What is a *Daimon* for Porphyry?

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Porphyry seems to have been the first to situate the particularly complex entity known as “demon” within a complete theological system. He takes his inspiration from Plotinus, who was himself strongly inspired by the Stoics, while remaining faithful to Plato.

**Before Porphyry**

In epic poems, in the *Homeric Hymns*, in tragedy, and in the Orphic poems, the term δαίμων frequently appears as a synonym of θεός; this connection between the two terms is also obvious in Porphyry. In epic poems, δαίμων can designate an indeterminate divine power that unleashes the wind on the sea, or that inspires reckless thoughts, a divinity linked to chance and fate. In the tragedians, one finds a representation of the δαίμων as a vengeful spirit. Finally, the term δαίμων could be considered as the posthumous title of some exceptional men.

In Plato, the term designates an entity intermediary between the gods and the world whose task it is to administer it, as in the myth told in the *Statesman*, or in the *Symposium*, between the gods and human beings. Particularly by means of oracles, the demon transmits the gods’ instructions to human beings; they also convey the prayers of human beings up to the gods. We can therefore understand why Eros appears as the ideal intermediary, between the gods and human beings, between human beings in the context of amorous relations,

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* I would like to thank Michael Chase for translating this article into English.

1 For systematic references, see Timotin (2012). This book was very useful to me.

2 Odyssey XIX 201; XII 169.

3 Iliad IX 650.

4 Odyssey XVIII 256; XIX 129.

5 Euripides, *Orestes* 1545.

6 Aeschylus, *Persians* 619–621 in particular.

7 In the myth of the races, Hesiod (Works and days 121–126) grants the men of the Golden Age the title of δαίμονες. See Plato’s adaptation of this myth in Republic iii 415a–c.


9 Plato, *Symposium*, 203a–e.
and finally within the human being, between the body and the soul. To this process of mediation one may connect the assimilation, in the human soul, of the intellect to a δαίμων, for the intellect is the activity that makes possible the establishment of a link between the divine and the human being, assimilated to a celestial plant,\textsuperscript{10} whose roots are in the head. Also associated with this δαίμων is the notion of happiness, called εὐδαιμονία in ancient Greek, literally “whose δαίμων (the intellect) is in a good shape.” Finally, the demonic sign, that divine voice that prevents Socrates from acting in certain circumstances, is connected with this intermediary.\textsuperscript{11}

In the \textit{Epinomis},\textsuperscript{12} a treatise attributed to Plato but which is not by him, one finds the first attempt to establish a hierarchy among divine beings in which the δαίμονες find their place. The general thesis defended by the author of the \textit{Epinomis} is the following: philosophy is identified with astronomy, which is defined as the science of the heavenly bodies, considered as the highest divine beings, to which, moreover, a cult must be rendered. In this context, demons are situated between the visible gods, that is the stars, and human beings. They are made of either ether or air.\textsuperscript{13} If we believe Plutarch,\textsuperscript{14} moreover, Xenocrates, second head of the older Academy, considered demons to be intermediary beings in the manner of the \textit{Symposium}, but associated them with the isosceles triangle, in reference to the \textit{Timaeus}.\textsuperscript{15}

With the renewal of Platonism at the beginning on the Roman Empire, which can be defined as a rejection of the aristotelianised and stoicised interpretation of Plato promoted by the New Academy, demonology assumes considerable importance. For Philo of Alexandria,\textsuperscript{16} the entire universe is provided with souls, and the souls in the air are precisely the angels of which \textit{Genesis}