

Phil 31 / E-101: Saints, Heretics and Atheists – An Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion



Saints, Heretics, and Atheists

- Welcome to Phil 31/E-101: Saints, Heretics and Atheists!

Saints, Heretics, and Atheists

- **What is this course about?**
- We might say: Big Themes, Great Works, Historical Context

Saints, Heretics, and Atheists

- Big themes:
- Some obvious: Does God exist? What's the nature of God? What about evil? Can we be good without God or religion?
- Some less obvious: Would immortality be a good thing? What is deism? Is religion useful?
- Supplemented by optional, contemporary readings.

Saints, Heretics, and Atheists

- Great works:
- We will be reading some of the greatest, most enduring works in the history of Western thought, works, for example, by Plato, Aquinas, Marguerite Porette, Al-Ghazali, Pascal, Hume, Spinoza, Nietzsche, and William James.
- Our readings are typically short but difficult; they repay careful study.
- Not all of these works will stick with you, but I promise some will, different ones for different people.

Saints, Heretics, and Atheists

- Historical context:
- We'll read our main works in chronological order.
- They range from the Fifth Century BCE to the Twentieth Century.
- Why an historical approach?
 - More interesting
 - To understand the present, you need to understand the past.

Saints, Heretics, and Atheists

- Full course details available online
- A few course details at end of lecture
- I want to jump right in and give you a sense of what a regular class will be like.

Lecture 1: What is Piety?



Introduction



Introduction

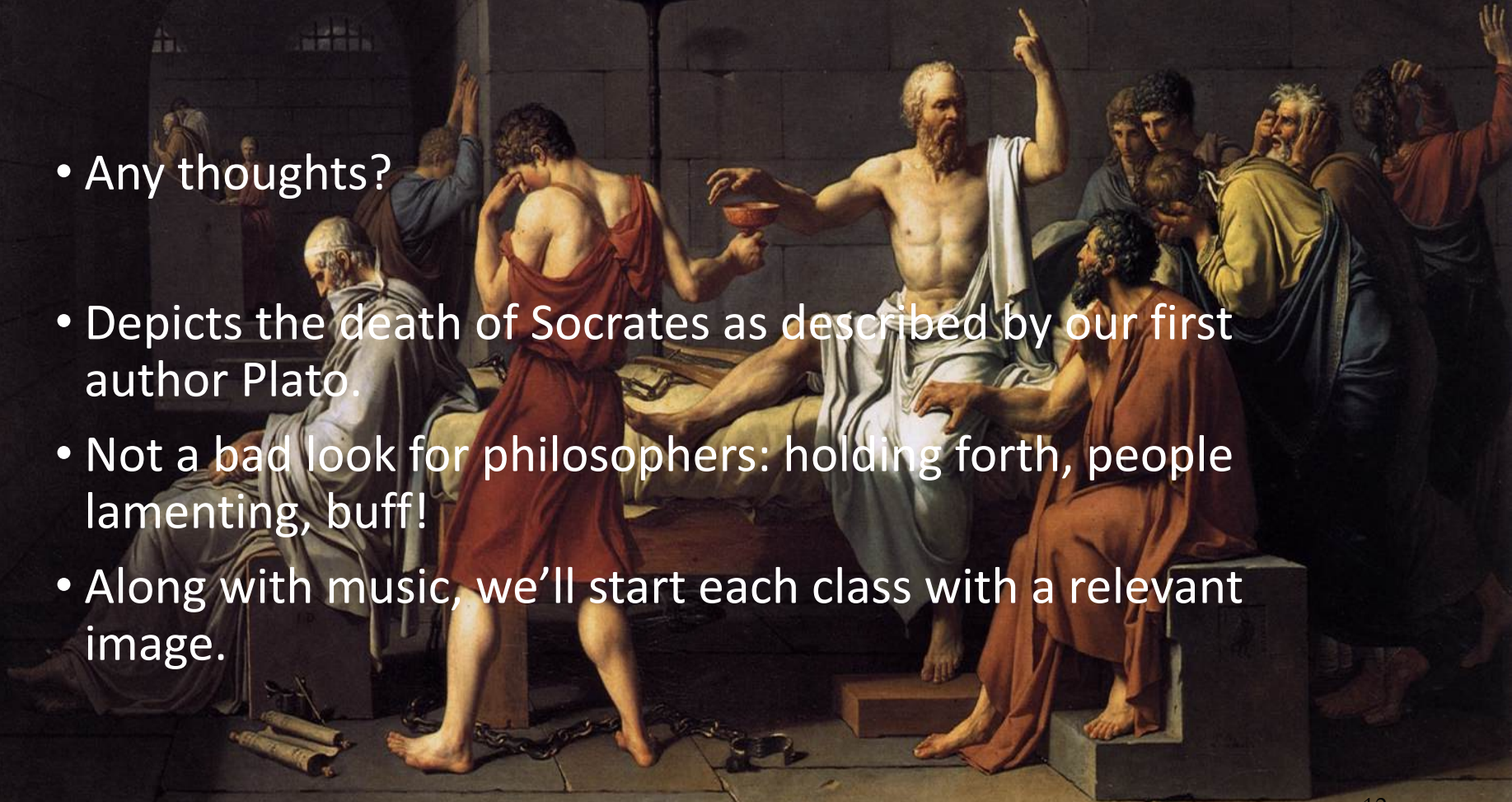
- Today's music is from the 5th century BCE, the Golden Age of Greece
 - A sham: first musical notation is from two centuries later
 - I'll try to have clips playing at the beginning of class from each period

Introduction

- Today's image is of Jacques Louis David's *The Death of Socrates* (1781).

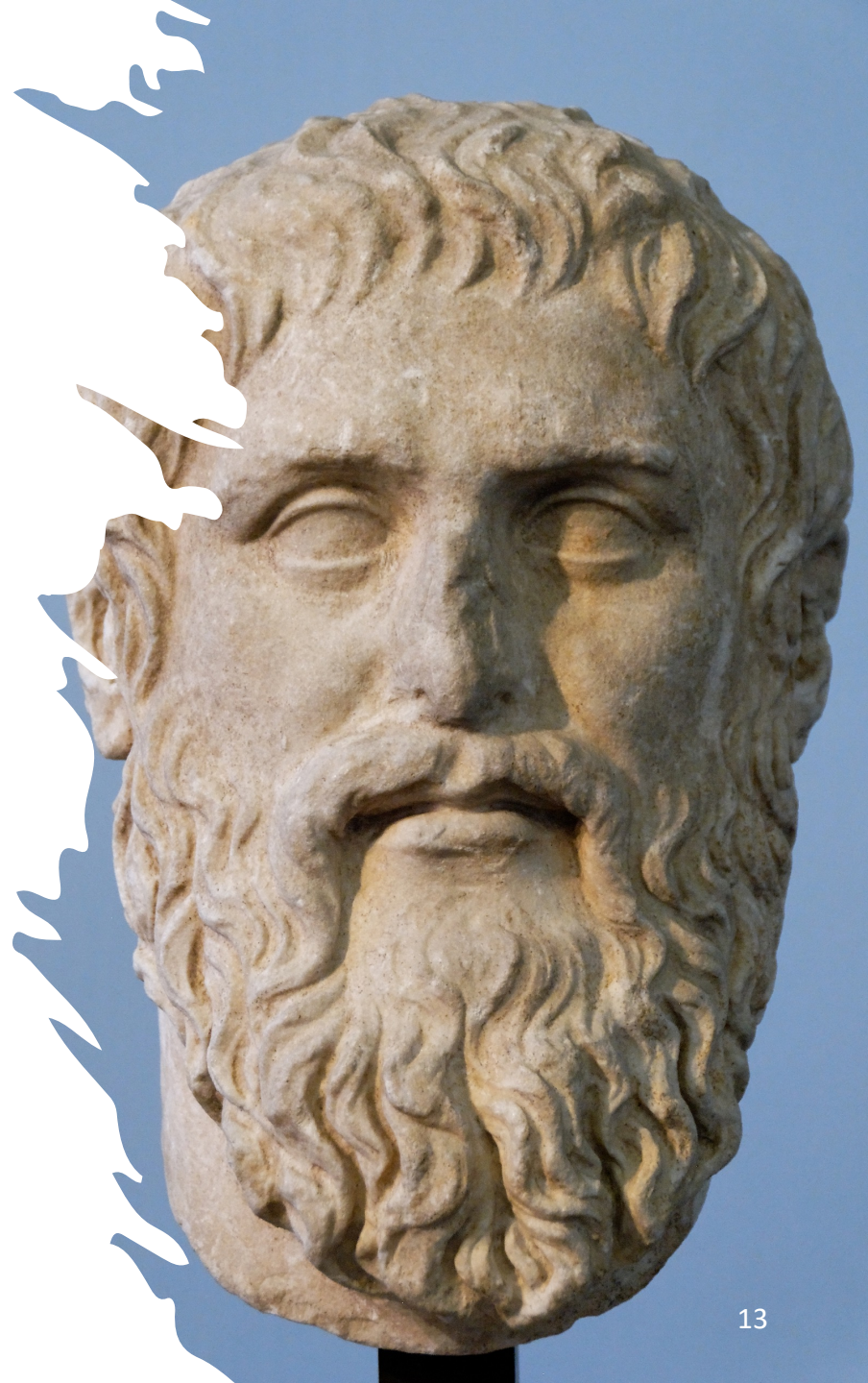
Introduction

- Any thoughts?
- Depicts the death of Socrates as described by our first author Plato.
- Not a bad look for philosophers: holding forth, people lamenting, buff!
- Along with music, we'll start each class with a relevant image.



Introduction

- Our first work is Plato's *Euthyphro*.
- Plato was born in Athens, Greece.
- He lived ca. 427-347 BCE.



Introduction

- The *Euthyphro* has two main characters: Socrates and Euthyphro.



NOVA IOANNIS SERRANI
INTERPRETATIO, PERPETVIS EIVSDEM
notis illustrata, quibus methodus & series
disputationis commonstratur.

VTHYPHRONIS ΤΑ ΤΟΥ ΕΥΘΥΦΡΟ-
dialogi persona, νος Διγλοβρου παρόσωπα,
EVTHYPHRO, SOCRATES. ΕΥΘΥΦΡΩΝ, ΣΟΚΡΑΤΗΣ.

Qui causam a ju-
re in forum venis-
set, aut se impetrat
à Melito accusari. Ita
opportune sternitur
via ad disputationem
de RELIGIONE.
Prudenter etiam Euthyphronis personam
quasi in Platone, sum-
mam quandam Reli-
gionis cognitionem
venditatis, & quasi
iam ante adstantis (e-
rat enim scolaris) sicut
ex frequentibus &
Craylo apparet) ut
in illustra persona &
Religionis decenda
munus gereret, vanas
suorum hominum de
Religione opiniones
commodius retineret.



QUID NAM hoc no-
ui est, Socrates, te relicti
Lycci spatii, in hac Re-
gis porticu nunc versari?
non enim tibi aliqua est
lis apud Regem, ut mi-
hi, s o c r. Non enim quidem Athenien-
ses, Euthyphro, litem, sed accusationem
vocat. **E V T H.** Quid ais? aliquis, ut vi-
detur, te accusat. non enim illum quidem sta-
tuerim, te alium accusare. s o. Neminè fanè
accuso. **E V.** Tene ergo alius? s o. Alius.
E V. Quisnam ille est? s o. Ne ipse quidè il-
lum bene novi, Euthyphro. iuuenis enim
quidam & incognitus mihi videtur. cum
autem (ut arbitror) Melitum vocant. est ve-
rò gente Pitthenis, siquem in animo habes
Melitum Pitthensem, hirsitis capillis,
non ita promissa barba: at naso praedun-
co. **E V.** Non subit, Socrates. Verùm ec-
quam aduersus te accusationem ille insti-
tuit? s o c. **E** Equam rogas? haud ignobi-
lem illam, mea quidem sententia, neq; ho-
minis ignavi. iuuenè enim tantà rē perse-
xile, haud certè parui & humilis ingenii est.
Nam affirmat se nosse & qua ratione iu-
uentus corrumpatur, & quinam illi sint
qui eam corrumpant. Sapiens quippe vi-
detur, meaque inficitia animaduërta, quasi
suos ego a quales corrumpere, prodit me
accusaturus apud ipsam ciuitatem, tan-
quam apud matrem: atque adeo, opinor,
Reipublice administranda rationem ab eo
quod contentaneum est arcescit primor-
dio. Contentaneum enim est primam de
ipsis iuuenibus curam suscipere, ut quam-
optimi euadant: quemadmodum decet
agricolam nouellarum plantarum primam
curam gerere, tum verò de cæteris cu-
tandis rationes inire. Et certè, Meliti hoc



ΙΝΕΩΤΕΡΟΝ ὡς ἄ-
κρατες γέροντες, ὅτι σὺ τὰς ἐν
Λυκίᾳ καταλιπὼν διαπε-
ρας, ἐνθάδε νῦν διατελεῖς,
καί πῶς ἔλασιν εὐαίεως
γάρ πῦρ σὺ δίκην πῖς ἔσται τυγχάνῃ τῶς
Βασίλειᾳ, ὡς ἀρ' ἐμοί. **Σ Ο.** Οὔτοι δὲ Ἀθηναῖοί γε,
ὡ Εὐθύφρων, δίκην αὐτὴν κελεύουσιν, ἀλλὰ γρη-
φίῳ Εὐ. Τί φησὶ γρηφίῳ σε πῖς, ὡς εἴκοι, γέγρα-
πται, ὅ γάρ ποτε ἐκεῖνο γρηφίῳ γινώσκω, ὡς σὺ γε
ἔπρεσθ. **Σ Ο.** Οὐ γὰρ ἔν. **Εὐ.** Ἀλλὰ σε ἄλλος, **Σ Ο.**
Παῖν γε, **Εὐ.** Τίς ἔσθις; **Σ Ο.** Οὐδ' αὐτὸς παῖν
ταί γρηφίῳ, ὡ Εὐθύφρων, τ' ἀνδρα. νέος γάρ τις
μοι φαίνεται καὶ ἀγνώστ. ὀνομάζουσι γάρ ποτε αὐτὸν,
(ὡς ἐγὼ μὲν) Μελίτων. ἐστὶ δὲ δῆμον Πιτθαιεὺς· εἰ
ἂν ἐν γὰρ ἔχῃ Πιτθῆα Μελίτων, ὅτι τετάρτου τε-
ρα, καὶ ἔπαυ δὲ γῆρον, ἔπαυ γῆρον δὲ. **Εὐ.** Οὐκ
ἔνοα ὡ Σόκράτες, ἀλλὰ δὴ τίνα γρηφίῳ σε
γρηφίῳ; **Σ Ο.** Ἦν ἴνα: ὅτι ἀγνώστ. ἐμοί γε δο-
κεί. ὅ γὰρ, νέος ὄντα, ποσῶν τῶν ἔργων ἐγνω-
ναι, καὶ φάλλον ἔστιν. ἐκεῖνος γὰρ, ὡς φησὶ, οἷδε τίνα
ἔσθιν οἱ νέοι Διγλοβροί, καὶ τίνας οἱ Διγλοβροί
ἔσθιν αὐτοί. καὶ κινῶν δὲ σφόδρα πῖς ἔστι καὶ τ'
ἐμὴν ἀμαθίαν κελεύουσιν, ὡς Διγλοβροί εἰσὶν τοῖς
ἡλικιά ται αὐτῶν ἔργων κατηρηθῶσιν μου, ὡς ἀρ'
τῶς μὲν τῶν, τῶς τῶν πολλῶν καὶ φαίνεται μοι
τῶν πολλῶν μόνος ἀρχεσθαι ὄντως. ὄντως γάρ
ἔστι τῶν νέων τῶν μελιτῶν, ὅπως ἔσθιν
ὅτι αἰετοί, ὡς ἀρ' ἡραρῶν ἀγαθὸν τῶν νέων φυτῶν
εἰκὸς τῶν ὄντων μελιτῶν, καὶ δὲ τῶν καὶ
τῶν ἄλλων καὶ δὴ καὶ Μελίτων ἴσως τῶν γῆρον

b Aduersiorum suo-
rum contra se accusa-
tione commemoratis
Socrates sine quo mo-
re, nullo aut persona-
rum aut rerum odio,
rem simpliciter &
modeste proponens,
ita agit ut illorum
suorum aduersiorum
improbis & factis
perspiciatur: qui ni-
mirum pietatis & pu-
blice utilitatis pietatis
nam hoc uno elabo-
rarent, ut vanas suas
cupiditates exerce-
rent. Ita primam
apud est de religione,
Homini quod edunt religio,
nomen ad sua fecer-
it, ut bonos oppri-
munt quemadmodum
quom est in
certo. Socrates in-
uoluit.

Introduction

- Socrates, ca. 470-399 BCE.
- Plato's teacher
- Father of western philosophy
- Brought to trial on charges of introducing strange gods and corrupting the youth
- Executed by Athens



Introduction

- Euthyphro is a professional priest and “talking head” on matters of ritual and piety.
- On his way to prosecute his father for murder.

Introduction

- Euthyphro: The victim was a dependent of mine, and when we were farming in Naxos he was a servant of ours. He killed one of our household slaves in drunken anger, so my father bound him hand and foot and threw him in a ditch, then sent a man here to inquire from the priest what should be done. During that time he gave no thought or care to the bound man, as being a killer, and it was no matter if he died, which he did. Hunger and cold and his bonds caused his death before the messenger came back from the seer. (4c-d)

Introduction

- By standards of the time, it is not clear that the father did anything wrong.
- Socrates (and Plato) think that prosecuting your own father for murder is morally complex.
- It is not clear that it is appropriate for a son to prosecute his father.

Introduction

- Socrates suggests that if Euthyphro is so certain, he must have a deep and exact knowledge of piety.
- Socrates therefore asks him to explain what piety and impiety are.
- In the dialogue, a number of different accounts of piety are offered by Euthyphro and examined by Socrates.

Examples of Piety



Examples of Piety

- Euthyphro begins by suggesting that pious and impious things should simply be identified with the sorts of things that he and the gods do and refrain from doing.
- Socrates is characteristically unsatisfied; he was hoping for an account, definition, or *logos* of piety, not just examples.

Examples of Piety

- Socrates: Remember that I did not ask you to give me two or three examples of piety, but to explain the general idea which makes all pious things to be pious. Do you not remember that there was one idea that made the impious impious, and the pious pious
- Euthyphro: I do.
- Socrates: Tell me what is the nature of that idea ... a standard ... by which I may measure actions ... and then I shall be able to say that such and such an action is pious, such another impious. (6d)

Examples of Piety

- **Any thoughts?**
- A small point:
- One could challenge Socrates's demand (consider, for example, games).
- Nonetheless, Euthyphro's extreme confidence might suggest that he thinks there are clear and unambiguous criteria separating the pious from the impious.

What Is Dear to the Gods



What Is Dear to the Gods

- Euthyphro: Well then, what is dear to the gods is pious, what is not is impious. (7a)
- **Any thoughts?**
- Earlier, Socrates confirmed that Euthyphro believes in the Greek gods and all they do.
- But this presents a difficulty: what if the gods disagree?

What Is Dear to the Gods

- Note, there is a contemporary corollary: what is pious can't just be what religion says, because there are lots of religions and they don't always agree.
- We'll return later to the question of religious diversity, but let's note here three big views among believers.

What Is Dear to the Gods

- *Exclusivists* maintain that there is one correct religion, and that those who believe and act in accordance with that religion will alone enjoy its benefits and rewards.

What Is Dear to the Gods

- *Inclusivists* maintain that there is one true religion, and generally one set of revealed or sacred texts, but nonetheless maintain that even those who do not share belief in the true religion may enjoy its benefits and rewards, often in large by pursuing a strictly false religion in a way that resonates with the moral dictates of the true religion (e.g. “the virtuous pagan”).

What Is Dear to the Gods

- Pluralists maintain that many different religions may be striving after the same truth, and that none has a complete and full grasp of the truth.
- This non-relativist view is often illustrated with an elephant metaphor: different religions are touching different parts of one larger truth.

What All Gods Love



What All Gods Love

- After some prompting, Euthyphro settles on a third definition: "the pious is what all the gods love, and the opposite, what all the gods hate, is the impious" (9e).
- **How is that different?**

What All Gods Love

- Euthyphro's third attempt directly responds to the previous objection: piety concerns only those things that all religions agree upon.
- An intuitive move: you might think that what religions disagree about is less important than what they agree about.
- This is the view behind the idea of "core religious values".

What All Gods Love

- It is at this point that Socrates raises the most famous objection of the entire dialogue:

“Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?” (10a).

- This question is really an objection: **what is the thought?**

What All Gods Love

- Granting that the gods love the pious, Socrates thinks the order of explanation is important:
 - (i) Do the gods recognize pious things and love them *because* they are pious, or
 - (ii) Are these things pious simply *because* the gods love them (the reasons why they love them being unimportant).

What All Gods Love

- Plato implies that we face a dilemma:
 - (ii) If, on the one hand, we say that things are pious simply because the gods love them, then it looks like what is pious or impious depends on the arbitrary whim of the gods.
 - (i) If, on the other hand, things are pious independently of whether or not the gods like them, then the fact that the gods love pious things seems incidental to defining or understanding piety.

What All Gods Love

- Many philosophers have seen this dilemma as an absolutely devastating critique of “natural law” or “divine command” theories of piety.
- I think Plato’s dilemma is challenging and thought provoking but far from conclusive.

What All Gods Love

- In fact, I think a theist could plausibly embrace either horn of Euthyphro's dilemma:
- Perhaps some arbitrary choices do give you a reason; perhaps the choices of a wholly good creator give you reasons (compare to you mother's choices).
- Perhaps God has reasons for his decrees but all we know is that God loves the things he decrees.

Piety Is a Part of Justice



Piety is a Part of Justice

- Euthyphro tries to say next how just actions and pious actions are related; he proposes that:

“the godly and pious is the part of the just that is concerned with the care of the gods, while that concerned with the care of men is the remaining part of justice” (12e).

- **What’s going on here?**

Piety is a Part of Justice

- The main idea is something like this:
- *Justice* covers a lot of things – things that have to do with both humans and gods.
- *Piety* is concerned only with justice as it relates to the gods (and not as it relates to people).
- While all pious things are just, not all just things are pious.

Piety is a Part of Justice

- Although the dialogue takes some bends and twists, two big points get made.
- (i) If piety involves doing something for the gods, it can't be something they need or depend on.
- (ii) Indeed, Socrates argues that it is hard to see how the gods can benefit from our actions at all.

Piety is a Part of Justice

- Ironically, Socrates's point is less obvious with respect to the Greek gods, who were notoriously vain and resentful, and might well be expected to benefit from human adoration and compliance.
- But it might be more difficult to see how the God of Abrahamic religions, for example, could benefit or be influenced by our actions.



Piety is a Part of Justice

- Incidentally, this will become a huge issue during the Reformation.
- Thinkers like Luther and Calvin will be influenced on this point by Augustine (up next).
- And Augustine, as we'll see, was massively influenced by ... Plato.



The Pious Is What Is Dear to the Gods




The Pious is What Is Dear to the Gods

- Under pressure from Socrates, Euthyphro offers one last definition:
- The pious is “of all things most dear” to the gods (15a)
- **What has gone wrong here?**
- We are right back where we started: The pious is what is dear to the gods.

The Pious is What Is Dear to the Gods

- Socrates is a philosopher, so he says, okay, let's start again from the beginning.
- Euthyphro is not a philosopher so ... he walks away.

A cartoon illustration of two students walking. On the left, a girl with blonde curly hair, wearing a white shirt and blue pants, carries a red backpack. She has a surprised expression. On the right, a boy with dark hair, wearing a blue shirt and blue pants, carries a green backpack. A large speech bubble originates from the girl, containing the text: "What is the Point in Walking all this Way, if We end UP Where We Started?".

What is the Point
in Walking all this
Way, if We end
UP Where We Started?

The Pious is What Is Dear to the Gods

- **A fair warning:** Don't be surprised if we end up at the end of the semester just like Socrates – namely, back where we started, hopefully a little wiser, but no more, and perhaps even less, certain than when we started.

A Few Course Details



A Few Course Details

- A list of recommended book editions is offered on the syllabus.
- Those editions will be on reserve at Robbins and Lamont.
- The syllabus also includes links to online editions.
- Lecture slides will posted.
- A textbook is not required but is available.

A Few Course Details

- We will have a mid-term and final exam.
- Ten writing opportunities: choose four, two before midterm.
- There are different kinds of writing opportunities: exegetical; argumentative.
- Rubrics are available; a good idea to consult before writing.

A Few Course Details

- Phil 31 students – office hours
 - Finlay: Thursdays, 10:30-12:30 (Emerson 107)
 - Jeff: Thursdays, 3:00-5:00 (Emerson 202)
- E-101 students – discussion board
- Topics should be easy to engage with and discuss

A Few Course Details

- More details are available on the course web site and syllabus.
- Please let me know if you have any questions.
- Until next class!

Lecture 1: What is Piety? – The End

