Justice and Pollution in the Euthyphro

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Readers of Plato's *Euthyphro* typically focus their attention on Socrates' elenctic examination of Euthyphro's five attempted definitions of piety (εὐσέβεια): (1) piety is proceeding against whomever does injustice (5d-6e), (2) piety is what is loved by the gods (6e-9d), (3) piety is what is loved by *all* the gods (9e-11b), (4) piety is that part of justice which assists the gods to produce their most beautiful product (11e-14b), and (5) piety is an art of prayer and sacrifice (14b-15c). But although these argumentative episodes do very much form the explicit philosophical substance of the dialogue, the complex motivations which drive its participants also deserve careful scrutiny if we are to fully understand both them and the overall import of the dialogue. It seems clear that Plato himself wishes to provoke this sort of examination, since he provides an unusually complex and long dramatic prologue, amounting to roughly one-third of the dialogue's length (one whose themes continuously inform the subsequent inquiry into piety). We would do well, then, to investigate one of the prologue's most puzzling and yet least-discussed elements; namely, Euthyphro's assertion that he is justified in prosecuting his father out of a concern for the μίασμα — the pollution — that attends homicides of the sort he imagines his father to have committed, and because impartial justice demands it (4b7-c3). In this paper I shall argue for a novel account of this appeal, one which shows Euthyphro to be more morally and theologically progressive than he has been thought but which also freshly illuminates the way in which the *Euthyphro* serves as an indirect, nonforensic defense of Socrates.[1]

1 It is not possible to address here the issue of whether we might legitimately use the

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The *Euthyphro*'s introduction consists of two parts, the first introducing the topic of Socrates' upcoming trial and the second detailing Euthyphro's own court case. For my purposes here I shall take the risk of assuming that in this first section and in what follows Plato portrays Socrates' motives for engaging with Euthyphro as relatively transparent, fully virtuous, and identical with those professed by the Socrates of the *Apology* (e.g., *Ap* 22e-3b, 29c-31c): as this Socrates has it, the quest for knowledge of 'what the pious is' (15c-16a) ought never to be abandoned, since not only is this enterprise pleasurable (arguably an 'inconceivable happiness'; *Ap* 41c3-4) and pious in itself, but coming to understand piety would allow one to 'live better the rest of one's life' (15e7-16a4), especially should its continuation be threatened by a charge of *im*piety (3b-d, 5a-c, 12e, 15e-16a).[2]

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testimony of Aristotle in conjunction with that of Plato and Xenophon to triangulate to the views of the historical Socrates in the manner of Gregory Vlastos (but see, e.g., Vlastos, chs. 2 and 3; and McPherran 1996, ch. 1.2). Rather, I will simply make the plausible and interpretatively-useful assumption that the *Euthyphro* and the *Apology* (among other dialogues such as the *Crito*; those commonly labeled 'early', 'elenctic', 'aporetic', 'Socratic', and/or '*ad hominem*') constitute a mosaic of the characteristics, methods, views, and activities of a cross-dialogue, literary figure named 'Socrates' who manifests distinctly different philosophical attitudes from those expressed by the Socrates of the *Republic* and other such 'constructive', Platonic dialogues (cf., e.g., I. Kidd, 214). Such an approach avoids the issue of how we might accurately refer to the individual teacher of Plato, yet still allows us to confront the most interesting questions Plato's works provoke (on the reasonable assumption, in this case, that the *Euthyphro* and *Apology* were meant to be read in concert with one another). Euthyphro does, however, strike me as too multifaceted a character to have actually existed (on this, see below): he is probably more Platonic construction than historic interlocutor. There is also no evidence to support the idea that the Euthyphro of our dialogue is based on any particular historical individual, although most scholars agree that the character is the one mentioned in the *Cratylus*; see, e.g., W.K.C. Guthrie, 102 and n. 2. As for the historicity of the conversation itself, Plato's calculated artistry and the bizarre nature of Euthyphro's legal case should give us pause. Ultimately, however, there is no reliable way to decide if the conversation is historical, fictionalized, or simply fabricated; see the thorough discussion in A. Tulin, 65-71. Nevertheless, I take it to be part of Plato's maieutic, protreptic intention in writing dialogues to provoke his readers to raise and inquire into questions of the sort that the record of an actual conversation would raise (even, e.g., the question 'Where does Euthyphro go after his abrupt farewell?' [15e3-16a4]).

2 Moreover, Socrates' conversational activity is benevolent, something he would pay others to listen to (*Euthphr* 3d). See M. McPherran 1996, chs. 2.2, 4.2, for a defense

Naturally, some commentators have found such representations to be laced with brazen insincerity. According to John Beversluis, for example, the typical characterization of Euthyphro as a pretentious, dense, father-bashing, religious zealot who 'would have done well in the Nazi Youth Movement,' has drawn attention away from our noticing how abusive and ineffectual Socrates' examination of him actually is.[3] Socrates, we are told, first overwhelms Euthyphro with his idiosyncratic principles of proper definition (5c-d, 6d-e) and then elenctically drubs him on the basis of uncomprehending, merely verbal agreement. But however plausible this critique may be, it does not follow that Socrates is therefore guilty of impiously, unjustly, and hypocritically neglecting Euthyphro's soul (Beversluis, 184). Rather, *pace* Beversluis (176, 184), it seems most dramatically effective on Plato's part to have us think that Euthyphro's sudden departure at the end of the dialogue occurs *before* the court convenes, so that he thereby forfeits his ill-conceived suit (as later tradition had it; DL 2 29). Socrates' tactics thus benefit Euthyphro, his father, and his relatives by dissuading Euthyphro from pursuing a potentially damaging course of action. Be all this as it may, however, it is Euthyphro on whom I now wish to focus.

According to Plato's story, five years prior to Socrates' encounter with Euthyphro one of Euthyphro's hired farm hands (a πελάτης) had killed one of the family's household slaves (an οἰκέτης) during a drunken rage. Euthyphro's father had the killer bound and thrown in a ditch, and then — since the laborer was a murderer — neglected him while awaiting word from one of the Athenian religious advisors (ἐξηγηταί) on how to proceed. As a result, the laborer perished from hunger and exposure. In response, Euthyphro now brings before the Archôn Basileus a suit for

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of the claim that for Socrates philosophical activity is pious. Note too that this Socrates also seems to hold the view that coming to a general conceptual understanding of piety is advisable, since without grasping and being able to use as a moral yardstick the definition of the one *eidos/idea* by which all pious things are pious (6d9-e7) one ought not to attempt actions whose performance poses a significant danger of impiety (and so injustice and harm) unless one has secure, countervailing reasons (4e4-8; 15d4-16a4); McPherran 1996, ch. 4.1, esp. 175-85.

3 R.F. Holland, quoted in J. Beversluis, 163; For Beversluis' view of Socrates' treatment of Euthyphro in general, see his ch. 8; for further discussion of Beversluis, see C. Gill and McPherran 2001. For the argument that Socrates/Plato is even foisting the Theory of Forms onto Euthyphro at this point, see R.E. Allen, ch. 3.

homicide — a δίκη φόνου — against his father, in order to cleanse both his father and himself (and presumably his relatives) of the μίασμα that he sees attending this sort of unjust killing (4b-e).[4] Socrates is understandably astonished by this story. By suing his own father, Euthyphro appears to be crazy (μαίνεσθαι; 4a1), since it would be most unusual (if not actually impossible; see below) to prosecute a relative on behalf of an outsider. Moreover, doing so violates the norms of filial piety (4d-e, 9a-b, 15d).[5] Hence, Socrates insinuates, it could only be through the possession of a conception of piety superior to that of received tradition that Euthyphro could be so confident as to pursue such an unconventional and — one would think — potentially damaging course of action (4e; cf. 4a-b; 15d-e; damaging to Euthyphro, his father, and family in a variety of aspects [e.g., socially, psychologically, morally, and economically] if his father were to be convicted and sentenced to exile). Without the least hesitation, Euthyphro swallows the bait by agreeing with Socrates' suggestion, grandly laying claim to a 'precise' (ἀκριβῶς) knowledge of all such divine things. The characteristic setup of a Socratic interlocutor has thus been successfully stage-managed: if Euthyphro has such an exact understanding of divine matters then surely he can spell out for Socrates just what piety is.[6]

Euthyphro's unusual suit has generated a great deal of scholarly debate, much of it focused on the issue of whether fifth-century Athenian homicide law was restrictive; that is, whether initiating a suit for homicide was restricted to those family members (or a slave, his master or a

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4 On the precise legal, historical, and religious issues raised by this story, see J. Burnet, 82-107; R.G. Hoerber; D.M. MacDowell, 109-32, 192-4; W.D. Furley, 201-8; and I.G. Kidd. On μίασμα — a pollution, a defilement, that can settle and spread like a disease and upon which disasters attend — see R. Parker and below.

5 On which see, e.g., M.W. Blundell, 41. *Cri* 50e-1a provides additional evidence that Socrates endorsed the traditional authority of fathers and the virtue of filial piety; see too *R* 574a-c; *Mem* 2 2 13; *Laws* 717b-18a, 869a-b, 931a; Aristophanes *Clouds* 1303-1453; and Ar *EN* 1163b18 ff. According to the 'priests of old' endorsed by Plato's *Laws* (872c-3a), the 'karmic' relationship between children and parents is such that a child who commits the ultimate crime of murdering a parent will himself or herself be killed by one of his or her own children (in this incarnation or the next).

6 It is a common theme of the Socratic dialogues that the possession of knowledge of some concept confers the ability to give a Socratic definition of it; see, e.g., *Laches* 190c ff.

woman her *kyrios*) specified in Draco's law, or whether exceptions might be allowed (A. Tulin provides a good survey; see M. Gagarin 1997a for a review of Tulin). I shall bypass this issue here, and simply assume that Euthyphro's specific suit is legally permissible. For, if it were not, we would expect that Plato would then have had his Socrates at least make note of Euthyphro's ignorance of the law for the sake of verisimilitude and dramatic plausibility. Likewise, Plato would not have portrayed Euthyphro's relatives as being as troubled as they are (4a, 4d-e, 6a) were his suit in fact legally impossible.[7] Finally, the central discussion of whether Euthyphro's proposed prosecution is pious or not would be decidedly under-motivated if that prosecution posed no genuine threat to Euthyphro's father (*pace* J. Burnet, 104). In any case, the emphasis in the dialogue is placed not on the fact that Euthyphro is prosecuting on behalf of a non-relative, but that it is *his father* he is prosecuting on behalf of a non-relative (see 4b4-6).

Let us recall, then, how Euthyphro attempts to ground his unusual behavior:

> It is laughable, Socrates, that you suppose that it makes any difference whether the dead man is an outsider [ἀλλότριος] or of the family [οἰκεῖος], rather than that one should be on guard only for whether the killer killed with justice or not; and if it was with justice, to let it go, but if not, to proceed against him — especially if the killer shares your hearth and table. For the pollution is equal if you knowingly associate with such a man and do not purify yourself, as well as him, by proceeding against him in a lawsuit. (4b7-c3; trans. after West and West)

Shortly thereafter, Euthyphro justifies and increases the scope of this principle of impartial justice:

> Piety is doing as I am doing; that is to say, prosecuting anyone who is guilty of murder, temple thefts, or of any similar crime — whether he be your father or mother, or whoever he may be — that makes no difference; and not to prosecute them is impiety. And observe, Socrates,

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7 See I. Kidd, 215-16. He also notes, 219-21, that the man killed by Euthyphro was a πελάτης, and hence, may well have possessed a legal status akin to that of a slave (thereby making Euthyphro's suit quite legally permissible).

> what powerful evidence I can cite that this is the law ... that one is not to give way to the impious one, whoever he happens to be. For do not men acknowledge Zeus as the best and most righteous of the gods? — and yet they admit that he imprisoned his father [Kronos] because he wickedly devoured his sons, and that he too castrated his own father [Ouranos] for the same sort of reason. Yet they are angry at me because I am proceeding against my father when he has done injustice, and so they contradict themselves both concerning the gods and concerning me. (5d8-6a6; cf. 8b, 9a-b)[8]

Euthyphro is less than clear in communicating the principle of conduct he has in mind here and above, but he appears to hold that (P): [Pa] one who closely associates with an unjust killer becomes vulnerable to the pollution that attends such murderers;[9] hence, [Pb] in order to avoid becoming polluted oneself (or to purify oneself if already polluted), and to purify the murderer of his or her own pollution, one ought to prosecute, and thereby punish (typically: banish) that murderer irrespective of one's familial relationship to the killer.[10]

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8 Euthyphro's traditionalist focus here on the injustice of those who commit impious acts (viz., temple theft and *similar* crimes) and the piety and justice of proceeding against such malefactors is brought into question at 11e-14a (for here piety's relation to 'secular' person-to-person justice is raised as an issue; see McPherran 2000, 300-22).

9 Euthyphro also holds that the pollution posed by an unjust killer is the same for non-relatives as well as relatives so long as one's association with the killer is a knowing (συνειδώς; 4c2) one. Presumably the level of awareness this designates is not tantamount to a full knowledge of the killer's injustice (since, on Socrates' account at least, one would never knowingly associate with what one knows is sure to harm one; see below). It seems a safe assumption that Euthyphro also believes that the potential for harm is even greater for those individuals who *unwittingly* have a close association with an unjust killer (on this, see below).

10 This seems the best account of Euthyphro's principle of conduct when considered in light of the only two reasonable alternatives: (i) all unjust killers (including one's relatives) ought to be prosecuted *by someone or other* and pay the penalty for their crime; and (ii) one ought to prosecute any unjust killer to whom one is related. (i) would hardly represent an innovation on Euthyphro's part; indeed, it is taken to be a trivial truth at 8e-9a. (ii) fails to recognize that for Euthyphro it is one's conscious and close association with a murderer, rather than one's biological relationship to him/her, that renders one susceptible to the pollution for which prosecution is the sole remedy. Of course, my rejection of (ii) in favor of P raises the question of why

In view of Euthyphro's status as a μάντις (3b9-c3, 3e2-4), his initial concern with pollution, and his subsequent appeal to the behavior of Zeus and Kronos in justification of his suit (5d-6a), scholars have often been led to view him as simply Plato's mouthpiece for popular Athenian religion.[11] This interpretation, however, is only half right.[12] As I have argued elsewhere, Euthyphro's literary function is complex and two-fold: (A) Plato intends first that he should serve as a hubristic patient for the *elenchos* who, by prosecuting an older man on the grounds of piety and the justice of Homeric/Hesiodic Zeus, can thereby serve as a paradigm of retrograde traditionalism and, thus, as a surrogate for Socrates' prosecutor Meletus as well; and (B) by suggesting various affinities between Socrates and Euthyphro — in particular, by casting Euthyphro as a *non*-traditionalist religious innovator and δεισιδαίμων free-lancing

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Euthyphro takes it upon *himself* to prosecute his father rather than simply *avoiding* his father, leaving it for another (esp. a relative) to prosecute, since he does not appear to think of himself as *already* polluted. I think the answer is that Euthyphro sees there to be a familial requirement on the part of some relative or other to attempt to 'decontaminate' the family by prosecuting, convicting, and exiling his father (over and above one's prudential reasons for decontaminating polluted individuals with whom one has direct or indirect contact, whether related to them or not). Since, however, he is the only member of the family who judges his father to be a source of pollution (4a, 4d), that task can currently only be assumed by him (because of what he takes to be the requirements of filial piety and justice, presumably, Euthyphro believes he will suffer pollution by failing to prosecute; this appears to be a requirement of justice for him because of his claim that he acts in imitation of the justice of Zeus when Zeus punished his father Kronos for Kronos' injustice [5e-6a]). [Pb], then, should be understood to contain an implicit qualification: one ought to prosecute a murderer irrespective of one's relationship to the killer only if one is already polluted by contact with the killer, or because failing to purify the killer through prosecution will create the same or greater amount of pollution for oneself through the neglect of a virtue (e.g., filial piety, justice).

Although Euthyphro leaves it unclear whether his proposed prosecution is sufficient to remove the pollution or whether actual conviction and punishment are required, the latter is implied when Euthyphro allows that no doer of injustice ought to go unpunished (8d-e).

11 See, e.g., Allen, 9; F.M. Cornford, 311; M. Croiset, 179; Furley; P.T. Geach, 370; G. Grote, 322; R. Guardini, 9, 26; and W.A. Heidell, 165.

12 Those who agree that Euthyphro has a non-traditionalist aspect include Burnet, 85-8; Hoerber, 95-8; J. Hoopes, 1-6; R. Klonoski, 123-39; F. Rosen, 105-9; and A.E. Taylor, 147.

prophet — Plato presents him as a dark *Doppelgänger* of Socrates, a lesson in what Socrates *is* and *is not*.[13] This interpretive outlook would thus suggest that Euthyphro's appeal to μίασμα in [Pa] is a manifestation of Plato's intention (A) to contrast Euthyphro's superstitious extremism with Socrates' own philosophically-sound religious outlook. Oddly, though, it is this seemingly conventional notion of μίασμα that Euthyphro uses to explicate what appears to be a quite forward-looking, cosmopolitan principle of impartial justice (Pb) (Tulin, 81). Indeed — and although Euthyphro is portrayed as mildly chastising Socrates for possibly believing otherwise (4b7-c1) — the idea that one ought to proceed against those who do injustice, even if they are relatives, is a *Socratic* principle grounded in our texts (*Euthphr* 8d-e; *Cri* 49b, *Ap* 28b; *Grg* 480a-d). What appears to differentiate Euthyphro from Socrates here, then, is the incentive driving the principle of impartial justice constituted

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13 For a defense and explication of this view of Euthyphro, see McPherran 1996, chs. 2.1.1, and 4.1.1 In brief, (A) Euthyphro's traditionalism is suggested by his endorsement of Homeric/Hesiodic conventions (e.g., the relationship between Zeus and Kronos, the existence of quarreling and epistemically-deficient deities, and the correctness of *do ut des* prayer and sacrifice [14b; cf. *Il* IX 497-501]); whereas his claims to precise knowledge of the 'divine things' (4e-5a), his appeal to Zeus' and Kronos' conduct in justification of his own (see below), and his proposed prosecution serve as evidence of his hubris. As for (B), Plato points to a number of similarities between Socrates and Euthyphro; e.g., he has Euthyphro take Socrates' side against the Athenians, has him accept — as a fellow μάντις (3b-c) — that the *daimonion* is harmless, grants Socrates' imputation of wisdom to himself (4b), and implicitly appeals at 5e-6a to the Socratic-Sophistic principle that the standard of morality for the gods is the same as for humans (against the tradition of a divine double-standard; cf. *R* 378b; see below). Plato also invites us to make the parallel when he has Socrates suggest that Euthyphro might take *his own place* in court (5a-c), and then when he has Euthyphro claim that his imagined court discussion would 'turn out to be much more about him [Meletus] than about me,' (5c2-3) a typically Socratic claim. And just as Euthyphro claims to know with precision an uncommon amount about divine things, so Socrates likewise regards such knowledge as an important matter (5a) to which he also makes a similar claim (though modest in extent; cf. 6b). Socrates, after all, seems to know with precision that he has been commanded by the gods to do philosophy (e.g., *Ap* 33c), and both Euthyphro and Socrates regard the divine as a source of conviction on matters of virtuous conduct — one proceeding to prosecute his father on ostensibly religious grounds, the other proceeding to his trial and death for the sake of what he takes to be his pious obligation. Moreover, both believe that one should proceed against those who do injustice, even if they should be close relatives (4b-c, 5d-e, 8d-e; *Cri* 49b8, *Ap* 28b; *Grg* 480a-d); see, e.g., Allen, 23; Burnet, 3, 23, 113; Furley, 202-4; Hoerber, 95-107; and Taylor, 16, 149 n. 1.

by Euthyphro's appeal to μίασμα; for surely *Socrates*, one might naturally suppose, would never endorse such a superstitious concern. Thus, we are to understand Euthyphro to be facing a moral and legal dilemma between the ancient demands of filial piety that would prohibit his prosecution of a relative (suggested at 4e, 9a-b, 15d), and the filial imperative 'that he free both himself and his father from the dangerous taint of pollution' (Tulin, 84). As a typical instance of 'the superstitious man' (a δεισιδαίμων man) he thus chooses the latter course, but then paradoxically proceeds to represent it as grounding an enlightened principle of justice that anyone ought to heed.[14] To make sense of and resolve this puzzling, seemingly concocted conjunction, we must investigate Euthyphro's conception of pollution in light of the popular conception.

Constructing a brief, consistent, and accurate account of the fifth-century Greek understanding of pollution is, of course, highly problematic.

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14 Commenting on this grounding, R. Weiss, 265, claims that it reveals Euthyphro's leading motive to be not selfless devotion to impartial justice, but self-regarding fear of the kind of μίασμα that only a member of the household or a relative can inspire (irrespective of whether the slain person is οἰκεῖος or ἀλλότριος). I want to contend in response that not even Socrates would recommend *selfless* devotion to justice, since for him self-interest and justice perfectly coincide such that all our just actions derive from self-interested motives (cf. Brickhouse and Smith 1994, ch. 3.4). In any case, Weiss's claim appears to underrate 5d-6a, which — without making any mention of pollution — emphasizes the idea that any wrongdoer, relative or not, ought to be proceeded against (see also 8b-e, where the same point appears to be made; again, with no mention of pollution). There is also no reason not to suppose that Euthyphro acts out of a concern for his relatives as well as himself, and some reason to suppose he does (viz., his claim that pious actions preserve families; 14a-b). Hence, *pace* Weiss, Euthyphro arguably does advocate prosecuting 'just any unjust killer,' (265) but apparently places the responsibility for doing so on those for whom it is a (self-interested) requirement of piety and justice (neglect of which would pollute one; usually, of course, these will be the killer's relatives) (see n. 10 above). On this count, at least, Euthyphro is a radical reformer of Athenian morality and law, which placed the burden of prosecution on the *victim's* family, not the killer's family. *Pace* Weiss (265 n. 9), then, we should see Euthyphro as appealing to Zeus' impartial justice as evidence of his own impartial justice at 5e-6a. Finally, in my argument below, I shall contend that while it might be a self-regarding fear of pollution that drives Euthyphro primarily, since his conception of pollution is coextensive with Socrates' own revisionary conception of pollution as moral corruption, that motive is one Socrates himself endorses. For, as Socrates sees it, moral pollution is something we should all fear and be motivated to eradicate (in oneself and others; *Ap* 29b; *Cri* 47c-d).

However, it is fair to say that most Athenians would have understood μίασμα to have the following characteristics: it is a contagious defilement one may wittingly or unwittingly (as in the cases of Heracles and Oedipus) incur through unjust and impious conduct; it makes those affected ritually impure (thus unfit to enter a temple), it is dangerous since disasters attend upon it, and it can settle and spread like a disease to the innocent as well as the guilty (indeed, 'μίασμα' in its widest sense included disease).[15] Unlike curses, however, the gods are only indirectly involved in the suffering of those parties affected by the spread of μίασμα; for μίασμα is an impersonal, invisible material taint that polluted individuals transmit to others, although its origin can be divine animosity (R. Parker, 8-10; cf. *Il* I 2-102; Soph *Ant* 999-1047). The pollution that attends the killing of a human being — whether intended or not, just or unjust — is especially virulent: it takes the form of the victim's blood which in some sense clings to the hands of the murderer and spreads out from them to encompass the entire city (see, e.g., Soph *OT* 1-150; Antiphon *Tetr* 1.1.3, 2.1.2, 3.1.5). This blood carries the anger of the victim and/or attending avenging spirits and the victim's desire for revenge. Hence, there is legislation that proscribes associating with murderers so as to prevent the spread of their μίασμα (Demosthenes 20-1, 158). Sophocles' Oedipus is the most famous vector for this kind of μίασμα in Greek drama: as the unwitting, unpunished killer of his own father (King Laius), Oedipus bears a μίασμα that has rendered his entire city infertile. But thanks to the information provided by Apollo, he is able to set out to banish (or kill) the unidentified polluter (*OT* 1-150).[16] The remedy for μίασμα great or small is purification (καθαρμός), which can range from everyday ritual washing with lustral water to the civic purification achieved through the expulsion of scapegoats (see Parker, 23-31, and chs. 4 and 9).

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15 Parker, esp. chs. 7, 8, 9; E.R. Dodds, 35-7, 55 n. 43-4; W. Burkert, 147; Soph *OC* 1482 ff., *Ant* 773-6; Eur *IT* 1218; cf. *Laws* 871b-e. See also R.J. Hankinson on the concept of pollution (37-40) and its relation to disease (27-37). As Dodds (36) famously put it, μίασμα operates 'with same ruthless indifference to motive as a typhoid germ.'

16 Hankinson, 39-40, notes that Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* (226-36, 254-7, 1132-6) provides evidence that μίασμα can persist 'even after punishment has been meted out' (39).

In light of this and our knowledge of Athenian law, Euthyphro's suit and his appeal to pollution and impartial justice emerge as non-traditional in several respects:

(1) Euthyphro appears to think that it should make no moral or civic difference whether a slain person is οἰκεῖος or ἀλλότριος as one determines how to proceed in a case of killing (M.J. Edwards, 216-17). Again, by prosecuting his own father Euthyphro contravenes conventional morality and risks doing something impious to his father and relatives (namely, subjecting his father to the punishment of exile) (4e, 5b, 15d).

(2) Euthyphro assumes that his father's neglect of the thrall amounted to murder (φόνου; 4a10), even though many excused the father of deliberate homicide because of the individual's apparent guilt, because it was inaction and not violence that killed the thrall,[17] and because that neglect was due in part to the father's attempt to consult with one of the ἐξηγηταί.[18]

(3) Euthyphro's view that only the justice of his father's deed is relevant rests on the claim that it is *because* of the attendant pollution that one should proceed against those unjust individuals who 'share one's hearth and table.' But an allegation of pollution by itself carried virtually no legal weight in Athens (Parker, 116; M. Gagarin and D.M. MacDowell, 18).

(4) Euthyphro holds that if a killer kills justly then no pollution is incurred (4b-c). Moreover, he appears to ground this novel idea on the equally novel tenet that he and his action are pious because he acts in imitation of gods (Zeus and Kronos). Euthy-

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17 My interpretation of what is meant by Euthyphro's family's contention that the father did not kill (οὔτε ἀποκτείναντι; 4d7) the thrall.

18 Neither Euthyphro nor Socrates make any mention of the possibility that Euthyphro's father may himself have been trying to avoid polluting contact with the thrall. This, in fact, seems likely to be the case, in view of the father's concern to be religiously correct as attested by his attempt to consult with the Athenian religious advisors (an especially scrupulous act, if he had caught the thrall in the act, since that gave him the right to execute the thrall on the spot; Allen, 21). There is reason, then, to see a 'like-father-like-son' story-line at work here.

phro's appeal to the gods' behavior in justification of his own is, of course, *extra leges*.

(5) Euthyphro apparently holds that it is only through close association with an *unjust* killer that one incurs pollution (4b7-c3).

In attempting to account for why Plato ascribes these particular innovations to Euthyphro, the first obstacle to remove is the idea that Plato employs them in order to cast Euthyphro as an unusually superstitious or archaic thinker (P.T. Geach, 370) or an especially 'rigid adherent to traditional mores' (W.D. Furley, 206). For, as a few scholars have noted, Euthyphro anticipates in several respects the progressive view of pollution and civic justice represented in the *Laws* by the Athenian Stranger (Edwards; cf. L. Versényi 1982, 36-7; see also *R* 469e-70a). There we find it held that (a) non-relatives may prosecute on behalf of a stranger (866b, 871b) and that a kinsman who fails to prosecute on behalf of another is subject to pollution (871a-b) (*per* 1); (b) if a deed is just there is no wrongdoing and thus no religious sanction, and since the Stranger 'also holds that the civic laws should be underwritten by the gods (855b-c), he cannot fail to agree with Euthyphro that the only actions capable of polluting us are the ones that they [the gods] condemn,' (Edwards, 222) (*per* 3 and 4); and (c) pollution has very much to do with the state of one's soul, such that the morally corrupt person is impure of soul, and is in this way polluted (716d-17a) (*per* 4 and 5).[19] How, then, are we to square what now seems to be an attempt to cast Euthyphro as a forward-looking thinker on the topic of pollution, giving that notion a non-physicalist moral sense, with Plato's equally clear desire to make Euthyphro out to be philosophically deficient?

One answer holds that it is *Socrates*, not Euthyphro, who is initially made to pose 'as the mouthpiece of traditional partialities,' so that Euthyphro can then be seen as correct and cosmopolitan on the topic of civic justice (Edwards, 223). Euthyphro's failure to defend a coherent account of piety and its relation to justice in the face of Socrates' relentless elenctic examination is thus meant to signal that, unlike Socrates, he lacks the philosophical ability and self-knowledge required to defend his

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19 Edwards, 221-2. It should be noted, though, that the *Laws*'s notion of pollution is occasionally quite traditionalist: see, e.g., 759a-c, 865a-c, 871b, 881b-2a, 946e-8b; cf. Parker, 113.

views. His purported mantic abilities may have given him a few true insights, then, but they manifestly fail to give him the ability to rationally defend them.

Although this interpretation is correct insofar as it takes Euthyphro to be both forward-thinking and (nonetheless) intellectually deficient when it comes to rational self-examination, it ought not to satisfy us entirely because of its failure to account for several of Euthyphro's other eccentricities (see n. 13) and Socrates' own resistance to the theology that undergirds them. Moreover, it appears to be at odds with what I take to be the *sine qua non* of any adequate interpretation; namely, the dialogue's obvious pairing *per* dramatic intention (A) of Meletus — a seeming advocate of 'traditional partialities' — with Euthyphro. Socrates, then, should be compared to Euthyphro's father; for like Euthyphro's father, Socrates is elderly (*Euthphr* 3a), 'goes to each Athenian like a *father*, persuading each to care for virtue' (*Ap* 31b; my emphasis), and yet now finds himself rashly indicted by a younger man on the grounds of piety (5a-b) (McPherran 1996, 32-3, 181).[20] This analogical connection argues in turn that we are to pair Meletus' formal charge of corruption with Euthyphro's informal charge of pollution.[21] The text of the *Apology* also

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20 Mitchell Miller has pointed out to me that Plato's pairing of Socrates with Euthyphro's religiously scrupulous father may contribute to the *Euthyphro*'s apologetic agenda by leading us to view Socrates as not a Sophistic denier of religion but as a thinker who aims to renew its progressive character (this would be especially true if Euthyphro owes his progressive view of pollution to the teaching of his father). So the moral here would seem to be that Meletus and the citizens of Athens, having had their ignorance of virtues such as piety repeatedly brought home to them by Socrates, ought to retract their writ of impiety against him, just as Euthyphro ought to abandon his suit (despite his countervailing reasons; e.g., the importance of pursuing murderers impartially and of removing the pollution they engender). For in neither instance do the prosecutors understand what piety is, and since moral harm is incurred through unjust action (*Cri* 47a-9e), the moral risk posed by a mistaken conviction means that neither set of prosecutors ought to employ the concept of piety as the basis of their respective lawsuits (see *Ap* 30d-e).

21 Nicholas Smith has objected in correspondence to this pairing on the grounds that, unlike Euthyphro and his father, Meletus is not worried that Socrates' corruption of the youth will 'stain' him (Meletus) *personally*, whereas that seems to be an important element of why Euthyphro thinks he must prosecute his father. While I acknowledge this difference, it is not a telling one for my thesis; rather, it is explained by the fact that (i) Meletus is not related to Socrates and (ii) did not *closely associate* with him (see *Euthphr* 2b; *Ap* 26a) (as Euthyphro may have already done with his

supports this pairing, for at 23d1-2 Socrates represents the informal allegation against him (that led Meletus to lodge the formal charge of corruption) as stating that 'Socrates is a most polluted fellow [μιαρώτατος] and corrupts the youth,' (with, presumably, a causal connection implied).

The key to making sense of this last pairing is to first note Socrates' surprising silence — tantamount to silent acceptance in view of our observations concerning the *Laws* — of Euthyphro's reliance on a non-traditionalist, moral conception of pollution. This acceptance stands, moreover, in sharp relief to Socrates' subsequent resistance to Euthyphro's appeal to the behavior of Zeus and Kronos and any other such stories of divine disagreement and conflict he might produce to justify his prosecution.[22] The uncommon hubris of this appeal[23] and, in particular, Euthyphro's agreement that there is but one sort of piety, however, does indicate that Euthyphro is no hide-bound traditionalist. Only someone with a relatively unorthodox intellectualist theology would simply presuppose that there is but one canon of virtue *for both gods and human beings*, as Euthyphro does with his 'powerful evidence' of Zeus' and Kronos' just, yet father-bashing, behavior (then confirmed by his acceptance of the idea of *generic* justice at 11e-12e). For the common view had generally held the gods not to be bound by human standards of con-

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father, subsequent to the laborer's death). The parallel is in any case supported by the evidence that both men are prosecuting out of an alleged concern for others.

22 Socrates, Plato seems to be telling us, is especially unjustly charged with impiety if the basis of those charges lies in Socrates' doubts (6a-d) concerning the sorts of disagreeing gods Euthyphro appeals to in justification of his legal case. The stories of the gods' quarrels would have been received with skepticism by a number of Athenians, and if so, that is one reason for thinking that the charges against Socrates are unfairly brought (McPherran 1996, ch. 3.3-4).

23 In his *Trojans* (948), Euripides points out that the gods might be (wrongly) invoked to excuse or sanction human immorality (in the way Euthyphro does) by having Phaedra's nurse excuse her illicit passion with a reference to the example of Zeus and Eos, conquered by the power of Aphrodite; cf. Aeschylus *Eum* 640. Plato makes the same point, in a clear reference to the *Euthyphro*, at *R* 377e-8e (esp. 378b); cf. *Laws* 886c-d. Note too that even a critic of the new intellectualism like Aristophanes sees this same problem, but foists it onto the intellectuals, not the traditionalists (correctly so, since it is these individuals who are responsible for advocating a unitary conception of justice); e.g., in the *Clouds* he has Wrong Argument advocate using the example of Zeus to excuse one's own adulteries (1079-1084; cf. 904).

duct.[24] Together with his introduction of the notion that there is but *one* overarching property of piety, Socrates' pass over this unusual presupposition in utter silence indicates that he too thinks of piety — and so the other virtues — as universal, univocal, concepts/properties (such that both just gods and just humans are, for example, just in the same sense). He apparently also has no problem with the implicit, revolutionary, and (of course) very Platonic idea that one should attempt to model and justify one's own behavior in relation to that of a god (were one to have good evidence of what that behavior consisted in; *Euthphr* 9a-c).[25]

Socrates' response to Euthyphro's 'proof' of the piety of his prosecution is, instead, entirely prompted by Euthyphro's conventionalist assertion that among the gods there exist many disagreements and battles

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24 See, e.g., Guthrie 1950, 120-4; H. Lloyd-Jones, 176-9. This is true despite the fact that Zeus was generally understood to underwrite a code of just conduct for humans (see, e.g., Thuc V 104-105, and McPherran 1996, ch. 3.2), and that hence, what we term 'traditional Greek religion' carried within itself the seeds of its own reformation. In Hesiod, for example, we can find evidence that justice is already in the process of being raised to a universal. Nevertheless, Hesiod is himself a reformer who intends to 'elevate' Zeus, and so cannot be taken as emblematic of the entire body of ancient religious practice and belief that Gilbert Murray once labeled 'The Inherited Conglomerate' (Murray, 66 ff.). At any rate, if we do consider the whole of this Conglomerate what we find is that *Dikê* 'consisted first of all in doing what custom alone had established as being suitable for a particular station in life,' (Guthrie 1950, 122), and on this view there is indeed a divine double-standard of morality. On my picture, then, Euthyphro is very much a conflicted exemplar of a conflicted era: he is on the one hand drawn toward the developing-yet-still-new-fangled picture of non-capricious deity inhabiting a *cosmos* unified by one over-arching principle of justice (against which even Zeus is to be measured) — a picture whose outlines begin to be drawn by Hesiod (and Homer, in one unique passage [*Il* 16.384 ff.]). But his equally-intense attraction to the ideas that piety is established by divine *fiat* and that the gods quarrel also mark him out as what I would call a traditionalist.

25 This may explain why Aristophanes of Byzantium in the late second century BCE produced an edition of Plato's dialogues that grouped the *Theaetetus* together with the *Euthyphro* and *Apology* (DL 3 61-2); although dramatic chronological considerations alone would justify this trilogy, it may be that Aristophanes saw a thematic connection between the *Euthyphro* and *Theaetetus* because of the latter's advocacy of 'becoming as like god as possible' through 'becoming just and pious, with wisdom' (176a-c); Allen, 7-8 (*pace* his claim that '... no reader, however ingenious, could draw such conclusions as these from the *Euthyphro* itself,' 8; cf. Hoerber, 107, who sees just such a connection).

similar to that experienced by Kronos and Zeus (6b; 6c); and to *this*, Socrates' reaction is swift incredulity (6a-c).[26] Indeed, he indicates that whenever anyone has said such things about the gods he has responded with a disbelief so unmistakable that he speculates that public awareness of this disbelief may be what has prompted his indictment on charges of impiety (6a-c). Thus, Socrates proceeds to show how Euthyphro's defenses of such later claims as 'piety is what gods love' (6e11-7a1) are inconsistent with his desire to retain both this popular conception of the gods as capricious, disagreeing rulers and the belief that the gods might also behave in a uniform and standard-setting fashion (e.g., that Zeus displays a standard of justice we should adopt and imitate [*Euthphr* 5e-6a] and that the gods might all of them have a love for the same thing; 9e1-3).

I want to argue, then, that Socrates' silent acceptance of Euthyphro's use of a non-standard account of pollution in view of Plato's second dramatic intention (B) of drawing parallels between Socrates and Euthyphro strongly suggests that we are to understand Euthyphro's 'pollution' as conceptually equivalent to 'corruption' in the Socratic, moral sense; that is, a pollution of the soul we can label 'pollution$_m$'. This is the psychic pollution of inconsistent and false belief Socrates has in mind when he praises what philosophical activity and just punishment are able to eliminate from our souls (as forms of purification; *Ap* 20d-23d, 29e-30b; *Grg* 457c-8b, 476a-81b; *Phd* 65e-9d, 80d-3d; cf. *R* 611c-12a; *Crat* 403d-4a; *Symp* 211e-12a). Besides making dramatic sense, both terms — 'pollution' (μίασμα) and 'corruption' (διαφθορά) — are first of all bound by linguistic and conceptual ties; both, for example, are to be understood as designating states of defilement and ruination (cf. Eur *Bacchae* 1384; s.v. L&S) that can be remedied only through purification (cf. Soph *OT* 1-150; Eur *Hipp* 601-6, 653-4, 946; *R* 399e, 567c). Second, we have seen evidence that Euthyphro had come under new intellectualist influence, and such influence would have included the view exemplified in Antiphon's *Tetralogies* where 'pollution appears [in contrast to the traditional conception] as a stern and discriminating upholder of the moral order,'

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26 Of course, rather than play the dogmatic, Socrates makes his typical confession (at 6b2-3) that his lack of knowledge on such subjects prevents him from affirming the truth of such stories; cf. *Phdr* 229c-30a.

(Parker, 110; my bracketed phrase).[27] Finally, notice that rather than denigrating Meletus' charge of corruption, Socrates characterizes it as 'not ignoble or paltry, but weighty' (2c2-4; cf. 5b). Moreover, he then asserts that Meletus alone, of all the politicians, is proceeding correctly by paying attention to the moral development of Athens's youth and by proposing to 'weed out' — that is, expel from the city — those who corrupt them (2c-3a) (just as one does with those who carry μίασμα; cf. Parker, 264). Meletus rightly sees how Socrates could be a threat, since it is by teaching the young corrupting beliefs that they are corrupted (2c-3a, 3c-d). In the *Apology* as well, Socrates never complains that charges of corruption are illegitimate and (again) represents the informal allegation that led to the formal charge of corruption as stating that 'Socrates is a most polluted fellow [μιαρώτατος] and corrupts the youth' (*Ap* 23d1-2). Moreover, in the course of defending himself against the charge, Socrates reveals his own understanding of what corruption is, how it is spread, and how best to eradicate it.

Recall that according to the report of Diogenes Laertius (DL 2 40) and Xenophon (*Mem* 1 1 1), and as Socrates himself recounts at *Apology* 24b8-c1 (cf. *Euthphr* 3b-d), Meletus' writ of impiety (γραφὴ ἀσεβείας) consisted of three distinct charges:

(I) Socrates does not recognize (νομίζειν) the gods recognized by the state.

(II) Socrates introduces new divinities (καινὰ δαιμόνια).

(III) Socrates corrupts (διαφθείρων) the youth.

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27 It is interesting to note on this score that, like Euthyphro, and despite his status as a Sophist, Antiphon seems to have been an 'ultraconservative ... [and] enthusiastic supporter of the traditional religion,' (Guthrie 1971, 294; cf. Gagarin 1997b, 9).

Hankinson, 40-6, notes that in the fifth-century text *On Breaths* (6, 3-22) the 'notion of *miasma* has ... been taken over by rationalist medicine and thoroughly demythologized' (45) and that in Thucydides (II 47-58, III 87) we find an implicit refusal to explain the Athenian plague (mainly 430-426 BCE) in terms of *miasma* (whereas popular explanation would cite *miasma* and target Apollo, god of healing and illness, as its initial source; cf. *Il* I 1-102; Thuc III 104). Parker, 310, also claims that one can find in Euripides something of a contrast between his enlightened view in which 'pollution has lost its sting,' and the 'conventional piety of Sophocles.'

Socrates takes up the three formal charges in reverse order, considering the corruption charge first: (III) '[Socrates] also wrongs the youth by corrupting them (ἀδικεῖ δὲ καὶ τοὺς νέους διαφθείρων)'. This allegation depends upon the other two: it is *teaching* the doctrines specified by the other two charges that constitutes the charge of corruption (see T.C. Brickhouse and N.D. Smith 1989, ch. 3). Socrates' initial response to it is to interrogate Meletus along two lines of argument meant to establish the implausibility of the charge in its own right, irrespective of what he is alleged to teach. The first tries to show this by eliciting from Meletus the extremely unlikely claim that all the Athenians improve the youth while Socrates alone corrupts them (25a9-10; 24c-5c). The second aims to defeat the corruption charge by arguing that since no one wishes to be harmed (25d1-2), attempting to corrupt — that is, to harm morally — those young people *with whom he associates* is something that Socrates would never willingly do (25c-6a; cf. 37a; see e.g., Brickhouse and Smith 1989, 117-19, for discussion).

This second argument provides further reason for assimilating Euthyphro's notion of μίασμα as pollution$_m$ to Socrates' sense of corruption; for here it is argued that just as with pollution$_m$ (cf. [5] above), a person may expect to be harmed by closely associating with those who are corrupt, and where for Socrates this must refer to moral harm, moral corruption. On Socrates' account, while involuntary corrupters ought to be educated and not prosecuted in order to change their behavior, those who intentionally corrupt ought to be reformed through prosecution and punishment (cf. *Cri* 51b; *Grg* 480b-e; *Phd* 113d).[28] Likewise, Euthy-

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28 Brickhouse and Smith (unpublished) point out that the distinction Socrates makes at *Apology* 25e6-6a8 between those cases in which instruction but not punishment is appropriate and those other cases where a court trial and punishment are appropriate would make no sense if Socrates did not believe — despite his view that no one does wrong knowingly — that there are some individuals who do wrong with a culpable degree of awareness; see Brickhouse and Smith 2000, ch. 6.5, which argues for an interpretation of Socratic intellectualist moral psychology that is compatible with Socrates' apparent acceptance of corporal punishment.

As noted above (n. 11), Euthyphro holds that the pollution posed by an unjust killer is the same for non-relatives as well as relatives provided that one's association with the killer is a knowing (συνειδώς; 4c2) one. Presumably the level of awareness this designates is of the above Socratic kind; that is, not tantamount to full knowledge (which on Socrates' account is impossible, since no one would knowingly associate with what one knows is sure to harm one). Again, it seems safe to assume

phro's seemingly retrograde idea that the pollution posed by his father is 'caught' through *close* association with him ('sharing hearth and table'), and can only be remedied through prosecution and punishment (non-traditional aspects 3, 4, 5), is thus arguably none other than Socrates' own.[29] Since, then, as Euthyphro understands it, his father intentionally allowed his (Euthyphro's) laborer to perish from hunger and cold without any dispensation from the religious advisors (ἐξηγηταί), prosecution followed by punishment — not instruction — is what is called for. Moreover, from his perspective, those who are aware of the questionable nature of his father's behavior (viz., his relatives [4d-e]) and yet *continue to associate with him* must themselves be morally blind and impaired, and thus, are very much threatened with further damage to themselves. They are not, however, endangered by the archaic, hobgoblin invisible physical taint of μίασμα, but rather, by his father's evident influence and example: his teaching, so to speak (so no wonder Euthyphro thinks that his relatives have no understanding of true piety). Presumably these corrupting lessons would consist of whatever justifications for his negligence his father might profess — citing his own fear of the μίασμα carried by the thrall, for example (a wonderfully ironic twist, if true) — something we may presume Socrates would himself find morally objectionable, and so, teachings that are themselves instances of pollution$_m$. Here, yet again, Plato invites us to see Euthyphro and Socrates as kindred spirits in the fight against the morality of the many.[30]

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that Euthyphro thinks that the potential for harm is even greater for those individuals who *unwittingly* have a close association with an unjust killer, since that ignorance would only make it easier for the killer to infect them with — to teach them, that is — his or her injustice.

29 Although Socrates begins his *elenchos* of Meletus at *Apology* 25c-6a by addressing the charge that he corrupts *all* of Athens's youth (viz., 'those he dwells among'), his attention shifts immediately and solely to 'those who are closest to him and with whom he associates (συνόντων; as opposed to Meletus, who has avoided associating with Socrates),' a match for the close association Euthyphro adumbrates at *Euthphr* 4b7-c3. In both cases, most clearly in the case of Socrates, the sort of potentially corrupting association that is envisaged is one that involves regular close contact of the sort that can transmit values by means of conversation and 'role-modeling' behavior.

30 Socrates' and Plato's appropriation and rational recasting of the notion of μίασμα as moral — that is, psychic — pollution is arguably part of their overall agenda of revisioning religious and medical conceptions in the service of philosophy. In the

By drawing Socrates and Euthyphro close to each other in the above fashion, Plato forces his readers to identify the crucial differences between the two. One difference would seem to be that while Socrates is innocent of the charge of corruption, Euthyphro is not. Just as Socrates humorously hints at 5a-b, if he, Socrates, *were* to become Euthyphro's student in religion, he *would* be corrupted if he were to imbibe the tenets of conventionalist theology and other such inconsistency-producing beliefs at Euthyphro's feet; in which case Euthyphro's crime (corruption of the old) and consequent pollution$_m$ might well be appropriately dealt with by Meletus prosecuting and punishing Euthyphro. Euthyphro puts himself in danger of harming, not improving, his father and everyone who associates with him (including himself) by labeling his own father as a source of corruption on the basis of an inconsistent mix of cosmo-

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case of μίασμα, their move from a material to a moral contagion view of μίασμα is natural since μίασμα (in the traditional sense) and guilt were closely associated ('... the imagery of pollution may be used to express moral revulsion'; Parker, 312; 312-17; cf. Aesch *Supp* 366, 375, 385 ff.). The move from moral to mental contagion is also natural, given the popular explanation of mental illness in terms of pollution (Parker, 128-9, 243-8, 318). Note too, e.g., how in the *Charmides* Socrates endorses the view of certain successful Greek physicians (probably the Hippocratics) who do not attempt to cure eyes by themselves, but only by means of treating the entire person (156b-c; similarly, the *Crito*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus* all treat body and soul 'as not merely parallel ... but interdependent' [R.F. Stalley, 358]). As a result, the headache cure Socrates claims to possess — a medicinal leaf (*pharmakon*) — is only effective if accompanied by the singing of a charm, an *epôdê* (Greek medicine of the time commonly assumed that the application of drugs would precede or be joined with that of such chants [L. Entralgo, 1-107; J. Scarborough, 141-3; cf. *Tht* 149c-d, 157c). According to certain Thracian physicians whom Socrates endorses, both leaf and charm are needed to effect a cure of both body and mind, but

> if the head and body are to be well, you must begin by curing the soul ... And the cure of the soul ... has to be effected by the use of certain charms, and these charms are beautiful words, and by them temperance is implanted in the soul, and where temperance comes and stays, there health is speedily imparted, not only to the head, but to the whole body (*Charm* 157a1-b1).

On this basis, some commentators have thought that more than any other of his dialogues, the *Charmides* shows Socrates/Plato to be the inventor of 'scientific verbal psychotherapy,' beside whom 'Gorgias and Antiphon are mere prehistory' (Entralgo, 137; cf. 126). See McPherran unpublished for an account of Socrates' diagnostic use of the *elenchos* and his rationalistic revisioning of charms as poetic *muthoi* that can moderate or still our childish fears (e.g., the concluding myth of *Phaedo* 107c-15a; cf. *Apology* 40c-1d and *Gorgias* 522c-7e). See McPherran 2003 for discussion of Socrates' relation to the healing god Asclepius.

politan morality with errant, if popular, theology — one that he is clearly shown to be willing to teach to others, even Socrates and the members of the Assembly (3b-c). Because of his confused mix of advanced with traditionalist doctrines, Euthyphro is revealed to be a source of pollution$_m$ and a potential corrupter of both young and old (including his own father; cf. *Crito* 53c1). His examination by Socrates, moreover, ought to be seen as an example of how individuals ought to be purified and so healed of the pollution of hubris and contradictory belief by being 'put on trial' in the sort of private elenctic suit Socrates favors.[31] The *Euthyphro* thus also presages the *Sophist*'s discussion (226b-31b, 231e) of the sort of moral healing and purification (καθαρμός) the Socratic *elenchos* is able to provide.[32]

The outset of our dialogue can now be seen as implicitly declaring that, just as Euthyphro proposes to protect himself and others from the threat of moral pollution by suing and punishing his father, so likewise Meletus should be seen as proposing to purify and protect Athens by

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31 Note how 2a-b makes the point that Socrates — in silent contrast to Euthyphro and Meletus — is not the sort of man to bring legal indictments against others. Rather, as we know from Plato's other works, he pursues private suits *via* the real politics of the one-on-one elenctic encounter (see, e.g., *Ap* 22e-23c; *Grg* 473e-4b); see H. Ausland on this. In view of the parallel Plato has invited readers to make between Socrates and Euthyphro's father, Socrates' 'trial' of Euthyphro can be understood to exemplify the law of just payback Plato sees as governing the relations between relatives (e.g., *Laws* 872c-3a): Euthyphro's attempt to prosecute his own father has resulted in Euthyphro himself being put 'on trial'.

32 Socrates also plays the role of elenctic physician in the *Charmides*; see above, n. 30, and McPherran unpublished. 'Purification' (καθαρμός) is the topic of Plato's sixth definition of the *Sophist* (226b-31b, 231e). There we are introduced to the art of Separation and the part of it concerned with the separation of better from worse, namely, 'purification'. This can be of body or soul, and for the two kinds of evil in the soul there are two kinds of purification: punishment for vice and instruction or education for ignorance. The worst and most pervasive ignorance is believing that one knows what one does not, and here the best educational remedy is not rough reproof or gentle admonition (since ignorance is involuntary) but the *elenchos* as practiced by Socrates. No one can be said to be truly happy without having been cleansed by this greatest sort of sophistical purgation (cf. *Grg* 470e): a sophistry that if it must be called such is still 'the Sophistry of noble lineage'. In view of Socrates' own intellectualist moral psychology, there is for him no difference between this intellectualist sense of purification and the moral sense of purification I have alluded to.

prosecuting and punishing Socrates. Both Euthyphro and Meletus initially appear to be young firebrands pushing an agenda of conservative social reform, but both are revealed to be reckless extremists with a telling lack of belief-consistency (cf. *Ap* 26b-28a); they display a confusion emblematic of the tension between past and future that marked the last years of the Athenian fifth century. Specifically, both are guilty of allowing theological propositions that they are demonstrated to be incapable of defending (since they are inconsistent with their other beliefs) to govern their treatment of others: it is they who have 'made new gods' (*Euthphr* 3b), not Socrates. Rather, on such theological details as the exact career of each god or goddess Socrates professes ignorance (while yet affirming basic truths, such as the wisdom, goodness, and non-quarreling nature of divinity) (6b, 14e-15a; cf., e.g., *Ap* 21b-d; McPherran 1996, chs. 3.4, 5.2).[33]

Nevertheless, although Euthyphro may be an inept epistemologist, he is less a crackpot theologian and moralist than he has been thought; for he is also portrayed as forward-thinking through his principles of $\text{pollution}_{\text{m}}$ and impartial justice (P). Here we see, just as Socrates later notes at 14b8-c6, that it is possible for Euthyphro to almost 'get it right'. But with his subsequent unjustified and unjustifiable appeal to Zeus' treatment of his father he turns aside at the very moment when he might have at least plausibly defended the piety — or at least the justice[34] — of

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33 Socrates' suggestion that Meletus might put Euthyphro on trial in his (Socrates') place (5a-b), Euthyphro's retort to that idea (5b-c), and Socrates' parting words at 15e-16a indicate that, as they both see it, Euthyphro and Meletus share a similar traditionalist theology of imperfect, quarreling gods; Furley, 204, 207-8.

34 By having acknowledged that piety is but a part of justice concerned with our relation to the *gods* at 12a-13e (with 'secular', person-to-person justice as the remainder), Euthyphro can no longer straightforwardly claim that the prosecution of his father for an act concerning another *person* is just by reason of its piety. Rather, the case now appears to be a matter whose merits are primarily to be determined on the grounds of *secular* justice (although it remains possible on this view for an action to be not only secularly just but pious as well; see McPherran 2000). By presenting both Euthyphro and Socrates as involved in court cases whose crucial concern is pious action — yet where the search for a complete Socratic definition of piety fails — Plato may be attempting to tell us that since we as mere humans do not and perhaps cannot have complete knowledge of what acts serve the gods (nor a precise assessment of the intentions of any person), we should be extremely hesitant in judging someone's acts to be pious or impious. Hence, just as Euthyphro ought not

his own suit. Instead, he is shown to have his feet in two camps, the first morally progressive, but the second religiously antiquated, a position which rules out his ever producing a consistent defense of his behavior, let alone a Socratically-adequate definition of piety. Neither Euthyphro nor Meletus is the serious revitalizer of the past he takes himself to be; rather, that role is reserved for Socrates. It is Socrates — indicted for his philosophical service to Apollo (*Ap* 20e-3c) — who is that god's own appointed guardian and interpreter of Athenian core values. It is he who is truly pious and pollution-free, and it is he who possesses the best measure of wisdom in respect of divine matters currently to be had in Athens. Or so, I submit, we are to think.[35]

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to prosecute his father for a crime against another man on the unwarranted assumption (as revealed by Socrates' examination of him) that his prosecution is pious, neither should Socrates be charged with impiety. Such a charge is unwarranted, given our very fallible and incomplete understanding of the gods, and especially in view of Socrates' claims elsewhere that rather than acting impiously he is in fact operating under a divine mandate (see McPherran 1996, ch. 4.1).

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