

Plato's *Euthyphro*

ABSTRACT: This dialogue dramatizes a concept which is portrayed as held in one way or another by everyone: that the holy is respect. The character of Socrates accurately exemplifies this concept (he respects), while the character of Euthyphro exemplifies its misconception (he makes a disrespectful show of mercenary respect), with all that that entails: the show of respect is intended to placate the frightening gods of Athenian mythology who are considered easily offended both by certain injustices such as murder, and by the sort of disrespect of which the historical Socrates was accused. Euthyphro differs from the Many in that his knowledge of, and belief in, mythology is extreme; he is therefore to be seen as a personification of the *miasma*-court system itself which, like him, acts on its extreme beliefs.

This analysis of *Euthyphro* reveals the dialogue to be yet another Platonic dramatic representation of a *communis opinio* as it should be perceived and as it is misconceived.¹ It is immediately clear from the sophistic argumentation that Plato is not talking to us through one or other mouthpiece.² The characters need to be understood in their own right, since they are clear-cut and consistent, which makes them behave suspiciously like models rather than normal human beings. I should also state, before we begin, that the “Euthyphro Dilemma” is alien to any analysis of the dialogue *Euthyphro*, and is therefore beyond the scope of this paper.³

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1. For a detailed read-through of the dialogue, see episodes 31-70, uploaded March-November 2022, of my podcast, *The Plato Paradigm*. My published analyses of other Platonic dialogues are Ludlam (1991) on *Hippias Major*, Ludlam (2015) on *Politeia*, and Ludlam (2017) on the two *Hippias*, all reveal Platonic dialogues to be philosophical dramatizations of various aspects of concepts.
 2. Much scholarly literature on this dialogue, as on others, treats Socrates as a spokesman for Plato, in one version or other of Platonism, a point made admirably explicit by Benson (2013) 137n3: “Henceforth, I will not distinguish between what Socrates, i.e., the character in the so-called elenctic dialogues, thinks and what Plato thinks or wants his readers to think, although I am alive to the possibility that they diverge”.
 3. The “Euthyphro Dilemma” is not entirely devoid of interest, particularly for those concerned with monotheistic metaethics; see, e.g.: MacKinnon & Meynell (1972), MacBeath (1982), Harris (1984), Joyce (2002), Zangwill (2012), Walden (2015).

It is usual for scholars analysing this dialogue to begin with the obvious but dramatically pertinent fact that Euthyphro and Socrates meet outside the Stoa of the Archon Basileus (“Magistrate King”).⁴ It is rightly perceived that Euthyphro and Socrates, the only participants in the dialogue, are meant to be contrasted,⁵ particularly as contrasting approaches to a religious concept, be it holiness or piety, as may be exemplified by Heidel: “We have here piety, old style and new, placed in immediate juxtaposition for the sake of contrast”.⁶ Klonoski (1985) even extends the scope of contrast to the Archon Basileus, whom he treats as a third character: “Commentators on the *Euthyphro* have generally failed to see or to take full account of this apparent threefold contrast” (133). It is, however, precisely because there is supposed to be a stark contrast between Euthyphro and Socrates that we should explain from the outset the undeniable fact that the Archon Basileus supervises both their cases.

The Archon Basileus (“Magistrate King”) was the most senior of ten senior officials elected annually from the ten voting tribes of Athens (each tribe voted for one of these officials). There seem to have been, at or near the beginning of democracy in Athens, only three officials (these, in probable order of their introduction into the political structure, were the Basileus, the Polemarch, and the *Eponymos*) to whom were later added six other archons and a secretary, making ten senior officials in all. By the time of Plato, the nine archons presided over a variety of courts dealing with different transgressions. The Archon Basileus, as the name implies, had inherited certain royal powers from the kings of old, including

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4. This fact was treated too literally in antiquity, as if the dialogue presents a conversation which actually took place. The second century CE doxographer Diogenes Laertius (2.29) even reports an opinion that the dialogue portrays Socrates successfully persuading Euthyphro to drop his suit (presumably based on Euthyphro’s hasty departure at the end of the dialogue, as if the trial would have been held immediately after the deposition at the Stoa).
 5. Many contrasting features between the two characters are conveniently listed in Hoerber (1958), 98-99.
 6. Heidel (1900), 166.

responsibility for religious matters. All trials relating to the ancient concept of pollution (*miasma*) fell under his jurisdiction.⁷

The tribes annually elected six thousand jurors (*dikastai*) to be the pool from which a varying number, usually in the hundreds, of jurors would be allocated by lot to one trial or another, on the day of the trial, which would last no more than that day: the large quantity of jurors and the speed of the trial were deliberate measures to prevent bribery from affecting the verdict. When allocated to a trial presided over by the Archon Basileus, *dikastai* would effectively be deciding whether the accused was a source of *miasma*; if the accused were found guilty, another vote would decide which of two punishments proposed by the prosecution and the defence should be adopted (usually death, exile, or a fine), but even with the source of the *miasma* dealt with in one way or another, purification rituals would also be held, just to make sure.

There were two general types of *miasma*-trials - one dealing with an injustice offensive to the gods, the other with disrespect toward the gods - and they just so happen to be exemplified in this dialogue by the trials of Euthyphro and Socrates respectively.

Euthyphro's trial pertains to murder, and on Athenian homicide law we have a fair amount of information. By Plato's time, the task of the Archon Basileus was to decide, through preliminary hearings in his Stoa, which of three⁸ courts should deal with any particular homicide case, and he would at a later date preside over the trial to ensure correct procedure. The trials were all held in the open air due to the *miasma* surrounding the agent of

7. For a detailed account of pollution (*miasma*), see Parker (1996), although his book does not mention Socrates' trial.

8. Two other courts by Plato's time were no longer convened, unless only ceremonially: Phreatto (on a promontory near Piraeus) had been the location where the Archon Basileus and a number of *dikastai* would meet, for example, with exiled murderers wishing to return to Athens; Prytaneum (near the Acropolis) used to be where non-human lethal agents, such as an animal or an arrow, were tried. For a more detailed but still reasonably brief list and explanation of the five courts, see Sealey (1983) 277-287; Boegehold, et al. (1995) 43-50.

the killing. Cases were tried: on the Areopagus (the “Hill of Mars”, southwest of the agora), concerning the premeditated murder of Athenian citizens; at the Palladium, concerning attempted premeditated murder of Athenian citizens, the premeditated murder of non-citizens, and the manslaughter of citizens and non-citizens alike; and at the Delphinium, concerning lawful murder, e.g., of adulterers or thieves caught in the act. Homicide was only one of the types of injustice considered offensive to the gods, theft from temples being another, and there were other courts to deal with each type.

On trials of disrespect (*asebeia*) we have less information. Parker in his book on *miasma* explains this type of pollution as the perceived devaluation of the respect owed to the gods.⁹ There is little that may be said about the *realia* of Socrates' trial, other than that it would have been held in an open area, just like the homicide trials (because of the *miasma*), probably with 501 *dikastai*, and the Archon Basileus presiding.

Euthyphro is the only character in this dialogue to mention *miasma* explicitly, and that occurs only once (4c1), in the prelude to his account of the killings leading up to his trial. His apparent attitude to *miasma* there is logical. He observes that one should not eat with someone polluted, since the pollution is contagious, and he makes this the only reason why one should prosecute anyone associated with *miasma*. It has been doubted whether Euthyphro's prosecution could have successfully come to trial, on the understanding that only an Athenian citizen who was a relative of the victim could prosecute.¹⁰ There seems to be, however, no compelling evidence for such a restriction.¹¹ In any case, that the Archon

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9. See Parker (1996) Ch. 5 “Sacilege”, 144-190. I do not agree with this interpretation of disrespect, as will become clear later.
 10. See Boegehold, et al. (1995) 45 for literature on the restrictions on who could prosecute. Boegehold himself suggests that the murderer and Euthyphro may have been members of the same phratry.
 11. Panagiotou (1974) 428-431 discusses in detail Draco's homicide code, adduced in support of the view that only a relative of the victim could prosecute, and concludes that it fails to provide sufficient evidence for such a view.

Basileus allowed the trial to go ahead seems to me evident from various clues in the dialogue.¹²

The dialogue itself emphasizes that Euthyphro's prosecution is problematic rather than legally impossible: Euthyphro is disrespectfully prosecuting his father for a death which came about simply through following proper religious procedure, as becomes evident from Euthyphro's summary of the background to his prosecution at 4c3-d5. While Euthyphro and his father were farming in the Athenian colony on Naxos, Euthyphro's own indentured labourer became drunk and slit the throat of one of his father's household slaves. His father bound the hands and feet of the murderer and threw him into a ditch while he endeavoured to find out what to do with him by sending to the religious interpreter in Athens. It was days before word came back to Naxos from Athens, by which time the murderer had died of cold and starvation. It is because of this second death that Euthyphro is prosecuting his father for murder.

Socrates had earlier appeared to be shocked to learn that Euthyphro was prosecuting his father, and had suggested that the victim must have been a member of the family. While this suggestion is based on conventional wisdom, we may also consider the possibility that Socrates is already aware of Euthyphro's case and he knows exactly what to say in order to get the response he actually does get. Euthyphro's response, just before his account of the incident, was to declare that it did not matter who the victim was, but it did matter that one would suffer *miasma* equal to that of the murderer by sharing food with the murderer (4b10-c2). This was evidently the principle used by Euthyphro's father as well, when he isolated the

12. Euthyphro has just left the Stoa and he has evidently not been rejected out of hand by the Archon Basileus. We know that Euthyphro has just left the Stoa of the Archon Basileus because, at the end of the dialogue, he avoids further Socratic questioning by saying that he needs to go somewhere else (15e3-4). Meanwhile, Socrates has fancifully proposed a defence strategy he could present to the Archon Basileus (5a4-b8), suggesting that he has yet to make his deposition. I should stress that all of this calculation pertains not to historical events, but only to the drama.

murderer (binding him hand and foot in a ditch) while sending to Athens to find out - we may infer - whether anyone should prosecute on behalf of a mere slave, and if so, who. This question became moot when the murderer died, but Euthyphro's family now had to fear a new source of *miasma*, not from the death of the murderer, but from Euthyphro's prosecution of his father; it is in reaction to their objection that Euthyphro declares that it is precisely because of his father's *miasma* (in allegedly killing the murderer) that he needs to prosecute. So great is Euthyphro's confidence in his knowledge of divine matters, that he breezily dismisses his family's fears, claiming "they know badly how the divine thing is with regard to the holy and the unholy (*to hosion* and *to anosion*)" (e2-3).

What is it that Euthyphro knows that others do not know? As Euthyphro and Socrates both appear to accept repeatedly throughout the dialogue (e.g., 4a11-b3, 4e4-5a2, 6b1), Euthyphro is an expert on Athenian law and religion. So far as religion is concerned, Euthyphro has complete knowledge of Athenian mythology. Euthyphro is often dismissive of the Athenian Many, not least in their ignorance of mythology. When Socrates asks if he believes that the overthrow of Ouranos by Kronos, and of Kronos by Zeus actually happened, Euthyphro replies "And even more amazing things which the Many do not know" (6b5-6). Given that Socrates seems to be equally well-informed about Athenian mythology, it is Euthyphro's fanatical belief in it all which sets him apart from other Athenians. Socrates is at the opposite extreme, since he finds such stories about the gods hard to accept (a9). The Many acquire their information about the war between the gods, with its accompanying terrible hostilities and battles (b8), from poets, good painters, and Athena's embroidered dress in the Panathenaia (b9-c4), but Euthyphro somehow knows even more divine things which Socrates (and by extension, the Many) would be shocked to hear (c5-7).

Euthyphro not only has complete knowledge of Athenian religion, and complete belief in it, but he also applies this knowledge to matters in his personal life. He counters his family's charges of disrespect in prosecuting his father by adducing the overthrow myths, as if they are reasonable parallels to his own action - Kronos castrated his father, Ouranos, and

was bound and cast into Tartarus by his son, Zeus,¹³ and in a similar way, Euthyphro is prosecuting his father. His family clearly do not think much of this argument since they are still arguing with him. I suspect that Euthyphro also misapplies mythology in the public assembly which causes the Many to mock him as if he is mad (2b9-c2). They may think he takes mythology too seriously but they deem him harmless; Socrates suggests that he is not a threat to the polis because he shares his expertise too rarely to be a problem (c6-d6), although we are probably intended by Plato to understand that Euthyphro's long stay on Naxos would have been sufficient reason for his insignificance in Athens. Euthyphro for his part regards the Many as ignorant of the more amazing parts of Athenian mythology (5b5-6; cf. 4e9-5a2).

Euthyphro, then, differs from the Athenian Many in his superior knowledge of Athenian mythology, in the habitual application of his knowledge of Athenian mythology, and his blind belief that the mythology is true, but this does not mean that he is the complete opposite of the Many. They too know a moderate amount of mythology from the relatively accessible sources listed by Socrates (6b7-c4), and they also misapply¹⁴ this knowledge, whether they believe in it or not, when carrying out the functions of the lawcourts of the Archon Basileus whose purpose it is to remove *miasma* not only in cases of murder, temple thefts, and other injustices of this sort, but also in cases of disrespect toward the gods.

After the description of the trials at the beginning of the dialogue, the rest of the dialogue falls into two main sections. Formally, the first section refutes Euthyphro's attempt to define the holy as the god-loved, with much of the argument being in great part a demonstration of the various ways in which an accident, as opposed to the essence, of a thing may be expressed, and how this affects our understanding of the thing (e.g., as passive, as coming-to-be, and of course, without understanding the thing itself). Formally, the second section dismisses without refutation Euthyphro's attempt to define the holy as respect;

13. Euthyphro for some reason failed to identify a parallel between Zeus binding an unjust child-swallower, and his own father binding an unjust murderer.

14. As we shall see, the *miasma*-courts are based on a misconception of the holy.

Socrates thinks the holy should be explained yet again, once respect is found to be god-loved, just as the holy was found to be god-loved (a mere accident rather than the essence of the holy) in the first section. These arguments appear to be the main thrust of apparently philosophical arguments, but they distract attention away from important points made during the introductions to these sections.

The *miasma*-courts are concerned with *anosia*, unholy things, and they deal either with injustice as exemplified by Euthyphro's case in this dialogue, or with disrespect as exemplified by Socrates' case. Euthyphro and the Many, however, appear to treat both types of *miasma*-trials (on injustice or disrespect), as pertaining to injustice and disrespect at the same time. The two sections do not discuss this conflation directly, but Socrates introduces both sections with carefully crafted formulations touching on this point.

Socrates' first formulation is overshadowed by the subsequent question, "What is holiness?", but it clearly conforms with the way in which Euthyphro then explains holiness. This is the formulation:

5c9-d1 ... what sort of thing do you claim respect and disrespect to be, both concerning murder and concerning the other things?¹⁵

Respect and disrespect at first glance have nothing to do with those *miasma*-courts pertaining to justice since there are three courts dealing with homicide alone, and more courts dealing with other injustices offensive to the gods, and in addition to these there is at least one separate court dealing with disrespect (as in Socrates' case). Yet Socrates ties murder and temple thefts to respect and disrespect, as if all *miasma*-trials pertain to respect and disrespect. This induces Euthyphro to reply to Socrates' subsequent general question "What do you claim *to hosion* and *to anosion* to be?" (5d3-7) in the same generalizing way, but he uses his own murder case as an example, resulting in all *miasma*-trials appearing to pertain to justice and injustice (5d7-e2):

15. 5c9-d1 ποῖόν τι τὸ εὐσεβές φησ εἶναι, καὶ τὸ ἀσεβές καὶ περὶ φόνου καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων;

I say that *to hosion* is what I am doing now, to prosecute the one-doing-injustice whether about murders or about thefts from temples or transgressing some other thing of such things, whether he happens to be a father or a mother or anyone else; and not to prosecute is *anosion*.

According to Euthyphro, it is *hosion* to prosecute in *miasma*-trials of any kind. Euthyphro will go on to declare almost immediately that *to hosion* is what is pleasing to the gods (6e11-7a1). It follows that Euthyphro regards prosecuting in *miasma*-trials as pleasing to the gods. The logic seems to work as follows. All *miasma*-trials are conducted with a view to removing the *miasma* arising from offences against the gods. Since the *miasma* is removed by the end of the trials, the legal process evidently pleases the gods, indicating to Euthyphro and indeed the Many, that prosecuting anyone offending the gods is itself *hosion*. Euthyphro's further assertion that not to prosecute is *anosion* is also quite logical: the failure to fulfil one's obligation to prosecute is known to exacerbate the *miasma*, which is an indication that the gods are even more displeased, and what displeases the gods (or is caused by this displeasure, such as *miasma*) is *anosion*. Socrates' first formulation therefore perfectly reflects the understanding of the Many: the respect and disrespect he is referring to is not the content of *miasma*-trials pertaining to disrespect, but the respect and disrespect which motivate *miasma*-trials in general: *miasma* occurs because of an offence against the gods; it is assumed to be removed by showing respect to the gods through a respectful trial, or worsen if the gods are disrespected by a failure to prosecute.

The notion that justice pertains to both types of *miasma*-trial is picked up by Socrates in his much later second formulation:

12e1-4 "You, try to teach me which part of justice the holy¹⁶ is so that I may tell Meletus to do me injustice no longer, or write

16. There is no definite article before *hosion* in the text since here it is a predicate, and in Greek usage, the predicate does not usually receive the definite article.

a writ of disrespect against me,¹⁷ given that I have learned from you sufficiently the respectful things and holy things and the things not (i.e., the disrespectful and unholy things).¹⁸

Euthyphro has no problem with this formulation, and answers as if justice does indeed extend even to the *miasma*-trials concerning disrespect:

12e5-8 It seems to me then, Socrates, that this part of justice is (the) respectful and (the)¹⁹ holy, the (part) concerning the treatment (*therapeia*) of the gods, while the (part) concerning the (treatment) of humans is the remaining part of justice.²⁰

Euthyphro accepts the basic assumption inherent in Socrates' formulation, that all law courts deal with justice and injustice, and this is surely because law courts by definition deal with justice and injustice. Euthyphro's attitude towards the law courts, however, suggests that justice is not uppermost in his mind when he thinks of law courts, but rather what the law courts are intended to accomplish. He explains that while most courts deal with treating humans, the *miasma*-courts deal with treating the gods, meaning the amelioration between gods and men which comes about through the very holding of *miasma*-trials.

The *miasma*-courts deal with that part of justice which pertains to *to hosion*. This time, in the second argument, *to hosion* is equated with *to eusebes* (the respectful). The subsequent argument appears to conclude, once again, that *to hosion* (the holy) is the god-loved. This provides us with all the information we need to understand how the courts of the Archon Basileus work. The fundamental role of the *miasma*-courts is to placate the gods; the

17. Socrates refers to himself in this sentence in the first person plural.

18. 12e1-4 περιῶ δὴ καὶ σὺ ἐμὲ οὕτω διδάξαι τὸ ποῖον μέρος τοῦ δικαίου ὅσιόν ἐστιν, ἵνα καὶ Μελήτω λέγωμεν μηκέθ' ἡμᾶς ἀδικεῖν μηδὲ ἀσεβείας γράφεσθαι, ὡς ἱκανῶς ἤδη παρὰ σοῦ μεμαθηκότας τά τε εὐσεβῆ καὶ ὅσια καὶ τὰ μὴ.

19. The predicate once again has no definite article in the Greek.

20. 12e5-8 τοῦτο τοίνυν ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ, ὃ Σώκρατες, τὸ μέρος τοῦ δικαίου εἶναι εὐσεβές τε καὶ ὅσιον, τὸ περὶ τῆν τῶν θεῶν θεραπείαν, τὸ δὲ περὶ τῆν τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸ λοιπὸν εἶναι τοῦ δικαίου μέρος.

only way in Athens to remove *miasma* - traditionally associated with offences against the gods - is now through the court system. *To hosion* is also associated with prayers and sacrifice, and these do help keep the gods pleased (according to the Many), but the legal procedure itself is necessary for the removal of *miasma*. The *miasma*-courts are themselves a display of respect, and that is pleasing to the gods, as the subsequent disappearance of *miasma* demonstrates.

The claim that *to hosion* is that which is god-loved is refuted twice in the first long argument (8a10; 10d12-14),²¹ and when this definition of *to hosion* reappears at the end of the second argument, Socrates declares that *to hosion* needs to be reexamined (15c11-12), which has led many to believe that *to hosion* is not god-loved. The apparent refutation is based on the argument that the god-loved expresses an accident rather than the essence of *to hosion*: in other words, even if we agree that *to hosion* is loved by all the gods, we still do not know what it is about *to hosion* which the gods love. The second argument actually provides the answer. Respect (*to eusebes*) is what the gods love. It is Socrates who prompted this answer from Euthyphro by recalling his own case regarding disrespect (*asebeia*) and equating holy things (*hosia*) with respectful things (*eusebē*) during his question concerning the part of justice the holy is, at 12e1-5 (quoted above). Euthyphro says that the holy is *therapeia* of the gods, but this refers to the reason for *miasma*-courts.²² Euthyphro has picked up on the equation of the holy with the respectful in his answer at 12e5-8 (quoted above), and it is respect which is loved by the gods. Although Socrates sophistically²³ derails the second

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21. The refutation at 8a10 is framed eristically, as if the god-loved is as much *anosion* as *hosion*, thanks to disagreements among the gods; the stronger refutation at 10d12-14 is elucidated at 10e10-11b1 in terms of *ousia* and *pathos* (“essence” and “accident”).
 22. *Miasma* disappears once the gods are placated, which occurs by displaying towards them respect, achieved by prosecuting offenders through the *miasma*-courts.
 23. Socrates argues sophistically throughout the second argument as if *therapeia* is *technē*, and the conclusion that the holy is (once again) the god-loved is therefore technically invalid, although this is

argument into a discussion pertaining to the value of prayers and sacrifices, Euthyphro and the Many, in the dramatic reality of this dialogue, regard the *miasma*-courts as functioning on the premise that *to hosion* is a display of respect to the gods, and this, because it is god-loved, is an antidote to *ta anosia* which for some reason displease the gods or are a manifestation of the gods' displeasure. We should note that the gods are evidently not upset by disrespect alone. There are *miasma*-courts dealing with disrespect, but there are also several others dealing with various types of injustices, such as murders and thefts from temples.²⁴ Although there are many ways to upset the gods, the only way to please them is to show them respect, either through the prosecution of those who offend them, or through prayers and sacrifices. The prosecution of *miasma*-cases, therefore, is motivated more by the need to show respect toward the gods than by a desire to correct injustices.

The attitude of Euthyphro and the Many towards justice in this dialogue is evidently a significant element in the dialogue. Plato the dramatist draws our attention to the distinction, and the confusion, between a *graphē asebeias* ("writ of disrespect") and a *dikē phonou* (literally, a "justice for murder", but understood as a "murder case"). Euthyphro assumes at the outset that Socrates has a *dikē* like his own, but Socrates tells him that the Athenians call it a *graphē* (2a3-6). The legal system formally draws a distinction between a private prosecution (*dikē*), and a prosecution brought on behalf of the polis (*graphē*). Despite this distinction, Plato has both characters elsewhere call Socrates' *graphē* a *dikē*.²⁵ This is one of the first indications that the Many regard all court cases as somehow concerned with justice,

indeed what the Many assume the holy to be.

24. In general, *ta anosia* are all the behaviours which have traditionally been associated with *miasma*. Why the gods hate them is less important than the apparent fact that they do hate them.
25. Euthyphro treats every case as a *dikē* because, as we have already seen, the Many assume that all cases are subsumed under justice: some (the *miasma*-cases) treating issues of the gods, and the rest treating issues of humans (3e6, cf. 12e5-8). Socrates uses *dikē* in the same sentence together with the verb *graphomai* ("to indict", "serve a writ"), to make the confusion as palpable as possible in an attempt to spark some critical thinking in Euthyphro - but his interlocutor does not react to it (5b6-7).

a point made much clearer towards the end of the dialogue by Socrates' question concerning the part of justice which is the holy (quoted above).

Despite all court cases being regarded as pertaining to justice, this is not to say that the Many are concerned with justice *per se*. Euthyphro himself states (8c3-5): "They (i.e., humans) don't stop debating these things, especially in courtrooms. Acting unjustly in many things, they do and say all things to escape justice." Euthyphro, however, is so far from being concerned about justice, that he practises the same tricks, boasting, for example, that were Meletus to issue him with a *graphē* for "corrupting" his father, he would ensure that the speech in the trial would centre on the failings of Meletus rather than of himself (5b9-c3). A little earlier, Euthyphro fears that Meletus is harming the city by trying to do Socrates an injustice (3a8 ἐπιχειρῶν ἀδικεῖν σέ). When Euthyphro says this, he is insinuating that the prosecution, being unjust, will displease the gods, and hence will cause *miasma* instead of removing it. We may compare this with the family's accusation that Euthyphro's prosecution of his father is *anosion* (4d9-e1), where again the implication is that more *miasma* rather than less will result from the prosecution.

Furthermore, Euthyphro actually abuses the notion of justice in his defence against his family's charge of familial disrespect. He tries on Socrates what appears to be part of a prepared speech he has already tried out on his family and will use formally in his trial. When he compares himself to Zeus, and his own father to Kronos, he cleverly observes that all agree that Zeus is the most just of the gods, and yet Zeus bound his father (5e5-6a2); it speciously follows that doing something apparently bad to one's father is actually just, since Zeus, although apparently disrespectful towards his father, is just, and therefore Euthyphro is also just in prosecuting his own father. Euthyphro will attempt to influence the *dikastai* at his trial further by adding that Kronos swallowed his children "not in justice" (οὐκ ἐν δίκῃ - 6a2) and that his family are upset with him for prosecuting his father "[who is] doing injustice" (τῷ πατρὶ ἐπεξέρχομαι ἀδικοῦντι - 6a3-4). Thus the father in both cases is unjust,

strengthening the impression that the son in both cases is just.²⁶

The secondary, or indeed the purely rhetorical, role played by justice in the *miasma*-courts is no doubt one of the conclusions we the readers are meant to arrive at, but the treatment of justice in this dialogue is only a foil to the main concept, *to hosion*. As we have already seen, holiness in this dialogue is conceived by Euthyphro to be what the gods love, and what the gods love is a display of respect. Socrates devotes a great deal of time to explaining that a *pathos*, an accident, does not explain the *ousia* or essence of a thing,²⁷ and Socrates is correct so far as this goes.²⁸ The god-loved is not the essence of the holy, but it does explain why a display of respect is the holy, so far as the Many are concerned; they conceive of the holy as a show of respect, and the gods of mythology love being shown respect. The only reason the Many make a show of respecting the gods in this dialogue is in order to placate the gods (who love the respect) in order to remove *miasma*.

At first sight one might think that Euthyphro and the Many respect the gods, particularly since they appreciate the “many and fine things” (*polla kai kala* - 13e14) the gods give to humans. The awareness that humans are dependent on the gods, however, takes on a nightmarish hue when seen in the context of the horrific mythological accounts about the gods, from which Socrates recoils (6a7-9). These fickle monsters need to be placated at all

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26. In case it needs pointing out, the Greek gods did not operate according to justice. The goddess Dikē in Hesiod is a device to keep humans in order. Imposing human values on the gods is arguably an act of *hybris* on the part of Euthyphro, although the Many are guilty of this as well. We may add this to his act of *hybris* in the very comparison he makes between himself and Zeus.
27. The holy is not loved by the gods because it is god-loved, but it is god-loved because it is loved by the gods. Being a passive accident, the god-loved says nothing about the essence of the holy. The “Euthyphro Problem” is loosely based on this reasoning, but is set in the context of divinely sanctioned morality in monotheism.
28. The answer that the holy is respect is rejected simply because respect itself is found to be god-loved, but there is no reason why the god-loved cannot be a *pathos* both of the holy and the respectful, while respect itself may still be the essence of the holy.

costs. It is not entirely coincidental that Socrates introduces the concept of apprehension (*deos*) during a discussion having nothing to do with apprehension. This occurs after the refutation of the holy as the god-loved, and just after Socrates asks the following question (11e7-12a2):

Is all the just holy? Or is all the holy just while not all the just is holy, but some of it holy, some [of it] something else as well?²⁹

Euthyphro will eventually understand “the just” to refer to the whole judicial system, of which there are *miasma*-courts (“the holy”), and other courts (the rest of “the just”). Thus, where there is “the holy” (a part of the judicial system) there is also “the just” (the judicial system), but where there is “the just” (the judicial system) there is not always also “the holy” (“the holy” is only one of two parts of the judicial system). To help him arrive at this understanding of the relationship between the two concepts, Socrates presents two other concepts, *aidōs* and *deos*, “shame/respect” and “apprehension”. Euthyphro replies, when given the choice, that where there is *deos* there is not always *aidōs*, but where there is *aidōs* there is always *deos*.

The reason why *aidōs* (“shame/respect”) is translated in English by two different emotions is that the term actually denotes one’s awareness of inequality to one’s disadvantage: the awareness of self-inferiority gives rise to shame, while the awareness of other-superiority gives rise to respect. It is Socrates who connects *aidōs* with apprehension, but Euthyphro need not have agreed. His agreement that where there is *aidōs* there is apprehension is revealing. He apparently assumes that the superior entity is able to exploit its superiority in a way deleterious to the inferior party. The term *aidōs* alone may have allowed us to believe that Euthyphro respects the gods, but Euthyphro’s acceptance of *deos* wherever there is *aidōs* suggests a less than healthy respect. To confirm that Euthyphro’s conception of

29. 11e7-12a2 ἄρ’ οὖν καὶ πᾶν τὸ δίκαιον ὅσιον; ἢ τὸ μὲν ὅσιον πᾶν δίκαιον, τὸ δὲ δίκαιον οὐ πᾶν ὅσιον, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν αὐτοῦ ὅσιον, τὸ δὲ καὶ ἄλλο;

respect here is entirely unhealthy, Socrates glosses verbal cognates of *aidōs* and *deos* with negative words pertaining to shame and fear respectively (αἰδούμενος... καὶ αἰσχυνόμενος, πεφόβηται τε καὶ δέδουκεν... 12b9-c2), and still Euthyphro agrees.

Euthyphro confirms this sad state of affairs himself, when he portrays the gods as masters, and humans as slaves whose function is primarily to please the gods (13d6-7). That Euthyphro and the Many fear rather than respect the gods is easily explained from the dialogue itself. Mythology is the first reason. Euthyphro is steeped in mythology, even more so than the Many, as he is happy to point out (6b5-6). The gods appear immoral, fickle, spoilt, and vengeful, and they perform the most horrific acts. This leads to the second reason demonstrating that Euthyphro and the Many fear the gods, and this is the very concept of *miasma*. When the gods are happy they are generous and bountiful, but when they are unhappy they appear to withdraw from human life. The resulting deprivations - crop failure, infertility, disease - are interpreted as *miasma*, a pollution, but it is simply a manifestation of the unwillingness of sulky, angry, vindictive gods to provide. Additional disrespect will lead to further withdrawal, but a show of respect will please the apparently vain gods and induce them to return to their beneficial ways.

When seen in this light, any show of respect toward the gods in the form of a prosecution in a *miasma*-court or a religious ceremony in a temple appears to be rather mercenary. This is in fact a point Socrates attempts to impress upon Euthyphro, at the end of the second argument in which he has treated various forms of *therapeia* sophisticatedly as *technē*, with his conclusion that holiness (*hosiotēs*) is a mercantile art (*emporikē technē*) between gods and men (14e6-7). Euthyphro admits that it is, although he does not appreciate such language (e8).³⁰ Euthyphro explains that the gods cannot receive benefit from humans

30. After this admission, Socrates continues to press Euthyphro, wondering what benefit the gods could possibly gain in return for the benefits they give humans. Euthyphro himself knows that the gods (being superior to humans) cannot enjoy any benefit from humans (15a6-7), and explains (a10-11) that the gods are given “honour, presents, and what I was saying just now, gratitude (*charis*)”.

but can receive honour, presents, and gratitude, in return for all the benefits humans receive from the gods. The show of respect, therefore, is self-serving and actually disrespectful. Not only are the Many interested mainly in the benefits they receive from the gods, but they regard the gods as vain and easily manipulated by shows of respect, and easily offended by shows of disrespect or unjust actions between humans. The Many do not seriously think that the gods are interested in justice itself, if only for the simple reason that it is very easy to flatter the offended gods with a show of respect, in which justice quite often plays only a rhetorical part. Euthyphro is even worse than disrespectful when he dares to compare his own prosecution of his father to the binding of Kronos by Zeus. This is surely nothing short of *hybris*.

Euthyphro and the Many have much in common when it comes to *miasma*-trials. They are all aware that the gods provide, but they are also terrified of the gods abandoning them in a fit of rage or wounded pride for one reason or another; it is the result of the gods' withdrawal of beneficial offices which the Many interpret as *miasma* (crop failure, infertility of women and animals, and the like). The gods are believed to be easy to anger and prone to vengefulness because they are depicted as such in mythology. The *miasma*-courts, just like temples, are designed to appease the gods by showing respect to them. It is apparently quite easy to placate these vain divines, as any particular *miasma* is considered to be removed by the end of the *miasma*-trial dealing with it, or perhaps after subsequent purification ceremonies held on the same day.

We may ask why there is a need in a philosophical dialogue for a character such as Euthyphro who is so similar to the Many. We might suppose that he represents a pure and clear-cut concept of holiness, but the concept of holiness adopted by the Many is already clear-cut: that holiness is respect, interpreted as a show of respect with a view to appeasing

Socrates then uses a word which is cognate with *charis* but has a slightly different meaning - *kecharismenon* ("pleasing thing") - and tricks Euthyphro into equating this with "pleasing to the gods" (b1-5), and it is this which leads to the abandonment of the second, final, argument.

gods in order to remove *miasma*. What else might the character of Euthyphro be doing? He differs from the Many in his expertise in the field of the holy, his fanatical and detailed belief in the horrific accounts of the gods, and the application of his belief in daily life. Another entity like Euthyphro is the institution of *miasma*-courts. The institution, to be credible, must uphold all Athenian mythology as true, and it exposes those who take an opposite view to be condemned to a fine, or exile, or death (cf. Socrates); it applies its belief in mythology to all cases pertaining to offences against the gods, assuming that the gods are actually as cruel and vain and fickle as they are in the myths, and it effectively claims that its displays of respect in the form of *miasma*-trials actually placate gods, given that the *miasma* is thereby removed, usually with the judicial removal of the offender. As we have also witnessed from Euthyphro himself, the *miasma*-courts appear to encourage the rhetorical use of the terms “justice” and “injustice”, at the expense of actual justice. Thus it would seem that Euthyphro is a personification of the institution of *miasma*-courts. Among other possible reasons for the personification, I would suggest that it both facilitates a conversation in this dialogue between the true and false interpretations of the central concept underpinning the dialogue, and reveals that the Athenian Many would actually laugh at the premises of the institution of *miasma*-courts were it merely a person like that insane Euthyphro.

The concept underpinning the dialogue is holiness (*to hosion, hosiotēs*) which is understood by all to be respect (*to eusebes, eusebeia*). True respect is displayed by Socrates, but a mercenary show of respect is displayed consistently by the Many, by Euthyphro, and most importantly, by the institution of *miasma*-courts. As is so often the case in a Platonic dialogue, because the characters are fixed *deigmata* which need to represent at all times the aspect which they exemplify, they badly discuss the concept at the heart of the dialogue. The holy is misunderstood by Euthyphro, while Socrates, who does understand it, is engaged in dialectic rather than didacticism. Although it is badly discussed, the concept is well dramatized - by Socrates on the one hand, by the Many, by Euthyphro, and by the institution of *miasma*-courts on the other hand - allowing the dialectical reader to arrive at an

understanding of the concept both as it should be perceived and as it is too often misconceived.

Euthyphro, the Many, and the institution of *miasma*-courts, are all *deigmata* (examples) of a general *paradeigma*, a minimally concrete agent misapplying the notion that *to hosion* is *to eusebes*. All particular details of the *deigmata* need to be removed in order to arrive at the *paradeigma* from which they derive, the concrete representation in its minimalist form of the misconception concerning respect and the gods. The misconception stems from a fear of the gods, and respect is interpreted as a show of servility designed to placate the fickle gods of mythology, in the mercenary expectation that they will then return to their beneficial ways. Such an attitude towards the gods is actually disrespectful.

In contrast to the previous *deigmata* who all fear the gods, Socrates refuses to accept the horrific mythological accounts which justify or even cause belief in the existence of *miasma* and the necessity of *miasma*-courts (in post-vendetta Athens). Socrates, believing the gods to be consistently beneficial, cannot believe in *miasma* or the need for *miasma*-courts. He also appears to believe that fathers deserve respect, and the *daimonion* seems to have been thrown into the dialogue for good measure, to confirm our impression that Socrates is an all-round respectful person. To arrive at the *paradeigma* of which Socrates is a *deigma*, it is worth examining what the character does in the dialogue. His main activity is to conduct a brand of dialectic which attempts to cause some sort of critical thinking in his interlocutor through the use of comparisons, contrasts, extended arguments, and not a little sophistry. Dialectic is the only *technē* which is necessarily beneficial (if it works at all³¹); other crafts are means to ends, and the craftsman may aim at good or bad ends, but dialectic thinking inevitably results in an improvement in the behaviour of the thinker, if only in the habit of thinking critically. It is not that Socrates has a *daimonion* that makes him holy. If he is to be

31. Dialectic cannot work in a Platonic dialogue since all the characters are models or examples (*deigmata*), and as such cannot change beyond what their type allows. It is the readers who need to change, not the characters.

considered holy, it is because he respects the beneficial gods by being beneficial himself, as a dialectician. Plato's Socrates, then, is a *deigma* of the extreme *paradeigma* of the dialectician (as in other dialogues), but in this dialogue, the dialectician is to be seen in light of the holy. The character is not to be regarded as an accurate representation of the historical Socrates, since Plato's Socrates is the *paradeigma* of the dialectician to which only various secondary details associated with Socrates have been added.³²

The reader of a Platonic dialogue needs to proceed from the tangle of conversation held by the characters to the characters themselves as *deigmata*, then from the *deigmata* to the *paradeigmata*, and from the *paradeigmata* to the concept underpinning the entire dialogue as it should be perceived and as it is too often misconceived: in this case, the holy is the respectful (*to hosion* is *to eusebes*; *hosiotēs* is *eusebeia*). The idea is properly perceived when the gods are understood to be consistently beneficial. True holiness is the quality of a beneficial human who respects the gods as beneficial. False holiness is the quality of any human or thing demonstrating a mercenary servile flattery towards gods who are believed to lack any moral fibre, as reflected in mythology. Unholiness is the quality of any person or thing considered to be offensive to the gods. It follows that *hosia* and *anosia* (holy and unholy things) and *miasma* itself are artifacts of the misconception of holiness.³³ The

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32. It should by now be apparent that a true concept of the holy allows for no concrete things apart from people to be holy, since they cannot respect. The misconception of the holy, on the other hand, allows the existence of holy things, since they are demonstrations of mercenary respect. Similarly, *miasma* may be regarded as unholy since it is completely in the realm of the misconception of the holy: it indicates the abandonment by the gods of their duties towards humans due to some intentional or unintentional show of disrespect by one or other human.
33. It seems to follow that someone who does not believe in gods, an *atheos*, would lack the quality of holiness altogether, rather than have the quality of unholiness. People with the quality of misconceived holiness would regard an *atheos* as unholy, which raises the question whether Socrates is to be regarded as *atheos* rather than *hosios*. While Socrates' inability to accept the horrific accounts from mythology might indicate a lack of belief in any gods as much as a true belief in beneficial gods,

institution of the *miasma*-courts embodies this misconception in its most perverse form, the form which ultimately led to the death of Socrates.³⁴

the mention of his *daimonion* is decisive.

34. This allows us to speculate that Plato was initially intrigued (if not appalled) by the institutional murder of Socrates. Other early dialogues also deal with the question how a good man might appear to be bad, and a bad man appear to be good, but the most egregious case was surely Socrates' trial for *asebeia*. Although Plato could have gone the way of Xenophon and portrayed Socrates as an ideal Athenian citizen, he subordinates the personal injustice done to Socrates to the interests of philosophy, and dramatizes not Socrates and the Many but the aspects of a concept - in this case, the true and the misconstrued interpretations of the holy as respect.

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