

'Socrates' intellect, on the other hand, was pure and untrammelled, not involving itself in the body except¹⁷³ to a small extent [588E] for necessary purposes; it was therefore sensitive and delicate enough to respond quickly to whatever impinged upon it. And that, it may be supposed, was not a sound but the thought of a daimon, making contact voicelessly with the thinking mind by its bare meaning.¹⁷⁴ Voice is like a blow to the soul, which receives the thought by force through the ears, whenever we converse with one another. The intellect of the higher being, on the other hand, guides the gifted soul, which needs no blow, touching it with its thought; and that soul surrenders its impulses to this intellect, which relaxes or tightens them, not violently <as>¹⁷⁵ [588F] against the resistance of passions, but yielding¹⁷⁶ as it were its soft and pliable reins.

'There is no need to wonder at this, when we see, on the one hand, huge merchantmen turned round by small tillers, and, on the other, the revolution of the potter's wheel that turns so smoothly at the touch of a fingertip. These things, though lifeless, are so contrived as to run easily, and their smoothness enables them to yield to the motive force, once the inclination is given. The human mind, likewise, is strung as it were with the strings of countless impulses, and is much the most easily guided of machines; touch it by reason, and it accepts the pressure to move as the idea directs. [589A] In us, you see, the origins of emotions and impulses lead back to the intelligence; once this is disturbed, there is a tug upon them, and they in turn exert a pull and a tension upon the man. This above all is how the idea lets us understand what great power it has. For bones and sinews and moisture-laden flesh have no sensation, and the mass made of them, so heavy when at rest and inert, rises up, all of it, becomes tense in all its parts, and takes off for action as though on wings, the moment¹⁷⁷ the soul forms a conception in the intellect and rouses its impulse to respond to it. Now¹⁷⁸ how the mode of movement, tension and excitation [589B] by which the soul, having formed its thought, draws the mass after it by its impulses, is difficult or indeed impossible to understand. But as the conception of a thought, even without a voice,¹⁷⁹ does in fact easily move the body, so we should be ready to believe that an intellect may be guided by superior intellect and a mind by a more divine mind which makes contact with it from outside with the form of contact which is natural between thought and thought, a sort of effulgence [light] as it were.¹⁸⁰

'For in truth, while we understand the thoughts of others by groping for them in the dark, as it were, by the spoken word, the thoughts of *daimones*, by contrast, have brilliance and shine on those who can receive¹⁸¹ them, with no need of the verbs and nouns¹⁸² [589C] which humans use as symbols among themselves to discern images and pictures of their thoughts, the thoughts themselves remaining unrecognized except by these on whom,

as I said, there shines some special, daemonic brilliance. The phenomenon of speech in some ways offers the unbeliever some reassurance. Air moulded by articulate sound and wholly converted into word and speech conveys the thought to the hearer's mind. So why¹⁸³ should we be surprised if the air, because of its plasticity, is changed in accordance with what thoughts¹⁸⁴ the higher beings¹⁸⁵ have, and so impresses the meaning of the thinker on the minds of divine and exceptional men? Think how the noise made by sappers in a tunnel is detected by bronze shields¹⁸⁶ because of the resonance produced [589D] when the sounds are carried up from the depths and strike the shields, though they pass through everything else¹⁸⁷ undetected. In the same way, the thoughts of *daimones* pass everywhere, but echo only in the ears of those who have an untroubled personality¹⁸⁸ and whose soul is tranquil, 'holy' and 'daemonic' individuals, as we call them.

'Most people however believe that it is only in sleep that the 'daemonic' power inspires humans. That it should move¹⁸⁹ them in the same way when awake and of sound mind they find surprising and incredible. But that is like thinking that a musician uses his lyre only when it is unstrung, and does not touch or use it when it has been adjusted and tuned. They do not see that the cause is [589E] the tunelessness and confusion within themselves.¹⁹⁰ Our friend Socrates was completely free of this, as the oracle given to his father when he was a child foretold.¹⁹¹ It told the father to let Socrates do whatever came into his mind, and not to force or divert the boy's impulses, but give them their head; he should pray for Socrates to Zeus Agoraios and the Muses, and otherwise not bother about him – [589F] because (I suppose) he had within himself a guide for life better than any number of teachers and tutors.

21. 'Such were the thoughts which occurred to us, Phidolaus, about the *daimonion*, both during Socrates' lifetime and after his death. We despised those who <adduced>¹⁹² chance words or sneezes or anything like that. As for the account of this which we heard from Timarchus of Chaeronea,¹⁹³ it is <more like> myth than rational argument,¹⁹⁴ and perhaps it is best left unsaid.'

'Not at all,' said Theocritus, 'tell us about it. Myth too does in some degree touch on truth, even if not very precisely. But first tell us who this Timarchus was, [590A] for I don't know him.'

'Naturally you don't, Theocritus,' said Simmias, 'since he <died>¹⁹⁵ quite young, and asked Socrates to let him be buried next to Socrates' son Lamprocles,¹⁹⁶ his friend and contemporary, who died <not many>¹⁹⁷ days before him. Timarchus had a strong desire to know the power of Socrates' *daimonion* – he was a spirited youth, who had just got his teeth into philosophy – and (not consulting anyone except Cebes and me) he descended

into the cave of Trophonius,¹⁹⁸ first performing the regular rituals of the oracle. **[590B]** He stayed down there two nights and a day; most people despaired of him, and his relations were already mourning, when he reappeared early in the morning, very cheerful, prostrated himself before the god and (as soon as he could escape the crowd) told us of many marvels he had seen and heard.¹⁹⁹

22. 'He said that, after descending into the cave of the oracle, he first found himself in deep darkness. Then he prayed, and lay there for a long time, with no clear consciousness of whether he was awake or dreaming. It seemed to him however that there was a sudden noise and at the same time a blow on his head; the sutures of his skull opened²⁰⁰ and let his soul out. It left joyfully to blend into the pure, bright air, and seemed then first to relax **[590C]** at long last after its former confinement²⁰¹ and become bigger²⁰² than before, like a sail being unfurled. Then he dimly heard a kind of whirring going round and round above his head, making a pleasant sound. When he looked up, he could not see the earth anywhere. Islands, shining upon one another with a soft glow, and²⁰³ constantly changing hue, dyed²⁰⁴ the light, as it were, so that it varied as they changed. They seemed innumerable and huge in size, not all equal but all alike round. He fancied that the heaven made a <melodious>²⁰⁵ sound in response to their revolutions, for the softness of the sound produced by the harmony **[590D]** of them all corresponded to the smoothness of their motion. In between them lay a sea or lake gleaming with colours that blended with its greyness. A few of the islands sailed out along a channel and were carried to the other side of the stream, but many others were borne along <with the flow of the sea> which itself moved more or less <in a circular track>.²⁰⁶ In some parts of the sea, principally towards the south, there were great depths; elsewhere there were small patches of shallows;²⁰⁷ in many areas it flooded and again ebbed, but not making any great outflow.²⁰⁸ In colour, part was the pure hue of the open sea, **[590E]** part was polluted, turbid, and swampy. As the islands surmounted the surges, they turned back, not however making the end of their movement coincide with its starting-point, nor completing a circle, but changing position a little, so as to produce a single spiral in their revolution.²⁰⁹ This²¹⁰ sea was inclined (as it seemed to Timarchus) at a little less than eight parts of the whole to the central and widest part of the surrounding space.²¹¹ **[590F]** It had two openings, receiving rivers of fire which emptied into it from opposite directions, so that a large extent of it was lashed and broken into foam and its greyness turned to white water.²¹²

'Timarchus watched all this with delight. But when he looked down, there came into view a huge round gulf, as though a sphere had been excavated from it,²¹³ very terrible and deep, full of a darkness that was not still

but turbulent²¹⁴ and continually welling up. From this were to be heard innumerable howls and groans of animals, the weeping of innumerable infants, the mingled mourning of men and women, and all kinds of noises and dim tumult rising out of the distant depths, [591A] by which he was greatly disturbed. After a time, someone (whom he could not see) spoke to him and said, "Timarchus, what do you wish to know?"

"Everything," he replied, "for what is not worthy of wonder?" "Well," said the voice, "we²¹⁵ have little to do with what is above; that belongs to other gods. But, if you wish, you can view the Portion of Persephone²¹⁶ which we administer, which is one of the four portions, and is as Styx delimits it."²¹⁷

"What is Styx?" asked Timarchus. "The road to Hades," the voice replied, "it starts on the opposite side²¹⁸ and the extreme tip of it divides the light. It stretches up, as you see, from Hades below, and the point where, in its revolution, it touches the light marks the boundary of the last division of the universe. [591B] There are four Principles of all things: the first is that of Life, the second that of Motion, the third that of Becoming, and the fourth that of Decay. The first is bonded to the second by the Monad in the Invisible; the second to the third by Intellect in the sun; and the third to the fourth by Nature in the moon.²¹⁹ A Fate, daughter of Necessity, sits holding the keys of each of these bonds: Atropos has the first, Clotho the second, and Lachesis the bond in the moon, where the turning-point of Becoming is found.²²⁰ [591C] The other islands have gods, but the moon belongs to terrestrial *daimones*,²²¹ and she avoids Styx by rising a little above it, though she is caught once in every 177 second measures.²²² As Styx approaches, the souls cry out in terror. Many slip, and Hades snatches them, while others are hauled up from below by the moon as they swim towards her. These are they for whom the end of Becoming has come opportunely. The foul and unclean are the exception: the moon does not let them come near, but flashes and roars at them horribly. They lament their fate, tumble away, and are carried down to another birth, as you see."

"But I don't see anything," [591D] said Timarchus, "except a lot of stars moving up and down around the gulf, others plunging into it, and others darting up again from below."

"Then," he said, "you see the *daimones* themselves, but you do not recognize them. This is how it is: every soul has its share of Intellect, there is none which is without reason or Intellect. But whatever part of the soul combines with flesh and passions is changed by pleasures and pains and becomes irrational. Not every soul is combined in the same way: Some are wholly sunk in the body, wholly mixed²²³ with it and entirely at the mercy of their passion throughout life. Others are mixed to some extent, [591E] but to some extent leave their purest element outside. This is not

dragged down by it, but floats as it were, keeping contact with the man by his head, like an attachment on top of <a net>²²⁴ sunk in deep water. The soul straightens itself around it, and it holds up as much of the soul as is obedient and not under the domination of the passions. The part submerged in the body²²⁵ is called the soul: the part that survives destruction is commonly called Intellect, and people believe it to be within themselves, just as they believe reflections to be *in* mirrors. Those who have the right idea of it, however, call it *daimon*, regarding it as outside themselves. The stars which seem to be being extinguished, Timarchus," he went on, "you should understand [591F] as souls being wholly submerged in the body; those that light up again, as it were, and appear from below, shaking off the mire of darkness and mist, as those making the voyage up from their bodies after death. Those that are moving around²²⁶ above are the *daimones* of men who are said to possess Intellect.²²⁷ Try to catch a sight of the bond in each of them, to see how it is joined to the soul."

'When he heard this, Timarchus (as he told us) paid closer attention and saw the stars tossing up and down, some more and some less violently, [592A] like the movement we see of corks marking nets in the sea. Some however described a confused and irregular spiral²²⁸ like a spindle as the thread is spun, being unable to steady their motion and keep to a straight path. The Voice explained that those who displayed a straight, controlled motion had souls made responsive to guidance thanks to good nurture and education, souls which therefore delivered their irrational element in not too stubborn or savage a condition. Those that swerved up and down in an irregular and confused way, as though jerked about [592B] at the end of a tether, were struggling against a personality rendered disobedient and uncontrollable by lack of education; sometimes they prevailed and guided their course to the right,²²⁹ sometimes they were deflected by passions and dragged along by misdeeds, only to try once again to resist and enforce their control. The bond, you see, was like a curb put on the irrational element in the soul; when the *daimon* pulls on it, it induces what is called repentance for misdeeds and shame for illicit and uncontrolled pleasures. This shame is a painful wound felt because the soul is from this point²³⁰ being checked by its controlling and ruling power, and it continues to be felt [592C] until this chastisement makes the soul accustomed and responsive to the rein, like a well-broken animal, needing no blow or pain, but quickly becoming aware of the *daimon* through symbols and signs.

"These souls," the Voice went on, "are guided and settled in the way they should be though slowly and late in the day. But it is from those which are responsive and obedient to their own *daimon* from the start, from birth in fact, that the race of prophets and divine men comes. Among these, you have doubtless heard of the soul of Hermodorus of Clazomenae.²³¹

It used to leave his body completely, at night and by day, and wander far and wide returning again [592D] after encountering and witnessing many things done and said in distant places, until his wife betrayed him, and his enemies found the body, abandoned by the soul, in his house, and burnt it. This account however is not quite true: the soul did not depart from the body, it merely eased and loosened its bond to the *daimon*, and let the *daimon* travel and wander around, so that it could report back the many things it saw and heard in the world outside. Those who destroyed the body as Hermodorus slept are even now paying the penalty in Tartarus. You will know these things [592E] better, young man," the Voice continued, "two months from now. For the present, you may go."

'When the Voice had ceased, Timarchus said, he wanted to turn round and see who the speaker was. But he again felt a violent pain in his head, as though it was forcibly crushed, and he had no further understanding or sense of his situation. But after a little while he recovered consciousness and saw that he was lying in the cave of Trophonius, just by the entrance, where he had originally lain down.

23. 'Well, that is Timarchus' story. He died, as the Voice had said, two months after his return to Athens. [592F] We marvelled, and told Socrates; and he blamed us for not having told him about it while Timarchus was still alive, because he would have liked to hear it from him and question him in more detail.

'So, Theocritus, there is your myth and there is your argument. But maybe we should ask our guest to join our investigation for it is one that is very proper and fitting for godly men.'

'But,' said the stranger, 'why doesn't Epaminondas contribute his view, seeing that he has had the same training as we have?'

My father smiled. 'That is his personality, sir,' he said, 'taciturn and cautious in speech, but insatiable in learning and listening. Spintharus of Tarentum,²³² who spent quite a long time with him here, says that he never yet met any man of his time [593A] who knew more or said less. So tell us what you yourself think about what has been said.'

24. 'My opinion,' said Theanor, 'is that Timarchus' account should be dedicated to the god, as sacred and inviolable. But as to what Simmias has said on his own behalf, I should be surprised if any should disbelieve it, or be prepared to call swans, snakes, dogs, and horses 'sacred',²³³ without believing that there are men who are godly and loved by the gods – and that, though they think god to be 'lover of mankind' not 'lover of birds'. And just as a horse-lover [593B] does not take equal care of all the specimens of the same breed,²³⁴ but always singles out and selects one that is best, trains it by itself, fosters it, and specially cherishes it, so those above us put

their brand, as it were, on the best of the herd and think that these deserve some particular and special guidance, controlling them not by reins or halters but by reason through the medium of secret signs which are entirely unknown to the many and the common herd. After all, most dogs don't understand the hunter's signals, most horses don't understand the trainer's; only those who have learned immediately perceive the command that is being given by a casual whistle or a clacking of the tongue²³⁵ [593C] and easily come to order. Homer clearly understands the distinction we are making. He calls some prophets augurs and priests, while believing that others understand and are conscious of the talk of the gods themselves and so give warning of the future. He says:

"Then Priam's dear son Helenus understood

The plans the gods in counsel had approved";

and again

"For so I heard the voice of the immortal gods."²³⁶ The outside world perceives and knows the intention of kings and generals by beacons and proclamations and trumpet-calls, while to their loyal associates they declare it themselves. Similarly,²³⁷ the divine power [593D] converses directly with few men and rarely, while to the many it gives signs, out of which is constituted what is called 'divination'. The gods honour the lives of a few men whom they wish to make supremely blessed and truly godly; but souls which have done with Becoming²³⁸ are free from concern with the body and are left as it were to range free – these are, as Hesiod tells us,²³⁹ the *daimones* that take care of humans. Athletes who have given up training because of age are not altogether abandoned by the spirit of competitiveness and concern for the body; they enjoy seeing others training, they encourage them and run beside them. [593E] So those who have retired from the contests of life and, because of the excellence of their soul, have become *daimones*, do not altogether spurn the affairs, arguments, and enthusiasms of this world, but feel well-disposed to those in training for the same goal, and encourage and urge them on in their quest for virtue, when they see that their striving has brought them within touching distance of their hopes.

'The daemonic power, indeed, does not aid all and sundry. [593F] Think how spectators on shore watch in silence swimmers who are still out at sea and far from land, but, once they come close, run down and wade into the water, helping by hand and voice to bring them to safety. This...²⁴⁰ is the way of the daemonic power: it <leaves>²⁴¹ us, when we are swamped by circumstances, passing from body to body – from boat to boat, as it were – to struggle and suffer in our efforts to save ourselves by our own virtue and come safely into port. But if a soul has fought its long fight well and enthusiastically through countless births, and now, its cycle

complete, draws near the upper region, ever in danger [594A] and striving with much sweat to secure its landing²⁴² – then god does not grudge its *daimon* the chance to help it, but lets it do so if it so wishes; and one wishes to save one soul, and another another by cries of encouragement, and the soul can hear (for it is close by now) and is saved; or if it does not heed, and the *daimon* deserts it, it comes to no happy end.’

25. At the end of this speech, Epaminondas looked at me. ‘It’s nearly time for you to go to the gymnasium, Caphisias,’ he said, ‘and not desert your comrades. [594B] We will choose the time to break off this conversation, and then we will look after Theanor.’

‘Let’s do that,’ I said, ‘but here is Theocritus, wanting, I think, to have some talk with you, with Galaxidorus and myself present.’

‘Good luck to him,’ he said, ‘let him have it.’ He got up and led us out to the angle of the colonnade. We gathered round him, and tried to urge him to take part in the plan. He said that he was well aware of the day of the exiles’ return, and he and Gorgidas had made arrangements with their friends to meet the situation; but he would not kill any citizen without trial except in case of great necessity; [594C] moreover, it was right for the general population of Thebes that there should be some persons without responsibility or involvement in the affair, who could be less suspect to the people,²⁴³ and be known to have the highest moral grounds for their advice. We approved this. Epaminondas then returned to Simmias and the rest, while we²⁴⁴ went down to the gymnasium and met our friends. Wrestling with different partners, we were all able to ask questions, give explanations, and organize ourselves for the action. We saw Archias and Philippus²⁴⁵ also anoint themselves and go off to the dinner. Phyllidas, in fact, [594D] being afraid they might kill Amphitheus²⁴⁶ before we could act, had intercepted Archias as soon as he had returned from escorting Lysanoridas,²⁴⁷ and instilled into him some hope that the...²⁴⁸ woman with whom he was in love would be coming to the drinking party. He had thus persuaded him to relax and be comfortable with his usual companions in debauchery.

26. It was late now, and getting colder, and a wind had arisen. Most people therefore had gone home quickly. We²⁴⁹ fell in with Damoclidias,²⁵⁰ Pelopidas, and Theopompus²⁵¹ and took them along with us. Others did the same for others of the exiles; they had separated immediately [594E] after crossing Cithaeron,²⁵² and the stormy weather enabled them to wrap up and hide their faces, so as to pass through the city without fear. Some, as they entered the gate, had seen a flash of lightning on the right, unaccompanied by thunder.²⁵³ This was a good sign of safety and of glory: our actions would be famous, but free of danger.