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THE PHILOSOPHY

FROM UNDER THE SIGN OF A DAIMONION

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INTRODUCTION

A TWICE-BORN PHILOSOPHER

Two events decided about the philosophical way of Socrates: the first was the discovery of daimonions and the second—the words of the oracle given to Chaerephon. The latter event, which took place when Socrates was a mature philosopher, is better known. Chaerephon, Socrates’ peer and, at the same time, one of the most devoted of his disciples, went to the temple of Apollo in Delphi to ask god whether there existed anyone who was wiser than Socrates. Pythia was to answer that there was no such person. Most of the pilgrims gathered there must have been astonished not only by the answer given by Pythia, but also the question itself as the question revealed insolence and audacity on the part of an unknown disciple of an equally unknown philosopher. Years later the Athenians judges reacted in a similar way. When the seventy-year-old Socrates mentioned this situation to them, there was to be observed visible indignation among the judges. We can observe even today as we read Plato’s Apology:

Chaerephon, as you know, was very impetuous in all his doings, and he went to Delphi and boldly asked the oracle to tell him whether – as I was saying, I must beg you not to interrupt – he asked the oracle to tell him whether there was anyone wiser than I was, and the Pythian prophetess answered that there was no man wiser.¹

Socrates’ words caused an uproar during the trial. Xenophon also relates that the judges “gave vent, as was only natural, to a

¹ Plato, Apology, 21 a. All quotations from Plato’s and Pseudo-Plato’s works in B. Jowett’s translation.
fiercer murmur of dissent”\textsuperscript{2}, wanting in this way to stop Socrates from his speech in which he portrayed himself as a person who was chosen by god, as someone who was very close to god. This is testified by not only the words of the oracle, but also a \textit{daimonion}—Socrates was much more devoted to the divine matters than anything else, even his own matters. Accusing him of impiety, his accusers act against the well-known facts and do not count with the original dimension of his philosophy into which utmost respect to that which is divine is inscribed. They consider him to be one of the many philosophers whilst he himself from the very start of his philosophical journey follows his own footpath without imitating anyone.

The news brought by Chaerephon from the Delphi caused a stir among Socrates’ disciples and friends and dumbfounded the philosopher himself, who, as it seems, did not expect this sort of favour of Chaerephon. He asks himself further questions: “What can the god mean? and what is the interpretation of this riddle?”\textsuperscript{3}.

He did not think of himself this way; he did not feel himself superior to others nor did he compare himself with others. In any case, how could he have been better than others, he, who from his young years disobeyed many civil duties—even those ones which belonged to the sphere of the political activity—, he, who, criticized the religious ceremonials of the Athenians? As he underlined in court, he himself thought of himself that he knows that he has “no wisdom, small or great”.\textsuperscript{4} Thee are important words for Socrates contained in them the essential feature of philosophy in the period which was prior to the event in the Delphi. They refer to the philosophy under the sign of \textit{daimonion}, his later philosophy—called the philosophy under the sign of Apollo here—is already ascertained in the answers to the earlier questions: Socrates already knew what he was better at than others; he found out where the recognition in the eyes of

\textsuperscript{2} Xenophon, \textit{Apology}, 15. All quotations from Xenophon’s works in H.G. Dakyns’s translation.

\textsuperscript{3} Plato, \textit{Apology}, 21 b.

\textsuperscript{4} Plato, \textit{Apology}, 21 b.
god comes from. Philosophy will become for him, first and foremost, a kind of service to god.

Who was Socrates before he was to solve the Delphinian riddle? What kinds of wisdom did he mean when he said to the judges that he had none. By little wisdom he meant, among other things, the knowledge that was part of different kinds of occupational competence. He found it during his talks with craftsmen, traders, sailors and soldiers as the basis of their proper occupational conduct. He himself did not have any job. Taking account of the then standard of vocational education, Socrates did not have the competence with which he could compare himself with others, let alone having or thinking of any kind of superiority. Although he found many people who were wiser than him in this respect it was upon him that god—according to the words of the oracle—bestowed the title of the wiser than others: it is thus that a man without an occupation is more important to god than those who gained greatest fame thought their occupational careers. In his own way, useless for the other citizens of Athens, he became someone precious to god. Apparently, god, when he assesses human life, is not directed by the measure of little wisdom, not in the first place at least; there are more important things for him.

Was Socrates recognized as wiser than others as a reward for deepening his knowledge concerning gods themselves? Perhaps he discovered the principles according to which the world of gods work or he maybe found the way in which gods care about the whole world? It is possible to imagine Socrates so engrossed in theological and naturalistic issues that it prevented him from pursuing occupational interests. Choosing his person, god would assess higher his achievements in the sphere of great wisdom than the greatest achievements in the sphere of little wisdom. This suggestion is plausible and promising—many have already supposed that the basis of real acknowledgement I the eyes of god is going towards god through the development of theoretical knowledge. But Socrates immediately quenches our optimism: I do not possess this kind of wisdom either—the great wisdom of the superhuman proportion. Thus, who was
Socrates, who pitted his strength against the great wisdom of philosophers and poets who talked about that which is divine and who also rejected the order of the little wisdom coming to the conclusion that it will be better for him to remain the same person as he used to be.\(^5\)

However it was impossible: he did not manage to stay the same person as he used to be. His investigations, in connection with the oracle’s words, became the lasting element of his way of doing philosophy. He left the secluded places where he used to philosophize in the company of carefully chosen people, he leaves his home—the *frontisteron* from the comedy by Aristophanes—and directs his steps towards the agora to proclaim the good news: not everything is lost, if they take care of their souls they will find acknowledgement in the eyes of god. He is no longer afraid of rebuking them and giving them lessons. The previous kind assistance in the individual effort to know oneself he replaces with the persistent and violent call to adhere to divine principles. Standing before the jury he knew that he was there for his service to god; in other words, for practicing philosophy in the spirit of Apollo. He was also very well aware of the fact that those who followed him at that time did not always knew what was the purpose of his philosophical methods; they were not his disciples, but rather listeners who, like Critias and Alcibiades, selectively treated his words. Alcibiades, who did not even have a chance to come near Socrates in the earlier period, now finds in Socrates his spiritual tutor and this may be added that it was Socrates’ initiative! The older disciples did not have a habit of flouting the law. For them Socrates was their friend and they were his disciples. That must have been a curious paradox for Socrates himself, that when he did not teach anyone at the time of doing philosophy under the influence of a *daimonion*, he had many disciples, whereas later he gained only listeners who were very selective in their treatment of his words. In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates was very

\(^5\) “I asked myself on behalf of the oracle, whether I would like to be as I was, neither having their knowledge nor their ignorance, or like them in both; and I made answer to myself and the oracle that I was better off as I was”. Plato, *Apology*, 22 e.
clear about not being anybody’s teacher—this is as far as his earlier phase of his philosophy is concerned, but also taking into account the standard of his new philosophy he does not stop in giving lessons to the Athenians. In like manner, he would do the same with other people, continually working on the moral condition of these people, even if he were to lose life in the process!

In the present outline of Socrates’ thought I primarily focused on the less discussed aspect of his philosophy—I am principally interested in the birth of his philosophy from under the sign of a daimonion. I believe that the interventions of a daimonion became a source of original reflections for him as well as the basis of an intellectual overdoing of the theses of other philosophers. Contra those who marginalize the role of a daimonion in his philosophy, I hold that it is impossible to understand Socrates—together with all his rationalism—without bringing to the fore the pivotal role of this very specific experience, which distinguished him from the other Greeks in the first place.

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7 „Someone will say: Yes, Socrates, but cannot you hold your tongue, and then you may go into a foreign city, and no one will interfere with you? Now I have great difficulty in making you understand my answer to this. For if I tell you that this would be a disobedience to a divine command, and therefore that I cannot hold my tongue, you will not believe that I am serious”. Plato, *Apology*, 37 e.
CHAPTER ONE

A DAIMONION – A DIVINE PREMONITION

1. In point of fact we know the reason for which Socrates coined the word ‘daimonion’: all historical sources—along with the text of the accusation—unanimously point out to the fact that Socrates meant by it a peculiar kind of contact with divine reality. Grammatically, the word daimonion belongs to the neuter kind. Thus, so as to be close to Socrates’ intentions one should avoid using terminology which suggests a personal character of the reality designated by the name daimonion (for example such as divinity, guide, god, spirit). Socrates needed a new word; for, as he probably thought, no one experienced divine interventions before him in the way that he himself did. Hence, he perceived the already existing vocabulary in terms of the relation ‘god – man’ as being inadequate to his own experiences.

Coining a new term however did not equal a complete negation of the already existing theological terminology. As Xenophon has it, the newly proposed expression was to express “more exactly and more reverentially” than the extant way of expression as regards the relation between men and gods. It is impossible to support the interpretation of Socrates’ opponents who claimed that because of his belief in the existence of daemonions one can infer that Socrates renounced the belief in gods which were acknowledged by the Athenians and other Greeks. In like manner, one should not follow those interpreters who bring the position of a daimonion down to personally conceived daimons. Both of these interpretations swerve from

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8 Certain premises which concern the nature of daimonion and of which more will be said later, made me use the category ‘divine premonition’ to refer to this impersonal phenomenon—Socrates’ daimonion.

9 Xenophon, Apology, 13.
the intentions of Socrates rather than confirm them. At the same time, they conceal the originality of the discoveries made by Socrates. It is true that until the end of his life Socrates upheld some elements of the religious tradition in which personal elements played a vital role. It also true however that Socrates took great care that the specific character of *divine premonitions* differed from any other kinds of divine interventions. It was for a long time that this care—till the Chairephon journey to Delphi—was a *sine qua non* condition of his philosophical efforts and it was only the words of the oracle that suppressed in him the interventions of a *daimonion* so much so that his philosophical devotion assumed, first and foremost, the role that he took on from the words of Pythia.

When did Socrates employ the word *daimonion* for the first time? There is no accurate information on this point. In all likelihood it happened after Socrates gained knowledge of the theories of such philosophers as Heraclitus of Ephesus, Anaxagoras of Clazomenae and Diogenes of Apollonia. We must assume however that Socrates went through a series of very personal experiences, which he was unable to comprehend on the basis of the knowledge he possessed. His endeavour to understand *divine premonitions* was one of the main reasons for his interest in philosophy: without the prior effort put into an attempt to fathom this mysterious phenomenon the conception of philosophy as we know it from the trial would not have come into existence.

Plato’s *Apology* allows to situate the birth of the problem of *divine premonitions* in a pre-philosophical period of spiritual development of Socrates. For passage 31d informs us that it is ‘from his childhood’ that he dealt with this mysterious experience.\(^\text{10}\) This is also confirmed by the message of the pseudo platonic *Theages*.\(^\text{11}\) The strength of the Socratic faith in *daimonions* is clearly seen in the *Apology* of Plato’s. Full of determination Socrates defends himself and his own philosophy

\(^{10}\) Plato, *Apology*, 31 d.

\(^{11}\) Socrates: “There is something spiritual which, by a divine dispensation, has accompanied me from my childhood…”, Pseudo-Plato, *Theages*, 128 d.
referring several times to the testimony of a *daimonion*, instead of—as it had been expected by his accusers—covering up his faith in the face of the complaint that he believed in a *daimonion* which the Athenians do not accept. Socrates would rather die than abandon his belief. All the same, we are more interested in the beginnings of his ‘acquaintance’ with a *daimonion*.

After all, it is a valuable item of information: if it is so early that Socrates encounters a *daimonion*; for it was as early as in his childhood, it is necessary to pose a question concerning the influence of his reflections over the nature of these psychic interventions upon the overall shape of his philosophical standing. The Socratic literature entertains no illusion: there is probably no other such information about Socrates which, being so firmly rooted in the sources—Plato’s *Apology* is regarded as being the most certain source of information about the historic Socrates—would simultaneously be so much ignored by the commentators of his philosophy. In my view, so great is the influence of *divine premonitions* upon the whole of Socrates’ philosophy that it deserves to be dubbed one of the foremost sources of his conception of philosophy.

2. What speaks in favour of the hypothesis that the experiences connected with the *daimonion* exerted so big an influence upon the formation of Socrates’ philosophy? Even at this point we can mention two arguments concerning the youth of the philosopher: the indirect one; for it speaks of his relation to public affairs and the other, directly connected with philosophy.

As is well known, Socrates steered clear of a direct involvement in a political activity. In this commitment he was consistent from the very beginning, or from the moment when the legal and public norm obliged him to attend to the matters of the *demos*. At the time when his peers were engaged in the realm of political activity he preferred to keep away from it and wittingly did not participate in any political bodies making important decisions. His radicalism as to shunning the public dimension of life was more profound than one could expect from his aversion to big politics: Socrates rejected the current
styles of behaviour which were considered commendable from the point of view of the general public in Athens. Dealing with the matters of the *demos* did not only mean an interest in the mechanism of power and holding offices, but it also meant fulfilling roles useful in the public eye, such as for example taking up a publicly valuable occupation. Thus, when a seventy-year-old Socrates stood in court and stated that he had never dealt with politics he contrasted the public model of life of an individual with that which is particular and unique. From the very beginning he chose a “private station and not a public one”. It is since early youth that Socrates decided to become a private person—*idiotes*, who does not bother with the problems of broadly understood politics.

What enabled Socrates to oppose the pressure of the society so early in his life? Why was Socrates immune to political aspirations? From Plato’s *Apology* we learn that the cause of this state of affairs was nothing else but a *daimonion*: “… and this is what stands in the way of my being a politician. And rightly, as I think.” Divine premonitions from god coerced Socrates into adapting to the new standard of behaviour and made him an enemy of everything that contradicted this standard.

Since a *daimonion* affected the formation of the way of life of the young Socrates to such an extent, can we then doubt the strength of this effect upon philosophy? After all, we do speak of more or less the same period of life of Socrates. To be less precise, we ought to put it like so: before Socrates reached the age when he was in a position to deal with politics he had already had a concrete array of reflections over the nature of divine premonitions. It is my belief that these reflections had made him not only a rebel within the public sphere of life, but had also prepared him to read the existing philosophy in a rather non-standard way and to create a very original conception of philosophy.

Let us now turn to the other argument. Socrates was saying of himself that he’s a *self-taught philosopher*, which both Plato and

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13 Plato, *Apology*, 31 d.
Xenophon unanimously confirm. In the *Laches* Socrates thus speaks of himself:

As for myself, Lysimachus and Melesias, I am the first to confess that I have never had a teacher of the art of virtue.....\(^\text{14}\)

And Xenophon thus relates in his *Symposium* what Socrates said to Callias:

When will you have done with your gibes, Callias? Why, because you have yourself spent sums of money on Protagoras, and Gorgias, and Prodicus, and a host of others, to learn wisdom, must you pour contempt on us poor fellows, who are but self-taught thinkers in philosophy compared with you?\(^\text{15}\)

In a sense Socrates was doomed to being self-taught. Considering his unwillingness to leave Athens as well as the fact that at the time of his life there was no philosophical school in the city it is small wonder that he was incapable of giving in to systematic and organized philosophical education. In the first half of the V century B.C. Athens was lagging behind the leading centres of scientific and philosophical thought in Asia Minor and Italy. It is only in the second half of the century that the situation altered to such a degree that the Athenians did not need to leave the city to come across a philosopher.

Nonetheless, before first philosophers came to Athens, Socrates managed to live through his childhood and early adolescence in an ambience which was very distant from intellectual standards of philosophy. Had Socrates gone through a methodical philosophical education, as it was in the case of for example the school of Pythagoreans or, had he from the very beginning been introduced into the philosophical arena by a fully-fledged philosopher, his pre-philosophical stage of spiritual development would not have mattered so much so as to devote much attention to it. Socrates however entered philosophy supporting himself with his own considerations; his *being self-taught* commands us to protect this pre-philosophical source of his philosophy. His

\(^{14}\) Plato, *Laches*, 186 b-c.

\(^{15}\) Xenophon, *Symposium*, I, 5.
philosophical originality emerges from the adolescent cognitive needs and queries he posed at that time. He did not take the fundamental philosophical problems over from other philosophers.

In the beginning was the astonishment brought about by mysterious interventions which were quickly put down to a divine origin. What can be said about the characteristic features of divine premonitions?

3. For Socrates a daimonion was unpredictable. He did not succeed in controlling this phenomenon to the end of his days. Neither was it a link on a chain of pre-planned actions. Socrates was not in possession of a method capable of producing a premonition; time and time again he took this experience as something unpredictable, surprising and unexpected\textsuperscript{16}, something that stopped the already taken plan of action.\textsuperscript{17} Very well did he realize that in this case the initiative was not on his side and that he had to resign to the twist of fate.\textsuperscript{18}

Most probably the first experiences connected with the daimonion caused not only interest in him but also aroused in him great anxiety. Perhaps it is even more appropriate to speak about fear as a result of which Socrates felt compelled to revalue his conduct. It may be supposed that Socrates was not a model to follow when he was a child: naughty, unruly and disrespectful towards home matters, Socrates did not attach high importance to parental advice. Peripatetic Aristoxenus of Tarentum (IV century B.C.) portrays him as an impulsive and irascible. He was to be a debauchee always willing to share a company of suspicious people. Historians of philosophy usually undermine the faithfulness of Aristoxenus’ words seeing in his writing a sort of lampoon and libel. There is some evidence however which lets us see in Aristoxenus’ relation a grain of truth. The confirmation is found in Phaedo who was to describe a meeting between Socrates, an already grown up man, with Zophurus the

\textsuperscript{16} Xenophon, Memorabilia, IV, 3, 12.
\textsuperscript{17} Cf. Plato, Alcibiades I, 103 a.
\textsuperscript{18} Pseudo-Plato, Theages, 130 e.
physiognomist.\textsuperscript{19} Zophyrus, advancing the theory that a person’s outer appearance reflects his character, was to describe Socrates as a womanizer and debauchee, as a person who yields to evil and who is spiritually shallow. This description was to reduce Socrates’ disciples to laughter. For them nothing could be further from the truth. Yet, and this is what interests us most, Socrates spoke in Zophyrus’ defence, saying that he indeed was such a man, but the state described goes back to the time when he was not engaged in philosophy.

It is therefore possible that Sophroniscos, occupied with stonemasonry—at that time he could not complain about employment in Athens—did not have time for his son. Nor was Phaenarete able to control an overactive child, who was unable to find himself on the way from Athens to the quarry and consequently discovered his world in the Athenian street. Socrates was the disciple of an agora: he freely chose his company, he was curious, always willing to discuss things, sometimes impetuous and even violent in disputes. Living on the edge of the social norm, Socrates tests himself in various situations and in the company of different people. To this may be added that he is increasingly excited by it. He departs further and further away from hearth and home and he cares less and less for what his parents have to say. It is in this mutinous youth, living ‘his own way’, that the first experiences appeared. Those were the experiences which exceeded well beyond the bounds of his will.

4. The experiencing of \textit{daimonion} was instantaneous. It had in itself something of a nature of an instinctive reflex. It could enter, Socrates as pointed out, “in the middle of a speech”\textsuperscript{20}, but it had no verbalized dimension itself: it was a wordless mysterious touch which awakened Socrates from a state of complacency in a split second. A \textit{daimonion}, as a premonition from God, was a \textit{supra-sensual signal}, an impulse which you do

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\textsuperscript{19} The contents of the lost dialogue of Phaedo, \textit{Zophyrus}, is known to us through the authors who have access to the original. Cf. Cicero, \textit{Tusculan Disputations}, IV 37.
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\textsuperscript{20} Plato, \textit{Apology}, 40 b.
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not hear, which you do not touch and which you do not argue with. A daimonion was never an interlocutor to Socrates. It was like lightning—instantaneously altering the present status quo.\textsuperscript{21}

Socrates could not imagine a daimonion and in all probability he even did not feel a need to do so.\textsuperscript{22} He did not place daimonion in a physical sphere. Nor could he withhold the very experience connected with the interference of the daimonion. The experience itself along with what it left behind was the sole property of Socrates: he himself had to come up with the causes of the appearance of a daimonion. The experience given to him in a split second forced him to reanalyze, step by step, the stages of the already taken action.\textsuperscript{23} Socrates was able to ignore the premonition appearing in his consciousness. Most likely he did that time after time in his youth, but—as he acknowledged later—as long as he treated the impulse seriously, a daimonion never let him down.

5. A divine premonition belongs to the dominion of conscious experiences of Socrates. It is not a daydreaming experience, nor does it emerge by means of outer objects, but every time it directly permeates his consciousness. The principle ‘the worse it is for the conscious me, the better it is for divine signs’ does not

\textsuperscript{21} In this understanding of the term daemonion the essential property of the archaic term daimon is preserved, which might denote a sudden and irresistible intervention of a divine element into the life of man.

\textsuperscript{22} Has anyone of us ever tried to imagine a premonition?

\textsuperscript{23} In like manner we can speak of our ordinary premonitions. We often feel premonitions when for example we have planned something or just before the final stage of an action we’ve undertaken, we feel a sudden anxiety which points to the fact that something is wrong. We do not know what has gone wrong, but we feel that something is wrong. It is then that we analyze everything we have done so far, so as to, as a result of our analysis, repair anything of which we were convinced as being in best possible order. Almost always premonitions reveal a real fault in our scheme. We do not think of this unexpected experience as being a mere reminder. We do not ponder over that fact that our attention is focused on the next stage of the fulfillment of the plan. A premonition requires of us to halt this movement and return to the once finished actions. We do not know what went wrong, but we feel that something did go wrong. We require a new cognitive effort to uncover the cause of the appearance of the premonition.
operate here. Under the influence of a daimonion Socrates neither loses consciousness nor does he go berserk: by no means does it limit his perception of the surrounding reality. A contrary rule to the one mentioned above operates here: the more Socrates is focused on what he does and the more attention he devotes to himself and his surroundings the more precise is the perception of the divine signal. A daimonion kept him company in his everyday proceedings and, as he said in court, it frequently called on him intervening even in minor things.\(^{24}\) As early as a young man, Socrates discovered that premonitions are connected with the sphere of innermost thoughts. Nothing could hide before such interventions. It seemed that daimonion, although it itself was purely instantaneous, came out because of the whole of Socrates’ particular conduct. Thus the interpretation led Socrates from that which had been done to that which had been intended and to which, thanks to the divine premonition, he should no longer aspire.

Such character of the premonition made it impossible for anyone to replace Socrates in his endeavour to understand the psychic intervention that he came into contact with. He knew that it was only him who possessed all the data necessary to bring to light the true cause of the appearance of the divine sign. Aside from him there was no one who knew all the circumstances surrounding the situation, nor was there anyone who knew the contents of his thoughts. It was only on the way of self-discovery that he was able to grasp the sense of the happening. A premonition directs Socrates towards himself and compels him to develop the awareness of coming to decisions. Only then will he be in a position to seize the sense of the divine intervention and modify the conduct he was engaged in. Divine premonitions helped Socrates to realize how profound was divine knowledge of reality. According to common religious sense, gods see some things and do not see other things and man is even capable of concealing his dark deeds before them, not to mention his thoughts! However, divine premonitions show that everything that man does, everything that man thinks and

\(^{24}\) Plato, Apology, 40 b.
everything that man plans is already known to gods. Gods know everything. Socrates felt compelled to depart from the widely accepted opinion shared by a majority of the population of Athens. Xenophon strongly emphasizes this difference in the following words:

Whereas most people seem to imagine that the gods know in part, and are ignorant in part, Socrates believed firmly that the gods know all things that are said and the things that are done, and the things that are counselled in the silent chambers of the heart.\(^{25}\)

That was a turning point in his life: god is all-knowing and yet in all his excellence he engages in the life of so little a person that the young Socrates must have been. How did he win this distinction? It could not have been knowledge; for this he simply did not possess. He did not even ask god for such signs. God endowed Socrates with attention that was difficult to fathom. Or maybe god passes his signs on to everyone, but not everyone is able to discern them? What can be done to take advantage of this godly gift? Similar queries must have befallen upon the mind of the youth. Afterwards there came a time for unearthing the nature of *divine premonitions*, as well as drawing conclusions from the made discoveries.

6. There is a *sui generis* one-sidedness in the experience occasioned by the *daemonion*'s intervention which is expressed by an intentional *negativity*: *divine premonitions* warned only against a continuation of an action. Socrates is very clear on this attribute of the *daimonion*:

The sign is a voice which comes to me and always forbids me to do something which I am going to do, but never commands me to do anything (…)\(^{26}\)

A transfer from the negative side to the positive side was only made possible through an individual cognitive effort on the part


\(^{26}\) Plato, *Apology*, 31 d.
of Socrates, who did not always succeed in guessing the right meaning of the experienced event. What confirms this is this astounding habit of his when he would move aside and remain motionless in a standing position. We learn of this from the mouth of Aristodemus in Plato’s *Symposium*. 27 Switching off from the current rhythm of events testifies to the considerable cognitive effort associated with the recognition and correct interpretation of the experienced *divine premonition*. The situation described in the same dialogue by Alcibiades demonstrates that this sort of retreat—when Socrates remained impervious to outer stimuli—could have lasted long hours. 28

A *divine premonition* was read by Socrates as a warning beacon against something that had not yet occurred, but which emanated from the future plan of action already undertaken by Socrates. A *daimonion* forced a possible revision of that plan. Socrates could not have foreseen the influence of outer factors on the final result of the undertaken endeavours. However, since a *divine premonition* gives him a chance to change something then the proper area to undergo the change is the ‘inner part’ of Socrates from which, as if from a spring, flow out his deeds. So as to accurately employ a *premonition* it is obligatory to conduct a thorough analysis of the accepted plan of action and to state intentions accompanying the action. A *daimonion* made Socrates carry out this sort of investigation. No one could replace him in that effort; for, apart from god, no one could know what he intended to do. Nor could anyone recognize concrete persons towards which Socrates actions were directed. Later on, he required the same kind of effort of, first and foremost, his disciples, knowing that only they were able to accurately grasp the meaning of their experiences and accordingly reach a decision for which they would be personally responsible.

There will have happened situations when Socrates misinterpreted a *divine premonition*, which in turn led to the emergence of other interventions. A situation like this may have

28 Plato, *Symposium*, 220 e-d.
taken place during his preparation to the trial. He said to Hermogenes that his made a twofold attempt to prepare defence, but every time he did try to do so, a *daimonion* hindered him.\(^{29}\)

Why did Socrates take upon himself the task of preparing a second apology? Perhaps because he misinterpreted the warning beacon; he may have thought that the first intervention concerned not so much the fact of defence preparation, as the strategy adopted by Socrates during the trial. Only the second intervention made Socrates aware of the inappropriateness of working on the defence itself.

7. *Divine premonitions*, as we have mentioned before, did not use up the range of relations linking Socrates with that which is divine. Aside from the negative signs he also accepted a whole assortment of positive signs. Socrates was most earnest about the oracular art, thinking that in things which are hidden, let us seek to gain knowledge from above, by divination; for the gods, he added, grant signs to those to whom they will be gracious.\(^{30}\)

In all probability it was a firm element of Socrates’ convictions quite in accordance with his youthful outlook. Getting acquainted with later philosophical output did not make him verify this conviction, which stands to reason granting the fact that a majority of Greek philosophers did not oppose a belief in divination to reason.\(^{31}\) Socrates was however the first to highlight the fact that there existed no stringently drawn boundary of knowledge beyond which the human reason is helpless. What is left is the art of divination.\(^{32}\)

\(^{29}\) Xenophon, *Apology*, 4.  
\(^{32}\) Cf. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I, 1, 2: “(...) he was often to be seen engaged in sacrifice, at home or at the common altars of the state. Nor was his dependence on divination less manifest”. 

8. The place, where the power of all divine indications is revealed along with simultaneous maintaining the distinction into positive signs and negative signs, is the Socratic way of understanding philosophy. Socrates was very forceful in saying that he had taken up philosophy *by order* of god. Philosophy was for him a kind of *mission* he had been dispatched on by god. It was a *divine service* performed at god’s *command*.

And this is a duty which the God has imposed upon me, as I am assured by oracles, visions, and in every sort of way in which the will of divine power was ever signified to anyone ....

The judges, who wanted him to resign from doing philosophy, were given the following answer:

...Men of Athens, I honor and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy....

Various kinds of positive indications were brought to prominence in the ‘Apollonian’ phase of philosophical development of Socrates: the command was included in the missionary role of his philosophical practice. The earlier philosophy of Socrates, the philosophy from under the banner of *daimonion*, had a somewhat more delicate nature: here Socrates does not give others lessons, he does not refer to the will of god, speak on his behalf or engages in the reformation of those whose will is not being taken account of. A *daimonion* taught Socrates that the most important thing was that at which an individual arrived themselves and for what the individual would accept responsibility. At first, Socrates encourages others to work on themselves. He is a *quasi* signpost that shows others the direction to follow. However, he does not replace people in their own work. He does not teach anything. What he has to say from himself is brief: I do not know. This way of philosophizing is a result of deep contemplation of *divine*

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34 Plato, *Apology*, 33 c.
35 Plato, *Apology*, 29 d.
premonitions: just as daimonion inspired Socrates to the development of reflection over the reached decisions, Socrates’ goal was analogous: to inspire specially chosen people to do the same thing. He made use of the negativity from the divine premonition to achieve his own philosophical aim. He may have come to the conclusion that if god treats him in this way, he may in turn treat other people alike. This is where his authentic, benevolent and not yet sprinkled with mockery “I do not know” comes from. The testimony from the Theaetetus can be contained within the boarders of thoughts understood on the ground of the daimonion:

…the god compels-me to be a midwife, but does not allow me to bring forth. I am not myself at all wise, nor have I anything to show which is the invention or birth of my own soul, but whose who converse with me profit.36

9. Socrates’ daimonion is an impersonal phenomenon. Coining a new word, Socrates, so it seems, wanted to depart from the nomenclature of the theology of that time. This is why he transformed the already existing word daimon to create a neuter noun in lieu. Socrates was convinced that in his experiencing of the daimonion he did not make contact with any entity of a personal nature. The newly invented word highlighted the distinction.

In a way, in devising the word daimonion Socrates underscored that which the word daimon had already contained. Originally, the term daimon signified a ‘dispenser’, a ‘distributor’, the ‘one who bestows’, and was utilized when someone did not want to use the name of god they talked about. To be sure, Socrates knew that archaic custom.37 Philosophers

36 Plato, Theaetetus, 150 c-d.
37 The way of understanding of the category daimon by ancient Greeks underwent an evolution: a point of departure was the concept of an impersonal and anonymous force able to impose a course of events on man, whereas the point of arrival was the concept of a personal entity, intermediating between gods and men. Did Socrates increase the speed of evolution when he was speaking of daimonion. An answer in the affirmative is implied in the standpoint adopted by Plato, however the specific qualities of divine premonitions speak in favour of an answer in the negative. After
also employed the word *daimon* to describe the divine reality in its abstract form (*daimon* – ‘that which is divine’). Heraclitus made use of this word as an opposite to the word *theos*: in his philosophy, the former meant an impersonal force governing the destiny of man, while the latter referred to a personal god.

The basis of acknowledging the impersonality of a *divine premonition* was an analysis of the direct experience—Socrates, whenever he spoke of a *daimonion*, tried to maintain a very critical attitude to his own cognitive abilities and limited himself only to the way in which he experienced that which was divine. Therefore, he did not claim that a *daimonion* was an intermediary being between men and gods; for this presupposed a certain theological theory. Plato might have already introduced the category of *demons*—separate entities, whose role was to be links between divine and human reality. However, both Socrates’ childhood and the period of adolescence were taken over by another idea, the one that came from the works of Pindar, where there were no separate *demons*, but only gods, people and heroes. We can assume that a *daimonion* referred directly to god to young Socrates and did not come in contact with any go-betweens.

10. The range of *daimonionic interventions* is encompassed within the area of close to Socrates *interpersonal relations*. A *daimonion* did not intervene into the realm of contemplating nature. It did not disclose itself when public matters were being discussed nor did it caution Socrates against military defeats of the Athenians. People who did not belong in the active life of Socrates were not a subject of *daimonionic* warnings. The base of *divine premonitions* were always concrete situations with concrete people. If the *daimonion* cautioned Socrates against developing an acquaintance, then he knew who he was to avoid; if the subject of a discussion ceased to interest him a *daimonion* could push him away from the discussant—even a close Socrates’ death Plato fell under the influence of the Pythagorean and Orphic conceptions in which the speed of the course of the semantic evolution of ‘*daimon*’ was considerably increased.
Socrates’ disciple could become a *persona non grata* in this way.\(^{38}\)

Socrates is said to have experienced *daimonic premonitions* also with respect to the matters of his nearest and dearest.\(^{39}\)
According to the *Theages*, Socrates sometimes dissuaded his friends from reaching a particular goal, provided he felt a *premonition* as he listened to their plans.\(^{40}\)

Socrates did not attempt to artificially beautify psychic interventions caused by a *daimonion*. They were something ordinary to him: a *daimonion* was an ordinary sign he often felt, even in trifling matters. The space of experiences connected with the *daimonion* will, in a way, delineate the range of philosophical research specific to Socrates. If he was to say that in philosophizing he pursues “the argument chiefly for [his] own sake, and perhaps in some degree also for the sake of [his] other friends”\(^{41}\) then he closed himself within the borders of a potential impact of the *daimonion* which justified a scientific investigation or even a control of the correctness of these investigations. Thence, the need of closeness felt by his first disciples—an indispensable condition to an appropriate employment of the philosophical power of Socrates.

11. The last sentence from the previous paragraph will be more lucid if we narrow down the range of influence of *divine premonitions*: a *daimonion* appears only when Socrates is faced with a *moral choice*. Socrates believed that divine interventions were an expression of opposition to him who was not intending to go ‘to good’.\(^{42}\)
When he was about to ‘make a slip or error about (something)’\(^{43}\) then the daemonion was a sign to amend his behaviour. If his actions were subordinated to the moral

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\(^{38}\) This is the cause of Antisthenes’ complaint in Xenophontic *Symposium*.

\(^{39}\) Our *premonition* contains this message as well: we may feel that something is wrong with our closest family, yet it does not pertain to strangers. Likewise, it does no pertain to a crowd of people, a society, political parties, etc.

\(^{40}\) Pseudo-Plato, *Theages*, 128 d.

\(^{41}\) Plato, *Charmides*, 166 d.

\(^{42}\) Plato, *Apology*, 40 c.

\(^{43}\) Plato, *Apology*, 40 b.
good—the daemonion was silent. As long as the moral good was lower in comparison to other goods, the Socrates had warning *premonitions*. Socrates was not a model citizen of Athens, if we consider the then standard of civic life. He was not a good husband or a good father; he neglected his house and his family, he did not look after himself—after all, he was regarded as being slovenly—in spite of all this, he did not feel any *warnings*.

He was unused to receiving money. Nor did he know how to invest the money he inherited. As a philosopher, he could not envisage a situation when he would ask for remuneration for something that god, in his good will, presented to him as the purpose of his *service*.

By and large, a *divine premonition* does not appear where necessity rules, that is where god may make a decision about anything. Man has little choice here: god can effortlessly make use of man in such a way that no trace of his interference is left in man’s memory. God may engender enthusiasm in a poet who is creating a beautiful work. He can provide support for an artisan, politician or an army commander. Socrates’ faith in such a state of affairs was very strong and there is no doubt that it had its roots in his formative years.

Nevertheless, Socrates’ reflections upon *divine premonitions* coerced him into revising his views concerning god’s control over man’s life. God did not intend to control every aspect of man’s life! *Daimonion’s space* illustrates the very area where god does not supplant man. This is why god does not avail himself of positive signs in this area and does not affect man’s demeanour from beyond man’s consciousness. This space of *divine premonitions* is the sphere of making moral decisions. It transpires that when it comes to the choice between good and evil, god does not constraint man, but leaves him to himself. Not totally, though; for through *premonitions* god presents man with the difficulty of the situation man found himself in. At the same time, god does not propose positive solutions, as if he did not want to take moral responsibility for a future deed. This is why Socrates had to work towards solutions to problems himself. In the last analysis, it is
him who bore the responsibility for his deed, not god. God does not make decisions for people, albeit the fact of the appearance of *daimonic premonitions* bears us out on thinking that god is not indifferent to the decisions people make.

It is here where the difference between the *demon* of the traditional mythology and the *divine premonition* of Socrates is clearly visible. According to the traditional religiousness of the Greek, gods may have shown hostility towards people. They may have used people to play games between each other. This in turn led to an admission that part of evil committed by people has its origin in gods. Hence the dichotomy between good and bad *daimons*. As far as the *daimonion* is concerned, there is no question of bad intentions. Socrates was quick to acknowledge that this experience was not only a manifestation of God’s care for his moral condition, but also, given that Socrates treated himself as an example to others, for the moral condition of other people.\(^{44}\) Socrates rejected the conception of *evil* influence on the part of god. The *interventions of the daimonion* that he experienced were of far more delicate nature from those whose source was to be *daimon*. A *daimonion* touched Socrates, moved him and inspired him, without foisting anything upon him, whereas *daimon*, on direct contact with man, generated unabashed impetuosity comparable to the might of Moirae.

Bearing in mind the already discussed distinction between positive signs and negative signs as well as the present demarcation of the range of *daimonic influences* it is easier to understand the difference of opinion between Plato and Xenophon. It is common knowledge that Plato’s *daimonion* only forbade whereas Xenophon ascribed also positive functions to *daimonion*. Plato’s relation seems to be more precise: if we accepted that a *daimonion* appeared only in situations when Socrates was facing a moral dilemma then a *daimonion* forbade only, without imposing anything. Xenophon did not see that distinction and subsumed *daimonion* under the category of other oracular signs, which, as we know, Socrates made use of. This may have brought about an interpretation to the effect that a

*daimonion* did not only proscribe but also prescribed. Put it like this: whether Socrates’ god gave him not only negative but also positive signs then Xenophon’s standpoint is, generally speaking, in accord with Socrates’ perspective, but suffers the loss of an innovative component of his philosophy.
CHAPTER TWO

SOCRATES THE “LACEDAEMONIAN”

Before he encountered philosophy, thus before being able to draw on from a vast collection of philosophical theses concerning that which is divine, Socrates managed to reach a certain theological and religious practice, whose principles he considered congruous with the rules of the divine premonitions he experienced. He ‘discovered’ this practice in a place hardly expected by the Athenians, namely, in the area of the religious ethos of the Spartans.\[^{45}\] In his own way he stayed truthful to the Lacedaemonians to the rest of his life, and nothing could change his attitude towards them, even the bloodiest episodes of the Peloponnesian War. The political and military fiasco of the Athenians in this war exhibited for Socrates only a symptom of a greater superiority of the Lacedaemonians over the Athenians, the superiority in the spiritual sphere.

What was it that Socrates found in the Spartans that let him understand the nature of divine premonitions better and, at the same time, put them in a broader theological context? It was the so called Lacedaemonians’ prayer, whose basis formed euphemia – the silent worship. We find some valuable suggestions concerning this subject in the manuscripts of Xenophon and Plato, but undoubtedly the most interesting source of the above subject is the dialogue of Alcibiades II, written probably in the III century BC.

Socrates tells the title Alcibiades a story, once heard from older citizens, of a certain conflict between Athens and Sparta. It

\[^{45}\] I placed the word discovered in inverted commas because, in my view, Socrates was under the greater impression of the legend about the Lacedaemonians and the citizens of Crete, than the historical truth about them.
was becoming so unfortunate for Athens that its soldiers lost battle after battle, be it on land or be it at the sea, and despite their best endeavours and most fervent prayers, hardly was it possible to hope for a victory. The Athenians, worried about such a state of affairs, decided to seek advice from the oracle of Ammon, to ascertain whether a revenge from gods for some misdeeds of their city did not stand behind their failures; or maybe whether, against their conviction, they do not fulfil their duties to gods as well as they should.\(^{46}\) Their self-gratification was so deep that in their question to the oracle they were bold enough to show surprise that they gave so many offerings to gods and received nothing in return, whereas the Spartans enjoyed gods’ support although they did not equal the Athenians in the amount of offerings.

Ammon was to reply to them:

The silent worship of the Lacedaemonians pleaseth me better than all the offerings of the other Hellenes\(^{47}\)

Socrates commended this silent worship to Alcibiades as a proper form of worshiping gods, and the \textit{Lacedaemonians’ prayer} was a more perfect form of a prayer than, let us call it, the \textit{Athenians’ prayer}.

What is the difference between these two forms of worship?

1. Comparing them from the semantic point of view, we can notice a terminological difference in naming the subject of the request: the Athenians are concrete, the Lacedaemonians however are more abstract; the \textit{Athenians’ prayer} concerns concrete goods (gold, fortune in trade, health, etc.), whose lack makes them unhappy, whereas a Lacedaemonian asks in his

\(^{46}\) Although the oracle of Ammon, whom the Greeks identified with Zeus, was situated in the Libyan desert in Africa, which was far distant from Greek \textit{poleis}, it enjoyed great respect among the Greeks; it was well-known to the Greeks already in VI century BC, which is confirmed by Herodotus (I 46); it is also mentioned by Aristophanes (\textit{The Birds}, 716).

\(^{47}\) Pseudo-Plato, \textit{Alcibiades II}, 149 b-c.
prayer for *what is good and beautiful* without making anything concrete at the same time. As we read in the dialogue of *Alcibiades II*:

The Lacedaemonians, too, whether from admiration of the poet or because they have discovered the idea for themselves, are wont to offer the prayer alike in public and private, that the Gods will give unto them the beautiful as well as the good:—no one is likely to hear them make any further petition. And yet up to the present time they have not been less fortunate than other man; or if they have sometimes met with misfortune, the fault has been due to their prayer.  

The request for the good and the beautiful completely fulfils the verbal part of a prayer: apart from it there is only the silent worship—an earnest adoration lacking in any verbalization of acts of man’s will. This attitude contains a deep conviction that god is unattainable to man and that no one is allowed to compare themselves with god. Man is too weak to be able to cross the distance that separates him from god. Everything is in god’s hands, and man’s silence is an act of the greatest humility before that which is divine.

Socrates remained faithful to the principles he had gained in his earlier youth to the rest of his life. Xenophon, who, like Plato, knew Socrates in the last years of his life, wrote in *Memorabilia* that:

his formula of prayer was simple: ‘Give me that which is best for me,’ for, said he, the gods know best what good things are—to pray for gold or silver or despotic power were no better than to make some particular throw at dice or stake in battle or any such things the subject of prayer, of which the future consequences are manifestly uncertain.

Let us consider the fact that a request for what is good is not the same as a request for the good itself. A Lacedaemonian knows that god, if he is on his side, will express it in a concrete way. However, no concrete thing is absolutely good in itself, nor is it like that for the sake of man’s appreciation: that which is

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perceived by an individual as evil, god can see as the greatest good. Obviously, god possesses the knowledge to determine it.

Such an approach to knowledge will come to affect the future philosophical stance of Socrates: the more general is the nature of a given object of thinking, the more participation of divine wisdom there is in its recognition and the less trust in man’s cognitive powers. There is a considerable disproportion between the divine and man’s wisdom; for Socrates claims that god knows everything; man, however—Socrates states—knows very little, or even nothing\(^\text{50}\). Hence asking for what is good, Socrates is giving himself up to god’s ruling over him, with god’s knowledge being a foundation of real defining of that which is actually good. God’s omniscience goes hand in hand with his omnipotence. Everything depends on the knowledge and will of god, who occasionally, as *divine premonitions* prove, cautions man against taking a certain moral course of action; or whom, as some positive signs show, nothing will hinder from revealing a few bits of somebody’s future; or, what is more, god can use a particular person to accomplish a beautiful work of art (e.g. poetic enthusiasm). No man has enough knowledge to succeed: desiring to achieve the intended aim, he presumes that he has adequately recognized the surrounding reality, that he has properly responded to something as good for him; however he does not know the future and is unable to correctly evaluate whether, for example, the gold for which he is asking god, will not bring misfortune on him! For this reason it is safer to ask god for that which is good, hoping that god will give to man good adequate to his situation, no matter what this man thinks about it. Then even death can be such a good, granted to man by god.\(^\text{51}\) *Divine premonitions*, which were preventing him from organizing his defence, were interpreted by Socrates as an

\(^{50}\) Plato, *Apology*, 23 a-b.

\(^{51}\) We can find an example of it in, among other things, the myth of Kleobis and Biton’s mother, who prayed to Hera to grant her sons what was best for them; having heard her priestess’s request, Hera put them to death.
expression of the will of god that it would be better for him to
die by the court’s verdict.\textsuperscript{52}

Socrates then advises Alcibiades to be most cautious about
what he intends to ask for in his prayers; for it can happen that,
when asking for a particular good precious to him, he is
requesting for something bad in the eyes of god. And then, as
Socrates used to say, god can fancy to give that for which he had
once asked them.\textsuperscript{53} This kind of cognitive error causes that man
becomes a source of evil for himself.\textsuperscript{54} Probably that is why
Socrates praises a poet who addressed god with the following
words:

\begin{quote}
King Zeus, grant us good whether prayed for or unsought by us;
But that which we ask amiss, do thou avert.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

2. The Lacedaemonians’ prayer is less ornamental in its form
than the Athenians’ prayer. The Lacedaemonians did not attach
so great an importance to ceremonial behaviour or places of
prayer; also their sacral architecture was definitely less
developed compared to the other Greek \textit{poleis}. At that time, the
Athenians were already famous for an enormous number of
temples, altars, religious celebrations, processions, ceremonials
and suchlike forms of religious cult: on average, there were
some religious festivals every two days in Socrates’ Athens. The
Lacedaemonians were much more reticent about it; their piety
did not presume that the offerings and rituals were to play a
significant role in making contact with gods. They were more
direct. Socrates must have shared this belief, which is indirectly
testified by the accusation of denying the religious cult of
Athens; had Socrates actually taken part in religious ceremonials
in Athens, as Xenophon would have it, the charge would not
have won the judges’ recognition. Whereas, as shown by
passages illustrating Socrates before court, he did not defend

\textsuperscript{52} Xenophon, \textit{Apology} 4-5. Cf. Plato, \textit{Apology} 40 b.
\textsuperscript{53} Pseudo-Plato, \textit{Alcibiades II}, 138 b.
\textsuperscript{54} Plato speaks in this context about the so-called ‘mistaken prayer’ (B. Jowett), when a
man prays for something totally different than he needs to. Plato, \textit{Laws} 801 c.
\textsuperscript{55} Pseudo-Plato, \textit{Alcibiades II}, 142 e.
himself against the charge by reminding the judges of his own participation in religious rituals, what, as it seems, would have been the simplest form of refuting the accusation. Therefore, he could not have participated in those ceremonies.

The approval of the principles of the *Lacedaemonians’ prayer* undermined not only the sense of a religious ritual, but it also was to make Socrates an enemy of religious triumphalism of the then Athens, where huge temples had just started to be built as offerings to gods for their patronage over the city. Socrates did not need temples or public ceremonies; every place was good enough to come into contact with the divine.

His prayers were becoming more and more scanty in words, more often they were *euphemia*—the silent prayer. Socrates did not have to plan it with respect to place or time; often it emerged as a result of an *intervention of a daimonion*, as a manifestation of Socrates’ lack of knowledge as for the cause of the emergence of a *daimonion*. A prime example of it are his prayer trances when he was silent, which Plato mentions in his *Symposium*.

Through the lips of Alcibiades he relates the story of Socrates’ incidents during the Potidaean campaign:

One morning he was thinking about something which he could not resolve; he would not give it up, but continued thinking from early dawn until noon—there he stood fixed through; and at noon attention was drawn to him, and the rumour ran through the wondering crowd that Socrates had been standing and thinking about something ever since the break of day. At last, in the evening after supper, some Ionians out of curiosity (I should explain that this was not in winter but in summer), brought on their mats and slept in the open air that they might watch him and see whether he should stand all night. There he stood until the following morning; and with the return of light he offered up a prayer to the sun, and went his way.⁵⁶

Although Alcibiades did not mention a *daimonion*, his description of the incident implies quite clearly that the whole story had its beginning in a *divine premonition*. For a very long time Socrates could not find the source of the emergence of a

⁵⁶ Plato, *Symposium*, 220 c-d.
divine sign, nor could he find a way to change his reactions, having already the knowledge of what went wrong. Having been taken out from his philosophical everyday routine, to which he was already so strongly attached, he must have felt this situation to be very uncomfortable. In addition to that, there were no any menacing barbarians, or eager for new lands Persians standing on the other side, but their former allies. This could have made Socrates frustrated. We do not know at what conclusions he then arrived, however, the amount of time he devoted to meditation and prayer implies that it was hard for him to come to terms with the existing state of affairs. No verbalized prayer required so long a concentration. *Euphemia* well explains this withdrawal from time: in the end Socrates prayed to the sun, thus passing from the *silent prayer* phase to the *verbalized prayer*.

How often did stoppages of this kind happen? They probably lasted for not so long as those described by Alcibiades. Most likely they were not uncommon; they were frequent enough for the philosopher’s friends to learn how to deal with them. For example, they knew they should not break Socrates’ trance. Another fragment of the *Symposium* describes it openly. Agathon, the host of the symposium, on hearing that Socrates, instead of entering the house, stopped somewhere in the neighbourhood and in silence ignored every call for him, decided to send a boy to collect him, but one of Socrates’ friends opposed to this decision, saying that:

Let him alone, said my informant; he has a way of stopping anywhere and losing himself without any reason. I believe that he will soon appear; do not therefore disturb him.\(^{57}\)

3. In the mind of an average Athenian, god is interested in what a man can offer him or how a man can enrich him. In addition to that, god does not do anything complimentary: he can help an Athenian, but he will do it in return for something. An Athenian knew that in order to encourage god to give help, one must simply bribe him. An offering given to god was to make him feel obliged

\(^{57}\) Plato, *Symposium*, 175 b.
to show his gratitude: the Athenians’ prayer is then similar to trade negotiations, in which it was defined what and for what god would be able to do. Not without reason did Socrates speak about this kind of piety as follows:

Then piety, Eutyphro, is an art which gods and men have of doing business with one another?58

The Lacedaemonians, as well as Socrates, perceived god as incorruptible and unselfish at the same time. For the Gods, as Ammon and his prophet declare, are no receivers of gifts, and they scorn such unworthy service.59

God does not have to do anything under the pressure of gifts, he is not bound by anything and no thing a man possesses interests him. Hence, offering gifts to god involves an element of impiety since it suggests god’s imperfection.

Under the influence of divine premonitions and euphemia, Socrates started to change the relation of “being bestowed” in mutual dealings between man and god. Only god is the one who can truly offer. The whole world, man and everything that he needs to survive, is god’s gift. God is not a cashier, he does not calculate nor practise usury, he does not measure his grace by the scale of human gifts: he is unselfish in what he does. The notion of god’s gift will become a key concept in the philosophy from under the sign of daimonion. Why, the very daimonions was perceived by Socrates as an honour from god, as a great gift that god wanted to grant him.

4. The Athenians’ prayer is based on the conviction that gods know some things, but they do not know about others; hence an Athenian comes up with an idea to remind god about himself and even to articulate his wishes in concrete words. It is in this way that Socrates must have perceived Athenians’ piety, and it is about

58 Plato, Euthyphro, 14 e.
59 Pseudo-Plato, Alcibiades II, 150 a.
them that Xenophon is most likely to be saying in the passage already mentioned above:

Whereas most people seem to imagine that the gods know in part, and are ignorant in part, Socrates believed firmly that the gods know all things that are said and the things that are done, and the things that are counselled in the silent chambers of the heart. Moreover, they are present everywhere, and bestow signs upon man concerning all the things of man.\(^{60}\)

A Lacedaemonian perceives it differently from an Athenian: for him god is perfect and omniscient, that is why in order to be heard by god, one does not have to speak. The silence of the Lacedaemonians’ prayer appears silent only for people, and never for god who knows everything and from whom nothing can be hidden.

The abandonment of the ritual and the criticism of the popularized form of expressing requests changes also the situation of the worshipper: he is perceived as an individual and unique being. Silence opens the individual for what is suitable for him and not for others. There are no verbal formulas by dint of which a man would render the particularity of a situation in which he found himself. But he does not have to do it, since god perfectly recognizes the range of human behaviour. A verbal formula revokes the uniqueness of the situation of a praying person; it is a repetition, a remembrance of something which has already happened, and which someone else has experienced in a different situation and in relation to other people. No was, even sanctified by god’s will, will replace the current is. Knowing everyone, as it were, individually, god recognizes the uniqueness of the exercised moral choices. Divine premonitions confirmed Socrates in the belief in god’s omniscience combined with individualism in treating people. Socrates knew that premonitions affected him personally and that they referred to concrete situations in which he found himself.

Socrates must have been the opponent of the practice found in his times to interpret god’s will through an analysis of the previously written oracles. When someone wanted to seek god’s

\(^{60}\) Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I, 1, 19.
advice, he went to an expert on prophecy, who in his collection of oracles searched for a prophecy which was somehow related to the situation of the seeker. And then, through an analogy to someone who posed a similar question long ago in a temple such as Olympia, this priest would show the enquiring person the adequate way of proceeding.\textsuperscript{61}

The gods known from the perspective of the \textit{Athenians’ prayer} were deprived of the attribute of omniscience; their knowledge depended not only on the competence ascribed to god, but also on the place in the divine pantheon. The polytheistic structure of gods was propitious for this kind of theological reflection, since the limitations of knowledge were becoming a condition for gods to live harmoniously with one another. Together with the birth of the ideal of an omniscient god, the belief in polytheism will weaken. The \textit{Lacedaemonian prayer} does not yet imply so far-reaching theological consequences, but, I believe, it is going to prepare Socrates to create an original theological conception in which the focal point will be the thesis of god as Providence.

5. The \textit{Lacedaemonian prayer} assumes a friendly attitude of gods’ towards people. Despite his perfection, god cares for people’s affairs. But what is it that interests god, if it is not gifts nor religious ceremonies of any kind? Why does god intervene in some cases and not in others? The answer is simple: that which interests god is honesty and fairness with which people treat one another. Unselfishly and unasked for, he is even ready to give his assistance to man in developing his moral resourcefulness. God values a person who is morally good more than the one who is bad and no gifts offered to gods, even the most precious ones in man’s thinking, cannot compare with acts of moral resourcefulness. Socrates perceived Spartans as people devoted to cultivate moral resourcefulness, valuing honour and courage, mutual friendship and respect for god. Could god, judging a case of two people, value more the bad and rich one, who offers gifts, than the good but poor one who does not offer gifts? Wealth and an elaborate

\textsuperscript{61} One of the most famous priests at that time using this technique of fortune telling was Diopeites.
The simplicity of Spartans is more precious to god than the sophisticated religious art of Athenians and their generous gifts sacrificed on altars in temples, for in favour of Spartans speaks their eagerness for moral resourcefulness. According to Socrates:

The idea is inconceivable that the Gods have regard, not to the justice and purity of our souls, but to costly processions and sacrifices, which men may celebrate year after year ... 62

The judgment on the degree of piety thus becomes the consequence of the judgment on moral behaviour. Here is how Xenophon put it:

It were ill surely for the very gods themselves, could they take delight in large sacrifices rather than in small, else oftentimes must the offerings of bad men be found acceptable rather than of good; nor from the point of view of men themselves would life be worth living if the offerings of a villain rather than of a righteous man found favour in the sight of Heaven. 63

Thence: the best way in which man can win god’s approval is to satisfy the requirements of *moral arete*.

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63 Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 1, 3, 3.
CHAPTER THREE

THE PRINCIPLE OF JUSTICE

How could interventions of daemonions assist Socrates in working out a view on politics? Interventions of this kind did not pertain to politics as such; for such activities did not belong in the sphere of influences of divine premonitions. At the same time, Socrates does not say: politics as such is evil; for such a judgment would equal crossing the border of the legitimate interpretation of divine premonitions. Any contraindications concern Socrates himself, so they may not simply be generalized to include all people, unless someone hankers after the same thing. It was probably no accident that of the first generation of his disciples not even one of them was involved in politics; it was typical of them to be impervious to public opinion or even to be ostentatiously ignorant of politics—a quasi logo of the philosophy practiced under the banner of daemonion. If something clashes with the law of arete, it does not deserve acceptance: nomos has to be subordinated to arete, not the other way. Antisthenes was loud in his praise of adoxa (lack of worship) as a moral virtue. No one with this attitude to the ‘wide circles’ could not even dream about doing politics. The matter looked different from the point of view of listeners (the second generation of disciples of Socrates). There were a few politicians there: Charmides, whom Socrates himself was to persuade to enter politics,64 Alcibiades and Critias, contemporaneous with Socrates, were, so to speak, co-authors of Athenian politics—unfortunately, one may add.

Socrates’ apolitical stance in the first stage of his philosophical development was not characterized by enmity towards politicians: politicians lived in their world and Socrates with a small group of disciples in theirs. Politicians did not

64 Cf. Xenophon, Memorabilia III 7.
disturb Socrates, who, returned this gesture with indifference to public matters: he did not get in their way, he did not reform them, he did not teach them nor did he attempt to talk them into going into politics. It was so much easier for him that he saw the moral weakness of politicians who were making the most important decision in the matters of *polis*. Athens’ military and political successes did not create a favourable ambience to criticize the city authorities. It was only the trouble caused by the lingering Peloponnesian War that emboldened the people from beyond the circle of politics to airing more daring opinions on this issue. Socrates was still *beyond politics*, but he spoke more and more often about politics, and primarily of its weaknesses resulting from Athenians’ abandonment of the *principle of moral justice* in favour of the *principle of gain*. One should not practice politics ‘at any price’, and certainly not at the price of forfeiting moral virtues; one make succeed politically when acting in accordance with the principle of gain, but such successes will be but temporary and sooner or later the injustice of the intentions that accompany them will out. There will be nothing left but receive the fitting punishment.

When Pericles and Aspasia’s son, Pericles the Younger expressed surprise at that fact that so powerful a city as Athens had fallen so low, Socrates answered him that the reason for that state of affairs was Athenians’ departure from the healthy principles that their forefathers adhered to. Thus Socrates gives the following counsel:

- We can rediscover the institutions of our forefathers – applying them to the regulation of our lives with something of their precision, and not improbably with like success; or we can imitate those who stand at the front of affairs to-day, adapting to ourselves their rule of life, in which case, if we live up to the standard of our models, we may hope at least to rival their excellence, or, by a more conscientious adherence to what they aim at, rise superior.

Pericles - You would seem to suggest that the spirit of beautiful and brave manhood has taken wings and left our city; as, for
instance, when will Athenians, like the Lacedaemonians, reverence old age—the Athenian, who takes his own father as a starting-point for the contempt he pours upon grey hairs? When will he pay as strict an attention to the body, who is not content with neglecting a good habit, but laughs to scorn those who are careful in this matter? When shall we Athenians so obey our magistrates—we who take a pride, as it were, in despising authority? When, once more, shall we be united as a people—we who, instead of combining to promote common interests, delight in blackening each other’s characters, envying one another more than we envy all the world besides; and—which is our worst failing—who, in private and public intercourse alike, are torn by dissension and are caught in a maze of litigation, and prefer to make capital out of our neighbour’s difficulties rather than to render natural assistance? To make our conduct consistent, indeed, we treat our national interests no better than if they were the concerns of some foreign state; we make them bones of contention to wrangle over, and rejoice in nothing so much as in possessing means and ability to indulge these tastes. From this hotbed is engendered in the state a spirit of blind folly and cowardice, and in the hearts of the citizen spreads a tangle of hatred and mutual hostility…

Socrates reminded the Athenians that the might of the their polis had been built by dint of the principle of justice, which he reminded the magistrates on the day of his trial: “I tell you that virtue is not given by money, but that from virtue come money and every other good of man, public as well as private.”

A model politician for him was a moderate democrat, Aristides (c. 520 – c. 467 B.C) who because of his moral and intellectual values was dubbed ‘Aristides the Just’ by the Greeks. What allows us to speak of the influence of this person on Socrates? There are several reasons: some are of biographical nature and some concern a resemblance in the views on the nature of political activity. Let us begin with the first group of reasons.

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65 Xenophon, Memorabilia, III, 5, 14-17.
66 Plato, Apology, 30 b.
Aristides belonged to the tribe of Antiochis (derived from Antioch—Heracles’ son), from the deme of Alopeke (name derived from the name for fox—alopeks), the same deme that Socrates’ family were from. Aristides was famous all over Greece and was a source of pride for many Athenians, for a majority of the citizens of his tribe and almost for all of the citizens of the deme. This advocate of an amicable coexistence of Athens and Sparta—thinking highly of Lycurgus and admiring this lawgiver of Sparta for his political wisdom—was actively engaged in the politics of Athens: he was, *inter alia*, a commander of the Athenian forces at the Battle of Plataea, he showed great heroism at the Battle of Marathon as well as the Battle of Salamis. Aristides was involved in politics with a moral point of view. Thus, if Socrates criticized politicians from the democratic party for discarding the moral perspective in politics, he did not have to refer to Spartan models or other aristocratic forms of power; he may well have employed the democratic source. The democratic choice was continued by Aristides’ son, Lysimachus67, of whom we know that was a close friend of Sophroniscos, the father of Socrates. Lysimachus was to personally remind about this to Socrates:

Moreover I have a claim upon you as an old friend of your father; for I and he were always companions and to the hour of his death there never was a difference between us68

In the light of this information, the influence of Aristides the Just upon the views of the young Socrates becomes even more plausible.

There is one more reason to link these two figures. This time round, the thread that joins Aristides with Socrates is Aristides’ niece Myrto, of whom, in the difficult times of the Peloponnesian War, Socrates took care, in spite of the fact that he provided for his wife Xanthippe and at least one child.69 How long did Socrates look after Aristides’ niece? We do not know. Neither do we know

68 Plato, *Laches*, 180 e.
what form this care assumed. A more significant at this juncture is the fact that of strengthening of the ties with Aristides’ family by Socrates.

Let us move to the arguments of the second kind.

According to the ideal embodied in Aristides, a true politician should display the following qualities: disinterestedness, honesty, justice and abiding by the law. He demonstrated great political agility when the Greek poleis, being part of the forming the Athenian Symmachia (Sea Alliance), turned to him for help in establishing the amount of contribution (phoros) of the nations in the costs of the operations led by the Symmachia and directed against the Persians. Using the method of proportional division of burdens and treating all the poleis on an equal footing—including Athens—Aristides proposed such contributions that no polis questioned. In time, however, the policy of radical democratic leaders of the kind of Themistocles and Pericles led to the alternation of this voluntary alliance into an empire ruled with an iron hand by the Athenians. Democratic Athens undertook actions in their international politics which were not consonant with the spirit of the internal system of Athens: the authorities’ conduct was double-faced—with respect to their own citizens they proclaimed slogans of freedom and responsibility resulting from the defence of the principles of freedom, whereas with respect to other poleis they actions and methods were most tyrannical. Athenians disarm and forcefully subordinate the nations of the allied with them Greeks, while phoros ceased to denote a contribution and came to mean tribute. Athens appropriated the treasury of the alliance and the funds secured for the war with Persians began to be used to realize the internal schemes of Athens. The military and political triumph quickly found its expression in their religious triumphalism.

The imperialistic drive of the Athenian democrats must have caused repulsion in those who thought similarly to Aristides.

69 Plutarch, in passing this information, referred to the earlier testimonies of Demetrius Phalereus, Hieronimus of Rhodos and Aristoxenos of Tarentum. Plutarch, Aristides, 27.
70 There is a low degree of probability that Myrto was to become Socrates’ second wife.
71 Aristocratic Spartans were far more democratic in dealings with their allies.
Those Athenians who wished to develop a close partnership among the Greek poleis, most probably critically evaluated the style of wielding power by the radical democrats. In time, putting aside the moral dimension showed the shortsightedness of this policy. Pericles could utter many a beautiful word on the subject of honesty and law and order that democrats upheld. At the same time however, he broke those principles on the international arena. In the main, democrats did not blame him for it. In 446 he bribed Pleistoanax for Athenian money, which directly hit Sparta, and greatly benefited Athens; what was wrong from the point of view of internal political affairs—Pericles prided himself on being immune to bribery—was a reason for glory on the international front. This amounted to a complete betrayal of the ideals defended by Aristides. Fifteen-year-old Socrates will have heard of how Athenian allies became their servants; it is around that time, i.e. c. 454 B.C. that Korystos, Naxos, Tazos and Egina were disarmed by Athens and forced into obedience. Even the most faithful allies of Athens, to which certainly belonged Samos, were humiliated by the tyrannical endeavours of Athenian democrats. Athenians treated their friends like enemies, and the seized funds of the Symmachia were used, among other things, to erect magnificent temples, which were supposed to show gratitude towards gods for their help given to the city. Aristides continually emphasized the moral sense of political activities and saw to the fact that the principle of benefit would not overshadow the principle of justice.\(^\text{72}\) It is clearly seen in his evaluation of one of the secret plans of Themistocles. This event took place after the formation of the Athenian Symmachia. Themistocles announced to the Athenians that he had a very beneficial plan for Athens; however he could not reveal it because it might have thwarted the plan, yet he needs to receive the Athenians’ acceptance for its realization. The Athenians’ reply to Themistocles was such that he should reveal the plan to Aristides who would evaluate the righteousness of the undertaking. Themistocles revealed the plan to Aristides: the Athenian fleet would unexpectedly attack the fleet of their

\(^\text{72}\) Aristides fund fame in that, inter alia, after the Battle of Marathon, he did not appropriate the Persian spoils. He did not allow others to do it either.
Greek allies and destroy it, burning all the ships. In this way, Athens, in Themistocles’ mind, would become the most powerful navy, which would accordingly perpetuate the hegemony of the Athenians. Having heard Themistocles, Aristides was to say to the Athenians that Themistocles’ plan was truly very beneficial to Athens, but, at the same time, it was very unjust. On hearing this evaluation, the Athenians ordered Themistocles to discard the thought of implementing the plan. We need to acknowledge the fact that the behaviour of the demos’ spoke very well of the Athenians: they obeyed Aristides’ advice, by which they showed the high quality of their morality; alas, time was to show that benefit was superior to justice.

It may be presumed that Socrates took the idea of disinterestedness, being consequent upon moral values, over from Aristides. Aristides never took advantage from his position to derive personal benefit, nor did his friends receive any advantage because of his position. He lived in poverty, the fact which, incidentally, put his wealthy cousins in an awkward position as they were made to explain this situation. The road of poverty was also chosen by Socrates. It was Aristides who was the first to show Greek politicians what price a politician must pay to put moral bravery in the first place. Socrates later taught a similar lesson to philosophers. What sharply distinguishes them is the awareness of the relation between the sphere of political goods and moral values: for Aristides, political activity was to be an apogee of a moral development of an individual; Socrates rejected this view, claiming that moral values discover a more excellent world before man. Politics for him was closer to a craft rather than to ethics. This is why he could say before his judges that he considered himself as being “really too honest a man to” be able to enter the realm of politics. Had he done so, he would have—as he himself admitted—died trying to defend the principle of justice. He was not uninterested in politics for the reasons for which he

73 Themistocles is reported to have said that being part of the government had no sense if the governors and their friends were not to obtain any personal benefit from it.
74 Cf. Plutarch, Aristides, 25.
75 Plato, Apology, 36 b.
did not work on his field, or did not trade, or do any other job. Warning him against the politicians at that time, a *daemonion* did not only prevent him from a certain and inglorious death, but also demonstrated the existence of a higher dimension of reality, for which it is not only worthy to live, but also for which it is worthy to lay down your life. His life is consonant with this conviction. when the Thirty Tyrants demanded that he and four other Athenians go to bring Leon of Salamin, Socrates disobeyed this order, as he wanted to preserve his morality. He would sooner have died than to take part, even at the pain of death, in the murder of an innocent man; for what he feared most was “the fear of doing an unrighteous or unholy thing.”

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76 Plato, *Apology*, 32 d.
CHAPTER FOUR

KNOW THYSELF!

Chairephon’s idea to go Delphi and ask Pythia if there existed anyone wiser than his master did not appear in an intellectual vacuum: the source of his audacity must have been Socrates’ philosophical practice, in which Delphic theology played so significant a role that the disciple came up with the idea of making Apollo the arbiter in the contention about the value of Socrates’ teaching. If it is really the case that Socrates is close to god, as one can gather from divine premonitions experienced by him, then it stands to reason that god should like to confirm it. Chairephon would not have bothered god about someone whom he knew but little: he inquired about his friend and a teacher; at the same time he inquired about someone who made Delphic dictums the dominant motif of his philosophy. There is no doubt that Socrates had discovered his spiritual kinship with the cult of Apollo in Delphi long before Chairephon asked his famous question.

In a sense, Socrates was destined to show interest in Apollonian theology. On comparing his divine premonitions with the accepted methods of divination at that time, he was compelled to acknowledge the kind of oracular intervention which resigns from the use of outer signs. Apollo did not employ such signs as the rustle of leaves, the flight and twitter of birds, smoke, etc., which was characteristic of the earlier forms of divination. Apollo spoke directly through his prophet. The brittleness of life as well as the weakness of human body did not hinder Apollo from passing signs to people whom he endowed with the power to prophesy. His prophetic influence was known not only to priests and priestesses from the temples in Delphi or Clarus—Apollo gave the gift of prophesying also to private individuals.
How did Socrates interpret the aphorism “Know thyself!”? Let us try at this juncture to delineate the direction of his thoughts.

I. In the beginning was an *awakening* which Socrates experienced under the influence of a divine intervention. A *daemonion* made Socrates aware that he was on the wrong track, that something was not right with the decisions he had made, that his *thinking* was leading him up the garden path. However, before Socrates entered the realm of object thinking, before he emerged himself in the surrounding him reality in order to analyze the undertaken assignment and to draw conclusions from it, he had to face the very *fact* of the divine intervention that he was experiencing. *To know oneself* meant a necessity of recognizing *divine premonitions* as a gift from god by means of which he delineated the fundamental relation of that which is divine for Socrates. Thus, the first task Socrates took upon himself was the delineation of the relation between his own *thinking* and a *daemonion*.

1. Socrates was deeply convinced that the most precious for him is the contact with that which is divine. He probably also thought that every man who were to be in his position would think alike. For, as he maintained, it is an ability to receive divine signs that is most important for all people. In this respect neither an Athenian should consider himself better than another Greek, nor a Greek should regard himself as superior to any representative of another nation. This is so because the initiative of hint giving hinges on the will of god, not man. All nations are in honour bound to worship that which is divine. In addition, people who have an ability to receive divine signs can be met everywhere. According to Socrates, it is worshipping gods that most sharply distinguishes man from other creatures. “What other tribe of animals save man can render service to the gods?”, he asks Aristodemus, who, Socrates reports, did not bow his

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77 The phrase “gnoti seauton”, carved into the lintel of the entrance to the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, was to be placed there by Chilon of Sparta.
head in worship. God’s service and holding god in reverence is the greatest honour for man. Thus, when Aristodemus tells him that he does not worship god because “the Divinity is too grand to need any service which I could render”\textsuperscript{78}, Socrates instructs him that the course of his thoughts should be different: the point of departure is not god’s expectations towards you, but your gratitude for the good that god was willing enough to give you even before you became conscious of the need of thinking over your attitude towards god. On receiving the best of all possible souls from god, you have acquired an ability to experience that the world in which you live has its divine creators. Therefore—Socrates continues—the greater gods are, the more you should worship them.

2. A \textit{divine premonition} is something \textit{external} to \textit{thinking} and is not subordinated to the power of thinking: it is \textit{thinking} that must come under \textit{premonitions}, not the other way round. The initiative lies on the side of divine \textit{premonitions}, which, through a higher—\textit{daemonic}—dimension of the human soul interferes in the sphere of thinking and knowledge. \textit{To know oneself} signifies a necessity of reaching for \textit{something higher} within oneself than thinking or cognition. It signifies reaching a level which enables a reception of divine signs and maintenance of a close contact with that which is divine. For Socrates this task was of primary importance. Nothing constituted his \textit{nature} so much as his mysterious relationship with that which is divine.

Socrates talks with the title hero of \textit{Alcibiades I} dialogue on this subject. He poses here the following problem:

And if the soul, my dear Alcibiades, is ever to \textit{know herself}, must she not look at the soul; and especially at that \textit{part} of the soul in which her virtue resides, and \textbf{to any other} which is like this?\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{78} Cf. Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia}, I 4, 10.

\textsuperscript{79} Plato, \textit{Alcibiades I}, 133 b. Italics and emphasis are mine.
Alcibiades agreed with Socrates, yet he did not appear to have understood the assumption which was laid down at the root of the question and according to which there existed two distinct parts in man’s soul: the first being the strength in the shape of human wisdom. The other being like the first one, except—as it seems—it surpassed it; therefore, on hearing the next question and realizing the consequences of the earlier accord, Alcibiades denied Socrates. The second question is as follows:

And do we know of any part of our souls more divine than that which has to do with wisdom and knowledge?\(^{80}\)

Almost immediately, without waiting for Alcibiades’ reply—who deemed it impossible to answer—he said:

Then this is that part of the soul which resembles the divine; and he who looks at this and at the whole class of things divine, will be most likely to know himself?\(^{81}\)

There is no doubt that the historic Socrates claimed that there existed in man something superior to the level of thinking and knowledge, something that could not be encompassed by thought. Yet, a serious difficulty arises: how can one know himself, without being able to know that which is superior to knowledge by nature, knowing at the same time that ‘the unknowable’ may affect cognitive processes? On the one hand, a daemonion forces one to gain knowledge, on the other, it installs impassable barriers before knowledge. It is true that by means of various oracular signs man ‘reaches’ the daimonic dimension of his soul. However, whether or not a flow of information takes place is not dependent upon him. The information highway is one-way street: from the daimonic dimension to thinking and knowledge, never the other way round. That which is less perfect cannot rule that which is more perfect. Socrates understood divine omniscience as coupled with

\(^{80}\) Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 133 c.

\(^{81}\) Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 133 c. Italics mine.
omnipotence: god knows everything because everything is under his care. God’s omnipotence is an attribute of his power. God cannot deny himself; thence his omniscience is consonant with his omnipotence: divine ‘to know’ means as much as ‘to act’.

If to know oneself refers to a necessity of recognizing in oneself that which is most perfect in man and that which is beyond knowledge, then such a task seems to be unattainable! How can this difficulty be resolved? Socrates’ standpoint is well known and is captured in his famous motto “All I know is that I know nothing”. Man is incapable of encompassing with his thought that which is beyond his thinking; he cannot know that which, on gods’ ordinance, is beyond his knowledge; he cannot fathom that which surpasses his possibilities of understanding. Socrates, as is his wont, is using here an epistemological cut: no one is able to cross the boundaries drawn by gods. One cannot however conclude from it that if something transcends the level of knowledge then it does not deserve attention. The fact that something is not submitted to knowing, as it clearly belongs to that which is unknowable, proves its greater excellence. The discovery of the divine might dormant in that which is over and beyond the sphere of rational reflection entails attaining such a state of mind in which the daimonic dimension is no longer littered up with human thoughts.

Of what benefit is the existence of the daimonic dimension for man if it is unknowable to him? Man owes a feeling of the unity of action to the daimonic dimension. All kinds of divine interventions—no matter whether they are positive or negative—made man aware of the fact that his existence is taken care of by a powerful being whose attribute is omniscience. Listening to the signs signifies an affirmation of a link with god, whose manifestation is the strength to give man a feeling of identity granted in the act of the identification of oneself as the ‘thinking me’. Thinking itself cannot be a warrant of the unity of ‘me’; the defence of this unity becomes one of the main tasks that Socrates puts before thinking. In this respect, thinking may be better or worse: better—by defending the unity,
and worse—by leading to the disintegration of the unity of human being.

3. If I cannot comprehend the level of human soul which gods have placed above the level of knowledge however can I refer to it? Socrates’ response is short: obey it. Must a slave know the thoughts of his master in order to correctly carry out his commands? Must a soldier know the plan of the commander-in-chief in order to execute his orders? Must a student share his teacher’s knowledge in order to follow instructions in class? The acknowledgement of ignorance by no means dismisses the possibility of undergoing the *daemonionic factor*. It is however needful to have strong enough character to exercise the mind in order that divine signs could be received and correctly interpreted. Socrates acted in absolute obedience to the divinely revealed fate, even though it meant an immediate resignation from thinking. Xenophon’s testimony is most compelling here:

If it appeared to him that a sign from heaven had been given him, nothing would have induced him to go against heavenly warning: he would as soon have been persuaded to accept the guidance of a blind man ignorant of the path to lead him on a journey in place of one who knew the road and could see.82

In much the same spirit, he defended his philosophy in Plato’s *Apology*: it would be terrible, he said to his judges, if I were to, because of the fear of death, depart from my mission: “as I conceive and imagine, God orders me to fulfil the philosopher’s mission of searching into myself and other men.”83 Thinking and gaining knowledge—perceived from a higher level of the soul—is nothing more but an *exercise* in the skill of listening out for divine signs.

4. The highest dimension of the human soul, i.e. the *daimonic dimension*, contains the power of annulling all human

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83 Plato, *Apology*, 28 e.
reflections, save those which constitute a moral choice. Its power over the lower parts of the soul is so great that it can make use of them without leaving a trace in the cognitive sphere of man. Through the *daimonic dimension* god enters people and causes them to achieve things they would not normally even dream of achieving. Socrates made a mention of the power of this natural to man dimension of his existence, before the judges, when he told them of his talks with poets, which convinced him that they were unable to say anything sensible of their works.

That showed me in an instant that *not by wisdom* do poets write poetry, but by a sort of *genius and inspiration*; they are like diviners or soothsayers who also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them.⁸⁴

However, the problem does arise only because of the fact that poets do not know how they wrote this or that, or even why they wrote their poems; this much is understandable for Socrates as he realizes the fact of the existence of the enormous *daimonic* power in man. The real problem comes up when poets ascribe the full authorship of their works to themselves, failing to appreciate god’s assistance given them. *Hubris* blinds them and, in consequence, makes them oppose the will of god. Socrates tries to rectify this situation. He feels to be god’s assistant, who is entitled to waken people up to the simple truth of their worthlessness, when one compares their knowledge and strength with god’s omniscience and omnipotence.

The way in which poets, among others, treat themselves is a manifest contradiction of the requirements of the Delphi motto, as it closes the door to the highest level of human existence. Those who will get to know themselves will not be able to make their works the measure of themselves, as they will never find out to what extent god has helped them in their creative effort. Socrates exhorts us not be led astray by the spiteful *hubris* which carries us away from that which is most precious in us. It

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⁸⁴ Plato, *Apology* 22 b-c.
would be much better for us and better for our dearest if we say: *we do not know*. Let us then be grateful to god for his assistance that he renders. Let us sense it in every work made by our hands and let us not advance our cognitive egoism above that which is more excellent from our wisdom; for “the wisdom of men is little or nothing”\(^85\) and only he will find recognition in god’s eyes who “knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing.”\(^86\)

II. The *daimonic dimension* of the human soul conceals a *power* before a man of divine origin. Man has no control over it, but the dimension of human *knowledge and thinking* contains powers over which man can take control and over which—in Socrates’ view—man ought to gain control. Added to this, the dimension in question contains properties which distinguish man from other beings. God has given man reason not only to enable him to possess awareness of the existence of divine transcendence, but also to enable him to take advantage of the resources god has endowed him with. This is why, in caring about one’s soul, the postulate that man should take care of the cognitive domain, of the development of knowledge or of acquiring new skills takes a second position.

1. Men of reason realize the fact that there exists a clearly drawn border that they should not cross. They also know that god, on giving them reason, imposed a number of obligations connected with the proper use of this gift. Those who cannot make use of this gift usually commit one of the two errors: they either believe, at the expense of the *daimonic* aspect of their soul, that their reason has an absolute power; or they limit the power of their reason and fall into an irrational fanaticism. Xenophon accurately describes both errors:

To suppose that all these matters lay with the scope of human judgment, to the exlusion of the preternatural, was preternatural folly. Nor was it less extravagant to go and consult the will of

\(^{85}\) Plato, *Apology* 23 a.

\(^{86}\) Plato, *Apology* 23 b.
Haeven on any questions which it is given to us to decide by dint of learning

According to Socrates:

where we are permitted to work through our natural faculties, there let us by all means apply them

2. Gaining knowledge about the world which surrounds man must be accompanied by self-knowledge. Socrates’ standpoint is very original here; for he holds that self-knowledge is not merely an ‘addition’ to object knowledge, nor does it come after knowledge. It is pre-knowledge, without which proper gaining of knowledge is impossible. Self-knowledge precedes object knowledge of any kind, because: first of all, it concerns the most excellent reality that man can ever face within the research he conducts; secondly, self-knowledge enables a moral evaluation of the possessed knowledge, which, incidentally, is a fundament of moral reflection. Human knowledge is nothing in comparison with god’s omniscience; however, as divine premonitions demonstrate, divine mind constantly controls the way in which man shapes his own knowledge. This is why by searching into his own thinking and discovering, man, in a sense, emulates god. It is in self-knowledge where man finds himself closest to god, and searching into himself is simultaneously a kind of a prayer pilgrimage to the place where it is easiest to ‘understand’ god.

Every man possesses an ability to a reflective reference to the contents of his most inner thoughts; every man is capable of discerning the aims which had been laid down at the fundamentals of his moral choices. And no one can substitute for him. Procedures for gaining self-knowledge make every man an autonomic, unrepeatable, independent of people and surroundings

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87 Xenophon, Memorabilia, I, 1, 9.
88 Xenophon, Memorabilia, I, 1, 9.
89 No human being of course, since god fully controls human thoughts by dint of the daimonic dimension.
individual. Every man has to, by himself, make an effort to carry out a self-knowing procedure. Grounded on this assumption is a feeling of personal responsibility for one’s actions, which coerces every individual into constant work on himself; for—as Socrates’ held—god is not going to replace anyone in the moral domain.

III. The next task for the reason is to manage the lowest dimension of the soul, i.e. the bodily dimension. The relationship between the bodily dimension and the thinking and knowledge dimension performs an analogous role to the relationship between the latter dimension and the daimonic dimension; the reason assumes the intermediate position in the soul. It is in a way a mediator between the divine decree and the energy dormant in the body. Without the former, the reason is blind and without the latter it is powerless; it is a whole which comprises the three dimensions of human existence that composes the human soul—psyche, which is the living human ‘me’. The obligation of caring about the soul will also refer to the control over one’s body (enkrateia)—the fundament of all virtues.90

1. According to Socrates, the third dimension should be taken to be a gift from god as well. He who does not look after his body turns against god: it is useful to get to know your body in order to preserve it in such a way so as to make possible a harmonious development of the whole of psyche. On giving us our body, god gave man a possibility of a better or worse employment of the power latent in him. Body—just like thinking and knowledge—is not something finished or complete, but is in need of being improved. Under no circumstances should we allow a situation when the sphere of body desires and instincts dominates the higher dimension of the soul. The pressure on the side of the reason forces the body to take exercises whose ultimate sense cannot be reduced to the level of fulfilling body needs only—the true character of the body is revealed through its influence on thinking and knowledge, and even on the daimonic dimension.

90 See: Xenophon, Memorabilia, I, 5, 4.
2. The task put forward by Socrates that everyone should control himself, forces a man to consider one’s psyche in two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. In the vertical dimension one should take care of harmonious cooperation of the carnal element with the cognitive element, and the latter with the daimonic element; in the horizontal dimension it is necessary to use moderation in every dimension of psyche in order not to fall into any of the extremes. Thus, it is necessary to painstakingly take care of not coming into conflict with the next maxim, engraved on the entrance to the temple of Apollo in Delphi—nothing in excess! (nothing beyond measure!) Socrates first seeks the right measure in relation to each level of psyche separately; with respect to the body, he talked about enkratea—controlling the body (self-restraint); with respect to the cognitive dimension, he pointed at sophrosyne—prudence and with respect to the daimonic dimension the standard is set by the discussed earlier euphemy—silent worship. Only when all these virtues are combined and conflated into a coherent whole can one talk about sophia—the genuine wisdom cut for the human race. In so far as the particular planes of psyche do not coexist in accordance with their natural powers, then the state of akrasia is born—the state of an improper conflation of the elements which constitute psyche.

3. On the physical level akrasia assumes the appearance of the state of akrateia—the lack of strength, infirmity: neglecting physical exercise, giving in to uncontrollable desires and instincts as well as leading an unhealthy lifestyle weakens the natural strength of man’s body, which prevents him from reaping benefits on the purely physical level, but also prevents the spiritual development on the higher levels of psyche. In contrast to akrateia, enkrateia is the knowledge of the body which enables the control of all kinds of physical impulses and not giving in to emotions; this way it allows the rule of the body in accordance with the requirements imposed by both the cognitive and the daimonic order. On describing enkrateia as the foundation of all virtues, Socrates confirmed the existence of a
significant part of the traditional approach to education in which apart from inborn factors were also two others: exercising and learning. Let us read several of Socrates’ thoughts on this matter.

Does it not come to this, that every honest man is bound to look upon self-restraint as the very corner-stone of virtue: which he should seek to lay down as the basis and foundation of his soul? Without self-restraint who can lay any good lesson to heart or practise it when learnt in any degree worth speaking of? Or, to put it conversely, what slave of pleasure will not suffer degeneracy of soul and body?  

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Socrates very clearly points to the positive link between the physical dimension and the cognitive dimension, diverging quite a lot from the popular thesis of the Orphics according to which the good of the soul (Dionysian element) somewhat quarrels with need of the body (Titanic element). Socrates proclaims a very simple and to a large extent convergent with tradition thesis that the health of psyche is contingent upon the health of the physical element. He talked to Epigenes, Antiphon’s son about this matter:

In every demand, therefore, which can be laid upon the body it is much better that it should be in the best condition; since even where you might imagine the claims upon the body to be slightest – on the act of reasoning – who does not know the terrible stumbles which are made through being out of health? It suffices to say that forgetfulness, and despondency, and moroseness, and madness take occasion often of ill-health to visit the intellectual faculties so severely as to expel all knowledge from the brain. But he who is in good bodily plight has large security.  

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91 Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I, 5, 4-5.
He commanded a weak interlocutor to exercise his body as if he was to take part in the Olympics. He will then not only gain the required features of character, but will also increase his moral impact on his surrounding him people.

And yet the very opposite of that which befalls the ill attends the sound condition. Does not the very soundness imply at once health and strength? Many a man with no other talisman than this has passed safely through the ordeal of war; stepping, not without dignity, through all its horrors unscathed. Many with no other support than this have come to the rescue of friends, or stood forth as benefactors of their fatherland.\footnote{Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia}, III, 12, 4.}

\textit{Akrateia} forms an objective obstacle which hinders the fulfillment of the higher aims of \textit{psyche}. Because of this, Socrates requires of every individual to make an effort to appropriately use the powers dormant in his body so as not be befallen by evil. What really matters is not the body itself, but to what use man will put it. If he develops his dormant powers then he follows the right path, but if he weakens his body then he becomes more susceptible to that which is harmful for him ad others. \textit{Akrasia} is the most real menace in this dimension. Let us for a moment listen to the conversation between Socrates and Euthydemus:

Socrates: And does it not appear to you that this same beldame incontinence shuts out wisdom, which is the best of all things, from mankind, and plunges them into the opposite? Does it not appear to you that she hinders men from attending to things which will be of use and benefit, and from learning to understand them; that she does so by dragging them away to things which are pleasant; and often though they are well aware of the good and of the evil, she amazes and confounds their wits and makes them choose the worse in place of the better?  
Euthydemus: Yes, so it comes to pass.
Socrates: And soundness of soul, the spirit of temperate modesty? Who has less claim to this than the incontinent man? The works of the temperate spirit and the works of incontinency are, I take it, diametrically opposed?
Euthydemus: That too, I admit.
Socrates: If this then be so concerning these virtues, what with regard to carefulness and devotion to all that ought to occupy us? Can anything more seriously militate against these than this same incontinence?
Euthydemus: Nothing that I can think of.
Socrates: And can worse befall a man, think you? Can he be subjected to a more baleful influence than that which induces him to choose what is hurtful in place of what is helpful; which cajoles him to devote himself to the evil and to neglect the good; which forces him, will he nill he, to do what every man in his sober senses would shrink from and avoid?⁹⁴

It needs hardly to be mentioned at this place that Socrates took care of his own body; he led a truly Lacedaemonian lifestyle and he even found many followers who were not always strong enough to enter the deeper layers of Socratic psyche. The relation left by Xenophon finds confirmation both in Aristophanes’ Birds and Plato’s Protagoras.

4. For most historians of philosophy, Socrates problem of self-control begins only with the advance to the level of thought and knowledge. What was the aim of Socrates’ spiritual exercises at this level of self-development of the individual?

In the horizontal aspect the aim was to avert the extreme that endangers every individual: on the one hand, the state of ignorance as a lack of appropriate competence for action; on the other hand, the state of choking with the reason. In both cases Socrates talks about stupidity and human madness which arouse god’s wrath. If Socrates condemned people for doing things of which they have no knowledge, he at the same time pointed in the direction of the dangers coming from the incapacity to use

⁹⁴ Xenophon, Memorabilia, IV, 5, 6-7.
one’s ability of thinking and cognizing. He pointed I the same
direction when he dealt with the theses of the philosophers of
nature, whom he also called fools and madmen. However, as far
as the vertical aspect is concerned, the care about the dimension
of cognizing and thinking was to prepare the ground for the
correct development of that which is divine. Socrates was
preparing anyone to work out the personal perspective into
divine matters; for he precluded the possibility of anyone being
led by someone else here. The philosophy as put forth by
Socrates was an art of awakening others to self-reflection; for it
is only in this way that the true way of life can be discovered.
Everything that was an impediment to the realization of this
goal, was immediately the object of his attack.

The strategy that Socrates was trying to realize forced the
other person to be maximally aware of expressing and taking
well-thought-over moral decisions. The best way to control
one’s knowledge is to control one says, to whom and how he
says it. To attain his aim, Socrates employed his famous irony,
whose blade was directed towards thoughtless speech. The focal
point of the strategy determined by irony were the reflections
that today are known as the search for definition.  

On demanding definitions from individuals Socrates showed
different kinds of generalities, from whose point of view the
individuals take moral decisions, without taking into account all
this that shows the unrepeatable and unique character of each
situation in which they must take morally binding decisions.
Knowledge of this kind is an impediment to the correct
perception of oneself and others. Thanks to definitions Socrates
fights the overuse of general terms, which suggest that everyone,
that always, that everywhere..., can act in the same way,
w warranting at the same time that he act morally. This is not so.

95 In spite of the fact that this way of placing the problem of definition makes it
impossible for it to be treated within the perspective of theoretical research it has to be
stressed that this is not the aim that Socrates wanted to reach when he approached each
person causing a paralysis of his or her thoughts. Definitions were a part of a shock
therapy where the intention to cure the soul was of lesser importance. Of much more
significance was the idea to show the soul that it is ill, very ill.
This is why it is necessary to break this shell of concepts which curb the thoughts of the individual. How can this be done? The best course of action, as Socrates seems to be saying, is to realize the inadequacy of that which you yourself assume to be obvious in itself. Since you think that the knowledge that you possess is a sufficient foundation to make decisions so give your definition. Next, Socrates was giving numerous examples of exceptions and cases in which the application of this knowledge quarrels with the common sense as well as the principle of conscious decision making. Thus, Socrates rejected this kind of thinking, leaving his interlocutor deep in doubt and ignorance. Did he have a ready definition up his sleeve? Of course not. If he had given it, he would have taken the position that he had just been criticizing. What mattered for him the most was to make his discussant appreciate the situation of an existential entanglement in the unrepeatable and unpredictable world in which everyone has to take his own decision; and that the appreciation of the situation in which someone has found himself may not be ignored on the pretext of acting in accordance with the generally accepted statement.

IV. Socrates would always say to people: take care of yourselves and look after your own soul because this is the greatest good which god has let you use. If you know yourself, you will learn how to coexist with others. Know thyself is also about discovering a relation between oneself and someone else. If you come to a conclusion that someone is better than you, listen to this person and learn from him or her: “I do know that injustice and disobedience to a better, whether God or man, is evil and dishonourable.”

Do not imitate those who are weaker than you; it is you who is to be a model for them so that they look up to you and become better.

Who is better, and who is worse? Everything depends on the structural qualities of psyche, since it is the best measure of relationships between people. If someone has a beautiful body but little knowledge, he is inferior to the one whose

96 Plato, Apology 29 b.
attractiveness gives way to the first one, but whose knowledge is superior. The primacy of the reasonable part over the body part makes it needful for us to have a higher opinion of someone who have developed a higher dimension of his psyche than the one who has achieved more notable successes on a lower level. According to Socrates, the greatest achievements on a lower level do not match the most modest achievements on a higher level. This correlation is to be observed both between the body-knowledge dimension and the knowledge-daimonic dimension: the most remarkable triumphs of the reason are nothing when compared with the lowest signs from god.97

On an interpersonal level, the daimonic dimension shows itself as a sort of an intuition of power that man deals with when it comes to making moral decisions. According to Socrates, every man is capable of discerning an intention to make decisions about other people, and, accordingly, is able to answer the fundamental questions: in making a decision about this or that person, did he have a desire to strengthen or weaken this or that person? He thought that one could find a basis for a desire to strengthen another person in every arete. The circumstances in which a man participates, the people he comes across, the problems they are beset with, are so complex that it is impossible to grasp them with the human mind. God however has given man a help in the form of an intuition of power that we use in our dealings with other people. A trace of this original decision can be found in every decision: I will help him or I will cause him harm, I will strengthen him or I will weaken him, I will pull him out or I will let him drown.

It is necessary to act in a conscious, thoughtful way to act properly. At the root of this behaviour there lies a need to know oneself as well as knowing the person about whom we make decisions. This is why one should not act by heart, one should not follow the established pattern of behaviour, hence

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97 What of a poet’s knowledge, even the most comprehensive one, if the most beautiful of his poems has a divine source?
each codified ethics will be in contradiction to the will of god. For the same reason it is impossible to write down philosophy because written word separates an individual from the reality that is directly being experienced by him and prompts a good solution for another individual and, possibly, only for him. God has conferred upon you a different place, different people, different problems, a different body, a different knowledge. All this causes that the written word precludes the service of god of this kind. It is needful to think through the prism of what is here and now in order to be able to make use of the gift of the intuition of power, which is revealed to us only when we directly participate in circumstances. Socratic divine premonitions did not pertain to that which is beyond the sphere of the direct experience.

V. The last task which springs from the realisation of the Delphic precept “Know thyself!” is a delineation of the relationship between a person and the reality which surrounds him. Caring about material possessions is included in the broadly understood care about psyche. Socrates did not condemn working towards the manufacture of material goods, without which worthy life would be impossible; however the strength of this care may not be an obstacle to the process of the self-improvement of psyche. It must also be subordinated to consolidating and deepening friendly relationships. Socratic principle of the hierarchy of goods is at work here too: the lowest good from the highest level is better than the highest good from the lowest level; in Socrates’ formulation—“and yet what thing else may a man call his own is comparable to this one best possession! What rather will not serve by contrast to enhance the value of an honest friend!”98 As long as the eagerness to the multiplication of worldly possessions does not clash with relations between friends or does not hinder someone from working on themselves, it locates itself within the boundaries set by god. The less time man sacrifices for acquiring material possessions the better, as he will have more

98 Xenophon, Memorabilia II, 4, 5.
time on pondering on himself. Socrates was well known for his ascetic lifestyle. However, when Antiphon called him “professor of the art of wretchedness”\textsuperscript{99}, Socrates retorted:

To have no wants at all, to my mind, an attribute of Godhead; to have as few wants as possible the nearest approach to Godhead; and as that which is divine is mightiest, so that is next mightiest which comes closest to the divine\textsuperscript{100}.

In this concise review of the issues connected with Socrates’ implementation of the precept “Know thyself!” I have tried, as far as it was possible, to ignore the most vital issue, that is to say, the problem of good and evil. Can we however understand Socrates’ moral views, without taking into consideration what he had to say on the subject of knowledge? In my opinion we cannot. In this connection it seems worthwhile to stress the fact that one has to be very cautious when interpreting Plato’s or Xenophon’s writings; for it is easy to commit the mistake of overgeneralization. It is not only important who Socrates engages in a conversation with, but also what is the cognitive level on which he touches upon a problem. Let us then proceed to the moral matters.

\textsuperscript{99} Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia} I, 6, 3.
\textsuperscript{100} Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia} I, 6, 10.
CHAPTER V

ARETE – A MEASURE OF GOOD LIVING

A frequent appearance of divine premonitions reminded Socrates not only about the fact that human knowledge can only warrant wise moral decisions to a very limited degree—Socrates himself, in spite of his care to be morally clean, had to continually correct his own mistakes—it also ascertained him that every man was actually responsible for taking moral decisions. The interventions of a daemonion would be useless, implausible even, if man did not have a possibility of taking his own decisions, rectifying his own choices and if human decisions were only an extension of fate which would somehow take a hand in people’s lives. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the conclusions which Socrates drew from his reflections on the daemonion fully justified his reception of a position similar to moral indeterminism.

To better understand Socratic thoughts concerning arete we must place them in the context of his conception of human behaviour. First, Socrates thought that arete may not be an result of chance or unconscious action—even if they are an effect of a divine intervention. The necessary condition to attain arete is a free, conscious endeavour to become a morally valuable person. Thus, when Socrates said that arete was indissolubly connected with knowledge he primarily meant the awareness of acting, which is an opposite to unconscious (contingent) acting. You cannot then gain any moral titles by dint of a lottery. However, not every conscious act leads to attaining arete. Socrates was certain that attaining arete was conditioned by the intention of strengthening oneself and other people. A conscious action whose aim is to cause harm is evil. This kind of evil calls for punishment. In turn, the strengthening conscious action driven
by an intention can be either competent or incompetent. If it is an action that is motivated by someone’s good will, though without a suitable support on the part of necessary knowledge for achieving a particular purpose, then another dimension of evil appears whose source is human ignorance. When he was asked what he considered to be the ultimate vocation of man he answered: eupraxia—noble conduct, which he understood as an opposite to good fortune.\textsuperscript{101}

For myself, I consider fortune and conduct to be diametrically opposed. For instance, to succeed in some desirable course of action without seeking to do so, I hold to be good fortune; but to do a thing well by dint of learning and practice, that according to my creed is successful conduct, and those who make this the serious business of their life seem to me to do well.\textsuperscript{102}

1. On the strength of the fact that man can make moral choices, can we conclude that god left him to himself and has no interest in what man does? By no means. Socrates was certain that god was not indifferent to man’s moral decisions: it is not only divine premonitions that prove that god cares about the way that man acts; he wants people to follow the path of righteousness and to reject the evil ways. Man should make use not only of material goods that gods bestowed upon him. Most of all he should appreciate the opportunity of his participation in the moral order ordained by god; the order whose principles are the highest possible form of all the accessible to man forms of organized reality. The way of good is shown through the “unwritten laws”\textsuperscript{103}, which have been ordained by gods and by which people ought to abide. An example is “a law and custom everywhere to worship and reverence the gods” or a law “to return good for good, and kindness with kindness.”\textsuperscript{104} The way of evil is opened by the human inability to make use of the

\textsuperscript{101} Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia}, III, 9, 13.
\textsuperscript{102} Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia}, III, 9, 14.
\textsuperscript{103} Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia}, IV, 4, 19.
\textsuperscript{104} Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia}, IV, 4, 24.
received goods and a rebellion against the will of providence. A good man is sure to count on the fact that “no evil can happen to [him], either in life or after death. He and his are not neglected by the gods”\textsuperscript{105}, and that gods watch over him and appropriately reward him for his effort into becoming a better person, whilst a bad man is bound to expect retaliation from them.\textsuperscript{106} This principle was explicitly stated by Socrates in his conversation with Hippias: he who transgresses gods’ laws will inevitably be punished: “only the penalty, I take it, affixed to the transgression of the divine code is certain.”\textsuperscript{107} The legal effectiveness of the moral code is comparable to the effectiveness of divine laws governing nature: if someone should desire to ram into a stone wall with his head he will necessarily break his head into pieces; if a farmer sets out to grow plants but he will not see to irrigating the fields then he will lose his crops. Briefly speaking: whoever goes against the rules of nature he is doomed to failure. At this juncture it is worthwhile to underline the fact that the mechanism of reward and punishment does not require an additional participation of god’s will, as the legal principle itself, which is an expression of this will, is a sufficient basis for meting out the penalty. The same can be said about the laws which govern the human arete: who disobeys universal laws of god he has to suffer punishment, unless he manages to repay early enough for the harm he had caused. Therefore, he who breaks another law, according to which “injustice and disobedience to a better, whether God or man, is evil and dishonorable”\textsuperscript{108}, cannot avoid being punished. Those who know less should listen to those who are wiser. “For whatever the matter be in which he disobeys the word of good advice, he will

\textsuperscript{105} Plato, \textit{Apology}, 41 d.

\textsuperscript{106} A warning given to Lamprokles is fully understandable in this light: “And as for you, my son, if you are in your sober senses, you will earnestly entreat your mother, lest the very gods take you to be an ungrateful being, and on their side also refuse to do you good.“ Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia}, II, 2, 14.

\textsuperscript{107} Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia}, IV, 4, 21. Hippias too (IV, 4, 24) was to acknowledge the trueness of this diagnosis: “that a law should in itself be loaded with the penalty of its transgression does suggest to my mind a higher than human type of legislator.”

\textsuperscript{108} Plato, \textit{Apology}, 29 b.
fall into error, I presume, and falling into error, be punished”.\textsuperscript{109} In connection with the mentioned above mechanism of punishment and reward god does not have to ‘personally’ mete out the punishment; for the law itself suffices to administer punishment. God is never in contradiction to the law that he has established; as the lawgiver he needs not judge anyone, for the actual judge is man who follows the path delineated by god. Then he experiences the fullness of his existence, or, rejects it—an act which makes him unhappy. God can only warn people against the evil way, as if protecting man from the consequences of his own actions. In all probability, this is how Socrates interpreted the fact of the appearance of \textit{divine premonitions}.

A visible punishing tool for people are those who, on following the way of good, refuse to support the wicked. This is why a tyrant is the most unhappy man because no-one from amongst the good will want to be friends with him, no-one will offer him a friendly piece of advice, nor will anyone will tell him the truth; sentenced to the company of the same sort of people as him, sooner or later he will become a victim of the same intrigues thanks to which he had risen to power. For similar reasons Lemprokles should fear a just punishment from those people who, seeing how badly he treats his mother, considered him as unworthy of their regard and their respect. Here is the advice given to him by his father:

You will beware of men also, lest they should perceive your neglect of your parents, and with one consent hold you in dishonour; and so you find yourself in a desert devoid of friends. For if once the notion be entertained that here is a man ungrateful to his parents, no one will believe that any kindness shown you would be other than thrown away.\textsuperscript{110}

Every good man should defend the principles of the divine law to oppose those who break this law. His philosophy, as a \textit{divine service}, is a form of a ‘punitive expedition’, a

\textsuperscript{109} Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia}, III, 9, 12.

\textsuperscript{110} Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia}, II, 2, 14.
mission whose aim is to compel the Athenians to work on themselves. Socrates compares himself to a gadfly which stings a sluggish horse:

For if you kill me you will not easily find another like me, who, if I may use such a ludicrous figure of speech, am a sort of gadfly, given to the state by the God; and the state is like a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size, and requires to be stirred into life. I am that gadfly which God has given the state and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you.\footnote{Plato, \textit{Apology}, 30 e – 31 a.}

He told the judges in court who were voting against him that they should expect a punishment for what they had done:

And I prophecy to you who are my murderers, that immediately after my death punishment far heavier than you have inflicted on me will surely await you. Me you have killed because you wanted to escape the accuser, and not to give an account of your lives. But that will not be as you suppose: far otherwise. For I say that there will be more accusers of you than there are now; accusers whom hitherto I have restrained".\footnote{Plato, \textit{Apology}, 39 c-d.}

We need remember, however, that Socrates firmly rejected the principle of a collective moral responsibility: the crowd does not have a soul (\textit{psyche}), so decisions made by various bodies, such as the jury gathered in the Athenian court, do not have any moral qualification. He said to Crito: “I only wish, Crito, that they could; for then they could also do the greatest good, and that would be well. But the truth is, that they can do neither good nor evil: they cannot make a man wise or make him foolish; and whatever they do is the result of chance”.\footnote{Plato, \textit{Crito}, 44 d.} The problem arises when someone who treats the judgment of such
bodies as if it was morally obligating and acts in the same way so as not to come into conflict with them. This is a grave error which very often becomes a cause of evil. Who will then pay for this: the whole community or an individual? The individual of course: god settles accounts with individual people not with the community at large. Every man makes his own moral decisions —no matter whether he wants it or not—and he takes responsibility for them even though he does not realize the full importance of the decision he makes. If he does it being unaware of what he does—so much the worse for him.

It is better then to be aware of the moral choices we make, rather than to live in ignorance. Entering the sphere of moral values every man must be aware of the sense of his conduct on his way of self-knowing: for without the conscious participation in the moral sphere, without examining oneself there can be no moral values. Only on the way of conscious decisions can man participate in this special divine dimension of existence—which is the moral dimension. In this way arete will be linked to knowledge. Thoughtlessness leads to harm done to oneself and to others—“the life which is unexamined is not worth living.”\footnote{Plato, Apology, 38 a.} Just as divine premonitions awoke Socrates to reflection on making moral decisions, so he tried to awake others to undertake the same effort. When writing a poem, a man need not have a understanding why and how he created a ‘good’ work; making a ‘good’ moral decision every man must know a reason for which he has decided to act as he did. No act deserves to be deemed morally good if there is no conscious intention of doing something good. No-one is good by chance, neither is anyone morally good by inheritance; to be good it is required to follow the moral path of arete, that is the way of the unwritten laws. Not everyone can become a poet, a politician or an Olympic athlete; gods conferred different gifts upon different people but they conferred one gift upon each and every one of us—the gift to enter the realm of moral thinking and hence they require of each and every one of us to make the effort of moral auto-creation. Whoever will not make this effort will inflict
harm on himself, on other people and, first and foremost, he will oppose the will of god.

3. As it has been said in the previous chapter, Socrates maintained that every man has a gift of an intuitive evaluation of whether a decision made about a person serves to strengthen or weaken this person. He perceived this ability as a fundamental ingredient of an analysis of all moral decisions: when a man decides to take a particular step he is capable of realizing whether he wishes well for a given person or whether he would rather this person’s strength weakened. One cannot be mistaken in this self-recognition; for we are dealing here with a simple intuition of power on the basis of which we intend to present ourselves outside. We meet this form of knowledge only within the frames of self-knowledge, for no-one is able to know another person’s intentions behind his/her actions. In every arete, regardless of its kind, Socrates found this fundamental ingredient which unified the multiplicity of moral actions in one intuition of good, which we come across in good people. Evil people will be characterized by a willingness to do harm to other people—a sui generis spitefulness in relations with other people. Thus, morally good people are those who have an outward influence within the frames of the strengthening intuition; and evil people are those who wish bad for others and who consequently wish to weaken them: “Do not the good do their neighbors good, and the bad do them evil?”115 This is the reason for avoiding the company of some people and for seeking the company of the other kind of people. He advised his friend thus: “You should avoid censerious persons and attach yourself to the considerate and kind-hearted, and in all your affairs accept with a good grace what you can and decline what you feel you cannot do”.116

The will to do something good is a necessary condition to recognize a particular act as being morally good; it is not however a sufficient condition; for one can show good will, one

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115 Plato, Apology, 25 c.
116 Xenophon, Memorabilia, II, 8, 6.
may wish to strengthen others and yet to cause harm. Aside from the knowledge of intentions one needs knowledge of how to deal with problems in this or that case. What if a good man because of an erroneous recognition causes harm to someone? Will the assessment of his behaviour be the same as the one who brought about similar harm as a result of a spiteful intention?

An answer to these questions can be found in Plato’s *Apology*. Socrates is very clear here. If someone has shown good will in his behaviour and in spite of this he did harm, then he should not be punished, though, taking account of his mistake, he is in need of an admonishment. If we find, however, that there stands bad will behind someone’s actions, which is a readiness to harm another person, then a punishment is in order. Let us read part of a conversation with Meleteus:

Socrates: And when you accuse me of corrupting and deteriorating the youth, do you allege that I corrupt them intentionally or unintentionally?
Meleteus: Intentionally, I say.
Socrates: But you have just admitted that the good do their neighbors good, and the evil do them evil. Now is that a truth which your superior wisdom has recognized thus early in life, and am I, at my age, in such darkness and ignorance as not to know that if a man with whom I have to live is corrupted by me, I am very likely to be harmed by him, and yet I corrupt him, and intentionally, too; that is what you are saying, and of that you will never persuade me or any other human being. But either I do not corrupt them, or I corrupt them unintentionally, so that on either view of the case you lie. If my offence is unintentional, the law has no cognizance of unintentional offences; you ought to have taken me privately, and warned and admonished me; for if I had been better advised, I should have left off doing what I only did unintentionally – no doubt I should; whereas you hated to converse with me or teach me, but you indicted me in this court, which is a place not of instruction, but of punishment”.  

4. To deserve kindness from god man has to avoid everything that is harmful to his relation with god, which is manifested, *inter alia*, by a lack of respect towards the charitable power of gods. Ingratitude towards gods is the basis of all evil behaviour of man: if someone cannot appreciate god’s charity he will neither appreciate what he will receive from people, nor, *a fortiori*, he will not endeavour to do something really good. “It follows, then, that in proportion to the greatness of the benefit conferred, the greater his misdoing who fails to requite the kindness?”¹¹⁸ It is well known, according to Socrates, that man should be most indebted to gods: “You must then honour the gods, not with shortcoming but according to your ability; and having so done, be of good cheer and hope to receive the greatest blessings. For where else should a man of sober sense look to receive great blessings if not from those who are able to help him most.”¹¹⁹ In this way, the measure of all things is man’s relation to god. As recounted Xenophon, Socrates started his work on his disciples by instilling into them a “wise spirit in their relation to the gods”¹²⁰; for—Socrates was well aware of this—it was impossible to understand his moral philosophy without the prior knowledge of his philosophy of the god. Although it is true that god does not replace people in their choice of moral decisions, which means that god cannot be blamed for the evil they caused, according to Socrates god bestowed upon them a predisposition to fulfil moral principles which rule a higher level of justice from the one that can be found in human legislation.¹²¹

He conceived that every man:

deliberately chooses what, within the limits open to him, he considers most conducive to his interest, and acts accordingly.¹²²

From where does man take this mechanism of highlighting of what is best for him? Is it an effect of human thinking and

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human knowledge? Probably it is not, for every thinking and
gaining knowledge discovers this principle as being prior to the
workings of one’s own mind. Thus, even before man recognizes
and identifies anything as objects which constitute the contents
of his choice he is already ready to highlight that which will be
most beneficial for him. The primordial act of will precedes all
cognitive efforts in a similar way, just like daemonion’s
intervention precedes cognitive reflection. In this way Socrates
turns round the generally accepted way of things: it is generally
believed that will emerges on the plane between knowledge and
action. It is thanks to will that a transfer from ‘I know’ to ‘I put
it into action’ is possible. This position, as Socrates seems to
claim, testifies to the dependence of the human will to do good
upon accidental contents of knowledge. This in turn leads to
losing the free will. No theory is capable to force man to be
moral. Meanwhile, as Socrates believed, man is obliged to be a
moral being independently of place and time; independent also
of what man will be able to recognize as binding. The prior
status of the will to do good with regard to knowledge and
thinking causes that knowledge does not have a purely
informative character, but is a force which affects man’s
behaviour. Socrates perceives man by analogy with god: since
god made the law and does not think it necessary to confirm his
will already expressed in the law, then man who recognizes
something as good may not change anything in the secondary
act of will. One cannot want and not want something at the same
time. If we want to help our friend and we find the best way to
help him will we have second thoughts whether we want to give
assistance to our friend? According to Socrates there is no need
to ponder over it. If someone is consistent in his thoughts he will
surely not contradict himself.

5. Taking into account the fact that every human soul contains a
propensity for doing something better, Socrates’ theses that no
one inflicts harm upon himself becomes understandable. It is
impossible that man should like evil for himself: everything that he chooses, even though it could be seen as the greatest evil in the eyes of other people, is always good for him that chooses it, and it is the highest good. With reference to the will which precedes knowledge—whose understanding may entail as binding only that which saturates into consciousness through the daemonic dimension of the soul—it is even impossible to think of the existence of evil will; for in order to accept the theses that man is ready to choose the worse thing out of two unequal things it would be necessary to accept the influence of evil ‘god’. Socrates, however, rejects the conception of evil that exists within the realm of divine reality; therefore he finds it impossible for god ‘to lead man into temptation’. The daemonic dimension present in human psyche does not contain any evil. Facing god’s omniscience and god’s goodness man cannot find any justification for his own degradation as the most perfect of all god’s gifts, the highest good on the hierarchy of goods.  

6. Was Socrates to claim that no one inflicts any harm upon himself? Nothing of the kind: he continually demonstrated to others that they made wrong decisions, that they judged various things in the wrong way, that they are treating themselves badly and that they are disobedient to god. God bestowed upon man any goods, but on giving him a possibility of choosing, he did not enforce on man an obligation to properly use them. On becoming a free being, thanks to god’s ordinance, man came into the possession of ‘abilities’ not to use the possessed goods, and even using them inappropriately. “Now is it not insensate stupidity to use for injury what was meant for advantage?” Even on the level of thinking and gaining knowledge it is possible to leave the way of good and to enter the way of evil, whose symptom will be thoughtlessness and ignorance. Leaving the way of good (the way is de facto a submission to the will of god) weakens human will or even debase it, revealing the spiteful intention with regard to other people. Although man

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123 See: Xenophon, Memorabilia, IV, 3.
124 Xenophon, Memorabilia, II, 3, 19.
cannot be spiteful towards himself, he may think that it would be better if he worsens the situation in which another person finds himself. Believing that god appreciates all efforts directed towards following the path of good, Socrates realized the fact that there would be no human merit in it, if it were not a kind of objection to the alternative way of evil. Socrates was very clear in underlining the existence of these two mutually exclusive moral positions. In the court he said of himself that he had done “nothing wrong”\textsuperscript{125} in his lifetime. His actions were never accompanied by ‘evil thoughts’ about another person, he never attempted to weaken another person, but—as we read in Plato’s \textit{Apology}—“where I could do the greatest good privately to everyone of you, thither I went”\textsuperscript{126}. A little further e expresses the same idea even stronger: “I am convinced that I never intentionally wronged anyone.”\textsuperscript{127} It was his greatest merit and the best defence; that is why he remained calm during the trial; for he had the inner certainty of a moral life he had lived. The silence of a \textit{daemonion} confirmed his self-judgement. This is why he bore no grudges against the jury who were voting against him, that they voted as they did; the verdict was consonant with the will of god. What struck him more and what hurt him was the fact that they were driven by their evil will, wanting to harm Socrates. But this action deserves condemnation already. He speaks briefly: “and for this I may gently blame them”\textsuperscript{128}. Acting according to an evil intention must lead to a moral degradation of an individual. But “the easiest and noblest way is not to be crushing others, but to be improving yourself”\textsuperscript{129}.

\textsuperscript{125} Xenophon, \textit{Apology}, 3.
\textsuperscript{126} Plato, \textit{Apology}, 36 c.
\textsuperscript{127} Plato, \textit{Apology}, 37 a.
\textsuperscript{128} Plato, \textit{Apology}, 41 e.
\textsuperscript{129} Plato, \textit{Apology}, 39 d-e.
CHAPTER SIX

A PRAISE OF PRACTICAL ABILITIES

The first generation of Greek philosophers played a double role in Greek civilization: first, it transferred the knowledge of the Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian, and most probably, also Phoenician scholars onto the Greek ground; second, it brought to life a new way of understanding the world, which was alien to the mentioned-above civilizations. Historians of philosophy are quite one-sided in their descriptions of the achievements of the first Greek philosophers. They concentrate on conveying their theses concerning the nature of reality and omit or at least marginalize the role of the scientific competence acquired by them. However, if we were to look at the first Greek philosophers from the perspective of contemporaneous with them Greeks, this picture would most probably differ from the picture painted by historians of philosophy: these philosophers gained their fame not so much from their thoughts on the nature of reality, as from the scientific knowledge of astronomy, mathematics or mechanics. As philosophers they were not very well understood innovators within the area of the Mediterranean; as scientists they only continued a very long tradition of scientific research.

1. The first scientific presentations made by the first philosophers—for example, Thales’ land-surveying calculations, the sundial and the maps drawn by Anaximander—incommensurably with their achievements focused the attention of the astonished and surprised Greeks for whom even this dimension of the philosophers’ activity was to testify of their striking originality, for a great majority of Greeks were unaware of the intellectual heritage of the did not realize the older civilizations. One Egyptian priest was to tell Solon that the Greeks “are all young in mind”; for “there is no old opinion handed down among you by ancient
tradition, nor any science which is hoary with age.”

The prediction of the eclipse of the sun in 585 B.C. (610 B.C. ?)—considered as the symbolic date of the birth of science—was impossible without the knowledge of the Babylonian and Egyptian astronomy whereas the part of scientific “discoveries” ascribed to the first philosophers bore, to some extent, the hallmarks of plagiarism.

Thus, judging the first Greek philosophers we should take account of not only their original thought with respect to their unsurpassed philosophical theory, but also the enormous effort they made in order to adapt the knowledge accumulated by the older cultures. As we read in ancient sources, gaining knowledge in Egyptian and Babylonian schools took Pythagoras several decades; Thales of Miletus—the founder of Greek philosophy—was also a disciple of Egyptian priests. Of longstanding attractiveness of the Egyptian education testifies the fact that as early as in the V (e.g. Democritus of Abdera) and the IV centuries B.C. (e.g. Plato) young Greeks went there to receive education.

2. There is no question that the first schools of Greek philosophy were greatly influenced by the pre-Greek mathematics and astronomy. Let me, however, to put forward a stronger thesis: without the existence of the pre-Greek science, Greek philosophy as we know it, that is the philosophy as we find in the first conceptions of Greek philosophy, could not have appeared. Their naturalistic character is a result of, first of all, the reflection over the cognitive effectiveness of astronomical and mathematical knowledge. How could, for example, mathematical abstractions have influenced the emergence of Greek philosophy. Let us consider two things at this juncture.

The development of mathematical abstraction—as no other method of gaining knowledge—is, to a large extent, dependent


131 It is worth quoting the words of Heraclitus about Pythagoras: “Pythagoras son of Mnesarchus pursued inquiry further than all other men, but choosing only what he liked from these compositions, made a wisdom of his own much learning, artful knavery”; M. Crowe.
upon the development of the symbolic dimension of language. Mathematical knowledge nearly constituted a model way of not only doing a systematic and precise thinking at that time, but also consolidating the achieved results in simple and clearly formulated words. Mathematics showed a need for a research method, for judging this method by other scholars and for detaching from the ambiguity inherent in natural language. The more mathematical abstraction developed subsequent levels of knowledge, the more mathematical symbolism became detached from the symbols of natural language. Therefore, the language of mathematics can be considered to be the first artificial language from the point of which it was possible to systematically evaluate the value of ethnic languages. Mathematical symbolism, relatively easy transferable from one culture to another, was quick to become the foundation of the universalization of theoretical language.

However, the biggest challenge facing a student of mathematics was the effort to cross a utilitarian point of view. The input of the pre-Greek mathematics in the development of the Greek philosophy becomes underrated here. He who learns to think in terms of abstract numbers understands that to practise theory it is necessary to cross over the empirical vantage point. Plato was well aware of this fact when he put up an inscription over the entrance to the Academy to the effect that those who had not had a course in mathematics should not cross this entrance. Without the introductory knowledge of mathematics no one will be able to comprehend the real message of his theoretical philosophy as a way towards the invisible. The author of the Republic argued that mathematics “has a very great and elevating effect, compelling the soul to reason about abstract number, and rebelling against the introduction of visible or tangible objects into the argument”. Consequently, thanks to mathematics, the philosopher finds “the easiest way for [the soul herself] to pass from becoming to truth and being.”

132 Plato, Republic, 525 d.
133 Plato, Republic, 525 c.
of philosophy, and raise up that which is now unhappily allowed
to fall down”.  

Plato does not say anything new here: in the main he
repeats the teaching that he learnt after the Socrates’ death, that
was brought into the Greek philosophy by its creators. Even the
pre-Greek mathematicians reached a level that allowed them to
deal with mathematical problems in abstraction from practical
issues and to develop them for their own sake rather than for the
sake of their practical application. Most contemporary historians
of mathematics, contra historians of philosophy, reject the popular
in the first decades of the XX century thesis of a purely utilitarian
color of the pre-Greek mathematics.

3. Let us at this place pose a question which I feel is very natural
to ask: if the pre-Greek mathematics received so high a level of the
development of abstract knowledge that we can talk about an
accompanying it disinterestedness, so why was philosophy not
created by the Egyptians? The secret of giving an answer to this
question lies, in my opinion, in noticing the difference between the
mythologies of the Greeks and the Egyptians. The Greek
mythology was ins contents far more abstract than the Greek
mythology; it thus could rationalize the method of mathematical
abstraction and harness it to playing the role which was
compatible with the mythological viewpoint. In this mythology we
can find contents which agrees with scientific work: the key role
was played by the cult of the god Toth there, patron saint of
inventors and those who acquire knowledge. It was to him that the
invention of writing and various sciences, including mathematics,
was ascribed to by religious tradition.

The Egyptian religion, in the course of its long evolution, worked
out various mechanisms of getting acquainted with the contents
issuing from the abstract scientific search. An abstract thought
requires a suitable cultural context, it has to secure a positive
ambience in which it will be able to nurse its disinterested
investigations. Nonetheless this context is dependent upon the way

134 Plato, Republic, 527 b.
in which societies engage in the development of abstract ways of knowledge. The Greek religion was unable to fulfill this cognitive function, with which the Egyptian religion succeeded in dealing. The Greek mythology was unable to rationalize knowledge, which had just been brought from the outside. Hence, there appeared an empty space around this knowledge—an upshot of a lack of cultural bonds between the old structure of the culture and its new element. This state of a specific intellectual anomy brought about a need of finding something that would help to explain the abilities of theoretical cognizance.

The first conceptions of the Greek philosophy were an answer to this need and that is why—I will stress it again—it was no accident that the Ionians are regarded as being the creators of Greek philosophy as well as being those who passed on to the Greeks the eastern mathematical and astronomic knowledge.

The exceptionality of the person of Thales of Miletus does not, in fact, rest on the fact that he knew the Egyptian mathematical knowledge nor on the fact that he passed this knowledge to the Greeks. The greatness of his achievement lies primarily in noticing the need to expand the autonomic and theoretical context around the scientific research. This is exactly where he helped science; for he separated it from the changeable religious beliefs. He created a completely new mechanism of understanding of scientific knowledge in which the dominant role is played by a rational explanation of natural phenomena. Since the gods are silence on this matter people may speak. The situation of the mentioned earlier intellectual anomy that he experienced allowed him to see a new object of research, which was impossible to be penetrated by the mythological Greek thought. One can presume then that the clash of he Greek mythology—which did not have any holy scriptures or speculative theology—with the eastern scientific thought which was practiced in the context of the developed theology, opened the gate to the independent investigation on the nature of being. I therefore see Thales’ merit in that he courageously entered the new area, and that he managed
to encourage others to individual study on the nature of reality. Socrates was not capable of taking up this challenge. His live religiousness, whose central manifestation was the care about the *daemonion*, did not allow him to distance himself from the traditional way of thinking about that which is divine. Neither did it allow to show up the belief in the cognitive possibilities of the theoretical method. Thus, insofar as I see in the religious weakness of Thales of Miletus an important source of his cognitive courage, I am inclined to think that Socrates’ strong connection with religious-theological content hindered him from crossing the border delineated by the religious *taboo*.

4. Socrates did not belong to those who were particularly filled with awe by scientific research. He was a man of practical nature and very poor education in the sphere of mathematics and astronomy. He could not accept knowledge which did not bear the hallmarks of utility. Socrates was well aware of the fact that the thinking of the archaic philosophers was permeated by scientific intent; he himself, however, never managed to plough through this layer of archaic philosophy, a state that was certainly affected by the low level of education of the then Athenian schooling. Socrates’ standard of mathematical and astronomical competence was too basic to thoroughly evaluate the present knowledge. This in turn had a considerable influence on his evaluation of the archaic theory of nature. Thus, wanting to take a stance on the archaic conception of doing philosophy Socrates had first separated himself from its mathematical and astronomic roots. This is why Socrates rejected theoretical geometry. Xenophon relates that according to Socrates:

> Every one (he would say) ought to be taught geometry so far, at any rate, as to be able, if necessary, to take over or part with a piece of land, or to divide it up or assign a portion of it for

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135 In contradistinction to him, Pythagoras did not only graft onto the Greek ground a technique of theoretical studying of things, but also the religious context in which, in his opinion, it was expedient to treat the development of scientific research. In this respect, Pythagoras was much more shaped by his eastern masters.
cultivation, and in every case by geometric rule. That amount of geometry was so simple indeed, and easy to learn, that it only needed ordinary application of the mind to the method of mensuration, and the student could at once ascertain the size of the piece of land, and, with the satisfaction of knowing its measurement, depart in peace. But he was unable to approve of the pursuit of geometry up to the point at which it became a study of unintelligible diagrams. What the use of these might be, he failed, he said, to see; and yet (I beg to differ with Xenophon’s relation here—W.P.) he was not unversed in these recondite matters himself.  

Socrates rejected theoretical arithmetic. True, he did encourage his disciples to learn reasoning processes,

Socrates inculcated the study of reasoning processes, but in these, equally with the rest, he bade the student beware of vain and idle over-occupation. Up to the limit set by utility, he was ready to join in any investigation, and to follow out an argument with those who were with him; but there he stopped.  

Socrates never knew theoretical mathematics in such a way so as to thoroughly evaluate it from the point of view of a theoretician of knowledge. Nevertheless, he knew, perhaps thanks to Anaxagoras, that it was possible to practice such mathematics; he also knew that mathematics encouraged many philosophers to study very general and abstract things of whose practical merits he was unable to say much. This is the reason why he maintained that he does not know why undertake such inquiries. There is no use of theoretical mathematics, but there is some loss which comes from the fact that someone who devote himself to mathematics must, out of necessity, neglect the development of other useful skills or abilities. There is one ore reason why Socrates felt helpless in the matter of mathematical research: the results that were obtained in mathematics he found impossible to judge with respect to their

137 Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, IV, 7, 8.
goodness or evil. Mathematical theorems are not susceptible to any moral criteria of evaluation; for once they are divested of concrete dimension and once they are formalized they cannot be treated as either good or bad. In this matter a daemonion did not interfere at all. Of good and bad results one can talk in the context of a craftsman, poet, painter, politician, but, in Socrates’ view, the results of mathematician’s work are not liable to this kind of judgment.

Socrates did not only sharply separated himself from the tradition of mathematical research. Likewise he did with astronomy. He rejected theoretical astronomy, being satisfied with the purely practical level of this knowledge. In his view, a practical knowledge of astronomy is needful for people:

Every one should know enough of the science to be able to discover the hour of the night or the season of the month or year, for the purposes of travel by land or sea— the march, the voyage, and the regulations of the watch; and in general, with regard to all matters connected with the night season, or with the month, or the year, it was well to have such reliable data to go upon as would serve to distinguish the various times and seasons. But these, again, were pieces of knowledge easily learnt from night sportsmen, pilots of vessels, and many others who make it their business to know such things. As to pushing the study of astronomy so far as to include a knowledge of the movements of bodies outside our own orbit, whether planets or stars of eccentric movement, or wearing oneself out endeavouring to discover their distances from the earth, their periods, and their causes, all this he strongly discountenanced; for he saw (he said) no advantage in these any more than in the former studies. And yet he was not unversed in the subtleties of astronomy any more than in those of geometry; only these, again, he insisted, were sufficient to wear out a man's lifetime, and to keep him away from many more useful pursuits.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, IV, 7, 4-5.
The lack of transfer from theoretical knowledge to the practice of everyday life made Socrates think of science as something useless. In his opinion, philosophy is to answer the question about how to live so it cannot escape from dealing with issues which are directly pertinent to the problems that normal people are beset with.

5. Looking at the above words of Socrates from the point of view of the requirements accompanying theoretical mathematics, one needs to state that not only did he have no understanding for this kind of work, but also he put forward statements whose fulfillment would draw mathematics back to the pre-theoretical level. If Socrates’ words were to be taken seriously, over a thousand-year-old efforts of Eastern mathematicians would be forgotten.

An inevitable consequence of Socrates’ reflections over divine premonitions was his rejection of a possibility of doing philosophy within the frames of a theoretical approach. His philosophy had, first of all, a practical dimension; his cognitive disinterestedness, known from his theoretical activity, was replaced by his axiological disinterestedness. Socrates felt compelled to reject the model of theoretical philosophy; for his object of enquiry—the sphere of arete—could not be encompassed by it. Colloquial language was rightly considered by him as a better tool to communicate moral contents than the most sophisticated languages of the present at that time philosophical theories. No technical language is a match for a natural language as regards the description of concrete situations in which man has to take moral decisions. What is harmful from the point of view of theoretical language, e.g. ambiguity or vagueness, in natural language becomes an asset; for it becomes a more flexible means of communication. It is understandable then that the achievements of Prodicus of Ceos regarding his study on the synonymics of natural language were far more useful for Socrates than all the formal languages. It is for the same reason that Socrates showed his disregard for writing, which by nature may not consider the conditions that the addressee of the text has at his disposal when
interpreting a particular text. This situation may cause the best pieces of advice to bring forth undesirable results.

6. There is no gainsaying that Socrates was critically predisposed to the philosophers who practised the theory of nature. All the sources are unanimous in saying that he himself did not practise the theory of nature. Xenophon maintained that Socrates:

Indeed, in contrast to others he set his face against all discussion of such high matters as the nature of the Universe; how the "kosmos," as the savants phrase it, came into being; or by what forces the celestial phenomena arise. To trouble one’s brain about such matters was, he argued, to play the fool.\textsuperscript{139}

In Plato’s Apology we find words in which Socrates rejects the accusation that he practiced the theory of nature. Standing before the jury he was to say:

„I have nothing to do with these studies. Very many of those here present are witnesses to the truth of this, and to them I appeal. Speak then, you who have heard me, and tell your neighbors whether any of you have ever known me hold forth in few words or in many upon matters of this sort."\textsuperscript{140}

Why did Socrates reject he archaic theory of nature? We shall not find an answer to this question in his ethics; for it was theological reasons that mattered. Socrates is faithful here to the religious tradition which sustains the existence of a substantial gap which separates people from gods. No man can know god; no one will know the way in which god manages the reality. For this reason Socrates:

in regard of things celestial … set his face against attempts to excogitate the machinery by which the divine power formed its several operations. Not only were these matters beyond man's

\textsuperscript{139} Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia}, I,1,11-12.

\textsuperscript{140} Plato, \textit{Apology}, 19 d.
faculties to discover, as he believed, but the attempt to search out what the gods had not chosen to reveal could hardly (he supposed) be well pleasing in their sight. Indeed, the man who tortured his brains about such subjects stood a fair chance of losing his wits entirely, just as Anaxagoras, the headiest speculator of them all, in his attempt to explain the divine mechanism, had somewhat lost his head.\textsuperscript{141}

However, god let people know the works of his wisdom: there are things which man is not only able to know, but he must know. The whole world that surrounds man may become the object of human enquiry. There is, however, one stipulation—this enquiry may not cross the boundaries established by god. Man has is not entitled to enter the realm of the invisible; those who break this precept—like the theoreticians of nature, for instance—deserve to be dubbed fools.

7. But how is man to be certain that he does not cross the boundaries established by god? An answer to this question can be found in Socrates’ theology of nature. Against the popular belief, Socrates did not resign from a reflection upon the issue of nature or did he intend to leave emptiness after the rejected theories of archaic philosophy. He superseded the archaic theory of nature with his own theology of nature. Man, along with the surrounding world, was treated by Socrates as a gift: a gift from god who, for reasons unknown to people, made the world as it is. It was obvious for Socrates that god, on creating the whole reality, had not created it in order that man could, with its help, reach the divine dimension of existence. The reality is not a ladder that man can climb up to reach god.

When creating the reality, god did not place an epistemological riddle before man, but created appropriate conditions for man’s practical development. From man’s point of view, it is indifferent how god holds everything in existence. God’s omniscience is coupled with omnipotence, therefore man can forget the knowledge about things which he can influence in

\textsuperscript{141} Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia}, IV, 7, 6.
no practical way. Why should man need the knowledge concerning the way god moves the sun if he cannot in any way help him in it. Clearly, Socrates linked knowledge with action and not only with respect to the nature of god, but also with respect to man. He thought at the same time that this link is a natural consequence of god’s decision, who was led by utility when he was making reality. Particular entities were created because of their utility for man.

The acceptance of this perspective allowed Socrates to state the existence of a theological intention contained in every entity which shows up in a teleological dimension of god’s works. According to Socrates god inscribed an aim in the nature of particular entities; it is an aim that these entities are subordinated to. In this way he analyzed the existence of light and dark, hot and cold, plants and animals. It is also in this way that he understood the nature of man, man’s physical constitution and even the existence of the laws that govern human life. Socrates’ anthropology is part of the theology of nature; simultaneously it is a distinguished part, for it concerns the most perfect being in the world of nature.

Man is a divine being of whom god remembers and cares. The proof of god’s care about man is the surrounding world and man himself whom god created in such a way so that man could enjoy the goods of this world to the full. God does not economize on light, he makes the earth give plentiful harvest, he gives water, air and fire; he directs the movements of the stars, the sun and the moon; god formed the human body and gave intellect to man and enabled him to receive divine signs. Then, there is really no need to cross the boundaries set up by god. It suffices if man lives a utilitarian life and lets others do the same, without breaking the principles of arete.