Phil Religion: Plato on God and Goodness (*Euthyphro*)

**Socrates’ question**

What is it for an action to be pious?

**Euthyphro’s first try**

E: I say that the pious is to do what I am doing now, to prosecute the wrongdoer, be it about murder or temple robbery or anything else, whether the wrongdoer is your father or your mother or anyone else; not to prosecute is impious. (5e)

But this doesn’t answer the question!

S: ... You agree, however, that there are many other pious actions.

E: There are.

S: Bear in mind then that I did not bid you tell me one or two of the many pious actions but that form itself that makes all pious actions pious, for you agreed that all impious actions are impious and all pious actions pious through one form, or don’t you remember?

E: I do.

S: Tell me then what this form itself is, so that I may look upon it, and using it as a model, say that any action of yours or another's that is of that kind is pious, and if it is not that it is not. (6d–e)

**Euthyphro’s second try**

E: Well then, what is dear to the gods is pious, what is not is impious. (6e)

Problem: the gods disagree with one another. If what some of the gods love is pious, and what some of the gods love hate is impious, then some things would be both pious and impious.

**Euthyphro’s third try**

E: I would certainly say that the pious is what all the gods love, and the opposite, what all the gods hate, is the impious. (9e)

• **Euthyphro’s Identity.** To be pious is to be loved by all the gods.

**Socrates’ argument against Euthyphro’s Identity**

S: Is [the pious] loved because it is pious, or for some other reason?

E: For no other reason.

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

E: Apparently.
S: And because it is loved by the gods it is being loved and is dear to the gods?

E: Of course.

S: The god-beloved is then not the same as the pious, Euthyphro, nor the pious the same as the god-beloved, as you say it is, but one differs from the other.

E: How so, Socrates?

S: Because we agree that the pious is beloved for the reason that it is pious, but it is not pious because it is loved. Is that not so?

E: Yes.

S: And that the god-beloved, on the other hand, is so because it is loved by the gods, by the very fact of being loved, but it is not loved because it is god-beloved.

E: True.

S: But if the god-beloved and the pious were the same, my dear Euthyphro, and the pious were loved because it was pious, then the god-beloved would be loved because it was god-beloved, and if the god-beloved was god-beloved because it was loved by the gods, then the pious would also be pious because it was loved by the gods; but now you see that they are in opposite cases as being altogether different from each other: the one is of a nature to be loved because it is loved, the other is loved because it is of a nature to be loved. 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. (10c–11b)

**Argument Outline**

Let $A$ be some pious action.

1. $A$ is loved by all the gods *because* all the gods love $A$.
2. All the gods love $A$ *because* $A$ is pious.
3. So it’s not the case that: $A$ is pious *because* all the gods love $A$. (from 2)
4. So to be pious is *not the same thing as* to be loved by all the gods. (from 1 and 3)