Plato's Euthyphro 10a to 11b

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In the section 10a to 11b of the Euthyphro, the Platonic Socrates presents a long and complicated argument against the soothsayer’s third account of τὸ ἔσιν. The importance of this argument is indicated not only by its central location in the dialogue and by its appearance in two versions, but also by Socrates’ use of an admission elicited here to reject Euthyphro’s fifth account later in the dialogue. The purpose of this paper is to give a careful exegesis of this complex argument, to prove its validity, and to determine what light it sheds on the nature of Platonic ethics.

'ΑΙ ΕΠΑΓΩΓΑΙ

Euthyphro suggests as his third account of piety that “what all the gods love is holy (pious) and, on the other hand, what they all hate is unholy (impious).” The Platonic Socrates’ reply begins with two ἐπαγωγαί. In the first, he contrasts active and passive participles of three verbs, or what they express, and concludes that a similar contrast obtains with respect to ‘love’.

First ἐπαγωγή:
1. λέγομεν τι φερόμενον καὶ φέρον καὶ ἀγόμενον καὶ ἀγόν καὶ ὀρώμενον καὶ ὀρὼν καὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα μανθάνεις ὅτι ἔτερα ἄλληλον ἔστι καὶ ἕτερα;
2. Οὐκοῦν καὶ φιλομένον τι ἔστιν καὶ τοῦτο ἐτερον τὸ φιλοῦν;

In the second ἐπαγωγή he professes to draw a distinction between a series of Greek words and their periphrastic equivalents. Since a periphrastic, by definition, means the same as the simpler form, it is not at all clear what the distinction is intended to be. The translator is put in a quandary because English does not possess two corresponding ways of expressing the passive voice. I propose to meet the problem of translation by inserting a dot between the form of the verb to be and the participle in the English translation where the Greek expresses the passive voice by means of the suffix on the verb stem. Thus ‘is carried’ corresponds to “φέρεται,” while ‘is carried’ corresponds to “φερόμενον ἔστι.”
Second ἐπαγωγή:

a. a thing which is carried (τὸ φερόμενον) is carried (φερόμενον ἔστιν) because it is-carried (φέρεται), not vice versa.
b. a thing which is led is such because it is-led (ἀντεSubsysteme), not vice versa.
c. a thing which is seen is such because it is-seen, not vice versa.

Superordinate case: If something becomes or undergoes, it does not become (γίγνεται) for the reason that it is becoming (γίγνομενον ἔστι), but it is becoming because it becomes (ὅτι γίγνεται); and it does not undergo (οὐ πάσχει) for the reason that it is undergoing but because it is undergoing it is undergoing.

Coordinate Case: οὐ χρί φιλοῦμενόν ἔστιν φιλεῖται ὅπο ὁν φιλεῖται, ἀλλ' ὅτι φιλεῖται φιλοῦμενον;

What all this means, is by no means evident. Indeed we might regard Plato’s distinction as an impenetrable mystery, as does P. T. Geach. An alternative to despair is to work out different possible interpretations and to settle on that which is in greatest agreement with the text and with what we know about Plato’s doctrines.

The second ἐπαγωγή is intended to bring Euthyphro to recognize a certain asymmetric relation. It is tempting to think that Socrates was claiming that a thing’s being in a given state or condition is causally dependent upon its acting or being acted upon in a certain way. This claim seems true concerning those sorts of conditions or states which can outlast their causes and thus are demonstrably distinct from them, e.g. the state of being electrically charged. However the cases cited in the ἐπαγωγή are not of this sort. The states of being carried, led, seen, and loved last not a whit longer than their “causes,” the carrying, leading, seeing, and loving. “But,” as John Brown has pointed out, “the state, if it is simply the state of being carried (etc.), is identical with being carried (etc.).” The two expressions refer to the same state of affairs. Thus there is no possible causal relation to which Plato could be referring. Similarly, entailment cannot be the relation to which Plato is appealing, for if it were, the premiss and conclusion of the second ἐπαγωγή would be false. That something is-carried entails that it is carried if and only if “it is carried” entails that it is-carried, contrary to the because the two expressions necessarily denote the same state of affairs, where the necessity is semantic. We must accept the identity of sense between the two expressions and look elsewhere for Plato’s distinction.