

Tychè et Pronoia

La marche du monde selon Plutarque

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

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Abstract

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

1. A remarkable case of demonic providence

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

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

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

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

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

⁴ Cf., e.g., Cicero, *ac.* 2,136.

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