

[Pronunciation](#)[Spellings](#)[Etymology](#)[Quotations](#)[Date chart](#)

1. a. In ancient Greek mythology (= *δαίμων*): A supernatural being of a nature intermediate between that of gods and men; an inferior divinity, spirit, genius (including the souls or ghosts of deceased persons, *esp.* deified heroes). Often written *dæmon* for distinction from sense 2. **1569** [J. SANDFORD](#) tr. Agrippa Van. *Artes* 2 Grammarians..doo expounde this woord Dæmon, that is a Spirite, as if it were *Sapiens*, that is, Wise. **1587** [GOLDING](#) *De Mornay* xix. 303 And vnto Cratylus again [Plato] saith, when the good man departeth this world..hee becommeth a Dæmon. **1638** [MEDE](#) *Gt. Apost.* iii. Wks. (1672) III. 627 et seq. **1680** [H. MORE](#) *Apocal. Apoc.* 252 Dæmons according to the Greek idiom, signify either Angels, or the Souls of men, any Spirits out of Terrestrial bodies, the Souls of Saints, and Spirits of Angels. **1774** [J. BRYANT](#) *Mythol.* I. 52 Subordinate dæmons, which they supposed to be emanations and derivatives from their chief Deity. **1846** [GROTE](#) *Greece* I. ii. (1862) I. 58 In Homer, there is scarcely any distinction between gods and dæmons.

b. Sometimes, particularly, An attendant, ministering, or indwelling spirit; a genius.

(Chiefly in references to the so-called ‘dæmon of Socrates’. Socrates himself claimed to be guided, not by a *δαίμων* or *daemon*, but by a *δαίμωνιον*, *divinum quiddam* (Cicero), a certain divine principle or agency, an inward monitor or oracle. It was his accusers who represented this as a personal *daemon*, and the same was done by the Christian Fathers (under the influence of sense 2), whence the English use of the word, as in the quotations. See tr. *Zeller's Socrates* iv. 73; Riddell, *Apology of Plato*, Appendix A.)

1387 [TREVISA](#) *Higden* III. 279 We haveþ i-learned of Socrates, þat was alway tendaut to a spirit þat was i-cleped demon. **1603** [HOLLAND](#) *Plutarch's Mor.* 1222 The soule..that obeieth not nor hearkeneth to her owne familiar and proper dæmon. **1606** [SHAKES.](#) *Ant. & Cl.* II. iii. 19 O Anthony!..Thy Dæmon, that thy spirit which keepes thee, is Noble, Couragious, high vnmatchable. **1758** [HOME](#) *Agis* 11, Inspiration, The guardian god, the demon of the mind, Thus often presses on the human breast. **1768-74** [TUCKER](#) *Lt. Nat.* (1852) I. 222 If the moral sense does not check, if the demon does not warn. **1865** [LECKY](#) *Ration.* (1878) I. 378 *note*, Minucius Felix thought the dæmon of Socrates was a devil.

2. An evil spirit. **a.** (Representing *δαίμωνιον* of the LXX and N.T. (rarely *δαίμων*); in Vulgate *daemonium*, *daemon*). Applied to the idols or gods of the heathen, and to the ‘evil’ or ‘unclean spirits’ by which demoniacs were possessed or actuated.

A Jewish application of the Greek word, anterior to Christianity. *Δαίμονια* is used several times by the LXX to render *shēdīm* ‘lords, idols’, and *šē-ērīm* ‘hairy ones’ (satyrs or he-goats), the latter also rendered *μάταια* ‘vain things’. It is also frequent in the Apocrypha (*esp.* in Tobit), and in the N.T., where in one instance (Matt. viii. 31) *δαίμονες* occurs in same sense. In the Vulgate generally rendered *daemonium*, pl. *-ia*, but once in O.T. (Lev. xvii. 7), and in 10 places in N.T. (8 in St. Matthew) *daemon*, pl. *-es*. These words are indiscriminately translated *deofol* in the Ags. Gospels, *feend* or *deuil* in Wyclif, and in all the 16-17th c. versions *devil*; the Revisers of 1881-5 substitute *demons* in Deut. and Psalms, but in the N.T. retain *devil*, *-s*, in the text, with the literal translation *demon*, *-s*, in the margin. Quite distinct from this is the word properly translated ‘Devil’, *διάβολος*, which is not used in the plural. It is owing to this substitution of *devil* in the Bible versions, that *demon* is not found so early in this, as in the popular sense b, which arose out of this identification.

1706 [PHILLIPS](#) (ed. Kersey), *Demon*..in Holy Scripture, the Word is always taken for the Devil or a Bad Genius. **1727-51** [CHAMBERS](#) *Cycl.*, *Dæmoniac* is applied to a person possessed with a spirit or dæmon. **1767** [T. HUTCHINSON](#) *Hist. Mass.* II. i. 16 A young woman..supposed to be possessed with dæmons. **1865** [MOZLEY](#) *Mirac.* 201 *note*, The relation in which these persons stood to dæmons and evil spirits. **1881** N. T. (R. V.) *John* x. 20 He hath a devil [*marg.* Gr. demon] and is mad; why hear ye him? **1885** O. T. (R. V.) *Deut.* xxxii. 17 They sacrificed unto demons, which were no God.—*Ps.* cvi. 37.

b. In general current use: An evil spirit; a malignant being of superhuman nature; a devil.

[**1398** [TREVISA](#) *Barth. De P.R.* II. xix. (1495) 45 For Demon is to vnderstonde knowynge And the deuyll hyghte soo for sharpnesse..of kyndely wytte.] **a1400** *Cov. Myst.* (Shaks. Soc.) 399

Blow flamys of fer to make hem to brenne, Mak redy ageyn we com to this demon. **1599** [SHAKES.](#) *Hen. V*, II. ii. 121 If that same Dæmon that hath gull'd thee thus, Should with his Lyon-gate walke the whole world. **1699** [W. DAMPIER](#) *Voy.* II. III. iv. 32 [They] fired their Guns to kill the old Dæmon that they say inhabits there to disturb poor Seamen. **1782** [PRIESTLEY](#) *Corrupt. Chr.* I. I. 8 A malignant dæmon had brought [them] into his power. **1813** [SCOTT](#) *Trierm.* II. Concl. vii, But wouldst thou bid the demons fly Like mist before the dawning sky. **1865** [WRIGHT](#) *Hist. Caricat.* iv. (1875) 69 The three special characteristics of mediæval demons were horns, hoofs..and tails.

c. Applied to a person (animal or agency personified), of malignant, cruel, terrible, or destructive nature, or of hideous appearance. (Cf. *devil*.)

1614 [B. JONSON](#) *Barth. Fair* III. v. Wks. (Rtldg.) 322/2 'A caveat against cut-purses!' ..I' faith, I would fain see that demon, your cut-purse you talk of. **1821** [T. G. WAINEWRIGHT](#) in *Ess. & Crit.* (1880) 127 The grim demon of a bull-dog who interrupts the cat. **1822** [SCOTT](#) *Pirate* xl, The Boatswain used to be staunch enough, and so is Goffe, though an incarnate demon. **1829** [CARLYLE](#) *Misc.* (1857) II. 4 The Tartar Khan, with his shaggy demons of the wilderness.

d. *fig.* An evil passion or agency personified. *spec.* an alcoholic drink. Also *attrib.*
1712 [ADDISON](#) *Spect* No. 387 ¶11 Melancholy is a kind of Demon that haunts our Island. **1754** [CHATHAM](#) *Lett. Nephew* v. 39 Beware..of Anger, that dæmon, that destroyer of our peace. **1809** [N. PINKNEY](#) *Trav. France* 86 The dæmon of anarchy has here raised a superb trophy on a monument of ruins. **1884** in *Africana Notes & News* (1961) 295 A good many of them would have..made their mark in the musical history of this country, had it not been for the demon—drink. **1887** [see [METHEGLIN](#)]. **a1895** *Mod.* Led astray by the demon of intemperance. **1922** [JOYCE](#) *Ulysses* 348 Had her father only avoided the clutches of the demon drink. **1936** [MENCKEN](#) *Amer. Lang.* (ed. 4) vi. 244 An Englishman..never uses *rum* in the generic sense that it has acquired in the United States, and knows nothing of *rum-hounds*..the *rum-trade*, and the *rum-evil*, or of the *Demon Rum*. **1948** [PARTRIDGE](#) *Dict. Forces' Slang* 54 *Demon vino*, Italian wine of the cheaper sort.

e. Applied to a being of superhuman or 'diabolical' energy, skill, etc. (cf. 3a *spec.*); also to an action, etc.

1876 *Coursing Calendar* 21 A demon of a hare got up for Rose and Bar Girl. *Ibid.* 315 It was hard lines indeed for Mr. Watson to meet with such a demon of a hare for the decider. **1899** *Westm. Gaz.* 6 Feb. 3/1 He is a demon of accuracy. **1961** *Times* 4 July 11/4 'Demon' services were, by custom, reserved for male opponents.

f. *Cards.* (Also *Demon Patience*.) A simple, one-pack patience game, which rarely comes out. Also *Racing Demon*, *Demon* adapted for several players, each with his own pack, but played in competition.

1893 [M. W. JONES](#) *Games of Patience* 3rd Ser. ix. 19 *Demon Patience*. **1900** 'L. HOFFMANN' *Patience Games* 36 The *Demon*. **1918** [H. G. WELLS](#) *Joan & Peter* xi. 388 A new card game, *Demon Patience*, a scrambling sort of game in which you piled on aces in the middle. **1919** [K. MANSFIELD](#) *Lett.* (1928) I. 245 You know how, when we get hungry, we are at last even unable to play *Demon* for wanting the hash-hammer to sound. **1936** 'P. QUENTIN' *Puzzle for Fools* xii. 95, I began to wonder whether she stole cards from a concealed pack... Her demon came out three times running. **1948** [G. GREENE](#) *Heart of Matter* I. III. i. 84 I've never played cards—except *demon*..and that's a patience.

3. *attrib.* and *Comb.* a. appositive (= that is a demon), as *demon-companion*, *-god*, *-hag*, *-king*, *-lover*, *-mole*, *-snake*; *spec.* applied *colloq.* to one who seems more than human in the rapidity, certainty, destructiveness, etc. of his play or performance, as a *demon bowler* at cricket; **demon star**, Algol [Arab., the demon: see [GHOUL](#)], the star β Persei. b. simple attrib.

and attrib. comb. (of, belonging, or relating to a demon or demons), as *demon altar*, *-doctrine*, *herd*, *-land*, *life*, *-trap*, *-ship*, *-worship*; **demon-bird** = [DEVIL-BIRD](#); **demon-kind** [after *mankind*], the nature of demons; the race of demons; also **c. demon-like** adj. **d.** instrumental, etc., as *demon-infested*, *-scooped*, *-stricken*.

1863 [W. PHILLIPS](#) *Speeches* iv. 57 The *demon altar of our land.

1840 [J. FORBES](#) *11 Years in Ceylon* (1841) 353, I first heard the wild and wailing cry of the gaulawa, or *demon-bird.

1883 *Harper's Mag.* Nov. 900/1 We do not want our boys..*demon bowlers.

1814 [BYRON](#) *Corsair* II. iv, Some Afrit sprite, Whose *demon death-blow left no hope for fight.

1677 [GALE](#) *Crt. Gentiles* III. 177 Al those *demon-doctrines..introduced by Antichrist and his Sectators.

1638 [MEDE](#) *Gt. Apost.* vi. Wks. (1672) III. 635 A worshipper of *Dæmon-gods.

1814 *Prophetess* III. iv, Like the *demon-hags of Tartarus.

1774 [J. BRYANT](#) *Mythol.* I. 141 Among all the *dæmon herd what one is there of a form..so odious..as Priapus.

1933 [W. DE LA MARE](#) *Fleeting* 169 *Demon-infested rank morass.

1890 [E. H. BARKER](#) *Wayfaring in Fr.* 15 That small *demon-insect, the mosquito.

1904 [BEERBOHM](#) *Around Theatres* (1953) II. 50 In the 'seventies pantomime was flourishing still. *Demon King and Fairy Queen..were familiar. **1954** ['N. BLAKE'](#) *Whisper in Gloom* II. xi. 148 Alec Gray is..a cheap snake, a proper young Demon King.

1857 *Tait's Mag.* XXIV. 378 The sentences, on all mankind and *demonkind.

1859 [G. WILSON](#) *Life E. Forbes* i. 29 Grim or gentle visitants from *Demonland or Fairyland.

1851 [MAYNE REID](#) *Scalp. Hunt.* xi. 82 They seem endowed with *demon life.

1822 [E. NATHAN](#) *Langreath* III. 416 *Demon-like horrors.

1797 [COLERIDGE](#) *Kubla Khan* 16 Woman wailing for her *demon-lover.

1821 [KEATS](#) *Isabel* xlv, And let his spirit, like a *demon-mole, Work through the clayey soil and gravel hard.

1924 [R. CAMPBELL](#) *Flaming Terrapin* iii. 41 Sleep was a long dark tunnel *demon-scooped Out of the Night's black rock.

1895 *Funk's Standard Dict.*, *Demon star. **1909** *Daily Chron.* 1 Sept. 7/3 Algol, the Demon Star.

1936 *Discovery* June 187/2 The newly-made spirit-doctors proceed to exorcise the *pepo*..from the scores of *demon-stricken people.

1677 [GALE](#) *Crt. Gentiles* III. 56 The *Demon-theology..was brought into the Christian Church

first by the Gnostics.

Ibid., By this their *demon-worship.

[^top](#)