

# Socratic Wisdom in the *Euthyphro*

PHI 200  
(Erion)

“I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that *I do not think I know what I do not know.*”

Plato's *Apology* 21d,  
emphasis added

The *Euthyphro* begins as Socrates and Euthyphro (who is prosecuting his father for murder) meet at the entrance to the law courts, and Socrates asks, “What is holiness?”

**Euthyphro's 1<sup>st</sup> Answer:** holiness is prosecuting wrongdoers (including, for instance, murderers) [5e]

**Socrates Replies:** but there are many things that are holy besides prosecuting wrongdoers; we need to find “the essential form of holiness that makes all holy actions holy” [6d]

**Euthyphro's 2<sup>nd</sup> Answer:** what is pleasing to the gods is holy [7a]

**Socrates Replies:** the gods often disagree about whether an action is holy or unholy, so the same action can be both holy and unholy at the same time [7b-8b]

**Euthyphro's 3<sup>rd</sup> Answer:** what is pleasing to *all* of the gods is holy, and all of the gods would be pleased by the prosecution of a murderer [8b]

**Socrates Replies:** but *why* do the gods love the things they love [10a-11b]?

**Euthyphro's 4<sup>th</sup> Answer:** holiness is the part of justice which has to do with service to the gods [12d-e]

**Socrates Replies:** how could the gods ever be improved by the service of mere mortals [13a-d]? what can they gain from our service?

**Euthyphro's 5<sup>th</sup> Answer:** service to the gods is “the science of sacrifice and prayer” [14c]

**Socrates Replies:** this is a sort of “commerce with the gods,” but why would the gods bother to engage in commerce with mere mortals [14c-15a]?

**Euthyphro's 6<sup>th</sup> Answer:** the gods don't benefit from our sacrifice and prayer, but they are pleased by it [15a-b]

**Socrates Replies:** this merely repeats Euthyphro's third answer, and so we must ask again, *why* do the gods love the things that they love [15c]?

At this point, an embarrassed Euthyphro abandons Socrates; the “straight thinker” has been shown to be otherwise, while Socrates laments that he still does not understand the nature of holiness.