

### The Divine Sign and the Socratic Problem

I. Was the *daimonion* an important part of Socrates' personality?

A. Xenophon's Socrates speaks boastfully about the *daimonion* in court (Xen. Ap. 13)

ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν οἰωνούς τε καὶ φήμας καὶ συμβόλους τε καὶ μάντις ὀνομάζουσι τοὺς προσημαίνοντας εἶναι, ἐγὼ δὲ τοῦτο δαιμόνιον καλῶ, καὶ οἶμαι οὕτως ὀνομάζων καὶ ἀληθέστερα καὶ ὀσιώτερα λέγειν τῶν τοῖς ὄρνισιν ἀνατιθέντων τὴν τῶν θεῶν δύναμιν.

But while other people believe that birds and utterances and prophets foretell the future, I [Socrates] call this the *daimonion*, and by believing this, I think that I say something more true and more pious than those attributing the power of the gods to birds.

B. Plato's Socrates speaks boastfully about the *daimonion* in court (Plat. Ap. 31d5-32a3)

τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὃ μοι ἐναντιοῦται τὰ πολιτικὰ πράττειν, καὶ παγκάλως γέ μοι δοκεῖ ἐναντιοῦσθαι· εὖ γὰρ ἴστε, ὧ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, εἰ ἐγὼ πάλαι ἐπεχείρησα πράττειν τὰ πολιτικὰ πράγματα, πάλαι ἂν ἀπολώλη καὶ οὐτ' ἂν ὑμᾶς ὠφελήκη οὐδὲν οὐτ' ἂν ἐμαυτόν. καί μοι μὴ ἄχθεσθε λέγοντι τάληθῆ· οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ὅστις ἀνθρώπων σωθήσεται οὔτε ὑμῖν οὔτε ἄλλω πλήθει οὐδενὶ γνησίως ἐναντιούμενος καὶ διακωλύων πολλὰ ἄδικα καὶ παράνομα ἐν τῇ πόλει γίγνεσθαι, ἀλλ' ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι τὸν τῷ ὄντι μαχούμενον ὑπὲρ τοῦ δικαίου, καὶ εἰ μέλλει ὀλίγον χρόνον σωθήσεσθαι, ἰδιωτεύειν ἀλλὰ μὴ δημοσιεύειν.

**[My *daimonion*] is what prevented me from doing politics, and it seems to me to have opposed me rightly; for you know well, Athenian men, that if I had tried to do political business long ago, I would have been killed long ago, and I would have benefited neither you nor myself; for no one will be safe who has nobly opposed either you or any other multitude and who prevents many unjust and illegal things from happening in the city. But it is necessary for a person who fights for justice in reality to have a private station and not to be in the public service if he intends to be safe even for a little while.**

II. Did the *daimonion* pose a threat to Socrates' rationality?

A. Standard translation of *Crito* 46b4-6

ἐγὼ οὐ νῦν πρῶτον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀεὶ τοιοῦτος οἷος τῶν ἐμῶν μηδενὶ ἄλλῳ πείθεσθαι ἢ τῷ λόγῳ ὃς ἂν μοι λογιζομένῳ βέλτιστος φαίνεται.

I am not just now but in fact I've always been the sort of person who's persuaded by nothing but the reason that appears to me to be best when I've considered it. (*Crito* 46b4-6)<sup>1</sup>

B. My translation of *Crito* 46b4-6

ἐγὼ οὐ νῦν πρῶτον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀεὶ τοιοῦτος οἷος **τῶν ἐμῶν** μηδενὶ ἄλλῳ πείθεσθαι ἢ τῷ λόγῳ ὃς ἂν μοι λογιζομένῳ βέλτιστος φαίνεται.

I am not now for the first time, but have always been the sort of man who is persuaded by nothing **of my own things** other than the reason that seems best to me while I am deliberating.

C. Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.9

τοὺς δὲ μηδὲν τῶν τοιούτων οἰομένους εἶναι δαιμόνιον, ἀλλὰ πάντα τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης γνώμης, δαιμονᾶν ἔφη· δαιμονᾶν δὲ καὶ τοὺς μαντευομένους ἃ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἔδωκαν οἱ θεοὶ μαθοῦσι διακρίνειν

But [Socrates] said that those who think that none of these sorts of things are divine, but that all belong to human reason, are mad. But those seeking oracles regarding things which the gods have granted to human beings to interpret by learning are mad, too.

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<sup>1</sup> Brickhouse and Smith (2005, 43).

- III. Was Socrates' *daimonion* exclusively apotreptic (Plato), or both apotreptic and protreptic (Xenophon)?
- A. Parallels between the *daimonion* and Socratic virtue in Plato's *Apology*
1. Socrates' wisdom is based in his unique awareness of the limits of human knowledge (Plat. *Ap.* 23a5-b4).
  2. Socrates fights for justice by opposing injustice (Plat. *Ap.* 32a4-e1).
- B. Plato uses the same verb (ἐναντιόομαι):
1. to describe the *daimonion*'s opposition to Socrates' going into politics (Plat. *Ap.* 31d5)
  2. to explain that no one fighting for justice who opposes a crowd is safe (Plat. *Ap.* 31e3)
  3. to describe Socrates' opposition to the motion to try the Arginusae generals as a group (Plat. *Ap.* 32b6)

### Selected Bibliography

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