

PHIL 321
Lecture 5: Plato's *Apology*

9/12/2013

Wrap-up from *Euthyphro*

S's question: "Is the pious loved by the gods because it's pious? Or is it pious because it's loved?" (10a), is about the "order of explanation," "priority," or "fundamentality" of the relevant phenomena.

He ultimately claims that the fact that a certain action is pious explains why (all) the gods love it, and not the other way round. This is why S says that E has identified (at best) a quality of piety, not the nature of piety.

"Euthyphro Dilemma": If certain actions were pious (right, wrong, obligatory, impermissible, etc.) *because* they are dear to the gods (or commanded but God/the gods, etc.), we would ask why the gods love what they love. Either it is [A] *arbitrary* what the gods love, or [B] the gods love what they do for *reasons*. Either way, trouble looms:

- [A] seems absurd (it is just obviously false that if the gods had happened to love rape, murder, etc. then rape, murder, etc. would be pious)
- If [B], it is the features of the actions in virtue of which the gods love them that explains why they are pious. The attitude of the gods is not what *explains* or *makes it the case* that they are pious

Basic structure of dialogue

17a–35d: S's main defense; found guilty

35e–38b: S proposes as "punishment" that he be given free meals in the Prytaneum; sentenced to death

38c–42a: S's parting words

Socratic ignorance: specific claims

[1] S does not know anything about "physics"/natural philosophy (19c)

[2] S does not know how to make people "excellent" (= virtuous) (20c)

[3] S has (if anything) "human wisdom" = does not think he knows what he does not know (20–21d)

[4] But: S grants the craftsmen know many things about their crafts (22d); how?

These claims are typically stated with noun "*epistēmē*" and verb "*epistasthai*"

What is human wisdom?

It seems clear that the scope of [3] covers "the most important things"—seeming to mean moral or ethical truth; but, the meaning of his denial is controversial:

- [3a] S has no (ethical) knowledge *at all*; but, he does have (ethical) beliefs (if so, what does he take to be the status of those beliefs?)

- [3b] S has no technical or expert (ethical) knowledge, but does have non-technical knowledge
- [3c] (modification of 3b?) S lacks systematic (ethical) understanding but does have some piece-meal knowledge

At 29b, Socrates claims, “To act unjustly, on the other hand, to disobey someone better than oneself, whether god or man, that I do know (*oida*) to be bad and shameful.”

The “Elenchus” (= “test,” “cross-examining,” “method of (dis)proof”)

X = alleged knower; P, Q, R, etc. = propositions

- S finds a claim X asserts, P
- S gets X to assert other claims, Q, R, ...
- S gets X to conclude (from Q, R, ...), not-P
- S gets (or tries to get) X to conclude that he does not know whether P

This method shows, at the least, that X has an inconsistent belief set

What kind of knowledge [1], [2], or [3] would this test for?

“The” problem of the elenchus

S seems to think that elenchus is *the* method of philosophical thought *and* that philosophical thought is necessary for happiness, BUT

A consistent set of beliefs can still be false, so what would be the upshot even if someone “survived” the elenchus?

- How, despite this, could S think the elenchus can be employed to make progress?

What matters in life, according to Socrates

The state of one's soul (*psuchê*) is of the utmost importance (29e, 30b). Is it the *only* thing that matters? Or just the most important?

The translation of 30b3-5 is controversial:

“It's not from wealth that virtue comes, but from virtue comes money, and all the other things that are good for human beings, both in private and in public life.” [Grube]

“It's not from wealth that virtue comes, but from virtue money and all the other things become good for human beings, both in private and in public life.” [Alternative]

The fear of death should not lead people to act unjustly, impious, etc.

- Socrates paints two possible pictures of what death is like, neither of which he thinks we should fear (40c–41c)
 - A dreamless sleep
 - Existence in Hades with other deceased people