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# Socrates on the Definition of Piety: *Euthyphro* 10A-11B

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PLATO'S *EUTHYPHRO* is a clear example of a Socratic definitional dialogue. The concept to be defined is that of holiness or piety (τὸ ὅσιον); the need for a definition is presented in a manner characteristic of the early dialogues. Euthyphro is about to prosecute his father on a charge of murder, Socrates expresses surprise at Euthyphro's action, and Euthyphro defends himself by saying that to prosecute his father is pious, whereas not to prosecute him would be impious. Socrates then wonders whether Euthyphro's knowledge of piety and impiety is sufficient to guarantee that he is not acting impiously in prosecuting his father. The trap has been set; Euthyphro's vanity is stung, and the search for a definition begins. The outcome of the search is also familiar; all of Euthyphro's efforts miscarry. The dialogue ends with no satisfactory definition of piety either produced or in the offing.

The central argument in the dialogue is the one Socrates advances (10a-11b) against Euthyphro's definition of piety as "what all the gods love." The argument is interesting on several counts. First, the argument is sufficiently unclear as to warrant discussion of what its structure is. Second, it is at least open to question whether there is any interpretation or reconstruction of the argument according to which it is valid and non-fallacious. Third, there are a number of points of contemporary philosophical interest that inevitably arise in any adequate discussion of the argument. Fourth, the argument has been traditionally thought to have an important moral for contemporary ethical theory, and not just for ancient theology. Before beginning a detailed examination of the argument itself, I will comment briefly on the moral the argument has been traditionally thought to have.<sup>1</sup>

For Euthyphro, the question whether or not he ought to prosecute his father is to be settled by determining whether or not it would be pious for him to do so. Whether or not his doing so would be pious is determined by finding out whether

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. E. Taylor, *Plato the Man and his Work* (London: Methuen, 1949), p. 151, and Robert G. Hoerber, "Plato's *Euthyphro*," *Phronesis*, III (1958), 95-107, esp. n. 1, p. 102, and p. 104.

all the gods love it, or, as we might now say, approve of it. For Euthyphro, then, moral questions (such as “Ought I prosecute my father?”) are settled by appeal to moral authorities—the gods. Euthyphro is offering an authoritarian normative ethical theory. But he apparently wishes to offer an authoritarian meta-ethical theory as well, since ‘pious’ is for him *defined* in terms of the approval of an authority. Moreover, Euthyphro’s authorities must have been thought of by him to be pre-eminently wise and rational; after all, they are the gods. Their wisdom and rationality is part of what makes them moral authorities. It is their wisdom and rationality that enables them to perceive, where mere mortals may fail to perceive, whether a given act is pious. Socrates’ argument may then be thought of as having the following force. If ‘pious’ is to be defined in terms of the gods’ approval, then the piety of a given act cannot be that upon which the gods base their approval of it. If the gods’ approval of a pious act has any rational basis, then, it must lie in their perception of some *other* features of the act. And then it is *these* features in terms of which ‘pious’ should be defined. In general, if one’s normative ethics are authoritarian, and one’s authorities are rational and use their rationality in forming moral judgments, then one’s meta-ethics cannot also be authoritarian.

I want to argue in support of this somewhat traditional interpretation of the *Euthyphro*. I shall try to show that Socrates’ arguments should be taken as supporting this conclusion (indeed, that they cannot be taken to support anything else).

## I

Socrates begins his argument against Euthyphro’s proposed definition by asking him this question: “Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved?”<sup>2</sup> Socrates hopes to get Euthyphro to affirm the first and deny the second of these two alternatives, but Euthyphro fails to understand the question. Socrates agrees to “speak more plainly” (σαφέστερον φράσαι) and then produces the most baffling part of the argument. Before examining the explanation that Socrates offers, we might note that it seems somewhat surprising that Euthyphro does not realize that he cannot, consistent with his own definition, deny the second of these alternatives. For if ‘pious’ is to be defined as ‘loved by all the gods’, then surely, in some sense of ‘because’, it will be because it is loved that the pious is pious. But I think it is easy to see why Euthyphro cannot be expected to have realized this. First of all, it has not been explicitly stated that Euthyphro was to be offering a *definition*. When the question was first raised, Socrates simply asked Euthyphro to “say what the pious is” (τί φησ εἶναι τὸ

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<sup>2</sup> ἄρα τὸ δσιον δι δσιόν ἐστιν φιλεῖται ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν, ἢ δι φιλεῖται δσιόν ἐστιν (10a2-3). Translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

δοιον : 5d7); later, Socrates asks for “the characteristic in virtue of which everything pious is pious” (τὸ εἶδος ᾧ πάντα τὰ δόσια δόσια ἐστίν: 6d10-11). And it is not hard to imagine that Euthyphro, not appreciating the force of the phrase τὸ εἶδος ᾧ, would find it sufficient to produce a formula which he feels will serve to pick out all and only pious things. After all, the philosophical topic of definition was just being invented, and Euthyphro could hardly have been at home in it. And part of Plato’s point will surely be that the definition of a term ‘F’ cannot be *just* a formula which applies to all and only F things. If this is a mistake that Plato wants to show up, then Euthyphro must surely be given the opportunity to make it. At this point in the dialogue Euthyphro is content to say that pious things are the ones the gods love; and if this is what he wishes to say, then he need not be expected to answer Socrates’ question “Is the pious pious because it is loved?” in the affirmative, even if he understood the question. But he has not even claimed to understand it.

## II

The next part of Socrates’ argument, in which he tries to explain to Euthyphro what his question meant, has produced more confusion on the part of commentators and translators than has anything else in the dialogue. Everything starts out well enough: Socrates notes that we speak of a thing being carried and a thing carrying, a thing being led and a thing leading, etc., and that the first member of each pair is different from the second.<sup>3</sup> The first member of each pair is a passive participle (*pheromenon*, *agomenon*, *horōmenon*) and the second an active participle (*pheron*, *agon*, *horōn*).<sup>4</sup> The distinction is surely intended to be a grammatical one; as has been frequently noted, the grammatical terminology in which the distinction between active and passive voices would be expressed had not been invented at the time Plato was writing. The distinction is then applied to the verb relevant to Euthyphro’s definition; being loved (*philoumenon*) is distinguished from loving (*philoun*). So far, so good. The distinction Socrates wishes to draw is clear, even if what he is up to is not.

But having distinguished between active and passive participles, Socrates immediately drops the active member from the discussion and contrasts, instead, the passive participle with the inflected third person singular passive. The distinction Socrates is after has to do with how these forms fit into sentences of the form ‘p because q’. He wants to say that substituting the participle for ‘p’ and the inflected passive for ‘q’ will yield a truth, whereas substituting the inflected

<sup>3</sup> λέγομέν τι φερόμενον καὶ φέρον καὶ ἀγόμενον καὶ ἄγον καὶ δρώμενον καὶ δρών καὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα μανθάνεις ὅτι ἕτερα ἀλλήλων ἐστὶ καὶ ἡ ἕτερα (10a5-8).

<sup>4</sup> In what follows I shall transliterate the Greek terms a Greekless reader will find it useful to identify in following the argument.

passive for 'p' and the participle for 'q' will yield a falsehood. Thus a thing carried (*pheromenon*) is (1) *pheromenon* because *pheretai*, but not (2) *pheretai* because it is a *pheromenon*. The trouble is that whereas Socrates' first distinction was between active and passive voices, this second distinction is between two different passive forms. Thus, it is hard to see how the first distinction is meant to bear on the second. An even greater difficulty is that when we try to translate Socrates' words when he draws this distinction, we are faced with the fact that *both* of these forms are normally translated the same way into English—'is carried', 'is led', etc. If we try to translate what Socrates says, then, we get: "a thing carried is (1) carried because it is carried, but not (2) carried because it is carried." But this makes Socrates' point nonsense.

This difficulty has reduced translators to babble and driven commentators to despair. Let me give one example of each. In one translation of the *Euthyphro* we read: "a thing is not carried because it is in a state of being carried: it is in a state of being carried because it is carried."<sup>5</sup> But even if one can find this intelligible, it is still hard to see why it is supposed to be true. Geach<sup>6</sup> tries translating what Socrates wishes to deny as "A thing is carried because *carried* is what it is" and what he wishes to affirm as "Because a thing is carried, *carried* is what it is" and then gives up, saying that

this is just whistling in the dark; we just do not know how Plato conceived the difference between the forms I provisionally translate 'so-and-so is carried' and '*carried* is what so-and-so is', nor why it is supposed to be obvious that [the second] is true and [the first] is false.

I think that we can do better by way of both translation and interpretation. Indeed, unless we can understand what Plato is up to here we will be in no position to assess his argument.<sup>7</sup>

Two important points need to be noted if we are to grasp Plato's point. The first is that the passive participle can function as part of a noun phrase or, by itself, nominally. *Pheromenon ti* means "something carried"; a *pheromenon* is something which is carried. The second point is that the inflected passive entered the discussion in place of the active participle. *Pheretai*—"it is carried"—can, in general, have the sense of "one carries it" or "something carries it," and it clearly must have that sense in Socrates' argument.<sup>8</sup> It now becomes tempting to try to

<sup>5</sup> F. J. Church, revised by Robert D. Cumming (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1956), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> P. T. Geach, "Plato's *Euthyphro*: An Analysis and Commentary," *The Monist*, July, 1966, p. 378.

<sup>7</sup> This opinion is not shared by Geach. Cf. *ibid.*, bottom.

<sup>8</sup> This has been noted by some translators of the *Euthyphro*. *Pheretai* is translated by Fowler (Loeb Classical Library) as "one carries it" and by Cooper (*The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Hamilton and Cairns, ed.) as "something carries it."

put Socrates' point this way: the passive participle of a verb introduces the notion of an alteration in something—a thing's being in an altered state or condition. The inflected passive of the verb introduces the notion of a process which results in that alteration—a thing's having been acted on in such a way that it is altered as a result. Then Socrates would be saying that a thing's having been acted on in a certain way explains why it is in an altered condition, whereas a thing's being in an altered condition does not explain why it underwent the process which results in that alteration. Socrates would be seen as putting forward a rudimentary causal doctrine having to do with the relative explanatory powers of causes and effects.<sup>9</sup>

But to try to interpret Socrates' point in this way invites the obvious objection that, owing to a clear disanalogy between the verb 'love' and the others that Socrates first considers, the point Socrates wishes to make using those other verbs cannot be applied to the verb 'love'. For whereas a thing that is carried or led is altered by being carried or led, a thing that is loved need not be altered by being loved.<sup>10</sup>

Let me try to present what I take to be Socrates' point in a way that will leave it immune to such an objection. Let us represent the passive participle of a verb 'φ' as 'φ-ed thing' or 'is a φ-ed thing', and the inflected passive of the verb either as 'is φ-ed by x' where the subject, x, is specified or as 'is φ-ed (by something)' where no subject is specified.<sup>11</sup> Then Socrates' point is that, where 'φ' is a verb, a φ-ed thing is

(α) a φ-ed thing because it is φ-ed (by something)

not:

(β) φ-ed (by something) because it is a φ-ed thing.

Our job now is to try to see whether this claim can be understood in a fairly natural way such as to make (α) true and (β) false. Clearly, this will depend upon the force we assign to the crucial word 'because'.

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<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Socrates' generalization of his examples has often been interpreted as giving voice to just such a doctrine. Socrates' generalization is this: εἴ τι γίγνεται ἢ τι πάσχει, οὐδὲν ὅτι γιγνόμενον ἔστι γίγνεται, ἀλλ' ὅτι γίγνεται γιγνόμενον ἔστιν (10c1-3). Cooper translates these lines as follows: "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." This mistranslation gives rise to an erroneous interpretation of Socrates' point. It seems to me that Socrates is trying, without an adequate logical vocabulary, to generalize on his earlier examples; lacking the notion of a variable, Socrates uses the all-purpose verb γίγνεσθαι, in effect as a verb-variable. The result of reading Socrates' sentence in this way—with 'φ' as a verb-variable in place of γίγνεσθαι—is my pair of principles (α) and (β) below.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Geach, *loc. cit.*, pp. 378-379. A further reason for not taking Socrates' point in this way is that the verb 'see', which occurs in the *epagoge*, is, like the verb 'love', dis-analogous to the others in this respect.

<sup>11</sup> Bearing in mind that 'is φ-ed by x' is taken to be equivalent to 'x φ-s it' and 'is φ-ed (by something)' to 'something φ-s it'.

It is not hard to see that, on a natural reading of ( $\alpha$ ) and ( $\beta$ ), 'because' must be understood to have different senses in the two sentence-forms.<sup>12</sup> Let us begin with ( $\beta$ ). We may be at a loss in trying to understand ( $\beta$ ), I think, unless we remember that the inflected passive, 'is  $\varphi$ -ed (by something)', entered the argument in place of an active form.<sup>13</sup> If we are to understand the earlier distinction between active and passive participles to have any bearing on the later distinction between two passive forms, we must, I think, give the inflected passive in ( $\beta$ ) an active sense. Transforming ( $\beta$ ) in this way we get:

( $\beta^*$ ) Someone or something  $\varphi$ -s a  $\varphi$ -ed thing because it is a  $\varphi$ -ed thing.

If we understand the context governing the first occurrence of ' $\varphi$ -ed thing' in ( $\beta^*$ ) to be transparent, we can read ( $\beta^*$ ) as:

( $\beta^*1$ ) Someone or something  $\varphi$ -s a thing (which is, in fact, a  $\varphi$ -ed thing) because it is a  $\varphi$ -ed thing.

Leaving out the parenthetical clause we get:

( $\beta^*2$ ) Someone or something  $\varphi$ -s a thing because it is a  $\varphi$ -ed thing.

Concentrating on just the first part of ( $\beta^*2$ ), "Someone or something  $\varphi$ -s a thing because . . .," it is easy to see that the 'because' should be thought of as introducing a reason for some action or attitude. What sort of reason is being introduced will, of course, depend on the verb that replaces ' $\varphi$ '. Where the verb is one which will properly take 'someone', but not 'something', as the subject (such as the key verb in the argument—'love'), the reason introduced will have to be a person's reason for having a certain attitude or performing a certain action.<sup>14</sup> The first part of ( $\beta^*2$ ) can therefore be understood as introducing a reason which would serve to answer a question of the form "Why does someone  $\varphi$  . . .?" The form of answer, "Someone's reason for  $\varphi$ -ing is that . . .," is clearly what is intended by

<sup>12</sup> J. L. Ackrill is reported (in a footnote in John H. Brown, "The Logic of the *Euthyphro* 10A-11B," *Philosophical Quarterly*, Jan. 1964, p. 13) to have suggested an interpretation much like the one I develop at length below. The interpretation I offer, however, was arrived at independently of Ackrill's.

John C. Hall ("Plato: *Euthyphro* 10a1-11a10," *Philosophical Quarterly* [Jan. 1968], pp. 1-11) also considers the possibility of understanding the argument to employ 'because' equivocally, and even tries out the "person's reason" sense of 'because', in much the way that I do below. But he winds up rejecting such an interpretation, on what seem to me to be mistaken grounds. Cf. n. 22 below and Brown, *loc. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Cf. above, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Where the verb can take 'something' as well as, or rather than, 'someone' as subject, the 'because' might introduce all or part of a purely causal explanation, and not a person's reason. I shall ignore this complication in what follows, as it is not relevant to the point at issue.

the first part of ( $\beta^*2$ ), in which 'because', rather than 'reason for', occurs. ( $\beta$ ), then, can be understood as the claim that someone's reason for  $\varphi$ -ing  $x$  is that  $x$  is a  $\varphi$ -ed thing. I think that this is a natural reading for ( $\beta$ ); that ( $\beta$ ), so read, is an unacceptable principle I hope to show later.

The 'because' in ( $\alpha$ ), on the other hand, cannot be thought of as introducing a person's reason for some attitude or action. The first part of ( $\alpha$ ), "A  $\varphi$ -ed thing is a  $\varphi$ -ed thing because . . .," does not suggest that what is needed to fill the blank is the specification of a person's reason. Rather, it suggests that what is needed is, at least, a logically sufficient condition for applying the participial term ' $\varphi$ -ed thing' to something. Perhaps even more is needed. For we ought to understand ( $\alpha$ ) to be an answer to the question "Why is a  $\varphi$ -ed thing a  $\varphi$ -ed thing?" And this question seems to require an informative answer which provides logically necessary and sufficient conditions for applying the term ' $\varphi$ -ed thing' to something. Transforming ( $\alpha$ ) by replacing the inflected passive with the corresponding inflected active, as we did with ( $\beta$ ), will not alter this reading of ( $\alpha$ ). Transforming ( $\alpha$ ) in this way we get:

( $\alpha^*$ ) A  $\varphi$ -ed thing is a  $\varphi$ -ed thing because someone or something  $\varphi$ -s it.

Once again understanding the context governing the first occurrence of ' $\varphi$ -ed thing' to be transparent, we can read ( $\alpha^*$ ) as:

( $\alpha^*1$ ) Something (which is, in fact, a  $\varphi$ -ed thing) is a  $\varphi$ -ed thing because someone or something  $\varphi$ -s it.

Again leaving out the parenthetical clause we get:

( $\alpha^*2$ ) Something is a  $\varphi$ -ed thing because someone or something  $\varphi$ -s it.

( $\alpha^*2$ ), like ( $\alpha$ ), must be thought of as purporting to provide an informative answer to the question "Why is something a  $\varphi$ -ed thing?", an answer which provides logically sufficient (and perhaps also necessary<sup>15</sup>) conditions for applying the term ' $\varphi$ -ed thing' to something. In what I take to be the natural readings of ( $\alpha$ ) and ( $\beta$ ), then, 'because' is used equivocally. We must now determine whether, on these readings, ( $\alpha$ ) is an acceptable principle and ( $\beta$ ) unacceptable.

We can see why ( $\alpha$ ) should be affirmed and ( $\beta$ ) denied by examining some of Socrates' examples. "A carried thing is a carried thing because it is carried (by something)" has this force: the fact that something or someone carries  $x$  is an

<sup>15</sup> That Plato thought of ( $\alpha$ ) as providing a necessary condition as well seems likely. At 10b1-2 Socrates asks Euthyphro whether a *pheromenon* is a *pheromenon* because it *pheretai* "or because of something else" (ἢ δι' ἄλλο τι). Euthyphro's answer, οὐκ ἀλλὰ διὰ τοῦτο, must be understood to mean that *pheretai* and only *pheretai* specifies an informative sufficient condition for being a *pheromenon*, thus making it necessary as well as sufficient.



informative, logically sufficient, condition for calling *x* a carried thing. This seems unobjectionable. The condition is logically sufficient because it follows from the fact that *x* carries *y* that *y* is a carried thing. It is informative because it might instruct someone in the use of the expression 'carried thing'. 'Carried thing' is to be applied to something, *y*, when there is something, *x*, which carries *y*. By contrast, "A carried thing is carried (by something) because it is a carried thing" has this force: a reason why *x* is carried by someone or something (i.e., a reason why someone or something carries *x*) is that *x* is a carried thing. But this is clearly objectionable; that *x* is a carried thing cannot be anyone's reason for carrying *x*. The same point seems to carry over to the verb Socrates is interested in. The fact that someone loves *x* is an informative, logically sufficient, condition for *x*'s being called a loved thing; but the fact that *x* is a loved thing does not explain why someone loves *x*. It cannot be anyone's reason for loving *x* that *x* is a loved thing.<sup>16</sup> Thus, for Socrates' claim to be made intelligible and acceptable, the *hoti* ('because') in *philoumenon hoti phileitai* and *phileitai hoti philoumenon* must be understood to be used equivocally. But whether this equivocation proves fatal to Socrates' argument remains to be seen.

### III

At this point (10d1) Socrates once again poses his original question, and this time Euthyphro is willing to answer. What he says is that the pious is

(a) loved by the gods because it is pious

not:

(b) pious because it is loved (by the gods<sup>17</sup>).

('Loved' translates the inflected passive *phileitai*; the participle *philoumenon* does not appear here.) Now a new term is introduced: *theophiles*, or 'god-loved'. From the manner of its introduction it is clearly serving as a specific filler for *philoumenon*. To be *theophiles*, I take it, is to be a *philoumenon* which *phileitai*

<sup>16</sup> One might offer the following objection to this claim. My reason for loving *x* cannot be that *I* love it, but it can be that *others* love it. And if a loved thing is one that people generally love, then perhaps *I can* give as my reason for loving *x* that it is a loved thing, i.e., that it is generally loved. Socrates' argument, as we shall see, neatly avoids this difficulty by replacing *philoumenon* ('a loved thing') with *theophiles* ('god-loved') before the discussion of why the *gods* love what they do begins.

<sup>17</sup> Plato does not actually say *hupo theōn*—'by the gods'—here, but that qualification is clearly intended.

*hupo theōn*. Next a pair of *hoti* statements, like (a) and (b) above, is put forward (by Socrates, with Euthyphro's assent) about *theophiles*.<sup>18</sup> The god-loved is

(a') god-loved because it is loved by the gods

not:

(b') loved (by the gods<sup>19</sup>) because it is god-loved.

Euthyphro has now agreed that (a) and (a') are true while (b) and (b') are false. Socrates claims that this shows the pious and the god-loved to be "different from one another" (ἕτερον τοῦτο τούτου), for "if they were the same" (εἰ γε ταῦτόν ἦν), (b') would follow from (a) and (b) would follow from (a'). The warrant for this inference, not stated by Socrates, can only be that the substitution of 'god-loved' for 'pious' in (a) yields (b') and the substitution of 'pious' for 'god-loved' in (a') yields (b). At this point it will be wise to stop and assess the argument.

First of all, what does Socrates mean when he says that the pious and the god-loved are different from one another? Does he think he has shown that the class of pious things and the class of god-loved things are not co-extensive? If he does think this, he is clearly mistaken. His argument depends on substituting the terms 'pious' and 'god-loved' for one another in sentences agreed to be true, where the substitutions produce sentences which are agreed to be false. But this result will not show that the terms 'pious' and 'god-loved' apply to different instances unless the sentences in which the substitutions are made are clearly extensional. And sentences of the form 'p because q' are not extensional, whether 'because q' is thought of as introducing a person's reason for acting or a logically sufficient condition for the application of a term to something.

But there is no reason to think that Socrates took himself to be showing that these two classes are not coextensive. He has already told Euthyphro that he is

<sup>18</sup> Whether the *ὅτι* statements about τὸ θεοφιλέσ enter the argument at 10d9-10 or only later at 10e5-7 is open to question. I have followed Bast and Schanz in amending 10d10 by adding the words τὸ θεοφιλέσ as the subject of the sentence, which then amounts to an assertion of (a'). If the manuscript tradition is accepted, the subject of the sentence is an implicit τὸ ὅσιον, which would carry over from 10d1. Socrates' point would then be that *what is pious* is god-loved because it is loved by the gods. The reason for preferring the emendation is not that this last point would be unacceptable to Socrates (it would not), but that without the emendation the speech at 10d9-10 would have no place in the argument. The construction at 10e2-7 (ὁμολογοῦμεν τὸ μὲν ὅσιον . . . τὸ δὲ γε θεοφιλέσ . . .), where (a') and the negation of (b') are explicitly asserted, indicates that at least one if not both of (a') and (b') have been explicitly formulated already. Burnet, for some reason, feels that the emendation "spoils the argument by making τὸ θεοφιλέσ the subject instead of τὸ ὅσιον" (John Burnet, *Plato's Euthyphro* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924], p. 49). How this would spoil the argument is unclear to me. But even without the emendation the argument is not spoiled; we need only take the agreement at 10e5 to refer back to 10c9-11, where φιλούμενον ὁὶ φιλεῖται is affirmed and φιλεῖται ὅτι φιλούμενον is denied. But this would make the place of 10d9-10 in the argument somewhat mysterious.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. n. 17.

not interested in an enumeration of things that are pious, but rather wants to know the characteristic in virtue of which (τὸ εἶδος ᾧ) each pious thing is pious (6d9-11). Clearly, the point must be that 'god-loved' does not introduce τὸ εἶδος ᾧ a thing is pious. And this point is quite consistent with 'god-loved' applying to the same things to which 'pious' applies. Also, Socrates gives some indication, at the end of his argument, that he realizes he can grant Euthyphro that 'pious' and 'god-loved' apply to the same things without putting his main point in jeopardy.<sup>20</sup>

So Socrates is trying to show that 'god-loved' does not introduce τὸ εἶδος ᾧ a thing is pious. And I think it is safe to say that the phrase which *does* introduce τὸ εἶδος ᾧ a thing is pious would be the definition of 'pious'. So the principle which Socrates' argument depends on is not, as Geach thinks, "the Leibnizian principle that two expressions for the same thing must be mutually replaceable *salva veritate*,"<sup>21</sup> but rather a principle which might be formulated roughly as follows: two expressions, one of which is a definition of the other, must be mutually replaceable *salva veritate*. We might call this the principle of substitutivity of definitional equivalents, understanding definitional equivalents to be a pair of expressions one of which is a definition of the other. And while perhaps both principles can be shown to break down in some intensional contexts, the principle of substitutivity of definitional equivalents does not seem to be one which will break down in the intensional contexts in question, even if the Leibnizian principle will. So if there is a flaw in Socrates' argument, it does not lie in the intensionality of 'because'. But it may lie in an equivocation on 'because'.

We saw earlier that in order to render Socrates' claims about the use of participles and inflected passives in 'because' contexts intelligible, we had to interpret *hoti* equivocally. It is clear that we will have to do the same here if we are to see why (a) and (a') are to be accepted as true, and (b) and (b') rejected as false. Let us then disambiguate the troublesome word *hoti* in the following way: *phileisthai hoti* (clearly equivalent in the context to *phileitai hupo theōn hoti*) will be rendered as 'the reason the gods love it is that . . .'; *hosion hoti* and *theophiles hoti* as 'a logically sufficient condition for applying the term 'pious' to it is that . . .' and 'a logically sufficient condition for applying the term 'god-loved' to it is that . . .', respectively. The referent of 'it' will be supplied by the subject of each sentence in which these phrases occur. The four sentences can now be reformulated as:

(Ra) The reason the gods love what is pious is that it is pious.

(Rb) A logically sufficient condition for applying the term 'pious' to what is pious is that the gods love it.

<sup>20</sup> 11b2-4. Socrates says that the question of what piety is (τί ποτε ὄν τὸ ὅσιον) arises even if the pious *is* loved by the gods (εἴτε φιλεῖται ὑπὸ θεῶν); and he adds that he and Euthyphro will not disagree about this last point (οὐ γὰρ περὶ τούτου διοισόμεθα)—i.e., will agree that what is pious is loved by the gods.

<sup>21</sup> Geach, *loc. cit.*, p. 376.

(Ra') A logically sufficient condition for applying the term 'god-loved' to what is god-loved is that the gods love it.

(Rb') The reason the gods love what is god-loved is that it is god-loved.

We may now turn to the question whether (Ra) and (Ra') should be accepted by Euthyphro as true, but (Rb) and (Rb') rejected by him as false.

Since (Ra) is what is going to get Euthyphro into trouble, by turning out to be inconsistent with his definition, one might feel that he should not accept it. But Euthyphro's acceptance of it must be taken to indicate that he thinks the gods do have a reason for loving pious things, that they do not love pious things irrationally, and that *their being pious things* is precisely this reason. (Ra') seems clearly acceptable; that the term 'god-loved' correctly applies to something ought to follow from the fact that the gods love it. (Rb), however, should not have been rejected by Euthyphro; for his rejection of it is clearly inconsistent with his definition and it is not apparent that he must reject it in order to maintain that the gods have a reason for loving the pious. But as we will see, Socrates' conclusion does not depend upon Euthyphro's rejection of (Rb); whether Socrates saw that a rejection of (Rb) was superfluous, however, is another matter. But (Rb') must certainly be rejected. For although a person's reason for loving something, *x*, may be that *x* has a property *P*, it is absurd to suppose that this could hold when *P* is the property of being loved by him. For *x*'s having this property amounts to nothing more nor less than the fact that he loves *x*. And one's *reason* for loving something cannot be that he loves it. Imagine the following dialogue:

A: "She mistreats you terribly. Why do you love her?"

B: "Just because I do."

B's answer, which amounts to saying "I just love her," is clearly a rejection of A's question. B is saying, in effect, that he has *no* reason for loving her; he just does. Thus, since being god-loved amounts to nothing more nor less than being loved by the gods (a point Euthyphro can be assumed to have at least a dim awareness of, in view of his acceptance of (a')), (Rb') is certainly false. The gods' *reason* for loving something cannot be that they love it.

Socrates, we have seen, equivocates on *hoti* in the course of his argument. But this is not to say he commits the fallacy of equivocation in the argument. Let us call the *hoti* which serves to introduce a person's reason a "reason-*hoti*," and the one which serves to introduce logically sufficient conditions for the application of a term a "logical-*hoti*." Then for Socrates to be committing the fallacy of equivocation would be for him to infer, by substitution, from a sentence which must be understood to contain a reason-*hoti* one which must be understood to contain a logical-*hoti*, or *vice versa*. But Socrates does not do this. Although he equivocates on *hoti* in the argument, the word is used univocally within each

of the *inferences* that Socrates draws. Socrates' argument, as we have interpreted it, was that if 'pious' and 'god-loved' are definitionally equivalent, then (a) entails (b') and (a') entails (b). But the *hoti* in both (a') and (b) is the logical-*hoti*; the one in both (a) and (b') is the reason-*hoti*. Socrates' argument, then, does not commit the fallacy of equivocation.<sup>22</sup>

Nor does the argument depend upon Euthyphro's dubious rejection of (b). For the conclusion, that 'pious' and 'god-loved' are not definitionally equivalent, follows from the acceptance of (a) and rejection of (b') alone.<sup>23</sup> If 'pious' meant 'god-loved', then something's being pious could not be a reason for the gods to love it, since something's being god-loved cannot be a reason for the gods to love it. The *hoti* that is crucial for Socrates' argument is the reason-*hoti*. But the logical-*hoti* still plays an important, if subsidiary, role in the argument. For the acceptance of (a'), in which the logical-*hoti* occurs, paves the way for the rejection of the absurd (b').

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<sup>22</sup> Brown, *loc. cit.*, claims that Socrates' argument is equivocally fallacious because, he feels, the negation of (b) is *inferred* by Socrates from (a); he similarly feels that Socrates infers the falsity of *pheretai hoti pheromenon* from the truth of *pheromenon hoti pheretai*, etc. As I have presented the argument, the denials of (b) and (b') are put forward independently of the assertions of (a) and (a'), not inferred from them. If this is right, there is no reason to suspect that some inference in the argument is equivocally fallacious.

There is, however, some reason for thinking that the negations of (b) and (b') are inferred from (a) and (a'), respectively. For although no inferential particles precede the introduction of the negations of (b) and (b') into the argument, the situation seems to be different in the *epagoge*. There an instance of ( $\alpha$ ) is put forward, after which the negation of the corresponding instance of ( $\beta$ ) is introduced preceded by the (weak) inferential particle  $\acute{\alpha}\rho\alpha$  (10b4-8). And since the truth of both (a) and (a') and the falsity of both (b) and (b') seem to be inferred from the *epagoge*, the inferential connection between ( $\alpha$ ) and not-( $\beta$ ) might be thought to carry over to the later pairs.

Since the inferential particle is the weak  $\acute{\alpha}\rho\alpha$ , rather than the strong  $\omicron\upsilon\nu$ , one might argue that Socrates is speaking somewhat carelessly and is not supposing that there is a logical connection between ( $\alpha$ ) and not-( $\beta$ ). But the success of my interpretation does not depend on such an argument, for I think it can be shown that even if not-( $\beta$ ) is being inferred from ( $\alpha$ ), the inference is not fallacious *despite* the equivocation on *hoti*.

The sense of ( $\alpha$ ), as I have interpreted it, might be put in this way:

Being a  $\varphi$ -ed thing is not a property that a thing can have (or be thought to have) independently of being (or being thought to be)  $\varphi$ -ed by someone or something.

The sense of ( $\beta$ ) would be:

Someone's reason for  $\varphi$ -ing something is (or can be) that that thing has the property of being a  $\varphi$ -ed thing.

But despite the obvious equivocation on 'because' in ( $\alpha$ ) and ( $\beta$ ), it still seems quite correct to *infer* not-( $\beta$ ) from ( $\alpha$ ). For if *both* ( $\alpha$ ) and ( $\beta$ ) were true, then it would be possible for someone, x, to  $\varphi$  something, y, and have as a reason for  $\varphi$ -ing y that y has a property which, it turns out, y cannot even be *thought* to have independently of x's  $\varphi$ -ing it. The absurdity of this seems to be that it conflicts with the following, which I take to be a conceptual truth. If x's reason for  $\varphi$ -ing y is that y has property P, then it must be possible for y to have property P independently of being  $\varphi$ -ed by x. Otherwise, x's "reason" turns out to be no reason at all. Cf. above, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Lynn E. Rose, "A Note on the *Euthyphro*, 10-11," *Phronesis*, X (1965), 149-150, for a brief discussion of the multiplicity of inconsistencies into which Euthyphro falls.

## IV

What, then, does Socrates' argument prove? It does not prove that 'pious' cannot be defined as 'god-loved'. It only proves that 'pious' cannot be defined as 'god-loved' if the gods' reason for loving what is pious is that it is pious. Does this amount to proving that 'pious' cannot be defined as 'god-loved' if the gods have a reason for loving what is pious? No; the gods might have other reasons for loving what is pious. But this implication is clear at any rate: if the gods do have reasons for loving what is pious, it is to these reasons that we should look in trying to define 'pious'. If the gods have a reason for loving pious acts, it will be that these acts have, or are thought by the gods to have, certain features. It is these features, then, that should serve to define piety. The fact that the gods have a rational love for what is pious may be relevant to the problem of defining piety. But then it would be in the rationality, and not in the love, that the answer to this problem lies.

The more general point I take to be this. If a moral concept M is such that there is an authority whose judgment whether or not something falls under M is decisive and is rationally grounded, then 'M' cannot be defined in terms of that authority's judgment. This may be taken to be a generalization of the conclusion of the central argument in Plato's *Euthyphro*.<sup>24</sup>

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