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Recenzijos / Reviews

Plato's *Euthyphro* in Lithuanian

Luca Gili

Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, Lithuania
luca.gili@zohomail.eu
https://ror.org/03nadee84

With the translation of the *Euthyphro*, the colored series "*Philosophica. Klasikinių filosofijos tekstų ir studijų serija*" begins its 'second tetralogy'. T. Aleknienė is well known to Lithuanian readers of Plato, as she has already translated the *Philebus* (2016), the *Gorgias* (2019), and the *Theaetetus* (2020) for the same series, as well as the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium* (Aidai, Vilnius, 1999 and 2000). This volume is designed to offer the Lithuanian reader a more recent and fluent translation of this dialogue, centered on the notion of ὅσιον. There was already a Lithuanian translation with no facing Greek text, published by Merkelis Račkauskas in 1929 in the journal *Logos*, at the time published by the University of Lithuania based in Kaunas. As expected, Aleknienė adopts the text established by John Burnet[1], while introducing a few changes that appear well-justified. At 4b1, she retains the reading ὀρθῶς, which Burnet had deleted; this decision seems reasonable, since the overall meaning of the sentence remains unaffected, and one may question the necessity of removing a word attested in the entire manuscript tradition (perhaps omitted by Burnet for stylistic reasons). At 14c3–4, Burnet's τὸν ἐρῶντα τῷ ἐρωμένῳ is replaced with the equally well-attested τὸν ἐρωτῶντα τῷ ἐρωτωμένῳ: Aleknienė's choice gives to the passage a more explicitly dialectical nuance, which is particularly appropriate in the context and may well be the authentic reading.

The translation is impeccable and has the rare quality of mirroring not only the content but also the movement and literary qualities of the original. Since the dialogue focuses on the notion of ὅσιον (often translated into English as 'pious' or 'holy'), it is worth examining the translator's choices for this and other key terms. Aleknienė follows Račkauskas in translating ὅσιον as *dievotas* ('devout', 'pious'), whereas εὐσέβεια is rendered as *dievobaimingumas* (literally, 'fear of [the] god[s]'). This is considered more appropriate than *pamaldumas* ('piety' or 'devotion'), because, in Greek religion, offerings and sacrifices

[1] *Platonis Opera. Tomus I tetralogias I-II continens*, edidit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit J. Burnet, Oxford, e typographo Clarendoniano, 1900.

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were more central than prayer. As is also evident from the philosophical discussion in one of the essays in the appendix, translating into modern languages the very concepts conveyed by Plato is far from straightforward. Modern European languages such as Lithuanian express a religious landscape largely shaped by Christianity. In short, the original notions of ὅσιον and εὐσέβεια are almost untranslatable, and Aleknienė opts for what she considers the least inadequate solution (cf. p. 7).

The translation is prefaced by a short essay, where Aleknienė explains the content of the dialogue and offers a synthetic presentation of the critical debate on it, and is followed by notes and two essays, one on the reception of the themes of the *Euthyphro* in Clemens of Alexandria, and the other on a comparison between the Socratic conception of religion, as it emerges from the *Euthyphro*, and the theory about the religious phenomenon expanded by Gintaras Beresnevičius (1961–2006), a Lithuanian scholar in the field of religious studies.

In the concise preface, Aleknienė pays careful attention to the literary features of the dialogue and lays the ground for a philosophical interpretation. A well-known issue in the study of ancient philosophy is the division of scholars into two broad camps: some emphasize the logical structure of ancient arguments, while others focus on the literary dimensions of the texts. In the case of Plato, however, no philosophical interpretation is possible without a prior analysis of the literary features of his works, and this by the author's own intention[2]. A brief thought experiment may help clarify this point. Suppose that all the original texts of Greek philosophers were lost and that we could access them only through modern translations. Our understanding of the philosophies of figures such as Aristotle or Epicurus would not be significantly compromised[3]. With Plato, however, much of what he seeks to convey would become difficult to grasp, as his dialogues are rich in allusions, wordplay, and irony: these are features that often elude even the most perceptive reader without access to the original Greek. For this reason, Aleknienė's preface, including its more literary-oriented sections, proves essential for the philosophical understanding of readers who do not have access to the original Greek text.

[2] The bibliography on this aspect of Plato's works is vast. This feature has been extensively explored particularly by the late Christopher Rowe (see, e.g., Rowe 2007) and by F. Gonzales (see, e.g., Gonzales 1998). Interpretations of Plato's philosophy that place strong emphasis on the literary features of his writings include, among others, Trabattoni 2016.

[3] Alas, much of their writings are indeed lost. But, in my mental experiment, even if we were to lose works such as Epicurus' *Epistle to Herodotus* or Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in the Greek original and retain them only in translation, we would certainly lose important nuances, but not the essential doctrinal content. In Plato's case, by contrast, translation can obscure not only stylistic features but also the argumentative point itself. A good example is the discussion of the impossibility of uttering 'not-being' at *Soph.* 237b–e. Crivelli (2012), *ad loc*. reconstructs the passage by taking τὸ μὴ ὄν as "what does not exist" Yet, the transition from μὴ ἕν to μηδέν (to claim that whoever utters what is not talks about what is not one, thereby saying nothing at all) is not really an argument: it depends on a phonetic and verbal play, by which "not-one [thing]" (μὴ ἕν) slides into "nothing" (μηδέν). The conclusion that one who says μὴ ὄν "says nothing," and therefore does not speak at all, thus does *not* rely on logical arguments (*contra* Crivelli 2012), but on a wordplay that a strictly logical reconstruction or an interpretation that overlooks the Greek version would tend to miss.

Aleknienė begins by observing that the dialogue is the first in the order of reading of Plato's works commonly adopted in antiquity and so sets the stage for the whole of his philosophy. The first sentence, uttered by Euthyphro ("What's the news, Socrates?" "Kas atsitiko, Sokratai?"), alludes to the novelty of Plato's philosophy, as already stressed by Proclus (cf. p. 15). And also Socrates' understanding of religion is quite new, as stressed by most commentators[4]. Euthyphro first maintains that the fear of the gods consists in doing what he is up to, i.e., charge his father for murder, but then goes on to state that it is to do what the gods love. Socrates dismantles this second definition as well, by arguing that devotion is indeed loved by the gods, but cannot coincide with it (it is the so-called 'Euthyphro's dilemma': is something pious because the gods love it, or do the gods love it because it's pious?). The next definition consists in maintaining that religion is a part of justice, and it is probably the most revolutionary part of the dialogue. Aleknienė has written much in the past on the Greeks' understanding of religion[5], and is clearly intrigued by this section, and she stresses that the 'impiety' for which Socrates is charged is a true service to the gods (cf. p. 39), according to Socrates' own definition. But this definition is also destroyed and replaced with the idea that piety consists in learning how to pray to the gods and to offer sacrifices to them. Then, pressured by Socrates, Euthyphro leaves the conversation, as he feels obliged to go to finish his business. Is the dialogue aporetic (cf. pp. 45-47)? Clearly it ends without any definition, but the practice of the dialectical method by Socrates leaves the reader with an impression that, indeed, a conclusion has been reached, and that the traditional understanding of religion is certainly inadequate[6].

After a concise commentary, the volume includes two essays and a set of indexes. In the first essay, Aleknienė expands on an earlier paper devoted to the reception of *Euthyphro*'s themes in Clement of Alexandria. The study contains a detailed section (pp. 139–141) on the later reception of the dialogue's doctrine (more extensive here than in the version of 2006) and traces the presence of several Platonic motifs in Clement's account of Gnostic piety, including a possible allusion to the *Euthyphro*.

The final essay turns to Beresnevičius' *Religijotyros įvadas* and draws a comparison with Socrates' understanding of religion (cf. esp. pp. 176–177). Beresnevičius expresses dissatisfaction with earlier approaches to religion coming from different theoretical backgrounds (both Marxist reductionism and accounts based on communication theory are deemed inadequate, cf. pp. 163–164) and instead adopts a working hypothesis which defines religion as a relation to the numinous ("santykis su 'galia' arba 'šventybe'", p. 162; cf. also p. 164) and religious studies should have as its focus the structure centered around

[4] C. Wildberg has downplayed the novelty of Socrates' reform of religion (cf. p. 40), but his view has not gained general acceptance, and Aleknienė stresses the use of the verb καινοτομέω (cf. p. 15, n. 8) when Socrates introduces his new understanding of religion.

[5] See her papers collected in Aleknienė 2016.

[6] Aleknienė agrees with Erler (1987) in maintaining that the readers should behave like the Socrates of the dialogue, working through the arguments anew and arriving at the resolution of the *aporiai* on their own: "Atidus Platono skaitytojas turėtų elgtis kaip dialogo Sokratas, sutelkdamas visą savo dėmesį ir teigdamas, kad nė vienam pašnekovo žodžiui neleis 'nukristi žemėn'" (p. 47).

the sacred ("šventybinės struktūros", cf. e.g., p. 177). Aleknienė identifies a parallel between this approach and Socrates' search for a universal account of ὅσιον.

The book is finely produced and includes a polyglot bibliography (pp. 179–184) and extensive indexes (pp. 185–199): it will be a welcome addition to the shelves of all students of Plato's philosophy.

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