In *Euthyphro* and *Meno* Socrates is concerned with finding Forms, for piety and virtue respectively. Platonic Forms are supposed to be mind-independent, transcendental entities. But putting aside that eccentricity, we can see Plato’s Socrates as engaged in an activity that is still natural to many philosophers. Actually, there is a family of activities, going by several names, which has this Socratic search for Forms as an ancestor. These activities include:

- **The search for a definition.** What is the definition of ‘piety’ or ‘virtue’?
- **The search for an essence (or nature).** What is the essence of piety, or of a pious action? What is the essence of virtue, or of a virtuous action?
- **Conceptual analysis.** What is the correct analysis of the concept piety, or virtue?
- **The search for necessary and sufficient conditions.** What features are common to all, and only, pious actions? What features are common to all, and only, virtuous actions?

Socrates knew some canonical examples of pious actions, but he wanted to know what made those actions pious. He did not want just a list. We might ask, “In virtue of what are the pious actions pious?” The answer to this question will be the form, essence, etc. of piety. We can then turn to this form, essence, etc. to determine if other actions count as pious or not.

The search for forms is often understood as a search for necessary and (jointly) sufficient conditions. For example, what features are common to all (necessity), and only (sufficiency), virtuous actions? If we can come up with an answer to this question, then we will have a recipe for determining if some as yet unclassified action is virtuous. And perhaps uncovering the essence of virtue will make clear the standards that our actions should aspire to satisfy. Or maybe we will discover that there is no form to be found. (There would still be virtue then, right?)
• What value is there in conceptual analysis? What do we get out of this linguistic gamesmanship? Isn’t this activity just a word game with no real insight or meaningful contribution? Presumably we engage in conceptual analysis because there is some end-state that we find desirable. But what is so desirable about this end-state? I came up with the following answers:

1. When we have an analysis of a concept (be it correct or not), we have at least systematized usage so as to foster better understanding and communication.
2. An analysis of a concept provides us with a recipe for classifying objects or events.

These first two answers are very close to the surface. They almost tell us what a correct analysis amounts to, rather than saying what is so good about it. The next 5 answers go deeper:

3. An analysis can lead to changes in our perceptions and/or thoughts of particular objects or events. When, by attending to our analysis of the concept of y, we come to judge that x is a y, this often changes our perceptions and/or thoughts about x.
4. An analysis can alter our practices.
5. An analysis often informs our standards of evaluation for that kind.
6. An analysis of a prized concept, such as virtue or knowledge, can also reveal why the concept is thought to be important, valuable, etc.
7. An analysis, and the categorization that inevitably follows, might also be needed for official, practical, and oftentimes bureaucratic purposes.