

Socrates among the Orphics:
The Evidence of Plato's *Euthyphro* and the Derveni Papyrus

The Orphic commentator of the Derveni Papyrus shares much in common with Euthyphro, the seer who appears in two Platonic dialogues. While scholars have focused on the similarities between the commentator's etymologising fancies and those attributed to Euthyphro in the *Cratylus*, a comparison with the *Euthyphro* reveals that Plato represented Socrates as being familiar with Orphic ideas early on (cf. also *Ap.* 40e4-41c7; *Phd.* 63b5-c7, 70c5-d5).

Since the Athenians ridicule Euthyphro's prophecies, he tells Socrates that they "envy people like us" (3c4): the philosopher is embraced as a kindred spirit, who also makes use of prophecy with his divine sign and suffers from "popular prejudices" (3b5-9). Likewise, the commentator of the Derveni Papyrus faces "distrust" (col. V.10, 13) because "the many" do not understand the deeper meaning of theogonic myths (col. VII.9-11): in particular, that of Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus, which Euthyphro links to "tales that the many do not know" (6b5-6).

Because of their violence, Socrates is reluctant to believe in such Orphic myths. Yet, Euthyphro unpacks their ritualistic aspect: they explain why the gods are concerned about human "justice" and the purification from murder (4b8-c3, cf. 5d8-6a6). Socrates takes this interpretation of religion in terms of justice very seriously (12e5-9). The *Euthyphro* hints at a definition of piety as a righteous "service to the gods" (θεοῖς ὑπηρετική, 13e6), a service that reappears only in Plato's *Apology* (θεῶν ὑπηρεσία, 30a7) and the Derveni Papyrus (θεῶν ὑπηρεταί, col. III.7-8).

This conception of religion, where human beings are viewed as hard-working subordinates of the gods (cf. also *Ap.* 22a6-8; *Phd.* 62b2-e4), had no precedents in Athenian cult –and so helps to explain the indictment against Socrates for religious innovation in 399 B.C.

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