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Does Morality Depend on God?

*Euthyphro**

Plato

(For a brief biographical note on Plato, see chapter 3)

Study Questions

1. Of what crimes does Meletus accuse Socrates?
2. Why is Euthyphro prosecuting his father? Why is he convinced that this is the right thing to do?
3. How does Euthyphro first define the holy? Why does Socrates think this definition is inadequate?
4. What is Euthyphro's second, more precise, definition of holiness? What problem does Socrates raise for this definition?
5. How does Socrates modify Euthyphro's definition? What reasoning leads him to this modification?
6. What question does Socrates ask regarding the modified definition of holiness? What does he think is the right answer?
7. What does Euthyphro mean by "service to the gods"? What objection does Socrates have to this last definition of holiness?

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EUTHYPHRO: This, Socrates, is something new? What has taken you from your haunts in the Lyceum, and makes you spend your time at the royal porch? You surely cannot have a case at law, as I have, before the Archon-King.

SOCRATES: My business, Euthyphro, is not what is known at Athens as a case at law; it is a criminal prosecution.

EUTHYPHRO: How is that? You mean that somebody is prosecuting you? I never would believe that you were prosecuting anybody else.

SOCRATES: No indeed.

EUTHYPHRO: Then somebody is prosecuting you?

SOCRATES: Most certainly.

EUTHYPHRO: Who is it?

SOCRATES: I am not too clear about the man myself, Euthyphro. He appears to me to be a young man, and unknown. I think, however, that they call him Meletus, and his deme is Pitthos, if you happen to know anyone named Meletus of that deme—a hook-nosed man with long straight hair, and not much beard.

EUTHYPHRO: I don't recall him, Socrates. But tell me, of what does he accuse you?

SOCRATES: His accusation? It is no mean charge. For a man of his age it is no small thing to have settled a question of so much importance. He says, in fact, that he knows the method by which young people are corrupted, and knows who the persons are that do it. He is, quite possibly, a wise man, and, observing that my ignorance has led me to corrupt his generation, comes like a child to his mother to accuse me to the city. And to me he appears to be the only one who begins his political activity aright, for the right way to begin is to pay attention to the young, and make them just as good as possible—precisely as the able farmer will give his

attention to the young plants first, and afterward care for the rest. And so Meletus no doubt begins by clearing us away, the ones who ruin, as he says, the tender shoots of the young. That done, he obviously will care for the older generation, and will thus become the cause, in the highest and widest measure, of benefit to the state. With such a notable beginning, his chances of success look good.

EUTHYPHRO: I hope so, Socrates, but I'm very much afraid it will go the other way. When he starts to injure you, it simply looks to me like beginning at the hearth to hurt the state. But tell me what he says you do to corrupt the young.

SOCRATES: It sounds very queer, my friend, when first you hear it. He says I am a maker of gods; he charges me with making new gods, and not believing in the old ones. These are his grounds for prosecuting me, he says.

EUTHYPHRO: I see it, Socrates. It is because you say that ever and anon you have the spiritual sign! So he charges you in this indictment with introducing novelties in religion, and that is the reason why he comes to court with this slanderous complaint, well knowing how easily such matters can be misrepresented to the crowd. For my own part, when I speak in the Assembly about matters of religion, and tell them in advance what will occur, they laugh at me as if I were a madman, and yet I never have made a prediction that did not come true. But the truth is, they are jealous of all such people as ourselves. No, we must not worry over them, but go to meet them.

SOCRATES: Dear Euthyphro, if we were only laughed at, it would be no serious matter. The Athenians, as it seems to me, are not very much disturbed if they think that so-and-so is clever, so long as he does not impart his knowledge to anybody else. But the moment they

suspect that he is giving his ability to others, they get angry, whether out of jealousy, as you say, or, it may be, for some other reason.

EUTHYPHRO: With regard to that, I am not very eager to test their attitude to me.

SOCRATES: Quite possibly you strike them as a man who is chary of himself, and is unwilling to impart his wisdom; as for me, I fear I am so kindly they will think that I pour out all I have to everyone, and not merely without pay—nay, rather, glad to offer something if it would induce someone to hear me. Well then, as I said just now, if they were going to laugh at me, as you say they do at you, it wouldn't be at all unpleasant to spend the time laughing and joking in court. But if they take the matter seriously, then there is no knowing how it will turn out. Only you prophets can tell!

EUTHYPHRO: Well, Socrates, perhaps no harm will come of it at all, but you will carry your case as you desire, and I think that I shall carry mine.

SOCRATES: Your case, Euthyphro? What is it? Are you prosecuting, or defending?

EUTHYPHRO: Prosecuting.

SOCRATES: Whom?

EUTHYPHRO: One whom I am thought a maniac to be attacking.

SOCRATES: How so? Is it someone who has wings to fly away with?

EUTHYPHRO: He is far from being able to do that; he happens old, a very old man.

SOCRATES: Who is it, then?

EUTHYPHRO: It is my father.

SOCRATES: Your father, my good friend?

EUTHYPHRO: Just so.

SOCRATES: What is the complaint? Of what do you accuse him?

EUTHYPHRO: Of murder, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Good heavens, Euthyphro! Surely the crowd is ignorant of the way things ought to go. I fancy it is not correct for any ordinary person to do that [to prosecute his father on this charge], but only for or a man already far advanced in point of wisdom.

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, Socrates, by heaven! Far advanced!

SOCRATES: And the man your father killed, was he a relative of yours? Of course he was? You never would prosecute your father, would you, for the death of anybody who was not related to you?

EUTHYPHRO: You amuse me, Socrates. You think it makes a difference whether the victim was a member of the family, or not related, when the only thing to watch is whether it was right or not for the man who did the deed to kill him. If he was justified, then let him go; if not, you have to prosecute him, no matter if the man who killed him shares your hearth, and sits at table with you. The pollution is the same if, knowingly, you associate with such a man, and do not cleanse yourself, and him as well, by bringing him to justice. The victim in this case was a laborer of mine, and when we were land in Naxos, we employed him on our farm. One day he had been drinking, and became enraged at one of our domestics, and cut his throat; whereupon my father bound him hand and foot, and threw him into a ditch. Then he sent a man to Athens to find out from the seer what ought to be done—meanwhile paying no attention to the man who had been bound, neglecting him because he was a murderer and it would be no great matter even if he died. And that was just what happened. Hunger, cold, and the shackles finished him before the messenger got back from visiting the seer. That is why my father and my other kin are bitter at me when I prosecute my father as a murderer. They say he did not kill the man, and had he actually done it, the victim was himself a murderer, and for such a man one need have no

consideration. They say that for a son to prosecute his father as a murderer is unholy. How ill they know divinity in its relation, Socrates, to what is holy or unholy!

SOCRATES: But you, by heaven! Euthyphro, you think that you have such an accurate knowledge of things divine, and what is holy and unholy, that, in circumstances such as you describe, you can accuse your father? You are not afraid that you yourself are doing an unholy deed?

EUTHYPHRO: Why, Socrates, if I did not have an accurate knowledge of all that, I should be good for nothing, and Euthyphro would be no different from the general run of men.

SOCRATES: Well then, admirable Euthyphro, the best thing I can do is to become your pupil, and challenge Meletus before the trial comes on. Let me tell him that in the past I have considered it of great importance to know about things divine, and that now, when he asserts that I erroneously put forward my own notions and inventions on this head, I have become your pupil. I could say, Come, Meletus, if you agree that Euthyphro has wisdom in such matters, you must admit as well that I hold the true belief, and must not prosecute. If you do not, you must lodge your complaint, not against me, but against my aforesaid master; accuse him of corrupting the elder generation, me and his own father—me by his instruction, his father by correcting and chastising him.

And if he would not yield, would neither quit the suit nor yet indict you rather than myself, then I would say the same in court as when I challenged him!

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, Socrates, by heaven! If he undertook to bring me into court, I guess I would find out his rotten spot; and our talk there would concern him sooner by a long shot than ever it would me!

SOCRATES: Yes, my dear friend, that I know, and so I wish to be your pupil. This Meletus, I perceive, along presumably with everybody else, appears to overlook you, but sees into me so easily and keenly that he has attacked me for impiety. So, in the name of heaven, tell me now about the matter you just felt sure you knew quite thoroughly. State what you take piety and impiety to be with reference to murder and all other cases. Is not the holy always one and the same thing in every action, and, again, is not the unholy always opposite to the holy, and like itself? And as unholiness does it not always have its one essential form, which will be found in everything that is unholy?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, surely, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then tell me. How do you define the holy and the unholy?

EUTHYPHRO: Well then, I say that the holy is what I am now doing, prosecuting the wrongdoer who commits a murder or a sacrilegious robbery, or sins in any point like that, whether it be your father, or your mother, or whoever it may be. And not to prosecute would be unholy. And, Socrates, observe what a decisive proof I will give you that such is the law. It is one I have already given to others; I tell them that the right procedure must be not to tolerate the impious man, no matter who. Does not mankind believe that Zeus is the most excellent and just among the gods? And these same men admit that Zeus shackled his own father [Cronus] for swallowing his [other] sons unjustly, and that Cronus in turn had gelded his father [Uranus] for like reasons. But now they are enraged at me when I proceed against my father for wrongdoing, and so they contradict themselves in what they say about the gods and what they say of me.

SOCRATES: There, Euthyphro, you have the reason why the charge is brought against me. It is because, whenever people tell such stories about the gods, I am prone to take it ill, and, so it seems, that is why they will maintain that I am sinful. Well, now, if you who are so well versed

in matters of the sort entertain the same beliefs, then necessarily, it would seem, I must give in, for what could we urge who admit that, for our own part, we are quite ignorant about these matters? But, in the name of friendship, tell me! Do you actually believe that these things happened so?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, Socrates, and things even more amazing, of which the multitude does not know.

SOCRATES: And you actually believe that war occurred among the gods, and there were dreadful hatreds, battles, and all sorts of fearful things like that? Such things as the poets tell of, and good artists represent in sacred places; yes, and at the great Panathenaic festival the robe that is carried up to the Acropolis is all inwrought with such embellishments? What is our position, Euthyphro? Do we say that these things are true?

EUTHYPHRO: Not these things only, Socrates, but, as I just now said, I will, if you wish, relate to you many other stories about the gods, which I am certain will astonish you when you hear them.

SOCRATES: I shouldn't wonder. You shall tell me all about them when we have the leisure at some other time. At present try to tell me more clearly what I asked you a little while ago, for, my friend, you were not explicit enough before when I put the question. What is holiness? You merely said that what you are now doing is a holy deed—namely, prosecuting your father on a charge of murder.

EUTHYPHRO: And, Socrates, I told the truth.

SOCRATES: Possibly. But, Euthyphro, there are many other things that you will say are holy.

EUTHYPHRO: Because they are.

SOCRATES: Well, bear in mind that what I asked of you was not to tell me one or two out of all the numerous actions that are holy; I wanted you to tell me what is the essential form of holiness which makes all holy actions holy. I believe you held that there is one ideal form by which unholy things are all unholy, and by which all holy things are holy. Do you remember that?

EUTHYPHRO: I do.

SOCRATES: Well then, show me what, precisely, this ideal is, so that, with my eye on it, and using it as a standard, I can say that any action done by you or anybody else is holy if it resembles this ideal, or, if it does not, can deny that it is holy.

EUTHYPHRO: Well, Socrates, if that is what you want, I certainly can tell you.

SOCRATES: It is precisely what I want.

EUTHYPHRO: Well then, what is pleasing to the gods is holy, and what is not pleasing to them is unholy.

SOCRATES: Perfect, Euthyphro! Now you give me just the answer that I asked for. Meanwhile, whether it is right I do not know, but obviously you will go on to prove your statement true.

EUTHYPHRO: Indeed I will.

SOCRATES: Come now, let us scrutinize what we are saying. What is pleasing to the gods, and the man that pleases them, are holy; what is hateful to the gods, and the man they hate, unholy. But the holy and unholy are not the same; the holy is directly opposite to the unholy. Isn't it so?

EUTHYPHRO: It is.

SOCRATES: And the matter clearly was well stated.

EUTHYPHRO: I accept it, Socrates; that was stated.

SOCRATES: Was it not also stated, Euthyphro, that the gods revolt and differ with each other, and that hatreds come between them?

EUTHYPHRO: That was stated.

SOCRATES: Hatred and wrath, my friend—what kind of disagreement will produce them? Look at the matter thus. If you and I were to differ about numbers, on the question which of two was the greater, would a disagreement about that make us angry at each other, and make enemies of us? Should we not settle things by calculation, and so come to an agreement quickly on any point like that?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, certainly.

SOCRATES: And similarly if we differed on a question of greater length or less, we would take a measurement, and quickly put an end to the dispute?

EUTHYPHRO: Just that.

SOCRATES: And so, I fancy, we should have recourse to scales, and settle any question about a heavier or lighter weight?

EUTHYPHRO: Of course.

SOCRATES: What sort of thing, then, is it about which we differ, till, unable to arrive at a decision, we might get angry and be enemies to one another? Perhaps you have no answer ready, but listen to me. See if it is not the following—right and wrong, the noble and the base, and good and bad. Are not these the things about which we differ, till, unable to arrive at a decision, we grow hostile, when we do grow hostile, to each other, you and I and everybody else?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, Socrates, that is where we differ, on these subjects.

SOCRATES: What about the gods, then, Euthyphro? If, indeed, they have dissensions, must it not be on these subjects?

EUTHYPHRO: Quite necessarily.

SOCRATES: Accordingly, my noble Euthyphro, by your account some gods take one thing to be right, and others take another, and similarly with the honorable and the base, and good and bad. They would hardly be at variance with each other, if they did not differ on these questions. Would they?

EUTHYPHRO: You are right.

SOCRATES: And what each one of them thinks noble, good, and just, is what he loves, and the opposite is what he hates?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, certainly.

SOCRATES: But it is the same things, so you say, that some of them think right, and others wrong, and through disputing about these they are at variance, and make war on one another. Isn't it so?

EUTHYPHRO: It is.

SOCRATES: Accordingly, so it would seem, the same things will be hated by the gods and loved by them; the same things would alike displease and please them.

EUTHYPHRO: It would seem so.

SOCRATES: And so, according to this argument, the same things, Euthyphro, will be holy and unholy.

EUTHYPHRO: That may be.

SOCRATES: In that case, admirable friend, you have not answered what I asked you. I did not ask you to tell me what at once is holy and unholy, but it seems that what is pleasing to the

gods is also hateful to them. Thus, Euthyphro, it would not be strange at all if what you now are doing in punishing your father were pleasing to Zeus, but hateful to Cronus and Uranus, and welcome to Hephaestus, but odious to Hera, and if any other of the gods disagree about the matter, satisfactory to some of them, and odious to others.

EUTHYPHRO: But, Socrates notion is that, on this point, there is no difference of opinion among the gods—not one of them but thinks that if a person kills another wrongfully, he ought to pay for it.

SOCRATES: And what of men? Have you never heard a man contending that someone who has killed person wrongfully, or done some other unjust deed, ought not to pay the penalty?

EUTHYPHRO: Why! There is never any end to their disputes about these matters; it goes on everywhere, above all in the courts. People do all kinds of wrong, and then there is nothing they will not do or say in order to escape the penalty.

SOCRATES: Do they admit wrongdoing, Euthyphro, and, while admitting it, deny that they ought to pay the penalty?

EUTHYPHRO: No, not that, by any means.

SOCRATES: Then they will not do and say quite everything. Unless I am mistaken, they dare not say or argue that if they do wrong they should not pay the penalty. No, I think that they deny wrongdoing. How about it?

EUTHYPHRO: It is true.

SOCRATES: Therefore they do not dispute that anybody who does wrong should pay the penalty. No, the thing that they dispute about is likely to be who is the wrongdoer, what he did, and when.

EUTHYPHRO: That is true.

SOCRATES: Well then, isn't that precisely what goes on among the gods, if they really do have quarrels about right and wrong, as you say they do? One set will hold that some others do wrong, and the other set deny it? For that other thing, my friend, I take it no one, whether god or man, will dare to say—that the wrongdoer should not pay the penalty!

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, Socrates, what you say is true—in the main.

SOCRATES: It is the individual act, I fancy, Euthyphro, that the disputants dispute about, both men and gods, if gods ever do dispute. They differ on a certain act; some hold that it was rightly done, the others that it was wrong. Isn't it so?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, certainly.

SOCRATES: Then come, dear Euthyphro, teach me as well, and let me grow more wise. What proof have you that all the gods think that your servant died unjustly, your hireling, who, when he had killed a man, was shackled by the master of the victim, and perished, dying because of his shackles before the man who shackled him could learn from the seers what ought to be done with him? What proof have you that for a man like him it is right for a son to prosecute his father, and indict him on a charge of murder? Come on. Try to make it clear to me beyond all doubt that under these conditions the gods must all consider this action to be right. If you can adequately prove it to me, I will never cease from praising you for your wisdom.

EUTHYPHRO: But, Socrates, that, very likely, would be no small task, although I could indeed make it very clear to you.

SOCRATES: I understand. You think that I am duller than the judges; obviously you will demonstrate to them that what your father did was wrong, and that the gods all hate such deeds.

EUTHYPHRO: I shall prove it absolutely, Socrates, if they will listen to me.

SOCRATES: They are sure to listen if they think that you speak well. But while you were talking, a notion came into my head, and I asked myself, Suppose that Euthyphro proved to me quite clearly that all the gods consider such a death unjust; would I have come one whit the nearer for him to knowing what the holy is, and what is the unholy? The act in question, seemingly, might be displeasing to the gods, but then we have just seen that you cannot define the holy and unholy in that way, for we have seen that a given thing may be displeasing, and also pleasing, to gods. So on this point, Euthyphro, I will let you off; if you like, the gods shall all consider the act unjust, and they all shall hate it. But suppose that we now correct our definition, and say what the gods all hate is unholy and what they love is holy, whereas what some of them love, and others hate, is either both or neither. Are you willing that we now define the holy and unholy in this way?

EUTHYPHRO: What is there to prevent us, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Nothing to prevent me, Euthyphro. As for you, see whether when you take this definition you can quite readily instruct me, as you promised.

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, I would indeed affirm that holiness is what the gods all love, and its opposite is what the gods all hate, unholiness.

SOCRATES: Are we to examine this position also, Euthyphro, to see if it is sound? Or shall we let it through, and thus accept our own and others' statement, and agree to an assertion simply when somebody says that a thing is so? Must we not look into what the speaker says?

EUTHYPHRO: We must. And yet, for my part, I regard the present statement as correct.

SOCRATES: We shall soon know better about that, my friend. Now think of this. Is what is holy holy because the gods approve it, or do they approve it because it is holy?

EUTHYPHRO: I do not get your meaning.

SOCRATES: Well, I will try to make it clearer. We speak of what is carried and the carrier, do we not, of led and leader, of the seen and that which sees? And you understand that in all such cases the things are different, and how they differ?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, I think I understand.

SOCRATES: In the same way what is loved is one thing, and what loves is another?

EUTHYPHRO: Of course.

SOCRATES: Tell me now, is what is carried 'carried' because something carries it, or is it for some other reason?

EUTHYPHRO: No, but for that reason.

SOCRATES: And what is led, because something leads it? And what is seen, because something sees it?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, certainly.

SOCRATES: Then it is not because a thing is seen that something sees it, but just the opposite—because something sees it, therefore it is seen. Nor because it is led, that something leads it, but because something leads it, therefore it is led. Nor because it is carried, that something carries it, but because something carries it, therefore it is carried. Do you see what I wish to say, Euthyphro? It is this. Whenever an effect occurs, or something is effected, it is not the thing effected that gives rise to the effect; no, there is a cause, and then comes this effect. Nor is it because a thing is acted on that there is this effect; no, there is a cause for what it undergoes, and then comes this effect. Don't you agree?

EUTHYPHRO: I do.

SOCRATES: Well then, when a thing is loved, is it not in process of becoming something, or of undergoing something, by some other thing?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, certainly.

SOCRATES: Then the same is true here as in the previous cases. It is not because a thing is loved that they who love it love it, but it is loved because they love it.

EUTHYPHRO: Necessarily.

SOCRATES: Then what are we to say about the holy, Euthyphro? According to your argument, is it not loved by all the gods?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Because it is holy, or for some other reason?

EUTHYPHRO: No, it is for that reason,

SOCRATES: And so it is because it is holy that it is loved; it is not holy because it is loved.

EUTHYPHRO: So it seems.

SOCRATES: On the other hand, it is beloved and pleasing to the gods just because they love it?

EUTHYPHRO: No doubt of that.

SOCRATES: So what is pleasing to the gods is not the same as what is holy, Euthyphro, nor, according to your statement, is the holy the same as what is pleasing to the gods. They are two different things.

EUTHYPHRO: How may that be, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Because we are agreed that the holy is loved because it is holy, and is not holy because it is loved. Isn't it so?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Whereas what is pleasing to the gods is pleasing to them just because they love it, such being its nature and its cause. Its being loved of the gods is not the reason of its being loved.

EUTHYPHRO: You are right.

SOCRATES: But suppose, dear Euthyphro, that what is pleasing to the gods and what is holy were not two separate things. In that case if holiness were loved because it was holy, then also what was pleasing to the gods would be loved because it pleased them. And, on the other hand, if what was pleasing to them pleased because they loved it, then also the holy would be holy because they loved it. But now you see that it is just the opposite, because the two are absolutely different from each other, for the one [what is pleasing to the gods] is of a sort to be loved because it is loved, whereas the other [what is holy] is loved because it is of a sort to be loved. Consequently, Euthyphro, it looks as if you had not given me my answer—as if when you were asked to tell the nature of the holy, you did not wish to explain the essence of it. You merely tell an attribute of it, namely, that it appertains to holiness to be loved by all the gods. What it *is*, as yet you have not said. So, if you please, do not conceal this from me. No, begin again. Say what the holy is, and never mind if gods do love it, nor if it has some other attribute; on that we shall not split. Come, speak out. Explain the nature of the holy and unholy.

EUTHYPHRO: Now, Socrates, I simply don't know how to tell you what I think. Somehow everything that we put forward keeps moving about us in a circle, and nothing will stay where we put it.

SOCRATES: Your statements, Euthyphro, look like the work of Daedalus, founder of my line. If I had made them, and they were my positions, no doubt you would poke fun at me, and say that, being in his line, the figures I construct in words run off, as did his statues, and will not

stay where they are put. Meanwhile, since they are your definitions, we need some other jest, for in fact, as you see yourself, they will not stand still.

EUTHYPHRO: But, Socrates, it seems to me that the jest is quite to the point. This tendency in our statements to go in a circle, and not to stay in one place, it is not I who put it there. To my mind, it is you who are the Daedalus; so far as I am concerned, they would have held their place.

SOCRATES: If so, my friend, I must be more expert in his art than he, in that he merely made his own works capable of moving, whereas I give this power not merely to my own, but, seemingly, to the works of other men as well. And the rarest thing about my talent is that I am an unwilling artist, since I would rather see our arguments stand fast and hold their ground than have the art of Daedalus plus all the wealth of Tantalus to boot. But enough of this. And since, to my mind, you are languid, I will myself make bold with you to show how you might teach me about holiness. Do not weaken. See if you do not think that of necessity all that is holy is just.

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, I do.

SOCRATES: Well then, is all justice holy too? Or, granted that all holiness is just, is justice not all holy, but some part of it is holy, and some part of it is not?

EUTHYPHRO: I do not follow, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And yet you surpass me in your wisdom not less than by your youth. I repeat, you are languid through your affluence in wisdom. Come, lucky friend, exert yourself! What I have to say is not so hard to grasp. I mean the very opposite of what the poet wrote.

Zeus, Who brought that all to pass, and made it all to grow,
You will not name, for where fear is, there too is reverence.

On that I differ from the poet. Shall I tell you why?

EUTHYPHRO: By all means.

SOCRATES: I do not think that ‘where fear is, there too is reverence.’ For it seems to me that there many who fear sickness, poverty, and all the like, and so are afraid, but have no reverence whatever for the things they are afraid of. Does it not seem so to you?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, certainly.

SOCRATES: Where, however, you have reverence there you have fear as well. Is there anybody who has reverence and a sense of shame about an act, and does not at the same time dread and fear an evil reputation?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, he will be afraid of it.

SOCRATES: So it is not right to say that ‘where fear is, there too is reverence.’ No, you may say that where reverence is, there too is fear—not, however, that where fear is, there always you have reverence. Fear, I think, is wider in extent than reverence. Reverence is a part of fear, as the uneven is a part of number; thus you do not have the odd wherever you have number, but where you have the odd you must have number. I take it you are following me now?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, indeed.

SOCRATES: Well then, what I asked you was like that. I asked you if wherever justice is, there is holiness as well; or, granted that wherever there is holiness, there is justice too, if where justice is, the holy is not always to be found. Thus holiness would be a part of justice. Shall we say so, or have you a different view?

EUTHYPHRO: No, that is my opinion. I think that you are clearly right.

SOCRATES: Then see what follows. If holiness is a part of justice, it seems to me that we must find out what part of justice it is. Suppose, for instance, in our case just now, you had asked

me what part of number is the even, and which the even number is. I would have said it is the one that corresponds to the isosceles, and not to the scalene. Does it not seem so to you?

EUTHYPHRO: It does.

SOCRATES: Then try to show me in this way what part of the just is holiness, so that we may tell Meletus to cease from wronging me, and to give up prosecuting me for irreligion, because we have adequately learned from you of piety and holiness, and the reverse.

EUTHYPHRO: Well then, Socrates, I think that the part of justice which is religious and is holy is the part that has to do with the service of the gods; the remainder is the part of justice that has to do with the service of mankind.

SOCRATES: And what you say there, Euthyphro, to me seems excellent. There is one little point, however, on which I need more light. I am not yet quite clear about the thing which you call 'service.' I suppose you do not mean the sort of care we give to other things. The 'service' of the gods is not like that—the sort of thing we have in mind when we assert that it is not everybody who knows how to care for horses. It is the horseman that knows, is it not?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, certainly.

SOCRATES: I suppose it is the special care that appertains to horses?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes.

SOCRATES: In the same way, it is not everyone who knows about the care of dogs; it is the huntsman.

EUTHYPHRO: True.

SOCRATES: The art of the huntsman is the care of dogs.

EUTHYPHRO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And that of the herdsman is the care of cattle.

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, certainly.

SOCRATES: And in the same way, Euthyphro, holiness and piety mean caring for the gods?

Do you say so?

EUTHYPHRO: I do.

SOCRATES: And so the aim of all this care and service is the same? I mean it thus. The care is given for the good and welfare of the object that is served. You see, for instance, how the horses that are cared for by the horseman's art are benefited and made better. Don't you think so?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, I do.

SOCRATES: And so no doubt the dogs by the art of the huntsman, the cattle by that of the herdsman, and in like manner all the rest. Unless, perhaps, you think that the care may tend to injure the object that is cared for?

EUTHYPHRO: By heaven, not I!

SOCRATES: The care aims at its benefit?

EUTHYPHRO: Most certainly.

SOCRATES: Then holiness, which is the service of the gods, must likewise aim to benefit the gods and make them better? Are you prepared to say that when you do a holy thing you make some deity better?

EUTHYPHRO: By heaven, not I!

SOCRATES: Nor do I fancy, Euthyphro, that you mean it so—far from it. No, it was on this account that I asked just what you meant by service of the gods, supposing that, in fact, you did not mean that sort of care.

EUTHYPHRO: And, Socrates, you were right. I do not mean it so.

SOCRATES: Good. And now what kind of service of the gods will holiness be?

EUTHYPHRO: Socrates, it is the kind that slaves give to their masters.

SOCRATES: I understand. It seems to be a kind of waiting on the gods.

EUTHYPHRO: Just that.

SOCRATES: See if you can tell me this. The art which serves physicians, what result does it serve to produce? Don't you think that it is health?

EUTHYPHRO: I do.

SOCRATES: Further, what about the art that serves the shipwrights? What result does it serve to produce?

EUTHYPHRO: Obviously, Socrates, the making of a ship.

SOCRATES: And that which serves the builders serves the building of a house?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now tell me, best of friends, about the service of the gods. What result will this art serve to produce? You obviously know, since you profess to be the best informed among mankind on things divine!

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, Socrates, I say so, and I tell the truth.

SOCRATES: Then tell me, I adjure you, what is that supreme result which the gods produce when they employ our services?

EUTHYPHRO: They do many things and noble, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Just as the generals do, my friend. All the same you would have no trouble in summing up what they produce, by saying it is victory in war. Isn't it so?

EUTHYPHRO: Of course.

SOCRATES: And the farmers too, I take it, produce many fine results, but the net result of their production is the food they get from the earth.

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, surely.

SOCRATES: Well now, of the many fine and noble things which the gods produce, what is the sum of their production?

EUTHYPHRO: Just a little while ago I told you, Socrates, that the task is not a light one to learn precisely how all these matters stand. I will, however, simply tell you this. If anyone knows how to say and do things pleasing to the gods in prayer and sacrifice, that is holiness, and such behavior saves the family in private life together with the common interests of the state. To do the opposite of things pleasing to the gods is impious, and this it is that upsets all and ruins everything.

SOCRATES: Surely, Euthyphro, if you had wished, you could have summed up what I asked for much more briefly. But the fact is that you are not eager to instruct me. That is clear. But a moment since, you were on the very point of telling me—and you slipped away. Had you given the answer, I would now have learned from you what holiness is, and would be content. As it is—for perforce the lover must follow the loved one wherever he leads the way—once more, how do you define the holy, and what is holiness? Don't you say that it is a science of sacrifice and prayer?

EUTHYPHRO: I do.

SOCRATES: Well, and is not sacrifice a giving to the gods, and prayer an asking them to give?

EUTHYPHRO: Precisely, Socrates.

SOCRATES: By this reasoning, holiness would be the science of asking from the gods and giving to them.

EUTHYPHRO: Quite right, Socrates; you have caught my meaning perfectly.

SOCRATES: Yes, my friend, for I have my heart set on your wisdom, and give my mind to it, so that nothing you say shall be lost. No, tell me, what is this service to the gods? You say it is to ask of them and give to them?

EUTHYPEIRO: I do.

SOCRATES: And hence to ask aright will be to ask them for those things of which we stand in need from them?

EUTHYPHRO: What else?

SOCRATES: And, on the other hand, to give aright will be to give them in return those things which they may need to receive from us? I take it there would be no art in offering anyone a gift of something that he did not need.

EUTHYPHRO: True, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And therefore, Euthyphro, holiness will be a mutual art of commerce between gods and men.

EUTHYPHRO: An art of commerce, if you like to call it so.

SOCRATES: Well, I do not like it if it is not so. But tell me, what advantage could come to the gods from the gifts which they receive from us? Everybody sees what they give us. No good that we possess but is given by them. What advantage can they gain by what they get from us? Have we so much the better of them in this commerce that we get all good things from them, and they get nothing from us?

EUTHYPHRO: What! Socrates. Do you suppose that the gods gain anything by what they get from us?

SOCRATES: If not, then what would be the meaning, Euthyphro, of these gifts to the gods from us?

EUTHYPHRO: What do you think they ought to mean but worship, honor, and, as I just now said, good will?

SOCRATES: So, Euthyphro, the holy is what pleases them, not what is useful to them, nor yet what the gods love?

EUTHYPHRO: I believe that what gives them pleasure is precisely what they love.

SOCRATES: And so once more, apparently the holy is that which the gods love.

EUTHYPHRO: Most certainly.

SOCRATES: After that, will you be amazed to find your statements walking off, and not staying where you put them? And will you accuse me as the Daedalus who makes them move, when you are yourself far more expert than Daedalus, and make them go round in a circle? Don't you see that our argument has come full circle to the point where it began? Surely you have not forgotten how in what was said before we found that holiness and what is pleasing to the gods were not the same, but different from each other. Do you not remember?

EUTHYPHRO: I do.

SOCRATES: And are you not aware now that you say that what the gods love is holy? But is not what the gods love just the same as what is pleasing to the gods?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, certainly.

SOCRATES: Well then, either we were wrong in our recent conclusion, or if that was right, our position now is wrong.

EUTHYPHRO: So it seems.

SOCRATES: And so we must go back again, and start from the beginning to find out what the holy is. As for me, I never will give up until I know. Ah! Do not spurn me, but give your mind with all your might now at length to tell me the absolute truth, for if anybody knows, of all mankind, it is you, and one must not let go of you, you Proteus, until you tell. If you did not know precisely what is holy and unholy, it is unthinkable that for a simple hireling you ever would have moved to prosecute your aged sire on a charge of murder. No, you would have feared to risk the wrath of the gods on the chance that you were not doing right, and would have been afraid of the talk of men. But now I am sure that you think you know exactly what is holy and what is not. So tell me, peerless Euthyphro, and do not hide from me what you judge it to be.

EUTHYPHRO: Another time, then, Socrates, for I am in a hurry, and must be off this minute.

SOCRATES: What are you doing, my friend? Will you leave, and dash me down from the mighty expectation I had of learning from you what is holy and what is not, and so escaping from Meletus' indictment? I counted upon showing him that now I had gained wisdom about things divine from Euthyphro, and no longer out of ignorance made rash assertions and forged innovations with regard to them, but would lead a better life in future.

Questions for Reflection

1. How would you answer Socrates's question, "Is what is holy holy because the gods approve it, or do they approve it because it is holy?" Why?
2. How would you define holiness? What, if anything, might Socrates say about your definition?
3. Do you think that morality is ultimately dependent on God or not? Why?