

# The Anomaly of the Last Elenchos of Plato's *Euthyphro*

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**Abstract:** Common readings of the end of *Euthyphro* suggest that in comparing Euthyphro's final conception of piety to commerce, Socrates shows what is wrong with it. But the discussion seems to end, not with this comparison, but with a reduction of Euthyphro's last definition to an earlier, already rejected definition. This creates an interpretive tension: if the comparison to commerce refutes Euthyphro's definition, what purpose does reduction serve; and if reduction refutes the definition, what does the comparison show, since it could not, in that case, show that Euthyphro's definition has failed? In this paper, I argue that the dominant classic readings fail to answer these questions satisfactorily. I then outline a better reading, one that makes the comparison a philosophically substantial, but nonetheless subordinate, step leading to reduction, and explains the reduction's significance by demonstrating a doctrinal similarity between Euthyphro's final definition and the one it is reduced to.

This paper reflects on Euthyphro's final attempt to answer the question "What is piety?" and the discussion that follows. The relevant portion of text runs from 14a11 - 15c10. Compared to other parts of the dialogue, this passage has received scant attention in the last century of Plato scholarship, despite the fact that a number of commentators have noted difficulties with the argument structure.<sup>1</sup>

The discussion ends in typical elenctic fashion with a contradiction. But there are some odd things about this contradiction. It is recycled from an earlier discussion, and it doesn't seem to follow from the inferences that immediately precede it. This is further complicated by the fact that many have thought the philosophical lesson of the elenchos is expressed by the unfavorable comparison of Euthyphro's model of piety to commerce; this comparison, however, is not equivalent to the contradiction that ends the elenchos, nor is the logical relationship between this comparison and the contradiction clear.

In what follows, I will lay out what is problematic about the last elenchos, and explain why the dominant classic readings do not address these problems. I will offer a new analysis of the logic of the passage that will explain how the final contradiction is connected to the comparison to commerce, and what the general philosophical lesson of the elenchos is meant to

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<sup>1</sup>Allen (1970, 61), Benson (2000, 64), Geach (1966, 381), McPherran (2003, 2, 20). McPherran, for example, calls this passage "much-neglected", and notes "the structure of the resulting Socratic elenchus of Euthyphro's [last] definition is obscure, and unlike the previous elenchi, there have been few serious attempts to clarify it."

be. That lesson is not that Euthyphronic piety, understood as ritual sacrifice and prayer, is like commerce, but that ritual is theological voluntarism in practice.<sup>2</sup>

## 1 Preliminary

### 1.1 Assumptions

It will be useful to begin by laying out a few of my assumptions about the dialogue as a whole. I call the elenchos under discussion ‘last’ to avoid controversy about the number of definitions and elenchoi in the dialogue. Though by my count, which I cannot argue for here, this is the sixth elenchos, several important commentaries count this as the fourth or fifth.<sup>3</sup> Importantly, I will refer to the most famous discussion in the dialogue as the *third* elenchos (9e1-11b5). This is where the eponymous dilemma appears:

Is [the pious] being loved then because it is pious, but it is not pious because it is being loved? (10d6-7).

Socrates here suggests that the discussion of this dilemma shows that Euthyphro’s third definition, that the gods’ loving things makes them pious, should be rejected in favor of the view that gods love things on account of their being independently pious (11a-6b1). Consequently, I will also assume *Euthyphro* has at least one central thesis, that Euthyphro’s *theological voluntarism*, represented by his view that piety is what all the gods love, is philosophically misguided and should be rejected.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.2 *Charis*

Euthyphro’s final answer to Socrates’ question is:

...I say that if a man knows how to say and do what is pleasing (*kecharismena*) to the gods at prayer and sacrifice, those are pious actions...(14b2-4)<sup>5</sup>

...ὅτι ἐὰν μὲν κεχαρισμένα τις ἐπίσταιται τοῖς θεοῖς λέγειν τε καὶ πράττειν εὐχόμενός τε καὶ θύων, ταῦτ’ ἔστι τὰ ὅσια...

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<sup>2</sup>Roslyn Weiss has given a brief argument for part of this view, that ritual is applied voluntarism. However, her position was not developed as a response to the problems of the elenchos I raise in this paper, and accordingly, my version of the thesis will be more labored than her simple, but elegant case. See Weiss (1994, 266).

<sup>3</sup>McPherran (2003), Benson (2000), Adam (1890, xxi).

<sup>4</sup>Cohen (1971, 13); Irwin (1977, 48, 62); Irwin (1995, 25); McPherran (1996, 45-47); Reeve (1989, 66); Taylor (1926, 151-152); Versényi (1982, 84-86); Vlastos (1991, 165).

<sup>5</sup>I use the English of Grube/Cooper (Grube, 2002) unless otherwise specified. Line numbers are from Burnet’s Greek text (Burnet, 1924).

Though ‘pleasing’ or ‘gratifying’ have been the traditional choices for translating Euthyphro’s *kecharismena*, they do not capture important aspects of the original, and distort Euthyphro’s meaning. Throughout what follows, I will leave *charis*, from which *kecharismena* derives, and related words untranslated. Let me briefly explain why I do this, and provide some direction for the reader on how to think about these words.<sup>6</sup>

*Charis* and related words like its adjectival *kecharismena* were often used to denote relationships defined by reciprocal exchange. These relationships were norm-governed, and *charis*-language is often a shorthand for referring to those norms.<sup>7</sup> A typical instance of a *charis* relationship might involve giving a gift to initiate a friendship, and thereby creating an expectation of requital that would be (partly) constitutive of the ensuing relationship.<sup>8</sup>

Religious ritual was thought to be a species of the broader set of *charis*-exchanges. *Charis*-words singled out things that were to be given to the gods in order to meet religious obligations, as a kind of payment (in advance or retroactively) for reciprocal favors.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, when English translations render *kecharismena* as ‘pleasing,’ ‘gratifying,’ and the like, especially in religious contexts, they can result in interpretations that range from puzzling to misleading. Here is Mikalson, on his treatment of *charis* in religious contexts:

One may well feel ‘gratitude’ upon receipt of such a favour, and for this reason *charis* is often translated simply as ‘gratitude’ or ‘thanks’, but this is a misleading oversimplification of the relationship. An individual’s reaction to receiving such a *charis* is to be *κεχαρισμένος* [*kecharismenos*], etymologically related to *charis*, meaning essentially ‘to be put into the *charis* relationship’. Delightful favors, when received by the gods, are *κεχαρισμένα* [*kecharismena*], and here the offerings should be thought not merely as ‘pleasing’, but as ‘pleasing (or acceptable) in the context of the *charis*-relationship between men and gods’... There is no simple English word to offer as a translation

<sup>6</sup>As much as I am going to re-evaluate the last elenchos in this paper, there is at least this much more rethinking to be done on it that centers around the correct understanding of *charis*-words. But this topic merits a paper unto itself.

<sup>7</sup>LSJ’s listings for *χάρις* are mostly along the lines of *grace, favor, goodwill, kindness, gratitude* and the like. But it also lists: *a favor done or returned*; *χάριν φέρειν τινί: to do a thing to oblige him*; *χάρις ἀποστερεῖν: to withhold a return for what one has received*; *διὰ χάριτων εἶναι or γίνεσθαι τινι: to be on terms of friendship or mutual favor with one*.

<sup>8</sup>Think of the exchange of favors between the mouse and the lion in Aesop, or the role that gifts play in the dysfunctional relationship between Achilles and Agamemnon in *Iliad*. See Mueller (2001), pp. 472, 474-476, for a thorough summary of the shape of Greek reciprocity. Also, the essays in Gill, Postlethwaite, and Seaford (1998).

<sup>9</sup>This is not always true. The primary sense of *charis* is indeed *gratification, pleasure, or favor*, and in some contexts, like that of the pastry-baking analogy of *Gorgias* (462c7ff), *charitos* and *charizomai* do just mean to please or gratify.

of this complex of ideas, and therefore in the following discussions we leave *charis* untranslated and render its cognates in terms of *charis*. (Mikalson, 2010, 14-15)

I will follow Mikalson in this practice. I will further suggest that Euthyphro's last definition of piety says that piety is what conforms to *charis*-norms; it is what is acceptable to the gods in prayer in sacrifice. This makes the definition both broader and narrower than it has traditionally been treated as being: broader in that the definiens cries out for a definition nearly as badly as the definiendum; narrower in that it refers to a very specific set of practices and norms not picked out by the English 'pleasing.'

### 1.3 A Basic Reading

Euthyphro's answer is rejected in the end because he takes what is *kecharis-mena* also to be what is dear to the gods (*philos/theophilēs*), and since that answer has been rejected on independent grounds, in the third elenchos, this answer is rejected as well. In a sense, then, Euthyphro's last definition does not receive its own elenchos at all. It appears that his final answer is equivalent to his third, and since that answer was already refuted, its elenchos can be recycled here.<sup>10</sup>

In order to ease exposition later, I want to begin by breaking the passage into smaller blocks of text and offering interpretation of the least controversial aspects it. After the definition, the passage proceeds as follows:

**Clarification:** (14c5-14e3) Socrates begins his discussion of Euthyphro's answer by asking him a few clarificatory questions about it, rendering it more precise and drawing out implications. The result of clarification is that piety is skill at requesting things from the gods, and giving things to them.

**Comparison to Commerce:** (14e6-15a6) Here Socrates appears to turn from clarification, and asks Euthyphro about the relationship between his definition and commercial trading, suggesting that there may be similarities. Socrates presents Euthyphro with two alternatives. Either pious exchange is like commerce in this respect, that it bestows benefits on gods just as they bestow benefits on us; or the gods do not benefit from what we give them, and the exchange is one-sided in human favor. This moment bears an important relation to an earlier moment in the dialogue, where Euthyphro conceded that he does not think humans can benefit gods (12e9-13d4). Euthyphro replies to the

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<sup>10</sup>And indeed Socrates notes this, saying "You surely remember that earlier the pious and the god-loved were shown not to be the same but different from each other?...Either we were wrong when we agreed before, or, if we were right then, we are wrong now." (15c1-3, 8-9)

comparison with a question of his own that requires interpretation, which will be a major topic of discussion below.

**List:** (15a7-10) Socrates does not answer Euthyphro's question. He instead asks Euthyphro what things we give to the gods in our pious rituals. Euthyphro produces a list of three things: honor, reverence, and *charis*. Euthyphro suggests that the third item on the list he has made reference to before. This is likely due to the fact that *charis* (usually translated here as 'gratitude' or 'favor') is the root of *kecharismena*, the adjective Euthyphro uses in his 14b definition. Euthyphro is clearly signaling a link between his original definition and his list here.

**Reduction:** (15b1-15c10) Socrates asks Euthyphro if we are to understand that the items on his list are neither beneficial nor dear to the gods. Euthyphro answers emphatically that they are dear, and just like that, the last definition becomes the third: piety is what is dear to the gods. Call this collapse *reduction*, on account of the fact that the last answer is shown to be nothing over and above the third answer.

## 2 The Reduction Problem

Here is the key moment of reduction. Let us call Socrates' question that brings about reduction *the reduction question*:

**Socrates:** The pious is then, Euthyphro, *kecharismenon* to the gods, but not beneficial (*ōphelimon*) or dear (*philon*) to them?

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

**Socrates:** So the pious is once again what is dear to the gods.

**Euthyphro:** Most certainly. (15b1-5)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>It is clear that Socrates takes Euthyphro's answer to claim that piety is *definitionally* what is dear to the gods. But it would have been open to Euthyphro to recall what Socrates said in concluding the discussion of his third definition: "...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..." (11a6-b1) He might have claimed here that he was not reverting to his previous definition, but merely granting that piety has the quality, affect, or *pathos* of being loved, a view Socrates did not seem to find fault with earlier. Surely Socrates is aware that Euthyphro could say this, and may even mean this, as he was the one who pointed out the distinction between *pathos* and *ousia* before. Why he assumes Euthyphro did not mean this is an additional puzzle, one I will not have much to say about here. If we assume Socrates could have interpreted Euthyphro's answer as an accidental predication, but chose to see in it an essential predication because it is more damning, we attribute some bad dialectical behavior to Socrates. I don't see that there is much to gain, interpretively or philosophically, by assuming this. So I will assume that Socrates operates in good faith here, and sees the essential predication in Euthyphro's answer because that is what Euthyphro meant.

**ΣΩ.** Κεχαρισμένον ἄρα ἐστίν, ὦ Εὐθύφρων, τὸ ὅσιον, ἀλλὰ οὐχὶ  
ὠφέλιμον οὐδὲ φίλον τοῖς θεοῖς.  
**ΕΥΘ.** Οἶμαι ἔγωγε πάντων γε μάλιστα φίλον.  
**ΣΩ.** Τοῦτο ἄρ' ἐστὶν αὖ, ὥς ἔοικε, τὸ ὅσιον, τὸ τοῖς θεοῖς φίλον.  
**ΕΥΘ.** Μάλιστά γε.

Reduction concludes the elenchos, and contains the contradiction that refutes Euthyphro's last answer. Yet, it is hard to see how it arises from the discussion that precedes it. The last mention of *theophilēs* (god-loved)<sup>12</sup> or *philos* (dear) was in the third elenchos. There is no re-introduction of these terms at any point in the last elenchos leading up to the reduction question; they return abruptly only in that question. Why does Socrates reintroduce this language now?

We should notice that the question does not ask only about the relation between piety and the god-loved; it also asks about the beneficial. In this way, the question *does* make reference to the immediately preceding conversation, since the ostensible point of that discussion was to establish whether or not Euthyphro's conception of piety entails that gods benefit from things we give them. In fact, much of the discussion of the second half of the dialogue has centered on benefit,<sup>13</sup> and an earlier definition was rejected because it implied the benefit of the gods (12e9-13d4). The reduction question might then be an attempt to summarize the results of the dialogue so far: it has been established that piety is neither benefitting the gods, nor doing what is dear to them. Socrates may thus be read as asking: "Euthyphro, concerning your latest conception of piety, that it is what is *kecharismena*, am I to understand that being *kecharismena* is neither beneficial nor dear, in conformity with our earlier results?"

While this explanation motivates Socrates' question, it does not motivate Euthyphro's answer. Why, now, would he so emphatically grant what was so memorably and laboriously refuted before? It is true that Euthyphro seems to learn little from his conversation with Socrates *in general*, but he registers a stronger reaction to the third elenchos than to the others. He emerges from that discussion confused and unsure of how to proceed, experiencing the only moments of (uncharacteristic) self-doubt in the dialogue. It would be surprising, Euthyphro's other faults notwithstanding, for him to have forgotten the results of the third elenchos already and to simply re-assert his earlier view.

There is no *prima facie* reason offered in these last few lines of the passage that could easily explain Euthyphro's reversal; there is no argument here, only a concession.<sup>14</sup> Call the problem of how to understand why

<sup>12</sup>This is Socrates' substantive for a thing loved by the gods (10d9).

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Versényi (1982, 117).

<sup>14</sup>One might wonder whether this concession is just a recognition of the semantic similarity between *kecharismena* and *theophilēs*, and indeed this seems to be Adam's position

Plato has Euthyphro concede that the *kecharismenon* is the god-loved the *reduction problem*.<sup>15</sup> The most natural place to look for a solution to this problem is the sequence of inferences that takes place between Euthyphro's definition and reduction. There we might hope to find something that helps us understand why Plato sees a link between reduction and the rest of the elenchos.

## 2.1 Early Refutation

These intervening inferences comprise lines 14c5-15a6, from clarification to Euthyphro's list. A plausible interpretation of the argument structure, given most prominently by Allen (1970, 61),<sup>16</sup> has it that the comparison to commerce is the last in a series of inferences showing that Euthyphro's definition entails that mortals benefit gods with their offerings. Socrates makes clear that the key respect in which Euthyphronic piety may resemble commerce is in being an exchange of benefits (14e9-15a4). When he asks if piety, on Euthyphro's view, would be a sort of trading skill (*emporikē technē*) (14e6-7), he is asking whether Euthyphro thinks pious gifts are beneficial to gods. So, on this reading, when Euthyphro grants that one may call his conception trading (*emporikē*) (14e8), he also grants that human offerings benefit their divine recipients. Euthyphro has already maintained (13c6-d2) that humans do not benefit gods, so it would appear that the elenchos has produced a refuting contradiction at 15a. Many commentators see this comparison to commerce as representing the point of the elenchos, as being Plato's main criticism of Euthyphronic piety: it is somehow too commercial or transactional in suggesting that piety is an exchange of benefits.<sup>17</sup>

But if the definition Euthyphro offered at 14b is refuted by 15a, then what do we make of what we thought was the rest of the elenchos? Reduc-

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(1890, 100, n. 34; 104, n. 29). Translating *kecharismena* as 'pleasing' pushes us hard toward that conclusion, and that is another reason to avoid so translating. We should want to avoid reading the passage this way because such a reading renders entirely superfluous every moment between Euthyphro's definition at 14b and reduction. If Socrates meant to rely solely on semantic resemblance between *kecharismena* and *theophilēs* to refute Euthyphro, he could have asked the reduction question right away, immediately after Euthyphro defines piety as *kecharismena*.

<sup>15</sup>While this has been often noted by commentators, few have treated it as an interpretative problem that requires a solution. McPherran (2003, 24) puts the point well: "Indeed there seem to be no strictly logical grounds for Euthyphro to have answered Socrates' question at [15b] with the claim that the 'pious is [definitionally] what is loved by the gods...' " Also see Benson (2000, 64). McPherran, however, does go on to offer a non-logical explanation for why Euthyphro concedes this, which I do not have the space to discuss here.

<sup>16</sup>But also by Versényi (1982, 117) and Walker (1984, 111).

<sup>17</sup>A. E. Taylor goes so far as to say that this is the point of the entire *dialogue* (Taylor, 1926, 147-148). Versényi (1982, 115) argues the transactional nature of the definition is not the problem; rather, it is that Euthyphro does not have the knowledge (of how to benefit gods) that his definition entails he must have.

tion, its relation to the logic of the rest of the passage already foggy, now appears to be completely unnecessary and disjointed.

The answer Allen et al.<sup>18</sup> give is to say that the reduction is the conclusion of a entirely distinct elenchos comprising 15a7-15c10. Between the comparison to commerce and the reduction is Euthyphro's list, prompted by a question from Socrates. Socrates asks: "What could those gifts from us to the gods be, Euthyphro," and Euthyphro replies with a list of three things. Allen reads these lines as follows: having shown that Euthyphro's 14b answer is refuted, Socrates now asks Euthyphro to give yet another definition of piety. Since what we give to the gods cannot be things that benefit them, the question implies, what do we give them *instead*? The items on Euthyphro's list thus represent a new answer to the original question, and reduction reduces *this* answer, not the previous one, to the answer from the third elenchos.<sup>19</sup>

I call any view that takes the definition Euthyphro offers at 14b to be refuted by the comparison to commerce at 15a *Early Refutation*. As my tentative label suggests, I think these readings locate the main contradiction in the wrong place.<sup>20</sup> I think reduction, not the comparison to commerce, is meant to be the refutation of Euthyphro's 14b definition, and that Euthyphro's list does not represent a new answer to the original question. My main reason for thinking this is Euthyphro's language. I have not yet said what the content of any new definition represented by Euthyphro's list would be. As soon as we say it, the problem with early refutation readings becomes obvious. Euthyphro lists three things: honor, reverence, and *charis*.<sup>21</sup> His 14b definition said that piety is what is *kecharismena*, and *kecharismena*, as we have already noted, derives from *charis*. This strongly suggests that Euthyphro is not offering a new definition here, but re-stating his 14b definition. And in fact, here is his complete answer to Socrates' question:

What else do you think, than honor, reverence, and what I said just now (*arti*), *charis* (15a9-10, my rendering).

Euthyphro emphasizes that what he is saying now, *charis*, he has already said. There is no use of *charis* or derivatives at any point in the dialogue prior to his definition at 14b, so Euthyphro could only be referring

<sup>18</sup>Allen (1970, 61); Versényi (1982, 117); Walker (1984, 111)

<sup>19</sup>A view like this is also supported by the disjunctive structure of the reduction question we mentioned above: having rejected that piety is dear to the gods, and that piety is beneficial to the gods, Socrates wants to know if Euthyphro is offering a new kind of definition in his list.

<sup>20</sup>Benson seems to agree. (2000, 65, n. 26).

<sup>21</sup>Underscoring what I claimed in section 1.2, some translators obscure the point I am making here by translating inconsistently between 14b and 15a. For example, McPherran renders *kecharismena* at 14b and in the reduction question as 'gratifying', and *charis* in the list both as 'gratitude' and (later in his analysis) 'favor'. (2003, 20-22). Also see Walker (1984, 109).



to his statement there. The intent of Euthyphro's list appears to be to give Socrates examples of the kinds of things he meant when he called pious offerings *kecharismena*; these will be things like honor and reverence.<sup>22</sup> And note again the language of the reduction question:

The pious is then, Euthyphro, *kecharismenon*, but not beneficial or dear to the gods?

I think this continuity of language from the 14b definition to reduction is a good reason to think Plato wants us to consider that definition, and not a new one, still under examination at 15b.

Besides ignoring this continuity, early refutation has an additional drawback, in that it awkwardly distributes the dialectical content of the end of the dialogue. As we have already noted, there is no argument in reduction; it is a mere concession. If reduction is an *elenchos* unto itself, it is philosophically vacuous. It contains no line of reasoning and no philosophical lesson. It is hard to see why Plato would include it at all, much less present it in such a place of prominence, as the closing word of the dialogue.

So there is a puzzle concerning what role the comparison to commerce and the inferences leading to it play in the *elenchos*. If we say that they refute, on their own, Euthyphro's definition, then we exacerbate the reduction problem: reduction becomes an empty addendum that doesn't link in any philosophically meaningful way to the rest of the dialogue. But if we say Euthyphro's definition survives these inferences, then we need to explain what they show, since they do not show that Euthyphro's definition has failed.

Let us then turn to examining the inferential structure of the passage in more detail.

### 3 The Logical Structure of the *Elenchos*

#### 3.1 The Main Inferences

My breakdown of the inferences largely follows Benson (2000, 64) and McPherran (2003, 20-22).<sup>23</sup> In what follows, I assign numbers to what seem to be

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<sup>22</sup>Though the list contains three items, I do not think they are of equal weight. Since *charis* was offered as the main component of his definition, it would be strange for Euthyphro to mate it equally to two other notions here. Rather, I think *timē* (honor) and *gera* (reverence) are meant to fall under *charis*: Euthyphro is giving examples – an approach he is partial to – of things he has all along taken to fall under his 14b definition. Reading Euthyphro's  $\alpha\alpha$  as epexegetical would yield this result. Socrates also seems to take this to be Euthyphro's meaning, since he treats, in his next question, the single term *kecharismenon* as equivalent to the entire list Euthyphro has just given.

<sup>23</sup>Allen, whose discussion of the *elenchos* will play an important role here, does not give a step-by-step breakdown, but skips to an explanation of the important inferences at the end (1970, 60-61). Cf. Walker (1984, 111).

key steps in the elenchos. Some may be premises, others sub-conclusions used to arrive at the main conclusion. I indicate putative inferences with ‘∴’ and use bold subtitles to group the steps according to my basic reading from Section 1.3.

### Definition

1. Piety is knowledge of how to say what is *kecharismena* to the gods in prayer and give what is *kecharismena* in sacrifice. (14a11-14b7)

### Clarification

2. To sacrifice is to give to the gods. (14c8)
3. To pray is to request from the gods. (14c8-9)
- ∴ 4. So, piety is knowledge of how to request from and give to the gods. (14d1-2) – From 1, 2, and 3.
5. To request from the gods correctly is to ask them for things we need (δεόμεθα/*deometha*). (14d9-10)<sup>24</sup>
6. To give to the gods correctly is to give them things they need (δεόμενοι/*deomenoi*). (14e1-3)

### Comparison to Commerce

- ∴ 7. “Piety would then (ἄρα) be a trading skill or an art of commercial exchange – ἐμπορικὴ τις τέχνη [*emporikē tis technē*] – between gods and men?” (14e6-7)

Although I will argue against this view below, many take this question to represent an inference from 4, 5, and 6.<sup>25</sup> Ἄρα indicates inference, acting as English ‘therefore’ does, and Euthyphro answers Socrates’ question affirmatively, or so it seems at first. If Euthyphro’s acceptance of this claim represents an inference he draws (with Socrates’ help), there are suppressed premises. For example, the (plausible) assumption that commercial exchange is also a giving and requesting of needed things seems to be at work here in some way, but this issue will require further exploration. Hence I flag this moment as a *putative* inference, and we’ll return to it below.

From here, things begin to get a bit murky. By 15b, we have gotten onto some premise that could be expressed thus:

<sup>24</sup>‘Correctly’ is *orthos*. Calling piety knowledge (*epistētai*) in premise 1 implies that piety requires skill (it is a *technē*) and thus that one can do it correctly or incorrectly. The use of *kecharismena* also implies this: to give or request in accord with *charis*-norms is to do it the right way, knowledgeably. See Allen (1970, 58).

<sup>25</sup>Benson (2000, 64); McPherran (2003, 20); Vlastos (1991, 74); Walker (1984, 111).

8. The things we give to the gods do not benefit them. – from the reduction question, 15b1-2.<sup>26</sup>

But it is less clear how we have gotten here. It is true that Euthyphro has already denied that piety bestows benefits on gods (13c6-10).<sup>27</sup> But we need to explain why this idea comes to be re-introduced here. There is no explicit connection drawn between benefit (ἡ ὠφέλεια/τὸ ὠφέλιμον [*hē opheleia/to ophelimon*]) and 1-7; ‘benefit’ and ‘benefit’-equivalent terms are not used in any of those steps of the elenchos. They are first used in a passage immediately following Euthyphro’s reluctant endorsement of the putative inference at 7 – “Trading yes, if you prefer to call it that”:

**Socrates:** I prefer nothing, unless it is true. But tell me, what benefit do the gods derive from the gifts they receive from us? What they give us is obvious to all. There is no good that we do not receive from them, but how are they benefited by what they receive from us? Or do we have such an advantage over them in the trade that we receive all our blessings from them and they receive nothing from us? (14e10-15a4)

This passage links commerce to benefit, suggesting that the typical model of commerce is one in which reciprocal benefits are traded. If we had a premise to link the reciprocal exchange of *needed* things in ritual (premise 6, 14e1-2) to the reciprocally *beneficial* things exchanged in commerce, then we could see a direct line of inferences from the definition to premise 8.

Allen notes that “...surely, if the gods need a thing, they must benefit from getting it...” (1970, 61).<sup>28</sup> This is presumably an instance of the more general principle that if one needs a thing, then one benefits from getting that thing. Let us call this idea *Allen’s Principle* (AP). AP and 6 give us:

6.1 To give to the gods correctly is to give them things they benefit from.

Thus if Euthyphro accepts 6, AP, and 8, then he has contradictory views, and we can consider his 14b definition refuted. What do we make of premise 7, however, since the damning contradiction can be reached without it? The comparison to commerce, in re-introducing benefit to the discussion, seems to be playing the bridging role that Allen assigns to his principle. Perhaps

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<sup>26</sup>Following Benson (p. 64), who cites 15a5-6; McPherran (p. 20-21), who cites 14e10-15a6, but ultimately deriving from 12e9-13d3; and Walker (p. 111) with a similar derivation. Allen does not list steps but credits Euthyphro with the view by simply saying “Euthyphro denies that gods benefit from our gifts” (p. 61).

<sup>27</sup>“**Socrates:** Is piety then, which is the care of the gods, also to benefit them and make them better?...**Euthyphro:** By Zeus, no.” No explanation is offered for why Euthyphro denies this, but it is likely he denies it on account of holding the conventional view that gods do not suffer from deficiencies that mortals can remedy.

<sup>28</sup>Also Walker (1984, 111).

there is a way to see them as working together, so that we assign an essential role to what seems to be an important moment in the elenchos. Here is one way to understand how the comparison to commerce contributes to the argument making use of AP:

- 7.1 Piety essentially involves reciprocal exchange of needed things. – from 1-6.
- 7.2 Piety and commerce are alike in what they exchange. – from 14e6-7.
- 7.3 Therefore, commerce essentially involves reciprocal exchange of needed things. – from 7.1 and 7.2.
- 7.4 Needed things are beneficial things. – AP.
- 7.5 Therefore, commerce essentially involves reciprocal exchange of beneficial things. – from 7.3 and 7.4.
- 7.6 Therefore, piety essentially involves reciprocal exchange of beneficial things. – from 7.5 and 7.2.

On this reading, we still assume AP, and strictly speaking, we still don't need any of the premises related to commerce to reach contradiction – we could get 7.6 from 7.1 and 7.4. But invoking commerce may seem, on this reading, to provide the motivation for assuming AP at 7.4. We see clearly, perhaps Socrates is suggesting, that AP is true when we examine commerce, and then we apply that insight, by virtue of 7.2, back to pious exchange.

Premise 7.6 entails:

- 7.7 Piety essentially involves giving to the gods things that benefit them.

So, if Euthyphro accepts the line of reasoning that leads to 7.7, then his last definition contradicts his earlier commitment.

The important question to ask here is: does Euthyphro accept AP, since that is the assumption without which no line of reasoning produces a contradiction? The text is not clear on this point. Let us look at the commerce passage again in full context:

**Socrates:** Piety would then be a sort of trading skill between gods and men?

**Euthyphro:** Trading yes, if you prefer to call it that.

**Socrates:** I prefer nothing, unless it is true. But tell me, what benefit do the gods derive from the gifts they receive from us? What they give us is obvious to all. There is for us no good that we do not receive from them, but how are they benefited by what they receive from us? Or do we have such an advantage

over them in the trade that we receive all our blessings from them and they receive nothing from us?

**Euthyphro:** Do you suppose, Socrates, that the gods are benefited by what they receive from us?

**Socrates:** What could those gifts from us to the gods be, Euthyphro? (14e6-15a8)

What do we make of Euthyphro's final response ("Do you suppose...") to Socrates' comparison? We might hope for some confirmation from either Euthyphro or Socrates that something significant, like a refuting contradiction, has occurred here. But it is unclear what either of them think they have just established. Socrates has just asked Euthyphro for a second time<sup>29</sup> whether commerce and piety are alike, at least in a certain respect, in that they are both reciprocal exchanges of beneficial things. Euthyphro, in response, seems to ask Socrates the very question he has just been asked himself. Moreover, Socrates' own response is odd: he ignores that he has been asked a question, asks Euthyphro what pious gifts are – this, we thought, was what was already under discussion – and then imputes a view to Euthyphro that he did not himself express in this elenchos ("The pious is then...not beneficial [to the gods]?" (15b1-2).) That view entails what I labeled premise 8, which is equivalent to Euthyphro's view at 13c, a prior elenchos.

Allen-like readings of the elenchos claim that the contradiction of 7.7 and 8 refute the definition given at 14b, and then the final lines of the passage are in fact a distinct elenchos targeting a new definition. To make that case, one must interpret the puzzling lines we've just seen so that they conclude the elenchos began at premise 1 with Euthyphro's acceptance, tacit or explicit, of the line of reasoning in 7.1 - 7.7; or at least one very like it, and one that relies crucially on AP. One could, for example, see Euthyphro's question reversal as evasion, and understand his desire to evade to be recognition of his impending contradiction. Socrates, also so aware, and also aware of Euthyphro's attempt to evade, effectively dismisses the old definition, and resets the conversation by asking Euthyphro to state anew what pious gifts are. So 8, then, would be making explicit a parameter, derived from 13c, that will govern this new answer.

There are some prerequisites we need to address before we can decide whether Euthyphro assumes AP or whether anything he has agreed to entails the principle. I will begin this discussion in the next section, but before I do that, let us see what the rest of an Allen-like reading looks like.

The dialogue, but not the elenchos, would proceed with Euthyphro's "new" definition, found in his list (I'll use continuous numbering here so that later, when I give a unified reading, I can simply refer back to these steps under these numbers):

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<sup>29</sup>First at 14e10-11, and then again at 15a2.

## List

9. The pious things we give the gods are honor, reverence, and *charis* (15a9-10), which are not beneficial to the gods (15b1-2), so they are not in conflict with (8).

## Reduction

10. These things are also dear to the gods (τὸ φίλον τοῖς θεοῖς [*to philon tois theois*]). (15b1-3).
- ∴ 11. So, the pious is what is dear to the gods. (15b4-5)
12. The pious and the god-loved (*to theophilēs*) are not the same, but different (15c1-2).
- ∴ 13. Then either what was agreed before (in the third elenchos) was wrong or this is. (15c8-9) – From 11 and 12, and represents a contradiction between Euthyphro’s definition, or a supposed implication of it (11), and the conclusion of the third elenchos (12).

## 4 Vlastos’ Dilemma

Above we took (7) to be an inference, though we had to supply some missing information to do so.<sup>30</sup> However, (7) is put as a question, and we should only take it to be an inference if Euthyphro assents to it. He does appear to do so at first, albeit unenthusiastically (14e8). Socrates also expresses hesitation over the move, cautioning that they should not accept it unless they have a reason to think it is true. The fact that he proceeds to ask a follow-up question suggests that he is inviting Euthyphro to explore the issue further before he grants his assent. I think we as interpreters should heed Socrates’ advice here, and look at the text more closely before we assume Plato wants us to read (7) as an inference.

Vlastos has suggested that Socrates’ follow-up be read as presenting a *reductio ad absurdum* of Euthyphro’s definition:

Sniffing out here [in Euthyphro’s final definition] the age-old *do ut des* conception of worship – swapping gifts of sacrifice for prayed for benefits – Socrates rebuffs it brutally. He says that, if so, piety would be “an art of commercial exchanges between gods and men”, exchanges that would make no sense since they

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<sup>30</sup>We took 7 to be a compressed expression of the inference from 6 and 7.1-7.7.

would be so one-sided...if piety is holy barter it is a bargain for us, a swindle for the gods. (Vlastos, 1991, 174)<sup>31</sup>

Piety, Vlastos suggests, is obviously not an exchange wherein humans give beneficial gifts to the gods, but it would be equally absurd to think that we give them non-beneficial things in exchange for beneficial ones. Thus, assuming Euthyphro's definition is an exchange definition, it cannot be right, as it leads to one of two absurd outcomes.

On this reading, Socrates presents Euthyphro with a dilemma: if piety is an exchange with the gods of some sort, it is either a symmetrical exchange of benefits, or an asymmetrical one, with all of the advantage accruing to humans.<sup>32</sup> Vlastos suggests that the latter option is presented by Plato as an obvious absurdity, one that Euthyphro could not reasonably choose. This would force him to choose the benefit-symmetrical model, and this, as we have already seen, would put him in conflict with premise (8) and his 13c view, and thus render his 14b definition contradictory. Though he does not give his view on how the rest of the elenchos should be read, Vlastos' reading would have to largely follow the Allen reading we gave above: Euthyphro's odd answer to Socrates' question would be viewed as evasion, and Socrates' next question asking Euthyphro to renew his account of pious gifts would be regarded as a new answer to the initial question.<sup>33</sup>

I think it is clear that Socrates presents Euthyphro with two models. I take inspiration from Vlastos in thinking the dilemma offered here is important. I contend that the dilemma is an attempt to find out whether or not Euthyphro really endorses the view that piety is like commerce, and, as I shall show later, whether Euthyphro endorses AP. Socrates wants to make explicit that typical commercial exchange involves a symmetrical exchange of benefits, and so if piety is like it, then it will be like it in this respect.

However, I disagree with Vlastos on two key points (i): Plato does not intend that Euthyphro see the benefit-asymmetrical model as an obvious absurdity; and (ii) consequently, Euthyphro *is not* thereby forced into a contradiction with his earlier view by endorsing the benefit-symmetrical model.

#### 4.1 Benefit-Asymmetry and *Charis*

Euthyphro would not have seen benefit-asymmetry as absurd because that model was the conventional way to understand ritual offerings. It is likely

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<sup>31</sup>Also see Biernat (2018, 334-337); Burnet (1924, 61); McPherran (2000, 97); A. E. Taylor (1926, 155, 147-148); Weiss (1986, 266).

<sup>32</sup>Credit goes to Vanessa de Harven for helping me see this point.

<sup>33</sup>Vlastos would have trouble explaining the point of continuing the discussion, though. On an Allen-like reading, I assume that the items on Euthyphro's list were not beneficial gifts, and so avoided conflict with 8/13c. Vlastos' position is that giving non-beneficial gifts to the gods is presented as an obvious absurdity, and so it would odd for the discussion to continue by exploring such a hypothesis.

that both Plato and Socrates saw this model as absurd, and that perhaps explains the derisive tone with which it is presented, but Euthyphro would have seen the model as a live option, and Socrates likely presents it to him knowing this. To see this, we should recall a point I made early on, that Euthyphro's definition is an attempt to describe piety under the head of *charis*, and that would make certain assumptions operative, in his mind, throughout the discussion. It was a commonplace of popular understanding that in cases where symmetrical exchange was not possible due to inequalities in status or material welfare, a *charis*-relationship could be established through some kind of asymmetrical exchange: the bestowing of honors or praise, the pledging of fealty, performance of obeisance, or the paying of token tribute could all be used to initiate an exchange cycle that would result in the return of things of much greater substantial material benefit. So, in certain cases, asymmetrical exchange was taken for granted as in an inevitable, but morally proper, mode of *charis*.<sup>34</sup> This would be a particularly relevant consideration in religious contexts, where inequalities in status or material welfare between humans and gods were outsized.

It is thus anachronistic and incorrect to see the asymmetry of benefit Socrates describes as intended to represent an obvious absurdity. It seems false to *us* to think that pious exchange could work this way, but we have been aided by several millennia of philosophical discussion on such matters (beginning with the one in *Euthyphro*), and most modern conceptions of divine service have long since abandoned the basic reciprocity model that gives rise to this possibility. It is important to recall that Euthyphro has not abandoned this model, nor would an original reader of this dialogue have done so. Asymmetrical exchange between gods and mortals would not have appeared obviously absurd to a contemporary reader because it is built into the basic understanding of religious ritual. If Plato means for Euthyphro to think any view here is obviously absurd, it is the view that mortals can benefit gods, not the view that religious reciprocity is asymmetrical.<sup>35</sup>

In this way, we can see Euthyphro's rejection of the view that we can benefit gods from 13c as a doctrinal companion to his thinking here. It is not *merely* because Euthyphro has already rejected such benefit that he cannot accept the view here, but that *charis*-exchange between gods and mortals is inherently unbalanced is a piece of conventional wisdom.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup>MacLachlan (1993, 33); Mueller (2001, 475); Parker (1998, 118-124).

<sup>35</sup>Parker argues at length for this view (1998, 118-124), concluding "Of all the relations brought under the rubric of reciprocity in this volume, that between humans and gods is perhaps the most unbalanced — a fact that, in many contexts, the Greeks were very far from denying." Cf. Versényi (1982, 116).

<sup>36</sup>As Plato takes pains to portray him as at least a self-described innovator, like Socrates, we should not assume Euthyphro is the mouthpiece of convention on every score (McPherran, 1996, 35). But that doesn't mean we take him as an innovator on every score either. The very ordinariness of his last definition might suggest that here, at least, Euthyphro is voicing the opinion of the masses. This is delicious irony, given the effort he expends to



With this in mind, let us reflect again on the text. I contend that what makes Euthyphro's response to Socrates' question in the commerce passage (14e6-15a8) puzzling is an artifact of trying to read it as an evasion, or a recognition that he has been caught in a contradiction. I think a much more straightforward reading of the passage, were we free to see it, is as follows.

Though Euthyphro agrees with Socrates that his conception of piety could be called commerce, he is not enamored of this description (14e8).<sup>37</sup> Neither is Socrates, at least not without further exploration of the idea (14e9). I contend that what comes next *is* this exploration, and in it Socrates posits that a defining feature of commerce is its symmetry with respect to benefit. So if Euthyphro thought his model of piety was truly like commerce, he'd also think that his model entailed a symmetrical exchange of benefits (14e10-11). However, both the tone and substance of his reply suggest that he is happy to own the model that Socrates offers as an alternative. Unlike his tepid reception of the idea that ritual is commerce, Euthyphro embraces the idea that ritual is an asymmetrical exchange. Rather than give Socrates a simple answer to his question, he challenges Socrates with a question of his own. His aim is not to evade Socrates' question, but to emphasize the obviousness of his answer to it: only someone who thought that mortals *could* benefit gods would bother to ask this question at all, rather than assume asymmetry from the beginning. His question asks: "So should I conclude, Socrates, because you have asked this question, you think mortals can benefit gods?" (15a5-6) Euthyphro insinuates that it should be *obvious* that humans do not benefit gods in the ways they benefit us, and that, far from being a unanticipated problem with his conception of piety, this is an intended consequence.<sup>38</sup>

It is also interesting to note that Socrates does not answer Euthyphro's question. He instead moves straightaway to asking Euthyphro what things we give to the gods, suggesting he would like to know the nature of these gifts given as part of asymmetrical exchange, gifts that somehow fail to benefit while nonetheless being gift-worthy (15a7-8). Socrates thereby accepts Euthyphro's denial of benefit-symmetry, and proceeds to discuss the asymmetrical alternative. Moreover, when Socrates asks the reduction question a few lines later, he affirms that the discussion has now moved beyond considering views in which human gifts to gods are beneficial. In asking

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separate himself from conventional thinking in the introductory section of the dialogue. Adam takes the mundaneness of Euthyphro's conception of piety in this specific instance to be evidence, contra Burnet, that Euthyphro is "essentially the representative of active Greek orthodoxy." (Adam, 1890, xxii). Also see Parker (1998, 121).

<sup>37</sup>Walker also remarks on this (1984, 109).

<sup>38</sup>Parker's reading is bolder, but along the same lines: "Under pressure from Sokrates, Euthyphro eventually bursts out in some anger: of course the gods do not need our gifts, it is all a matter of 'honour and recognition and *kharis*'." (1998, 121) Weiss reads similarly: "Euthyphro insists that the gods gain no advantage from dealing with men (15a5-6); what they get is honor (*timē*, *gera*) and good will (*charis*) (15a9-10)." (Weiss, 1986, 450)

“The pious is then, Euthyphro, *kecharismenon*, but not beneficial or dear to them?” (15b1-2) Socrates is asking Euthyphro to re-iterate that his definition, piety is what is *kecharismenon*, does not involve saying that piety is (definitionally) beneficial.

Vlastos’ dilemma is thus an attempt to discover whether, after initially unenthusiastically agreeing to it, Euthyphro still accepts that piety is like commerce, once the implications of that view are made clear. I contend that he does not, and thereby endorses the asymmetrical model of piety as the one that best expresses his definition.

Notice that now the elenchos may proceed forward, since Euthyphro’s definition has not run afoul of 8 or 13c. We are then free to re-interpret (9)-(13) as continuing to discuss Euthyphro’s definition under the aspect of asymmetrical *charis*. I will offer my reading of those steps at the end of the paper.

Because much rests on accepting that Plato intends Euthyphro to endorse benefit-asymmetry in this passage, let me clear about my reasons for reading it this way:

1. There is an available interpretation of the passage that supports this reading, in which we do not read Euthyphro’s question as an evasion, but as an affirmation. This reading makes better sense of the text than the evasion-interpretation.
2. Socrates himself takes Euthyphro to have endorsed benefit-asymmetry, as evidenced by his follow-up questions.
3. Benefit-asymmetry was convention. Even if the notion is philosophically problematic, it was not popularly seen to be, and we cannot expect Euthyphro to have considered himself cornered into a contradiction by Socrates’ presentation of this alternative.

We are not quite done with Vlastos yet, though. His suggestion that giving unbeneficial gifts, especially in exchange for beneficial ones, is a patent absurdity is an eminently plausible contention. What else could make a gift *kecharismena*, a correct form of sacrifice, but that it does some good for the recipient?

## 4.2 Motive vs. Effect

We should pause here to make a relevant distinction that we will use throughout what follows. When we say that Euthyphro’s model of piety is benefit-asymmetrical, there are two things we could mean. The relevant symmetry could be with respect to the *effect* produced by the gifts given, or with respect to the *motive* of the giver. Suppose I give a gift with the intention of benefiting the recipient: it is possible that gift might succeed in producing that benefit, or, if perhaps I am an unskilled gift-giver, my gift might fail to

produce the desired effect. By contrast, suppose that I give my gift for some reason other than to benefit the recipient (to curry favor, for example, or to meet a familial obligation): despite my lack of intention, it is still possible my gift could benefit the recipient by accident, or then again, it might just as easily not. The point is that any such beneficial effect will be incidental to my motive. Thus, there could be benefit-symmetry with regard to motive, in which each participant gives to the other with the intention of benefiting the recipient (or they each give without that motive); and there could be benefit-symmetry with regard to effect, in which each participant gives to the other something that achieves the effect of benefiting the recipient (or they each fail to achieve this effect).

Moreover, in the case where one gives in order to benefit, there will be an important connection between motive and effect. The reason I give  $x$  is because I believe  $x$  to be such that it will benefit the recipient. Whether or not  $x$  is capable of producing that effect, or what I believe about  $x$  in this regard, will determine whether or not I give it. That  $x$  causes benefit will *explain* why I give it. However, in cases where my motive is not to benefit the recipient, it will not be the properties of  $x$ , or what effects  $x$  produces, that explain why I choose to give it.

When Socrates questions Euthyphro about benefit-symmetry, is he asking about motive or effect? His language strongly suggests he is concerned only with effect.<sup>39</sup> He wants to know how the things the gods receive from us impact them (beneficially or not?) by contrast with what we receive from them. There is no indication here that Socrates is asking Euthyphro to reflect on our motives for sacrificing or the gods' motives in blessing. So the asymmetry Euthyphro endorses is with respect to effect: the gods give us things that succeed in benefiting us, but we do not give them things that have that effect on them.

Despite that Socrates does not ask about the motives of Euthyphronic sacrifice, we can draw some conclusions about it. If Euthyphro believes that mortals cannot benefit gods, then the purpose of his giving should not, obviously, be to benefit them. Why then does he give? He tells us at 14b:

...I say that if a man knows how to say and do what is *kecharismena* with respect to the gods at prayer and sacrifice, those are pious actions *such as preserve both private houses and public affairs of state*. The opposite of these actions are impious and *overturn and destroy everything*. (14b2-7)

Euthyphro sacrifices, not in order to do anything for the gods, but in order to receive rewards and avoid curses in return for his gifts.<sup>40</sup> What emerges then

<sup>39</sup> "...what benefit do the gods derive from the gifts they receive from us...how are they benefited by what they receive from us...?"

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Weiss (1994, 265).

from the brief discussion of commerce and piety is Euthyphro's definition in this form: piety is what is *kecharismena*, and what is *kecharismena* is giving to the gods not things that benefit them, but things that ensure the gods return beneficial gifts to mortals. A gift-worthy gift that does not benefit its divine recipient, for Euthyphro, is a gift that guarantees a beneficial requital.

### 4.3 I Give So That You Will Give

The Latin phrase *do ut des*, 'I give so that you will give', is often used to describe ancient transactional religious practices like those under discussion here. In such practices, humans sacrifice to the gods primarily in order to coerce them to benefit us in return. Notice, however, my giving in order to get back would only be effective if there were a guarantee or high probability of requital, a binding agreement or something like a contract.<sup>41</sup> And for all the attention paid to the capricious and arbitrary nature of Homeric gods, they do behave in regular and predictable ways when it comes to honoring the expectations of ritual. They behave as if bound by obligation. Parker:

If one looks at the theology of Homer in terms of *kharis*, the accusation so often made that Homer's gods are arbitrary seems quite misplaced. In Greek terms, the ultimate and intolerable arbitrariness on the part of the gods would be indifference to the whole system of sacrifice and offering and prayer; but this is not how they are portrayed in the poem as a whole. (Parker, 1998, 117)<sup>42</sup>

Euthyphro is clearly outlining a *do ut des* model of piety in the last elenchos. A Euthyphronic gift places the gods under obligation to return a favor. In this way, Euthyphronic giving is much like meeting the terms of a contract: I don't pay the rent to enable the landlord to buy a boat; I pay the rent so that he does not evict me. I do not pay a certain amount in rent because I think it is a helpful sum; I pay that amount because the landlord has stipulated that is how much I shall pay in return for being allowed to remain on premises. In meeting the terms of contract, my motive is not to benefit the landlord, though it may happen the landlord is benefited by my paying the rent. The landlord has likely arranged the lease so that when I meet its terms, for my own gain, I thereby also benefit the landlord. Likewise, the landlord does not aim for my flourishing or comfort in providing

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<sup>41</sup>I mean this informally: a mutual agreement for which there are consequences if breached.

<sup>42</sup>He argues that even when *charis* agreements are broken "...there is always a clear reason in terms of the divine politics of the poem, or larger divine plans, why the sacrifice must be spurned, or the favourite hero surrendered. Simple indifference is never the explanation." (Parker, 1998, 117). James Adam insinuates a similar idea in his use of the language of 'compact' (1890, xxi).

me a home, but to oblige me to pay rent. Euthyphro's situation is different in that the gifts he gives, while not intended to benefit the gods, *could not* do so, even accidentally, if Euthyphro's assumption at 13c was right. Euthyphronic sacrifice does not concern itself with the specific content or nature of the things given, except insofar as they fall under the broad (extrinsic) description of being required or demanded by the gods. For this reason, I will call Euthyphro's model of piety a *contractual* model.

The idea that Euthyphro's model of piety is *do ut des*, and that Socrates objects to it on those grounds is not new. The main reason that the comparison to commerce is so frequently taken to be the point of refutation of Euthyphro's last definition is surely that in comparing it to commerce, Socrates means to highlight the problematically transactional nature of it. Here is Vlastos' remark again:

Sniffing out here [in Euthyphro's final definition] the age-old *do ut des* conception of worship – swapping gifts of sacrifice for prayed for benefits – Socrates rebuffs it brutally. He says that, if so, piety would be “an art of commercial exchanges between gods and men”, exchanges that would make no sense since they would be so one-sided...if piety is holy barter it is a bargain for us, a swindle for the gods. (Vlastos, 1991, 174).

But also notice McPherran:

...it was typical to accompany a prayer of request with an offering of some sort designed to establish a claim on the “helper”...As Euthyphro confesses to Socrates (*Euth* 14c-15a), this *do ut des* – “I give so that you will give” – conception of reciprocity between gods and humans is rather like an art of commerce (*emporikē*; 14e8). These practices appear to rest on the traditional and fundamental assumption that justice consists in reciprocation, in repayment in kind. (McPherran, 2000, 92)

A. E. Taylor calls the passage between 14e6 and 15a4 “gentile satire on the unworthy conception of religion as a trade-enterprise carried on by God and man for their mutual benefit,” and says “...this is a view of religion thoroughly in keeping with the more sordid side of the ancient State cultus, which was very much regulated on the *do ut des* principle.” (Taylor, 1926, 155, 147-148).<sup>43</sup>

But if what I argued above is correct, this comparison does not bring out, at least directly, the transactional nature of Euthyphronic piety. Allen-like

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<sup>43</sup>Also see Biernat (2018, 336); Burnet (1924, 61); Weiss (1986, 266). Taylor clearly assumes that the view being satirized is benefit-symmetrical in saying that it is carried on for ‘mutual benefit’, as does McPherran in saying ‘repayment in kind.’

readings, recall, claim that the comparison to commerce refutes Euthyphro's definition by forcing him into a contradiction with his position at 13. The commentators above go further than this, though, and claim that there is a deeper philosophical or doctrinal objection to Euthyphro's view that Socrates wants to highlight. It is not just that Euthyphro is inconsistent; he holds a view Socrates objects to on independent grounds. Moreover, these commentators all assume that Euthyphro is forced into conceding a similarity with commerce by the absurdity of the alternative, and this similarity reveals why Socrates finds Euthyphro's view objectionable. The objectionable similarity is the transactional nature supposedly shared by commerce and piety, represented by the *do ut des* ethos. For commerce is also *do ut des*, and contractual: a customer doesn't give a merchant money in order to benefit the merchant, but to get the merchandise one needs or wants to derive benefit from for herself. The payment is contractually required to get the merchandise, so the buyer tenders it.

But notice that the similarity Euthyphro would be forced to concede on this reading is not the objectionable similarity: being benefit-symmetrical with regard to effect need not be *do ut des*.<sup>44</sup> 'Repayment in kind' describes effect, but *do ut des* concerns motive. The commentators I mention above do not err in claiming that Euthyphro's view is *do ut des*, or that Socrates doesn't like this. They err in claiming that Socrates "brutally rebuffs" Euthyphro by comparing his view to commerce. If Socrates wants to show that traditional Greek ritual is problematic because it shares its *do ut des* contractuality with commerce, he has let the opportunity slip tragically away in shifting the focus away from this similarity and onto a respect in which it is far less obvious that two are similar: effect-symmetry. So the puzzle becomes: why does Socrates focus on effect-symmetry if his goal is to criticize motive?

Part of the answer to that question lies in noticing that if Socrates had focused on motive or otherwise compelled Euthyphro to say that his model was *do ut des*, that admission would not by itself have constituted a criticism of the view, or given Euthyphro a reason to question it. There would still need to be an explanation offered for why the view was problematic, or there would need to be reason to think Euthyphro's model is in conflict with some belief he has already expressed or harbors beneath the surface. Euthyphro's model was entrenched deeply enough in convention that he would not have seen it as obviously absurd, and if my reading of the passage so far is correct, we have not encountered any contradictions either.

We will get an explanation for what Plato thinks is wrong with *do ut des* giving, but it is the job of reduction to provide it. The comparison to commerce does not exist to refute Euthyphro's 14b definition, but to clarify

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<sup>44</sup>Exchange participants could be giving to one another out of kindness or altruism, for example.

it and thereby prepare it for refutation. Socrates needs to understand what Euthyphro's position is clearly before he can subject it to scrutiny, and I contend that the commerce section is an additional step of clarification. To see why that additional clarification is needed, we need to examine what impact my benefit-asymmetry reading has on the logic of the elenchos. Doing this will also make it easier to see what Plato thinks is wrong with Euthyphronic piety, and what role reduction is playing in the argument, the two main tasks that will close this paper.

## 5 Need, Benefit, and Allen's Principle

Recall that Allen has suggested there is a suppressed premise at work in the elenchos:

**AP:** If  $x$  meets a need, then  $x$  thereby confers a benefit.

I attempted to provide on Allen's behalf a derivation of this premise from the comparison to commerce, and that derivation depended on a similarity between piety and commerce we have shown Euthyphro rejects. Allen himself simply adds his premise to the argument on the strength of its initial plausibility (1970, 61),<sup>45</sup> so even if the comparison to commerce does not yield AP, because the principle is eminently plausible, we must still reckon with it. It is possible that the very intuitiveness of AP is what motivates Socrates to move without remark from asking about need to asking about benefit, and thus prompts the comparison to commerce.

Here is why we need to reckon with the principle. Recall premise 6:

6. To give to the gods correctly is to give them things they need (δεόμενοι/*deomenoi*). (14e1-3)<sup>46</sup>

We should read this as a biconditional:<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>This has the disadvantage (for Allen) of making the comparison to commerce entirely superfluous, since if we simply add the premise to the argument, we can reach a refuting contradiction without any mention of commerce. My derivation was an attempt to remedy this on Allen's behalf.

<sup>46</sup>Καὶ αὖ τὸ δίδοναι ὀρθῶς, ὧν ἐκείνοι τυγχάνουσιν δεόμενοι παρ' ἡμῶν...

<sup>47</sup>"And to give correctly is to give them what they (happen to) need from us..." (14e1-3) surely gives us one side of this:

If  $x$  fulfills a need, then  $x$  is correctly given.

If we meet the condition of giving the gods what they need, then we have given correctly. But Socrates goes on to add, by way of explaining the link between correct or skillful giving and meeting needs: "...for it would not be skillful to bring gifts to anyone that are in no way needed." (14e3-4) It is hard to read this any other way than as the following conditional:

If  $x$  is does not fulfill a need, then to give  $x$  is not skillful (and therefore not

6.  $x$  is correctly given iff  $x$  is needed.

This much Euthyphro seems to agree to (“True, Socrates” (14e5)). If AP is an operative assumption in the elenchos, then when Euthyphro accepts Socrates’ alternative that pious gifts do not benefit the gods, that acceptance will entail that pious gifts are not correctly given. Since 6 has been accepted as a straightforward clarification of Euthyphro’s definition at 14b, we would get a contradiction: piety as defined at 14b entails, by 6 and AP, that mortals give gods beneficial gifts, but Euthyphro denies this by accepting benefit-asymmetry. So far, then, my reading has done nothing to address the reduction problem, and still generates a variety of early refutation. In order to avoid this result, I must show that AP is not an operative assumption in the elenchos despite its intuitive plausibility.

### 5.1 *Deomai*

Earlier, we had to answer a difficult question: how can a gift be *kecharismena* but confer no benefits? Now we must ask: how can a gift meet a need, but fail to thereby confer a benefit? It is hard to think of a case like this; many needs are naturally tied to benefits: food, shelter, companionship, money, transportation. There are many things we need, and when we get those things, we are better off in some way.

Most translate Socrates’ δεόμενοι [*deomenoi*] – third-person plural of *deomai* – at 14e1-3 as ‘they need’.<sup>48</sup> But it is important to note that Greek *deomai* often has a shade of meaning that English ‘need’ lacks. *Deomai* does often mean to lack or stand in need of, but it can also mean simply to request or ask for.<sup>49</sup> This makes it easy to produce counterexamples to AP: one can request things that are not beneficial. If gods did this, we could describe those things as *deomenoi* (things they requested) without implying that these were things they benefitted from. Of course, typically, *people* ask for things that benefit them, but it is at least a logical possibility that they could ask for things of no benefit; and if it is gods doing the asking, and humans cannot benefit gods, then if they ask for anything, they will be asking for things of no benefit.

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correctly given).

Contraposition gives us

If  $x$  is correctly given, then  $x$  fulfills a need.

All this together gives us a biconditional.

<sup>48</sup> Antecedent at 13d6: τοῖς θεοῖς – ‘the gods’.

<sup>49</sup> LSJ δεώ(β) II.2. Δεόμαι/*deomai* is the middle/passive voice form of δέω/*deō*. Middle voice verbs often have an active voice sense, but since they share a grammatical form with their passive counterparts, context is sometimes necessary to determine how they should be translated.



Additionally, in English, there are uses of ‘need’ and ‘necessity’ that describe a bare relation of dependence: we can express that  $x$  is a conditional requirement for  $y$  by saying that  $x$  is necessary for  $y$ . In contexts like these, what is necessary does not have to be something that confers a benefit, but only something that satisfies a requirement, regardless of whether what it is required for is beneficial. Suppose someone expressed concern over the penalty for a minor infraction, and her mate replied, “You shouldn’t worry about going to prison over a parking ticket, because you would need to commit a felony for that punishment to be appropriate.”

I raise the point about English because Greek *deomai* has uses like this as well.  $\Delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\tau\alpha\iota$  [*deitai*] is the third person singular middle/passive form of *deomai/deō*, and so often means ‘he/she/it lacks or is in need of.’ But this form is also used to express the same idea impersonally, as if to say ‘there is need of’ or ‘it is necessary.’ The third person active form of *deō*,  $\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}$  [*dei*] – ‘he/she/it needs’ – is the standard and most common way to express impersonal necessity, or to say the Greek equivalent of ‘it is necessary,’ and even gets its own lexicon entry.<sup>50</sup> I think it is in these impersonal examples that we come closest to seeing a mirror of the ambiguity in English ‘necessity.’ To say ‘it is necessary that  $x$ ’ in English could mean either ‘ $x$  is simply required’ or ‘ $x$  is required for some valued or beneficial outcome.’<sup>51</sup>

Finally, there is a special kind of necessity or requirement that is of particular relevance for our discussion: contractual necessity. Consider the following:

**Rent:** The landlord needs the rent.

This of course means that it is necessary that I meet the terms of my rental contract; I should yield to the landlord what she needs from me, given our agreement. But it does not mean:

**Rent<sub>(E1)</sub>:** I should yield to the landlord what she requires for survival or flourishing.

Nor:

**Rent<sub>(E2)</sub>:** I should yield to the landlord what is required to benefit her.

Rather, **Rent** means:

**Rent<sub>(C1)</sub>:** I should yield to the landlord what she requires so that I may stay housed.

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<sup>50</sup> $\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}$  II.

<sup>51</sup>English ‘deontic,’ used especially in philosophical discourse to describe obligations, derives from *deō*. In fact, *deon* is a participial form of *dei*, denoting a thing that is necessary/lacked/required/requested, and is yet another common way of expressing impersonal necessity.

Or:

**Rent<sub>(C2)</sub>:** I should yield to the landlord what she requires in order that she confer a benefit on me.

We might call the the first pair *eudaimonaic* uses of ‘need’ and the second pair *contractual*. In the eudaimonaic uses I am motivated to give the rent by the desire to benefit the landlord; it is relevant whether or not the rent money is truly beneficial to the landlord, whether it achieves the intended effect. In the contractual use, this is immaterial. It doesn’t matter whether the landlord is already fabulously wealthy, or whether she flushes the money down the drain upon receipt. It would nonetheless be true that I am required to pay her rent, because that is what the contract necessitates. What motivates me to care about payment is the beneficial behavior I am trying to oblige her to perform toward me, completely independently of what *other* effects my rent payment might have on her.

AP will not hold for uses of *deomai* that (i) mean simply to ask or request; (ii) describe bare relations of dependence; (iii) describe contractual requirements where the aim of meeting those requirements is to secure a benefit for the giver, regardless of what effect the giving has on the recipient. So we must now ask, in what sense does Euthyphro take *deomai* in Socrates’ question?<sup>52</sup>

## 5.2 *Deometha* vs. *Deomenoi*

The question has a prior counterpart:

“And to request correctly would be to ask from [the gods] things that we need?” (14d9-10)

‘We need’ here is *δεόμεθα* [*deometha*], also from *deomai*. We are clearly meant to think the use of *deometha* in the requesting clause of the definition is an Allen-use: we ask for things that benefit us.<sup>53</sup> It would be natural to assume that Socrates intends the same sense of *deomai* in asking for Euthyphro’s consent to the giving clause. But let us reflect on what we learned earlier. I have argued that Euthyphro does indeed think that mortals sacrifice to gods in order to reap reciprocal benefits, and in this way, ritual sacrifice is for Euthyphro much like paying the rent to a very wealthy landlord who does not need the money. We can here see all three exceptions

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<sup>52</sup>Adam notes: “There is the same ambiguity in *δεόμενοι* as in English ‘wanting.’” (1890, 103) It is interesting that he finds it necessary to add this note, though he does not elaborate on his reasons. Mentioning the ambiguity at all suggests that he thinks it is relevant to interpreting the passage.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. the commerce passage: “There is for us no good (*ἀγαθόν*) we do not receive from them...” (15a1-2). Moreover, *deometha* here is clearly not ‘ask or request’, since that would render as ‘we ask them for what we ask for’ (*αἰτεῖν ἂν εἴη ὃ δεόμεθα παρ’ ἐχέινων*).

to AP rolled into one: contractual necessity is just an instance of a bare relation of dependence;<sup>54</sup> and in being unconcerned with what effect pious gifts have on gods, apart from releasing the benefits in question, Euthyphro will give them what they ask for. Whatever the gods request, whatever conditions they set for requital, those will be the things that count as pious for Euthyphro.<sup>55</sup>

I want to suggest that we read the dialectic as follows. Socrates would like to know exactly what Euthyphro might have in mind in agreeing that piety is correct giving insofar as it is giving what is needed. Does he mean, Socrates wonders, ‘need’ in the more usual sense, the sense governed by AP, and the sense that describes what we ask for from gods? Or perhaps anticipating Euthyphro’s view from a few lines later, he wonders whether he might mean something different. To bring this out, Socrates initiates the comparison to commerce. In that comparison, Socrates offers two models, one in which the needed things exchanged are also beneficial, and hence within the scope as AP; and one in which there is asymmetry in this respect. I have suggested that Euthyphro chooses the latter model, a model in which the things we give to the gods are in some sense needed by the gods (requested in order to meet a contract-like requirement), but are not beneficial to them. Thus we see that when Euthyphro agrees to premise 6, that we give to the gods things that are needed, he does have a different sense of *deomai* in mind than when he agreed to premise 5, that we ask for what we need. It is likely this shifting of sense by Euthyphro is inchoate, and Socrates’ comparison to commerce is an attempt to bring it to the surface.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup>Though a benefit does accrue when the landlord gets the rent, it is a benefit to the tenant. Of course, the landlord may also benefit from the rent, but the requirement described in ‘The landlord needs the rent’ is only the requirement that must be met in order for the landlord to return a benefit to the tenant.

<sup>55</sup>It is interesting to note that the full text of Socrates’ question in the giving clause is ...ὅν ἔχουσιν τυγχάνουσιν δεόμενοι παρ’ ἡμῶν.... He pairs τυγχάνουσιν [*tunchanousin*] with *deomenoi*, giving the question the sense of “And to give correctly is to give them *whatever they happen to request (or require)* from us.” Socrates omits *tunchanousin* in the requesting clause, giving it less of an air of arbitrariness, and making the two descriptions asymmetrical in what may not be a trivial way.

<sup>56</sup>It is worth noting that Socrates makes a similar move in an earlier elenchos, and there, he is quite explicit about what he is doing:

**Socrates:** Is piety then, which is the care [*therapeia*] for the gods, also to benefit the gods and make them better? Would you agree that when you do something pious you make some one of the gods better?

**Euthyphro:** By Zeus, no.

**Socrates:** Nor do I think that this is what you mean – far from it – but that is why I asked you what you meant by the care of gods, because I did not believe you meant this kind of care. (13c6-13d2).

Here Socrates confirms that he saw well before Euthyphro that his answer was ambiguous, and that he had predicted that Euthyphro surely did not intend one possible sense of *therapeia*. The text between 13a and 13d is devoted entirely to Socrates’ attempt to confirm his prediction. So here we see that precisely what I claim Socrates is doing in the

Thus, Euthyphro's embrace of benefit-asymmetry allows the elenchos to proceed beyond the comparison to commerce. But because there is ambiguity in *deomai*, and one of the possible disambiguations accommodates Euthyphro's asymmetrical model, his position does not conflict with premise 6. So Euthyphro does not assume AP on his understanding of what it means to meet divine requirements. Now that all obstacles to moving forward to reduction have been eliminated, we can at last see what role Plato assigns it in the elenchos.

## 6 Ritual and Voluntarism

If what I have argued is correct, for Euthyphro, correct reciprocal giving will involve giving what is expected or required, whatever that turns out to be, without any concern for whether the things exchanged are of proportional value. This means any explanation of correct giving on this model will make no essential reference to what is given; the specific nature of what is given will be beside the point. All that matters for explaining the correctness of the exchange is that the requirements of the gods are met.

This accords with traditional accounts, not only of Greek religion, but other ancient religions as well. I recall being puzzled in my youth at stories from the Old Testament involving burnt offerings, often thinking: *why* are the characters in these stories burning animals as offerings? Does god eat the meat, and if so, does he like lamb a great deal more than chicken or beef? What purpose could this sacrifice serve; what use could god have for this activity? But the practical futility of the sacrifice, one might argue, was entirely the point. It was a show of devotion, a display designed to demonstrate that the god's followers were willing to obey, regardless of what they were asked to do. The content of the devotional act is deliberately severed from the reason the act is performed, precisely to emphasize that reason: I do not do this, the acolyte might say, because of what it accomplishes on its own; I do it *solely* as a display of obedience and devotion. Consider the case made famous by Kierkegaard, in which god commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. No alternative practical explanation can be offered here for why *this* sacrifice is appropriate; it is appropriate because god commanded it, and he commanded it to force a show of devotion (Genesis 22:1-14).

Greek religion called for the sacrifice of similarly arbitrary things,<sup>57</sup> like the paradigmatic *kecharismena mēria* – ritually-appropriate thighs of cattle – things that gods want us to give but have no obvious purpose or benefit outside of a show of devotion. They are just things the gods happen to

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last elenchos, he has done already shortly before.

<sup>57</sup>Occasionally, in myth, even involving human sacrifice: Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia to appease Artemis, and Tiresias prophesies that Creon's favored son of Oedipus, Eteocles, would triumph if Creon sacrificed Megareus.

require or request: “...ὧν ἐχέειναι τυγχάνουσιν δεόμενοι παρ’ ἡμῶν...” (14e1-2).

In my opening remarks, I suggested that the rejection of theological voluntarism is meant to be one thesis of *Euthyphro*. Recall:

**Theological Voluntarism (TV):** things are made pious, moral, or otherwise good by an act of divine will.

Euthyphro’s third answer (9e1 - 9e3) says that the pious is (definitionally) what is loved by all the gods. Taking his answer to be an expression of TV, he claims that what *causes* a pious thing to be that way is that the gods are fond of it; their loving that thing is what makes it pious. This means that there are no pious things independently of the love of the gods, and that *anything whatever* that is loved by the gods will be pious. If this weren’t the case, then the love of the gods would not be the explanation for why things are pious. This, of course, is the same thinking that lies behind Divine Command Theory, the view that whatever a divine being commands is a moral act, since the sole explanation of moral goodness is divine will. This kind of thinking results in counterintuitive scenarios like Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac. Human sacrifice, we think, is wrong for reasons of its own, reasons having to do with the kind of action that it is, and those reasons cannot be overridden by an act of will, divine or otherwise. God’s commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac does not change the fundamental nature of the act itself, and if it is wrong because of what kind of act it is, then it will not be the sort of action that a morally perfect being *would* command. But if it is true that gods cannot make any arbitrary thing holy or good by an act of will, that some things are holy or good independently of divine will, then TV is false.

In the third elenchos (9e4 - 11b5), famously, Euthyphro tries to have it both ways, driven by entrenchment in the conventional voluntarism of Homer and Hesiod, on the one hand, but on the other, presumably, by the same intuition that makes us balk over the suggestion that what makes human sacrifice wrong is merely divine preference. He claims that pious actions are made pious through divine love, but also claims that the gods love things because they are antecedently pious (10d1-8). There could be no independently pious things if his definition were true, so in claiming that gods love things as a consequence of the antecedent piety of those things, he contradicts himself. Socrates suggests that Euthyphro abandon the former view, equivalent to TV, possibly implying Socrates’ own acceptance of the latter one.<sup>58</sup>

Euthyphro’s contractual model of piety suffers from the same flaw as his third definition: it is voluntaristic. What makes a gift appropriate, and

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<sup>58</sup>Cohen (1971, p. 13); Irwin (1977, pp. 48, 62); Irwin (1995, p. 25); McPherran (1996, pp. 45-47); Reeve (1989, p. 66); Taylor (1926, pp. 151-152); Versényi (1982, pp. 84-86); Vlastos (1991, p. 165).

hence pious, is not *what the gift is*, but whether or not it is required by the gods. We do not give the gods what is *kecharismenos* by giving them things that benefit them; we give things that are *kecharismenos* by giving them things they require, request, or command that we give them. We do not need to understand why they want them; it need not even be the case that they want them for any particular reason. The only thing that matters is that we give them what they say we ought to give them. In this way, just as theological voluntarism denies that things are pious because of how they are, but claims they are pious solely in virtue of being willed or loved, contractual piety denies that things are appropriate gifts because of how they are, and claims they are appropriate solely in virtue of being required or requested. Just as voluntarism makes no essential reference to the particular natures of putatively pious things in explaining why they are pious, contractual piety makes no essential reference to the particular natures of exchanged things in explaining why they are exchanged.<sup>59</sup>

In childhood, I had a penurious and parsimonious aunt, who every Christmas, would give me and my siblings plastic trifles from the corner drugstore as presents: pez-dispensers, random animal figurines, hand-propellers, and the like. Her gifts were a running joke in the family, one she attempted to let herself in on by announcing, every year as we were perfunctorily opening her gifts, “Hey, it’s the thought that counts!”

Ironically, my aunt’s gifts required no thought of any kind whatsoever. She quite literally picked trinkets off the shelf at random. Of course, what she meant was: “it is not important *what* I got you; the important thing is that I met my familial obligation. I remembered that I owed you *something* in light of the occasion, and so here is that something.” This is Euthyphronic giving. There is no connection between the content of the gift and the reason it is given; there is no reflection on what kind of gift I might like or benefit from. There is merely a standing obligation to offer a gift, and any object will do.

Of course, not just any object would do for Euthyphro’s gods. As a matter of contingent fact, they expected some things, like thighbones, and not others. But as I noted above, it is precisely in demanding that we do things that have no independent motivation that gods could effectively test obedience. If the only reason I give a thighbone is that it has been commanded I do so, my giving is a purer display of devotion and obedience than otherwise. So the fact that there were conventions specifying that some things were acceptable sacrifices and not others doesn’t undermine the general point I am making here, which is that in principle, it could have been anything that the gods demanded. The thighbones, like my aunt’s

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<sup>59</sup>Note how arbitrary sacrifice and arbitrary command merge in the Abraham example: sacrifice whatever I require, god says, even if it is your son, and pay no mind to whether you would be committing murder in doing so, since whatever I command is moral.

Christmas presents, were just symbols of the obligation these gifts were meant to discharge.<sup>60</sup>

## 7 Reduction Revisted

Recall that the motivating problem of this paper is how to explain why the last elenchos ends by reducing Euthyphro's last answer to his third answer, when there is not a clear logical or discursive path to that outcome through the intervening discussion. Given everything we've said above, we can see that the last answer, once clarified by the comparison to commerce, *is* the third answer all over again. The entire apparatus of Greek ritual, understood as contractual reciprocity, is an instantiation of the general thinking that characterizes theological voluntarism, and accordingly suffers from the same fault. In this way, the last elenchos is a completion of the third, and to recycle the reasoning used in the third by circling back to it wholly appropriate.

I grant that the terms *philos* and *theophilēs* are re-introduced into the dialogue at the end in a logically arbitrary way to push Euthyphro toward agreeing that the *kecharismenos*, as he has now defined it, is just the *philos*. But in doing so, Plato means us to see that *kecharismenos*, understood as Euthyphronic contract-reciprocity, is doctrinally equivalent to voluntarism, and though it is not on the surface of the text, this is the reason the elenchos ends in the identification of these two answers.

So at last we understand the real problem with Euthyphro's last definition. It is not that it resembles commerce or (merely) that it is asymmetrical with respect to beneficial effect. The problem Plato wants us to see here is that piety as contractual giving is theological voluntarism in practice: it makes the content of what is given irrelevant to explaining the virtuousness of the giving, just as voluntarism makes the content of what is done irrelevant to the virtuousness of the action.

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<sup>60</sup>Though I stress the arbitrariness of the gods here, I remarked earlier that there seems to be one respect in which they were not popularly seen as arbitrary, and that is in honoring *charis* obligations. I used this observation to explain why someone like Euthyphro would give in the spirit of *do ut des*: he believes the gods will reliably give him benefits if he sacrifices what they require. I want to stress here that the reliability of the gods in this respect, and their otherwise being capricious, are not inconsistent traits, but reinforce one another. The more arbitrary the command or obligatory request, the more devotion is displayed by the acolyte who complies. It is unsurprising that a voluntaristic framework would have it that arbitrary gods would reward those who obey their arbitrary commands, and reward them with a non-arbitrary regularity. The regularity ensures compliance – few would bother if it were a roll of the dice – and broad compliance reinforces, despite their arbitrariness, that the dictates of the gods are the supreme cosmic law. It is necessary for voluntaristic gods to be consistent in this one respect in order to legitimize their otherwise capricious behavior. The unchecked power to reward and punish others will allow one a wide berth for one's own behavior.

Here is Roslyn Weiss expressing a nascent version of the view:<sup>61</sup>

By linking this late definition with the earlier ones, Socrates makes clear that Euthyphro's late and early definitions of holiness share a common essence: what is at the heart of holiness conceived as prayer and sacrifice is at the heart of all conceptions of holiness that appeal to what is 'dear to the gods'. What is at the heart of holiness conceived as prayer and sacrifice, and by extension of holiness conceived generally as τὸ θεοφιλέζ, is the tit-for-tat of the commercial venture. Socrates' characterization of prayer and sacrifice as an ἐμπορικὴ τέχνη, an art of commerce, is a characterization that fits all conceptions of holiness in which holiness is but the means for advancing one's own interests by satisfying the 'interests' of the gods. (Weiss, 1994, 266)

## 7.1 Euthyphro's List

A final piece of the puzzle is what role to ascribe to Euthyphro's list:

**Socrates:** What could those gifts from us to the gods be, Euthyphro?

**Euthyphro:** What else, do you think, than honor (*timē*), reverence (*gera*), and what I mentioned just now, *charis*?

**Socrates:** The pious is then, Euthyphro, *kecharismenon*, but not beneficial or dear to them? (15a7-8)

A common approach to explaining this list is to take it to represent an alternative kind of gift, a kind that does not entail the benefit of the gods. Weiss, for example, agreeing with my analysis of the comparison to commerce, claims "Euthyphro insists that the gods gain no advantage from dealing with men (15a5-6); what they get is honor, (*timē*, *gera*) and good will (*charis*) (15a9-10)" (1986, 450). Since Euthyphro has made clear he retains his view that that humans cannot benefit gods, he must have some other kind of gift in mind, and Socrates wishes to elicit this by asking him to say what those gifts are. The list is thus an alternative path down which the elenchos can travel in exploring some version of the same definition Euthyphro gives at 14b.<sup>62</sup> I claim the list is Socrates' attempt to elicit from

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<sup>61</sup>Though she falls into the commerce trap that so many others do. Also see Adam (1890, xxi), who takes the hint from Plato that the last definition is nothing more than the third, but doesn't wrestle with any of the difficulties of the elenchos that have led me to my position. In fact, Adam may hold this view solely on the basis of the semantic resemblance between *kecharismena* and *theophilēs*. See note 14.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. Benson (2000, 64, n.26); McPherran (1985, 291-292); McPherran (2003, 22); Weiss (1986, 450-451).



Euthyphro the nature of the gifts that fall under *tunchanousin deomenoi*, things the gods happen to require or request.<sup>63</sup>

Though the list contains three items, I do not think they are of equal weight. As I have noted several times, Euthyphro's declaration that he has mentioned *charis* before can only be a reference to the *kecharismena* of his original definition, since that is the only previous use of a *charis* word in the dialogue. But since that was offered as the main component of his definition, it would be strange for him to mate it equally to two other notions here. Rather, I think *timē* and *gera* are meant to fall under *charis*: Euthyphro is giving examples – an approach he is partial to – of things he has all along taken to fall under his 14b definition. Socrates also seems to take this to be Euthyphro's meaning, since he treats, in his next question, the single term *kecharismenon* as equivalent to the entire list Euthyphro has just given.<sup>64</sup>

If this is true, the list does not convey new information, since we already knew that Euthyphro thinks piety is defined by being *kecharismena*. But the list provides an explicit link between the result of the commerce discussion, that pious gifts are not beneficial, and the original wording of Euthyphro's definition. In reminding us that these non-beneficial gifts are what he has meant all along by *charis*, Euthyphro confirms that his notion of religious reciprocity is contractual and voluntaristic. This is further supported by reflecting on the nature of the two examples of Euthyphronic *charis* on the list: honor and reverence.

I have argued that Euthyphro's conception of pious giving is voluntaristic insofar as it fails to link *what the gift is* to the *explanation for why it is given*, and his conception thus makes it the case that any arbitrary gift could be pious, so long as its offering was required by the gods. Any attempt to claim that the gods will only demand certain kinds of things, and hence not any arbitrary thing could satisfy those demands, would shift the explanation for why those things are appropriate gifts onto some feature of the things themselves, thereby linking *what the gift is* to *why it was given*. But this would just be Euthyphro's dilemma all over again: one cannot say that what makes a gift appropriate is just that the gods demand it, and also say that their demands are limited to certain kinds of things as a matter of principle.

Euthyphro's list suggests that anything we give to the gods falls under the heads of honor or reverence, and these will be what satisfy the gods' demands and are thus proper *charis*. So what makes offering a thighbone a form of honor? It is surely not *that it is a thighbone*; it is rather that *it is offered so as to honor*. And this is true of many forms of honor even outside ancient religion: we use medals, plaques, certificates, inscriptions, ribbons, and trophies to bestow honor, but apart from the meaning that social convention attaches to these as forms of honor, there is nothing about

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<sup>63</sup>Cf. Walker (1984, 110).

<sup>64</sup>Reading Euthyphro's *καί* as epexegetical would yield this result.

the items themselves that explains why giving them confers honor on the recipient. And the social conventions prescribing that these, and not other things, confer honor, might have easily gone another way.<sup>65</sup> There is a loose connection at best between what we use to show honor or reverence, and why we aim to honor or revere. A medal or ribbon can be used to honor scholarly excellence, athletic achievement, moral courage, bravery in battle, artistic innovation, and a host of other accomplishments equally. It is important that these laurels be intended so as to honor, but less important what the laurels are (they might even be literal laurels). In this way we see the gap between content and explanation inherent in Euthyphro's contractual voluntarism exemplified in the specific kinds of things he thinks are proper *charis*. The intent to meet one's obligation to give, or the intent to honor, do not attach themselves necessarily to any particular type of gift or honorific token.

## 7.2 The Complete Elenchos

With all the pieces now in place, let me lay out my complete position on how the last elenchos of *Euthyphro* should be read, and what its inference structure is.

I begin by noting a few general points. First, let us recall that Euthyphro does not intend to define piety by means of so specific a formula as *what is pleasing to the gods in ritual*. Rather, his *kecharismena* means something broader and, at the beginning of the elenchos, much less precise, something along the lines of *reciprocally appropriate*. Second, the clarification section is Socrates' attempt to elicit from Euthyphro a more precise formula, some explanation of what makes things reciprocally appropriate. The clarification section establishes that *kecharismena* will describe things correctly given to the gods and correctly requested from them (I omit the latter hereafter, as Socrates does, because there is no controversy about this part of the definition.) The last moment of clarification also establishes that correctly given things are things needed, but as we have noted, there is an important ambiguity in this language, and this is where my analysis departs from most others.

So from the beginning:

### Definition

1. Piety is knowledge of how to say and do what is *kecharismena* in prayer and sacrifice. (14a11-14b7)

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<sup>65</sup>I don't want to suggest that conventions can't imbue things with genuine value. It is a matter of geological contingency that we have attached value to gold (the contingency being the combination of its luster and its scarcity). But notice that the properties of the gold, its scarcity and luster, *explain* why we have attached value to it. We would not have attached such value to it if gold were as common as iron, or as dull as lead.

### Clarification

2. To sacrifice is to give to the gods. (14c8)
3. To pray is to request from the gods. (14c8-9)
- ∴ 4. So, piety is knowledge of how to request from and give to the gods. (14d1-2, from 1, 2, and 3).
5. To request correctly is to ask for things we need (*deometha*) from them. (14d9-10)
6. To give correctly is to give to the gods things they need (*deomenoi*) from us. (14e1-2)

Here we encounter the two senses of *deomai*. Let us label one sense *deomai<sub>R</sub>* and the other *deomai<sub>B</sub>*. *Deomai<sub>R</sub>* describes what is requested, required, or demanded, while *deomai<sub>B</sub>* describes a need that, when met, confers a benefit, one governed by AP. Note that since correct giving is an attempt specify what *kecharismena* means, and *deomai* is an attempt to specify what it means to give correctly, the two senses of *deomai* will generate two specifications of *kecharismena*, which I will also use the subscripts *R* and *B* to name.

I have argued that the comparison to commerce and the list (originally comprising steps 7-9) are collectively an attempt to determine which sense of *deomai* Euthyphro intends. Accordingly, these moments of the elenchos are best seen as extensions of clarification, rather than as establishing points of their own. To review, Socrates floats the idea that piety is like commerce, and Euthyphro unenthusiastically agrees. But when Socrates invokes the symmetry of benefit to specify the respect in which he thinks piety might be like commerce, Euthyphro is incredulous that anyone would have such a view. Since he rejects that we symmetrically give the gods things like they give us (things *deometha<sub>B</sub>*), Socrates wants to know what we give them as alternatives. Euthyphro's list represents his idea of *charis*, giving things that are not beneficial, but conform to the gods' demands and oblige them to do favors for us. These things are honor and reverence. Dismabiguation thus shows that Euthyphro does not think piety is *kecharismena<sub>B</sub>*; rather his model, *kecharismena<sub>R</sub>*, is contractual. This also shows us that, while he was not aware of it at the time, Euthyphro meant, and Socrates suspected he meant, *deomai<sub>R</sub>* back at premise 6.

Let us re-name these moments of the elenchos 'Disambiguation', and re-cast the three premises they produce as follows. Because we are extracting information from them that is not entirely explicit in the text, some paraphrasing will be necessary:

## Disambiguation

7. To give what is *deomenoi* is either to give what is *deomenoi<sub>R</sub>* or what is *deomenoi<sub>B</sub>* (from 14e6-15a6, 15a9-10).
8. It is not to give what is *deomenoi<sub>B</sub>*. (from 15a1-2, with support from 15b1-2).
- ∴ 9. So, to give correctly is to give to the gods things they *deomenoi<sub>R</sub>* from us (from 6, 7, and 8.)

The next step in the argument is reduction, but let's add a sub-argument to bridge the shift in language between the beginning of the elenchos and the reduction:

## Reduction

- 9.1 Piety is to give to the gods things they *deomenoi<sub>R</sub>* from us (from 1-9).
- 9.2 To give to the gods things they *deomenoi<sub>R</sub>* from us is to do what is *kecharismena<sub>R</sub>* (from 5b1-2, where Socrates subsumes Euthyphro's non-beneficial gifts under the head of his original term).
10. What is *kecharismena<sub>R</sub>* is also dear to the gods (*to philon tois theois*). (15b1-3).
- ∴ 11. So, the pious is what is dear to the gods (15b4-5, from 9.1, 9.2, and 10).
12. The pious and the god-loved (*to theophilēs*) are not the same, but different (15c1-2).
  - This is the conclusion of the third elenchos.
- ∴ 13. Then either what was agreed before (in the third elenchos) was wrong or this is. (15c8-9)

In our initial breakdown, we noted that premise 10 seems undermotivated: Euthyphro concedes this point when prompted, but it doesn't emerge from the preceding discussion. Given the load it bears in reaching the conclusion, this makes Euthyphro's concession seem uncomfortably convenient. But we now know that Plato treats these notions – *kecharismena<sub>R</sub>* and *to theophilēs* – as equivalent, not just because Euthyphro concedes their equivalence, but on account of their similar explanatory deficiency. I have suggested that there is a suppressed argument linking *kecharismena<sub>R</sub>* and *to theophilēs*. On this reading, Euthyphro's definition emerges from clarification and disambiguation in a form that makes it possible to see what it

has in common with theological voluntarism. Though Plato is not explicit about the reasoning behind this link, he nonetheless makes the link an indispensable part of the argument, and Euthyphro's definition is refuted by contradiction.

Lest we be bothered that such an important philosophical moment is inexplicit and left to the reader as an exercise, it is worth noting that the third elenchos has a similar structure. The philosophical lesson most scholars extract from that discussion, that things are either moral due to properties had by the things themselves, or they are merely arbitrarily labelled moral by gods, is never articulated in the dialogue itself. The closest Socrates comes is to say that:

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 (11a6-b1).

But this itself is an affect or consequence of accepting one side of the dilemma (the non-voluntaristic side), and Socrates never makes clear what is philosophically at stake in the dilemma itself. Socrates elicits a contradiction from Euthyphro without ever making him reflect on the inconsistency of his two lemmas. In fact, much like in the reduction and premise 10, Euthyphro merely concedes upon prompt that the gods love the pious because it is pious (10d4–8) – after having defined piety in an incompatible way – without ever being led there by argument. The reflective reader knows that Euthyphro should not concede what he does at 10d, but Socrates never explains this to him.<sup>66</sup> The third and last elenchos thus share another link, this time in the form of structural similarity. Just as the reflective reader who understands what is at issue can spot Euthyphro's mistake when he makes it in the third elenchos, the same reader, armed with the awareness gleaned from reflection on reduction, can spot the problem with Euthyphro's last definition. In each elenchos, there is one argument, explicit in the text, intended for Euthyphro, and a second implicit one, intended for the reader who understands the theoretical implications of it all in a way that Euthyphro cannot.

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<sup>66</sup>The mechanism by which Socrates produces a contradiction relies on the introduction of a third lemma, derived from the discussion of seeing, carrying, and leading (10a5–10c5), resulting in an inconsistent triad. My reading of this passage is closest to Cohen (1971), but also see Brown (1964), Geach (1966, 375–380) Hall (1968), Sharvy (1972).

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