

## PLATO'S *EUTHYPHRO*: PROPHECY AND RATIONAL CRITICISM

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Plato's *Euthyphro* – which is the earliest sustained attempt to discuss religion philosophically – is set on the steps of the office of the "king archon" where Socrates, about to go on trial, will discuss the charges against him, namely: "Socrates is unjust because he corrupts the young, not believing in the gods the state believes in, but introducing new *daimones* (divine beings)."

As the *Euthyphro* starts to unfold, two explanations are given for these charges:

1. Socrates speaks too much about his own "personal" *daimon* and the prophetic powers he derives from it, thereby angering and spooking skeptical fellow citizens (3b).
2. Socrates is too aggressive in his rationalist critique of sacred writing, thereby angering religious conservatives (6a).

Both explanations have validity. Socrates frightens people by wielding a double power, that of daimonic prophecy and that of rational criticism. And I would like to show how the *Euthyphro* – with its attempt to define the holy, to engage Homer and Hesiod, to show how holiness transcends the subject/object relation, and to situate holiness in the context of justice and ritual – is structured by the interplay of these two formidable powers.