

## LESSONS FROM *EUTHYPHRO* 10 A–11 B

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### I

IT is often held that there are facts about how we should think, feel, and act in response to things. If people are suffering, for example, then perhaps it is a fact that (all else equal) we should *believe* that they are suffering, *be upset* that they are suffering, and *make it no longer the case* that they are suffering. Facts of this sort—which I will call **normative facts**—are interesting, if they exist. For it is unclear how such facts would stand in relation to the relatively uncontroversial *non*-normative facts about us, especially the ones about how we *actually do* or *conditionally would* think, feel, and act in response to things. One possible view is that there are no normative facts at all.<sup>1</sup> Another possible view is that, although there are some normative facts, all of them are somehow *grounded in* or *explained by* some of the non-normative facts. On this view, which I will call **naturalism**, there are some normative facts, but they are not among the most fundamental facts there are.<sup>2</sup> A third (and final) view, which I will call **primitivism**, is that at least some of the normative facts are neither grounded in nor explained by *any* of the non-normative facts. On this view, at least some of the normative facts *are* among the most fundamental facts there are.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Recent defenders of this view include J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London, 1977), ch. 1; A. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Cambridge, 1990), ch. 2; and R. Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, 2006), ch. 6.

<sup>2</sup> See D. Lewis, 'Dispositional Theories of Value', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. 63 (1989), 113–37; P. Railton, *Facts, Values, and Norms: Essays toward a Morality of Consequence* (Cambridge, 2003), chs. 1–2; and S. Street, 'Constructivism about Reasons', *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 3 (2008), 207–45.

<sup>3</sup> See D. Sosa, 'Pathetic Ethics', in B. Leiter (ed.), *Objectivity in Law and Morals*

Some of the most vivid expressions of primitivism in the history of philosophy can be found, I think, in a handful of passages from Plato's *Republic* (507 A–509 C), *Phaedo* (96 A–99 D), and *Timaeus* (29 E–31 A).<sup>4</sup> If these passages are any indication, then Plato commits himself not only to primitivism, but also to *an extremely radical version* of primitivism—one that places normative facts, and *only* normative facts, at the very foundation of both the metaphysical order and the physical universe. This dramatic embrace of primitivism goes hand in hand, as it should, with an equally dramatic rejection of naturalism. One of Plato's favourite targets, from dialogue to dialogue, is a version of naturalism that he associates with the celebrated sophist Protagoras of Abdera. As Plato characterizes it, this version of naturalism—which I will call **constructivism**—holds (very roughly) that the facts about how we should respond to things are grounded in *our best beliefs* about how we should respond to things.<sup>5</sup> My aim in this paper is to show that (and how) the famous argument of *Euthyphro* 10 A–11 B, which I will call **the Euthyphro Argument**, can be seen to play an important role in Plato's broader anti-constructivist project. As I interpret it, this argument is best understood as an attack on the very idea that beliefs could ground facts in the way the constructivist thinks they could.

(Cambridge, 2001), 287–329; D. Enoch, 'An Outline of an Argument for Robust Metanormative Realism', *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 2 (2007), 21–50; and R. Wedgwood, *The Nature of Normativity* (Oxford, 2007), pt. II. Note that primitivism as I define it is consistent with the common view that the normative facts 'supervene on' the non-normative facts in roughly the following sense: *there can be no change in the normative facts if there is no change in the non-normative facts*. For, as is now widely understood, facts of one kind might supervene on facts of another kind even if the former are not grounded in or explained by the latter. The mathematical facts are not grounded in or explained by the geological facts, for example, even though the former supervene on the latter. For more on this point, and for further examples of supervenience without grounding, see J. Kim, *Supervenience and Mind: Selected Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, 1993), 167; J. Schaffer, 'On What Grounds What' ['Grounds'], in D. J. Chalmers, D. Manley, and R. Wasserman (eds.), *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology* (Oxford, 2009), 347–83 at 364; and G. Rosen, 'Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction' ['Dependence'], in B. Hale and A. Hoffmann (eds.), *Modality: Metaphysics, Logic, and Epistemology* (Oxford, 2010), 109–35 at 113–14.

<sup>4</sup> These passages are not my primary focus in this paper, and I will not attempt to defend my interpretation of them in any detail here. But it strikes me as uncontroversial that, in each of them, Plato strongly suggests that goodness itself (or the form of the good) is the ultimate determinant of the overall structure of things.

<sup>5</sup> This is an oversimplification, of course, but I think it captures the core of the allegedly Protagorean view that comes into question at *Theaet.* 170 A–179 B; *Crat.* 383 A–390 E; and *Euthyd.* 285 D–288 A.

My interpretation is unorthodox, however, and in the course of defending it I will need to challenge some long-standing and well-entrenched convictions about the structure, function, and merit of the argument. I will need to claim, in particular, that the argument *does not* (i) purport to attack any ‘divine command’ theory of anything; (ii) depend on the intuition that some things are (or could be) either god-loved but not pious or pious but not god-loved; (iii) hinge on the false thought that loving a thing is a way of altering it, or the questionable thought that your loving something is different from that thing’s being loved by you; (iv) allow the impermissible substitution of co-referring terms within non-extensional contexts; (v) leave undefended the crucial premiss that the gods love the pious thing because it is pious; (vi) equivocate on the term ‘because’; or (vii) fail to establish exactly what it is supposed to establish.

Here is how I will proceed. First I will provide a detailed reconstruction of the argument. Then I will try to show, on the basis of this reconstruction, that the argument can withstand many (if not all) of the most powerful lines of criticism that have been (and might be) advanced against it. Finally I will offer an assessment of the argument’s dialectical impact on constructivism in particular and naturalism in general. At each step along the way I hope to make it increasingly clear that this argument is more resilient than its critics have acknowledged, and that the naturalists among us must either learn its lessons or face defeat.

## II

Like many other arguments from the early Platonic dialogues, the Euthyphro Argument is couched in a distinctively Socratic framework of enquiry.<sup>6</sup> In the *Euthyphro* this framework consists (in part) of two broadly metaphysical assumptions (5 C 8–D 5, 6 D 9–E 1): the first is that, for every pious act, there is some ‘single form’ (*μίαν τινα ἰδέαν*, 5 D 3–5, 6 D 11; or *εἶδος*, 6 D 11) ‘in virtue of which’ (*ᾧ*, 6 D 11) that act is pious; and the second is that this pious-making form—that is, ‘the Pious’ (*τὸ ὅσιον*, 5 D 2)—is ‘the same in every [pious] act’ (*ταὐτὸν ἐν πάσῃ πράξει*, 5 D 1–2). These two assumptions, generalized and combined, yield roughly the following view:

<sup>6</sup> Compare *La.* 190 B–199 E; *Chrm.* 163 D–175 A; and *Lys.* 211 D–222 B.

**One In Many:** For any (appropriate) property of being *F*, there is some single form *the F* such that, for any *x*, if *x* is *F*, then what makes it the case that *x* is *F* is that *the F* is in *x*.

If Socrates accepts something like One In Many, then what he seems to want from Euthyphro at the outset of the dialogue is an adequate answer to a particular question about the Pious. But what question is that? Socrates himself suggests that Euthyphro's considered answer to this question—the answer that the ensuing argument is designed to undermine—both has the correct form (6 E 10–7 A 3) and has the form of an identity claim (10 E 9–10, 10 D 12–13, and 15 C 1–2). So the question probably should be understood as enquiring after the *identity* of the Pious.<sup>7</sup> Euthyphro's answer to this question, as Socrates interprets it, is that the Pious (τὸ ὅσιον) and the God-Loved (τὸ θεοφιλέσ) are 'the same' (ταὐτόν) (10 E 9–10). Therefore the target of the Euthyphro Argument would appear to be:

**Euthyphro's Answer:** The Pious is the same as the God-Loved.

On this reading, then, the primary aim of the argument is to undermine the view that *what makes a thing pious* is the same as *what makes a thing god-loved*.

One especially interesting consequence of this, the targeted view, is that a thing is pious if and only if it is god-loved. So, granted that a thing is god-loved if and only if (all of)<sup>8</sup> the gods love it, another consequence of Euthyphro's Answer is:

**Coextension:** A thing is pious if and only if the gods love it.

At first glance Coextension might also seem to imply Euthyphro's Answer, since it is somewhat difficult to see how the Pious could be

<sup>7</sup> Sharvy and Judson acknowledge that the text is clear on this point, but still hold—apparently on grounds of charity—that the question should be understood as enquiring after the *definition* of the Pious, not the *identity* of the Pious. See R. Sharvy, 'Euthyphro 9 D–11 B: Analysis and Definition in Plato and Others' ['Analysis'], *Nous*, 6 (1972), 119–37 at 125–9 and 132–6; and L. Judson, 'Carried Away in the Euthyphro' ['Carried'], in D. Charles (ed.), *Definition in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford, 2010), 31–61 at 33 and 49–50. Their thought seems to be that, if we interpret the question as enquiring after the identity of the Pious, then we render the ensuing argument transparently unsound or unintelligible. Later (in sect. IV) I will try to show that they would be wrong to think this. But in the meantime I will just assume that the more straightforward reading of the text is the right one.

<sup>8</sup> In what follows I will take this parenthetical qualification to be understood.

different from the God-Loved if the things the gods love are all and only the pious ones. But apparently Socrates does not accept this further implication. For he launches into his argument *against* Euthyphro’s Answer *right after implicitly conceding* Coextension (9 c 2–D 5; cf. 11 B 1–5).<sup>9</sup> Indeed, his very first move is to point out that Coextension, if true, prompts yet another question—one that poses an important challenge to Euthyphro’s Answer:

**The Priority Question:** Is the pious thing<sup>10</sup> pious because (ὁτι) the gods love it, or do the gods love it because it is pious? (10 A 2–3)

In asking this question Socrates seems to be assuming that Coextension (if true) requires an explanation, and that any such explanation (if successful) will show how the truth of one side of the biconditional supports the truth of the other side.<sup>11</sup> In his view, then, there are only two available answers to the Priority Question, and they are:

<sup>9</sup> Here I concur with S. M. Cohen, ‘Socrates on the Definition of Piety: *Euthyphro* 10 A–11 B’ [‘Definition’], in G. Vlastos (ed.), *The Philosophy of Socrates* (Notre Dame, 1971), 158–76 at 160–1; M. McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park, Penn., 1996), 45–6; C. Shields, *Classical Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction* (London, 2003), 39; T. Irwin, ‘Morality and Immutability: A Platonic Contribution to Meta-Ethics’ [‘Morality’], in R. W. Sharples (ed.), *Perspectives on Greek Philosophy* (Burlington, Vt., 2003), 19–37 at 21–3; and T. Irwin, ‘Socrates and Euthyphro: The Argument and its Revival’ [‘Revival’], in L. Judson and V. Karasmanis (eds.), *Remembering Socrates: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford, 2006), 58–71 at 60–5. As Shields points out, Coextension should probably be understood, in this context at least, as a *necessary* claim rather than a *contingent* one; for it seems clear that neither Euthyphro nor Socrates would want to accept that it is only by accident that the things the gods love are all and only the pious ones. Thus the primary dispute here seems not to turn on whether there could have been some non-pious things that the gods love, or some pious things that the gods do not love, since Euthyphro and Socrates seem to agree in advance that there could not have been any such things.

<sup>10</sup> On the decision to translate τὸ ὅσιον here as ‘the pious thing’ rather than ‘the Pious’ see Sharvy, ‘Analysis’, 121–2; D. Wolfsdorf, ‘*Euthyphro* 10 A 2–11 B 1: A Study in Platonic Metaphysics and its Reception since 1960’ [‘Study’], *Apeiron*, 38 (2005), 1–71 at 5–6; and E. Welch, ‘Self-Predication in Plato’s *Euthyphro*?’, *Apeiron*, 41 (2008), 193–210.

<sup>11</sup> This assumption is vulnerable, I take it, since someone might want to insist that Coextension either cannot be explained, or cannot be explained in either of the two suggested ways. But to insist on this is to reject both of the proposed explanations, and—as I will argue later, in sect. v—Socrates ends up giving us some fairly strong reasons not to go that far.

**Subject Priority:** The pious thing is pious because the gods love it.

**Object Priority:** The gods love the pious thing because it is pious.

But at first Euthyphro seems not to understand the significance of the Priority Question (10 A 4). He seems uncertain, in particular, about the meaning of the term ‘because’ as Socrates is using it here. To clarify things a bit (10 A 5) Socrates draws an extended comparison between the relation of *loving* on the one hand and the relations of *carrying*, *leading*, and *seeing* on the other. Evidently the relata of the latter three relations are in each case the *patient* of an activity (or an *affected* thing) and the *agent* of that activity (or an *affecting* thing). In each case of carrying, for example, there is ‘a carried thing and a carrying thing’ (*φερόμενον και φέρον*) (10 A 5–8). Likewise for each case of leading or seeing. (I will call relations of this sort **active relations**.) Socrates then asks Euthyphro ‘whether the carried thing is a carried thing because it is carried [by the carrying thing], or because of something else’ (*πότερον τὸ φερόμενον διότι φέρεται φερόμενόν ἐστιν, ἢ δι’ ἄλλο τι*) (10 B 1–2).<sup>12</sup>

This time Euthyphro doesn’t hesitate. He immediately accepts both the suggested answer (10 B 3) and the generalized application of that answer to leading, seeing, and every other active relation (10 B 4–C 5). So he seems willing to concede, on the basis of Socrates’ clarified use of ‘because’, something like the following principle:

**Affection:** For any  $x$  and any  $y$ , if  $x$  affects  $y$ , then  $y$  is  $x$ -affected because  $x$  affects  $y$ .<sup>13</sup> (10 A 5–B 6; cf. 10 C 1–5)

Apparently Euthyphro is also willing to concede that the relation

<sup>12</sup> There is a familiar difficulty in understanding why Socrates shifts from pairing the passive participle with the active participle at 10 A 5–8 to pairing the passive participle with the third person singular passive at 10 B 1–C 4. The generally (but not universally) accepted solution, which I follow here, is due to Cohen, ‘Definition’, 161–5. For an illuminating recent discussion of the issue see Judson, ‘Carried’, 34–40.

<sup>13</sup> Here I have added a variable prefix to the passive term in order to reflect the syntax of *θεοφιλές*, and I have—again, following Cohen, ‘Definition’, 161–5—converted the passive ‘ $y$  is affected by  $x$ ’ to the active ‘ $x$  affects  $y$ ’. As will become clear in sect. III, my use of the term ‘affection’ here is not meant to import any substantive assumptions about the nature of active relations. It is meant only to pick up on the repeated *πάσχει/πάσχον* contrast drawn at 10 C 1–4.

signified by the ‘because’ in this principle is asymmetric. For when he first accepts that the seen thing is a seen thing because it is seen, he also accepts Socrates’ invitation to *infer from this* (*ἀρα*, 10 B 7) *that it is not the case* that the seen thing is seen because it is a seen thing (10 B 4–8).<sup>14</sup> Likewise for carrying, leading, and every other active relation. Thus Euthyphro also seems willing to accept:

**Asymmetry:** For any *p* and any *q*, if *p* because *q*, then it is not the case that *q* because *p*. (10 B 7–C 1)

Next Socrates gets Euthyphro to agree that the relation of loving, like the relations of carrying, leading, and seeing, is an *active* relation. That is, he gets Euthyphro to accept:

**Active Love:** Loving something is a way of affecting it. (10 C 6–8)

Once this premiss is secure, Socrates turns his attention back to the issue raised by the Priority Question. This time, though, he frames the issue rather differently. Earlier, when Euthyphro was asked whether ‘the carried thing is a carried thing because it is carried, or because of something else’ (10 B 1–2), he seemed to understand the question perfectly well (10 B 1–3); so now, in order to avoid any further misunderstanding, Socrates asks him whether ‘the pious thing is loved by all of the gods . . . because of this, that it is pious, or because of something else’ (*διὰ τοῦτο, ὅτι ὅσιόν ἐστω, ἢ δι’ ἄλλο τι*) (10 D 1–4). And here, as before, Euthyphro accepts the suggested answer without any hesitation at all. That is, he accepts:

**Object Priority:** The gods love the pious thing because it is pious. (10 D 4–5)

Then Socrates does something underhanded. He smuggles into the argument a crucial, final premiss that Euthyphro never explicitly

<sup>14</sup> Pace Cohen, ‘Definition’, 172–6, who struggles—unsuccessfully in my view—to downplay the inferential force of *ἀρα* both here and at 10 D 6–7. Cohen’s aim is charitable: he seeks to save the validity of the argument from what he takes to be Socrates’ repeated equivocation on the term ‘because’ from 10 B 1 to 11 B 1. (He is convinced, for example, that *διότι* at 10 B 1 and *ὅτι* at 10 D 4 must differ in meaning). If he is right, and Socrates does equivocate in this way, then this equivocation is harmless only if *ἀρα* at 10 B 7–C 4 and 10 D 6–7 has no inferential force. Later (in sect. v) I will try to show that in fact Socrates *does not* equivocate in this way. But for the time being I will just assume that the more straightforward reading of the text is the right one, and that *ἀρα*—as Socrates uses it here—has all the inferential force it usually has. (See below, n. 46.)

accepts. This premiss is crucial because it is the first to bring Euthyphro's Answer directly into the flow of the argument. It does this by allowing Socrates to substitute 'pious' for 'god-loved' (and vice versa) throughout the entire argument—on the assumption that Euthyphro's Answer is true. Here is the premiss, as I understand it:

**Substitution:** If the Pious is the same as the God-Loved, then (S<sub>1</sub>) if the god-loved thing is god-loved because the gods love it, then the *pious* thing is *pious* because the gods love it, and (S<sub>2</sub>) if the gods love the pious thing because it is pious, then the gods love the *god-loved* thing because it is *god-loved*. (10 E 9–11 A 3)

Once Socrates gets this last premiss in place, his work is basically done. For the conjunction of Affection and Active Love entails that *the god-loved thing is god-loved because the gods love it*; and Object Priority (trivially) entails that *the gods love the pious thing because it is pious*. Thus the antecedents of both S<sub>1</sub> and S<sub>2</sub> are verified, and we get—by using *modus ponens* on each—the following, simpler conditional: if the Pious is the same as the God-Loved, then (C<sub>1</sub>) the pious thing is pious because the gods love it, and (C<sub>2</sub>) the gods love the god-loved thing because it is god-loved. But now notice, first, that the conjunction of Asymmetry and Object Priority entails that (contrary to C<sub>1</sub>) *it is not the case that* the pious thing is pious because the gods love it; and second, that the conjunction of Affection, Asymmetry, and Active Love entails that (contrary to C<sub>2</sub>) *it is not the case that* the gods love the god-loved thing because it is god-loved. Thus both C<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>2</sub> are falsified, and we get—by using *modus tollens* on the second, simpler conditional—that the Pious is *not* the same as the God-Loved.

If this reading is right, then the central ambition of the Euthyphro Argument is fairly straightforward.<sup>15</sup> It purports to establish that, because the pious thing's being god-loved is grounded in the fact that the gods love it, Euthyphro's Answer is true only if the pious thing's being *pious* is *also* grounded in the fact that the gods love it. For if its being pious is not so grounded, then its being pious and its being god-loved are not grounded in the same thing, contrary to Euthyphro's Answer. Therefore, since Object Priority entails that

<sup>15</sup> In what follows I will frequently refer back to the argument's premisses under the labels I have given them here, and this can be disorienting. To help ease things a bit, I have reproduced my complete reconstruction of the argument below, in Appendix A.



the pious thing's being pious is *not* grounded in the fact that the gods love it, Object Priority also entails that Euthyphro's Answer is false.

But the underlying structure of the argument is significantly more complex than this. In fact it can be broken down into two (partially) distinct lines of inference, each of which is almost (but not quite) powerful enough to establish the desired conclusion on its own.<sup>16</sup> (Recall the two-part *modus tollens* at the argument's final stage, and the two different paths leading to it.) Each of these distinct lines of inference—which I will refer to as the argument's 'legs'—has a unique, twofold task:

**The Action Leg** extends from Affection, Asymmetry, Active Love, and S<sub>1</sub> of Substitution to the negation of C<sub>2</sub>. The first task of this leg is to establish that, according to Euthyphro's Answer, *it is not the case that* the gods love the pious thing because it is pious. The second task of this leg is to establish that Euthyphro's Answer is false, since Euthyphro's Answer entails the (independently rejected) claim that the gods love the god-loved thing because it is god-loved.

**The Object Leg** extends from Asymmetry, Object Priority, and S<sub>2</sub> of Substitution to the negation of C<sub>1</sub>. The first task of this leg is to establish that, according to Euthyphro's Answer, *it is not the case that* the god-loved thing is god-loved because the gods love it. The second task of this leg is to establish that Euthyphro's Answer is false, since Euthyphro's Answer entails the (independently rejected) claim that the pious thing is pious because the gods love it.

Neither leg can succeed in reaching the argument's ultimate conclusion without the help of at least one part of the other leg: the Action Leg can succeed only if the Object Leg has already established that *it is not the case that* the pious thing is pious because the gods love it; and the Object Leg can succeed only if the Action Leg has already established that *it is not the case that* the gods love

<sup>16</sup> Several other commentators have noticed that the argument has a certain two-part structure, but they disagree with each other, and with me, about how that structure should be characterized. See, in particular, L. E. Rose, 'A Note on the *Euthyphro* 10–11' ['Note'], *Phronesis*, 10 (1965), 149–50; Cohen, 'Definition', 169–75; and A. Kim, 'A Chiastic Contradiction at *Euthyphro* 9 E 1–11 B 5' ['Chiastic'], *Phronesis*, 49 (2004), 219–25.

the god-loved thing because it is god-loved. As we will see, this unusual feature of the argument makes it surprisingly resistant to at least one standard line of objection against it.

### III

The first premiss of the Euthyphro Argument (Affection) has come in for some very heavy criticism over the years.<sup>17</sup> But it is not entirely clear whether this criticism is warranted, because it is not entirely clear what Affection *means*. When Socrates first proposes it, he seems to have two distinct purposes in mind: his first (and more obvious) purpose is to persuade Euthyphro that it is true; his second (and less obvious) purpose is to acquaint Euthyphro with the meaning of the term ‘because’ as it appears in the Priority Question (10 A 1–3). Evidently he expects Euthyphro to be able to understand this question once the sense of Affection has been made clear to him (10 A 5). So it is safe to assume, I think, that the meaning of the term ‘because’ is supposed to be the same in both Affection and the Priority Question. What, then, is that meaning?

It is perhaps tempting at first to think that this is the ‘because’ of **material causation**, as in ‘the window breaks because the ball strikes it’ or ‘the water boils because the stove heats it’. But most of the commentators resist this temptation, as do I.<sup>18</sup> For the relata of material causation are (generally thought to be) both modally and temporally distinct: *modally* distinct in that their standing in this relation to each other is a metaphysically contingent matter;<sup>19</sup> and *temporally* distinct in that one of them (the cause) precedes the

<sup>17</sup> For a useful overview see Wolfsdorf, ‘Study’.

<sup>18</sup> See J. C. Hall, ‘Plato: *Euthyphro* 10 A 1–11 A 10’, *Philosophical Quarterly*, 18 (1968), 1–11 at 6–7; A. Anderson, ‘Socratic Reasoning in the *Euthyphro*’, *Review of Metaphysics*, 22 (1969), 461–81 at 475–6; T. D. Paxson, ‘Plato’s *Euthyphro*: 10 A to 11 B’, *Phronesis*, 17 (1972), 171–90 at 172; P. Thom, ‘*Euthyphro* 9 D–11 B’ [*Euthyphro*], *Philosophical Enquiry*, 1 (1978), 65–70 at 66; and Wolfsdorf, ‘Study’, 32–41. For some moderate dissent see C. Emlyn-Jones (trans. and comm.), *Plato: Euthyphro* [*Euthyphro*] (London, 1991), 101–2; and P. Dimas, ‘Euthyphro’s Thesis Revisited’ [‘Revisited’], *Phronesis*, 51 (2006), 1–28 at 9–10.

<sup>19</sup> Some philosophers deny that the relata of material causation are modally distinct. See e.g. S. Shoemaker, ‘Causal and Metaphysical Necessity’, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 79 (1998), 59–77. But theirs is a minority view. For a recent defence of the majority view see A. Sidelle, ‘On the Metaphysical Contingency of Laws of Nature’, in T. S. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (eds.), *Conceivability and Possibility* (Oxford, 2002), 309–36.

other (the effect). Obviously the relata mentioned in Affection are not distinct in either way: if A affects B, then A's affecting B does not *precede* B's being A-affected; and it is metaphysically necessary, not metaphysically contingent, that A affects B just in case B is A-affected. No doubt A's affecting B might itself be *a case of* material causation, but then the relata are (something like) *A's action* and *B's passion*, not *A's being the agent of B's passion* and *B's being the patient of A's action*. Since Socrates suggests that it is the latter, not the former, that stand in the relevant 'because' relation, we should doubt that this is the 'because' of material causation.

Better to suppose, I think, that this is the 'because' of **metaphysical ground**, as in 'this event is a pain because it is a nociception' or 'this conjunction is true because each of its conjuncts is true'. What I have in mind here is the asymmetric dependence relation we want to express when we say things of the form 'what makes it the case that [ . . . ] is that [ . . . ]' or 'it is in virtue of the fact that [ . . . ] that [ . . . ]' or 'the fact that [ . . . ] is prior in the order of explanation to the fact that [ . . . ]'.<sup>20</sup> The relata of this relation, unlike the relata of material causation, need not be modally distinct. One might hold, for example, that *the singleton set {Plato} exists in virtue of the fact that Plato exists* even though it is metaphysically necessary that *the singleton set {Plato} exists if and only if Plato exists*.<sup>21</sup> Or one might hold (as Socrates himself almost certainly does) that *what makes the act of serving the gods pious is that the Pious is in it* even though it is metaphysically necessary that *the act of serving the gods is pious if and only if the Pious is in it*. And obviously the relata of these relations are not *temporally* distinct. So this interpretation suits the relata mentioned in Affection far better than the previous interpretation does.

It is worth noting, however, that the relation of metaphysical ground—as I understand it—is not equivalent to the relation of *conceptual* ground.<sup>22</sup> Rather the relation of conceptual ground (again, as I understand it) is a *special instance* of the relation of metaphy-

<sup>20</sup> Compare Judson, 'Carried', 37–40. On the relation of metaphysical ground see K. Fine, 'The Question of Realism' ['Realism'], *Philosophers' Imprint*, 1 (2001), 1–30; Schaffer, 'Grounds'; and Rosen, 'Dependence'.

<sup>21</sup> See K. Fine, 'Essence and Modality', *Philosophical Perspectives*, 8 (1994), 1–16.

<sup>22</sup> Some commentators seem to use the phrase 'logical priority' to refer to the relation I call 'conceptual ground'. See e.g. J. H. Brown, 'The Logic of Euthyphro 10 A–11 B' ['Logic'], *Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (1964), 1–14 at 5; Hall, 'Plato', 6–9; Cohen, 'Definition', 167–8; and Thom, 'Euthyphro 9 D–11 B', 68.

sical ground—one that holds between *concepts* (or ways for things to be *thought about*) rather than *properties* (or ways for things to be). Clearly one need not hold that two different concepts stand in a relation of ground to each other in order to hold that *the properties these concepts pick out* stand in a relation of ground to each other.<sup>23</sup> One might deny, for example, that the concept of being in pain is grounded in the concept of being in a certain neural state, but accept that the *property* of being in pain is grounded in the *property* of being in a certain neural state. Or one might deny that the concept of being good is grounded in the concept of being pleasant, but accept that the *property* of being good is grounded in the *property* of being pleasant. So there is no compelling reason to assume in advance that Socrates' claims of metaphysical ground, if that is what they are, must be understood as claims of *conceptual* ground.<sup>24</sup>

On the current interpretation, then, Socrates wants to say that the *passive* fact of B's being A-affected is metaphysically grounded in the *active* fact of A's affecting B. His claim is that, for every case in which one thing stands in an active relation to something else, there are two distinct facts—one active and the other passive—such that the former is metaphysically more fundamental than the latter. For example, Jane's carrying her coat is *what makes it the case that* her coat is Jane-carried; her coat is Jane-carried *in virtue of the fact that* Jane is carrying it. (And so on.) If this is what Socrates is trying to say here, then his claim strikes me as both intelligible and interesting. But is it also true?

My own sense—though I do not wish to insist on this—is that it is not. For even if we set aside any lingering doubts we might have about the relation of metaphysical ground, I suspect that in the end we will not be able to discern any genuine difference between the fact that A affects B and the fact that B is A-affected. Certainly we can see a difference between activity and passivity at the level of description, and this is where we find an observable shift in focus from one to the other. But it seems to me, and to many of the early

<sup>23</sup> Here I am assuming that (non-empty) concepts pick out properties, and that the property of being F is grounded in the property of being G just in case, for any *x*, if *x* is F, then *x* is F in virtue of being G.

<sup>24</sup> Nor is there any compelling reason to assume, as Patzig appears to, that Euthyphro's Answer must be understood as a claim of conceptual *identity*. See G. Patzig, 'Logic in the *Euthyphro*', in S. M. Stern, A. Hourani, and V. Brown (eds.), *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition* (Columbia, SC, 1972), 293–305 at 208–9. Here I concur with Irwin, 'Revival', 62–5, and Wolfsdorf, 'Study', 13–24.

analytic commentators, that this is not a shift in focus from one *fact* to another *fact*, but a shift in focus from one *constituent of* a fact to *another constituent of the same fact*.<sup>25</sup> If this is right, then Affection is false, since (by Asymmetry) no fact can ground itself.

Thus I am inclined to think that the first premiss of the Euthyphro Argument is in serious trouble. Yet I am *not* inclined to think (for this reason, anyway) that *the argument itself* is in serious trouble. To see why not, remember that the argument is composed of two partially distinct legs, the Action Leg and the Object Leg, and remember that the Object Leg can succeed as long as the Action Leg establishes that *it is not the case that* the gods love the god-loved thing because it is god-loved. Now consider what happens if we replace Affection with the very claim that, in my view, justifies our abandonment of it:

**Identity:** For any  $x$  and any  $y$ , if  $x$  affects  $y$ , then the fact that  $x$  affects  $y$  is the same as the fact that  $y$  is  $x$ -affected.

If we combine Identity with Asymmetry, then—since Asymmetry entails that no fact can ground itself—we get the result that, for any  $x$  and any  $y$ , *it is not the case that*  $x$  affects  $y$  because  $y$  is  $x$ -affected. If we then combine this with Active Love—that is, the claim that loving something is a way of affecting it—we get the further result that *it is not the case that* the gods love the god-loved thing because it is god-loved. And that is *exactly* what the Object Leg needs from the Action Leg in order to succeed! Thus the Euthyphro Argument cannot be (decisively) defeated by this particular objection to its first premiss, since the argument can still rely on the Object Leg to get where it needs to go.

But at this point we might start to worry about Socrates' inference from the claim that *it is not the case that* the gods affect the god-affected thing because it is god-affected to the claim that *it is not the case that* the gods *love* the god-loved thing because it is god-loved. For this step is sound only if Active Love is true, and—as Peter Geach pointed out long ago—there is something very dubious about Active Love.<sup>26</sup> The problem, as it is traditionally

<sup>25</sup> See Brown, 'Logic', 12; Hall, 'Plato', 6; and Paxson, 'Plato's *Euthyphro*', 74.

<sup>26</sup> See P. Geach, 'Plato's *Euthyphro*: An Analysis and Commentary' ['Commentary'], *Monist*, 50 (1966), 369–82 at 378–9; Cohen, 'Definition', 163–4; and Wolfsdorf, 'Study', 41–4. For a solution to Geach's problem that differs significantly from mine see Judson, 'Carried', 37–40.

understood, is that the relation of loving (like the relation of seeing) does not seem to be active in the same sort of way that straightforwardly causal relations (such as the relation of carrying) are. Carrying something essentially involves altering it in some way—by changing its location, say. Loving (or seeing) something, on the other hand, does not essentially involve altering it in any way. So if we must assume that affecting something essentially involves altering it in some way, then we must also conclude that Active Love is false, since nothing is affected simply by being loved (or seen).

It is not clear that we must assume this, however. For if we accept that the ‘because’ in Affection signifies the relation of metaphysical ground, then we can deny that affecting something—in the way that matters for the overall argument—essentially involves altering it. We can grant that the loved thing, simply by being loved, is not being altered in any way at all. Yet at the same time we can insist that in this case too there is a passive fact, and that this passive fact, like every other passive fact, must be grounded in some active fact. After all, a passive fact that does not essentially involve alteration seems to stand in no less need of the relevant sort of explanation than a passive fact that does. Consider, for example, the case of Jane’s coat: if the fact that it is Jane-carried must be grounded in some further fact, then surely the fact that it is Jane-*forgotten* must *also* be grounded in some further fact; and if the fact that it is Jane-carried is grounded in the fact that Jane carries it, then presumably the fact that it is Jane-*forgotten* is grounded in the fact that Jane *forgets* it. Thus the difference between passive facts that essentially involve alteration and passive facts that don’t seems completely irrelevant in this context. Of course we might still want to deny that passive facts stand in need of this sort of explanation in the first place, but then the proper target of our criticism would be Affection, not Active Love (and not Identity either).

What we have seen so far, then, is that two fairly popular and well-established lines of attack on the Action Leg do not succeed in undermining the Euthyphro Argument. The force of the first can be absorbed, and the force of the second can be blunted. So let us shift our attention now to the Object Leg, and try to figure out whether it has its own problems, and, if so, whether those problems can be solved.

## IV

Like the Action Leg, the Object Leg relies on the premiss that I have been calling Substitution. According to this premiss, Euthyphro's Answer entails that it is permissible to substitute 'pious' for 'god-loved' and 'god-loved' for 'pious' at certain crucial points in the argument. But it is not entirely clear why Socrates thinks that Substitution is true, since he never gives Euthyphro anything like an argument for it. (In fact, he never even seeks Euthyphro's assent to it.) Still, the commentators generally agree—and I concur—that he thinks of it as a specific application of some more general principle.<sup>27</sup> As I see it this principle can be inferred more or less directly from the logical form of Substitution itself.<sup>28</sup>

**The Substitution Principle:** For any properties of being K and being M, if *the K* is the same as *the M*, then, if the gods love the K thing because it is K, then the gods love the M thing because it is M.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> But the commentators generally disagree about how this principle should be understood. According to Geach, it should be understood as 'the [false] Leibnizian principle that two expressions for the same thing must be mutually replaceable *salva veritate*'. See Geach, 'Commentary', 376–7. Cohen criticizes Geach for failing to notice that the relevant relation between the two expressions is not merely that of *coreference*, but also (and more importantly) that of *definition*. He amends Geach's proposal to read: 'two expressions, one of which is the definition of the other, must be mutually replaceable *salva veritate*'. See Cohen, 'Definition', 171–2. Sharvy agrees with Cohen's criticism of Geach, but rejects Cohen's own formulation on the grounds that it is insufficiently restricted. In its place he offers (roughly) the following formulation: if  $F =_{df} G$ , then (i) if  $p$  because  $x$  is F, then  $p$  because  $x$  is G, and (ii) if  $x$  is G because  $p$ , then  $x$  is F because  $p$ . See Sharvy, 'Analysis', 122–32, especially 126–7. Sharvy's formulation differs from Cohen's in that it *does not* entail the (allegedly false) converse principle: if  $F =_{df} G$ , then (i) if  $p$  because  $x$  is G, then  $p$  because  $x$  is F, and (ii) if  $x$  is F because  $p$ , then  $x$  is G because  $p$ . For an extended discussion and assessment of these and other proposals see J. I. Friedman, 'Plato's Euthyphro and Leibniz's Law' ['Law'], *Philosophia*, 12 (1982), 1–20. My own proposal is probably closest to Sharvy's, but it differs from his in at least one important respect. (See below, n. 29.) For some dissent on the question of whether Socrates is using any sort of substitution principle here see Judson, 'Carried', 46–9.

<sup>28</sup> Note that in what follows I will be ignoring clause S1 of Substitution, since that clause belongs to the Action Leg, and—as I have already suggested—it is the Object Leg that must carry the argument now.

<sup>29</sup> The most significant difference between this formulation and Sharvy's is that the antecedent in this formulation is an identity claim, not a definition. So this formulation, unlike Sharvy's, reflects what Socrates actually says in the text. (See above, n. 7.)

The standard objection to the Substitution Principle is somewhat technical in nature, and is usually expressed in terms that make good sense to readers familiar with Anglo-American philosophy of language, but not to anyone else.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the best way to appreciate its force is to consider a scenario in which a substitution of the relevant sort clearly seems to lead us astray. Suppose, for example, that what it is to be water is the same as what it is to be H<sub>2</sub>O,<sup>31</sup> and suppose that Thales believes that the world is made of water. Is it permissible to infer from this that Thales believes that the world is made of H<sub>2</sub>O? (Call this **the Thales Inference**.) Most philosophers—and nearly all of the *Euthyphro* commentators, including myself—are inclined to think not.<sup>32</sup> But many of these commentators are also inclined to think that the Substitution Principle authorizes inferences of (roughly) the same impermissible kind.<sup>33</sup> Suppose, for example, that what it is to hit middle C is the same as what it is to oscillate at 260 hertz, and that the gods love a particular sound because it hits middle C. Is it permissible to infer from this that the gods love that sound because it oscillates at 260 hertz? (Call this **the Tone Inference**.) According to the Substitution Principle, the answer is yes. So if the Tone Inference is of the same impermissible kind as the Thales Inference, as many commentators suspect, then apparently the Substitution Principle fails.

But are these two inferences really of the same impermissible kind? Probably the best way to answer this question would be to single out that feature of the Thales Inference which makes it invalid, and then figure out whether the Tone Inference also has that feature. Now I take it that what makes the Thales Inference invalid is that Thales, since he has no knowledge of modern chemistry,

<sup>30</sup> It is typically said, for example, that the Substitution Principle fails because it allows the substitution of co-referring terms within non-extensional contexts.

<sup>31</sup> Here and in what follows I will assume that, for any properties of being K and being M, *the K* is the same as *the M* just in case what it is to be K is the same as what it is to be M.

<sup>32</sup> See Brown, 'Logic', 3; Geach, 'Commentary', 376–7; Cohen, 'Definition', 172; Sharvy, 'Analysis', 123; Paxson, 'Plato's *Euthyphro*', 184–5; Friedman, 'Law', 9–10; Wolfsdorf, 'Study', 65; B. O'Sullivan, 'The *Euthyphro* Argument (9 D–11 B)' ['Argument'], *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 44 (2006), 657–75 at 667–8. For some recent attempts to defend the opposing view, in the context of contemporary philosophy of language, see N. Salmon, *Frege's Puzzle* (Atascadero, Calif., 1986), chs. 8–9, and S. Soames, *Beyond Rigidity: The Unfinished Semantic Agenda of Naming and Necessity* (Oxford, 2002), ch. 6.

<sup>33</sup> See, in particular, Geach, 'Commentary', 376–7; Friedman, 'Law', 14–17; Wolfsdorf, 'Study', 65–7; and O'Sullivan, 'Argument', 667–9.



couldn't possibly believe that the world is made of H<sub>2</sub>O. For even if water *just is* H<sub>2</sub>O, Thales does not *think of* water as H<sub>2</sub>O. And if Thales does not think of water as H<sub>2</sub>O, then presumably it is a mistake to infer from *Thales believes that the world is made of water* to *Thales believes that the world is made of H<sub>2</sub>O*. Let's say that an attitude report is **concept-sensitive** if its correctness depends—as the correctness of this last report appears to—on the way in which (or the *concept under* which) the subject of the attitude thinks of the object of the attitude. Then we can say that what makes the Thales Inference invalid is that it moves from one concept-sensitive attitude report to another without ensuring that the attitude's subject thinks of the attitude's object under the relevant concept.

The next question we need to ask, then, is whether the attitude reports in the Tone Inference, like the attitude reports in the Thales Inference, are concept-sensitive. And in order to answer this question, we need to get a better sense of what the term 'because' means as it is used in the Substitution Principle (and hence also in the Tone Inference). Many commentators seem to think that this is the 'because' of **rational basis**, as in 'she believes it will rain because the weatherman said it would' or 'I will do it because it's the right thing to do'.<sup>34</sup> As these examples suggest, the relation of rational basis holds between an agent's attitude (or action) and *the rationale on the basis of which* that agent takes that attitude (or action).<sup>35</sup> On this reading, then, the Substitution Principle holds that, if *the K* is the same as *the M*, then, if the gods love the K thing on the rationale that it is K, then the gods love the M thing on the rationale that it is M. Now notice that the correctness of these last two attitude reports *does* seem to depend on the concept under which the gods think of the things they love. For consider again the Tone Inference, and suppose—*per impossibile*, perhaps—that the gods do not realize that the sound they love oscillates at 260 hertz. In that case it would presumably be incorrect to say that the gods love this sound on the rationale that it oscillates at 260 hertz, since (by hypothesis)

<sup>34</sup> See, in particular, Geach, 'Commentary', 379–80; Cohen, 'Definition', 166–7 and 173–5; and Thom, 'Euthyphro 9 D–11 B', 68.

<sup>35</sup> Here I am assuming that the rational basis of an agent's attitude is roughly equivalent to what is sometimes called the agent's 'motivating reason' for taking that attitude. On the notion of a motivating reason see S. Darwall, 'Reasons, Motives, and the Demands of Morality', in S. Darwall, A. Gibbard, and P. Railton (eds.), *Moral Discourse and Practice: Some Philosophical Approaches* (New York, 1997), 305–12 at 307–10.

the gods do not think of it that way. Therefore, if the ‘because’ in the Substitution Principle is the ‘because’ of rational basis, then the attitude reports in the Tone Inference are concept-sensitive.

Does it follow from this that the Tone Inference, like the Thales Inference, is invalid? Maybe not. For recall that what makes the Thales Inference invalid is not simply that it moves from one concept-sensitive attitude report to another, but that it does so *without ensuring that the attitude’s subject thinks of the attitude’s object under the relevant concept*. Clearly Thales doesn’t think of water under the relevant concept, since he doesn’t think of water as H<sub>2</sub>O. But what about the gods? Is it equally clear that they don’t think of the sound they love as oscillating at 260 hertz? Is it even clear that this sort of ignorance is *possible* for them? A moment ago we supposed that it was, but only in order to establish that the Tone Inference *would* be invalid if the gods *did not* think of the sound they love as oscillating at 260 hertz. We did not seek to establish (nor did we in fact establish) that the gods do not—or even *possibly* do not—think of the sound they love as oscillating at 260 hertz. For all we know, then, the gods are **omniscient lovers** in the sense that, if they love something, then they think of it under every potentially relevant concept. Thus we have not yet established that the invalidating feature of the Thales Inference is also an invalidating feature of the Tone Inference.

But now let us suppose for the sake of discussion that, as Socrates himself seems to believe, the gods really are omniscient lovers.<sup>36</sup> Evidently that would be enough to guarantee that the invalidating feature of the Thales Inference is not an invalidating feature of the Tone Inference. Would it also be enough to guarantee that the Tone Inference is *valid*? Some commentators seem to think so,<sup>37</sup> but I am inclined to think not. For even if we know *that the gods know* that hitting middle C just is oscillating at 260 hertz, I doubt that we can safely infer from *the gods love this sound on the rationale that it hits middle C* to *the gods love this sound on the rationale that it oscillates at 260 hertz*. That is because there is an important difference between thinking of a sound as hitting middle C and thinking of a sound as oscillating at 260 hertz, and this difference in concept supports a corresponding difference in rationale. Suppose, for example, that the gods think of some *x* under the concept of being F, for some

<sup>36</sup> For some evidence that he believes this, see below, sect. v.

<sup>37</sup> See Thom, ‘*Euthyphro* 9 D–11 B’, 68, and Dimas, ‘Revisited’, 11 n. 8.

F. Then it would seem to be possible *but not necessary* for the gods to love  $x$  under the concept of being  $F$ —where *loving  $x$  under the concept of being  $F$*  is equivalent to *loving  $x$  on the rationale that it is  $F$* . If this is right, then even if the gods think of the sound they love under every potentially relevant concept, they still might not love it under every potentially relevant concept.<sup>38</sup> They might love it under the *qualitative* concept of hitting middle C, say, but not under the *quantitative* concept of oscillating at 260 hertz.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, if the ‘because’ in the Substitution Principle is the ‘because’ of rational basis, then I think we must conclude that the Tone Inference is invalid—even if the gods are omniscient lovers.

However, we need not agree that the ‘because’ in the Substitution Principle is the ‘because’ of rational basis. We could (and in my view should) interpret it instead as the ‘because’ of metaphysical ground. On this alternative reading, the Substitution Principle holds that, if *the K* is the same as *the M*, then, if what makes it the case that the gods love the K thing is that it is K, then what makes it the case that the gods love the M thing is that it is M. These last two attitude reports are different from the previous ones, because their correctness *does not* seem to depend on the concepts under which the gods think of (or love) the things they love. (That is, they *do not* seem to be concept-sensitive.) To see a bit more clearly why this is so, consider the following difference between the relation of rational basis and the relation of metaphysical ground: while the

<sup>38</sup> Of course one might simply insist that, if the gods love something, then they love it under every potentially relevant concept. But this strikes me as a peculiar and unappealing theological view. We humans have the capacity to be rationally discriminating in our love of things, and it is hard to see this capacity of ours as a deficiency of some kind. So what reason could there possibly be for Plato’s gods not to have it? Eric Brown has suggested to me (in correspondence) that such a reason might be found in *Republic* 5 (474 c 8–475 c 8), where Socrates repeatedly claims that, if you genuinely love a particular kind of thing—such as boys (474 d 1–475 a 2), wine (475 a 5–7), honour (475 a 9–b 2), or wisdom (475 b 8–c 4)—then you love *the whole* of it, not just *a part* of it (474 c 8–11, 475 b 4–7). But in this passage Socrates never denies that the genuine lover is rationally discriminating in her love of *kinds of thing* (indeed he implicitly accepts this); what he denies is that the genuine lover is rationally discriminating in her love of *things of that kind*. And the former sort of discrimination is enough, I think, to generate the problem I am exploring here.

<sup>39</sup> Consider, by comparison, our own hatred of being in pain. Some philosophers think that it is possible for there to be a neural state  $N$  such that, although we know that the property of being in pain is the same as the property of being in  $N$ , we hate this property under its *phenomenal* concept, but not under its *neural* concept. See N. Block and R. Stalnaker, ‘Conceptual Analysis, Dualism, and the Explanatory Gap’, *Philosophical Review*, 108 (1999), 1–46.

former holds between a subject's attitude and *the rationale on the basis of which that subject takes* that attitude, the latter holds (in the cases under discussion here) between a subject's attitude and *the way things independently are with respect to the object of* that attitude. This by itself would explain why attitude reports featuring the 'because' of rational basis are concept-sensitive, while attitude reports featuring the 'because' of metaphysical ground are not. For, as we have seen, the rationale on the basis of which a subject takes an attitude towards an object can vary with the concept under which the subject thinks of that object, but the way things independently are with respect to that object clearly cannot.<sup>40</sup>

Would the Tone Inference turn out to be valid if the 'because' in the Substitution Principle is the 'because' of metaphysical ground? Suppose once again that to hit middle C just is to oscillate at 260 hertz, and that what makes it the case that the gods love a certain sound is that it hits middle C. Would we then be entitled to infer that what makes it the case that the gods love that sound is that it oscillates at 260 hertz? I believe so. For in this scenario it is irrelevant whether the gods think of (or love) that sound under some particular concept or other. Considerations of that sort cannot undermine the inference, since—as we have just seen—the relation of metaphysical ground is not sensitive to the various concepts under which the gods think of, or love, the things they love. Therefore, if the 'because' in the Substitution Principle is the 'because' of metaphysical ground, then the Tone Inference is valid and the Substitution Principle is secure.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> This point becomes especially clear, I think, when we reflect on our everyday practice of explaining someone's actions by referring to the rational bases of his or her action-triggering attitudes. In attempting to explain Oedipus' actions, for example, we need to draw a distinction between the rationale that his *wife* is in the bedroom and the rationale that his *mother* is in the bedroom, since the first rationale, unlike the second, allows us to explain why Oedipus does what he does. But in this case, when his wife *just is* his mother, we *cannot* draw a distinction between the *fact* that his wife is in the bedroom and the *fact* that his mother is in the bedroom—since these are not different facts.

<sup>41</sup> From what I can tell, O'Sullivan would still want to resist this conclusion. For in his view, if I understand it correctly, the term 'because' is not the only one in the Substitution Principle that generates troublesome concept-sensitive attitude reports; the term 'love' does too. If he is right about this, then it would be impermissible to infer (for example) from *Lois loves Superman* and *Superman is the same person as Clark* to *Lois loves Clark*. But in this scenario it strikes me as far less reasonable to say that Lois doesn't love Clark than to say that Lois doesn't *realize that she does* love Clark. Of course this is not to deny that Lois loves Clark under one concept and not under another; it is only to deny that, if there is some concept under which

Still, some might doubt that this interpretation really solves the underlying problem. For there is a lingering worry that, although the relation of metaphysical ground does not depend on the concept under which the relevant subjects think of (or love) the relevant objects, it does depend in some other way on how the relevant objects are considered, presented, or described. Suppose again that what it is to be water is the same as what it is to be  $H_2O$ , and that bodies of water are potential sources of hydrogen in virtue of being bodies of  $H_2O$ . Does it follow from this that bodies of water are potential sources of hydrogen in virtue of being bodies of *water*? Some commentators doubt that it does, on the assumption that uninformative explanations, like this one, are not true.<sup>42</sup> If this assumption is correct, then there must be something wrong with the Substitution Principle. For (as I read it) the Substitution Principle authorizes just the sort of inference that this assumption would, if correct, rule out.

But I doubt that this assumption is correct. For it seems to confuse the narrower *semantic* aim of an explanation with its wider *cognitive* aim: while the semantic aim of an explanation is simply to be true, its cognitive aim is, among other things, to be informative. This means that an explanation might fail in its cognitive aim, but succeed in its semantic aim. Consider once again the claim that bodies of water are potential sources of hydrogen because they are bodies of water. Clearly this explanation fails in its cognitive aim, since it is uninformative. But I think it succeeds in its semantic aim. After all, what makes bodies of water potential sources of hydrogen is that they are bodies of  $H_2O$ , and to be a body of  $H_2O$  just is (by hypothesis) to be a body of water. Therefore, since the relation of metaphysical ground holds between facts *no matter how anyone might think of them*, the proposed explanation is (uninformative but) true.

At this point I think it would be fair to conclude that the Substitution Principle, as I propose to read it, is safe. The considerations that have led so many commentators to reject it seem to be based

she does not love him, then—strictly speaking—what she loves is not *him*, but *him-under-a-concept*. See O'Sullivan, 'Argument', 671–2. Thanks to Dustin Locke and Peter Railton for discussion on this point.

<sup>42</sup> See e.g. W. E. Mann, 'Lending a Hand to Euthyphro' ['Hand'], *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 58 (1998), 123–47 at 130, and O'Sullivan, 'Argument', 668.

either on a dubious interpretation of its content or on a questionable view about the nature of explanation. Though Socrates never gives Euthyphro the opportunity to challenge it, I think it is strong enough to withstand any challenge that Euthyphro might have come up with, and more besides. But if we are prepared to accept that the Substitution Principle is true, then in my view we should also be prepared to accept that the Euthyphro Argument is successful. For if I am right, then Object Priority—the only remaining premiss whose truth might still be in doubt<sup>43</sup>—is much more difficult to deny than most commentators have thought.

## V

According to Object Priority, the gods love the pious thing because it is pious. But what does the term ‘because’ mean in this premiss? Many of the *Euthyphro* commentators, along with nearly everyone encountering the argument for the first time, are inclined to think that this is the ‘because’ of rational basis.<sup>44</sup> On this interpretation, which I will call the **rational basis reading**, Object Priority says that the gods love the pious thing *on the rationale that* it is pious. And Object Priority, so interpreted, strikes many readers as a philosophically plausible and historically important claim.

But if my account of the argument is right so far, then either the rational basis reading is incorrect or the Euthyphro Argument is a failure. To see why, remember that on my interpretation the ‘because’ in both Affection and Substitution is the ‘because’ of metaphysical ground, not the ‘because’ of rational basis. (If the ‘because’ in Substitution *were* the ‘because’ of rational basis, then—as we discovered in the previous section—Substitution would be false; and if the ‘because’ in Affection *were* the ‘because’ of rational basis, then Affection would be a non-starter, since the claim that *B is A-affected*

<sup>43</sup> Here I am assuming that the truth of Asymmetry is not in doubt. To my knowledge this premiss has not been challenged by any of the commentators, and all of the contemporary philosophers I have consulted on the issue seem to take it for granted. See e.g. Fine, ‘Realism’, 15; Schaffer, ‘Grounds’, 376; Rosen, ‘Dependence’, 115–16; and B. Schnieder, ‘A Puzzle about “Because”’, *Logique et Analyse* (forthcoming).

<sup>44</sup> See especially Cohen, ‘Definition’, 158–60 and 175, who derives what he takes to be the primary lesson of the Euthyphro Argument from this reading of the premiss. See also Geach, ‘Commentary’, 379–80, and Thom, ‘*Euthyphro* 9D–11B’, 68.

on the rationale that *A* affects *B* is either false or gibberish.<sup>45</sup>) Thus the rational basis reading entails that ‘because’ does not have the same meaning in Affection and Substitution (metaphysical ground) as it does in Object Priority (rational basis). But if that is so, then Socrates is equivocating viciously, and the crowning inference of the Object Leg is invalid.<sup>46</sup> Moreover it would be extremely unfair of Socrates to equivocate in this way, given the dialectical context, since he openly encourages Euthyphro to expect that the meaning of ‘because’ will be stable from Affection to the Priority Question, and from the Priority Question to Object Priority. So the rational basis reading requires us to see this entire line of argument as both invalid and dishonest.

Since this reading carries such a heavy cost, I think we should consider adopting the alternative **metaphysical ground reading** instead. On this reading, the ‘because’ in Object Priority, like the ‘because’ in Affection and Substitution, is the ‘because’ of metaphysical ground. Then the claim in Object Priority is that a pious act’s being pious is *what makes it the case that* the gods love it. Though this differs from the claim that the pious act’s being pious is *the rationale on the basis of which* the gods love it, the two claims are at least compatible with each other. One can readily imagine a theologian who holds that the gods are rationally flawless, and that their being so guarantees that, if they love something on the rationale that it is pious, then not only is it pious, but its being pious is what makes it the case that they love it. This theologian’s view, I assume, is perfectly coherent. So we can adopt the metaphysical ground reading without thereby denying that Socrates holds the proposed claim about the rational basis of divine love. All we have to deny is that *this is the claim being made in Object Priority*. And once we have denied this, we can insist that the Euthyphro Argument is neither invalid nor dishonest. For even if Affection does not succeed in being true, as I am inclined to admit, it does succeed in

<sup>45</sup> On this last point, compare Cohen, ‘Definition’, 167–8.

<sup>46</sup> The genius of Cohen’s version of the rational basis reading lies in his attempt to use the argument’s two-legged structure to establish that, although Socrates is equivocating here, he is not equivocating viciously (Cohen, ‘Definition’, 174). As we have seen, however, Cohen’s interpretation of the crucial texts is strained. He is forced to brush aside clear evidence to the effect that, if Socrates is equivocating in this way, then he makes at least two invalid inferences earlier in the argument. (See above, n. 14.) It would be much better, I think, if we could find a live alternative to the rational basis reading—one that does not require us to see Socrates as equivocating at all. Compare Judson, ‘Carried’, 50 n. 7.

fixing a sense for the term ‘because’ as it is used throughout the argument. All told, then, the metaphysical ground reading of Object Priority seems to be the better bet.<sup>47</sup>

But at this point we might start to wonder whether Socrates ever manages (or even tries) to give Euthyphro any reason at all to think that Object Priority, so interpreted, is true. After all, it is not always clear in a given Socratic refutation whether Socrates wants to advance and defend certain beliefs of his own, or only to expose an inconsistency in the beliefs of someone else. In this case, however, the commentators are in almost universal agreement that Socrates says nothing in the argument that would rationally compel Euthyphro (or anyone else) to accept Object Priority.<sup>48</sup> In their view, Socrates is trying to show that *if Object Priority is true, then Euthyphro’s Answer is false*; he is *not also* trying to show that *Object Priority is true*.

Though this has long been the consensus view among the commentators, I believe that it is mistaken. For in my view the text clearly indicates that Socrates, in proposing Object Priority, conspicuously and shrewdly closes off what appears to him to be the only available alternative to it. Recall that Socrates, after reminding Euthyphro of his agreement to the claim that the pious thing is loved by all of the gods, asks him whether ‘the pious thing is loved by all of the gods . . . because of this, that it is pious, *or because of something else*’ (10 D 4; cf. 10 B 1–2). It is significant, I think, that Euthyphro concedes Object Priority only in response to this question. For (as my italics suggest) this question does two important things: first, it *implicitly excludes* the possibility that *there is nothing that makes it the case* that the gods love the pious thing;<sup>49</sup> and second, it *explicitly includes* the possibility that the gods love the pious

<sup>47</sup> Judson considers taking this bet, but in the end decides not to. See Judson, ‘Carried’, 51.

<sup>48</sup> See e.g. R. Hoerber, ‘Plato’s *Euthyphro*’, *Phronesis*, 3 (1958), 95–107 at 103–4; Brown, ‘Logic’, 8; Rose, ‘Note’, 150 n. 3; Hall, ‘Plato’, 10; R. E. Allen, *Plato’s Euthyphro and the Earlier Theory of Forms [Forms]* (New York, 1970), 44–5; Paxson, ‘Plato’s *Euthyphro*’, 180; J. Leshner, ‘Theistic Ethics and the *Euthyphro*’ [‘Ethics’], *Apeiron*, 9 (1975), 24–30 at 27; G. Ziegler, ‘Plato’s *Euthyphro* Revisited’, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 61 (1980), 291–300 at 298–9; S. Candlish, ‘*Euthyphro* 6 D–9 B’, *Apeiron*, 17 (1983), 28–32 at 30; Emlyn-Jones, *Euthyphro*, 102; Mann, ‘Hand’, 129 and 141; Kim, ‘Chiastic’, 223; R. Dancy, *Plato’s Introduction of Forms* (Cambridge, 2004), 144; Dimas, ‘Revisited’, 11–12; O’Sullivan, ‘Argument’, 663; and Judson, ‘Carried’, 41–3.

<sup>49</sup> Thanks to Jacob Rosen for helping me see this.



thing *because it is pious*. Does it *implicitly include* any other possibility? Many commentators seem to think so, since they often suggest that Euthyphro is left free to affirm Subject Priority instead of Object Priority at this (or any other) point in the discussion.<sup>50</sup> But that is certainly not the case. For as Alan Kim points out,<sup>51</sup> the question Socrates is asking at this particular point is not *why the pious thing is pious*, but *why the gods love the pious thing*. Subject Priority doesn't even *suggest* an answer to this question,<sup>52</sup> and surely that is one of the reasons why Socrates is asking it.<sup>53</sup>

Another reason he is asking it, I think, is that it manages to convey—via its syntactic resemblance to its sister question at 10 B 1–2—a line of thought that rules out any answer *other than* Object Priority. To see this, recall that the question at 10 B 1–2 is asking (in effect) whether an *x*-carried thing is *x*-carried because it is carried by *x*, or because of something else. At this point Euthyphro is invited to think not only that the *x*-carried thing is *x*-carried *because of something*, but also that, if the *x*-carried thing is *x*-carried because of something, then the *x*-carried thing is *x*-carried *because it is carried by x*. So when he is asked only a few moments later (at 10 D 4) whether the gods love the pious thing because it is pious, or because of something else, I take it that he is *likewise* invited to think not only that the gods love the pious thing *because of something*, but also that, if the gods love the pious thing because of something, then the gods love the pious thing *because it is pious*.

On this reading, then, the question Socrates asks at 10 D 4 manages to convey two basic assumptions: first, that *the gods love the pious thing because of something*; and second, that *if the gods love the pious thing because of something, then the gods love the pious thing because it is pious*. These two assumptions constitute a simple, two-premiss argument for Object Priority—an argument that can be represented more formally as follows:

<sup>50</sup> See especially Allen, *Forms*, 44–5; Paxson, 'Plato's *Euthyphro*', 180; and O'Sullivan, 'Argument' 663.

<sup>51</sup> Kim, 'Chiastic', 222 n. 7.

<sup>52</sup> What Subject Priority suggests, if anything, is that there is something wrong with the question. Thanks to Casey Perin for discussion on this point.

<sup>53</sup> While Subject Priority doesn't suggest an answer to the question of why the gods love the pious thing, Object Priority doesn't suggest an answer to the (arguably more pressing) question of why the pious thing is pious. This makes it easy to see how Socrates, by his choice of question alone, at once emphasizes the explanatory gap that Subject Priority opens up, and downplays the explanatory gap that Object Priority leaves open.

- (1) **Explanation:** There is some property of being F such that the gods love the pious thing because it is F.
- (2) **Foundation:** If there is some property of being F such that the gods love the pious thing because it is F, then the gods love the pious thing because it is pious.
- (3) So the gods love the pious thing because it is pious. (Object Priority is true.) [From 1 and 2]

This is just a more regimented way of expressing the idea that, if there is some property of a thing in virtue of which it is loved by the gods—and there *must be* some such property—then that property *just is* the property of being pious. Let us call this line of thought **the Tacit Argument**.<sup>54</sup>

In my view the Tacit Argument puts Euthyphro in a real bind. He is not well placed to accept Object Priority, since he is committed to the claim that Euthyphro's Answer is true. This much, at least, is widely noted by the commentators. What is not so widely noted, however, is that he is not well placed to reject Explanation either. For he is (implicitly) committed to the claim that he has some special understanding of what it is about a thing that makes it god-loved or god-hated (4 E 4–5 A 2; 8 B 7–9; 9 A 1–B 10; and 15 D 4–E 1). Were he to reject this claim, he would be unjustified—by his own lights—in making the various judgements he so confidently makes about whether the gods love what he, his father, and Socrates have been doing lately. Presumably, then, he should be reluctant to embrace the idea that there is nothing distinctive about his own actions (as opposed to his father's, say) in virtue of which the gods love them. But in that case it is clear that Socrates, simply by asking the question he asks at 10 D 4, puts Euthyphro under significant rational pressure to accept Explanation, the first premiss of the Tacit Argument. That is why I find it so misleading to suggest, as most commentators do, that Socrates never gives Euthyphro any reason whatsoever to accept Object Priority.

Still, these commentators would seem to have a point. For Socrates does not put Euthyphro under the same kind of rational pressure

<sup>54</sup> This line of thought, as I understand it, is a recognizable version of what Mark Johnston sees as Plato's 'missing explanation' argument against the possibility of response-dependent concepts. See M. Johnston, 'Objectivity Refigured: Pragmatism without Verificationism', in J. Haldane and C. Wright (eds.), *Reality, Representation, and Projection* (Oxford, 1993), 85–130 at 118–19.

to accept Foundation, the second premiss of the Tacit Argument.<sup>55</sup> The pressure he does apply here is largely rhetorical, hinging as it does on a rather tenuous syntactic similarity between two questions that are substantively quite distinct from each other. What Socrates would have Euthyphro believe, I take it, is that the following two claims must stand or fall together: (B1) if the *x*-carried thing is *x*-carried because of something, then the *x*-carried thing is *x*-carried because it is carried by *x*; and (B2) if the gods love the pious thing because of something, then the gods love the pious thing because it is pious. But these two claims clearly *do not* stand or fall together: there would be nothing irrational at all in accepting one and rejecting the other. Euthyphro in particular would be well within his rights to deny B2, even if he were already committed to B1. Therefore, since B2 is roughly equivalent to Foundation, Euthyphro would be well within his rights to deny Foundation too.<sup>56</sup>

But would he be well *advised* to do so? I am inclined to think that he would not. For consider the position he would have to adopt if, having conceded Explanation, he were to deny Foundation. He would be free to hold that the pious thing is pious because the gods love it, but he would be *required* to hold that the gods love the pious thing *because it has some property other than the property of being pious*. And at that point Euthyphro's answer to Socrates' original question would appear to be incomplete at best, and irrelevant at worst. For if there is some property of pious things that makes the gods love them, *and thereby also makes them pious*,<sup>57</sup> then presumably it is *this* property that Socrates has been looking for all along. So I think Socrates would be entitled to restart the entire discussion, from the beginning, by asking Euthyphro what this other property is. The only difference is that now, unlike before, Euthyphro would not be allowed to say that this property is none other than the property of being god-loved. Thus the letter of Euthyphro's original proposal would be preserved, but only at the cost of its spirit.

What we have discovered, then, is that Euthyphro—given his

<sup>55</sup> Thanks to Jonathan Beere for pressing me on this point.

<sup>56</sup> Compare Judson, 'Carried', 43–4.

<sup>57</sup> Here I follow Judson, 'Carried', 49, in assuming that the relevant 'because' relation is transitive. From what I can tell, most contemporary philosophers would agree. See e.g. Schaffer, 'Grounds', 376; Rosen, 'Dependence', 116; and K. Fine, 'Some Puzzles of Ground', *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*, 51 (2010), 97–118 at 100.

antecedent commitments—has no especially promising line of response to the Tacit Argument. But what about the rest of us? Are we likewise compelled to accept Object Priority on the basis of Explanation and Foundation? Many would claim, with some justification I think, that we are not. For even if we take Foundation to be (something like) an analytic truth, we might still want to raise some doubts about Explanation—doubts that Euthyphro himself is in no position to raise. And it is hard to see how Socrates will be able to silence these doubts effectively. Nowhere in the argument does he say anything to undermine the thought that the attitude of loving is just as capricious, contingent, and wilful as it often appears to be in us, and that the gods—as the Homeric tradition suggests—are just as arbitrary in their loving as we are.<sup>58</sup> Presumably Socrates would disagree with the Homeric tradition about this, but he doesn't seem to have anything like an argument to justify his response. So it would be natural, I think, for us to feel some dissatisfaction with him at this point.

But I suspect that this feeling would be at least somewhat premature. For there is a very good reason why it would never have occurred to Socrates that Explanation might stand in need of further argument. To appreciate what this reason is, though, we need to turn our attention to some of his background beliefs, both about the gods and about the attitude of loving. Earlier in the dialogue Socrates makes it fairly clear that he accepts something along the following lines:

**Intellectualism:** For the gods to love something is for them to believe it to be good.<sup>59</sup> (7 B 6–E 7)

He also makes it tolerably clear, in this dialogue and others, that in his view the intellectual power of the gods is superlative, especially when it comes to questions about the good. The gods, in other words, are in no danger of making any cognitive mistakes:

**Sapience:** For the gods to believe something to be good is for them to know it to be good. (7 B 2–8 A 10 with 5 E 5–6 C 8 and 15 A 1–2; cf. *Ap.* 23 A 5–B 6)

<sup>58</sup> For a recent account of the loving attitude that runs roughly along these lines, see H. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton, 2004), 38–41.

<sup>59</sup> More precisely: for the gods to love something is for them to believe it to be 'beautiful, good, [or] just'. Here I am letting 'good' stand in for the trinity.

Of course it follows from the conjunction of Intellectualism and Sapience that, when it comes to the gods at least, loving something is just a matter of knowing it to be good.

Now we can start to see more clearly why Socrates would never suspect that Explanation might require further defence. For in his view the attitude of loving that is under consideration here couldn't possibly be as capricious, contingent, and wilful in the gods as it often appears to be in us. On the contrary, it is an accurate and rationally unimpeachable cognitive assessment of the goodness of its object. Unlike an *intense feeling towards* something, a *knowledgeable belief about* something is almost impossible to see as a merely arbitrary reaction to it. In so far as one knows something to be a certain way, one is *cognitively conforming oneself to its being* that way. So if we were to accept Intellectualism and Sapience, then we would be strongly inclined to accept that, if the gods love something, then that thing's being good is what makes it the case that they love it. This is why Explanation, as Socrates himself understands it, is much more difficult to reject than we might have originally thought.

Of course we could respond to all this by simply denying Intellectualism and Sapience out of hand. But by responding in this way I think we would be missing the point. Our purpose in seeing that Socrates accepts these views is not to use them as premisses in an independent argument for Explanation, but to clarify his idiosyncratic conception of the attitude he is trying to explain. Once we are in a position to see that for him the loving attitude in question here is fundamentally *epistemic* in nature, we are also in a position to see that the philosophical stakes of the Euthyphro Argument are quite different from what most of the commentators since the beginning of the Common Era have thought they were.<sup>60</sup> For in this argument Socrates is not attacking the broadly voluntarist view that the piety (or goodness) of things is grounded in someone's prescriptions, commands, commendations, stipulations, decrees, or whims.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, I believe his argument is largely powerless against

<sup>60</sup> See Irwin, 'Morality', 23–37, for an illuminating overview of the argument's reception among later Christian philosophers such as Scotus, Cudworth, and Clarke. According to these philosophers, among many others, the primary target of the argument is the view that the value and disvalue of things is grounded in the deliverances of a divine will. For reasons that will become clear in a moment, I am convinced that these philosophers are wrong.

<sup>61</sup> On this point I concur, albeit narrowly, with Leshner, 'Ethics', 24–30. Clear articulations of the contrary position can be found in Allen, *Forms*, 44–5; M. F.

such a view.<sup>62</sup> Rather he is attacking the view that the piety (or goodness) of things is grounded in someone's *knowledgeable beliefs about* the piety (or goodness) of things.

It is important to notice, however, that this is not the only view under threat from Socrates' argument at this point. For there is nothing in his argument, as I interpret it, that would restrict its application to the properties of being pious and being good. If it successfully applies to these properties, then it successfully applies to *all* properties, no matter what their normative significance might be. That is because the intuitive crux of Explanation (as Socrates understands it) is that, if the gods believe something to be a certain way, then *what makes it the case that* they believe it to be that way *is that it is that way*. Clearly there is nothing in this line of thought that would mandate (or even suggest) its restriction to any particular way a thing might be.<sup>63</sup>

In fact, when it is stated in this more abstract way, Explanation strikes me as extremely difficult to challenge.<sup>64</sup> For it is rooted in the widely (if not universally) shared pre-philosophical conviction that excellence in belief is a matter of conforming mind to world—or, to put the same idea a different way, that every attitude of belief is assessable as *correct* in so far as (and because) its object is the way it is believed to be, and *incorrect* in so far as (and because) its object is *not* the way it is believed to be.<sup>65</sup> If this conviction is sound, then

Burnyeat, 'The Impiety of Socrates', *Ancient Philosophy*, 17 (1997), 1–12 at 9; G. Matthews, *Socratic Perplexity and the Nature of Philosophy* (Oxford, 1999), 33–41; Irwin, 'Morality', 23–37; Irwin, 'Revival', 66–71; Dimas, 'Revisited', 13–18; and Judson, 'Carried', 59–60.

<sup>62</sup> My reasons for believing this will become clear shortly, in sect. vi.

<sup>63</sup> We could establish this more formally by substituting a second-order variable 'F' for 'pious' throughout the argument, binding that variable with a universal quantifier, and then replacing 'god-loved' and 'the gods love the F thing' with 'believed-by-the-gods-to-be-F' (or 'believed-F' for short) and 'the gods believe the F thing to be F'. Then the conclusion of the argument would be that, for any property F, *the F* is not the same as *the Believed-F*.

<sup>64</sup> It does not strike me as *impossible* to challenge, however. Consider Michael Dummett's recent reflections on what he takes to be the universally creative power of divine cognition: 'God's knowledge of how things are *constitutes* their being as they are . . . God's knowledge [is not], like our own, dependent on the reality He knows; . . . it is the other way about—the reality depends on His knowing it to be as it is.' See M. Dummett, *Thought and Reality* (Oxford, 2008), 103 and 108. For a more restricted, non-theological development of a broadly similar idea see C. Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, 1992), 108–39.

<sup>65</sup> Another way of expressing this conviction would be to say that 'truth' is 'the aim of' or 'the standard of correctness for' the attitude of belief. For some recent ar-

every attitude of belief, whether knowledgeable or not, is **objectively regulated** in the following sense: *its correctness depends on its object's being one way rather than another*. As I understand it, then, Object Priority—interpreted in the light of both the Tacit Argument and the basic tenets of Socratic theology—flows more or less directly from the intuitive view that attitudes of belief are, by their very nature, objectively regulated.

To see this a bit more clearly, recall that the Socratic gods are, by hypothesis, cognitively flawless. From this it seems to follow that, for each attitude of belief they have, they have it *because it is correct*. (The correctness of the attitude explains why they have it, not the other way round.) But if each attitude of belief is objectively regulated, as the intuitive view maintains, then each correct attitude of belief is correct *because its object is the way it is believed to be*. So, since the grounding relation is transitive,<sup>66</sup> Object Priority (as Socrates understands it) is true: if the gods believe an object to be a certain way, then they believe it to be that way *because it is that way*.

Of course this is just the bare sketch of an argument, but I think it allows us to see more clearly why Object Priority, as interpreted by Socrates, is so intuitively compelling. It also allows us to see why Object Priority would have such an important role to play in any larger argument against the possibility of what we might call **belief-grounded** properties—properties that a thing has *because it is correctly believed to have them*.<sup>67</sup> For if there were any such properties, then the way things are with respect to those properties would be grounded in *correct attitudes of belief about* the way things are with respect to those properties. According to Object Priority, however, the right order of explanation is precisely the opposite of this: correct attitudes of belief about the way things are with respect to those properties are grounded in *the way things are with respect to*

guments in favour of a view of this sort see D. Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (Oxford, 2000), 110–22 and 244–81; N. Shah, 'How Truth Governs Belief', *Philosophical Review*, 112 (2003), 447–82; N. Shah and D. Velleman, 'Doxastic Deliberation', *Philosophical Review*, 114 (2005), 497–534; Wedgwood, *The Nature of Normativity*, ch. 7; and P. Boghossian, *Content and Justification: Philosophical Papers* (Oxford, 2008), ch. 4. Plato himself seems to endorse such a view at *Phileb.* 37 A 1–E 9—a passage I discuss at some length in M. Evans, 'Plato's Anti-Hedonism', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 22 (2007), 121–45.

<sup>66</sup> See above, n. 57.

<sup>67</sup> More precisely: the property of being F is **belief-grounded** just in case, for any  $x$ , if  $x$  is F, then  $x$  is F because  $x$  is correctly believed to be F.

*those properties*. And Object Priority, when it is understood in this way, strikes me as very difficult to deny. For the relation between belief and its objects seems to be, in this respect, just as Object Priority says it is: *there are no belief-grounded properties*.<sup>68</sup>

## VI

What we have discovered, then, is that the Euthyphro Argument is strong enough to withstand many of the most powerful lines of criticism that have been (and might be) mobilized against it.<sup>69</sup> More importantly, perhaps, the argument seems strong enough to defeat the view I referred to earlier as constructivism. According to this view, remember, the facts about how we should respond to things are grounded in *our best beliefs* about how we should respond to things. Since this view entails that normative properties are belief-grounded, the Euthyphro Argument seems to succeed in defeating it. So anyone who wishes to hold that the normative facts are grounded in (some of) the non-normative facts—that is, anyone who wishes to be a naturalist—must specify some different set of facts in which the normative facts might be grounded. In this way, at least, the Euthyphro Argument puts the naturalist under genuine dialectical pressure.

But this pressure is far from unbearable, I think. Those naturalists who are sympathetic to the general constructivist approach could respond by modifying their account along roughly the following lines:

**Neo-Constructivism:** The facts about how we should respond to things are grounded in the non-cognitive attitudes

<sup>68</sup> Possible counter-examples to this negative generalization would include broadly Cartesian properties, such as the property of believing something. But I am not (yet) convinced that properties of this sort really are belief-grounded. For while it does seem clear that my believing that I am believing something would make it the case that I am believing something, it *does not* seem clear that my *correctly* believing that I am believing something would make it the case that I am believing something. In fact I have trouble seeing how there could be such a belief—a belief the correctness of which is somehow responsible for itself—if Asymmetry is true; and, as far as I can tell, *no one doubts* that Asymmetry is true. See above, n. 43.

<sup>69</sup> Since the version of the argument that (in my view) withstands these lines of criticism is different, in some ways, from the version of the argument that I claim to find in the text, I have reproduced what I take to be the successful version below, in Appendix B.



our epistemically ideal selves take (or would take) towards things.

Someone who holds this view need not quarrel with the Euthyphro Argument *as Socrates himself understands it*, since—as we have seen—Socrates holds that the loving attitude is cognitive. Thus the neo-constructivist is free to concede that the argument is sound, and that there are no belief-grounded properties. If Socrates were to resist this outcome by reversing course and claiming that the loving attitude is actually *non-cognitive*, then the neo-constructivist would be free to deny that our epistemically ideal selves (would) love the good thing because it is good. For the argument Socrates offers in support of Object Priority seems to break down once it becomes reasonable to hold that the attitude of loving is, unlike the attitude of knowing, fundamentally capricious, wilful, or arbitrary in nature. This is why I suspect that the Euthyphro Argument, taken by itself, does not succeed in defeating this retooled version of constructivism, let alone every available version of naturalism.<sup>70</sup>

But of course the Euthyphro Argument need not be taken by itself. It could be combined with some independent argument showing either (L1) that there are no non-cognitive attitudes, or (L2) that there are some non-cognitive attitudes, but all of them—or at least all of the relevant ones—are, like beliefs, objectively regulated.<sup>71</sup> If L1 is true, then the neo-constructivist can be forced to accept that there are no normative facts; and if L2 is true, then the neo-constructivist can be forced to accept that our epistemically ideal selves (would) love the good thing because it is good.

Though I doubt that there are any arguments for either L1 or L2 to be found in the *Euthyphro*, I believe that there are several arguments for *both* L1 *and* L2 to be found in various other dialogues. At crucial points in the *Protagoras*, the *Meno*, and the *Gorgias*, for example, Socrates suggests that all of our motivationally effective attitudes are, at bottom, beliefs.<sup>72</sup> And in the *Republic*, the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Philebus* he suggests that, although there are some non-cognitive attitudes, all of them—especially those of de-

<sup>70</sup> It may well succeed in defeating other views in the neighbourhood, however. On this possibility see G. Rudebusch, 'Socrates, Piety, and Nominalism', *Skepsis*, 20 (2009), 216–21.

<sup>71</sup> For a recent attempt to support L2, in the context of contemporary metaethics, see Sosa, 'Pathetic Ethics', 321–7.

<sup>72</sup> See *Prot.* 351 B–358 E; *Meno* 77 B–78 B; and *Gorg.* 466 B–468 E.

sire, pleasure, and pain—are objectively regulated.<sup>73</sup> He even seems to suggest in the *Cratylus* that the very act of thinking about things, and thus of taking attitudes towards things, is governed by norms that do not have their source in us.<sup>74</sup> Certainly Plato's wider anti-constructivist (and anti-naturalist) project will depend, at least to some extent, on the force of these other arguments. But that should not lead us to belittle the achievement of *this* argument, which—as we have seen—is both philosophically interesting and, if my interpretation is right, abundantly successful.

## APPENDIX A

## The Euthyphro Argument (Original Version)

- (E1) **Affection:** For any  $x$  and any  $y$ , if  $x$  affects  $y$ , then  $y$  is  $x$ -affected because  $x$  affects  $y$ . (10 A 5–B 6; cf. 10 C 1–4)
- (E2) **Asymmetry:** For any  $p$  and any  $q$ , if  $p$  because  $q$ , then it is not the case that  $q$  because  $p$ . (10 B 7–C 1)
- (E3) So, for any  $x$  and any  $y$ , if  $x$  affects  $y$ , then (i)  $y$  is  $x$ -affected because  $x$  affects  $y$ , and (ii) it is not the case that  $x$  affects  $y$  because  $y$  is  $x$ -affected. (10 C 1–5) [From E1 and E2]
- (E4) **Active Love:** Loving something is a way of affecting it. (10 C 6–8)
- (E5) So, for any  $x$  and any  $y$ , if  $x$  loves  $y$ , then (i)  $y$  is  $x$ -loved because  $x$  loves  $y$ , and (ii) it is not the case that  $x$  loves  $y$  because  $y$  is  $x$ -loved. (10 C 9–12) [From E3 and E4]
- (E6) **Object Priority:** The gods love the pious thing because it is pious. (10 D 4–5)
- (E7) So it is not the case that the pious thing is pious because the gods love it. (10 D 6–7) [From E2 and E6]
- (E8) So the god-loved thing is god-loved because the gods love it. (10 D 9–10) [From E5]
- (E9) So it is not the case that the gods love the god-loved thing because it is god-loved. (10 E 5–7) [From either E5 or E2 and E8]
- (E10) **Substitution:** If the Pious is the same as the God-Loved, then (S1) if the god-loved thing is god-loved because the gods love it, then the *pious* thing is *pious* because the gods love it, and (S2) if the gods love the pious thing because it is pious, then the gods love the *god-loved* thing because it is *god-loved*. (10 E 9–11 A 3)

<sup>73</sup> See *Rep.* 580 D–587 A; *Sym.* 199 D–212 C, *Phdr.* 245 C–257 A; and *Phileb.* 36 C–55 C.

<sup>74</sup> See *Crat.* 383 A–390 E. For an extended defence of this reading of the passage see M. Evans, 'Plato on the Norms of Speech and Thought', *Phronesis*, 56 (2011), 322–49.

- (E11) So, if the Pious is the same as the God-Loved, then (C1) the pious thing is pious because the gods love it, and (C2) the gods love the god-loved thing because it is god-loved. (10 E 9–11 A 3) [From E6, E8, and E10]
- (E12) So the Pious is not the same as the God-Loved. (11 A 3–4) [From either E7 and E11 or E9 and E11]

## APPENDIX B

## The Euthyphro Argument (Modified Version)

- (E\*1) **Identity:** For any  $x$  and any  $y$ , if  $x$  affects  $y$ , then the fact that  $y$  is  $x$ -affected is the same as the fact that  $x$  affects  $y$ .
- (E\*2) **Asymmetry:** For any  $p$  and any  $q$ , if  $p$  because  $q$ , then it is not the case that  $q$  because  $p$ .
- (E\*3) So, for any  $x$  and any  $y$ , if  $x$  affects  $y$ , then it is not the case that  $x$  affects  $y$  because  $y$  is  $x$ -affected. [From E\*1 and E\*2]
- (E\*4) **Active Love:** Loving something is a way of affecting it.
- (E\*5) So, for any  $x$  and any  $y$ , if  $x$  loves  $y$ , then it is not the case that  $x$  loves  $y$  because  $y$  is  $x$ -loved. [From E\*3 and E\*4]
- (E\*6) **Object Priority:** The gods love the pious thing because it is pious.
- (E\*7) **Substitution:** If the Pious is the same as the God-Loved, then, if the gods love the *pious* thing because it is *pious*, then the gods love the *god-loved* thing because it is *god-loved*.
- (E\*8) So, if the Pious is the same as the God-Loved, then the gods love the god-loved thing because it is god-loved. [From E\*6 and E\*7]
- (E\*9) So the Pious is not the same as the God-Loved. [From E\*5 and E\*8]

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