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The Euthyphro Problem Revisited

It is a fairly consensual view that Plato’s *Euthyphro* is the “urtext” of metaethics.¹ And yet, standard specifications of this view go astray. The *Euthyphro* is often thought to illustrate the concerns of Divine Command Theory. It is also thought to be the ancestor of metaethical realism, the view that value is attitude-independent. As I argue, the *Euthyphro* is neither concerned with Divine Command Theory nor is it a defense of realism in today’s sense. Instead, the *Euthyphro* argues that there is realist value, anti-realist value, and value that is both.

Plato’s proposal should strike us as radically revisionist, to the extent that it is not clear whether today’s philosophical “map” can accommodate it. This, I submit, is why the *Euthyphro* deserves our attention. On standard readings, Plato is a dull dogmatist, rather than an ingenious philosopher raised on a steady diet of rebellious ideas by the likes of Heraclitus, Parmenides, Socrates, and Protagoras. On my reading, the *Euthyphro* offers a refutation of relativism, finds a place for anti-realism, sketches the beginnings of realism about the good, and envisages a kind of value that is realist and yet constituted by attitudes.

After a brief conspectus of how philosophers reconstruct the so-called Euthyphro Problem (section 1), I sketch the most important bits of text (sections 2 and 3). Then I turn to contemporary work by Richard Swinburne, Connie Rosati, Selim Berker, Crispin Wright, and Sharon Street that invokes the *Euthyphro*. I argue that each of them makes some interesting suggestions, discussion of which permits a deeper appreciation of the dialogue’s proposals (sections 4 to 7). Future work on the *Euthyphro*, however, can do even better—by appreciating Plato’s distinction between kinds of value (section 8).

1. Formulating the Euthyphro Problem

The so-called Euthyphro Problem presents a choice between two options, (1) and (2). Given the problem’s fame, any number of formulations of these options have been proposed. Call this the Divine Command Formulation:²

- (DC1) God’s law-giving captures what is, independent of these laws, pious.
- (DC2) God’s law-giving creates the pious.

Somewhat closer to the terms of the dialogue, here is the Divine Love Formulation:

- (DL1) The gods love what is, independent of their love, pious.
- (DL2) The love of the gods confers the property pious.

¹ This paper develops further ideas from Vogt (2017, ch. 3). I am grateful for comments to Justin Clarke-Doane, Molly Gurdon, and Jens Haas.

² Cf. Irwin (2006) on 17th and 18th century engagement with the *Euthyphro*.

The problem can also be taken to be about any property and any property-conferring relation whatsoever. Call this the General Formulation:

- (G1) Y detects F and relates to it as being F.
- (G2) Y's attitudes create F.

Given the dialogue's concern with value, there is also the Value Formulation:

- (V1) Y detects value and relates to it as value.
- (V2) Y's attitudes create value.

None of these four formulations, I argue, gets things right.³ I call my own proposal the Kinds of Value Formulation:

- (K1) A pious action is god-loved because it is pious.
- (K2) A pious action is pious because it is god-loved.

The Kinds of Value Formulation flags that Plato is concerned with the relation between two values: the pious and the god-loved. If there are further values like the pious and like the god-loved, Plato is concerned with two *kinds* of value: the pious and whatever may be like it, and the god-loved and whatever may be like it. In putting things this way, I am assuming that pious and god-loved are value properties—in short, values—and that a value is different in kind from another value if its metaphysics is different. Consider, then, the text where (1) and (2) are formulated.

2. The Euthyphro Problem

Euthyphro suggests that the pious is what all the gods love (9e1-3). Socrates would like to know what this means (9e6-7). He drops the all-quantifier (“what *all* the gods love”), and asks the question that is traditionally referred to as “the” Euthyphro Problem—from hereon, EP:

T1 S: (1) Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or (2) is it pious because it is being loved by the gods? (10a1-3; numerals added)⁴

Socrates offers his respondent two choices. Accordingly, I call (1) and (2) “options.” But I also call (1) and (2) “positions” or “claims,” referring to the claims that respondents endorse by picking one of the two options.

At times, philosophers speak of the Euthyphro Dilemma. This label supposes that (1) and (2) are dilemmatic; in other words, the label supposes that both positions fail. This assumption is not far-fetched. The choice between (1) and (2) is formulated as a means of thinking through a definition Euthyphro proposes, namely, that the pious is the god-loved. This definition appears, throughout the dialogue's conversation, flawed. But this does not mean that both (1) and (2) must be misguided.

³ For present purposes, I won't engage extensively with scholarly literature. Regarding recent contributions, my approach owes most to Judson (2006).

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by Grube, reprinted in Cooper (1997).

The eventual dismissal of “the pious is the god-loved” is the dismissal of an identity statement. It is possible—and indeed, it is Socrates’s proposal—that the identity statement “the pious is the god-loved” is false, while (1) is true. In intuitive terms, it is entirely possible that the pious is loved by the gods on account of its being pious, while pious and god-loved are two different properties. If this is what the text says, the Euthyphro Problem is not a dilemma. (1) holds, and (2) is rejected.

Right after T1, Euthyphro is not yet in a position to choose between the two options. He doesn’t understand the question. Socrates explains to Euthyphro what it is he is asking via a comparison between god-loved and other properties such as carried, led, and seen:

T2 S: Tell me then whether the thing carried is a carried thing (φερόμενον) because it is being carried, or for some other reason?

E: No, that is the reason.

S: And the thing led (ἄγόμενον) is so because it is being led, and the thing seen (ὁρώμενον) because it is being seen?

E: Certainly.

S: It is not being seen because it is a thing seen but on the contrary it is a thing seen because it is being seen; nor is it because it is something led that it is being led but because it is being led that it is something led; nor is something being carried because it is something carried, but it is something carried because it is being carried. Is what I want to say clear, Euthyphro? I want to say this, namely, that if anything is being changed or is being affected in any way, it is not being changed because it is something changed, but rather it is something changed (γυγνόμενον) because it is being changed; nor is it being affected because it is something affected, but it is something affected (πάσχον) because it is being affected. Or do you not agree?

E: I do.

S: Is something loved either something changed or something affected by something?

E: Certainly.

S: So it is in the same case as the things just mentioned; it is not being loved by those who love it because it is something loved, but it is something loved because it is being loved by them? (10b-c)

God-loved, the claim is, is like carried, led, and seen. Two observations should stand out to us. First, pious is *not* a property of the relevant type. Second, the general feature that god-loved, carried, led, and seen share is that they are instances of something either being changed or affected in some other way. The Greek terms relating to change and affect may mislead one into thinking of a causal relation. But Plato’s list of properties does not support this reading.³ A bird is seen in virtue of being seen by a cognizer. The bird is not causally affected by being seen; and yet the bird comes to have the quality seen.

God-loved is like this. It is a property something has in virtue of being loved. In the terms of the Greek text, it is a *pathos*, a passively acquired property, conferred on something by the activity of something else. The bird is qualified via a relation that is external to what it independently is. Independently, it is a bird; via a relation to something else, it is seen. Seen, carried, led, and god-loved are relational properties that involve one-directional activity.

³ Cf. Judson (2010, 21) on “because”-vocabulary in 10a1-11b4.

Once the metaphysics of god-loved qua *pathos* is spelled out, Socrates reformulates EP:

T3 S: Well, then, what is it that we are saying about the pious, Euthyphro? Surely that it is loved by all the gods, as your account stated? E: Yes. S: Is it loved because of this—because it is pious—or because of something else? E: No, because of this. S: Then it is loved because it is pious, but it is not pious because it is loved? E: So it seems. (10d1–8, tr. Judson 2010)

And now the claim is that, while something comes to have the quality god-loved on account of being loved, it is not the case that something comes to have the property pious on account of being loved. This is why “the pious is the god-loved” is false:

T4 S: Then the god-loved is not the same as the pious, Euthyphro, nor the pious the same as the god-loved, as you say it is, but one differs from the other. (10d)

Not only are god-loved and pious not identical. The god-loved is a *pathos*, and the pious isn’t.

T5 S: I’m afraid, Euthyphro, that when you were asked what piety is, you did not wish to make its nature clear to me, but you told me an affect or quality of it, that the pious has the quality of being loved by all the gods, but you have not yet told me what the pious is. (11b–c)

God-loved, on this account, is a *pathos* that some action may have. Indeed, Socrates seems to endorse “the pious is the god-loved” in this sense: the gods love the pious and thus the pious comes to have the property god-loved. But this does not tell us the “what it is”—the *eidos* or form—of the pious.⁶ So far, we only know that pious is not identical with god-loved and that it is not itself a *pathos*. Notably, the text doesn’t say that the pious is a realist property, a property that something “simply” has, independent of any relations and attitudes. All we know is that the god-loved is a *pathos*, and the pious is something else. This analysis motivates my Kinds of Value Formulation:

(K1) A pious action is god-loved because it is pious.

(K2) A pious action is pious because it is god-loved.

(K1) and (K2) examine *two* properties, the god-loved and the pious. This observation single-handedly rules out readings according to which EP is concerned solely with an account of the pious, as well as readings according to which EP is concerned with value in general.

3. The Pious and the Good

Consider again the extended formulation of EP in T3:

⁶ The *Euthyphro* contains vocabulary that, in later dialogues, figures in Plato’s Theory of the Forms. Socrates says that he is not interested in examples of the pious, but in the form (*eidos*), the one idea (*mia idea*) that everything which is X displays and in using this as a model (*paradeigma*) (6d, cf. 5d). If we know what the form itself is, we will be able to judge whether particular actions are pious or not (6e).

T3 S: Well, then, what is it that we are saying about the pious, Euthyphro? Surely that it is loved by all the gods, as your account stated? E: Yes. S: Is it loved because of this—because it is pious—or because of something else? E: No, because of this. S: Then it is loved because it is pious, but it is not pious because it is loved? E: So it seems. (10d1–8, tr. Judson 2010)

When Socrates asks whether the pious is loved because it is pious or *because of something else*, he stipulates that the gods love what they love because of something. “Because” sounds intentional, as if the gods relate to a property that is their *reason*. This is how the most widely read translation, by Grube, puts it. According to Grube, Socrates says “Is it being loved because it is pious, or for some other reason?” (10d4) But the Greek preposition translated as “because,” *dia*, is commonly used in a causal sense. Interpretively, this means that the gods don’t detect a property which they consider as reason-giving. Rather, they respond to a property which elicits love.

Either way, it is seemingly just assumed that the gods do *not* love what they love arbitrarily. But this is option (2): that the gods love whatever they happen to love and thereby make it pious. This constitutes a significant problem. Socrates seems to formulate two options, only in order to exclude one of them before it has even been considered. The option that the gods love arbitrarily does not get a fair shot. And yet, this is the option that should be intuitive for Euthyphro and for Greek readers.⁷ By way of example, consider the famous beauty contest between Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite. The fact that Paris votes for the latter provides the goddesses with motives: for twenty years, it figures in their interventions in the Trojan War and Odysseus’s travels. Motives of this sort are arbitrary in the relevant sense: they do not pick out independently existing normative properties.

Why, then, does Plato not attend to option (2)? As I see it, the missing premise—that the gods relate to a property that is not constituted by their love—has been defended earlier in the text. Not knowing what he accepts, Euthyphro agreed to it. Socrates proposes, and Euthyphro agrees, that the gods love what they see as good.

T6 S: What subject of disagreement would make us angry and hostile to each other if we were unable to come to a decision? Perhaps you do not have an answer ready, but examine as I tell you whether these subjects are the just and the unjust, the noble and the ugly, the good and the bad. Are these not the subjects of disagreement about which, when we are unable to come to a satisfactory decision, you and I and other men become hostile to each other whenever we do?

E: That is the disagreement, Socrates, about those subjects.

S: What about the gods, Euthyphro? If indeed they have disagreements, will it not be about these same subjects?

E: It certainly must be so.

S: Then according to your argument, my good Euthyphro, different gods consider different things to be just, noble, ugly, good, and bad, for they would not be at odds with one another unless they differed about these subjects, would they?

E: You are right.

S: And they like what each of them considers noble, good, and just, and hate the opposites of these? (7c-e, tr. Grube with changes)

⁷ Cf. Miller (2013).

Call this the Good Premise:

Good Premise: The gods love what they see as good, just, and noble.

The way the Good Premise is introduced in T6 should inform whatever realism, if any, we ascribe to Plato. Our relation to ethical value is described in affective and desiderative terms. The good is the object of love. More precisely, what one takes to be good is the object of love. Presumably, we can be wrong in what we take to be good. This is why we fight. In loving what we take to be good we take ourselves to pick out what really is good, and we get upset with others who, by our lights, fail to pick out what really is good. This relation, I argue below, is key to the distinctive kind of realism we may—tentatively and in preliminary terms—ascribe to Plato.

The Good Premise supplies the assumption that Socrates presupposes in T3: it is not an option that the gods love arbitrarily, because we already know that they love the good. This should strike us as interesting. It conflicts with most readings of EP defended in the literature, which almost universally takes it that the gods love the pious.⁸ However, the Good Premise should inform our reconstruction of option (1), which Socrates endorses.

What, then, does (1) amount to? In my formulation (K1), the claim is that a pious action is god-loved because it is pious. Given that the primary intentional object of divine love is the good (just, noble), this must be a condensed formulation. The claim must be that the gods love what is pious, and what is, more fundamentally, good.⁹ So far, however, this relation has not been unpacked. Here, then, is a desideratum for a plausible approach to EP: it should ask how the good relates to the god-loved and the pious.

4. The Divine Command Formulation

Anyone teaching Intro to Ethics has wondered what text to select for discussion of Divine Command Theory. If one doesn't want to assign complex selections from Leibniz or theological treatises, the *Euthyphro* seems to be the only option. This approach stipulates the Divine Command Formulation of EP:¹⁰

(DC1) God's law-giving captures what is, independent of these laws, pious.

(DC2) God's law-giving creates the pious.

Discussion of (DC1) and (DC2) can contribute to engagement with the *Euthyphro* in the following sense. As one surveys the prescriptions in religious texts, *both* seem to occur. In some cases, God seems to make independently existing norms into divine law; for example, God prohibits murder, presumably recognizing that murder is wrong. Other laws seem to hold because God issues them, for example, that one should eat such-and-such at a given time.

⁸ Cf. Dimas (2006).

⁹ Cf. Judson (2010) and Vogt (2017).

¹⁰ Cf. Shafer-Landau (65-7, 269) and Miller (2013). On related discussions about a natural law, cf. Jacobs (2012).

Richard Swinburne defends this type of view by reference to the *Euthyphro*.¹¹ He explicitly reformulates the options in a theistic framework: “does God command what is obligatory for other reasons, or is what is obligatory obligatory because God commands it?” Swinburne argues that each option holds for a subset of our obligations. In some instances, such as not to commit murder, God can only command us to do what we are anyway obligated to do. In other instances, God’s commands create obligation. Connie Rosati, in her “Is there a “Higher Law”?” entertains a similar idea with respect to secular law. We need not suppose that all law exhibits the same kind of normativity. Perhaps some laws legally encode morality, while others make it that such-and-such is to be done. Swinburne’s and Rosati’s discussions, I submit, are in the spirit of the *Euthyphro*. They support the thought that not all norms have the same metaphysics.

In the *Euthyphro*, this idea is not developed via a combination of (1) and (2). Rather, Socrates presents (1) and (2)—or, according to the Divine Command Theory reading, (DC1) and (DC2)—as alternatives. On a standard Divine Command Theory interpretation, Socrates endorses (1), understood as realism about the pious, and by extension, realism about values and norms in general. God’s commands recognize and tell us what is good, bad, just, unjust, pious, and impious.

Alas, this traditional approach has little or nothing to do with the dialogue. First, and most obviously, this approach is misguided because of the kind of theology it presupposes. Divine Command Theory envisages one God, who is good, and who gives commands. These commands can be imperatives about particular actions; but often they are general norms, such as that some action type X is to be performed at a given type of occasion or that action type Y is in general forbidden. In other words, Divine Command Theory presupposes a monotheistic theology and, at least for the most part, a law-conception of normativity.

All this is alien to the *Euthyphro*. The dialogue deals with multiple gods, whom Socrates views as ethically bad; their relation to normativity is not law-giving, but love and hatred. Of course, Plato is working his way away from traditional Greek religion. Arguably, Plato rejects the idea that there are multiple ethically bad gods who are fighting amongst each other. Nevertheless, Socrates does not suggest that there is only one God. On the contrary, the divinity he “invents” (as one of the charges against him has it) is a *daimon*; this is a minor god, and surely not the only divinity Socrates or Plato thinks there is. Socrates also does not suggest that the divine relation to human action consists in law-giving or imperatives. Rather, he seems to develop the love-conception of normativity. The good, as he puts it—and as resonates with Plato’s later dialogues—is the primary intentional object of desire and love.

Second, insofar as the Divine Command Formulation talks about commands instead of love, it fails to see that Plato is interested in the metaphysics of the property god-loved. Third, the Divine Command Theory reading takes the upshot of the dialogue to be metaethical realism about the pious. It fails to ask how the premise that the gods love the good, which in the text precedes EP, fits into the picture. In effect, it misses the dialogue’s concern with three kinds of value, exemplified by the pious, the god-loved, and the good.

5. The Divine Love Formulation

¹¹ Swinburne (2008, 7).

The Divine Love Formulation conceives of the two options as follows:

(DL1) An act is loved by the gods because it is pious.

(DL2) An act is pious because it is loved by the gods.

The Divine Love Formulation avoids the theological implausibility of the Divine Command Formulation: it does not stipulate that there is one God, and it does not stipulate that normativity is law-like. It shares, however, the other flaws of the Divine Command Formulation. It fails to make transparent that (1) and (2) are concerned with the relation between two properties, the pious and the god-loved. And it proceeds as if Plato's proposal was fully about the pious, thereby neglecting the Good Premise. Nevertheless, the Divine Love Formulation is of interest.

Selim Berker, in "The Unity of Grounding," formulates (1) and (2) along the lines of the Divine Love Formulation—with one important difference: he speaks of "all" the gods rather than the gods.¹²

(SB1) An act is loved by *all* the gods because it is pious.

(SB2) An act is pious because it is loved by *all* the gods.

Reference to "all" gods is faithful to the text that immediately precedes the sentence that contains options (1) and (2). However, in EP the all-quantifier is dropped. Why? When Socrates formulates EP, the discussion of divine disagreement—of which T6 is a part—is already concluded. It is not resolved, however. Euthyphro's gods disagree and fight, while Socrates cannot believe in such gods.

Hence, the all-quantifier makes all the difference. Berker stipulates that the gods all agree. But do they? Berker takes it that (2) represents a kind of anti-realism that can be spelled out in terms of grounding: an action is pious "by virtue of" pro-attitudes.¹³ How plausible is assessor-grounding, as we may call this anti-realism, as a philosophical position?¹⁴ Arguably, in a domain governed by agreement, assessor-grounding generates norms that can guide action; in a domain governed by disagreement, assessor-grounding fails to do so.

This is what interests Plato, and it is one of the reasons, I submit, why the dialogue is the urtext of metaethics. The standard reading makes Socrates's endorsement of (1) quasi-dogmatic. This underrates Plato in a most depressing fashion. It makes him a dogmatist about "real" goodness, rather than the philosopher he is, inspired by Socrates, Protagoras, and other highly revisionist early Greek thinkers.

In brief, Plato offers the following proposal: anti-realism works, more or less, where there is agreement, and it doesn't work where there isn't. The "more or less" working anti-realism is the topic of the next section. For now, I turn to anti-realism in a domain that is characterized by disagreement. On Plato's construal, this amounts to a self-defeating relativism—a position that we may call Divine Relativism.

¹² (2017).

¹³ Cf. Evans (2012) for an interpretation of the text in terms of metaphysical fundamentality.

¹⁴ I borrow talk about "assessors" from Kölbel (2002) and (2003), without however attending to the specifics of his proposals.

Before EP is formulated, Socrates explores Divine Relativism. According to Euthyphro, he says, different gods consider different things to be just, beautiful, ugly, good, and bad (7e1-2). They like what each of them considers good, just, and beautiful, and they hate the opposites of these (7e5-6). The same things, then, are loved by the gods and hated by the gods, and thus the same things are pious and impious (8a). Even where the gods agree on a general notion, such as that the wrongdoer should be punished, they disagree about particular actions: about who the wrongdoer is, what he did, and when (8b-d).

According to Euthyphro's argument, one action is god-loved by one god, and god-hated by another god. So far, so good: a given action can be god-loved relative to one god and god-hated relative to another god. In a restricted context, this confers the property pious relative to a given god. For the sake of the argument, let's assume that no god other than Apollo has epistemic (or any other) access to the Apollo temple. Inside the temple, the Apollo-loved is Apollo-pious. If one visits the Apollo temple, the Apollo-pious is normative, where this means, it tells one what to do.

Euthyphro, however, does not envisage such restricted, "single-god" domains. The assumption is that typically we act in what we may call multi-god domains: domains to which several gods have access and about which several gods care. Recall Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite, all of whom care who is judged to be most beautiful. It is impossible to please one of them without offending the other two. This may appear to be an extreme stipulation, and yet it is the implication of Euthyphro's theological outlook. His gods have capricious personalities and they are entrenched in long-standing feuds. They watch humans with envy if someone seems to fare too well. They are jealous if someone aims to please a god other than themselves. Recall, they are said to disagree as we humans do (T6).

Typically, then, a person who aims to do what is pious must view her actions as subject to conflicting assessments by a plurality of gods. The very same action is loved and hated by different gods. Hence Divine Relativism fails. The pious is meant to be a normative property, a property that tells us what we should do. But the assessors' attitudes confer both piety and impiety on the same action. This means, according to Socrates, that the actions either have both properties, or that the properties cancel each other out, to the effect that the actions are neither pious nor impious (8a-e).

In multi-god domains, a human being cannot be guided by what is god-loved. That something is god-loved does not tell her that she should do it, because the very same thing that is god-loved is also god-hated. Alternatively, if we pursue the idea that the conferred properties cancel each other out, the fact that one god loves something does not succeed at conferring the property god-loved, because the very same thing is also hated by some other god. In effect, the action is neither god-loved nor god-hated, and thus divine attitudes fail to generate norms. Socrates abstains from judgment on whether assessor-grounded properties "pile on each other" when there is disagreement, or whether they cancel each other out. Either way, in a domain characterized by disagreement, assessor-grounding fails to account for normative guidance.

This argument is one of the metaethical highlights of the *Euthyphro*. Combined with Socrates's analysis of disagreement, of which T6 is a part, we now see the outlines of a metaethical project. Value disagreement—among human assessors and, if they exist, among the Olympian gods—is pervasive and persistent. Any version of realism or anti-realism we defend must proceed from this premise. Today's realists at times argue that disagreement shouldn't be overrated; it would seem

that we agree on a lot of things.¹⁵ Plato concedes this. However, he suggests that even while we agree on general things such as “the wrongdoer should be punished,” we still disagree on who did what when, and how to assess a particular deed (8d-e). The case against Socrates may serve as an example. Presumably, we agree that the young should not be corrupted. But we may not agree whether Socrates corrupts the young.

6. The General Formulation

Consider next the options as understood in the General Formulation:

(G1) Y detects F and relates to it as being F.

(G2) Y’s attitudes create F.

This is how Crispin Wright invokes the *Euthyphro* when discussing truth and objectivity.¹⁶ He describes (G1) and (G2) in terms of detectivism versus projectivism. Detectivism is the view that the gods detect what is pious and relate to it as such insofar as they love what they take to be— independent of their love—pious. Projectivism is the view that if the gods love an action, the action is made pious via this attitude. Wright offers the following gloss:

For any act x: x is pious if and only if it is loved by the gods.

This construal is interesting because of its generality. Wright proposes that this line of thought can be applied “to all judgments about color, shape, moral properties, mathematics, etc.”¹⁷ I return to the comparison between the good and mathematics in a moment. More immediately, we may say that Wright does not identify the most obvious comparison between normative and non-normative properties in the *Euthyphro*: the god-loved has non-normative comparanda. God-loved, Plato proposes, shares its metaphysics with non-normative properties such as seen, carried, and led.

This should strike us as interesting. It relates to the anti-realism that, as I suggested, works “more or less”: anti-realism that is situated in a restricted, disagreement-free domain. In a single-god domain such as Apollo’s temple, or if disagreement is eliminated in some other way, divine love makes actions god-loved. In this case, god-loved is an assessor-grounded, anti-realist value. A human being can orient her actions accordingly, doing what she takes to be divinely loved. Plato’s proposal seems to be this: there is a place for anti-realism in a comprehensive metaethical theory, for there are such values as god-loved. But the fact that god-loved is like carried means that it is an odd kind of value. As we may put this, it comes with a descriptive kind of normativity.

To illustrate, the dialogue starts with Socrates and Euthyphro meeting in front of the courthouse. Socrates is there because Meletus brought the charges against him for which, as we know, he receives the death penalty. A familiar thought in this context is that Socrates is guilty as charged (he introduces new divinities, teaches the young in an unconventional manner, etc.) but, really, he hasn’t done anything wrong. This standard reaction to Socrates’s case involves a distinction

¹⁵ Cf. Enoch (2009).

¹⁶ (1992, 108 ff.).

¹⁷ (1992, 108).

between kinds of value. Legally, Socrates is guilty, though more fundamentally we think he is innocent.¹⁸

Legal is like god-loved. Such value properties are in a sense descriptive: some god loves X and some legislator declares Y to be legal. Another god might not love X, another legislator might not declare Y legal. If there is no disagreement, the god-loved and the legal offer normative guidance. In this sense, anti-realist value plays a role in our lives. For example, if in a court case there is precisely one verdict, then legality is normative: it tells people what to do. This is an important feature of life, as Socrates's death illustrates. In other words, even if Plato is a metaethical realist with respect to goodness, he is not a metaethical realist tout court. By analyzing the metaphysics of properties like god-loved, he recognized that some of the values that govern our lives are anti-realist.

7. The Value Formulation

Finally, consider the Value Formulation.

(V1) Y detects value and relates to it as value.

(V2) Y's attitudes create value.

(V1) and (V2) may count as formulations of metaethical realism and anti-realism. This is how Sharon Street puts it: "the key point at issue between realists and antirealists is the answer to the central question of Plato's *Euthyphro* (in rough secular paraphrase), namely whether things are valuable ultimately because we value them (antirealism), or whether we value things ultimately because they possess a value independent of us (realism). In the final analysis, in other words, is normativity best understood as conferred or recognized?"¹⁹

Outside of theology, this strikes me as the most widespread understanding of EP today. The Value Formulation recognizes that the *Euthyphro* is concerned with the metaphysics of value. That is its merit. It precludes, however, the line of thought I pursue: that there are different kinds of value. Indeed, from the point of view of the *Euthyphro*, the Value Formulation begs the question. It presupposes what metaethics needs to prove or otherwise reject, namely that all value has the same metaphysics.

Discussion of EP in terms of realism and anti-realism should, moreover, proceed with caution. We already saw that Plato's engagement with Divine Relativism resonates with discussions of disagreement and assessor-grounding today. The dialogue is not a straightforward manifesto for realism. On the contrary, the dialogue is throughout concerned with disagreement. It starts with examples of value disagreement (is Socrates guilty? etc.), lays out an analysis of disagreement and then, based on this, turns to the metaphysics of value.²⁰ As we saw, in restricted domains—say, Apollo's temple—the god-loved is an assessor-grounded, anti-realist value.

¹⁸ Cf. Burnyeat (1997).

¹⁹ Street (2010, 370).

²⁰ Cf. Vogt (2017). The dialogue starts with three contested cases: Is Socrates guilty? Did Euthyphro's father commit murder, or a lesser crime involving negligence? Should Euthyphro bring charges against his own father? In each case, disagreement is presented as unresolved.

What about the other two value properties, the good and the pious? The most plausible candidate for realist value in the *Euthyphro* is the former, the good. And yet, it is by no means clear that Plato puts forward a metaethical proposal that today we would describe as realism. As we saw, Plato does not conceive of our (or the gods') relation to goodness as if we detected a property and regarded it as reason-giving. Rather, the claim is that we love what we take to be good. Other Platonic dialogues explore the difference between love for what one deems to be good and love for what really is good. The *Euthyphro* doesn't. That is, we are still miles away from any worked-out version of realism about the good. For now, all we have is the proposal that what seems good to us is the object of love. Immediately tied to this proposal, we have an analysis of value disagreement.

When Socrates introduces the good as the intentional object of love, he asks what it is that we fight about (7b-d, T6). What kinds of disagreement, the question goes, cause hatred and anger? If we were to differ about numbers of things, we would not turn into enemies; rather, we would count and soon resolve the disagreement. If we were to differ on what is larger and smaller or what is heavier and lighter, we would turn to measurement and soon cease to disagree. It is with respect to ethical value that, when we do not reach a decision together, we fight.

This account of value disagreement, I submit, is of inherent interest. It describes the good as our primary intentional object in normative assessment, and it describes our attitudes to the good as affective: we love what we see as good, hate what we see as bad, and for that reason value disagreement has the potential to create enmity, anger, and hatred. We lack a "measure" of the good that is comparable to the measures we employ in disagreement about numbers, sizes, and so on.

When Plato compares value and counting, he may seem to be *en route* to a view that comes to be called Platonism: an analogy between value properties and mathematical (as the ancients call numbers, axioms, proofs, etc.), both of which are intelligible rather than sense perceptible, causally efficacious entities. He may seem to be working toward the kind of theory that today is called realism in ethics and mathematics, the claim that in these domains, there are mind-independent facts. Today, the comparison between ethics and mathematics assumes that the two domains are, at least in some fundamental respects, epistemologically analogous.²¹ Both are separate from the sense perceptible world. Accordingly, it is equally mysterious how we can discover truths in ethics and mathematics.

However, though Plato compares value disagreement and disagreement in counting, he does *not* suggest that both domains work in the same way. Rather, he suggests that they differ both epistemically and affectively. Epistemically, counting differs from value disagreement because we have established methods of resolving the disagreement; affectively it differs because we don't get mad at each other.

Moreover, the desideratum that comes out of Plato's analysis of disagreement is that we should find a measure for the good, and an account of goodness that recognizes its role in our affective lives. This desideratum gestures toward a metaethics that elsewhere I call Measure Realism.²² Both Plato and Aristotle seek a "measure" for the good. In doing so, they employ the same idiom that

²¹ Cf. Mackie (1977) and Clarke-Doane (forthcoming).

²² Vogt (2017), ch. 4 and Vogt (forthcoming).

relativism employs; witness Protagoras's famous Measure Doctrine. In the *Philebus*, one of his latest dialogues, Plato defends the view that the good ethics is concerned with is the good *for* human beings.²³ Aristotle, too, argues that we are the measure: the good that ethics is about is the good for human beings, as he famously puts it, not for fish (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI.7, 1141a22–28).

When we invoke the *Euthyphro* as the ancestor of today's metaethical realism, we neglect that Plato's account is fundamentally shaped by his analysis of disagreement. This analysis is a shared concern among a number of early Greek thinkers, including Protagoras, the arch-proponent of relativism. The relevant discussions explore how the world seems different to human cognizers and other animals, different humans, individual humans in different conditions, and so on. These analyses proceed on a high level of generality: whoever the two cognizers are—exemplars of different species or the same person now and a moment later—the world typically appears differently to them. This observation leads different thinkers to different proposals: Heraclitean flux, the Parmenidean claim that the perceptible world “is not,” relativism, Plato's view that the perceptible world “becomes” rather than “is,” a metaphysics of indeterminacy according to which the world is “no more this than that,” and so on.

Plato's metaethical realism, as it comes into view throughout a number of dialogues, is part and parcel of this tradition. The ancient-inspired realism that I call Measure Realism thus differs profoundly from standard versions of realism today. According to the latter, moral judgments are true “of” attitude-independent moral facts, perhaps even of a priori necessary truths. But the realism toward which the *Euthyphro* takes some steps thinks of the good as the intentional object of desire, and of us, changing beings in a changing world, as the measure of what is good for us. If we develop an ancient-inspired realism in ethics—a realism that asks what a good human life looks like—we need to pursue the analogy with measuring.

Along these lines, it is worth asking how we should think of counting, weighing, and the like. These activities are neither evidently mathematical, nor are they evidently part of physics. Plato's contrast is neither of the two contrasts that are familiar today, between ethics and mathematics or between ethics and physics. His comparandum of ethics is a realist domain that has nevertheless a conventional dimension. For example, if we are counting chairs we may disagree on what counts as a chair. Our metric systems are conventional; some length in the world can be *x* meters and *y* inches.²⁴

Plato is, in a number of dialogues, interested in the ways in which properties such as tall and short are relative. Witness the famous passage in the *Republic*, where Socrates observes that one can turn into a theoretical thinker by looking at one's hand, seeing that the very same finger can seem to have opposite properties, big and small (523c–525a). This is by no means a throw-away remark. Earlier in the *Republic*, the thought is entertained that sense perceptible particulars have and have not whatever properties they have: *X* is and is not tall, *Y* is and is not beautiful, etc. (479a–c). In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates takes it to be philosophically important that six dice have the properties “more” and “1.5 as many” as compared to four dice, and the properties “fewer” and “half” as compared to twelve dice (154c–155b).

²³ Vogt (2017), ch. 1.

²⁴ Peacocke (2015).

This brief sketch should warn us against thinking that Plato has a simple view of counting and measuring. When we seek a measure of the good, we can expect to run into perplexities. Presumably, when we assess how well or badly someone acts we measure something “real,” just as, say, a magnitude is something real. But we need to decide which standard to invoke, and we may also need to accommodate a sense in which the same thing is and is not good. For example, our actions could be measured by how we fare compared to divine agents, or by how we fare qua human beings. Both lines of thought are explored in later Platonic dialogues.

8. The Kinds of Value Formulation

We can now return to the reading of EP I suggested at the outset, the Kinds of Value Formulation:

- (K1) A pious action is god-loved because it is pious.
- (K2) A pious action is pious because it is god-loved.

Euthyphro chooses (K1), even though, as we saw, (K2) is a better fit for Olympian religion. But since he accepted the Good Premise, according to which the gods love what they see as good, he must go with (K1). Because of the Good Premise, we already know that Plato is not putting forward the view that pious is a realist value. Rather, if anything, good is. What, then, is pious?

Given the Good Premise, (K1) must be a condensed formulation. The gods love what they see as good; and, given the gods’ love, the good is also pious. We can unpack this via some observations about the terms Plato uses for pious. In a way that should stand out to the Greek reader (though it is not visible in English translations), Plato uses two terms rather than one. Usually, in a “what is X?”-question, X is picked out by one term. Here, however, Plato uses *eusebês* and *hosion*. Both mean, roughly, pious. But the former picks out human attitudes of reverence toward gods, and the latter captures the sacredness of divine matters. The former takes the perspective from humans towards gods, and the latter the perspective from gods to humans.

This is in line with ordinary notions of piety. Surely, piety involves relations that run in both directions. Humans are reverent toward gods, and gods pay attention to them and approve of their actions. In other words, piety involves bi-directional attitudes. Accordingly, piety could be anti-realist by being a “double-*pathos*”: a property grounded in attitudes from two sides. An action, the thought might go, is pious if a human performs it with a view to pleasing the gods and if the gods approve of it. But the pious’s relation to goodness prevents this. Because the gods ultimately love the good, the pious isn’t a double-*pathos*. The pious is a kind of “goodness+”: a pious action is a good action that is performed with a view to seeking divine approval and that is in fact approved by divinity.

In today’s terms, the pious is a mix of realist and anti-realist. It is a subclass of the realist property goodness (or ethical value more generally), such that this subclass differs from other goodness by dimensions that are constituted by attitudes—attitudes of seeking and giving approval.²⁵ An analogue, I submit, can be found in political philosophy. In a sufficiently well-ordered society, one

²⁵ This is also how the dialogue ends (11e-13d), with a discussion of the relation between the pious and ethical value.

may argue, citizens should embrace the state's legislation. They should conceive of their own actions not merely as legal, but as lawful. In other words, they should act under the guise of wanting to do what is, in their society, the law, seeking and gaining the law's approval.²⁶

The distinction between the legal and the lawful is significant. The legal is a *pathos*, an anti-realist property. The lawful, however, only enters into the picture once a society is sufficiently just for citizens to be, ethically, at home in it. In grossly unjust societies, we do what is legal in order to avoid punishment; we may have to do what is illegal in order to do what is right. Only in sufficiently just societies can we embrace prevailing legal norms and conceive of our actions as lawful.

The same holds of the difference between god-loved and pious. The god-loved is an anti-realist property. For example, if a divinity loves horrible sacrificial practices, we may do what is god-loved to avoid punishment, and do what is not god-loved in order to do what is right. The *Euthyphro*'s Good Premise plays a role that is analogous to the premise that a state is sufficiently just, such that we can embrace the attitudes of lawfulness. Once we deal with gods who love what actually is good, we can aim to perform actions that are pious in their eyes.

As I hope this comparison with the legal sphere shows, the pious as analyzed in the *Euthyphro* is by no means irrelevant to a secular metaethics. This is not, as is standardly assumed, because we can just take it that Plato talks about value in general. Rather, this is because his analysis of the pious pushes us toward a distinction between kinds of value. The good is realist, though not quite in today's terms. In a restricted setting that excludes disagreement, the god-loved is anti-realist. In an unrestricted setting, characterized by disagreement, the god-loved is relativist. The pious is a blend of realist and anti-realist. It is "goodness+": value that, in addition to goodness, involves constitutive bi-directional attitudes.

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²⁶ A related line of thought is formulated in terms of a "sense of justice" in Rawls (1971).

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