

# Euthyphro - A Structural Analysis

## 1. The *Idea*

*To hosion* (τὸ ὅσιον) is in any and every manifestation of respect towards authority. The main authorities are parents and gods. The term is often translated as “the holy”, although this arguably has other connotations.

## 2. The *Eidos*

The two specific aspects dramatized in this dialogue are respect through fear, as opposed to respect through appreciation.

## 3. The *Paradeigma*

The representative of respect through fear must be an authority on all the lore and superstitions surrounding fearful respect for authority. A *mantis* is just such an expert. He is neither a priest nor a prophet: a priest fills an official role in the state religion, while a prophet is someone through whom a god speaks. The representative of respect through appreciation is, as usual, the dialectician, who understands that the gods are beneficial and do what is right and proper.

## 4. The *Deigma*

Euthyphro may be a self-proclaimed *mantis*, but he deserves the title. He is not only conversant in Athenian religion far more than any other Athenian, but he takes it all seriously. He is the human counterpart to the Athenian court system, which is also required to take all Athenian religion seriously. Opposed to Euthyphro is Socrates, who questions Euthyphro's actions and beliefs, protesting that Euthyphro is disrespecting his father, and exposing the disresepctful transactional relationship between Athenians and their gods, at the very heart of the notion of purification in Athenian law.

## 5. The Conversation

Euthyphro and Socrates meet outside the *King's Stoa*, the office of the *archōn basileus*, the elected magistrate who still retains some of the authority and duties of earlier kings. Both are there to give preliminary depositions, Socrates defending in his trial for disrespect towards the gods, and Euthyphro prosecuting in a murder trial against his father.

Euthyphro is often laughed at for his extreme views, but in the field of superstition and cult, he actually reflects very accurately the position of the court of the *archōn basileus* whose verdicts are respected even by the Many. Central to Euthyphro's present case is the concept of *miasma*, pollution, which is believed to spread if the anger of the gods is not quelled through, essentially, bribery. Euthyphro is so sure of the law that he has no qualms about prosecuting his own father.

Socrates pretends to enlist the aid of Euthyphro in handling his own case. A cross-examination of Euthyphro's understanding of *to hosion* leads eventually to the conclusion that the gods are appeased only through a form of transactional negotiation. While this is true, it displeases Euthyphro to be faced by it.