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*Introducing a New God: Socrates and His Daimonion*¹

Mark L. McPherran

One basic principle of fifth-century BCE Greek folk psychology is that the most likely cause of an intense and unusual mental event such as a vivid, prophetic dream is a divinity.² Modern readers of Aristotle, therefore, are prone to admire his forward-thinking remarks on the topic in his *On Divination in Sleep* (*ODS*). There, for example, he asserts that:

... since other animals also dream, it may be concluded that dreams are not sent by god ... Here is evidence: the power of foreseeing the future and of having vivid dreams is found in quite ordinary people, which implies that god does not send their dreams; but merely that all those whose physical temperament is ... garrulous and melancholic, see sights of all descriptions ... they just chance to have visions resembling objective facts (*ODS* 463b12-19). ... the minds of such people are not given to deep thought, but are derelict, or totally vacant (*ODS* 464a23-5).

1 This paper was presented at Dartmouth College, October, 2003, and also to the International Conference on Socrates' Daimonion and Religion, Centre d'études des Religions of the Free University of Brussels, Belgium, December, 2003. I am grateful to both audiences for their helpful remarks, and to Pierre Destrée for his invitation to participate in the latter conference. My thanks, as well, to Hugh Benson, Jan Kaufman, Jennifer Reid, and Christine Thomas for their comments on previous versions of this paper.

2 Gallop 1990, 4

However, since Aristotle surely recognized that Socrates was also very much a man of his own time in respect the extrarational,³ it must have been the better part of Aristotle's discretion to suppress the enthymeme 'All dream-diviners are chatty dopes' and 'Socrates was a dream-diviner'.⁴ Be that as it may, Aristotle's teacher was no shy flower on the topic, for his Socratic dialogues unabashedly portray a Socrates who gives clear credence to the alleged god-given messages and forecasts found in dreams, divinations, and other such traditionally-accepted incursions by divinity.⁵ Xenophon, too, depicts Socrates as sending his students to oracles and seers for advice (e.g., *Mem* I 1 5-9). Xenophon's portrait of Socratic piety is, however, a suspiciously normalizing one designed to contribute to his rather unsubtle defense of Socrates. And nowhere is that defense more strained than on the topic of Socrates' notorious divine sign — the *daimonion*. Moreover, Socrates' own characterization of his sign in Plato's *Apology* (e.g., 31c-2a) frequently seems to readers to be less a defense against than a confession of the formal charge of impiously introducing new divinities (24b-c). Plato's other works and those by his imitators (e.g., the *Theages*) do little to lessen this impression.⁶ However, the unquestioning trust their Socrates places in the *daimonion*'s frequent warnings also makes him appear far more superstitious than the average Athenian (!) — not the sort of behavior we expect from the paradigm of the rationally-self-examined life (e.g., *Cri* 46b-7a). After all, if enlightened contemporaries such as Pericles and Thucydides could stand aloof from comparable elements of popular religion, and if even traditionally-minded playwrights such as Aristophanes could poke cruel fun at seers and 'oracle-mongers', how could Socrates not do so as well? As a result, it is the *daimonion* that contributes more than any other Socratic eccentricity to Socrates'

3 It is interesting that Aristotle says nothing about Socrates' divine sign or the serious attention he paid to his dreams (*Rhetoric* 1419a6-19 is evidence that Aristotle would have known of the *daimonion*).

4 See Joyal 1997, 47 n 11, for an overview of those scholars who have found the *daimonion* to constitute evidence that Socrates was mentally ill.

5 E.g., *Cri* 43c-4b; *Ap* 33c; *Phd* 60e-1a. During Socrates' lifetime, divination was widely employed: Zaidman and Pantel 1992, 121-8.

6 For the argument that the *Theages* was by a member of the fourth-century Academy, see, e.g., Joyal 2000.

strangeness, his *'atopia'*, especially for modern readers (see, e.g., G. Vlastos 1991, 1; *Smp* 221d). The *daimonion* is, in any case, so embarrassing and 'philosophically marginal' a topic for so many scholars that we have in this discomfiture a ready-made explanation for the surprisingly meager attention that has been paid to the *daimonion* in the last sixty or so years of Socratic scholarship.⁷ Even in his own time and place, his divine sign made Socrates strange to his contemporaries, albeit for different reasons, and this arguably contributed to his conviction on a charge of impiety.⁸ So despite recent neglect, it is not surprising that this Socratic quirk inspired an interest inversely proportional to its appearance in our texts; one that dates from at least the first century BCE.⁹

The initial task in rekindling serious interest in the *daimonion* is to reconcile it and other such extrarational phenomena with Socrates' commitment to rational justification and argument (e.g., *Cri* 46b). I and others have done so elsewhere, showing how Socrates does not pursue a form of the intellectualist rejection of divination's efficacy,¹⁰ but also does not take the operations of traditional divinatory practices at face value.¹¹ On this account, Socrates accepts the notion that the gods provide us with accurate, content-laden extrarational signs but also insists that conventional methods of oracular interpretation must give way to his sort of rational methods for evaluating such phenomena. Rather than rehearse that scheme in any detail here, though, I shall instead address a number of outstanding problems concerning the function of the *daimonion* and its relationship with Socrates' philosophical presuppositions.

7 There are but twelve records in the *Philosopher's Index* 1940-2004 pertaining to Socrates' *daimonion*. The quoted phrase is from Todd's 2001 review of Joyal 2000.

8 See McPherran 1996, Ch. 3, which argues that Socrates' reliance on the *daimonion* would have appeared to his jurors to be his most obvious violation of accepted norms.

9 See Joyal 1995 for an account of ancient post-Platonic interest in the *daimonion*, and Joyal 1997, 47 n 11, for further references. A list of recent accounts of the *daimonion* can be found in McPherran 1996, 185-6 n 25.

10 E.g., in the manner of the characters of Euripides (e.g., *Philoc* fr 795; *Bel* fr 286; *Tr* 884-87; *Fr* 480; Sextus, *ad Math* IX 54). See Ostwald 1986, 279-90, for discussion.

11 McPherran 1996, Ch. 4; Brickhouse and Smith 1994, Ch. 6.3-4

1 The Nature of the *Daimonion*

Socrates' *daimonion*, we are told, is an internal, private admonitory 'sign' (*sēmeion*)¹² and 'voice' (*phonē*)¹³ caused to appear within the horizon of consciousness by a god; probably Apollo, from Socrates' perspective.¹⁴ It has occurred to few or none before Socrates (*R VI* 496c3-5) and has been his companion since childhood (*Ap* 31d1-2). The *daimonion's* intervention in his affairs is frequent and pertains to matters both momentous and trivial (*Ap* 40a4-7). That Socrates receives and obeys these monitions is well-known in Athens (*Ap* 31c8-d4 [the *locus classicus* for the sign]; *Euthphr* 3b5-7), and they are understood to be apotroptic signs that warn him *not* to pursue a course of action that he is in the process of initiating (*Ap* 31d3-4; *Phdr* 242b8-c3).¹⁵ These interventions are regarded as unfailingly correct in whatever they indicate (*Mem I* 1, 4-5), just as we would expect the gift of an unfailingly good divinity to be.¹⁶ The *daimonion's* generosity even extends to warning Socrates of the inadvisability of the actions intended by others,¹⁷ but in no case does it provide him with general, theoretical claims constitutive of the expert moral knowledge he seeks and disavows having obtained (e.g., *Ap* 20e-3b).¹⁸ Neither does it provide him with ready-made explanations of its opposition. Rather, its occurrences yield instances of what we might call non-expert moral

12 *Ap* 40b2 (to tou theou *sēmeion*); *Euthd* 272e4; *Phdr* 242b9; *R VI* 496c4; *Mem I* I, 3-5

13 *Ap* 31d1; *Phdr* 242c2; *Xen Ap* 12

14 See *Ap* 40b2 together with 26b2-8a2. See also *Ap* 31c8-d4, 40a4-6, 40c2-3, 41d6; *Euthphr* 3b5-7; *Tht* 151a2-5; *Thg* 128d1-31a7; *Xen Mem I* 1, 2-4; *IV* 8, 1; *Ap* 4-5, 8, 12-13; *Smp VIII* 5. What evidence there is (see esp. *Ap* 27c10-8a1) suggests that Socrates is not entirely certain as to the identity of the divinity behind his 'sign', but Apollo is surely the prime candidate, since it is he who has charged Socrates with his philosophical mission to the Athenians, one that exposes him to great danger. For full discussion of the *daimonion*, see McPherran 1996, Ch. 4.

15 But positive advice may attested to by, e.g., *Mem I* I, 4; *IV* 3, 12.

16 Socrates' trust in the *daimonion's* accuracy is testified to by his unhesitating location of its source in 'the divine', rather than opting for a more cautious specification that would identify the sign as a hunch or intuition.

17 *Tht* 150c-1b; cf. *Thg* 128d-31a; *Xen Mem I* 1, 4; *Ap* 13.

18 See n 26 below on why daemonic warnings do not amount to expert knowledge.

knowledge (or justified belief) of the inadvisability of pursuing particular actions because those actions are disadvantageous to Socrates and others; e.g., the knowledge that it would not be beneficial to let a certain student resume study with him (see, e.g., *Ap* 40a4-7; *Xen Smp* VIII 5; *Tht* 150c-1b). Finally, these 'signs' always target *future* unbeneficial outcomes, and especially those whose prediction lies beyond the power of human reason (*Ap* 31d; *Euthd* 272e-3a; *Mem* I 1, 6-9; IV 3, 12). It is, in short, a species of the faculty of divination, true to Socrates' description of it as his 'customary divination' (*Ap* 40a4) and himself as a *mantis* (*Phd* 85b4-6; cf. *Phdr* 242b3-4). Naturally, though, Socrates is no run-of-the-mill diviner: his elenctic grilling of his interlocutors and his interpretation and testing of the Delphic oracle's pronouncement at *Apology* 20e-3b that 'no one is wiser' suggest that Socrates takes it to be obligatory to subject occurrences of the *daimonion* or other such extrarational signs to rational confirmation and interpretation whenever possible, and especially if they forbid what would otherwise be morally warranted.¹⁹

One important example that displays Socrates' reliance upon and rational confirmation of a daemonic warning is found at *Apology* 31c-2a, where Socrates notes his obedience to the *daimonion*'s resistance to his entering public partisan politics (cf. *R* VI 496b-c). This account is introduced in the manner of one wholly convinced of not only that explanation, but of the extrarationally indicated truth that prompted that explanation — that the *daimonion* opposes now (31d5), as it has in the past (31d7-9), Socrates' every attempt at 'going to do' (31d4) politics. Hence, this is one argument that the *daimonion* is a source of particular knowledge claims (e.g., 'This political act I intend will be unbeneficial') and that Socrates sees an obligation to construct a rational account for such claims when they warn him away from actions traditionally thought to be just or prudent (e.g., doing politics [*Thuc* II 40]) (*pace* C.D.C. Reeve 1989, 69).

19 If Socrates did not hold this position, he would be unable to respond to an *ad hominem* argumentative ploy implicitly open to Euthyphro in the *Euthyphro* — namely, claiming that his prosecution of his own father has, like Socrates' mission to the Athenians, been commanded through divinations. In addition, Socrates' refusal to go into politics (see below) would then put him in violation of the principle he announces at *Euthyphr* 15c-d, to the effect that 'actions traditionally held to be unjust ought to be refrained from in the absence of compelling reasons to the contrary' (McPherran 1996, Ch. 4.1.1).

A perspicuous, though perhaps less momentous, case of daemonic activity is found at *Euthydemus* 272e1-3a3. There we find that Socrates had formed the intention to leave his seat in the Lyceum, but just as he was getting up he experienced his 'usual sign' and so returned to his seat. In this case, Socrates appears to have *no doubt* that its warning is utterly reliable; hence, Socrates puts great trust in the *daimonion*, although *how* or *why* it is that the result of his obedience will be good-producing — like many future events — is opaque to reasoned calculation (*Tht* 150c-1b; *Mem* IV 3, 12; I 1, 8-9). But this is in no way *irrational*, for it may be rationally confirmed in its wisdom and so given credence on an inductive basis, since (i) in Socrates' long experience of the *daimonion*, it has never been shown not to be a reliable warning system (*Xen Ap* 13; cf. *Pl Ap* 40a-c), and (ii) the reliability of its alarms has been continually confirmed over the course of many years by the good results that flow from heeding it (i.e., we should suppose that from an early age Socrates observed, subsequent to its warning, that he would most likely have experienced a harm had he not heeded its advice).²⁰ Some sense of its level of activity can be ascertained by attending to the end of the *Apology* (40a-b).

Subsequent to his conviction and condemnation in the *Apology*, Socrates closes his defense speech with a 'friendly chat' (39e1-40a2) designed to console the jurors who voted for his acquittal by persuading them that his death will be a good thing. Socrates offers them two reasons for the truth of this claim, the second of which is his famous constructive dilemma for the proposition that death is a good thing (40c-1d). This argument, however, is intended to buttress his initial reason for taking this stance, namely, that his *daimonion* has never once interfered with his trial proceedings (40a-c; 41d). Socrates represents this failure as a 'great indication' (*mega tekmerion*; 40c2) of the goodness of both his death and death in general, but for his argument to be reasonably cogent some

20 And, possibly, the tragedies that ensue for others when its warnings are ignored (e.g., *Thg* 128d ff.). Naturally, since Socrates has arguably never failed to heed a daemonic warning he has no direct, experiential evidence of the unbeneficial consequences that would have obtained had he not heeded it. Thus, it would seem that he also finds good reasons to believe that he is warned away from unbeneficial consequences in virtue of an inference from the phenomenological fact that it is clearly a *divine* (thus benevolent) sign that warns him.

interpretive work must be applied:²¹ (1) in the past the *daimonion* has occurred frequently, warning Socrates when was about to do something unbeneficial, and (2) it has done so even when the threat it warned against was something trivial (40a4-7). Thus, it is likely that (3) in respect of non-trivial matters, where grave harms are possible outcomes, the *daimonion* will always oppose him if he is about to do something that is not beneficial and good (40c2-4).²² Therefore, given that (4) death is not trivial, but is generally regarded as the worst of all evils (40a7-b1), (5) the *daimonion* would have opposed Socrates if it were likely that death is not a good thing. But since (6) though the long chain of events constituting his prosecution, trial, and sentencing the *daimonion* never once opposed him (40b1-6), (7) it is likely (*kinduneuei*; 40b7) that Socrates' death is a good thing.²³ The strength of the modal qualifier in (7) is hard to ascertain, and depends in part on whether premise (1) is to be understood as claiming that (1a) the *daimonion* has always opposed Socrates when he was about to do something unbeneficial or (1b) the *daimonion* has generally opposed Socrates when he was about to do something unbeneficial. However, (1a) would potentially give Socrates moral immunity — he could never do wrong (so long as he obeys the *daimonion*'s warning) — and so since he represents himself as having made errors in the past (e.g., *Hp Ma* 376c; 372a-e), (1a) seems too strong a principle to attribute to Socrates.²⁴ Moreover, there would be no need for Socrates to *argue* for (3) if he actually held (1a). In any case, the inference from (1a) or (1b) to (3) becomes especially compelling if we grant along with Socrates that the *daimonion* is the gift of a divinity who gives us nothing but good, who would never deceive us (*Ap* 21b, *R II* 381e-2a), and who is superlatively

21 Cf. Brickhouse and Smith 1989, 237-57. As I see it, since Socrates holds that the level of assurance provided by the *daimonion*'s silence alone makes the goodness of his death almost certain, the confirmation of this provided by the argumentative dilemma that follows explains why it is that Socrates can hold his death to be good with such conviction.

22 Possibly he believes this because he has concluded from (1) and (2) that the *daimonion* had *always* in the past warned him about non-trivial threats.

23 Cf. Brickhouse and Smith 1989, Ch. 5.5.2; Joyal 1997; and Vlastos 1991, 280-8.

24 Cf. Brickhouse and Smith 1989, 239.

wise (*Ap* 23a; *Hp Ma* 289b).²⁵ Given all this, then, Socrates can justifiably claim to believe that his death is a good thing and other propositions concerning serious potential harms indicated by the *daimonion*'s silence. But since Socrates' trust in the accuracy of the *daimonion* has been achieved inductively, the resulting beliefs that various intended plans of action are unbeneficial are not so secure that they amount to certain knowledge. That would seem to be why he goes on to confirm his argument from silence with the dilemma of 40c-1d (and with the claim that it is now clear [*dēlon*; 41d4] that he is now at this life-juncture better off dead [41d]), and then takes himself to have established a rational expectation (*elpis*; 40c5) but not a certainty that death is good (cf. 41c).

The fact that Socrates takes his daemonic warnings to yield a kind of knowledge and not mere hunches is indicated by Socrates' full confidence that the *daimonion* is always sent by a divinity who would never purposefully mislead him; that is, the divinity would never warn Socrates away from an action that was not harmful (cf. *Mem* I 1, 5; *Thg* 128d-31a).²⁶ This confidence is attested to by there being no instance in our texts of Socrates ignoring a daemonic alarm, and thus no case of Socrates actively attempting to ground the *daimonion* through a process of disconfirmation. He simply assumes that since this alarm is the gift of a wise and good god it could never in itself be deceptive. Of course, such an assumption is highly problematic. Among many other questions, this

25 It may be that at some point in the past Socrates inferred that the *daimonion* has a divine source on the grounds that only a divinity could so accurately foretell the future.

26 Although our own unaided ratiocination may make some accurate predictions of future events, it is unable to do so with reliability (*Mem* IV 3, 12). Thus, it is eminently rational for Socrates to place his trust in the predictive capacities of his rationally-warranted daemonic alternative, and even irrational to ignore or override it (*Mem* I 1, 8-9). On the other hand, the *daimonion* also leaves so many gaps in Socrates' understanding of its warning that it cannot generate expert moral knowledge: (1) daemonic events do not contain within themselves explanations of their judgments, and hence, offer no criteria or grounds for judging other actions; (2) they are partially agent-independent by being divine gifts (cf. *Thg* 128d; *Meno* 100b) that require the beneficence of the divinity whose sign the *daimonion* is; and (3) they are not 'teachable', since they depend on the volition of a divine being and are internal mental experiences that cannot be implanted in others. Even a long series of such events would be insufficient to generate the sort of moral theory Socrates is in search of; Brickhouse and Smith 1989, 245-53; 1994, Ch. 6.3.4.

conception of the *daimonion* should lead us to ask (1) how does the god of the *daimonion* foretell the future?; and (2) why, having foreknowledge, does the god send only apotreptic and not protreptic advice?; and (3) why is only Socrates and no other Athenian provided with such a boon companion?²⁷ The answer to the first of these questions is, arguably, latent in the text of the *Euthydemus*.

2 The God of the *Daimonion*

The first protreptic of the *Euthydemus* (277d-82e) argues against the common view that we achieve happiness by securing many (i) external, (ii) somatic, (iii) political, and (iv) characterological goods, by contending that the only happiness-securing good is wisdom.²⁸ Socrates explains that this is so because the conventional goods of this list actually have no value in themselves, and can contribute to our happiness only if used wisely. The argument is initially delayed, however, by the problem of where *eutuchia* — ‘good fortune’ — is to be placed: is it the greatest of all conventional goods — but also therefore dispensable — or is it a kind of wisdom and essential to happiness? In Terrence Irwin’s interpretation, Socrates resolves this issue in the first stage (A) of a three-stage argument (Irwin 1995, 52-64; cf. 1986):

- (A) Happiness does not require good fortune added to wisdom (279c4-80a8).
- (B) Wisdom is necessary and sufficient for the correct and successful use of other goods [goods other than *eutuchia*] (280b1-1b4).

Thus, (C) Wisdom is the only good (281b4-e5).

‘From this Socrates concludes that if we want to secure happiness, we need not acquire many goods; we need only acquire wisdom [i.e., virtue; Dimas 2002, 2 and n 2] (282a1-d3)’ (Irwin 1995, 55; Irwin 1986, 202).

Here, I think, it is crucial to observe what other interpretations have consistently failed to note: it is not this argument itself that first intro-

27 See McPherran (1996), Chs. 3.4.2, and 4, for further discussion of other such questions.

28 I regret that I can only provide adequate justification and discussion for the following claims elsewhere; viz., McPherran 2005.

duces its topic of *eutuchia*. Rather, this subject — and its connection to the *daimonion* — is the *very first thing* Socrates is made to introduce as he begins the narrative that frames, and so informs, the substance of the *Euthydemus*. Note, for example, that immediately after Socrates announces his intention to recount his discussions with Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, he begins ‘By the favor of some god I happened to be sitting there (*kata theon gar tina etuchon kathêmenos entautha*)...[when] my divine sign put in an appearance’ (272e1-4; my emphasis). Next, when Euthydemus announces that he and his brother have now found the ability to move entirely into the virtue-teaching business — which Socrates takes as implying that they themselves possess wisdom (273e-4a) — Socrates exclaims ‘Good heavens ... Wherever did you find this *hermaion*?’ (273e2); that is, this unexpected piece of *good luck*, this *godsend* (cf. 295a8).²⁹ However, *eutuchia*/good luck in both ancient and modern popular senses is ambiguous between ‘things happening to work out well for reasons of random, contingent, spontaneous, and indeterminate chance’ (sense *x*) and ‘things happening to work out well for reasons hard to determine’ (sense *y*) — as when I claim, after laying down a wager, that a tossed coin landing heads-up is simply due to good luck, but then go on to realize that this hard-to-predict result is in fact dictated by the laws of physics governing the forces involved in my initial toss. Hence, the text suggests that it is the initially embedded, ambiguous concept of *eutuchia* — and thus the issue of whether that term designates lucky random chance, happy fate, or expressions of god-given providential wisdom — that helps to inform the overall aim of the dialogue.

The opening of the dialogue, then, provides us with thematic touchstones by which any later argument that bears on them should be understood. On that basis, I have advocated the following representation of the overall argumentative strategy underlying (A) (in McPherran 2005):

29 That is, this god’s gift of lucky gain (see, e.g., Aeschylus, *Eu* 947); cf. Hawtrey 1981, 51. Socrates also informs the brothers that he is therefore addressing them as though they were *propitious* and *blessed* gods (273e7, 274a6; cf. 288a-d, 293a), and then proceeds to invoke the assistance of deities: the Muses and Memory (275c-d).

- (I) Wisdom is (identical to the greatest) good.
- (II) Good fortune (unusual, *apparently* chance events conducive to human well-being) is (commonly taken to be extensionally equivalent to) the greatest good.

[Thus]

- (1) Wisdom is (commonly thought to name the same thing as; is extensionally equivalent to) good fortune (because those with wisdom — like those who are said to be fortunate — have the happiest lives).

[But]

- (2) If a person possesses wisdom in full measure, then that person does not need to receive any good fortune (apparently chance events that yield the good) (for reasons undisclosed: ‘somehow, we came to an agreement’ [280b1]; but a person with less than a full measure of wisdom will profit from some events that are commonly ascribed to fortune [sense *y*]; in particular those events directed by *another’s* wisdom).

[Thus,]

- (3) Wisdom is other than good fortune (chance events) (and so happiness does not require good fortune [chance events that provide assets]).

[But since]

- (4) Nothing is good without wisdom,
- (5) There is no good fortune (chance events that by themselves yield the good [sense *x*]) (also, because *all* events are guided by wisdom — the wisdom possessed by gods in particular — there are no chance events at all [and, thus, such a thing as ‘fortune’ in sense *x* of the term]; but there is still ‘good fortune’ [sense *y*], and it *is* identical to wisdom).

I think this reconstruction better accounts for the whole of our text and its context, which in its pre-interpretive form provokes us to ask whether Socrates accepts the existence of good luck as a causal explana-

tion for anyone's happiness. Irwin and others rightly have Socrates denying this role to good luck, but that is because they have Socrates denying the existence of things working out well for a person independently of *that individual person* already possessing and employing some measure of wisdom *themselves*.³⁰ I deny that Socrates accepted the existence of good luck for another reason — a theological one — on the grounds that he subscribes, like the Stoics he presages, to the view that there are no chance events whatsoever. Rather, for him, and unlike atomists and those poets and religious traditionalists who recognize quarreling, morally-imperfect, non-omniscient deities, all events are guided by the operations of a wise, cosmic intelligence (see, e.g., *Euthphr* 14e-15a; *Tht* 210c-d; *Ap* 20c-3b; *Xen Mem* IV 3, 11-13; I 4, 17); therefore, all events — internal or external — are fortunate indeed, in the sense that they are all providential (even the sage's coming to possess his/her constitutive wisdom) (cf. *Ar EE* 1248a16-b8).

Let us grant, then, that as Socrates conceives of the matter no one can have bad luck, because on his account there is no luck at all; yet, there is fortune, and it is always good. This Stoic-like account of the cosmos as inherently providential provides us with at least part of an explanation for the complete confidence Socrates displays in the *daimonion*: as he understands the matter, the *daimonion* is a reliable warning sign because it derives from a divinity who is wise and omniscient, and can thus foretell the future with exactitude (e.g., *Xen Smp* IV 47-9; *Mem* I 1, 19). How, though, would Socrates explain the divinity's ability to accomplish this? His choices seem to be three: he can hold that (a) the divinity has knowledge of an already-existing future; or (b) the divinity is able to predict what the present causal nexus will lead to in a deterministic fashion; or (c) the divinity — knowing its own mind (or that of some other divinity) — knows what future events it will bring to pass. Since,

30 Dimas 2002, 27, holds that since, for Socrates, 'lucky' agents get what they desire not because of their actions that aim at that result but because of factors out of their control — i.e., luck (pure chance) — there is no occasion for them to employ their deliberative powers wisely, and hence, no gain in their happiness. However, this observation only appears to apply to resultant luck, not constitutional luck, since constitutionally lucky, fortunate agents can indeed be thought to gain in their happiness to the degree to which their share of wisdom increases, even were that to occur through no effort of their own (through, say, a divine dispensation).

again, the texts bearing on Socrates' theology strongly suggest that he holds there to be an immanent, rational, cosmos-governing god (see esp. *Euthphr* 14e-15a, *Tht* 210c-d, *Ap* 20c-3b, *Phd* 97b-8b, *Cra* 400a-b; *Mem* I 4, IV 3) — and since he also appears to lack a commitment to the sort of deterministic materialism embraced by the Stoics — he would not endorse the traditional Greek view on Fate that takes it to be the physicalistic preordainment of landmark events within which there remains room for the operations of a providential will. Neither, then, would he hold the cosmos to be entirely deterministic (as with Chrysippus).³¹ Rather, the view most consonant with the evidence (primarily that of Xenophon) is that — like Cicero's Stoic spokesman on behalf of divination, Quintus (*Cicero de Divinatione*, esp. I 55-8) — Socrates takes all events to be the expression of an immanent intelligence that knows what events it will bring into existence. Hence, (c) appears to be the most likely Socratic explanation for the foreknowledge of the *daimonion's* god.³²

As to the previous questions (2) and (3) as to why the *daimonion* is solely apotroptic and unique to Socrates, let us first recall that Plato's Socrates makes a point of informing his fellow Athenians of these facts (*Ap* 31d3-4; cf. *Phdr* 242b8-c3, *R* 496c3-5); his doing so thus strongly suggests that he and others (including Plato) would have asked why the *daimonion* has these characteristics. Speculative answers for its apotroptic function range from divine selfishness to divine ignorance on the part of the *daimonion's* source, but I think the best answer we can provide Socrates is to be achieved by connecting the earlier hypothesis that Apollo is the source of the sign with the observation that the *daimonion* resembles the Socratic *elenchos* by being dissuasive rather than admonitory (cf. Nussbaum 1985).

Although there is significant controversy over the issue of whether the *elenchos* simply reveals the inconsistency of an interlocutor's beliefs or is sometimes able to establish the falsehood of an interlocutor's initial

31 Long and Sedley 1987, 342

32 On this admittedly speculative account, Socrates may well identify the immediate source of the *daimonion* — Apollo — with the one Maker-god of the *Memorabilia*; thus, I suppose that Socrates shared the not-uncommon view which understood the gods to be manifestations of a singular supreme Spirit; Guthrie 1971, 156; Zaidman and Pantel 1992, 176: 'As the Greeks saw it, the divine simply manifested itself in multiply diverse aspects'.

thesis ('constructivism'), it is agreed by all that the former function is primary.³³ Secondly, although Socrates has secular warrant for subjecting himself and others to the *elenchos* (McPherran 1996, ch. 4.2), readers of the *Apology* know that Socrates also sees his relentless philosophizing as dictated in his case through the agency of the god of Delphi, Apollo. As Socrates characterizes it, the source of this obligation appears straightforward: he has been commanded to do philosophy by a god — similar to the way a soldier is commanded by a general to perform some task (33c4-7; 23b, 28d6; 29a3, 30a-b, 37e-8a) — and since one ought always to obey the command of a god at all costs (it is always impious [and so unjust] to refuse),³⁴ Socrates is obligated to philosophize regardless of any danger (29d; cf. *R* II 368b-c). The nature of and the justification for this command takes some time for Socrates to discern, but he eventually comes to the conclusion that he is being used by Apollo as a paradigm to deliver the message elenctically that any person 'is wisest, who, like Socrates has become cognizant that he is in truth worth nothing in respect of wisdom' (23b2-4).³⁵ Thus, when Socrates finds a person who pretends to moral expertise, he 'come(s) to the god's aid' (23b7); that is, he serves the god Apollo in accord with the demands of Socratic piety by delivering the antihubristic message of the god concerning our ignorance *per demonstrandum*.

Apollo has attached Socrates to Athens to perform the office of elenctic gadfly (30d), revealing belief inconsistency and thus establishing inter-

33 For a defense of constructivism, see Brickhouse and Smith 1994, Ch. 1. Opposition to constructivism can be found in Benson 2000, esp. Ch. 1.3. For further discussion, see Scott 2002.

34 Since Socrates' gods are by far our intellectual and moral superiors, whatever they command must be just and virtuous; hence, it is wrong not to obey the commands of such superiors (see, e.g., *Ap* 29b, 29d; *Chrm* 176b-c; *La* 184e; *Phd* 61e ff.; and McPherran 1996, Ch. 2.2).

35 Because it is the god's wish to use Socrates as a vehicle for delivering the message of our ignorance of divine wisdom, it would seem that part of Socrates' pious service in accord with his understanding of piety is to aid the god in this task. However, the message that we are all (like Socrates) ignorant of real wisdom would be rejected out-of-hand by those who believe they have expert moral knowledge, were that message to be directly asserted (recall the example of Euthyphro). Hence, its delivery must take the form of an *ad hominem* demonstration: specifically, through an elenctic refutation of the relevant knowledge claims.

locutors' lack of moral knowledge: an apotreptic 'No', if you will, to their claims of expertise. So, given that Socrates is the only craft-assistant of the *elenchos* in Athens who assists the master-craftsman-like (and general-like) Apollo to achieve his good ends (and in obedience to his command to do so),³⁶ we would expect this divine overseer to guide his servant's/soldier's work (especially in view of Socrates' ignorance of virtue). It would also be natural for Apollo's assistance to take an apotreptic form, so as to match the apotreptic form of the *elenchos* (note that the *daimonion* has often stopped Socrates from talking with others, even when he was in the middle of saying something — presumably during an elenctic encounter on at least some occasions [40a-b]). Socrates appears to approve of the model of piety that takes our pious service to the gods to be a service analogous to that rendered by soldiers to generals and assistant shipwrights to shipwrights, and in both these cases verbal oversight is typically provided.³⁷ Thus, since Socrates pursues a divinely sanctioned and morally dangerous apotreptic mission on behalf of Apollo, it he who is singled out for Apollo's gift of an apotreptic *daimonion*.

A further answer as to why Socrates and no one else is the privileged recipient of a *daimonion* is provided by Xenophon, who addresses this issue by having his Euthydemus observe that the gods appear to be more friendly with Socrates than with other men, because *even when they are not asked* they assist him, an assertion that Socrates greets with silent acceptance (*Mem IV 3, 12*). Why do they assist him? According to this Socrates, from perfectly good gods we have nothing to fear (*Mem IV 3, 5-7*) and they will spontaneously provide us with many and important goods at the right moment, irrespective of whether we deserve them or have actively requested them.³⁸ Moreover, since the gods wish to promote justice, and since for Socrates piety is that part of justice that requires us to serve the gods, they may aid us in doing so irrespective of our requests by, for example, sending us a helpful divine 'sign'. Such assistance would come *in response* to the piety of our actions/inten-

36 Although others employ the elenctic method in eristic combat, their aim is victory irrespective of truth, and so their efforts are not endorsed or supported by Apollo.

37 McPherran 1991; 1996, Ch. 2.2

38 Pl Ap 41c-d; *Euthphr* 15b; Xen *Mem* I 1, 19; I 4, 5-18; IV 3, 3-17; Ap 5-7; cf. [Pl] *Alc II* 149e-50b.

tions,³⁹ and so since Socrates holds that the gods aid those who are virtuous, and since he is a gift of the god and the most virtuous person in Athens (30d-1a, 41c-d), he is most aided through the gift of the *daimonion*.⁴⁰

A last, possible, explanation for the *daimonion*'s partiality — one more obvious to ancient readers than to ourselves — is latent in the fact of Socratic mind/body dualism, a dualism that takes our minds (souls) to be akin to the divine (*Mem* I 4, 17-18; IV 3, 14; *Alc* I 133b-c).⁴¹ According to Socrates, we are able to think most clearly and so are most receptive to the divine when our minds are divorced from the influences of our bodies through the possession of temperance and wisdom; the greater share of these we possess, the more we resemble god, and the more we resemble god the better able we are to receive the divine (*Tht* 176a-7a; cf. *Phd* 63e-8b). This explains why we dream when asleep and not when awake, and why those close to death are able to prophesy with accuracy (cf. *R* IX 571d-2b; *Cic de Div* I 29-31, 54). Readers familiar with Socrates the hero of self-control and self-sufficiency (see, e.g., *Pl Chrm* 155c-d; *Xen Mem* I 5; IV 8, 11), then, will understand why he is credited with prophetic dreams and harbors the only *daimonion* in town: of all the Athenians, it is he who is best able to distance himself from the clamoring voices of his sensual appetites, and so is best able to hear the voice of a divinity.⁴²

39 And not to the size or kind of any material offering that accompanied any request we might have made; *Mem* I 3, 3; II 1, 28; see also *Mem* I 1, 19; I 4, 10-18; IV 3, 13-14; *Smp* IV 48-9. Note that Aeschines of Sphettus, a close friend of Socrates and an author of Socratic dialogues, ascribes this same view to Socrates, as well as the view that 'the fine and good get a better deal from the gods because of their greater piety': Dittmar 1912, Fr 8, Ins 61-2; Reeve 1989, 67-8 n 80.

40 Xenophon, for example, represents Socrates as accepting the view that he receives goods from the god(s) (viz., portents such as his *daimonion*) because, apparently, of the piety of his mission to the Athenians; see *Mem* I 1, 9; I 1, 19; I 3, 3; I 4, 15-19; IV 3, 16-17; IV 8, 11; *Smp* 47-9.

41 The *Charmides*, for example, distinguishes fair souls from fair bodies (154d-e; cf. 156e-7d, 160a-b; *Mem* II 6, 32; IV 1, 2), and locates the virtue of temperance in the soul (175e). In the same way, the *Crito* (47d-8a), *Laches* (190b; cf. 185e, 192c), and *Protagoras* (312c; cf. 313a-14b, 351a-b) portray the soul as a distinct governing agent lodged in a body.

42 Nevertheless, Socrates is sufficiently tied to his body that he cannot easily receive

Finally, we must ask further why the god provides such minimal, apotreptic advice. Why, say, does Apollo not also send Socrates probing questions to ask of his interlocutors? After all, the god does provide protreptic advice through oracles and dreams (e.g., *Ap* 20c-3d, 33c); so, then, why not *via* the *daimonion* as well? An attractive answer is this: although oracles and dreams are sources of positive, action-guiding advice for Socrates, they are only useful once they have been subjected to rational interpretation, and this can require a significant amount of time-consuming effort (cf. *Ap* 20e-3b; *Phd* 60d-1b). Although their ambiguity could be due to our natural human inability to perceive oracular signs clearly, that obstacle would seem to be one that a deity could overcome if he or she so desired. Hence, it must be that deity desires Socrates to do the sort of interpretive work that is required in such cases in order to derive the informational nugget buried within the original oracular expression. This explanation accords with Socrates' view that the acquisition of wisdom involves self-teaching, and that he no less than his interlocutors must achieve positive results through his own efforts if such results are to constitute a state of genuine understanding. Moreover, the interpretive effort itself develops a variety of useful intellectual skills and characterological qualities, such as tenacity. All this, then, suggests that deity provides less-than-clear protreptic messages for pedagogical considerations; and, thus, that the function of the *apotreptic daimonion* is instead a more immediately prudential one — just as it is portrayed. Its role is to provide Socrates with an instantaneous warning in the day-to-day conduct of his mission; hence, it must be one that requires little or no interpretation on Socrates' part to make clear the identity of the action warned against (cf. Reeve 1989, 69).

or grasp the messages sent by divinity, but must subject them to rational interpretation of the kind displayed at *Apology* 20e-3b and *Phaedo* 60e-1b.

In this account, the explanation for the *daimonion* being credited with a protreptic function in Xenophon, *Alcibiades I*, and the *Theages* can be chalked up to the fourth-century inclination to make Socrates even more pious and god-like a figure than can be found in even Plato's most heroizing portraits. I think it also plausible to suppose that Plato could have suppressed the sort of protreptic function the *daimonion* might have exhibited when Socrates was not dealing with the sort of hostile interlocutors Plato shows him in contact with, but is instead with his friendly intimates (as in Xenophon's portraits).

However, this still leaves us wondering why the god of the *daimonion* does not also provide clear, protreptic, action-guiding recommendations from time to time. Why does he not tell Socrates, for example, that he should now proceed to the gymnasium of the *Euthydemus* in order to meet his sophistic interlocutors? Here we can only speculate as to how Socrates would reply to this query, but I think it plausible to suppose that he would point out that while frequent apotreptic advice does not significantly impinge on his autonomy and the development of his own powers of decision-making, frequent protreptic advice would. As Socrates' interpretation of his *Phaedo* dream (60e-1b) suggests, a god may give us encouragement or warnings as we run the race of life, but we ought not to expect that he should run it in our place. Thus, the god forbids positive daemonic help to Socrates for the same obscure — but surely good — reason the gods have for having left us all morally incomplete and thus burdened with the hard task of self-examination.⁴³

Still, the gift of the apotreptic *daimonion* is not to be denigrated; it marks Socrates out as a man who enjoys the unique assistance of a divinity. All too sadly, though, even the gift of a god does not grant immunity from the vicissitudes of mortal life: when brought up on charges of impiety, Socrates' defense fails to overcome the numerous and broad-ranging prejudices and allegations ranged against him. His strange, provocative, street-preaching conduct, purportedly commanded by a god and exemplifying the new intellectualist conception of piety that Socrates had forged, proved all too prone to misrepresentation before an undiscerning crowd. From outside the circle of Socratic philosophy, that revised piety looked all too similar to the newfangled impiety Aristophanes had lampooned in his *Clouds* long before (423 BCE), an impiety that Socrates himself would have condemned. It is, then, part of the drama and irony of Socrates' martyrdom that the sign of his god is also the sign of his demise. But, on my account, it is also natural that even with his last words Socrates gave thanks to a god for the extrarational signs that gave him a life of extraordinary rationality (McPherran 2003).

43 Given Socrates' frequent disavowals of wisdom, we ought not to expect him to be committed to a theory that explains why the gods do not give us protreptic guidance or why they have left so many of us morally imperfect.