On Dæmons

Proclus* Thomas Taylor (tr.)†

Let us now speak, in the first place, concerning dæmons in general; in the next place, concerning those that are allotted us in common; and in the third place concerning the dæmon of Socrates. For it is always requisite that demonstrations should begin from things more universal, and proceed from these as far as to individuals. For this mode of proceeding is natural, and is more adapted to science. Dæmons, therefore, deriving their first subsistence from the vivific goddess,[1] and flowing from thence as from a certain fountain, are allotted an essence characterized by soul. This essence in those of a superior order is more intellectual and more perfect according to hyparxis;[2] in those of a middle order, it is more rational; and in those which rank in the third degree, and which subsist at the extremity of the dæmoniacal order, it is various, more irrational and more material. Possessing therefore an essence of this kind, they are distributed in conjunction with the gods, as being allotted a power ministrant to deity. Hence they are in one way subservient to the liberated gods[3] who are the leaders of wholes prior to the world; and in another to the mundane gods, who proximately preside over the parts of the universe. For there is one division of dæmons, according to the twelve supercelestial gods, and another according to all the idioms of the mundane gods. For every mundane god is the leader of a certain dæmoniacal order, to which he proximately imparts his power; *viz.* if he is a demiurgic god, he imparts a demiurgic power; if immutable an undefiled power; if telesiurgic, a perfective power. And about each of the divinities, there is an innumerable multitude of dæmons, and which are dignified with the same appellations as their leading gods. Hence they rejoice when they are called by the names of Jupiter, Apollo, and Hermes, &c. as expressing the idiom, or peculiarity of their proper deities: and from these, mortal natures also participate of divine influxions. And thus animals and plants are fabricated, bearing the images of different gods; dæmons proximately imparting to these the representations of their leaders. But the gods in an exempt manner

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[1] Juno.

[2] The summit of essence.

[3] Gods who immediately subsist above the mundane deities, and are therefore called supercelestial.

supernally preside over dæmons; and through this, last natures sympathize with such as are first. For the representations of first are seen in last natures; and the causes of things last are comprehended in primary beings. The middle genera too of dæmons give completion to wholes, the communion of which they bind and connect; participating indeed of the gods, but participated by mortal natures. He therefore will not err who asserts that the mundane artificer established the centers of the order of the universe, in dæmons; since Diotima also assigns them this order, that of binding together divine and mortal natures, of deducing supernal streams, elevating all secondary natures to the gods, and giving completion to wholes through the connection of a medium. We must not therefore assent to their doctrine, who say that dæmons are the souls of men, that have changed the present life. For it is not proper to consider a dæmoniacal nature *according to habitude* as the same with a nature *essentially* dæmoniacal, nor to assert that the perpetual medium of all mundane natures consists from a life conversant with multiform mutations. For a dæmoniacal guard subsists always the same, connecting the mundane wholes; but soul does not always thus retain its own order, as Socrates says in the Republic; since at different times, it chooses different lives. Nor do we praise those, who make certain of the gods to be dæmons, such as the erratic gods, according to Amelius; but we are persuaded by Plato, who calls the gods the rulers of the universe, but subjects to them the herds of dæmons; and we shall every where preserve the doctrine of Diotima, who assigns the middle order, between all divine and mortal natures, to a dæmoniacal essence. Let this then be the conception respecting the whole of the dæmoniacal order in common.

In the next place, let us speak concerning the dæmons which are allotted mankind. For of the dæmons which, as we have said, rank in the middle order, the first and highest are divine dæmons, and who often appear as gods, through their transcendent similitude to the divinites. For in short, that which is first in every order, preserves the form of the nature prior to itself. Thus the first intellect is a god, and the most ancient of souls is intellectual: and hence of dæmons the highest genus, as being proximate to the gods, is uniform and divine. The next to these in order, are those dæmons who participate of an intellectual idiom, and preside over the ascent and descent of souls, and who unfold into light and deliver to all things the productions of the gods. The third are those who distribute the productions of divine souls to secondary natures, and complete the bond of those that receive defluxions from thence. The fourth are those that transmit the efficacious powers of whole natures to things generated and corrupted, and who inspire partial natures with life, order, reasons, and the all-various perfect operations, which things mortal are able to effect. The fifth are corporeal, and bind together the extremes in bodies. For how can perpetual accord with corruptible bodies, and efficients with effects, except through this medium? For it is this ultimate middle nature which has dominion over corporeal goods, and provides for all natural prerogatives. The sixth in order, are those that revolve about matter, connect the powers which descend from celestial to sublunary matter, perpetually guard this matter, and defend the shadowy

representations of forms which it contains.

Dæmons therefore, as Diotima also says, being many and all-various, the highest of them conjoin souls proceeding from their father, to their leading gods: for every god as we have said, is the leader in the first place of dæmons, and in the next of partial souls. For the Demiurgus disseminated these, as Timæus says, into the sun and moon, and the other instruments of time. These divine dæmons therefore, are those which are essentially allotted to souls, and conjoin them to their proper leaders: and every soul though it revolves together with its leading deity requires a dæmon of this kind. But dæmons of the second rank preside over the ascensions and descensions of souls; and from these the souls of the multitude derive their elections. For the most perfect souls who are conversant with generation in an undefiled manner, as they choose a life conformable to their presiding god, so they live according to a divine dæmon, who conjoined them to their proper deity, when they dwelt on high. Hence the Egyptian priest admired Plotinus, as being governed by a divine dæmon. To souls, therefore who live as those that will shortly return to the intelligible world whence they came, the supernal is the same with the dæmon which attends them here; but to more imperfect souls the essential is different from the dæmon that attends them at their birth.

If these things then are rightly asserted, we must not assent to those who make our rational soul a dæmon. For a dæmon is different from man, as Diotima says, who places dæmons between gods and men, and as Socrates also evinces, when he divides a dæmoniacal oppositely to the human nature: for, says he, not a human, but a dæmoniacal obstacle detains me. But man is a soul using the body as an instrument. A dæmon, therefore, is not the same with the rational soul.

This also is evident from Plato in the Timæus, where he says that intellect has in us the relation of a dæmon. But this is only true as far as pertains to analogy. For a dæmon according to essence, is different from a dæmon according to analogy. For in many instances that which proximately presides, subsisting in the order of a dæmon with respect to that which is inferior, is called a dæmon. Thus Jupiter in Orpheus, calls his father Saturn an illustrious dæmon, and Plato in the Timæus, calls those gods who proximately preside over, and orderly distribute the realms of generation, dæmons: "for," says he, "to speak concerning other dæmons, and to know their generation, exceeds the ability of human nature." But a dæmon according to analogy is that which proximately presides over any thing, though it should be a god, or though it should be some one of the natures posterior to the gods. And the soul, that through similitude to the dæmoniacal genus produces energies more wonderful than those which belong to human nature, and which suspends the whole of its life from dæmons, is a dæmon according to habitude, *i. e.* proximity or alliance. Thus, as it appears to me, Socrates in the Republic calls those, dæmons, who have lived well, and who, in consequence of this are transferred to a better condition of being, and to more holy places. But an essential dæmon, is neither called a dæmon through habitude to secondary natures, nor through an assimilation to something different from itself; but is allotted this peculiarity from himself, and is

defined by a certain summit, or flower of essence (hyparxis) by appropriate powers, and by different modes of energies. In short, the rational soul is called in the Timæus the dæmon of the animal. But we investigate the dæmon of man, and not of the animal; that which governs the rational soul itself, and not its instrument; and that which leads the soul to its judges, after the dissolution of the animal, as Socrates says in the Phædo. For when the animal is no more, the dæmon which the soul was allotted while connected with the body, conducts it to its judge. For if the soul possesses that dæmon while living in the body, which is said to lead it to judgement after death, this dæmon must be the dæmon of the man, and not of the animal alone. To which we may add, that beginning from on high it governs the whole of our composition.

Nor again, dismissing the rational soul, must it be said that a dæmon is that which energizes in the soul: as for instance, that in those who live according to reason, reason is the dæmon; in those that live according to anger, the irascible part; and in those that live according to desire, the desiderative part. Nor must it be said that the nature which proximately presides over that which energizes in our life, is a dæmon: as for instance, that reason is the dæmon of the irascible, and anger of those that live according to desire. For in the first place to assert that dæmons are parts of our soul, is to admire human life in an improper degree, and oppose the division of Socrates in the Republic, who after gods and dæmons places the heroic and human race, and blames the poets for introducing in their poems heroes in no respect better than men, but subject to similar passions. By this accusation therefore it is plain that Socrates was very far from thinking that dæmons who are of a sublimer order than heroes are to be ranked among the parts and powers of the soul. For from this doctrine it will follow that things more excellent according to essence give completion to such as are subordinate. And in the second place, from this hypothesis, mutations of lives would also introduce multiform mutations of dæmons. For the avaricious character is frequently changed into an ambitious life, and this again into a life which is formed by right opinion, and this last into a scientific life. The dæmon, therefore, will vary according to these changes: for the energizing part will be different at different times. If therefore, either this energizing part itself is a dæmon, or that part which has an arrangement prior to it, dæmons will be changed together with the mutation of human life; and the same person will have many dæmons in one life, which is of all things the most impossible. For the soul never changes in one life the government of its dæmon; but it is the same dæmon which presides over us till we are brought before the judges of our conduct, as also Socrates asserts in the Phædo.

Again, those who consider a partial intellect, or that intellect which subsists at the extremity of the intellectual order, as the same with the dæmon which is assigned to man, appear to me to confound the intellectual idiom, with the dæmoniacal essence. For all dæmons subsist in the extent of souls, and rank as the next in order to divine souls, and is neither allotted the same essence, nor power, nor energy.

Further still, this also may be said, that souls enjoy intellect then only when they convert themselves to it, receive its light, and conjoin their own with intellectual en-

ergy; but they experience the presiding care of a dæmoniacal nature, through the whole of life, and in every thing which proceeds from fate and providence. For it is the dæmon that governs the whole of our life, and that fulfils the elections which we made prior to generation, together with the gifts of fate, and of those gods that preside over fate. It is likewise the dæmon that supplies and measures the illuminations from providence. And as souls indeed, we are suspended from intellect, but as souls using the body, we require the aid of a dæmon. Hence Plato, in the Phædrus, calls intellect the governor of the soul; but he every where calls a dæmon the inspector and guardian of mankind. And no one who considers the affair rightly, will find any other one and proximate providence of every thing pertaining to us, besides that of a dæmon. For intellect, as we have said, is participated by the rational soul, but not by the body; and nature is participated by the body, but not be the dianoetic part. And further still, the rational soul rules over anger and desire, but it has no dominion over fortuitous events. But the dæmon alone moves, governs, and orderly disposes all our affairs. For he gives perfection to reason, measures the passions, inspires nature, connects the body, supplies things fortuitous, accomplishes the decrees of fate, and imparts the gifts of providence. In short, he is the king of every thing in and about us, and is the pilot of the whole of our life. And thus much concerning our allotted dæmons.

In the next place, with respect to the dæmon of Socrates, these three things are to be particularly considered. First, that he not only ranks as a dæmon, but also as a god: for in the course of this dialogue he clearly says, "I have long been of opinion that *the god* did not as yet permit me to hold any conversation with you."

He calls the same power, therefore, a dæmon and a god. And in the Apology, he more clearly evinces that this dæmon is allotted a divine transcendency, considered as ranking in a dæmoniacal nature. And this is what we before said, that the dæmons of divine souls, and who make choice of an intellectual and anagogic life, are divine, transcending the whole of a dæmoniacal genus, and being the first participitants of the gods. For as is a dæmon among gods, such also is a god among dæmons. But among the divinities the essence is divine; but in dæmons, on the contrary the idiom of their essence is dæmoniacal, but the analogy which they bear to divinity evinces their essence to be godlike. For on account of their transcendency with respect to other dæmons, they frequently appear as gods. With great propriety, therefore, does Socrates call his dæmon a god: for he belonged to the first and highest dæmons. Hence Socrates was most perfect, being governed by such a presiding power, and conducting himself by the will of such a leader and guardian of his life. This then was one of the illustrious prerogatives of the dæmon of Socrates. The second was this: that Socrates perceived a certain voice proceeding from his dæmon. For this is asserted by him in the Theætetus and in the Phædrus. And this voice is the signal from the dæmon, which he speaks of in the Theages; and again in the Phædrus, when he was about to pass over the river, he experienced the accustomed signal from the dæmon. What then does Socrates indicate by these assertions, and what was the voice, through which he says the dæmon signified

to him his will?

In the first place, we must say, that Socrates through his dianoetic power, and his science of things, enjoyed the inspiration of his dæmon, who continually recalled him to divine love. In the second place, in the affairs of life, Socrates supernally directed his providential attention to more imperfect souls; and according to the energy of his dæmon, he received the light proceeding from thence, neither in his dianoetic part alone, nor in his doxastic[4] powers, but also in his spirit, the illumination of the dæmon, suddenly diffusing itself through the whole of his life, and now moving sense itself. For it is evident, that reason, imagination, and sense enjoy the same energy differently; and that each of our inward parts is passive to, and is moved by the dæmon in a peculiar manner. The voice, therefore, did not act upon Socrates externally with passivity; but the dæmoniacal inspiration proceeding inwardly through his whole soul, and diffusing itself as far as to the organs of sense, became at last a voice, which was rather recognized by consciousness, than by sense: for such are illuminations of good dæmons, and the gods.

In the third place, let us consider the peculiarity of the dæmon of Socrates: for it never exhorted, but perpetually recalled him. This also must again be referred to the Socratic life: for it is not a property common to our allotted dæmons, but was the characteristic of the guardian of Socrates. We must say, therefore, that the beneficent and philanthropic disposition of Socrates, and his great promptitude with respect to the communication of good, did not require the exhortation of the dæmon. For he was impelled from himself, and was ready at all times to impart to all men the most excellent life. But since many of those that came to him were unadapted to the pursuit of virtue and the science of wholes, his governing good dæmon restrained him from a providential care of such as these. Just as a good charioteer alone restrains the impetus of a horse naturally well adapted for the race, but does not stimulate him, in consequence of his being excited to motion from himself, and not requiring the spur, but the bridle. And hence Socrates, from his great readiness to benefit those with whom he conversed, rather required a recalling than an exciting dæmon. For the unaptitude of auditors which is for the most part concealed from human sagacity requires a dæmoniacal discrimination; and the knowledge of favorable opportunities, can by this alone be accurately announced to us. Socrates therefore being naturally impelled to good, alone required to be recalled in his unseasonable impulses.

But further still, it may be said that of dæmons, some are allotted a purifying and undefiled power; others a generative; others a perfective; and others a demiurgic power: and in short they are divided according to the characteristic peculiarities of the gods, and the powers under which they are arranged. Each, likewise, according to his essence incites the object of his providential care to a blessed life; some of them moving us to

[4]The powers belonging to *opinion*, or that part of the soul which knows *that* a thing is, but not *why* it is.

an attention to inferior concerns, and others restraining us from action, and an energy verging to externals. It appears therefore, that the dæmon of Socrates being allotted this peculiarity, *viz.* cathartic, and the source of an undefiled life, and being arranged under this power of Apollo, and uniformly presiding over the whole of purification, separated also Socrates from too much commerce with the vulgar, and a life extending itself into multitude. But it led him into the depths of his soul, and an energy undefiled by subordinate natures: and hence it never exhorted, but perpetually recalled him. For what else is to recall than to withdraw from the multitude to inward energy? And of what is this the peculiarity except of purification? Indeed it appears to me that as Orpheus places the Apolloniacal monad over king Bacchus, which recalls him from a progression into Titanic multitude, and a desertion of his royal throne, in like manner the dæmon of Socrates conducted him to an intellectual place of survey, and restrained his association with the multitude. For the dæmon is analogous to Apollo, being his attendant, but the intellect of Socrates to Bacchus: for our intellect is the progeny of the power of this divinity.