SOCRATES: And the same things would be both pious and impious, according to this argument?

EUTHYPHRO: I'm afraid so.

SOCRATES: So you did not answer my question, you surprising man.

I did not ask you what same thing is both pious and impious, and it appears that what is loved by the gods is also hated by them.

**Related Characters:** Socrates, Euthyphro (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 7-8



### Explanation and Analysis

As soon as Euthyphro offers his second definition of piety (namely, what is loved by the gods), Socrates takes it as his starting point for analytical scrutiny. Here, the Socratic method really starts to unfold. Socrates takes Euthyphro's idea and runs through the logical implications of the claim that is offered, in order to show that it results in a self-contradiction. Here, Socrates shows Euthyphro that the gods often disagree, and if that's the case, then the same thing can be both pious (based on what one god thinks) and impious (based on what another god thinks) at the same time, which doesn't line up with the idea that piety and impiety are opposites (something both characters have already agreed upon).

Socrates's comments begin to expose a central criticism he has of associating piety with the gods: the gods are inconsistent. This means that piety could mean something one day, and another thing the next. Or, piety could mean one thing to one god, and another thing to another god. This is problematic for two reasons: one logical, and one practical. On logical terms, the definition could never function in a stable way to tell the difference between pious and impious behavior in all situations. In practical terms, the concept would be unstable in something like a court of law where a universal definition is necessary to enact justice. Socrates is exposing that on such a subjective reading of piety as Euthyphro's, almost anything could count as impious—depending on which god the definition is being based upon, and how that god is feeling that day. This also means that one person could be considered both guilty and innocent at the same time for the same action, which is logically inconsistent.

●● SOCRATES: [...] Consider this: Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?

**Related Characters:** Socrates (speaker), Euthyphro

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 10

### Explanation and Analysis

Just after Euthyphro poses his third definition of piety (as what all the gods love), Socrates raises the dilemma of whether the defining feature of something is detected in the thing itself, or if the feature is projected onto it by someone contemplating it. Another example of this type of dilemma might be something like: "Is beauty in the eye of the beholder?" Beauty might be something detected in things, but it might be something projected onto things by the person contemplating them (the beholder). Socrates doesn't mention beauty himself when he goes on to explain what he means, but rather appeals to cases like seeing versus being seen. The use of dilemmas is a hallmark feature of many of Plato's dialogues that showcase Socrates's unique method of inquiry. The dilemma is important in three ways. First, it is designed to shed light on the dialogue's central subject of inquiry (here, the nature of piety). Second, and perhaps more importantly, it is designed to say something about defining concepts in general. Specifically, that Socrates thinks it is important to distinguish between an action (like loving) and the thing acted upon (here, the thing that is love by the gods). Third, the dilemma is designed to engage the reader and prompt them to think about how they would respond to it. Engaging the reader is important for Plato, as his dialogues share a philosophical aim of making the reader curious enough to continue inquiring on their own, using the Socratic method. This is especially pertinent for the *Euthyphro* dialogue, since it ends without a satisfactory universal definition of piety.

●● SOCRATES: [...] I want to say this, namely, that if anything is being changed or is being affected in any way, it is not being changed because it is something changed, but rather it is some thing changed because it is being changed; nor is it being affected because it is something affected, but it is something affected because it is being affected.

**Related Characters:** Socrates (speaker), Euthyphro

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 10

### Explanation and Analysis


After posing and explaining the central dilemma of the dialogue—which asks if what makes something pious is the thing itself, or rather, the person perceiving it as pious—Socrates offers his answer. He thinks that what defines the nature of something is a function of the thing itself. He goes onto explain that the perception of




something (say, *as pious*) is merely a response to the quality (say, *of piousness*) detected in the thing itself. This claim is telling because it means that Socrates thinks the defining feature of something is independent of how any being (even a god) feels about it. That is, the gods love something because it is already pious, and not vice versa. This is an important claim when it comes to Socrates's trial, since he is implicitly arguing that merely feeling that something is impious (or thinking that the gods feel it is impious) isn't enough to say that it is definitively impious. Socrates's answer to the dilemma exposes his belief that Euthyphro and Meletus need to be able to explain what exactly about a particular behavior (such as spreading ideas, or letting a murderous slave die from neglect) makes it fall under the general label of "pious" or "impious" in order for their indictments to be defensible. In order to define what exactly piety is, they need a preexisting knowledge base of what, exactly, pious versus impious behavior look like.

☞ SOCRATES: It looks as if I was cleverer than Daedalus in using my skill, my friend, insofar as he could only cause to move the things he made himself, but I can make other people's things move as well as my own.

**Related Characters:** Socrates (speaker), Euthyphro

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 11



### Explanation and Analysis

This quote arises after Socrates has posed and answered the central dilemma of the dialogue, which asks whether the nature of something resides in the object or the perceiver of the object. Socrates invokes the metaphor of Daedalus (a sculptor famed for making his statues move) to indicate that Euthyphro's definitions thus far have been circular. Here, he makes a witty joke out of the metaphor, in suggesting he is in fact cleverer than Daedalus, because he can make other people's things (meaning ideas) move, as well as his own. Socrates's logic is metaphorically spinning circles around a confused Euthyphro. This joke exposes the central irony of the dialogue: Euthyphro is posing as the teacher who knows all about piety, but it is Socrates who is maneuvering Euthyphro's ideas closer toward his own definition of what piety must be. Socrates's humor here makes a more serious claim about the Socratic method. Namely, that it "moves" or

evolves people's reasoning.

☞ EUTHYPHRO: I think, Socrates, that the godly and pious is the part of the just that is concerned with the care of the gods, while that concerned with the care of men is the remaining part of justice.

**Related Characters:** Euthyphro (speaker), Socrates

**Related Themes:**  



**Page Number:** 12

### Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after Socrates and Euthyphro have discussed the metaphor of Daedalus, Euthyphro offers this fourth definition of piety as care of the gods. This definition marks a turning point in the text in two ways. Up to this point, Euthyphro has been making suggestions about piety that he refines on Socrates's nudging. Here, however, Socrates takes the lead in suggesting a possible path for reasoning toward the definition of piety. Socrates suggests piety might have something to do with justice, and prompts Euthyphro to suggest which part. The reader is thus exposed to another facet of the Socratic method. In Plato's dialogues, Socrates will often suggest a line of reasoning precisely for the purpose of showing what is problematic with it, essentially playing the role of devil's advocate. The philosophical payoff resides in knowing how, where, and why the path of reasoning went askew. But there is also a dramatic payoff here. In Euthyphro's formulation of this definition, and for the remainder of the dialogue, Socrates takes a more explicitly active role in driving the inquiry forward whilst Euthyphro struggles to keep up. This is the point in the dialogue at which it starts to dawn on Euthyphro that Socrates has been toying with him. In other words, Euthyphro starts to realize he is the one being taught, rather than the one doing the teaching.

☞ EUTHYPHRO: I told you a short while ago, Socrates, that it is a considerable task to acquire any precise knowledge of these things, but, to put it simply, I say that if a man knows how to say and do what is pleasing to the gods at prayer and sacrifice, those are pious actions such as preserve both private houses and public affairs of state. The opposite of these pleasing actions are impious and overturn and destroy everything.

**Related Characters:** Euthyphro (speaker), Socrates

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 14

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Euthyphro offers his fifth and final definition of piety as prayer and sacrifice, which—on Socrates’s probing—he quickly narrows to reframe as sacrifices, or gifts, for the gods, meaning whatever gifts are desired by the gods. The shift in Euthyphro’s tone is palpable here. He has realized he is out of his depth, and is irksome in his response, marking his embarrassment at being fooled by Socrates’s “ignorance.” The dialogue’s discussion about this fifth definition reveals another important thing about what Socrates believes about the nature of piety. Socrates thinks the definition of piety must be knowable. Thus, although Socrates doesn’t explicitly say what he thinks about the nature of piety, we have learned thus far that Socrates thinks the definition of piety is universal (as in, it applies to every case of piety), static (meaning it doesn’t change based on what one or another being thinks), and that it is not beyond the reach of human wisdom. This last claim explains why Socrates thinks definitions of piety that rely on some notion of the gods will never be precisely knowable, since humans can never have insight into the desires of the gods. To assume as much would amount to a sort of hubris.

☞ **SOCRATES:** If you had no clear knowledge of piety and impiety you would never have ventured to prosecute your old father for murder on behalf of a servant. For fear of the gods you would have been afraid to take the risk lest you should not be acting rightly, and would have been ashamed before men, but now I know well that you believe you have clear knowledge of piety and impiety. So tell me, my good Euthyphro, and do not hide what you think it is.

**EUTHYPHRO:** Some other time, Socrates, for I am in a hurry now, and it is time for me to go.

**SOCRATES:** What a thing to do, my friend!

**Related Characters:** Euthyphro, Socrates (speaker),

Meletus

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 15

### Explanation and Analysis

In the final section of the dialogue, after Socrates has shot down all of Euthyphro’s suggested definitions of piety and comically suggested they start all over again, Euthyphro abruptly ends the conversation. This passage functions in two important ways. First, it shifts the burden of inquiry after the nature of piety away from Euthyphro and towards the reader. Since the dialogue concludes without a satisfactory answer for the nature of piety, the reader is prompted to keep on thinking, using the same method of inquiry that has been illustrated in Socrates’s treatment of Euthyphro’s five failed definitions.

Second, Plato’s use of irony (in Socrates’s claim that surely Euthyphro is holding out on Socrates, for he wouldn’t dare go to court without a clear understanding of piety) indicates that Euthyphro doesn’t have wisdom—meaning a full understanding—of the concept of piety. Therefore, he isn’t justified in acting on whatever notion he has. This indicates that Plato thinks action on behalf of a concept is not justified without a full understanding of the concept. This is something that Euthyphro lacks, since his definitions for piety have all relied on the gods in some way. Meletus also invokes the gods in his indictment against Socrates, so presumably the same fault applies to him, as well. Plato ends the dialogue on this note to remind the reader of the dialogue’s subtext. Socrates is being indicted for hubris against the gods, but it is, in fact, Euthyphro—and, by extension, Meletus—who risks hubris. This is because anyone who thinks the piousness of an action depends on some notion of the gods dares to presume that they know what the gods know. Thus, the payoff of the dialogue is twofold. First, the reader learns that Socrates is after a definition of piety that is universal, static, and knowable, and this is what the dialogue has prompted the reader to continue looking for. Second, the dialogue establishes the conclusion that any indictment of impiety that relies on the gods is problematic, since the indictment itself could be considered impious on similar grounds.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## EUTHYPHRO

Euthyphro bumps into Socrates on the steps of the magistrates' court. Euthyphro expresses surprise at encountering Socrates, as Socrates is not the type of person who would be likely to press charges against another. Socrates explains that he is in fact the person being charged, by a young newcomer named Meletus. Socrates explains that Meletus is indicting him for impious behavior, alleging that he has corrupted the youths of Athens by spreading ideas that are irreverent towards the gods. Euthyphro responds in surprise that Meletus is "harming the very heart of the city" with such a charge. Socrates agrees that he intends to corrupt nobody, and his only crime is talking with people who will listen.

Euthyphro explains that he is prosecuting his father for impious behavior, namely murder. Euthyphro explains that the slave in question killed another slave in a drunken rage on the family's farm in Naxos. Euthyphro's father bound the slave and threw him in a ditch, sending a servant to seek advice from the authorities about what to do with this slave. In the meantime, the slave died from hunger and his bonds. Euthyphro acknowledges that this case is unusual because he is not addressing the death of a family member, but the death of a slave by a member of his own family. Normally, it is considered impious to prosecute a member of one's own family, but Euthyphro is convinced his actions are the pious thing to do.

Socrates feigns ignorance of such matters and suggests that Euthyphro must know what he is talking about if he is so bold as to prosecute his own father. Socrates proposes that Euthyphro educate him on the nature of piety, so that he will be able to use Euthyphro's wisdom in his own court case. Euthyphro boasts that he can counsel Socrates on the nature of piety to such an extent that Meletus would be the one ending up on trial.

*The opening passage sets up the premise of the dialogue. Socrates's explanation that he is facing a charge of impiety for irreverence towards the gods indicates the socially accepted view of piety as something concerned with the gods. Euthyphro's expression of surprise and sympathy with Socrates encourages the reader to engage similarly with Socrates's plight of being charged with a crime for the mere act of talking freely. In doing calling the morality of Socrates's free speech into question, Plato implicitly raises the question of whether acting piously really means conforming to what the gods deem is proper, or if there is a more universal definition for piety.*



*Euthyphro's explanation of his legal case not only establishes Euthyphro's concern with the concept of piety, it also raises vivid thought experiment designed to pique the reader's curiosity and engagement with the dialogue. The situation concerning Euthyphro's father and the two dead slaves is a moral conundrum: the modern reader is likely to oppose slavery in and of itself, and Euthyphro's father was overly negligent, but the murderous slave was also in the wrong. This dilemma helps to convey the moral grey area of pious versus impious actions that Socrates hopes to help Euthyphro (and, thus, the reader) clarify through the dialogue. Having positioned both Socrates and Euthyphro as people who are concerned with the nature of piety, Plato is now drawing the reader into the inquiry as well—a strategy that is central to the Socratic method of inquiry in which all participants in the philosophical thought experiment play an active role.*



*This passage sets up the dynamic of the Socratic method, in which Socrates will pose as the student (who will ask probing questions), and Euthyphro will pose as the local expert (who will communicate conventional views about piety). The reader can infer that Socrates, not Euthyphro, is the wise one in this situation, since he is only flattering Euthyphro by feigning ignorance. Socrates's prompting of Euthyphro suggests that there is a core, universal nature of piety to be uncovered, but that this definition is not self-evident or easy to understand. One must be knowledgeable and wise to justify a clear distinction between pious and impious behavior.*



Socrates asks Euthyphro to explain the nature of piety and impiety, assuming that they are opposites, and that the same thing that makes one thing pious will make another thing pious.

*It is clear from the way Socrates frames his question that he is looking for a universal definition of piety, as opposed to one that is logically inconsistent or dependent on certain scenarios.*



Euthyphro offers his first definition of piety, using his own actions as an example. He argues that acting piously is prosecuting wrongdoers, whilst failing to prosecute wrongdoers is impious. Euthyphro defends this claim by appealing to the actions of the gods, citing examples of Zeus binding his own father for unjustly swallowing his sons. Similarly, argues Euthyphro, Zeus' father castrated his own father for "similar reasons." Socrates flatters Euthyphro's ego, suggesting that Euthyphro of all people knows about matters pertaining to gods, but contends that Euthyphro has merely given him an example of pious behavior, and not a definition of piety that will apply to all cases. Socrates asks Euthyphro to tell him what distinguishes all pious actions from all impious actions.

*Euthyphro's explanation of piety reinforces to the reader his belief in a concept of piety that emulates the gods. This, however, is insufficient for Socrates since it does not provide a logically sound explanation of why piety is important—only that it should be arbitrarily emulated. The method of Socratic inquiry starts to unfold as Socrates points out the inconsistencies in Euthyphro's definition, and directs Euthyphro's attention (and, by extension, the reader's) away from listing specific examples, and towards articulating a universal definition of piety.*



Euthyphro offers his second definition of piety, suggesting that what is "dear to the gods" is pious, and what is not dear to them is impious. Socrates contends that this won't work since many gods disagree with each other. Socrates continues that if some Gods consider Euthyphro's actions pious, and others consider his actions impious then surely Euthyphro is claiming that the same thing is both pious and impious at the same time.

*Euthyphro's second definition again betrays his reliance on the gods when making sense of piety. Socrates's questions direct Euthyphro (and, once again, the reader) toward a definition that is not only universal, but also unchanging (unlike the feelings of the gods). In doing so, he urges both Euthyphro and the reader to use logic to formulate their own definition, rather than relying on Socrates to give them an easy answer.*



Feigning dull-wittedness, Socrates suggests that perhaps it might be that all the gods think Euthyphro's actions pious. Euthyphro jumps on this suggestion, and offers his third definition of piety, namely that what all the gods love is pious, and what all the gods hate is impious. Pleased with himself, Euthyphro calls this definition a "fine statement." Socrates cautions that they ought to examine the statement to see if it is actually "sound," or merely sounds good.

*This passage informs the reader more explicitly that Socrates is in fact, taking on the role of the teacher in the conversation. Socrates's flattery and Euthyphro's vanity also expose to the reader that Euthyphro has not caught on to this yet when he articulates his third definition of piety as what all the gods love. The reader can infer that Euthyphro assumes Socrates has the answer and it is his job to guess correctly. However, under Socrates's unique method of inquiry, he is more interested in Euthyphro acting as his own teacher and thereby reaching his own conclusion.*



Socrates poses the central dilemma of the dialogue. He asks Euthyphro to explain to him if the pious is being loved by the gods because it is pious, or rather, do the gods love it because it is pious? Euthyphro is already confused, so Socrates illustrates with some examples, suggesting “loving” is not the same as the thing “being loved.” Socrates suggests that surely the gods love certain things because they are already pious (and not vice versa). Euthyphro agrees, falling into Socrates’s trap. Socrates concludes that Euthyphro has only explained something that happens to pious things and not what makes them pious in the first place.

Socrates suggests that Euthyphro is acting like **Daedalus** (who could make his statues move) because Euthyphro is offering claims that merely move around the concept of piety. Euthyphro retorts—unwittingly—that Socrates is the one who is running circles around him with his logic. Socrates agrees, with irony, that he is in fact doing more, by moving other people’s thoughts and ideas in addition to the ones he creates himself. And, as if on cue, Socrates suggests that they could simplify their discussion by relating piety to justice. Euthyphro cautiously agrees. Socrates asks Euthyphro which part of justice, exactly, piety is.

Euthyphro once again appeals to the gods, by saying piety is the part of justice that is concerned with care for the gods in this fourth definition. Socrates easily illustrates that “care” is a confused concept. Surely, he suggests, it’s hubris to suggest that humans care for the gods in the same way that farmers care for their animals. Fearful of such an arrogant claim, Euthyphro immediately contends that the gods are superior to humans in his analogy, and he means something more like the kind of care that slaves provide for their masters. Socrates argues that surely slaves are able to provide such care because they are clearly informed about their masters aims, which their labor services. Socrates suggests, with tongue in cheek humor, that surely a man as wise on matters of the gods as Euthyphro can provide some details about what, exactly, the gods aims are.

*The central dilemma of the dialogue as posed by Socrates is designed to explicitly draw the reader in, allowing them to become actively participate alongside Euthyphro. The dilemma establishes Socrates’s view that the feelings of the gods are merely responses to piety, rather than a solid definition of the concept. The true nature of piety, then, is unrelated to any being’s subjective feelings about what is pious and what is impious.*



*The use of the Daedalus metaphor establishes clearly to the reader that Euthyphro is confused, and Socrates is the one running circles around him. It also indicates that Socrates will not accept a definition for piety that simply circles around the gods’ feelings, wishes, or desires whilst obscuring what, exactly, makes them feel, wish, or desire as such. The Daedalus metaphor thus invokes the idea that the concept of piety must be knowable: it is something that can be pinned down and recognized.*



*Socrates’s dissection of Euthyphro’s fourth definition is a clear example of the kind of reasoned inquiry that Plato thinks will uncover the definition of piety. This passage exposes to the reader how easy it can be to slip into hubris against the gods. It exposes why a fear of irreverence might cause conventional views about piety to be insufficiently examined, and therefore, perhaps unjustified. It also reminds the reader that this sort of conversation, of collaboratively thinking clearly through concepts, is what caused Socrates to face charges in the first place. Plato thus invites skepticism from the reader about the charge of impiety that Socrates faces.*



Euthyphro starts to grow frustrated, claiming that this is a complicated question but it suffices to say that knowing how to please the gods is pious. Socrates suggests perhaps Euthyphro might mean things like praying and offering sacrifices to the gods. Euthyphro quickly agrees. Socrates qualifies Euthyphro's claim, suggesting that praying is more like asking from the gods. Euthyphro retorts, with growing frustration, that he means actions like honor and reverence, which are analogous to gifts or services to the gods. Socrates asks Euthyphro to explain how he knows these gifts service the gods' aims. Euthyphro responds that if these actions are anything, they are dear to the gods, or loved by the gods. Invoking the metaphor of **Daedalus** again, Socrates contends that Euthyphro's suggestions are indeed circular, as they keep "moving around" to land back on this notion of whatever is loved by the gods, which they had already dismissed as inadequate.

Socrates suggests they start all over again to get to the bottom of this matter once and for all, for surely Euthyphro wouldn't take a risk like prosecuting his father unless he really had a clear concept of piety. Socrates comically implores Euthyphro to let him in on his secret. Euthyphro, knowing that he has nothing more substantive to offer than what he has already said, pretends to suddenly be in a hurry, and leaves Socrates with an unsatisfying "some other time."

Socrates exclaims with irony that if only Euthyphro had shared his "wisdom," Socrates might be able to use this wisdom to escape Meletus' indictment by showing that with this new "wisdom" he would no longer be "careless and inventive about such things."

*Euthyphro's frustration indicates to the reader that his "expertise" about piety is not on solid ground, which is why Socrates draws again on the metaphor of Daedalus to remind the reader that Euthyphro is circling once again back to a baseless claim about the gods. In doing so, he points out the logical flaw in Euthyphro's pattern of thought and thus holds the reader to the same standard, in an attempt to lead both Euthyphro and the reader to think more critically about what a universal definition of a concept should look like. Plato's use of the Daedalus metaphor also reinforces Socrates's view that the definition of piety must be knowable, and that this is incompatible with a conception of piety that relies on the gods, since humans cannot presume to know what the gods desire.*



*Plato uses Euthyphro's sudden departure and Socrates's dissatisfaction to indicate that the nature of piety has not been uncovered, and to prompt the reader to take over the inquiring. The purpose of this dialogue, then, goes deeper than Euthyphro's understanding of pious versus impious behavior—rather, Plato's goal is to encourage the reader to engage in a Socratic inquiry of their own about the nature of piety. Only through this train of critical thought is it possible to formulate a universal definition, rather than one that is dependent upon subjective or unknowable opinions, like those of the gods. Plato's use of humor through Euthyphro's embarrassment reintroduces the idea that wisdom about the core nature of piety itself is required to make claims about pious and impious behavior, especially in a court of law.*



*Plato's use of irony indicates his view that actions cannot be justified as pious without wisdom: a full understanding of the nature of piety. This is what Euthyphro—and here, by extension, Meletus—clearly lacks.*





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