

Tychè et Pronoia

La marche du monde selon Plutarque

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SOCRATES' δαιμόνιον IN MAXIMUS OF TYRE, APULEIUS, AND PLUTARCH

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Abstract

This paper deals with the positions of three Middle Platonists towards Socrates' divine sign. Maximus of Tyre tries to explain away the exceptional character of Socrates' δαιμόνιον and hardly deals with the interaction between the philosopher and his divine sign. Apuleius' general demonology is much more systematic, yet his more particular interpretation of Socrates' δαιμόνιον hardly surpasses Maximus' views. Plutarch's interpretation in *De genio Socratis*, on the other hand, is more interesting from a philosophical perspective, as is shown by an analysis of the fundamental interpretations proposed by different speakers in this dialogue.

1. A remarkable case of demonic providence

Should a philosopher be extravagant? This frank opening question may come as a surprise, certainly among a contemporary, philosophically minded audience. Of course not: why should he? A man's capacities and credibility as a philosopher obviously do not depend on outward idiosyncracies. An educated audience of the second century AD, however, may have been a little less surprised. More than one self-proclaimed philosopher seems to have based his claims primarily on his extravagant looks (esp. the notorious threadbare cloak or τρίβων) and behaviour (e.g. his disdain for, and harsh insults against everyone he encountered), which, of course, prompted others to unmask such unfounded imposture and self-display¹.

Should a philosopher, then, perhaps be a man of paradoxes and/or oversophisticated logical quibbles? Again, why should he? Yet again, in antiquity, many younger students were presumably attracted by precisely this aspect², and it is well known that the Stoics liked to express some of their basic doctrines in pithy paradoxes³. Other philosophical schools, however, were often less enthusiastic about such paradoxes⁴. Plutarch, for instance, repeatedly blames the Stoics for their παραδοξολογία⁵, and in *De facie*, Lamprias argues

¹ Cf., e.g., Plutarch, *De prof. in virt.* 82B; *De Is. et Os.* 352C; Dio Cassius, 6,13,1^a; Lucian, *Pisc.* 31 and 46; *Bis acc.* 6-7; Epictetus, 4,8,4-9, 15 and 34; Athenaeus, 5, 211de; Aulus Gellius, 9,2,4; cf. already Plato, *Ap.* 29de.

² See, e.g., Plutarch, *De prof. in virt.* 78EF; cf. *De aud.* 43AB.

³ While adding, though, that such doctrines had nothing paradoxical for the sage (Diogenes Laertius, 7,123).

⁴ Cf., e.g., Cicero, *ac.* 2,136.

⁵ See, e.g., *De facie* 924A and CD; *De comm. not.* 1060B; 1068B; 1071D; cf. *De Stoic. rep.* 1046E; *De comm. not.* 1077C, and Plutarch's treatise Ὅτι παραδοξότερα οἱ Στωικοὶ τῶν ποιητῶν λέγουσι (an extract from which has come down to us; 1057C-1058D). On the other hand, Plutarch realises that his own interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* also contains paradoxical elements, which he wants to justify (*De an. procr.* 1014A).

that one should not listen to philosophers who wish to ward off paradoxes by means of other paradoxes⁶.

However that may be, there can hardly be any doubt that Socrates was remembered as both an extravagant philosopher and a man of paradoxes. A particularly salient illustration of both these aspects can be found in his notorious δαιμόνιον σημεῖον. How is the presence of this remarkable divine sign to be explained in a man who in every situation only relied on his sober reason⁷ and who was especially interested in human issues, being the first, in Cicero's famous formulation, to call philosophy down from heaven in order to place it in the cities and houses of men⁸? Even during Socrates' lifetime, the strange phenomenon was presumably widely discussed in Athens⁹, and when the divine voice was finally silenced by the philosopher's execution, it was not forgotten by Socrates' followers. Plato and Xenophon¹⁰, but also other "Socratic" philosophers¹¹ and Plato's disciples¹² gave much attention to the divine sign in their writings. The period of so-called Middle Platonism saw a revival of interest in the issue¹³, and also in Neoplatonism, the topic received attention¹⁴.

The reason for this age-long interest cannot only be found in the remarkable idiosyncrasy of the famous philosopher. For one can easily think of behaviour or claims of other illustrious thinkers that were even more remarkable and yet received far less attention. Empedocles, for instance, was clothed in purple and gold, and used shoes of bronze and a Delphic wreath¹⁵. Pythagoras would have showed more than once his striking prophetic skills, but several of these

⁶ See 923F: φιλοσόφων δ' οὐκ ἀκουστέον ἂν τὰ παράδοξα παραδόξοις ἀμύνεσθαι βούλωνται κτλ.

⁷ Epictetus, *Ench.* 51,3: ἐπὶ πάντων τῶν προσαγομένων αὐτῷ μηδενὶ ἄλλῳ προσέχων ἢ τῷ λόγῳ; Plutarch, *De genio Socr.* 580C; cf. already Plato, *Cri.* 46b.

⁸ Cicero, *Tusc.* 5,10; cf. *ac.* 1,15; Xenophon, *Mem.* 1,1,16 (περὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀεὶ διελέγετο); cf. also the even stronger claim in Plutarch, *De genio Socr.* 582B: φιλοσοφίαν ἐξανθρωπίσαντος.

⁹ Cf. Plutarch, *De genio Socr.* 581E; *Nic.* 13,6. This would later enable Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon to charge Socrates for introducing new δαιμόνια (cf. Plato, *Ap.* 24c and 31cd; Xenophon, *Mem.* 1,1,1; Diogenes Laertius, 2,40).

¹⁰ A convenient survey of relevant passages can already be found in R.E. Macnaghten (1914); see further M. Joyal (2000), 65-71. On Plato, see also the thorough discussions of H. Gundert (1954); M.L. McPherran (1996), 185-208; Th.C. Brickhouse - N.D. Smith (2000), 244-252.

¹¹ Cicero, *div.* 1,122.

¹² On the date of composition of the *Theages*, see M. Joyal (2000), 135-155 (arguing for 345-335 B.C.); on its discussion of Socrates' δαιμόνιον, see Id. (2000), 72-97. On Xenocrates' demonology in general, see, e.g., J. Dillon (2003), 129-131 and 146-147.

¹³ Although it should be noted that our picture may be distorted due to the loss of so many important texts. It cannot be excluded, then, that in the intermediate period Socrates' δαιμόνιον was also discussed, e.g. in the context of philosophical debates about divination (cf. Cicero, *div.* 1,122-124), or in Epicurean attacks against Socrates' supposed ἀλαζονεία (cf., e.g., Plutarch, *Quaest. Plat.* 999C; J. Opsomer (1998), 128).

¹⁴ Proclus, *in Alc.* 78.8-85.17; Olympiodorus, *in Alc.* 21.1-14; Hermias, *in Phdr.* p. 65.26-69.31 Couvr.

¹⁵ Diogenes Laertius, 8,73; Aelian, *VH* 12,32.

achievements have only come down to us through a few late biographies¹⁶. What made Socrates' δαιμόνιον σημεῖον so special, then, is that it was an obvious example of direct intervention of divine powers in the life of an individual. Educated Athenians were familiar with such interventions from the Homeric epic literature¹⁷ and from tragedy (with the *deus ex machina* as the most tangible example), to be sure, but in Socrates' case, the god(s) seemed to interact with a human being no longer in myths and literature but in real life. In this – admittedly quite extraordinary – individual, the gap between the divine world and that of human beings appeared to be bridged to a certain extent. The gods' providential care for men had no longer to be derived from the general teleological character of nature, nor from prophetic dreams, oracles, and so on, but was illustrated in one particular person. Furthermore, the positive results of this divine guidance were impressive, fascinating, and undeniable: the divine sign enabled Socrates not merely to predict the débâcle of the Sicilian expedition¹⁸ or to avoid a herd of dirty swine¹⁹, but even saved his life in the battle of Delium²⁰.

In that sense, Socrates' δαιμόνιον σημεῖον could be regarded as an interesting example of the active influence of divine providence in the life of a single individual. In later Platonic school doctrine, however, this fairly general conclusion was made more specific, through an attempt to distinguish between several levels of providence. In the interesting treatise *De fato*, for instance, which was transmitted under Plutarch's name but was in all likelihood not written by him²¹, a distinction can be found between three different providences, connected with three different levels in the divine realm. On the basis of a few passages in Plato, the author argues that the intellection or will of the highest god should be regarded as primary providence, whereas secondary providence belongs to secondary gods (the stars and planets) and tertiary providence to daemons²², and that primary providence includes fate, tertiary providence is included by fate, and secondary providence exists side by side with fate²³. The details of this theory need not detain us here. What is important for our purpose is that Socrates' δαιμόνιον σημεῖον is explicitly interpreted as an instance of tertiary providence, which yields immediate results that conform to fate²⁴. The

¹⁶ Porphyry, *VP* 25, 28 and 29; Iamblich, *VP* 28. On the other hand, Pythagoras' notorious claim that he could remember his previous lives was often mentioned in ancient literature; see E. Rhode (1925), II, 417-421.

¹⁷ Maximus of Tyre (8, 5a) and Apuleius (*Socr.* 145) both refer to the famous scene in the first book of the *Iliad* (1,194-198), where Achilles, who intended to kill Agamemnon, was restrained by Athena. Cf. also Plutarch, *De genio Socr.* 580CD, who refers to Homer, *Od.* 13,301.

¹⁸ Ps.-Plato, *Thg.* 129cd; Plutarch, *De genio Socr.* 581D; *Nic.* 13,6; *All.* 17,4.

¹⁹ Plutarch, *De genio Socr.* 580D-F.

²⁰ Plutarch, *De genio Socr.* 581DE; Cicero, *div.* 1,123; *Epist. Socr.* 1,9.

²¹ The question of the (in)authenticity of the work has often been examined; see E. Valgiglio (1993), 34-42 for a recent thorough discussion.

²² Ps.-Plutarch, *De fato* 572F-574A.

²³ *Ibid.* 574B-D.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 574BC, with reference to Ps.-Plato, *Thg.* 129e.

parallels that can be found in other authors²⁵ show that this strange theory belongs to the period of Middle Platonism²⁶ and drew its main inspiration from a Platonic perspective²⁷. It is a typical example of a formalised school doctrine which tries to introduce everything, including even highly personal phenomena such as Socrates' divine sign, into a systematic and hierarchical Platonic world view.

Interesting though such attempts at systematisation may be, they are often bought at the price of oversimplification and neglect of particularities. In this case, too, the theory does not provide any further information about the concrete way in which the tertiary, "demonic" providence precisely worked in Socrates' case. In order to find an answer to this question, one should turn to other sources, more precisely to two speeches of Maximus of Tyre (*or.* 8 and 9), to Apuleius' *De deo Socratis*, and to Plutarch's *De genio Socratis*. In none of these texts is the above mentioned doctrine of the three providences explicitly discussed (although we can be sure that at least Apuleius was familiar with it²⁸). Instead, they focus on the providential working of demons in general, and particularly on Socrates' δαιμόνιον. Although the three texts have much in common, they also show several significant differences. In fact, the three authors took up the topic at issue in a variety of ways, for a variety of audiences, and for a variety of exegetic purposes.

2. Maximus of Tyre

The point of departure of Maximus of Tyre's two speeches about Socrates' δαιμόνιον is the audience's supposed astonishment²⁹ at Socrates' possession of a divine sign. By means of a first lengthy series of concrete examples – Laconic brevity was not one of his qualities –, Maximus then attempts to demonstrate that such phenomenon is not so remarkable after all: if all kinds of people can indeed through many oracles make contact with the demonic realm, a pure and virtuous philosopher such like Socrates is *a fortiori* able to keep in touch with a δαιμόνιον, even on a more individual basis³⁰. At the end of his first speech, Maximus even suggests that Socrates was not the only famous thinker who could benefit from such an association with a δαίμων: Plato too, and Pythagoras, and Zeno and Diogenes all had their personal daemonic supervisor³¹. And through his passing remark that the daemons order him to

²⁵ Apuleius, *de Plat.* 1,12 p. 205-206; Nemesius, *Nat. hom.* 43, p. 125.21-126.12 Morani; cf. Chalcidius, *comm.* 146.

²⁶ See further A. Gercke (1886), 284-286; J. Beaujeu (1973), 273-274; J. Dillon (1977), 324-326; S. Gersh (1986), 280-285; R.W. Sharples (2003).

²⁷ P. Moraux (1984), 503-504: "Die Erörterungen über die Vorsehung (πρόνοια) und ihr Verhältnis zur Heimarmene stützen sich fast ausschließlich auf platonisches Material, besonders aus dem Timaios. Inhaltlich bieten sie nichts, was auf die aristotelische Tradition zurückzuführen ist."

²⁸ Cf. *supra*, n. 25.

²⁹ *Orat.* 8, 1a: θαυμάζεις; cf. 8, 1b; 8, 3b; 8, 6i.

³⁰ *Orat.* 8, 1b-3d.

³¹ *Orat.* 8, 8f.

speak on their behalf³², Maximus subtly suggests that he himself can be added to this list of distinguished thinkers. A first important aim of Maximus' speeches, then, consists in explaining away the exceptional character of Socrates' divine sign. The philosopher's δαιμόνιον may have been an individual entity³³, to be sure, but it can perfectly be related to similar phenomena. It should be clear that this argument is not merely a neutral piece of instruction³⁴, but that it is also of paramount importance for Maximus' self-presentation. The author indeed presents himself as the competent expert who is able to free his audience from their ignorant amazement. He is the man who, even on such quite obscure and startling issues, can speak from personal experience.

After this piece of indirect self-promotion, Maximus turns to the crucial problem of the precise nature of Socrates' δαιμόνιον³⁵, though only to reformulate the question: a correct understanding of this specific instance presupposes an insight into the more general *genus* of δαιμόνια³⁶. This is sound methodology, no doubt, which moreover recalls similar Platonic principles³⁷, but at the same time, this self-confident methodological strategy enables Maximus to escape embarrassing difficulties: the particularly complex problem of Socrates' strange δαιμόνιον can now be replaced by the much less demanding topic of demonology in general³⁸. This, apparently, is a subject that better suits Maximus' rhetorical talents. After a lengthy discussion of Homer's treatment of daemons³⁹, which once again helps in explaining away the exceptional nature of Socrates' divine sign (and helps to show how traditional religion is to be understood from a philosophical point of view), Maximus finally begins to develop his views on a hierarchic universe, governed by a benevolent deity who is assisted by secondary immortal beings, the daemons. These daemons occupy an intermediate position, sharing their immortality with the god and their susceptibility to passions with human beings, and thus act as a kind of interpreters between both levels⁴⁰. More precisely, daemons are disembodied souls who, out of pity for kindred souls which are still linked to the body and in accordance with the god's command, involve in human matters⁴¹. In that sense, and in spite of the fact that Maximus never uses the term *πρόνοια* in this

³² *Orat.* 9, 1c: ἀποκριτέον γάρ τοι ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν, κελεύουσι γάρ.

³³ *Orat.* 8, 6a: τὸ μὲν γὰρ Σωκράτους δαιμόνιον ἓν, καὶ ἀπλοῦν, καὶ ἰδιωτικόν.

³⁴ That Maximus' speeches are primarily addressed to the young is argued by G.L. Koniaris (1982), 113-114 and M.B. Trapp (1997), xx-xxii.

³⁵ *Orat.* 8, 4b: τί δὲ καὶ ἦν τὸ δαιμόνιον ποθῶ μαθεῖν; cf. 8, 6l: τίς ἡ τοῦ δαιμονίου φύσις.

³⁶ *Orat.* 8, 4bc; cf. 6l.

³⁷ Cf., e.g., *Meno* 71ab. That Maximus' two discourses reflect a Platonic perspective is argued by J. Puiggali (1983), 192-240.

³⁸ It should be noted, however, that we do not know what title(s) these two lectures were delivered and/or published under. It is not impossible that the original titles promised an account of *daimones* rather than an explanation of the Socratic *daimonion*. If that is true, Maximus uses the well-known individual case of Socrates as an effective and striking point of entry to an exposition of an important area of philosophical cosmology and theology.

³⁹ *Orat.* 8, 5a-6l.

⁴⁰ *Orat.* 8, 8a-9, 4e.

⁴¹ *Orat.* 9, 6a-g.

context, these daemons obviously contribute to the highest god's providential care for the world of human beings.

While this general, and fairly superficial perspective is rhetorically elaborated with many examples and parallels⁴², the knotty problem of the peculiar character of Socrates' δαιμόνιον fades into the background. What has Maximus to tell his audience about the daemoniac working in Socrates' particular case? How should the interaction between Socrates and his δαιμόνιον be understood? On this point, Maximus' verbosity conceals a remarkable lack of ideas. His arguments can be reduced to two basic observations. First of all, he more than once underlines Socrates' exceptional purity⁴³, which serves both as an *a fortiori* argument ("if other people, then *a fortiori* Socrates") and a *conditio sine qua non* (daemons only assist virtuous people⁴⁴), without, however, explaining the *individual* nature of the phenomenon. Secondly, throughout the two speeches, Maximus is particularly vague about the precise way in which the δαιμόνιον communicated with Socrates. At the very outset of the first speech, he merely asserts that the δαιμόνιον always "attended" Socrates and was "all but mixed up with his mind"⁴⁵, without further even clarifying whether the δαιμόνιον had its seat in the body⁴⁶, the soul⁴⁷, or the mind. Socrates' association with the δαιμόνιον, or *vice versa*, is usually described with the general term συνουσία⁴⁸. At the end of his second speech, he adds a few words about the visual perception of daemons⁴⁹, and Maximus would not have been Maximus if he would not have pointed out that he himself had seen several of them, not in a dream but in waking reality⁵⁰. One could of course wonder what all this has to do with the divine *voice* that Socrates could apparently perceive. The less educated members of Maximus' audience may perhaps have been greatly impressed by the sophist's *grand finale*, but more erudite listeners probably recalled that Socrates used to regard men who claimed to have had visual communication with the divine as boastful charlatans⁵¹. Was Maximus an ἀλάζων?

I think he was, though a brilliant one! In both speeches, he used traditional material in order to present himself as a virtuoso speaker. His goal is not

⁴² Cf. M.B. Trapp (1997), 68: "Maximus' discussion provides the fullest surviving development of the notion that *daimones* are an indispensable rung in the hierarchy of living beings in the cosmos, but otherwise contains nothing not amply paralleled in the other sources, and at several points side-steps difficulties or refinements which they take into account."

⁴³ *Orat.* 8, 1a; 8, 3b; 8, 4a; 8, 6i-l.

⁴⁴ *Orat.* 8, 8g.

⁴⁵ *Orat.* 8, 1a: ἀει παρεπόμενον, και μόνον οὐ τῇ γνώμῃ αὐτοῦ ἀνακεκραμένον.

⁴⁶ *Orat.* 8, 8f: εἴληγεν δὲ ἄλλος ἄλλην ἐστὶν σώματος.

⁴⁷ *Orat.* 8, 8g.

⁴⁸ *Orat.* 8, 3d (τῇ πρὸς τὸ δαιμόνιον συνουσία); 8, 4a (ἠξιώθη ὁ Σωκράτης δαιμονίου συνουσίας); cf. 8, 1a (Σωκράτει συνῆν δαιμόνιον); 8, 3b (συγγίγνεσθαι τῷ δαιμονίῳ); 8, 3d (τῷ νῷ ταῖς τῶν θεῶν φωναῖς συγγιγνόμενος; probably Maximus' most precise statement about this topic); cf. also 8, 1b (συγγιγνόμενος); 8, 6a; 8, 6k (μοίρας δαιμονίου).

⁴⁹ *Orat.* 9, 7c-i.

⁵⁰ *Orat.* 9, 7i: οὐχὶ ὄναρ ... ἀλλ' ὕπαρ.

⁵¹ See Plutarch, *De genio Socr.* 588C.

so much to provide a systematic exposition of philosophical doctrines, but primarily to impress his audience (by such an exposition). This is ἐπίδειξις aiming at πειθῶ and self-display, rather than a search for the truth. To that purpose, Maximus completely does away with the listeners' initial wonder about Socrates' δαιμόνιον and about the tangible influence of the divine world on the life of an individual. And in thus killing wonder, he actually destroys the ἀρχή of philosophy. If there is any place for wonder in the world view which Maximus proclaims, it is wonder about the extraordinary genius of Maximus himself.

3. Apuleius of Madaura

The title of Apuleius' speech *De deo Socratis* is somewhat misleading, since the work is primarily a systematic discussion of demonology. Only a relatively small section is devoted to the particular case of Socrates' δαιμόνιον. The work begins⁵² with a reference to Plato's division of the universe into three levels. At the top is the realm of the first god and the lower gods⁵³, at the bottom the world of human beings⁵⁴, and no direct contact is possible between both⁵⁵. Nevertheless, this gap does not imply that man is entirely left to himself, bereft of any divine help, for there exists an intermediate level of "divine" beings, the daemons, who act as intermediaries between gods and men, and all have their own domain or *provincia*: dreams, entrails, birds, and so on⁵⁶. Apuleius thus depicts a strongly hierarchical universe, in which all sections have their own function: a kind of perfectly streamlined company, as it were, structured into different departments, administrated by a general manager who is assisted by a series of executive officers. It is clear that this view bears striking resemblance to that of Maximus, and in all likelihood, the view of both authors should – directly or indirectly – be traced back to a key passage of Plato's *Symposium*⁵⁷. Apuleius and Maximus both in their own way draw from their *copia verborum* in order to elaborate in great detail the Platonic material, but Apuleius' speech is no doubt the more detailed, well considered, and systematic of the two⁵⁸.

That also holds true for the interpretation of the notion of "daemon" itself. Again, Apuleius provides his audience with a systematic division into different categories. A daemon can be both (1) a human mind which is still in the body and (2) a disembodied mind. Moreover, there also exists (3)

⁵² On the much-discussed problem of the so-called false preface, see, e.g., V. Hunink (1995); G. Sandy (1997), 192-196; F. Regen (1999), 432-438; S. Harrison (2000), 141-144; M.-L. Lakmann (2004), 23-26.

⁵³ *Socr.* 115-124.

⁵⁴ *Socr.* 125-127.

⁵⁵ *Socr.* 127-132.

⁵⁶ *Socr.* 133-134.

⁵⁷ That is, *Smp.* 202e-203a.

⁵⁸ General studies of Apuleius' demonology include F. Regen (1971); Id. (1999), 451-456; Id. (2000), 41-54; C. Moreschini (1978), 19-27; W. Bernard (1994); P. Habermehl (1996); cf. also S.J. Harrison (2000), 151-161.

a higher kind of daemons, which have never been linked to the body and act as the individual supervisors of human beings, observing their lives and bringing them to trial after their death⁵⁹. This classification, which is once again a clear-cut systematisation and combination of several isolated ideas in Plato's works⁶⁰, follows upon an extensive discussion of the body of daemons⁶¹, a characterisation of them as both immortal and susceptible to passions⁶², and a concise, summarising definition⁶³.

It is only after this thorough general discussion that Apuleius finally turns to the specific problem of Socrates' δαιμόνιον. Just like Maximus, he begins with an attempt to downplay the extraordinary, exceptional nature of the phenomenon, pointing out that something similar could already be found in Homer⁶⁴. Apuleius' and Maximus' appeal to the supposed surprise of their respective audiences obviously reflects basically the same rhetorical strategy⁶⁵, yet from a more general point of view, their approach is diametrically opposed: whereas Maximus indeed takes the particular case as his starting point for more general reflections, Apuleius only deals with the concrete issue after having elaborated a more general perspective. Although the latter approach makes it easier to explain the phenomenon to an audience that is already introduced to the basics of the Platonic demonology, it is no doubt also the more demanding one, since Apuleius can no longer avoid the more difficult particular questions by escaping towards a more universal perspective. In that sense, Apuleius' challenge is much greater than Maximus'. His answer to it, however, which mainly focuses on two aspects, is almost equally disappointing, at least for philosophically interested listeners⁶⁶.

First, Apuleius deals with the exclusively apotropaic character of Socrates'

⁵⁹ *Socr.* 150-156.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., *Phd.* 108b and 113d; *R.* 620de for the daemon as personal guardian, and *Ti* 90a for the daemon as τὸ κυριώτατον παρ' ἡμῖν ψυχῆς εἶδος.

⁶¹ *Socr.* 140-145.

⁶² *Socr.* 146-147.

⁶³ *Socr.* 148: *daemones sunt genere animalia, ingenio rationabilia, animo passiva, corpore aera, tempore aeterna.*

⁶⁴ *Socr.* 158-162.

⁶⁵ According to J. Beaujeu (1973), 240 and S.J. Harrison (2000), 139-140 and 161; Id. (2001), 188, the similarities between Maximus and Apuleius suggest the existence of a common source: "The incredulous rhetorical questions and the stress on the great virtue of Socrates similarly expressed suggest a common origin; both authors are also raising an obvious problem, why the wise Socrates needed a *daimonion* in the first place, which is likely to have featured in previous writing on the subject." I am not sure whether this is correct: in my view, the similarities are less obvious than Harrison believes – after all, both authors describe Socrates' virtue in very different ways – and may find their origin in basically the same rhetorical strategy, that is, questioning the alleged feelings of the listeners in order to subtly enhance one's own reputation as an erudite, clever speaker. Moreover, both authors do not refer to the audience's surprise that Socrates needed a *daimonion*, but rather to their wondering about the *phenomenon itself* (abstracting from the question whether he needed it or not).

⁶⁶ Though perhaps not for Apuleius' listeners; cf. G. Sandy (1997), 211. On the audience of *De deo Socratis*, see further B.L. Hijmans (1987), 431-433; S.J. Harrison (2001), 187-188; M.-L. Lakmann (2004), 17.

δαιμόνιον. In his view, the reason why Socrates never received positive advice should be sought in the philosopher's virtuous disposition, which never required positive exhortations but sometimes needed warnings against possible dangers⁶⁷. This is an intelligent suggestion, which recalls Maximus' argument but also surpasses it, in that it uses the traditional element of Socrates' purity not only to explain the *presence* of the δαιμόνιον, but also its *general character*. On the other hand, Apuleius does not take further advantage of this topic in order to throw more light on the *precise nature* of the voice or sign that Socrates could perceive.

This crucial question, which directly thematises the communication between god and man, is discussed next, but here, Apuleius' answer is rather disappointing: the voice was not an ordinary one but came from a divine source⁶⁸, as is also indicated by Socrates' claim not just to hear a voice but "a certain kind of" voice⁶⁹. Apuleius thus rejects the interpretation of Socrates' δαιμόνιον as a kind of ominous chance utterance (κληδόν), but only in order to argue – quite remarkably – that Socrates was able to *see* his strange voice or sign. The basic argument on which this suggestion rests is an *argumentum ex auctoritate*: the Pythagoreans used to be astonished if anyone claimed that he had never seen a daemon (a testimony the reliability of which is guaranteed by Aristotle, yet another *argumentum ex auctoritate*)⁷⁰. If all this is true, an easy rhetorical *a fortiori* argument suffices to make the point: if everyone, then certainly Socrates, the pure sage⁷¹. In the end, Apuleius thus resembles Maximus both in replacing Socrates' daemonic *voice* by a *visual* apparition and by failing to do justice to the exceptional character of Socrates' δαιμόνιον, which becomes a more or less ordinary phenomenon⁷².

In that sense, Apuleius' discussion of the particular nature of Socrates' δαιμόνιον does likewise not surpass the level of a few vague commonplaces. Just like Maximus, Apuleius has to conceal the poverty of his ideas on this issue by means of his brilliant rhetoric. Many question marks are self-confidently replaced by exclamation marks, but behind the façade of rhetorical self-display, many essential questions are left untouched. Apuleius surpasses Maximus, however, in that his rhetoric is coupled with a much more systematic discussion. *De deo Socratis* happily combines the brilliant rhetoric of the *Apology* and the *Florida* with the philosophical

⁶⁷ *Socr.* 162-163. No doubt Socrates was an important model for Apuleius, who may have fashioned his own defence *De magia* after Plato's *Apology*; cf. U. Schindel (2000).

⁶⁸ *Socr.* 163: *vocem quampiam divinitus exortam*; cf. 166: *divinitus editam*.

⁶⁹ *Socr.* 165: *Socrates non vocem sibi, sed vocem quampiam dixit oblatam*, which refers to Plato, *Phdr.* 242c (τινὴ φωνήν); cf. *Ap.* 31d (φωνή τις).

⁷⁰ *Socr.* 166-167.

⁷¹ *Socr.* 167.

⁷² S.J. Harrison (2000), 165 correctly notes that Apuleius' "arguments for visual contact between Socrates and his daimonion are weak in the extreme." The reason why Apuleius nevertheless chose to include them can be found, always according to Harrison, in the intellectual context of the work: "The idea of private communion with a god was a highly popular one in the age of the Second Sophistic" (*ibid.*).

system of the *De Platone*, and thus strikingly illustrates both the self-display and the careful philosophical instruction of the self-proclaimed *philosophus Platonicus*.

4. Plutarch of Chaeronea

Plutarch situates his discussion of Socrates' δαιμόνιον in a historical context, viz. the liberation of Thebes in 379 BC. This entails a completely different approach: *De genio Socratis* does not aim at ἐπίδειξις and self-display but contains an erudite discussion among philosophically minded conspirators, who are obviously interested in problems of divination. Moreover, the topic of Socrates' divine sign does not come out of the blue, but is the logical consequence of the previous discussions⁷³.

The question is raised by Theocritus, as an objection against Galaxidorus, who argued that Socrates was opposed to superstitious beliefs regarding the apparition of divine signs and only relied on sober reasoning⁷⁴. Theocritus' view is fairly superficial⁷⁵: from his childhood Socrates had a kind of daemonic vision (ὄψιν) which showed him the way in obscure decisions⁷⁶. It is quite remarkable that it is with regard to this view, which is used by Plutarch in order to introduce the question on a rather general and even somewhat naive level, that several striking parallels can be found with Maximus of Tyre and Apuleius: the mention of Pythagoras, the reference to Athena in Homer, the intervention of the δαιμόνιον in obscure matters, the interest in anecdotes, and, of course, the visual interpretation of the divine voice. Those many significant parallels throw an interesting additional light on the level and scope of Maximus' and Apuleius' discussions. In a certain sense, they do not go (far) beyond a mere introduction of the question. In other words, they stop where Plutarch starts. Their view reflects a *pre-philosophical* position, and this is precisely the level to which they usually appeal. They are not interested in difficult technical issues, through which they would lose the attention of their audiences. For Plutarch, on the other hand, such pre-philosophical convictions are only the starting point of a more thorough, philosophical inquiry.

The first serious attempt at interpretation comes from Galaxidorus. Briefly, he regards Socrates' δαιμόνιον as a trivial external matter, a sneeze or chance

⁷³ See, e.g., D. Babut (1984), 63–68 on the importance of the theme of divination throughout *De genio Socratis*. This observation, however, does not solve the complex problem of the unity of *De genio Socratis*. M. Riley (1977), D. Babut (1984) and A. Georgiadou (1995) regard the relation between *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* as the unifying theme of the work, whereas F.E. Brenk (1996) points to the importance of the theme of freedom, and A. Barigazzi (1988) to the figure of Epameinondas.

⁷⁴ *De genio Socr.* 579F–580C.

⁷⁵ And to a certain extent conditioned by the story about Theanor, who spent the night at Lysis' tomb in order to remove the remains and bring it to Italy, unless some δαιμόνιον would oppose it during the night (579F: εἰ μὴ τι νύκτωρ ὑπεναντιωθεῖη δαιμόνιον).

⁷⁶ *De genio Socr.* 580CD.

remark (κληδών) which the philosopher used in matters of equipollence⁷⁷. This is a very rationalistic interpretation, which is both in line with Galaxidorus' general view of Socrates and not devoid of important philosophical credentials, as it can be traced back to Socrates' companion Terpsion⁷⁸. It is such an interpretation which is rejected by Apuleius, and Plutarch, too, brings forward several objections. If Socrates was really guided by a sneeze, why then did he not admit this and spoke instead of a divine sign? Is this not evidence of vain affectation? Moreover, the philosopher's behaviour usually seemed to rest on a stable foundation, and anecdotes about the working of the δαιμόνιον also seem to point in a different direction⁷⁹. These are interesting counter arguments, and several of them are much more fundamental, at least from a philosophical point of view, than those adduced by Apuleius. But what especially distinguishes Plutarch from Apuleius is the mere fact that he allows Galaxidorus to defend himself. Galaxidorus indeed intelligently argues that Socrates' conduct had nothing to do with conceited affectation: the philosopher realised that the sneeze was merely an instrument of the divinity, and preferred to focus on the divine source rather than on the trivial instrument⁸⁰. This may not be an answer to all problems which Galaxidorus' view entails, to be sure, but the view is interesting enough to be taken into account⁸¹. It is clear that this is perfectly in line with the dynamics of a philosophical *dialogue* rather than a rhetorical monologue. The reader is not introduced to ready-made answers, but enters a process of enquiry into the truth⁸².

Then it is Simmias' turn. After having underlined that Socrates' δαιμόνιον should be understood as an auditory phenomenon, not a visual one, he elaborates a particularly interesting philosophical alternative, starting from traditional insights about human speech as a blow against the air⁸³. In Socrates' case, however, the communication with the daemon did not entail such violent blows, but the philosopher was directly 'touched' in his mind by the daemonic messages⁸⁴. This is not the place to enter at length into the details of Simmias' interpretation⁸⁵, but I would like to emphasise that his approach is completely different from that of Maximus and Apuleius. Simmias' physicalistic interpretation is not based on *argumenta ex auctoritate* but looks for rational insight, and aims at the truth rather than at *πειθώ*. Moreover, Simmias does neither try to remove wonder nor explain away the idiosyncratic aspect of

⁷⁷ *De genio Socr.* 580F-581A.

⁷⁸ *De genio Socr.* 581A. On Terpsion, see also Plato, *Phd.* 59c and *Tht.* 142a-143c; *Suda* IV, 404.23 Ad.

⁷⁹ *De genio Socr.* 581B-E.

⁸⁰ *De genio Socr.* 581F-582C.

⁸¹ See esp. D. Babut (1988), who argues that Plutarch never utterly rejects Galaxidorus' point of view, and that such 'rationalism' was one aspect of Plutarch's own philosophical outlook.

⁸² *De genio Socr.* 588B (ζητήσεως οὐκ ἀγεννοῦς); 592F (ζήτησιν).

⁸³ *De genio Socr.* 588E and 589C; cf. L. Van der Stockt (1992), 57-58.

⁸⁴ *De genio Socr.* 588B-589F.

⁸⁵ Good discussions can be found in A. Corlu (1970), 53-60; K. Döring (1984), 379-381; K. Alt (1995), 82-83; A.A. Long (2006).

Socrates' δαίμόνιον. Socrates is rather depicted as one of the few exceptional men whose outstanding purity enables them to perceive the unuttered messages of daemons⁸⁶. The traditional element of Socrates' perfect virtue is thus used in a particularly interesting way. It does not explain the mere presence of the sign, but is part and parcel of an investigation into the precise way in which the daemon communicated with the human philosopher, and even becomes the interpretative key in order to translate the ordinary theory of language towards the special case of Socrates.

Having developed this view, Simmias goes on to relate what he heard from Timarchus. The core of the latter's view is that the daemon should be equated with the human mind or νοῦς, that is, the part of the soul which does not come into contact with the body⁸⁷ and which guides – or tries to guide – the soul⁸⁸. From this section on, the specific question of Socrates' δαίμόνιον begins to fade into the background. However, this shift of focus towards a more general perspective is not a clever way to ignore puzzling specific questions. The previous interventions of Galaxidorus and Simmias have already shown that Plutarch, unlike Maximus, does not evade the question of the peculiar nature of Socrates' divine sign. On the other hand, Timarchus' view does not contain a systematically elaborated demonology (such like that of Apuleius) either. What, then, is the function of the Timarchus section within the whole discussion?

First of all, it is important that both at the beginning and at the end, Simmias explicitly characterizes his account as a *myth*⁸⁹. As such, it can contribute to reaching the truth – ἀλήθεια again, no ἐπίδειξις –, although in a less accurate way than reason⁹⁰. No less important is the actual place of the myth in the discussion. It is not to be found at the beginning of the discussion⁹¹ but only occurs after reason has first got all the chances to throw its light on the matter. The myth then provides an additional perspective, not replacing the λόγος nor being replaced by it. Just as Galaxidorus' and Simmias' rational, philosophical reflections follow the pre-philosophical convictions of Theocritus, so the myth is only introduced when the philosophical λόγος has done its work. Such a composition can also be found elsewhere in Plutarch's works⁹², and reflects both his fundamental willingness to rely as much as possible on sober reasoning in his search for the truth and his openness for a complementary perspective. In this, he merely followed the example of his distinguished master Plato himself⁹³.

⁸⁶ *De genio Socr.* 588DE and 589C. Socrates was apparently not the only one who attained that level of purity; cf. 592CD on Hermodorus of Clazomenae.

⁸⁷ *De genio Socr.* 591DE.

⁸⁸ *De genio Socr.* 592A–C.

⁸⁹ *De genio Socr.* 589F; 592E and F.

⁹⁰ *De genio Socr.* 589F: καὶ γὰρ εἰ μὴ λίαν ἀκριβῶς, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ὅπη ψαύει τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τὸ μυθῶδες.

⁹¹ Simmias even hesitates to relate it at all (perhaps σιωπᾶν is ἄμεινον), and has to be persuaded by Theocritus; *De genio Socr.* 589F.

⁹² See *De facie* 937CD for an interesting parallel example.

⁹³ The same composition, in which philosophical λόγος precedes μῦθος, can be found in

Is there anything to be added after the myth? The last word is for Theanor. He regards daemons as disembodied souls who help kindred souls which are still in the body but which have made much progress and are about to reach the end of the reincarnation process⁹⁴. On the one hand, Theanor recalls several key topics which played an important part in the views of previous speakers, such as the idea of the exceptional nature that is worthy of communication with the gods⁹⁵ or the notion of moral excellence as the *conditio sine qua non* for the assistance of demons⁹⁶. On the other hand, he also adds a few new elements, the most important of which is that of the daemon as personal supervisor and thus indirectly the providential working of the daemons. This combination of looking back on the previous discussion and introducing a few new ideas shows that Theanor's contribution should be understood as an original evaluative conclusion. This is no mere addendum but the introduction of a broader perspective from which the previous contributions, including both λόγος and μῦθος, can be understood⁹⁷. This is also the reason why his contribution has such a general scope: in a retrospective evaluation there is no room for a discussion of particulars, although the introduction of the new perspective can stimulate further thinking. Even after the myth, philosophical reflection can in principle go on. The conspirators, however, do not take this opportunity. For them the time has come to deliver Thebes, for us to conclude.

5. Conclusion

In the second half of the fifth century BC, many voices could be heard in Athens. There were the dignified voices of the tragedians, the critical voices of the historians and the humorous voices of the comedians. Sophists discussed with philosophers, politicians with the people, and Socrates with everybody. But in this impressive chorus of usually extremely dissonant, though in some respects also remarkably harmonious voices, there was one strange, divine voice, which never directly took part in the public debates, had perhaps little more to say than a simple and clear "No!"⁹⁸, and was only heard by one individual. Yet it was this strange voice that became a challenge to later thinking for many ages to come and gave rise to a new chorus of often dissonant voices, three of which were those of Maximus, Apuleius, and Plutarch. Although Socrates' daemonic voice was confined to a brief but crucial period in the history of Western civilisation, at least part of the many voices and the torrents of words which it inspired have come down to us.

Plato's *Phaedo*, *Gorgias*, and *Republic*.

⁹⁴ *De genio Socr.* 593A-594A.

⁹⁵ *De genio Socr.* 593D.

⁹⁶ *De genio Socr.* 593F-594A.

⁹⁷ Significant in this respect is that Theanor explicitly expresses his approval of both Simmias' and Timarchus' interpretation; *De genio Socr.* 593A.

⁹⁸ Cf. Th.C. Brickhouse - N.D. Smith (2000), 248; *contra* M.L. McPherran (1996), 204-205.

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