





### III. Evans on the Tacit Euthyphro Argument

This leaves one major objection to be replied to. According to this objection, Euthyphro should have endorsed the following instead of Object Priority:

Subject Priority:        If  $x$  is pious, then  $[x \text{ is pious}] \leftarrow [\text{The gods love } x]$ .

Socrates' lack of an explicit argument against Subject Priority is widely seen by commentators as a major lacuna in the Euthyphro argument.

Evans, however, insists that some über-subtle syntactic similarities between two questions Socrates asks suggest the following Tacit Argument against Subject Priority:

Explanation:        There is some property  $F$  such that if  $x$  is pious, then  $[\text{The gods love } x] \leftarrow [x \text{ is } F]$ .

Foundation:        If Explanation is true, then one such property is the property of being pious.

So, Object Priority is true: if  $x$  is pious, then  $[\text{The gods love } x] \leftarrow [x \text{ is pious}]$ .

Note that this connects Socrates' argument to the modern way of presenting the Euthyphro dilemma, since to deny Explanation is (according to Evans) to take the gods' love to be *arbitrary*.

Why Euthyphro should accept Explanation:

“Were [Euthyphro] to reject this claim, he would be unjustified ... in making the various judgments he so confidently makes about whether the gods love what he, his father, and Socrates have been doing lately” (p. 26).

Why Euthyphro should accept Foundation:

If there is some property  $F$  other than being pious such that we have  $[x \text{ is pious}] \leftarrow [\text{The gods love } x]$  and  $[\text{The gods love } x] \leftarrow [x \text{ is } F]$ , then by transitivity  $[x \text{ is pious}] \leftarrow [x \text{ is } F]$ , so the gods' love is not the ultimate grounds of an act's being pious.

*slight worry:* Now we seem to have shifted from searching for the identity of the form *the Pious* to searching for the ultimate grounds of  $[x \text{ is pious}]$ .

According to Evans, Socrates considers Explanation uncontroversial because earlier in the dialogue he made clear that he accepts the following (where “good” is short for “good, beautiful, or just”):

Intellectualism:        For the gods to love  $x$  is for them to believe  $\langle x \text{ is good} \rangle$ .

Sapience:                For the gods to believe  $\langle x \text{ is good} \rangle$  is for them to know  $\langle x \text{ is good} \rangle$ .

Evans takes Intellectualism and Sapience to entail Explanation because he assume that  $[S \text{ knows } \langle p \rangle]$  is always partially grounded in  $[p]$ .

- *objection:* This way of arguing for Explanation undermines Foundation, since it entails that we have  $[\text{The gods love } x] \leftarrow [x \text{ is good}]$ , which is compatible with  $[x \text{ is pious}] \leftarrow [\text{The gods love } x]$ .

*reply #1:*  $[x \text{ is pious}] = [x \text{ is good}]$ . Then the Tacit Argument might not establish Object Priority when that thesis is interpreted in terms of *full grounding*, but it at least establishes that thesis when it is interpreted in terms of *partial grounding*.

(If Evans is using the “or” of identity when he writes “piety (or goodness)” on the bottom of p. 29 and the top of p. 30, then this is his reply.)

*reply #2:* We can reformulate the Tacit Argument so that it doesn't actually appeal to Foundation, but instead uses transitivity to show that  $[\text{The gods love } x]$  is not the ultimate grounds of  $[x \text{ is pious}]$  if Explanation is true.

#### IV. Generalizing the Euthyphro Argument

Evans interprets the idea that “excellence in belief is a matter of conforming mind to world” as follows:

Objective Regulation: S’s belief that  $p$  is correct if and only if, and because,  $p$ .

Let us say that the property of being F is *belief-grounded* just in case, for any  $x$ , the following holds:

(\*) If  $x$  is F, then  $[x \text{ is F}] \leftarrow [x \text{ is correctly believed to be F}]$ .

(Note that this leaves open who is to do the correct believing.)

Objective Regulation, together with the transitivity and irreflexivity of grounding, entails that there are no belief-grounded properties.

Evans thinks this shows how the true target of the Euthyphro Argument is not the view that normative facts are grounded in “someone’s prescriptions, commendations, stipulations, decrees, or whims” (p. 29), but rather its true target is the following view:

Constructivism: The facts about what we should think, feel, and act in response to things are grounded in *our best beliefs* about how we should think, feel, and act in response to things.

Evans endorses the Euthyphro Argument, as he has interpreted it, as a good way of arguing against Constructivism.

*worry #1:* The Explicit Euthyphro Argument is not actually doing any work in this argument against Constructivism.

*worry #2:* In fact, the Tacit Euthyphro Argument isn’t needed to argue against Constructivism in the way Evans sketches, either. All we need is Objective Regulation (plus transitivity and irreflexivity).

*worry #3:* To argue against Constructivism by appealing to Objective Regulation, we need the additional assumption that bestness of belief is partially grounded in correctness of belief.

*worry #4:* Most modern-day constructivists either drop the “best” in their formulation of Constructivism, or they provide a way of glossing what bestness of belief comes to which doesn’t make it partially grounded in correctness.

Can a similar argument also be offered against the following variant of Constructivism?

Neo-Constructivism: The facts about what we should think, feel, and act in response to things are grounded in the non-cognitive attitudes our epistemically ideal selves take (or would take) toward things.

(This is the analogue of trying to resist Socrates’ Tacit Argument by denying Intellectualism, thereby taking loving to be a non-cognitive attitude.)

Evans thinks we can find in Plato’s other dialogues the resources to extend the argument against Constructivism into an argument against Neo-Constructivism as well.

In particular, he thinks Socrates endorses the following in the *Protagoras*, the *Meno*, and the *Gorgias*:

(L1) There are no non-cognitive attitudes (because all our motivationally effective attitudes are, at bottom, beliefs).

And he thinks Socrates endorses the following in the *Republic*, the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Philebus*:

(L2) There are some non-cognitive attitudes, but all of them are, like belief, objectively regulated.