

# Proclus on Socrates' Daemon

He who lives according to intellect, says Hermeas, who is a lover of the Muses, and a philosopher, in consequence of wishing to reascend to the Gods, does not require the care of the body and of a corporeal life; but considers these as nothing, being desirous to be separated from them. For he meditates death, *i.e.* a departure from the present life, as he knows that the body molests and impedes the energies of intellect. But the *gift*<sup>1</sup> which is here mentioned signifies the soul becoming the attendant of its proper God. Hermeas adds: It is however necessary to know that a divine nature is present to all things without a medium, but that we are incapable of being conjoined with divinity, without the medium of a daemonic nature; just as we behold the light of the sun through the ministrant intervention of the air.

— Thomas Taylor<sup>2</sup>



Consecration of the herm by Fyodor Bronnikov

<sup>1</sup> [I.e., On insects being “formerly men, before the Muses had a being . . . from these the race of grasshoppers was produced, who received this gift from the Muses, that they should never want nutriment, but should continue singing without meat or drink till they died.” See below, *Phaedrus*, Westerink line 257c, pp. 373-74

<sup>2</sup> Taylor T. (Tr. & Annot.). *The Works of Plato: Phaedrus*. (Vol. III of a set of five volumes & Vol. XI of “The Thomas Taylor Series”) From: The Prometheus Trust, 1996. Endnote 29, p. 420, being Taylor’s additional note on Plato’s *Phaedrus*, line 257c, p. 373



From Taylor T. (*Tr. & Annot.*). *The Works of Plato*. (Vol. I of a set of five volumes & Vol. IX of "The Thomas Taylor Series") From: The Prometheus Trust, 1995. Endnote 2, pp. 167-74, being Taylor's notes from his translation of the Commentary of Proclus on Plato's *First Alcibiades*. [Westerink line 103, p. 103; text typographically enhanced with headings in blue placed by Philaletheians.]

**Daemons and heroes connect Divinity with man. Daemons are close to the divine nature; heroes to men. By its powerful light, Divinity also possesses whatever daemons possess peculiar to inferior beings. Heroes possess unity, identity, permanency, and virtue, only when under the condition of plurality, motion and mixture.**

As there is no vacuum in corporeal, so neither in incorporeal natures. Between divine essences, therefore, which are the first of things, and partial essences such as ours, which are nothing more than the dregs of the rational nature, there must necessarily be a middle rank of beings, in order that divinity may be connected with man, and that the progression of things may form an entire whole, suspended like the golden chain of Homer from the summit of Olympus. This middle rank of beings, considered according to a two-fold division, consists of daemons and heroes, the latter of which is proximate to partial souls such as ours, and the former to divine natures, just as air and water subsist between fire and earth. Hence whatever is ineffable and occult in the gods, daemons and heroes express and unfold. They likewise conciliate all things, and are the sources of the harmonic consent and sympathy of all things with each other. They transmit divine gifts to us, and equally carry back ours to the divinities. But the characteristics of divine natures are unity, permanency in themselves, a subsistence as an immoveable cause of motion, transcendent providence, and which possesses nothing in common with the subjects of their providential energies; and these characteristics are preserved in them according to essence, power, and energy. On the other hand, the characteristics of partial souls are, a declination to multitude and motion, a conjunction with the gods, an aptitude to receive something from other natures, and to mingle together all things in itself, and through itself; and these characteristics they also possess according to essence, power, and energy. Such then being the peculiarities of the two extremes, we shall find that those of daemons are, to contain in themselves the gifts of divine natures, in a more inferior manner indeed than the gods, but yet so as to comprehend the conditions of subordinate natures, under the idea of a divine essence. In other words, the prerogatives of deity characterize, and absorb as it were by their powerful light, whatever daemons possess peculiar to inferior beings. Hence they are multiplied indeed, but unitedly — mingled but yet so that the unmingled predominates — and are moved, but with stability. On the contrary, heroes possess unity, identity, permanency, and every excellence, under the condition of multitude, motion and mixture; *viz.* the prerogatives of subordinate predominate in these, over the characteristics of superior natures. In short, daemons and heroes are composed from the properties of the two extremes - gods and partial souls; but in daemons there is more of the divine, and in heroes more of the human nature.



Having premised thus much, the Platonic reader will, I doubt not, gratefully accept the following admirable account of daemons in general, and also of the daemon of Socrates, from the MS. Commentary of Proclus, on the first *Alcibiades* of Plato.<sup>3</sup>

**Demonstrations should always begin from things universal before proceeding from these down to particulars and individuals. This method is natural and more adapted to science.**

**There are three orders of daemons.**<sup>4</sup>

“Let us now speak, in the first place, concerning daemons in general; in the next place, concerning those that are allotted us in common; and in the third place concerning the daemon 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. Daemons, therefore, deriving their first subsistence from the vivific goddess,<sup>5</sup> 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;<sup>6</sup> 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 demoniacal 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<sup>7</sup> (*απολυτοι θεοι*) 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 daemons, 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 demoniacal 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 telesurgic, a perfective power. And about each of the divinities, there is an innumerable multitude of daemons, 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; daemons proximately imparting to these the representations of their leaders. But the gods in an exempt manner supernally preside over daemons; 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 daemons give completion to wholes, the com-

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<sup>3</sup> Proclus, *Alcibiades* i 68-84

<sup>4</sup> [See drawings and accompanying notes in our Masque of Love Series.]

<sup>5</sup> *i.e.* Juno.

<sup>6</sup> *i.e.* The summit of essence.

<sup>7</sup> *i.e.* Gods who immediately subsist above the mundane deities, and are therefore called supercelestial. [See *Phaedrus* 202a-c.]



munion 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 centres of the order of the universe, in daemons; since Diotima [*Symp.* 202d-e] also assigns them this order,<sup>8</sup> 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 connexion of a medium. We must not therefore assent to their doctrine, who say that daemons are the souls of men, that have changed the present life. For it is not proper to consider a daemoniacal nature *according to habitude* (*κατα οξεου*) as the same with a nature *essentially* daemoniacal, nor to assert that the perpetual medium of all mundane natures consists from a life conversant with multiform mutations. For a daemoniacal 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*;<sup>[618b]</sup> since at different times, it chooses different lives. Nor do we praise those, who make certain of the gods to be daemons, such as the erratic gods, according to Amelius; but we are persuaded by Plato,<sup>[*Pol.* 271a]</sup> who calls the gods the rulers of the universe, but subjects to them the herds of daemons; and we shall every where preserve the doctrine of Diotima, who assigns the middle order, between all divine and mortal natures, to a daemoniacal essence. Let this then be the conception respecting the whole of the daemoniacal order in common.

#### **Middle order daemons preside over mankind, and the ascents and descents of souls.**

“In the next place, let us speak concerning the daemons which are allotted mankind. For of these daemons, which as we have said rank in the middle order, the first and highest are divine daemons, and who often appear as gods, through their transcendent similitude to the divinities. 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 daemons the highest genus, as being proximate to the gods, is uniform and divine.

The next to these in order, are those daemons 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 efficient with effects, ex-

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<sup>8</sup> *Banquet* 202d-e



cept 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 representation of forms which it contains.

“Daemons therefore, as Diotima also says,<sup>[Symp. 203a]</sup> 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 daemons, and in the next of partial souls. For the Demiurgus disseminated these, as Timaeus says,<sup>[42d]</sup> into the sun and moon, and the other instruments of time. These divine daemons, 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 daemon of this kind. But daemons 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 daemon, who conjoined them to their proper deity when they dwelt on high. Hence the Egyptian priest admired Plotinus, as being governed by a divine daemon. 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 daemon which attends them here; but to imperfect souls the essential is different from the daemon that attends them at their birth.

#### **Daemons are much higher entities than the rational soul.**

“If these things then are rightly asserted, we must not assent to those who make our rational soul a daemon. For a daemon is different from man, as Diotima says,<sup>[Symp. 202d-e]</sup> who places daemons between gods and men, and as Socrates also evinces when he divides a daemoniacal oppositely to the human nature: ‘for,’ says he, ‘not a human but a daemoniacal obstacle detains me.’ But man is a soul using the body as an instrument. A daemon, therefore, is not the same with the rational soul.

“This also is evident from Plato in the *Timaeus* <sup>[90a]</sup> where he says that intellect has in us the relation of a daemon. But this is only true as far as pertains to analogy. For a daemon according to essence is different from a daemon according to analogy. For in many instances that which proximately presides, subsisting in the order of a daemon with respect to that which is inferior, is called a daemon. Thus Jupiter in Orpheus calls his father Saturn an illustrious daemon; and Plato, in the *Timaeus*,<sup>[40d]</sup> calls those gods who proximately preside over, and orderly distribute the realms of generation, daemons: ‘for,’ says he, ‘to speak concerning other daemons, and to know their generation, exceeds the ability of human nature.’ But a daemon 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 daemoniacal genus produces energies more wonderful than those which belong to human nature, and which suspends the whole of



its life from daemons, is a daemon *κατα οξεου*, according to habitude, *i.e.* proximity or alliance. Thus, as it appears to me, Socrates in the *Republic* <sup>[468e ff]</sup> calls those, daemons, 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 daemon is neither called a daemon 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 *Timaeus* the daemon of the animal. But we investigate the daemon 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 *Phaedo*.<sup>[107d]</sup> For, when the animal is no more, the daemon which the soul was allotted while connected with the body, conducts it to its judge. For if the soul possesses that daemon while living in the body, which is said to lead it to judgment after death, this daemon must be the daemon 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.

**They energise the soul and preside over us till we are brought before the judges of our conduct.**

“Nor again, dismissing the rational soul, must it be said that a daemon is that which energizes in the soul: as for instance, that in those who live according to reason, reason is the daemon; 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 daemon: as for instance, that reason is the daemon of the irascible, and anger of those that live according to desire. For in the first place to assert that daemons are parts of our soul, is to admire human life in an improper degree, and oppose the division of Socrates in the *Republic* <sup>[391d]</sup> who after gods and daemons 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 daemons 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 daemons. 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 daemon, 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 daemon, or that part which has an arrangement prior to it, daemons will be changed together with the mutation of human life; and the same person will have many daemons in one life, which is of all things the most impossible. For the soul never changes in one life the government of its



daemon; but it is the same daemon which presides over us till we are brought before the judges of our conduct, as also Socrates asserts in the *Phaedo*.<sup>[107d]</sup>

“Again, those who consider a partial intellect, or that intellect which subsists at the extremity of the intellectual order, as the same with the daemon which is assigned to man, appear to me to confound the intellectual idiom, with the daemoniacal essence. For all daemons subsist in the extent of souls, and rank as the next in order to divine souls; but the intellectual order is different from that of soul, and is neither allotted the same essence, nor power, nor energy.

**While intellect is the governor of the soul, daemon is the inspector and guardian of mankind. He governs the whole of our life.**

**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 everything in and about us, and is the pilot of the whole of our life.**

“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 energy; but they experience the presiding care of a daemoniacal nature, through the whole of life, and in every thing which proceeds from fate and providence. For it is the daemon 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 daemon 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 daemon. Hence Plato, in the *Phaedrus*,<sup>[247c, 265c]</sup> calls intellect the governor of the soul; but he every where calls a daemon 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 daemon. 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 by the dianoëtic part. And farther still, the rational soul rules over anger and desire, but it has no dominion over fortuitous events. But the daemon 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 daemons.



**Hence Socrates was most perfect, being governed by such a presiding power, and conducting himself by the will of such a great leader and guardian of his life.**

“In the next place, with respect to the daemon of Socrates, these three things are to be particularly considered. First, that he not only ranks as a daemon, 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 direct me to hold any conversation with you.’

“He calls the same power, therefore, a daemon and a god. And in the *Apology* [31d] he more clearly evinces that this daemon is allotted a divine transcendency, considered as ranking in a daemoniacal nature. And this is what we before said, that the daemons of divine souls, and who make choice of an intellectual and anagogic life, are divine, transcending the whole of a daemoniacal genus, and being the first participants of the gods. For as is a daemon among gods, such also is a god among daemons. But among the divinities the *hyparxis* is divine; but in daemons, on the contrary the idiom of their essence is daemoniacal, but the analogy which they bear to divinity evinces their essence to be godlike. For on account of their transcendency with respect to other daemons, they frequently appear as gods. With great propriety, therefore, does Socrates call his daemon a god: for he belonged to the first and highest daemons. 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 daemon of Socrates. The second was this: that Socrates perceived a certain voice proceeding from his daemon. For this is asserted by him in the *Theaetetus* and in the *Phaedrus*.<sup>[242b]</sup> And this voice is the signal from the daemon, which he speaks of in the *Theages*; <sup>[128b]</sup> and again in the *Phaedrus*, when he was about to pass over the river, he experienced the accustomed signal from the daemon. What then does Socrates indicate by these assertions, and what was the voice, through which he says the daemon signified to him his will?

**The daemon within Socrates did not act upon Socrates externally with passivity; but the daemoniacal 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,<sup>9</sup> than by sense.**

“In the first place, we must say, that Socrates through his dianoetic power, and his science of things, enjoyed the inspiration of his daemon, 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 daemon, he received the light proceeding from thence, neither in his dianoetic part alone, nor in his doxastic powers,<sup>10</sup> but also in his spirit, the illumination of the daemon, 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 daemon in a peculi-

<sup>9</sup> [For defining selections on Conscience and Consciousness, see *Compassion* (2009), Appendix I, pp. 369 ff.]

<sup>10</sup> *i.e.* The powers belonging to *opinion*, or that part of the soul which knows *that* a thing is, but not *why* it is.



ar manner. The voice, therefore, did not act upon Socrates externally with passivity; but the daemoniacal 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, (*συναισθησις*) than by sense: for such are illuminations of good daemons, and the gods.

**The voice never exhorted, but perpetually recalled Socrates. Motivated from his great readiness to benefit those with whom he conversed, he acted naturally from within without. He needed not promptings from his guardian and benefactor.**

“In the third place, let us consider the peculiarity of the daemon 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 daemons, 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 daemon. 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 daemon 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,<sup>11</sup> rather required a recalling than an exciting daemon. For the unaptitude of auditors which is for the most part concealed from human sagacity requires a daemoniacal discrimination; and the knowledge of favourable 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.

**The voice of his daemon kept recalling Socrates' consciousness inwardly in order to constrain his association with the multitude and the vulgar so that his purity remained untainted.**

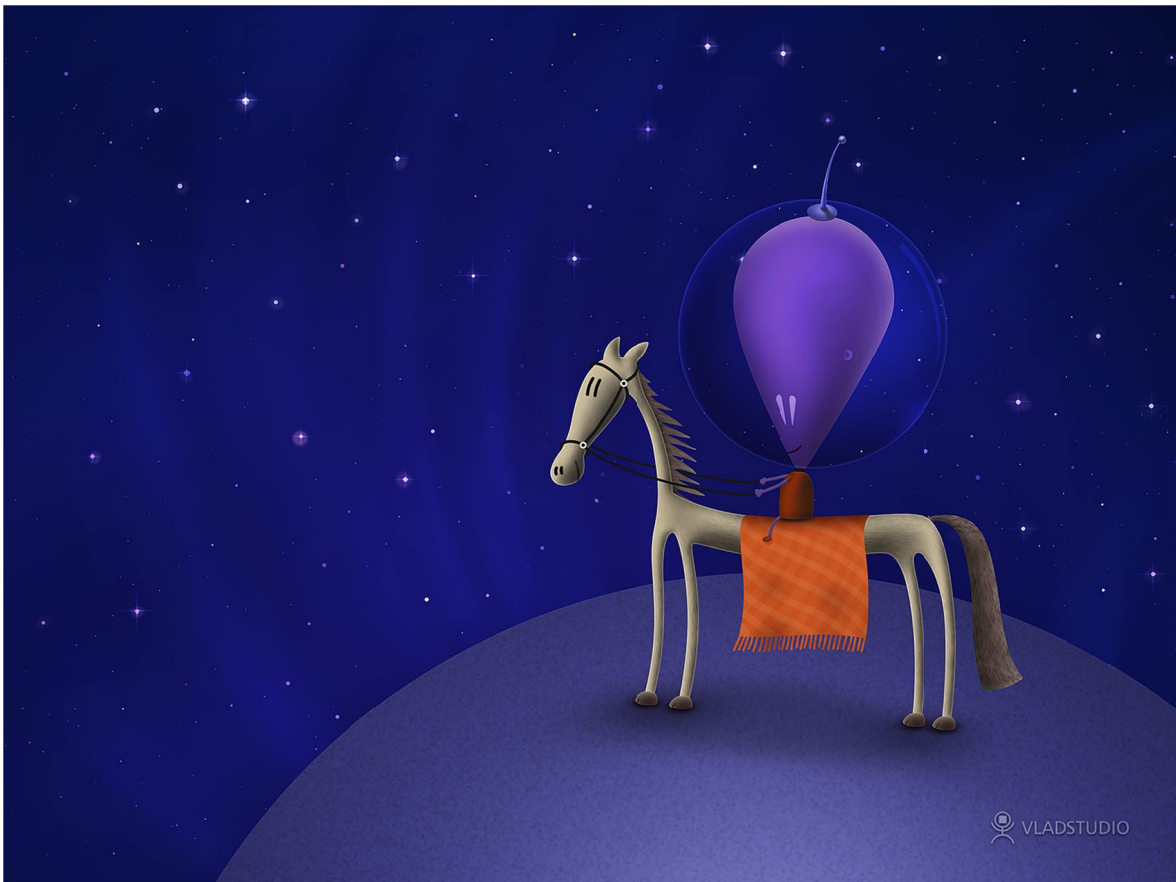
“But farther still, it may be said that of daemons, some are allotted a purifying and undefiled power; others a generative; others a perfective; and others a demiurgic power: and in short they are divided according to the characteristic peculiarities of the gods, and the powers under which they are arranged. Each, likewise, according to his *hyparxis* incites the object of his providential care to a blessed life; some of them moving us to an attention to inferior concerns, and others restraining us from action, and an energy verging to externals. It appears therefore, that the daemon 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 per-

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<sup>11</sup> *Theaetetus* 183d



petually 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 daemon of Socrates conducted him to an intellectual place of survey, and restrained his association with the multitude. For the daemon 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.”<sup>12</sup>



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<sup>12</sup> Taylor T. (Tr. & Annot.). *The Works of Plato*. (Vol. I of a set of five volumes & Vol. IX of “The Thomas Taylor Series”) Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 1995. Endnote 2, pp. 167-74, being Taylor’s notes from his translation of the Commentary of Proclus on Plato’s *First Alcibiades*. [Westerink line 103, p. 103; text typographically enhanced with headings in blue placed by Philaletheians]

