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## Piety: Lending a Hand to Euthyphro

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Many philosophers take the point of Plato's *Euthyphro* to be an indictment of attempts to ground morality in religion, specifically in the attitudes of a deity or deities. It has been argued cogently in recent essays that Plato's case is far from conclusive. This essay suggests instead that the *Euthyphro* can be read more narrowly as raising critical questions about a specific religious virtue, Piety. Then it presents the ingredients of a reply to those questions. The reply proceeds by suggesting that one need not accept the standards of definition used by Plato, and that one can provide an explanation of what Piety is by embedding Piety in a more comprehensive picture of the human, the divine, and the relations between the two. The picture makes use of a doctrine of divine sovereignty and a doctrine concerning love between God and humans.

Philosophers claim to find in Plato's *Euthyphro* a powerful argument against any attempt to base moral judgments on religious foundations. Many philosophers would contend in particular that the argument central to the *Euthyphro* is a dilemma that challenges the project of assigning moral preeminence to the gods, or God.<sup>1</sup> For any morally praiseworthy action, either God loves the action because it is good or the action is good because God loves it. If God loves the action because it is good, then although that fact may disclose something about the purity of God's moral psychology, it discloses nothing about what makes the action good so that God may love it. If alternatively God's loving an action is what makes the action good, then it would seem hard to resist the conclusion that if God were to love adultery, blasphemy, and cannibalism (the ABCs of evil), then adultery, blasphemy, and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Peter Geach, *God and the Soul* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), chap. 9 ("The Moral Law and the Law of God"); Baruch A. Brody, "Morality and Religion Reconsidered," in *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion: An Analytic Approach*, ed. Baruch A. Brody (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), pp. 592–603; Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 203–9; Norman Kretzmann, "Abraham, Isaac, and Euthyphro: God and the Basis of Morality," in *Hamartia: The Concept of Error in the Western Tradition*, ed. Donald Stump *et al.* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), pp. 27–50; and William E. Mann, "Modality, Morality, and God," *Noûs*, 23 (1989), pp. 83–99. I do not mean to imply that any of these authors regards the dilemma as sound.

cannibalism would be by that very fact morally *de rigueur*, a consequence that all but the religious diehards would find repugnant.

It is possible to be overly impressed by this dilemma.<sup>2</sup> However, my concern here is not to examine the pros and cons of theological objectivism and theological subjectivism, nor to defend or attack some version of a divine command theory of moral rightness or wrongness. My contention instead is that in our eagerness to join those issues, we philosophers have read back into the *Euthyphro* something that is not there, namely, any appreciation of that very set of general issues. The topic of the dialogue is something more *parochial* than that, in two senses of the term 'parochial': the topic is specific and specifically religious. Once we see the parochial nature of the *Euthyphro*, we can better appreciate the philosophical questions it does properly raise. We will also be in a position to reconsider Euthyphro's hapless performance. I shall argue on his behalf that there are respectable ways of responding to the questions and arguments voiced by Socrates.

This essay is a hybrid of two quite different projects. First, I try to give an accurate analysis of the argumentation that occurs in the *Euthyphro*, not only for the sake of historical fidelity, but because the arguments ascribed to Socrates by Plato are shrewdly crafted and philosophically pertinent. That project occupies Sections I–III below. Second, in Sections IV and V I sketch a response that someone of a Euthyphronian persuasion might give to Socrates's arguments. That someone should not be thought to be Euthyphro himself. In furtherance of my second project I do not take myself to be confined to considerations that could have been entertained by Euthyphro, Socrates, Plato, or anyone else alive in fifth-century-BCE Athens. The response I sketch owes much to developments in Christian philosophical theology, developments of which it is obvious Plato could not have been aware. I offer no apologies for the hybridization. Hybrids can be sterile. I hope that the fruit of this experiment in hybridization turns out to be vigorous.

## I. SOME PRELIMINARIES

The subject of the *Euthyphro* is Piety or the pious (*to hosion*): the dialogue begins in earnest when Socrates asks Euthyphro to tell him what kind of a thing Piety is, such that it, the selfsame thing, is common to all pious actions (5D).<sup>3</sup> The ostensible religious backdrop for the dialogue involves the polytheistic pantheon of the Olympian deities, powerful and even good on balance, but nonetheless agreed upon by Euthyphro and Socrates to be a bunch of squabbling gods with human psychological foibles writ large.

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<sup>2</sup> See the essays cited in the previous note.

<sup>3</sup> Combinations of numbers and letters refer to the Stephanus pagination of the *Euthyphro*, as contained, say, in John Burnet's 1900 Greek text, *Platonis Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), vol. 1, pp. 1–23.

When we contemporary philosophers wish to emphasize the enduring philosophical habitability of the *Euthyphro*, we retrofit it by making two adjustments to it. First, we treat the example of Piety as if it were virtually a cipher, replaceable with something as general, perhaps, as Goodness or Rightness. Second, finding very few believers in Zeus and his conspecifics nowadays, we replace the gods of Mt. Olympus with the—or *a*—monotheistic God. Modified in these ways, the dialogue can be understood in such a way that it raises fundamental questions about the attempts of monotheistic religions to provide theological foundations for morality. Contemporary philosophers can claim partial justification for the second modification by citing the drift of the *Euthyphro* itself. In order to set aside cases of disagreement among the gods, Plato has Socrates suggest to Euthyphro that they confine their attention—and the extension of the term Piety—to just those things that *all* the gods love (9C-D). Let us call this definition the (9D) definition:

(9D) Piety is what all the gods love.

In similar fashion, Impiety is to be confined to what all the gods hate. If all the gods are in harmony on matters pious and impious, and if a monotheistic God is not racked with internal conflict, we can regard the second modification as bringing the dialogue more in line with monotheism.

We would do well, however, to keep a watchful eye on these two modifications. The shift to monotheism can be made to appear too simple, with the resultant conception of deity remaining virtually featureless, as much a cipher as Piety has sometimes been made to become. Plato had a conception of the gods of Mt. Olympus that was rich in content, whatever he may have thought about the veridicality of that content. Different monotheistic religions have overlapping but also rich and characteristically distinct conceptions of their deity. The plurality of conceptions might be expected to generate a plurality of responses to the *Euthyphro*. The hand that I lend to Euthyphro will not be a mere skeletal abstraction. It will be fleshed out with some elements of a familiar, Christian version of monotheism. The enduring *philosophical* relevance of the *Euthyphro* lies in the integrity of its arguments, not in its backdrop of Olympian deities.

As for the other modification, I shall concentrate my attention on the fact that the *Euthyphro* is about *Piety*, one but only one of a handful of virtues singled out for philosophical scrutiny by Plato. It is the same Piety that is a member of the famous quintet of virtues listed in the *Protagoras*, a virtue whose confreres are Wisdom, Courage, Self-Control, and Justice—or, had Plato been successful with the line of argument he tried out in the *Protagoras*

and apparently abandoned thereafter, a virtue that would have been the same as the other four, as the other four would have been the same as each other.<sup>4</sup>

## II. THE ONSLAUGHT

It is natural to think that the *Euthyphro*'s logical climax occurs at Stephanus page 11B, where Socrates wraps up the case against the (9D) definition. That argument and its culmination are a truly intricate and impressive piece of reasoning. It provides what grist there is in the dialogue for the dilemmatic mill mentioned earlier. Moreover, the argument is brought back on stage at 15B-C to criticize Euthyphro's last attempt at definition. Even so, the fact remains that the *Euthyphro* does run for another five pages after 11B, or a full one-third of the length of the dialogue. Those pages are given over to an attempt to complete a definition of Piety on the assumption that Piety is a kind of Justice. I wish to examine the content of those pages, suggesting that they are not entirely anticlimactic.<sup>5</sup>

But first, let us look at the argument at 9D–11B. Socrates has just offered, ostensibly on Euthyphro's behalf and certainly with Euthyphro's consent, the (9D) definition. Socrates now (10A) poses the notorious question, 'Is Piety loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?' Before Euthyphro gets a chance to answer the question, Socrates secures Euthyphro's assent to the following two theses, one positive, the other negative (where 'φ' stands for any transitive verb of action):

- (1) A φed thing is φed because something (or someone) φs it.
- (2) It is not the case that something (or someone) φs a φed thing because it is φed.

Having established these two principles, Socrates gets Euthyphro to agree that

- (3) The pious is loved by the gods because it is pious,

and that

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<sup>4</sup> I intend the phrase 'the same as' to be neutral between 'necessarily equivalent in extension' and 'identical'. For a defense of the former interpretation, see Gregory Vlastos, "The Unity of the Virtues in the *Protagoras*," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 25 (1971–1972), pp. 415–58. For the latter, see Terry Penner, "The Unity of Virtue," *The Philosophical Review*, 82 (1973), 35–68.

<sup>5</sup> The *Euthyphro* has been blessed with some outstanding analysis and commentary. For analysis of the segment up to and including 11B, see S. Marc Cohen, "Socrates on the Definition of Piety: *Euthyphro* 10a–11b," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 9 (1971), pp. 1–13; and Richard Sharvy, "*Euthyphro* 9d–11b: Analysis and Definition in Plato and Others," *Noûs*, 6 (1972), pp. 119–37. For an interpretation of the post-11B part, see Mark L. McPherran, "Socratic Piety in the *Euthyphro*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 23 (1985), pp. 283–309.

- (4) It is not the case that the pious is pious because it is loved by the gods. (10D)

Socrates now springs the trap on Euthyphro's definition. That which is loved by the gods, or the god-beloved (*theophiles*), cannot be the same as the pious. For notice, first, the following instances of (1) and (2):

- (1i) A god-beloved thing is god-beloved because the gods love it.  
(2i) It is not the case that the gods love a god-beloved thing because it is god-beloved. (10E)

Now if (9D) were true and thus the god-beloved and the pious were the same, then by substitution (3) would yield

- (3') The god-beloved is loved by the gods because it is god-beloved.

Moreover, substitution would convert (1i) into

- (1i') The pious is pious because the gods love it.

But (3') contradicts (2i), and (1i') contradicts (4) (10E–11A). Hence Euthyphro cannot consistently cleave to the (9D) definition while assenting to all of principles (1)–(4).

But Socrates has more embarrassment to inflict on Euthyphro. In the last major unit of the *Euthyphro*, the two of them embark on a new campaign, in which Plato contrives to have Euthyphro march ultimately into the same ambush he encountered at 10E–11A. The campaign proceeds on Socrates's suggestion that Piety is a part but not the whole of Justice, and that the task before them is to specify what part of Justice Piety is (12C–E). Euthyphro makes three attempts at the specification. Each successor is supposed to respond to Socrates's questioning by making more precise something left unclear by its predecessor. By the time Euthyphro puts forward the third attempt, however, he appears so shell-shocked by the barrage of Socrates's questions that it is not even clear whether he remembers that Piety is supposed by them to be a part of Justice. Here are the attempts, baptized by their Stephanus page numbers:

- (12E) Piety is the part of Justice that is concerned with the care (*therapeia*) of the gods.  
(13D) Piety is the part of Justice that is of service to (*hupēretikē*) the gods.  
(14D) Piety is [the part of Justice that is?] concerned with a knowledge of how to give to, and beg from, the gods.

Socrates deploys the Craft Analogy, ubiquitous in the early dialogues, in criticism of the (12E) definition. The care of horses, dogs, and cattle is given over to the expert few—the breeders, trainers, herdsmen, and the like—who have the knowledge requisite to benefit and improve the creatures in their charge. This kind of care entails both specialized knowledge in the care-provider and intended benefit to the care-recipient. Socrates uses the second entailment to embarrass Euthyphro's (12E) definition. Nothing we do could possibly benefit or improve the gods; although Socrates never raises the point, he might have claimed that it would be *impious* to suppose that we could do so. Nor does he pursue the first entailment. Surely it is worth pursuing. Even if one came to think, as Plato did in the *Republic*, that the virtues of Wisdom and Courage could not be spread across the whole populace, one might still think that virtues like Justice and Self-control can and ought to be; if Piety is a part of Justice, so should it.

The (13D) definition replaces the notion of care of the gods in favor of the notion of service to the gods. This initially sounds more promising, for one may serve the gods without improving them. Socrates takes the service-relationship to be like the relation of apprentice to master. Invoking another aspect of the Craft Analogy, Socrates points out that apprentices help their masters to achieve their masters' goals, whether it be in treating the ill or in building a ship or a house. What goals, then, do we help the gods to achieve? Euthyphro's answer, 'Many fine things,' does not tell Socrates *what* fine things the gods bring about specifically with our aid. And, although Socrates does not press the point, there is another question waiting in the wings, suggested by the line of questioning aimed at the (12E) definition: what reason do we have to think that there are *any* goals for which the gods need or want our help? What can they achieve with our aid that they cannot achieve just as easily without our aid?

Socrates construes the (14D) definition as describing the pious person as *emporikē* (14E), possessed of a bartering skill of a certain kind. It is clear enough that there are many things we need to beg from the gods: in fact, Socrates is happy to say that every good we have we receive from them. But what can we give the gods in return? Or is it that pious people are such skillful barterers that they wring all sorts of goods from the gods without giving them anything in return? Euthyphro responds by saying that what we give the gods are honor (*timē*), respect (*gera[s]*), and gratitude (*charis*), gifts that please them without benefiting them (15A-B), gifts, in fact, that they love. Socrates now pounces for the last time. Euthyphro's (14D) definition entails that Piety is essentially connected to what the gods love, and so Euthyphro has to face anew all the problems that beset the (9D) definition.

At the end of the *Euthyphro*, then, the score is Socrates: 4, Euthyphro: 0. But remember that Plato was pitching *and* calling the balls and strikes. Perhaps some instant replay is in order.

### III. DEFINITION AND EXPLANATION

Let us first examine the (9D) definition. Socrates takes the point of his elenchus to be that the (9D) definition must be given up. But Socrates's case succeeds only because he takes advantage of two assumptions, *Euthyphro's Concession* and the *Definitional Ideal*.

Euthyphro's Concession is simply his acquiescence in propositions (3) and (4). Taken in tandem with the (9D) definition, the concession is surprising, because the (9D) definition appears to give a subjectivistic account of Piety while the concession of (3) and (4) seems to pay tribute to objectivism. It is tempting to think that Euthyphro's Concession is not only surprising but unwise, because the *reductio* that Socrates works on the (9D) definition shows that given propositions (1) and (2) as truisms, propositions (9D), (3), and (4) form an inconsistent triad. It is certainly true that Euthyphro is not *compelled* to concede (3) and (4). Moreover, the swiftness with which Euthyphro signs on to (3) and (4)—it happens without comment, let alone protest, in one line at 10D—precludes any development of the second horn of the dilemma presented at the beginning of this essay. Let us note for now what we get if we deny what Euthyphro affirmed and affirm what he denied:

(Anti-3) It is not the case that the pious is loved by the gods because it is pious.

(Anti-4) The pious is pious because it is loved by the gods.

We shall return to Euthyphro's Concession later.

Let us turn our attention to the other major assumption of Socrates's elenchus of the (9D) definition, the Definitional Ideal. After the stage-setting with which the *Euthyphro* begins, Socrates asks Euthyphro to tell him 'what kind of a thing godliness and ungodliness are'; to say 'what the pious is' (5C-D). Put that way, the request is informal and unformed: Euthyphro might reasonably have been expected to satisfy it in any number of ways. By the time Plato gets to 10E–11A, however, Socrates has honed his conception of what is called for down to razor-sharp precision. It is unfortunate that Plato does not let us see the principle that generates the contradictions mentioned above, for whatever the principle may be, it is an important component of the Definitional Ideal. All we are allowed to see is the transformation of (3) into (3') and (1i) into (1i'). We can infer that whatever its exact contours, the principle that sanctions those transformations must permit substitution of terms in intensional contexts governed by 'because'. Marc Cohen suggests that what is called for is a "principle of substitutivity of definitional equivalents, understanding definitional equivalents to be a pair of expressions one of which is a definition of the other", to the effect that such expressions "must



be mutually replaceable *salva veritate*.”<sup>6</sup> Richard Sharvy argues that Cohen’s principle, although sufficient to underwrite the Socratic transformations, also sanctions clearly invalid transformations. Sharvy’s own suggestion, where ‘ $\alpha$ ’ and ‘ $\beta$ ’ range over adjectives and ‘ $\alpha$ -ness’ and ‘ $\beta$ -ness’ range over corresponding abstract nouns, is the principle that [if  $\alpha$ -ness = *df*  $\beta$ -ness, then for anything that is  $\alpha$ , it is  $\alpha$  because it is  $\beta$ ].<sup>7</sup>

We need not choose up sides on these principles. We need only observe that whatever principle comports best with Plato’s thought, it will underscore the fact that for Socrates, to “say what the pious is” is to give a *definition* of Piety, an account that specifies the essence of Piety. For if *any* pair of terms will tolerate substitution into ‘because’ contexts, it would seem that they must be related as *definiendum* and *definiens*. Consider, for example, two terms that bear only the relation of necessary coextensiveness, a relation that is tight but not as tight as definitional equivalence. Necessarily coextensive terms are not generally interchangeable in ‘because’ contexts. Suppose that the terms ‘water’ and ‘H<sub>2</sub>O’ are necessarily coextensive but not related as *definiendum* to *definiens*. Truth is not preserved in the transformation of ‘Fish can respire in water because water is H<sub>2</sub>O’ into ‘Fish can respire in water because water is water’.<sup>8</sup> If you think that ‘water’ and ‘H<sub>2</sub>O’ are related as *definiendum* to *definiens* (and not, say, as *analysandum* to *analysans*), so that the example does not illustrate the point I am trying to make, then consider instead the pair, ‘triangular’ and ‘trilateral’, neither of which is plausibly part or the whole of the definition of the other. Then compare ‘This figure has one side less than a quadrilateral because it is trilateral’ with ‘This figure has one side less than a quadrilateral because it is triangular’.

Suppose instead that we do have two terms related as *definiendum* to *definiens*, perhaps ‘triangle’ and ‘closed, plane, rectilinear figure with exactly three interior angles’. It may be that terms like these can pass the substitution test; if they cannot, then the principle behind Plato’s reliance on substitution to refute the (9D) definition is misplaced. Let us set that issue aside for now, however, for there is another component of the Definitional Ideal that I wish to expose. Socrates takes the importance of the project of definition to be this: *if one cannot provide a definition of X, then one cannot claim to know with certainty which things are X and which things are not X*.<sup>9</sup> Euthyphro claims, for example, to know that prosecuting his own father is pious. If he lacks knowledge of the definition of Piety, his claim to certainty about prosecuting his father is unfounded. (In similar fashion, in the *Meno* Socrates

<sup>6</sup> Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Sharvy, *op. cit.*, p. 132. My square brackets are intended to function as Quine’s quasi-quotes.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen’s principle will sanction this transformation *if* ‘water’ and ‘H<sub>2</sub>O’ are related as *definiendum* and *definiens*. Sharvy’s principle will not.

<sup>9</sup> See Terence Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), §§ 12–16.

professes not to know whether virtue can be taught because he does not know what the definition of virtue is.)

Although I shall not pass judgment on the truth or utility of the Definitional Ideal, two observations are in order. First, the Definitional Ideal does not encode the only principles applicable to the enterprise of giving an account. Second, that enterprise can commence and proceed fruitfully in the absence of satisfying the Definitional Ideal.<sup>10</sup> An account of Piety need not be a definition but rather an *explanation* of Piety, something that outlines its religious dimensions, something that may in fact require embedding Piety in a more comprehensive theory about the human, the divine, and the relations between them. Not only may we be able to give such an explanatory account in the absence of a definition of Piety, but in fact, to insist that we cannot proceed until we have met the Definitional Ideal may have the effect of stifling the task of giving an account.

The account I have to offer is under-developed and undefended here. I only claim for it that it is neither unfamiliar nor indefensible. Much of it can be found in historically important Christian philosophical theology. Some of it fits, moreover, with the opinions hinted at by Euthyphro and rejected by Socrates. The account has two major components, one *metaphysical*, the other *moral*. The metaphysical component interacts directly with the examination of the (12E), (13D), and (14D) definitions. That examination will provide a segue to the moral component, which in turn will lead us back to the issues surrounding the (9D) definition.

#### IV. DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

The metaphysical component is a doctrine about God's *sovereignty over creation*. The doctrine maintains that God exists *a se*, depending on nothing else for his existence. Everything else depends for its existence upon the existence of God. The notion of everything else's dependence on God has been radically expressed in the history of philosophical theology by the doctrines of divine creation *ex nihilo* and divine continuous creation. According to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, God is the creator of everything else that exists, bringing all other things into existence not by *fabrication* out of independently pre-existing raw materials—as does Plato's Demiurge in the *Timaeus*—but rather by an activity whose proper opposite is *annihilation*. This doctrine entails the claim that everything that we have—indeed, everything that we *are*—we have received from God. We have the ability to compose, decompose, and recompose the material constituents of the world. We have the ability to develop or fail to develop our own characters and talents. But these abilities supervene on a base that would not exist were it not for God's creative activity. The doctrine of continuous creation maintains that this same creative activity is

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<sup>10</sup> The middle and late dialogues downplay the Definitional Ideal without abandoning it.

required to keep created things in existence over any stretch of time.<sup>11</sup> Together these two doctrines entail that everything we are, everything we have, and everything we do depends radically on God's creating and preserving activity.

These aspects of God's sovereignty over creation appear to make the questions that Socrates directs at the (12E), (13D), and (14D) definitions even more poignant. How can one benefit God, who is utterly self-sufficient? How can one improve God, who is perfect? How can one aid omnipotent God? How can one give something to God when everything one has already belongs to him?

Let us take these questions in turn. First, how can one benefit self-sufficient God? If *benefit* is opposed to *harm*, and if harming a person entails injuring or damaging that person, then it appears that just as we cannot harm God, so we cannot benefit him. Nothing that we do can promote God's well-being, increase his advantage, or repair an injury done to him. For similar reasons, it would seem that the response to the second question, 'How can one improve perfect God?' is that we cannot literally improve God's lot in any way. Alongside of harm, however, there is another familiar concept, the concept of *offense*. There are many ways in which people can be offended by the behavior of others without being harmed by that behavior. I can offend you by insulting you or someone you love. I can offend you by flouting the ideals and projects that you hold dear. I can offend you by engaging in behavior that you find rude, tasteless, or repulsive. I can offend you by ignoring you or snubbing you. I can offend you by spurning an act of graciousness on your part. I can offend you by trespassing on what rightfully belongs to you (whether or not I thereby harm you or your property) or by overstepping my bounds in some other way that affronts your person. And I can offend you by disobeying your orders when you are in a position of legitimate authority over me. Many would claim that we can offend God in many if not all of these ways, and perhaps in other ways as well. Traditional theology has a rich vocabulary covering this territory, including not only such redolent terms as 'blasphemy', 'sacrilege', and 'idolatry', but also the universal catchall, 'sin'.

This is not the occasion to explore the fine-grained contours of the territory. Instead, let me point out the following difference between harm and offense. It is possible to harm a person without the person's ever realizing it. I do not mean simply that a person can be harmed yet never discover the identity of the agent of harm. I mean that a person can be harmed yet never dis-

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<sup>11</sup> See Philip L. Quinn, "Divine Conservation, Continuous Creation, and Human Action," in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Alfred J. Freddoso (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 55-79; and Philip L. Quinn, "Divine Conservation, Secondary Causes, and Occasionalism," in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 50-73.

cover that the harm has been done. Jones might slander Smith, thereby causing Smith to lose his job, but Jones might commit the slander in a such a manner that Smith never becomes aware of it. Perhaps such cases of unrecognized harm are rare. That is not the point. The point is that in contrast to harm, a person cannot—logically cannot—*be* offended without *having taken* offense. In order for my behavior to offend you, it must register on you at some level and you must interpret it as offensive. You might misinterpret my behavior, reading into it intentions that I do not in fact have. You might not even be consciously aware that you have become offended by my behavior. Yet it remains true that while harm is *done*, offense must be *taken*.

No one can harm God; *a fortiori*, no one can harm omniscient God without God's knowing it. Anyone can offend God, and when omniscient God takes offense, it is never based on a misinterpretation of the offender's behavior. Is there something that stands opposite to 'offense' as 'benefit' stands to 'harm'? And if there is, is it something that we can do to or for God?

I think that the answer to both these questions is 'yes'. The answer will begin to emerge as we look at the other two critical questions occasioned by the (12E), (13D), and (14D) definitions. The third question was 'How can one aid omnipotent God?' Consider a mundane analogy. You are easily capable of setting the table for dinner by yourself. Your child, however, wants to help. So you and your child set the table together. It may be that you could have set the table more quickly and efficiently by yourself. But you recognize that there is more to life than speed and efficiency. So it may be with omnipotent God vis-à-vis us. There is nothing in the concept of omnipotence that precludes an omnipotent being from letting another, much less powerful being contribute to a project that the omnipotent being could have carried out alone.

We come, finally, to the last question, 'How can one give something to a God who already has everything?' Consider once again a mundane analogy. Your child wants to give you a present on your birthday. She saves up her allowance, that is, the money *you* gave her, goes to a rummage-sale, and buys a book for you which, unbeknownst to her, *you* donated to the rummage-sale. The analogy is of course not perfect, but I take it that the lesson is clear enough. You would have to be made of obsidian not to be touched by your child's gift, even in—especially in—these circumstances. As someone no doubt said somewhere, it is not the gift but the giving that counts. In some cases, the real gift *is* the act of giving itself, the object given functioning merely as a token for what the act conveys. As Euthyphro pointed out, an act of giving can be an act that honors the recipient, an act that expresses respect for the recipient, or an act that expresses the giver's gratitude to the recipient. In any of these cases the act of giving can confer value on the gift-object well beyond the object's intrinsic value. What Euthyphro did not say—I shall return to this point—is that the act of giving can also be an act

of love. The scarf that you would never have picked out yourself acquires a whole new beauty when it is given to you as a token of love.

To sum up the responses to the critical questions raised by the (12E), (13D), and (14D) attempts to define Piety: we cannot benefit God in a sense of benefit that is antithetical to harm, but we may be able to benefit God in a sense of benefit that is complementary to offense. We cannot do anything to improve God. We can nevertheless assist omnipotent God. Finally, it is possible to give something to God, the giving of which is an expression of honor, respect, gratitude, or love.

The two analogies I sketched above involve the relationship between child and parent. It is natural to think along these lines in a discussion concerning Piety, since the secular application of that concept is the notion of *filial* piety. Recall, for example, that Euthyphro is prosecuting his own father on charges of impiety, probably because, as some commentators have suggested, Euthyphro believes that to prosecute his father under the circumstances is an act of filial piety that will remove the taint of moral pollution from his father. Yet in stating the (12E) definition, Euthyphro compartmentalizes Piety in such a way that it is that part of Justice that applies *only* to the gods, while ‘that [part of Justice] concerned with the care of men is the remaining part of Justice.’ Consistent with Euthyphro’s compartmentalization, there are two different ways in which we might think about the notion of filial piety. One is to insist that inasmuch as Piety can only be directed to God, there is no such thing as filial *piety*. Among the duties of human justice that typically fall upon us, there are the duties that we owe our parents. Since our parents were immediate progenitors and—most likely—our early sustainers, it is easy enough to think of the duties we owe our parents as duties of Piety. But they are not; they are special duties of human justice. The other way to think about filial piety is to claim that there really is such a thing even though all duties of Piety are owed directly to God. For it may be that the fulfillment of Piety towards God includes, *inter alia*, the duties of filial piety. Our parents may thus be the *beneficiaries* of the duties of Piety while God is the party to whom the duties are owed. It is not important for present purposes to reach a verdict on this issue. It is enough that the moral relationships in which we stand to our parents make the use of parent-child analogies a fruitful way of understanding Piety.

## V. DIVINE LOVE

It is time to unveil the moral component of the account I wish to give of Piety. The moral component depends on the thesis that God is essentially and perfectly good. A corollary of this thesis is that for *whatever* sorts of beings God creates, God *cares for* those beings. The corollary does *not* maintain that a perfectly good, omniscient, omnipotent God must create the best of all possible worlds, even if that definite description should have a referent. God

could have created beings different from us in impressive ways. God could have created, perhaps *has* created, rational beings who have greater cognitive capacities than we, or who feel no pain and have no need for feeling pain, or who cannot be destroyed by any process now at work in nature. Such beings might be better than we are. My claim is only that he cares for us and cares for them (or would care for them, were he to bring them into existence).

Norman Kretzmann has recently argued that God *must* create *something*, which does not entail that there is something which is such that God must create *it*.<sup>12</sup> Kretzmann's claim is rather that God cannot refrain from creating altogether, that this divine effulgence is a consequence of God's perfect goodness as understood on the Dionysian Principle (*Goodness is by its very nature diffusive of itself and [thereby] of being*), and that the necessity under which God thus acts is the necessity of his own nature. Thus, on Kretzmann's view, God's "inability" not to create is analogous to God's "inability" to commit suicide. The thesis that I am plumping for is related to but independent of Kretzmann's. My thesis maintains that it is necessarily the case that for anything, *x*, if God creates *x*, then God cares for *x*.

So far I have used the notion of God's caring for his creatures in a generic sense, as if it were on all fours with the concern that a craftsman might extend to the inanimate products of his craft. But some of God's creatures are conscious, and of those conscious creatures, some are capable of having an infirm, partial understanding of their creator. I shall use the term *love* for the care that God bestows on these creatures. Unlike the unconscious parts of nature, these creatures are capable of responding reciprocally to God's care for them. Some of them can thus enter into a loving relationship with God.

We seem now to have strayed far from the fields of the *Euthyphro*. Socrates and Euthyphro converge on the opinion that Piety is a part of Justice. But what has love got to do with justice? To put it in traditional terms, Justice is a cardinal moral virtue, developed naturally by our acting as the just person acts. But love of God, or Charity, is a theological virtue, not subject to natural acquisition but bestowed on those who have it by the supernatural activity of God.<sup>13</sup> Euthyphro only mentions paying honor, respect, and gratitude to the gods. It is clear that Justice can demand that one honor, respect, and be grateful to another. It is also clear that one can satisfy these demands of Justice without one's thereby loving the other. So, to repeat, what has love got to do with Justice?

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<sup>12</sup> Norman Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?", in Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 208–28.

<sup>13</sup> See William E. Mann, "Theological Virtues," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, forthcoming.

If you are like me, you might be tempted to hold the following three views. Love does not have much to do with Justice. Piety is a part of Justice. Piety has a lot to do with love. If you are not fond of holding incompatible views, then you might be inclined to wonder whether Piety comes in two varieties, not one. As you have browsed through the 800,000 or so words of the Second Part of the Second Part of St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, you may have noticed the curious fact that *two* of its questions are labeled "Of Piety," Questions 101 and 121. The replication is not accidental, for, according to Aquinas, Piety leads a double life. Question 101 describes the sort of Piety that is a part of Justice. Question 121 describes the sort of Piety that is a gift of the Holy Spirit; unlike the first kind, this kind cannot be developed in oneself by habituation. I shall call the two 'natural piety' and 'supernatural piety' respectively. Many things could be said about the distinction as Aquinas sees it. I wish to make only a few observations that are germane to the issues we are investigating. First, although the bulk of the discussion of natural piety is given over to filial piety, along with the piety we owe to our country (*patria*), Aquinas insists that natural piety is owed to God above all else. What unites God, parents, and country under the heading of natural piety, according to Aquinas, is the fact that each is, in its own way, a source of our existence and our becoming what we are (a *principium* of our *esse* and our *gubernatio*), God being a source superior to the other two. I believe that it is Aquinas's view that we should know that we owe a duty of natural piety to God just by knowing what we can know about God by means of natural reason, that is, reason unaided by revelation.

Aquinas claims that what distinguishes supernatural piety from natural piety is that in the case of supernatural piety, we are led to worship God not only as ultimate source of our existence and upbringing, which is the function of natural piety, nor even merely to worship God as *Creator*, which is the function of the separate virtue of religion, but to worship God as *Father* (IIaIIae, Q. 121, a. 1, reply to the second objection). Aquinas does not have much more to say in elaboration of this suggestive notion. In the context of our discussion, I believe that Aquinas's view contains a negative element and a positive element. The negative element is that although supernatural piety may involve honoring, respecting, and being grateful to God, it cannot be reduced to these activities. The positive element is that supernatural piety involves loving God in a way that presupposes God's love of us as finite, created beings.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Christian doctrines of the Trinity typically maintain that the love between Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is a love of co-equals. Love between God and creatures is not love between co-equals.

Aquinas describes the theological virtue of Charity as *amicitia* between God and person.<sup>15</sup> It would be a mistake to confuse Piety—even supernatural piety—with Charity. But it is not a mistake, I suggest, to think of supernatural piety as something essential to the establishment and maintenance of *amicitia*. Consider the following fable. Imagine that some knowledgeable, powerful, and wealthy king from a distant land, for reasons utterly mysterious to Amanda, has taken an interest in Amanda's welfare. We may suppose further that this king is the soul of discretion. Although he could dazzle Amanda with an overt display of his wisdom, wealth, power, and affection, he chooses not to. Instead, he manages to drop hints, encoded in various written works and reported by various emissaries, about his affection for Amanda. At first, Amanda might react in disbelief: the hints are ambiguous, the emissaries themselves only claim to know fragments of the story, and it remains inexplicable to Amanda what such a person could find to admire in her. But Amanda's thoughts turn on many occasions to this king. Amanda reads more about his humanitarian exploits and projects. Amanda finds herself moved by those projects, adopting them as projects that Amanda herself wishes to further. Eventually Amanda comes to admire—we may even suppose that Amanda comes to love—this king.

Up to this point the king and Amanda, in spite of their mutual affection for one another, have not entered into a full-fledged relationship of *amicitia*. The mutual love between the two of them has not yet been fully shared or communicated. Amanda has become convinced by a thousand and one hints and ever-so-subtle gifts—or what Amanda now *takes* to be hints and gifts, for there are still elements of ambiguity and risk—that this king loves her. Amanda loves the king, but how does Amanda let the king know that? Amanda cannot now visit the king in the king's land. Amanda could inform one of the king's emissaries, asking that the information be passed along. It occurs to Amanda, however, that that approach is neither necessary nor sufficient. Not necessary, because if the king is as knowledgeable as Amanda believes him to be, he already knows about Amanda's love for him. Not sufficient, because Amanda believes that an essential component of communicating or sharing *amicitia* is *expressing* one's love for the beloved *to* the beloved, even if Amanda knows that the king already knows of Amanda's love.

What form should Amanda's expression take? Different emissaries offer Amanda different prescriptions. As Amanda reflects on this welter of information, she realizes that what is most important is that her expression be *received* as unambiguously as possible and be *interpreted* for what it is,

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<sup>15</sup> For more on *amicitia* and related concepts, see William E. Mann, "Hope," in *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, ed. Eleonore Stump (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 251–80.



namely, a confession of love. Amanda also realizes that in an important sense, the *amicitia* that is shared in this situation is not love between equals. The status of the king whom Amanda loves makes a significant difference, a difference that should be reflected in the way in which Amanda's love is expressed. It would be presumptuous of Amanda, for instance, to express her love in a way that suggests that her beloved might somehow have *need* of her devotion (as opposed to *wanting* it). At the same time, Amanda wants to avoid conveying the impression that her love is obsequious, servile, or sycophantic, a spurious "love" blended solely out of feelings of fear, desire for self-promotion, and calculations of personal advancement to be achieved by appeasing and exploiting her wealthy, more powerful beloved. (And remember that this particular beloved is, by the hypothesis of my fable, very wise to the ways of impostors.) The expression of Amanda's love, then, should not be a proposal of mutually beneficial joint venture, as might be appropriate for the love between two equals. Nor should the expression of Amanda's love be motivated by unilateral personal gain, even though in the case at hand, both Amanda and her beloved realize that Amanda is the one who stands to gain most by entering into and continuing the relationship. We might say that Amanda wants the expression of her love to be offered, received, and interpreted as an expression of her desire to become and remain *affiliated*.

Here my fable ends. As you scanned the word, 'affiliated,' you recalled its etymology, from *ad* and *filius*. The fable should not be supposed to capture all that is involved in the notion of supernatural piety. It does illustrate, however, how and what kind of love might exist between persons who are vastly unequal. Recall our earlier discussion of harm versus offense. At the time I left unanswered the question of what sort of activity might be opposite the sort of activity that offends God. Since there may be several different ways of offending God, there may be as many opposites as there are sorts of offense. Surely acts of supernatural piety, however, are to be counted among these opposites. In particular, acts of supernatural piety that are expressions of the love of affiliation would seem to be the opposite of offenses to God that overtly ignore or reject God's invitation to enter into a bond of *amicitia* with him. In the interests of theoretical unification, some might clamor to say that *every* offense to God is a rejection of his love; thus, that every opposite activity is an expression of love for him. This kind of reductive attempt seems too simplistic. Every criminal act violates the law. It does not follow that every act that is noncriminal shows respect for the law. And even if there is some attenuated sense of 'respect' according to which every noncriminal act does show respect for the law, it is still important to partition criminal behavior into different categories and to partition noncriminal behavior into different categories.

Return to the point made earlier about offense being the sort of thing that must be taken. Taking offense involves registering some person's behavior

and interpreting that behavior as offensive. In mundane cases, there is room for cognitive slippage on the part of all parties involved. I may not realize that my behavior offends you. You may misperceive or misinterpret my behavior. In the case of an expression of supernatural piety for God, whatever failures of cognitive transmission there might be must be on the side of the human transmitter, not the divine receiver. Omniscient God can neither misperceive my behavior nor misinterpret it. What is involved in God's interpreting a person's behavior as a case of supernatural piety? Is God an inerrant recorder of acts that come before him already bearing the stamp of supernatural piety? Or is God's acceptance of an act required to make the act count as an expression of supernatural piety?

In the twentieth-century spirit of leaving no noun or adjective unverbbed, I introduce the barbarism, 'superpietize', which means *to perform an act of supernatural piety*. ('Expiate' is in the etymological neighborhood, but both too narrow and too broad in meaning for my purposes.) We may then put the issue raised in the previous paragraph in Rylean terms or in Austinian terms. In Rylean terms, we may ask whether 'superpietize' is a task verb, a verb akin to 'run', requiring mere performance for its correct ascription to an agent, or whether it is instead an achievement verb, a verb more akin to 'win', whose correct ascription requires not only performance but also some kind of success—in the case of 'superpietize', acceptance of one's performance by God as the initiation or maintenance of affiliative *amicitia*.<sup>16</sup> In Austinian terms, we may ask whether a particular locutionary act<sup>17</sup> that has the illocutionary force of superpietizing has divine acceptance and reciprocation as an accidental perlocutionary sequel at best, or whether instead the perlocutionary consequence is an intrinsic object of the illocutionary act.<sup>18</sup> In other, less highfalutin words, is 'He superpietized' like 'He apologized' or like 'He made amends'? On the second Austinian option, or on the hypothesis that 'superpietize' is a Rylean achievement verb, 'His superpietizing was successful' will be trivially true if true at all. On the first Austinian option, or on the hypothesis that 'superpietize' is a Rylean task verb, 'His superpietizing was successful' will never be *trivially* true.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson & Company, Ltd., 1949), pp. 149–53.

<sup>17</sup> Here we may want to extend the notion of a locutionary act in a way presumably not anticipated by Austin, to include cases of interior speech or prayer. Normal communicants need some indication of your locutionary act available to their senses. But not God.

<sup>18</sup> See J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), Lectures 8–10.

<sup>19</sup> When I read an earlier version of this paper, William Alston reminded me of this example from *Henry IV, Part One*:

*Glendower*: I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

*Hotspur*: Why, so can I, or so can any man; But will they come when you do call for them?

Since I coined the term, you might think that I would be able to provide the answer. But I am not. The sketchy account that I have developed here does not entail a decision one way or the other. I can point out a connection, however, between the possible answers and Euthyphro's Concession. Suppose first that 'superpietize' is a task verb or that its intended upshot, establishing or maintaining *amicitia* with God, is adventitious. In that case it seems natural enough to accept analogues to Euthyphro's Concession, to wit:

(3\*) Acts of superpietizing are loved by God because they are acts of superpietizing.

(4\*) It is not the case that acts of superpietizing are acts of superpietizing because they are loved by God.

It may help to consider an analogy here. We are considering for the nonce the hypothesis that 'superpietize' is in relevant respects like 'apologize' rather than 'make amends'. Suppose that Abel owes Baker an apology. Suppose further that Baker is a magnanimous soul eager to accept Abel's apology. In these circumstances it would be true that

(3#) Abel's act of apologizing is desired by Baker because it is (or would be) an act of apologizing,

and that

(4#) It is not the case that Abel's act of apologizing is (or would be) an act of apologizing because it is desired by Baker.

Baker's desire is a desire *for* an apology, not a desire that *makes* Abel's performance an apology. Similarly, on the task-verb, adventitious-perlocutionary-sequel account of superpietizing, God loves acts of supernatural piety for what they are, but God's loving them does not make them what they are.

Suppose alternatively that 'superpietize' is a success verb, or a verb whose correct ascription to an agent logically requires that the agent's act receive divine acceptance and reciprocation. That supposition fits more closely (Anti-3) and (Anti-4), the antitheses of Euthyphro's Concession:

(Anti-3\*) It is not the case that acts of superpietizing are loved by God because they are acts of superpietizing.

(Anti-4\*) Acts of superpietizing are acts of superpietizing because they are loved by God.

(Anti-4\*) maintains that what makes an act of superpietizing count as an act of superpietizing is that it is accepted by God, just as Baker's acceptance of Abel's act of making amends makes Abel's act count as an act of making amends and not merely, say, an act of apologizing. (Anti-3\*) can thus be understood in the following way. Acts of superpietizing do not issue from the offerer *as* acts of superpietizing, any more than Abel's act of apologizing is by itself an act of making amends. To describe an act at the time that it is committed as a case of superpietizing is a sort of prolepsis.<sup>20</sup> What makes an act of acknowledging God as Father an act of supernatural piety is the act's being lovingly accepted by God. We might say that supernatural piety *super-venes* on the relevant complex of activities undertaken by the worshipper and God.<sup>21</sup>

Is it important that we choose between one of these two alternative analyses of supernatural piety? Here are two issues that will *not* be affected by our choice. First, anyone who wishes to defend an analogue of the (9D) definition of Piety can espouse (3\*) and (4\*), the analogues of Euthyphro's Concession, and still avoid the Socratic elenchus by insisting that not every successful explanatory account need live up to the lofty standards set by the substitution test and the Definitional Ideal that lies behind it. Second, one's choice between (3\*) and (4\*), on the one hand, and (Anti-3\*) and (Anti-4\*), on the other, is by and large independent of one's commitment to theological objectivism or theological subjectivism. One would normally associate theological objectivism, the thesis that moral values and obligations are independent of God's will, with (3\*) and (4\*). Yet it is possible to be a theological objectivist and to subscribe to (Anti-3\*) and (Anti-4\*). All one has to do is maintain that there is some core of normative propositions whose validity is independent of God's willing activity, but that nevertheless, when it comes to supernatural piety, God's will is determinative. Conversely, one can be a theological subjectivist and accept the seemingly objective (3\*) and (4\*). Theological subjectivism maintains that all moral standards are fixed by God's fiat. That position is compatible with maintaining that once God has decreed what constitutes supernatural piety, God will unfailingly commit himself to loving acts of supernatural piety for what they are.

What then is Piety? Socrates lowered the philosophical boom on Euthyphro's suggestion that Piety is what the gods love. The account that I have sketched here suggests that Euthyphro got us off to a decent start. For a mod-

<sup>20</sup> As normally understood, prolepsis involves an anachronistic *temporal* anticipation: stock examples are 'the precolonial United States' and 'the two brothers and their murdered man rode past fair Florence'. One interpretation of God's eternity entails that all actions, human and divine, are simultaneously present to God. In that case, the notion of prolepsis can be understood to apply to the staging of *effects* of God's actions on temporal creatures. See Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 78 (1981), pp. 429–58.

<sup>21</sup> I owe this suggestion to Peter Hare.

ern-day descendant of Euthyphro, imbued with a bit of Christian philosophical theology, can maintain that Piety is what God loves in us when we love God as Father.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> An earlier version of this paper was read in Buffalo at the 1994 Eastern Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers. I thank William Alston, David Christensen, Peter Hare, Derk Pereboom, Edward Wierenga, and an anonymous referee of this journal for comments and encouragement.