Plato's *Euthyphro*

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EUTHYPHRO: What's new, Socrates? Something out of the ordinary, since it has dragged you from the Lyceum here to the king-archon's court. Surely it can't be that you, like me, are bringing suit against someone before the king-archon?

SOCRATES: The Athenian term for what brings me here is not 'suit' but 'indictment', Euthyphro.

E: What? Someone must have indicted you, then. You aren't going to tell me you have indicted anyone.

S: No indeed.

E: But someone has indicted you?

S: That's just it.

E: Who is it?

S: I don't know the man myself, Euthyphro. He is apparently young and has yet to make a name for himself. He's called Meletus, I gather. He belongs to the Pitthean deme, if you happen to know anyone from there by that name – long hair, thin little beard, rather pointy nose.

E: Doesn't ring a bell, Socrates. What's the charge?

S: What charge, you ask? No mean charge, I should say, for it is no small thing for one so young to attain such insight. He says he knows how, and by whom, the young are corrupted. More likely than not the man is wise; so when he sees my dull ignorance corrupting his whole generation, he is provoked to denounce me to the city like a child running to its mother. I think he is the only one of our public men to make a proper start in politics. One should first of all look to the proper upbringing of the young – just as a good farmer tends young sprouts first, looking after the rest later. In just this way Meletus will start off by uprooting weeds – such as myself – that damage tender shoots, so he says; later he will obviously tend to older growth, thereby making himself a source of bounty and fruitful blessings for the city; a likely fate for anyone who sets about things in such a way.

E: I only wish it were true, Socrates. I'm afraid the opposite may be the case. By trying to hurt you, it seems to me he makes a very crude start, cutting at the very heart of the city. But tell me, what does he say you do to corrupt the young.

S: It's an outlandish business I'm mixed up in, to hear him tell the tale. He says I fabricate gods. He indicts me, so he says, on behalf of the old gods, whom I don't believe in while I'm making the new ones.

E: I know just how it is, Socrates. This is due to the divine sign you say comes to you. This man has written out his indictment against you as against one who innovates in divine matters. He comes to court to slander you, knowing such matters can easily be made to appear in a bad light before the crowd. That's how it is with me, too. Whenever I speak up concerning divine matters in the assembly, and foretell the future, they laugh me down as if I were crazy; yet all I have foretold has come to pass. They envy those of us with such gifts. But you musn't pay attention to all that; you just have to take the bull by the horns.

S: My dear Euthyphro, maybe being laughed at isn't such a big deal. The Athenians don't mind clever-types, so long as no one tries to teach his peculiar brand of wisdom. But if someone starts bringing others round to his way of thinking, then the Athenians get angry – either because they are jealous, as you say, or for some other reason.

E: I certainly don't have any desire to put their feelings towards me to the test.

S: Perhaps they take you for a stingy sort of fellow, not unduly eager to spread your wisdom around. But my fondness for people makes them think I am ready to spill all the beans to everyone – not just for free but maybe with a little extra thrown in, out of gratitude for the loan of a spare ear. So if it were all just a big plot to laugh at me, as you say they laugh at you, there would be nothing unpleasant about the prospect of a day in court, spent laughing and having fun. But if they are serious about it – well, in that case the outcome is less clear, unless you prophets know better.

E: Perhaps it will all come to nothing, Socrates. You will conduct your case properly, as I trust I shall mine.

S: What about your case, Euthyphro? Are you defendant or prosecutor?

E: Prosecutor.

S: Whom do you prosecute?

E: One whom I am thought insane to indict.

S: You're chasing after someone who is sure to get away?

E: Hardly; he is rather old.

S: Who is it?

E: My father.

S: My dear sir! Your own father?

E: Certainly.

S: What is the charge? What is the case about?

E: Murder, Socrates.

S: By Olympus! Certainly most men would not know how to go about a thing like this and end up in the right, Euthyphro. This isn't a thing for just anyone to do. This is a job for one far advanced in wisdom!

E: Yes, by Zeus, Socrates, that is so.

S: Is it a case, then, of your father killing another relative? But I suppose that much is obvious. It wouldn't make sense to prosecute your father for killing a stranger.

E: What makes no sense, Socrates, is for you to think it makes a difference whether the victim is a stranger or a relative. One should only consider whether the killer acted justly or not; if he acted justly, let him go; if not, prosecute even a killer who shares your hearth and home. You are just as polluted, remaining under the same roof with such a one, when you should be helping yourself and him by leading the way to divine cleanliness and justice. The victim was a dependent of mine, and when we were farming in Naxos he acted as our servant. In a drunken rage, he killed one of our household slaves, so my father bound him hand and foot, threw him in a ditch, then sent a man here to inquire of the priest what should be done. While awaiting an answer, he gave not a thought nor care to the prisoner – who, being a killer, might as well be dead, which he soon enough was. Hunger, exposure and his bonds did for the man before the messenger came back from the seer. Now my father and other relatives are angry that I am prosecuting him for murder on behalf of a murderer when my father didn't even murder him, so they say; and even if he did, the dead man doesn't deserve a second thought, being a murderer. They say it is impious for a son to prosecute a father for murder. But their notions of how the gods view holiness and unholiness are wrong, Socrates.

S: Whereas, Euthyphro, you think your knowledge of the divine, of holiness and unholiness, are so accurate that – by Zeus – given that it all happened just as you say, you have no fear of acting impiously now by bringing your father to trial?

E: Euthyphro would hardly be superior to the crowd – I should be of no use, Socrates – if I did not have accurate knowledge of all such things.

S: It is of paramount importance, then, for me to matriculate as your student, admirable Euthyphro, so as to be able to rebut Meletus concerning this indictment of his, which is all about these very things. Then would I say to him that in the past I too exalted knowledge of divinity above all else, and now that I stand guilty of divine improvisations and fabrications, I have enrolled myself as your pupil. I would say to him: 'Meletus, if you grant that Euthyphro is wise in these matters, then grant that I too have all the true beliefs, and don't drag me into court. If you don't grant it, sue my teacher, not me, for corrupting the old – me and his father – through teachings, exhortations, and legal actions.' If that doesn't do the trick, if he doesn't drop the charge, or else pin it on you instead of me, I'll try out the same line in court.

E: Yes, by Zeus, Socrates! And if he should try to indict me, I

think I would probe his weak spots, so that talk in court would sooner be about him than me.

S: This is why I now clamor to become your pupil, my dear friend. I know other people – as well as this Meletus fellow – do not seem to pay much attention to you, whereas I have caught his attention so completely he accuses me of sacrilege. So tell me now, by Zeus, that thing you just said you knew so well: namely what is righteous and unrighteous, regarding murder and everything else. I take it holiness always consists in some one thing, with regard to every action; and unholiness is always the opposite of holiness, and the same as itself. For everything unholy always appears to us in the same form – namely as a form of unholiness.

E: Most certainly, Socrates.

S: Tell me what you say, then; what is holiness and what is unholiness?

E: I say holiness is doing what I do now – namely, prosecuting wrongdoers, whether the crime is murder or temple robbery or anything else, and whether the culprit is your father or mother or anyone else; not to prosecute is unholy. And please note, Socrates, that I can quote the law as a heavy proof this is so. I have already said to others that such actions are proper – not to give way to the ungodly, whoever they may be. These people themselves believe that Zeus is the best and most just of gods; yet they acknowledge that, for the crime of swallowing his own sons, Zeus bound his own father, who in his turn castrated his own father on similar grounds. Yet everyone is mad at me for prosecuting my father for wrongdoing. They hereby contradict themselves in what they claim about the gods and about me.

S: Indeed, Euthyphro, these are just the sorts of considerations that have landed me in legal trouble, for I find it hard to accept things like this being said about the gods. Probably this is how and why I shall be told I am in the wrong. Now, however, if you – who know all about it – believe reports of this sort, then I must too, it seems. For what else can I say, admitting as I do my lack of first-hand knowledge? Tell me, in the name of the god of friendship, do you really believe these things are true?

E; Yes, Socrates, and so are even more surprising things – things that must remain mysteries, concealed from the crowd.

S: So you believe that the gods really go to war, that there are hateful rivalries and battles between them such as are related by the poets? These scenes out of our sacred stories – the sort that get embroidered in the works of fine writers, and upon the robe of the goddess that is carried up to the Acropolos during the great Panathenaic festival; we're supposed to believe it all really happened, Euthyphro?

E: Not only these things, Socrates. As I just saying, I will, if you wish, relate many other things about the gods that I know will astound you.

S: I wouldn't be a bit surprised. Someday – when we both have lots of time on our hands – you really must tell me all about it. In the meantime, try to fill me in more completely concerning that thing I was asking about a moment ago. Because, my friend,

you did not teach me adequately when I inquired as to what holiness is. You told me what you are doing now – namely, prosecuting your father for murder – is holy.

E: And I spoke truth, Socrates.

S: That may be. You do concede, however, that there are many other holy actions.

E: There are.

S: Keep in mind, then, that I didn't ask for a couple examples of holy actions. I asked what form all holy actions exhibit, making them holy. For you did agree all unholy actions are unholy and all holy actions holy in virtue of some shared form, or don't you remember?

E: I do.

S: Tell me then what this form is, so that I may consider it in itself; and, by taking it as my model, judge any action committed by you or anyone else: if the action be of the right form, I will declare it holy; otherwise, not.

E: If that is how you want it, Socrates, that is how I will give it to you.

S: That's what I want.

E: Well then, what the gods love is holy; what is unloved by them is unholy.

S: Magnificent, Euthyphro! You have now answered in just the way I wanted. As to whether your answer is a true one – that's a little something I don't know just yet; but you are obviously going to show me things are as you say.

E: Certainly.

S: Come then, let us examine what has been said. A man or deed loved by the gods is holy, whereas one hated by the gods is
unholy. They are not one and the same – in fact, they are diametrical opposites: the holy and the unholy. Isn't that so?

E: It is indeed.

S: This seems to you a sound proposition?

E: I think so, Socrates.

S: We have also declared, Euthyphro, that the gods exist in a state of discord, that they are at odds, indeed that they hate one another. Haven't we said this, too?

E: We have.

S: What sorts of things are they which, when causes of argument, are causes of anger and enmity? Let's look at it this way. If you and I were to get into an argument about which of two numbers was the larger, would this turn us into furious enemies; or would we sit down, count up, and quickly smooth our differences?

E: That is certainly just what we would do.

S: Likewise, if we had a fight about bigger and smaller, we would avail ourselves of measurement and swiftly settle the matter.

E: That is so.

S: And we would employ a scale, I think, if we disagreed about what was heavier and what lighter?

E: Of course.

S: What sorts of things might we argue about that would make us angry and hostile, if we couldn't reach agreement? Maybe you don't have an immediate answer; but see whether you think it's these things: justice and injustice, beauty and ugliness, the good and the bad. Aren't these the very things for causing disputes which, when they prove unresolvable, provoke irreconcilable differences between you, me and everyone else.

E: That's just how it goes in arguments about such things, Socrates.

S: What about the gods, Euthyphro? If in fact they get in arguments, won't they be about these sorts of things?

E: That must be how it is, Socrates.

S: Then according to your argument, good Euthyphro, different gods consider different things to be just, beautiful, ugly, good, and bad – for they wouldn't be at odds unless they disagreed about these things, would they?

E: You are right.

S: Each of them loves what each considers beautiful, good, and just, and each hates the opposite of these things?

E: Certainly.

S: But you say the same things are considered just by some gods, unjust by others. It is disputes over such things that set them at odds and at war. Isn't it so?

E: It is.

S: The same things, then, are loved by the gods and hated by the gods, and will be both god-loved and god-hated.

E: It seems likely.

S: And the same things will be both holy and unholy, according to the terms of this argument?

E: I'm afraid so.

S: So you didn't answer my question, you man of mystery. I did not ask you what one thing is both holy and unholy, but it appears
what is loved by the gods is also hated by them. So it won't be too surprising if the thing you now undertake – namely, punishing your father – is pleasing Zeus but displeasing to Kronos and Ouranos; is pleasing to Hephaestus but displeasing to Hera; and the same goes for any other gods who may care to take up the matter.

E: I think, Socrates, that here we have something no god would dispute: whoever kills anyone unjustly must pay the penalty.

S: Well now, Euthyphro, have you ever heard any man arguing that one who has murdered or otherwise acted unjustly should not pay the penalty?

E: There are endless disputes about this sort of thing, both in and out of the courts, because wrongdoers will say and do anything to avoid getting punished.

S: Do they admit they have done wrong, Euthyphro, but maintain that, even so, they should not be punished?

E: No, they don't admit it.

S: So then they don't say or do just anything. For they don't go so far as to admit this, nor do they go so far as to deny they should pay the penalty if they did wrong. But I think they do deny wrong-doing, don't they?

E: That's how it is.

S: Then they don't dispute that wrongdoers must be punished, only who did wrong, what they did, and when.

E: You are right.

S: Don't the gods have the same experience – if indeed they are at odds about justice and injustice, as your argument maintains? Some say that they wrong one another, while others deny it; but none among gods or men goes so far as to say a wrongdoer should not be punished

E: Yes, that is basically true, Socrates.

S: So parties to a given dispute, whether gods or men, dispute about a given action – if in fact the gods ever dispute. Some say the thing was done justly, some unjustly. Isn't that how it goes?

E: Yes, indeed.

S: Come now, my dear Euthyphro; tell me, that I may be the wiser for it, what proof you can offer that all gods deem this man unjustly killed – this servant-turned-murderer, bound by the master of his victim, who died in bondage before his captor learned from the seers what was to be done – and that all gods consider it right for a son to denounce and prosecute a father on behalf of such a one? Come, show me, if you can, a clear sign that all the gods definitely believe this action to be right. If you can produce an adequate proof of this l sing praises of your wisdom forevermore.

E: This is maybe not so easily done, Socrates – though I could show you very clearly.

S: I quite understand that you think I'm dull-witted compared to the jury, since obviously you are going to show them that these actions were unjust and hated by all the gods.

E; I will show them clearly, Socrates – if only they will listen to me.

S: They will listen so long as you seem to speak well. But something occurred to me while you were talking – a thought I am even now turning over in my mind: 'Suppose Euthyphro does show me conclusively that all the gods consider such a death unjust. To what extent will he thereby have taught me the nature of holiness and unholiness? That such a deed is hated by all the gods – so much would seem to follow; but a definition of holiness and unholiness does not. For what is hated by the gods has also been shown to be loved by them.' So I won't keep pressing the point. Let us grant, if you like, that all gods consider this thing unjust and hate it. Is this, then, the only amendment we wish to make to our account – namely, that what *all* gods hate is unholy, whereas what they *all* love is holy; that what *some* gods love and *some* hate is both or neither? Is this how we now wish to define holy and unholy?

E: Is anything stopping us, Socrates?

S: Not as far as I'm concerned, Euthyphro, but consider your own position – see whether this proposal will pave the way to the instruction you promised me.

E: I would certainly say the holy is what all the gods love, and the opposite – what all the gods hate – is unholy.

S: Then let us examine, once again, whether what we have here is a sound proposition. We could, of course, just let it pass; whenever we – or anyone – says something is so, we could simply take it to be so. Alternatively, we could look and see what it all means.

E: We must look and see, but I really think what we have now is a sound proposition.

S: And soon we will know whether it is. Consider this: is the holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?

E: I don't know what you mean, Socrates.

S: Let me try to explain more clearly: we speak of something carried and of a carrier; of something guided and a guide; of something seen and one who sees. You understand that, and how, these things are distinct?

E: I think I do.

S: So there are those who are loved and those who love, and the two are not the same?

E: Of course.

S: Tell me then whether the thing carried is carried because someone carries it, or for some other reason.

E: No, that's the reason.

S: Likewise, the thing guided is guided because someone guides it, and the thing seen is seen because someone sees it.

E: Of course.

S: It isn't that someone sees it because the thing is seen. It's the other way round: it is seen because someone sees it; likewise, something's being guided doesn't cause its guide; the thing is guided because of a guide; nor do carriers come to be by things getting carried; instead, things are carried because someone carries them. Is what I am getting at clear, Euthyphro? I am getting at this: when something changes, or undergoes some effect, the change doesn't happen just because it happens; everything happens for a reason. Likewise, effects don't happen because things undergo effects; effects happen because of causes. Or don't you agree?

E: I do.

S: Either belovedness is something that just develops naturally, or it is something brought about by someone's love?

E: Certainly.

S: So this case is analogous to those just mentioned: the thing is not loved because of its belovedness; rather, it is loved because of one who loves it.

E: Necessarily.

S: What then do we say about holiness, Euthyphro? Surely that it is loved by all the gods, by your account?

E: Yes.

S: Is it loved because it is holy, or is there some other reason?

E: There is no other reason.

S: It is loved then because it is holy, but it is not holy because it is loved?

E: So it seems.

S: And because the gods love it, it becomes loved by the gods and god-beloved?

E: Of course.

S: What is loved by the gods is not, then, identical to what is holy, Euthyphro; nor does holy mean god-beloved, as you maintain; these are distinct things.

E: How so, Socrates?

S: Because we agree that what is holy is loved because of its holiness; it isn't holy because it is loved. Isn't that so?

E: Yes.

S: And, on the other hand we agree that what is loved by the gods is loved because of the fact of the gods' loving it; love of something does not come about because of that thing's belovedness.

E: True.

S: But if that which is loved by the gods and that which is holy were one and the same, dear Euthyphro, and if the holy were loved because it was holy, then what is loved by the gods would be loved by the gods because it was loved by the gods; and if what is loved by the gods were loved by the gods because it was loved by the gods, then the holy would also be holy because it was loved by the gods. But now you see we have two quite opposite sorts of cases here – very different from one another. We have someone who loves a thing, making it be loved; and we have a lovable thing, which makes someone love it. I'm afraid that when I asked you what holiness is, Euthyphro, you didn't want to make its nature clear to me. Instead, you told me about an effect or quality of it – namely the quality holiness has of being loved by all the gods. But you have yet to tell me what holiness is in itself. Now, if you please, stop hiding things from me and start over again from the beginning, telling me what holiness is. We won't argue about whether it is loved by the gods, or has some other such quality; just look sharp and teach me what holiness and unholiness are.

E: But Socrates, I can't possibly explain to you what I have in mind, because whatever proposition we advance runs around in circles, refusing to stay put where we plant it.

S: Your propositions, Euthyphro, seem like the property of my ancestor, Daedalus. If it were me stating them and setting them forth, you might make fun of me, saying my conclusions have inherited from him the trait of running around and not staying in one place. Since these are your propositions, however, we will have to come up with a

different joke – because it's true, as you say, that these things of yours really won't stay put.

E: I think that joke fits in fine with our discussion, Socrates, because I'm not the one making these things go around and around, instead of sitting still. You're the Daedalus here, because if it were up to me, these things would stay still, just as they are.

S: Then it looks as if I must be even cleverer than Daedalus, my friend, since his skill only extended to animating things he made himself, whereas mine makes other people's creations move about as well. And the pinnacle of my genius is my cleverness, minus any desire to be clever. For I would give up the wealth of Tantalus as well as the cleverness of Daedalus, if only these things you say to me would stand still. But enough of this. Since it seems to me you are making all this needlessly difficult, we must both be equally eager to find some way for me to get taught by you about holiness; so don't give up before you find the way. Consider whether you think all that is holy is necessarily just.

E: I think so.

S: So, then, is all that is just holy? Or is all that is holy just, but not all that is just holy, but some is and some not?

E: You lost me there, Socrates.

S: And yet youth is on your side, just as wisdom is. As I said, you are throwing up obstacles by way of hoarding your wealth of wisdom. Pull yourself together, my good man, because the thing I'm saying is not that hard to grasp. I am saying the opposite of what that poet said, who wrote: 'you do not wish to name Zeus, who has done it, and who made all things grow, for where there is fear there is also shame.' I disagree with the poet. Shall I tell you why?

E: Please do.

S: I don't think that 'where there is fear there is also shame,' for I think many people who fear disease and poverty and many other things feel fear but are not ashamed of what they fear. Don't you agree?

E: I do indeed.

S: But where there is shame there is also fear. For is there anyone who, when ashamed and embarrassed about anything, does not at the same time fear and dread a reputation for wickedness?

E: He is certainly afraid.

S: Then it isn't right to say, 'where there is fear there is also shame,' rather that where there is shame there is also fear, because fear covers a larger area than shame. Shame is part of fear's domain just as odd is part of the domain of number – from which it follows that it isn't true that where there is number there is also

oddness, rather that where there is the oddness there is also number. Do you follow me now?

E: Absolutely.

S: This is the kind of thing I was asking about before: whether where there is holiness there must also be justice, and whether where justice is present, holiness may be absent – holiness being but one part of justice's domain. Shall we say so, or do you think otherwise?

E: No, that's fine; what you say seems right.

S: See what comes next: if holiness is part of justice, we must, it seems, find out what part of justice it is. Now if you asked me a similar question about the thing I just mentioned – what portion of numbers are even, and what those numbers are, I would say they are those numbers divisible into two equal, not unequal, parts. Or don't you think so?

E: I do.

S: Try to give me a similar account of that part of justice that is holiness – so that you can tell Meletus not to wrong us any more, and not to indict me for sacrilege, since I have learned enough from you to be able to tell the difference between what is sacred and holy and what is not.

E: I think, Socrates, that godliness and holiness are that part of justice concerned with the care of the gods, while the part of justice concerned with the care of men comprises the rest.

S: It seems to me you put that very well, but I still need to gather a bit more information. I don't yet know what you mean by 'care', for you don't mean 'care of the gods' in the same sense as 'care' of other things. We say, for example – don't we? – that not everyone knows how to take care of horses, only the horse-breeder does.

E: Yes, I do mean it that way.

S: So horse breeding is the care of horses.

E: Yes.

E: Nor is it the case that everyone can care for dogs, but the hunter knows how.

E: That is so.

S: So hunting is the care of dogs.

E: Yes.

S: And cattle-raising the care of cattle.

E: Quite so.

S: While holiness and godliness is the care of the gods, Euthyphro. Is that what you mean?

E: It is.

S: Now in each case care has the same effect; it aims at benefiting and securing the good of the cared-for thing. In the case of horses cared for by horse breeders, for instance, they are the better for it. Or don't you think so?

E: I do.

S: So dogs are benefited by dog breeding, cattle by cattle raising, and so on and so forth. Unless you have some notion that care aims at harming the thing cared for?

E: By Zeus, no.

S: It aims to benefit the object of care?

E: Of course.

S: Is holiness then – being the care of the gods – also a benefit to them, something that makes them better? Would you agree that when you do something holy you improve some one of the gods?

E: By Zeus, no!

S: I didn't think that was what you meant – quite the contrary; and that is why I asked what you meant by 'care of the gods'. I couldn't believe you meant this kind of care.

E: Quite right, Socrates. I didn't mean this kind of care at all.

S: Very well, but what kind of care of the gods would holiness be?

E: The kind of care, Socrates, that slaves take of their masters.

S: I understand. Holiness is shaping up to be a kind of service to the gods.

E: Quite so.

S: Could you tell me: what would be the point of being of service to a doctor? Wouldn't it be the improvement of health, don't you think?

E: I think so.

S: What about being of service to shipbuiliders? What would you be hoping to achieve?

E: Clearly, Socrates, the building of a ship.

S: And as to being of service to housebuilders: that would subserve the building of a house?

E: Yes.

S: Tell me then, my good sir, what is the point of the service men provide to gods? You obviously know since you say that you, of all men, have the most complete knowledge of divinity.

E: And I speak the truth, Socrates.

S; Tell me then, by Zeus: what excellent purpose is it that the gods achieve with the help of us, their servants?

E: Many fine things, Socrates.

S: And the same goes for generals, my friend. All the same, you would not have any trouble telling me that the main point of what they do is to achieve victory in war.

E: Of course.

S: Farmers too, I think, produce many fine things, but the main point of what they do is to bring forth goods from the earth.

E: Quite so.

S: Well then, how would you encapsulate the many fine things that the gods achieve?

E: I told you just a little while ago, Socrates, that it is no easy matter to arrive at precise knowledge of these things. Nevertheless, to put it simply, I say that if a man knows how to please the gods in word and deed – with prayer and sacrifice – then his are holy actions that support and sustain private houses and public affairs alike. The opposite of these pleasing actions are unholy, overturning and destroying everything.

S: You could save your breath if you would just tell me all and only what I asked, Euthyphro. But you are not keen to do so; that much is clear. You were on the point of teaching me, but you pulled up short. If you had given that answer, I would now stand in possession of knowledge of the nature of holiness, courtesy of you. But in the event, the lover of inquiry must chase after his beloved, wherever it may lead him. Once more then: what do you say that holiness and unholiness are? Do they consist in knowledge of how to sacrifice and pray?

E: They do.

S: To sacrifice is to give a gift to the gods, whereas to pray is to beg from them a boon?

E: Definitely, Socrates.

S: This proposition implies that holiness must be a knowledge of how to give to, and beg from, the gods,

E: You grasp well what has been said, Socrates.

S: That is because I want so badly to take in your wisdom that I concentrate my whole intellect upon it, lest a single word of yours fall to the ground. But tell me, what is this service to the gods? You say it is to beg from them and give to them?

E: I do.

S: And to beg correctly would be to ask them to give us things we need?

E: What else?

S: And to give correctly is to give them what they need from us. For it would hardly be graceful giving to provide a gift that is not needed in the least.

E: True, Socrates.

S: Holiness will then be a sort of knack for bartering between gods and men?

E: Bartering, yes – if you prefer to call it that.

S: I prefer nothing, except the truth. But tell me, what good do the gifts the gods receive from us do them? What they give us is obvious enough. There is no good we enjoy that does not come from them. But how is their lot improved by what they receive from us? Or have we negotiated such an advantageous balance of trade that we get all their blessings, while they get nothing back in return?

E: Do you really think, Socrates, that the gods receive some benefit from what they get from us?

S: What else could these gifts from us to the gods be, Euthyphro?

E: What else, indeed, except for honor, reverence, and that thing I mentioned just now, gratitude?

S: Holiness, then, is pleasing to the gods, Euthyphro, but not
beneficial or dear to them?

E: I think of all things it is most dear to them.

S: So the holy is once again what is dear to the gods.

E: Most certainly.

S: Will you be surprised if, even as you say this, your arguments exhibit signs of moving around instead of staying put. And will you accuse me of being the Daedalus who makes them move – though you yourself are far more skillful than Daedalus, since you can actually make things run around a complete circle? But maybe you haven't noticed how our argument has revolved and come right back where it started. You surely remember how, a little while ago, holiness and god-belovedness were said to be not one thing but distinct things. Or don't you remember?

E: I do.

S: Don't you see that now you are saying that what is dear to the gods is what is holy? Is this the same as what is loved by the gods, or isn't it?

E: It certainly is.

S: Either we were wrong about what we agreed to before, or – if we were right then – we're wrong now.

E: That seems to be so.

S: So we have to begin again at the very beginning, investigating what holiness is. And I won't willingly give up before I figure it out. Don't think me unworthy; instead, concentrate your attention to a supreme degree and tell the truth. For you know this thing, if any man does, and so I will clutch you as tightly as if you were Proteus himself, until you tell me. If you had no clear knowledge of holiness and unholiness, you would hardly have been so rash as to prosecute your dear old dad for murder on behalf of a servant. Fear of the gods would have restrained you from taking such a risk of acting wrongly. So I definitely know that you believe you have clear knowledge of holiness and unholiness. So tell me, my good Euthyphro, and don't keep secret what you think it is.

E: Some other time, Socrates. I am in a hurry, and I really have to go now.

S: What a thing to do, my friend! By leaving you cast me down from my high hope of learning from you the nature of holiness and unholiness. I might have escaped Meletus' indictment by exhibiting to him my wisdom – courtesy of Euthyphro – concerning divine matters. Ignorance would no longer have made me sloppy and improvisational about such things, and my whole life might have been lived the better for it.