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*The End of the Euthyphro*¹

C. C. W. TAYLOR

Most of the recent discussions of Plato's *Euthyphro* have concentrated either on the so-called "*Euthyphro* dilemma" (i.e. the problem of whether divine commands create moral values or presuppose independently existing values) or on the intricacies of the argument in 10a-11b in which a version of that problem is posed. The concluding section of the dialogue from 11b to the end, though much discussed by earlier writers,² is virtually ignored in the modern literature. In this paper, I renew the discussion of this section of the dialogue, in the belief that some of the insights of the earlier generation of commentators may prove to have something to contribute to the problem of the unity of virtue in the early Platonic dialogues.

A resumé of the section in question will be helpful. At 11b it is agreed that Euthyphro's proposed account of *to hosion* as what is pleasing to all the gods has been refuted, since it has been shown (by the argument of 10a-11b) to lead to contradiction: accordingly, Socrates invites Euthyphro to suggest another account. But Euthyphro is now (not surprisingly) in a state of complete bewilderment, so Socrates volunteers (11e2-4) to help him out with a suggestion. "Think of this, now", he says, "doesn't it seem to you necessary that whatever is *hosion* is just?" (e4-5). Euthyphro agrees, whereupon Socrates asks whether he also thinks that whatever is just is *hosion*, or whether his view is that, while everything *hosion* is just, not everything which is just is *hosion* (11e6-12a2). On Euthyphro's failing to grasp the point, Socrates spells it out by means of another example (12a3-c9) and Euthyphro eventually settles for the thesis that everything *hosion* is just but not *vice versa*, i.e. that "The *hosion* is a part of the just" (c10-d3). In response to Socrates' question "Which part?" (d5-7), Euthyphro replies that it is that part which is concerned with the service (*therapeia*) of the gods, while the remainder of the just is that part which is concerned with the service of men (e5-8).

At this point a few words of elucidation are in order. Firstly, the subsumption of *to hosion* under justice should remind us that the subject of the dialogue is *hosiotēs* as an attribute of persons and their actions. Of course, things of other kinds can be *hosia*, e.g. a grove or a temple, to which the Greek adjective *hosios* is as readily applicable as its English renderings "holy" and "sacred". The rejected account of *to hosion* as what is beloved of or pleasing to the gods has at least this to be said for it that it applies alike

to non-personal and to personal instances; the gods may love woods and rivers as well as men and their doings. But the opening of the dialogue makes it clear that agents and their actions are the primary cases: the quest for an account of *to hosion* arises out of the question whether it is *hosion* or *anosion* of Euthyphro to prosecute his father for homicide and Euthyphro's first answer to the question "What do you say *to hosion* is?" is "It's what I'm doing now" (5d6-9). The adjective *hosios* is treated as interchangeable with *eusebēs*, meaning "well-disposed towards the gods", "reverent" or "religious": Socrates first asks Euthyphro for his account of *to hosion* in the words "What sort of things do you say *to eusebes* and *to asebes* are, in cases of homicide and in the other types of case?" (5c9-d1). *To hosion* is then the virtue of being properly disposed both in thought and action towards the gods: it is *hosion* for Euthyphro to prosecute his father if and only if so doing manifests the proper relationship to the gods, which is to say that it fulfils a religious obligation. No one English word conveys this sense exactly: "religious", as applied (in a slightly archaic usage) to persons and their actions perhaps comes closest, while its opposite "irreligious" comes close to capturing the sense of *asebēs*.

The suggested connection between *hosiotēs* and justice is then straightforward. Justice (*dikaionē*) is the primary social virtue, the standing disposition to respect and treat properly all those with whom one enters into social relations. Human individuals have social relations, not only with other human individuals, but also with the gods. *Hosiotēs* is then the name of that particular aspect of the basic social virtue which is directed towards the gods: every *hosion* act is a just act, i.e. a just act directed towards a god or gods (e.g. making a sacrifice, mentioning a divine name with respect) and to be *hosios* is simply to be just in one's dealings with the gods. *Hosiotēs* is then a kind of justice, viz. justice *vis-à-vis* the gods, just as parricide is a kind of murder, viz. murder of one's father. On the position which Euthyphro finally adopts (12e5-8) justice towards other humans has no special name, being described merely as "the remaining part of the just" (i.e. what's left when *hosiotēs* has been distinguished); the term "justice" is treated as generic, the social virtue as such, exercised either towards gods or humans. Ordinary Greek idiom would naturally appropriate the term *dikaionē* as the name for the virtue of social relations with human agents, and it is in accordance with that usage that the good man is described at *Gorg.* 507b as one who would do right by men, i.e. justice, and by the gods, i.e. religion (lit. "concerning men he would do the fitting just things, and concerning the gods (the fitting) religious things").³ It is unnecessary to suppose any difference of doctrine between that passage and the *Euthyphro*; rather the difference is to be accounted for by a natural shift in

application of the term *dikaioṣunē* between the genus and its principal species parallel to that illustrated by the pair of sentences “Parricide is the worst kind of murder” and “John was guilty of murder, Peter of the far worse crime of parricide”.⁴

What has been said so far leaves the content of *hosiotēs* quite open; thus it has still to be determined whether proper behaviour towards the gods is restricted to the area of prayer, ritual, etc, or whether (as suggested by the problem raised by Euthyphro’s prosecution of his father) it extends more widely into what we should regard as the sphere of morality. Euthyphro’s description of *hosiotēs* as justice concerned with the *service* of the gods might suggest that he has the narrower conception in mind, as *therapeia* is regularly used in the sense “religious observance”, but we should not read too much into the use of this word, since the Greek construction requires that it be understood also in the account of “justice towards men” (τὸ δὲ περὶ <sc. θεραπεΐαν> τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸ λοιπὸν εἶναι τοῦ δικαίου μέρος, 12e7-8). Here the word has to be given a fairly attenuated sense, such as “treatment”, which itself gives a good contrast with “justice towards the gods”: religion is a matter of treating the gods correctly, the remainder of justice is a matter of treating other people correctly. Of course, correct treatment of the gods will include ritual as a prominent aspect, which is no doubt why the word *therapeia* is a natural one for Plato to use in this context, but we should not seize on the word to restrict the scope of *hosiotēs* in Euthyphro’s formulation to ritual alone.

I now revert to the text. Socrates asks Euthyphro to explain what he means by *therapeia* of the gods. One ordinary sense of the word is “care, looking after”, e.g. care of horses, but it is soon agreed that ἡ τῶν θεῶν θεραπεΐα is not caring for the gods, since the aim of caring for A is to benefit or improve the condition of A, but the aim of ἡ τῶν θεῶν θεραπεΐα is not to benefit the gods (12e9-13d3). Rather it is the sort of *therapeia* which a servant (*therapōn*) provides for his master, viz. service or assistance (another ordinary sense of the word) (13d4-8). But the giving of assistance presupposes that the person assisted has a goal, the achievement of which is furthered by the assistance: thus a boat-builder’s assistant helps him to build a boat (d9-e5). What, then, is the goal towards the achievement of which the gods are assisted by the *therapeia* of their worshippers (13e6-14a10)? Euthyphro seems to be misled by the wording of Socrates’ final question “What, then, are the many fine things which the gods bring about? How should we sum up their work?”, for his answer misses the train of thought which Socrates has been following. He answers that if a man knows how to please the gods by worshipping them aright with prayer and sacrifice they preserve his house and his city, but if he displeases them by failure in these respects then his irreligion will bring about

total ruin (presumably of house and city) (14a11-b7). This misses Socrates' drift: as Socrates later remarks (14d6-7), Euthyphro now conceives of the gods as standing in a quasi-commercial relationship with men, in which the gods either reward men for attentions paid to them, or punish them for failure to pay those attentions. But in such an exchange of services the worshipper cannot be described as assisting the god to promote the worshipper's well-being, since *ex hypothesi* the god has no pre-existing purpose of promoting the worshipper's good, but acquires an interest in that good only when the relation is set up. The situation of the worshipper is similar to that of a professional entertainer: he is paid for providing a service but it would be absurd for him to claim that by providing that service he assists his patron in the patron's task of enabling him (the entertainer) to earn his living. If the concept of assistance applies at all to this case it applies not to the entertainer but to the patron, who, by hiring the entertainer, assists him in his pre-existing task of earning a living. On that analogy it is the god who assists the worshipper, not *vice versa*. The notion of divine aid to the pious is indeed intelligible and prominent in many religions, including Greek religion: but in giving such a case as illustration of assistance *to* the god *by* the worshipper Euthyphro is represented by Plato, presumably intentionally, as confused.

That Plato was aware of the confusion is apparent from Socrates' reply (b7-c6). He says that Euthyphro has turned away when he was on the point of giving an adequate account of what *hosiotēs* is. That is to say, Euthyphro has now taken a wrong turning, which Socrates, like a lover pursuing his beloved, has to follow. The first stage in the examination of this wrong turning is the characterisation of Euthyphro's conception of *hosiotēs* successively as knowledge of prayer and sacrifice (c5-6), knowledge of how to ask for things from the gods and give things to them (d1-2), and finally as commercial expertise between gods and men, each side getting from the other what it wants while in return satisfying the wants of the other (d9-e7). What good, then, do the gods get from their dealings with men? Since Euthyphro maintains (15a5-6) the previous position that the gods can't be benefited, i.e. improved, by the actions of men, the good that they get is honour and pleasure (a9-10). Hence the wrong turning leads back again to the answer rejected earlier that *to hosion* is what is pleasing to the gods (b1-c10). Socrates offers to try a fresh start, but Euthyphro has to leave to keep an appointment, and the dialogue ends.

As is well-known, it is characteristic of the early dialogues to end in *aporiai*, and not unknown for them to contain fairly clear hints of a conclusion which is not explicitly drawn (e.g. *Charm.* 174d-175a). The *Euthyphro* gives us a clearer hint than most in Socrates' complaint that

Euthyphro has gone astray when he was on the point of giving the right answer to the question “What is *to hosion*?” As we saw, Euthyphro’s false move was to misunderstand the question “What are the fine things which the gods accomplish?” Socrates had brought him to the point of seeing *hosiotēs* as service of the gods, i.e. as assistance to them in their work. Now a competent craftsman doesn’t use assistants unnecessarily: hence, assuming the competence of the gods (which is not questioned in the dialogue), if “assistance to the gods” is to be a correct account of *hosiotēs* there must be some good purpose for the achievement of which the gods *need* human assistance. Plainly the gods don’t need human help in creating and maintaining the natural world, assuming those to be divine tasks. But there is one good product which they can’t produce without human assistance, namely, good human souls. For a good human soul is a self-directed soul, one whose choices are informed by its knowledge of and love of the good. A good world must contain such souls and hence, if the beneficent divine purpose is to be achieved, human beings must play their part by knowing (and hence loving) the good and acting in accordance with that knowledge. True *hosiotēs*, the real service of the gods, turns out then to be nothing other than *aretē* itself.⁵ It is, however, *aretē* under a certain aspect; just as Aristotle describes “general justice” as *aretē* in relation to another (*pros heteron* EN 1130a10-13) so the conception of *hosiotēs* which we have identified in the *Euthyphro* is that of *aretē pros ton theon*, goodness of soul seen as man’s contribution to the divine order of the universe.⁶

Now this is not a novel suggestion: indeed some version of it is maintained by most of the writers on the dialogue whom I have consulted. Gomperz (*Greek Thinkers*, trans. Barry, London, 1905, Vol. II, p. 367) provides an illuminating parallel from Kant’s *Religion Within the Limits of Unassisted Reason*:

“Religion is the recognition of all our duties as divine commands . . . In a universal religion there are no special duties towards God . . . If anyone finds such a duty in the reverence due to God, he does not reflect that this is no particular act of religion, but a religious temper accompanying all our acts of duty without distinction.”

Yet interesting though the parallel is, the fact that Kant had a certain thought is not itself evidence that Plato had a similar one, nor does a cloud of modern witnesses provide direct confirmation for a speculative interpretation of an ancient author. For support we must rather turn again to the text, not expecting explicit confirmation or refutation (for the interpretation *is* speculative) but rather looking for things in the text which provide a good fit with the interpretation, and also for things which clash with it.

The first point in favour of the interpretation (noticed by A E Taylor⁷ and I M Crombie⁸) is that it allows even Euthyphro's wrong turning, *when correctly interpreted*, to provide a correct account of *hosiotēs*. Following the lead given by Euthyphro's assertion that the man who knows how to please the gods by prayer and sacrifice wins rewards (14b2-5), Socrates summarises his view in the characteristically Socratic suggestion that *hosiotēs* is a sort of knowledge of prayer and sacrifice (14c5-6). Prayer being construed as asking for things from the gods and sacrifice as giving things to the gods, this formula becomes "holiness is knowledge of how to ask from and give to the gods" (d1-2). But that knowledge is not a distinct sort of knowledge from knowledge of how to live, i.e. (given the Socratic thesis that virtue is knowledge) from goodness (*aretē*) itself. Someone who knows what human good consists in knows that a life lived in the pursuit of that good is the only thing which the gods need from human beings (see above) and, as Socrates points out, it is not an intelligent thing to give someone what he doesn't need (e2-4). Again, he knows that such a life, being the supreme object of value, is that which above all we should ask from the gods: hence it is no accident that when Socrates prays in the dialogues he almost always prays for wisdom and goodness.⁹ When the knowledge of how to live which is *aretē* is related to the gods, that knowledge itself becomes knowledge of how to live in relation to the gods, which includes knowledge of how to give to the gods and how to ask from them. And one gives correctly to them just by living well and asks correctly from them by asking to live well. That was not indeed what Euthyphro meant, but Plato surely intends us to see that even the primitive notion of religion as a commercial transaction, when interpreted in the light of the Socratic doctrine that virtue is knowledge, contains an aspect of the truth.

This leads us to the firmest confirmation of the interpretation, viz. that it applies to *hosiotēs* the doctrine of the unity of the virtues, explicitly argued for in the *Protagoras* and implicit in the *Meno* and *Laches*. *Hosiotēs* is not an element contributing along with others to total goodness, in the way that a succession of different courses, each good, makes up a good dinner. Rather *hosiotēs* is goodness seen under a particular aspect, viz. the relation of man to gods. Hence whatever goodness is, that (whatever it is) will be what *hosiotēs* is. Now the *Protagoras* and *Meno* tell us that goodness is a sort of knowledge, viz. knowledge of how to live or how to achieve the good (identified in the former but not the latter as the maximisation of pleasure). (I pass over as irrelevant the complication that in the *Meno* Plato apparently accepts ὁρθὴ δόξα as an alternative account of goodness.) Hence knowledge of the good will be what *hosiotēs* is. Now at the end of the

Protagoras (361b) Socrates says that *each* of the virtues (courage, *sōphrosunē*, justice, and *hosiotēs*) has turned out to be knowledge: the argument has been given for courage only (viz. that knowledge of what is good and bad is necessary and sufficient to make a man brave) but is plainly intended to be applicable to the others. That same account of courage is derived in the *Laches*, only to be rejected on the ground that if it were correct courage would be identical with goodness, whereas it is *ex hypothesi* a “part” of total goodness. The implication is clear that it is the hypothesis which is to be rejected, rather than the account of courage. As is spelled out in the *Protagoras* the traditional view of the specific *aretai* as parts of total *aretē* is to be rejected. Rather each *aretē* is identical with every other and with goodness as such.

By this I understand the doctrine that what makes a man a good man overall is the very same thing as what makes him a courageous man, as what makes him a right-minded or self-controlled man, as what makes him a just man and as what makes him a religious man. The thing in question is his knowledge of what is good. The relation represented by the verb “makes” here is not that of formal causation, as in “What makes this figure a triangle is its having three straight sides”. Rather it is a relation of efficient causality, as in “What makes him a first-rate tennis player is his perfect balance, excellent co-ordination and exceptional stamina”. This illustration is helpful up to a point, in that it suggests a parallel for the thesis of the unity of the virtues. Suppose that all and only those qualities listed above are causally necessary and sufficient, not only for their possessor’s being a first-rate tennis player, but also for his being first-rate at badminton and at squash. Then it would be true that what makes him excellent at any one of those games is the very same thing (i.e. the same set of attributes) as what makes him excellent at both the others. Of none of the three games is it the case that his pre-eminence at that game derives even in part from some attribute which is exercised exclusively in the playing of that game. No doubt we should still refuse to say “His being good at tennis is the very same attribute as his being good at squash”, since the reference of “his being good at tennis” includes his actually playing tennis excellently, which is a different activity from his actually playing squash excellently. But this merely brings out the difference between our concept of “being good at ϕ -ing” and Plato’s concept of “the *aretē* appropriate to ϕ -ing”: being good at ϕ -ing is possessing and exercising the capacity to ϕ well, whereas the *aretē* appropriate to ϕ -ing is what accounts for the possession of that capacity. This is seen by the fact that Plato accepts that many types of *aretai*, including the principal moral virtues, are kinds of knowledge,

whereas knowing how to ϕ is never a sufficient account of what being good at ϕ -ing is.

As thus understood the doctrine does not embrace the thesis that the names of the specific virtues or the adjectives formed from those names are synonymous. "Just" and "religious" are not synonymous, nor are "justice" and "religion" though "justice" and "religion" name the same state in a man, since what makes a man just is the very same thing as what makes him religious, viz. his knowledge of the good. "Just" means roughly "treating others properly" and "religious" means "treating the gods properly": hence the description of someone as just and religious is not a mere hendiadys. The fact that a good man is correctly described by the various non-synonymous expressions "brave", "religious", "just", etc. allows a sense for the traditional talk of the "parts" of total *aretē*; nothing in the doctrine requires the abandonment of that way of speaking. Hence it is no surprise to find, e.g. in the *Meno*, the doctrine of the unity of virtue combined with talk (e.g. 78-9) of *sōphrosunē*, *hosiōtēs*, etc. as parts of *aretē*. What has to be abandoned is the substantial claim that the specific *aretai* are different states of an agent, e.g. that what makes a man courageous is something, a force say or a motivation, different from what makes him just, and that again something different from what makes him religious.

In general, then, there is no incompatibility between the doctrine of the unity of virtue and the treatment of the particular virtues as "parts" of total virtue. There is, however, a particular difficulty arising from the talk of "parts" for the interpretation of the *Euthyphro* which I have been defending. On that interpretation, the concluding section of the dialogue conveys the doctrine that *hosiōtēs* is goodness, described as related to the gods. *Hosiōtēs* thus includes justice, since a good man is just: in the terminology of the dialogue, all his just acts will be among the things he gives to the gods, i.e. every just act is a *hosion* (religious) act. But the hypothesis which led to this account was that *to hosion* is a part of *to dikaion*, and an implication of this is carefully spelled out by Socrates (12d1-3): "where there is something *hosion*, there is something *dikaion*, but where there is something *dikaion* there is not everywhere something *hosion*", i.e. "Whatever is *hosion* is *dikaion*, but it is not the case that whatever is *dikaion* is *hosion*". Moreover, this is not Euthyphro's hypothesis, but Socrates', and must therefore be assumed to have Plato's approval. Can it have been Plato's intention to reach from this hypothesis a conclusion which entails the denial of the hypothesis? (The difficulty is emphasised by Vlastos, *Platonic Studies*, Princeton, 1973, p. 228.)

I do not think that this difficulty is particularly serious. We can recon-

struct Plato's thought as follows. In looking for an account of the nature of religion one begins from the insight that fulfilling one's obligations to the gods is a special instance of fulfilling one's obligations. One expresses this by the description of religion as a part of justice, and makes the natural assumption that the extension of the part is less than that of the whole, i.e. that religious acts are a sub-set of the set of just acts. One then asks what part of justice religion is and identifies it as the part to do with the service of the gods. But when the concept of the service of the gods is examined, it becomes clear that the only satisfactory account of it is that it consists in being a good man. Hence while the initial insight that fulfilling obligations to the gods is a special case of fulfilling obligations stands, the inference that religious acts are a sub-set of just acts falls: since what one has to do to fulfil religious obligations is nothing other than to be good, including being just, it follows that every religious act is a just act, and *vice versa*. This is not itself the thesis that justice is the same thing as *hosiotēs*, which we have identified as the thesis that what makes a man just is the same thing as what makes him religious, viz. knowledge of what is good. Rather it is a consequence of that thesis, derived via the premise that what the gods need from men is goodness. The identity of justice and *hosiotēs* is argued for, by a woefully bad argument, in the *Protagoras* (330-1): we have now discovered that a stronger case for it emerges in the *Euthyphro* from the hypothesis that *hosiotēs* is a part of justice. That hypothesis is not so much contradicted as superseded: what remains of it is the analytic truth that fulfilling religious obligations is a special instance of fulfilling obligations. But Plato's aim is to establish, not an analytic thesis, but the substantial thesis of the identity of justice and *hosiotēs*, which is in turn a part of the doctrine of the unity of virtue. That doctrine, it must be emphasised, has nothing to do with the meanings of words. It is a psychological doctrine, which asserts that all human excellence derives, via a single universal motivation, viz. the desire for the agent's good, from a single intellectual state, the knowledge of what the agent's good consists in.¹⁰ The analytic hypothesis serves its function by introducing the argument which leads up to the thesis of the identity of justice and *hosiotēs*, but which stops short at the point where that thesis should be stated.

I conclude then, that the traditional account of the concluding section of the *Euthyphro* is supported by the fact that it represents Plato as doing in this dialogue what he also does in the *Laches* and *Charmides*. Each of these three dialogues seeks for an account of a single virtue and ostensibly fails to find it. Yet each conveys the implicit message that the virtue in question is nothing else than goodness itself, understood as knowledge of the good.

That implicit doctrine, with its corollary that each virtue is the same thing as each of the others, is explicitly argued for in the *Protagoras*. The *prima facie* objection presented by the fact that in the *Euthyphro* Socrates argues from the hypothesis that *hosiotēs* is a part of justice is not an obstacle to this interpretation; that hypothesis contains an analytic truth which is, therefore, consistent with the substantial doctrine of the unity of virtue. As to the falsehood in the hypothesis, that religious acts are a sub-set of just acts, that may be regarded as a ladder to be thrown away once it has led to the truth that religion is nothing other than goodness seen as man's co-operation with the gods.

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¹ An earlier version of this paper was read to the Southern Association for Ancient Philosophy in 1981. I have made several changes in the light of the discussion and wish to acknowledge my debt to all those whose criticisms have led me to improve the paper.

² In addition to the works cited later in this paper, there are useful discussions in the following: B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, Oxford, 1871, vol. I, pp. 295-9; J. Adam, *Platonis Euthyphro*, Cambridge, 1890, pp. xiv-xvi; W. A. Heidel, "On Plato's *Euthyphro*", *Trans. of the American Philol. Assoc.* 31 (1900), pp. 163-81; J. Burnet, *Plato's Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates and Crito*, Oxford, 1924, esp. pp. 56-7; M. Croiset, *Platon* (Budé ed., Paris, 1946), vol. I, pp. 181-3; P. Friedländer, *Plato* (tr. H. Meyerhoff, New York, 1964), vol. II, pp. 83-9. For further references see W. G. Rabinowitz, "Platonic Piety", *Phron.* 3 (1958), p. 113.

³ Cf. K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality*, Oxford, 1974, p. 247.

⁴ Cf. Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes*, 597-612 (cited by Dover, *op cit.*, p. 253).

⁵ For evidence in popular Greek thought of a wide conception of *hosiotēs*, in which much of social morality was seen as falling within the sphere of interest of the gods, see Dover, *op cit.*, pp. 250-4.

⁶ Compare *Laws* X, 903b-904b:

"He who provides for the world has disposed all things with a view to the preservation and perfection of the whole, wherefore each several thing also, as far as may be, does and has done to it what is meet . . . Thine own being also, fond man, is one such fragment, and so, for all its littleness, all its striving is ever directed towards the whole . . . it is not made for thee, but thou for it.

. . . He (sc. who provides for the world) contrived where to post each several item so as to provide most utterly, easily and well for the triumph of virtue and rout of vice throughout the whole" (tr. A E Taylor).

If I am right in my account of the *Euthyphro*, Plato's last thoughts on the cosmic role of the moral agent had much in common with what may have been his first.

⁷ *Plato, The Man and His Work*, paperback ed, London, 1960, pp. 154-6.

⁸ *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, Vol. I, London, 1962, p. 211.

⁹ See especially *Phaedrus* 279b-c and for fuller details and discussion, B. Darrell Jackson, "The Prayers of Socrates", *Phronesis* xvi (1971), pp. 14-37.

¹⁰ See Terry Penner, "The Unity of Virtue", *Philosophical Review* lxxxii (1973), pp. 35-68.