Plato's Philosophy in Interdisciplinary Context

Souls and bodies in the *Epinomis*[1]

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Some conjectures about the context: the problem of *phronesis*

In the very first lines of the late Platonic dialogue the *Epinomis* there is one word, mentioned twice. The word is *phronesis* – once in the genitive case, and once in the accusative case (973 a 1-5). ΚΛ. Πρὸς μὲν τὸ τῆς ὁμολογίας ἥκομεν ἅπαντες ὀρθῶς, ὦ ξένε, τρεῖς ὄντες, ἐγὼ καὶ σὺ καὶ Μέγιλλος ὅδε, τὸ τῆς φρονήσεως ἐπισκεψόμενοι τίνι ποτὲ χρὴ λόγῳ διεξελθεῖν, ὃ τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἕξιν φαμέν, ὅταν διανοηθῇ, κάλλιστ' ἔχειν ποιεῖν πρὸς φρόνησιν ὅσην δυνατὸν ἀνθρώπῳ σχεῖν.

This is not an instance of bad style or carelessness of the author, whoever he might be. The repetition is done on purpose – the reader has to notice from the very beginning that the dialogue is about *phronesis*, which is different both from wisdom *(sophia)* and practically applicable reasoning *(sophrosyne)*. In this paper, I will argue that this redundance is philosophically significant as it gives us a clue that the contextual translation of *phronesis* in some crucial places of the dialogue is not "wisdom" but "understanding." Moreover, understanding is understood not only and solely in the strict epistemological sense of present day usage, but also and primarily as the seed of the dianoetical virtue, which plays such an

[1] The English translation all over the text is the one by Richard D. McKirahan, Jr. in *Plato: Complete Works* (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997). Helpful comments on this paper were made by Associated Prof. Svetla Slaveva-Griffin, Florida State University and Hristo Todorov PhD candidate, University of Sofia.

important role in the ethical treatises of Aristotle. The focus here is the treating of the five bodies, through which the structure of the materially existing Whole is explained. This will be interpreted in light of the purpose, final end and audience to which the dialogue is addressed.

The debates about the authorship of the dialogue are well known. Still, I will allow myself a few remarks on the topic. The arguments and the counterarguments for attributing the dialogue to Plato and Philip are known[2], and less popular is the conjecture about the possible authorship of Aristotle. Since Werner Jaeger, many scholars have paid attention to the fact that all the members of the Academy had written dialogues. They had been obliged to do so by their tutor and master[3]. The direct fragments and the re-phrasings, the retellings and the indirect *testimonia* about the early writing of Aristotle are abundant. Aristotle had written poetry and his dialogues did not concede in respect of the prosaic refinement to any of the belletristic masterpieces of Plato[4].

On the other hand, we don't know anything about other possible writings of Philip. Neither *verbatim* quotations are extant, nor retellings. There is data about his highest erudition in mathematical astronomy and the tables of the correlation between the days in the calendar and the corresponding celestial phenomena, known as

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[2] The greatest defender of the hypothesis that Philip is the author of the dialogue is Leonardo Tarán (1975). However, in the debates concerning the authorship my sympathies are on the side of É. Des Places in his commentary to the French translation (1956, 97-105). The stylometric analysis also gives strength to this thesis: see the chapter of Leonard Brandwood 'Stylometry and chronology' in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. (1995, 90-120). Elegant irony for those, who doubt the authorship of Plato, in the chapter, dedicated to Plato's astronomy in D.R. Dick's *Early Greek Astronomy to Aristotle*, 1970. A third solution: Brisson, Luc. Epinomis : authenticity and authorship, 2005. According to Luc Brisson (2005 and 2012) the dialogue is written neither by Plato, nor by Philip.

[3] Jaeger, Werner, *Aristoteles. Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung* (Berlin, 1923), 53-102.

[4] Cicero had mentioned this in the lost dialogue of his *Hortensius.* See Jaeger, op.cit., loc.cit.

parepegmatics[5]. Also, when speaking of mathematical astronomy and highly speculative and abstract mathematics, let us remember the passionate defense of van der Waerden: in the long passage, starting from 977 c to 979 d, the Dutch historian of (the philosophy of) mathematics sees the genius of a brilliant mathematician, inventor of abstract algebra, talented writer and fascinating philosopher. No one could compete with Plato as an embodiment and mingling of all these gifts, hence, according to van der Waerden, Plato is the author of the dialogue[6].

But there is something even more important. The usual attribution of the dialogue to the hand of Philip and moreover the dating of the dialogue *Epinomis* in the decades *after* the death of Plato fail to explain the author's *motive* for composing it[7]. Why was this dialogue written, as sometimes has been suggested, by Philip after Plato's death, in imitation of his literary style, either on the main ground of his philosophical convictions or as a continuation or even as a final book in the *Laws*?

This question is not new. A possible and plausible answer to it was proposed long ago by Werner Jaeger again: many of the dialogues of the members of the Academy were created not only so that Plato's students could exercise themselves in formal, literary exposition of the philosophical content of their Tutor's teachings, but also to reply to a great adversary. It is worth insisting on the latter: the greatest rival of the Academy and personally of Plato in the last two decades of his life was not anyone from the sophists. The Sophists had been traveling intellectuals, the best of them were no longer on the scene of life and, if not all of them, at least some of them were good philosophers.

The greatest rival to Plato and the Academy was Isocrates and his rhetorical school[8]. It should be reminded that both Plato and

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[5] Dick, D.R., *Early Greek Astronomy to Aristotle* (New York: Ithaca, 1970) 84-85.

[6] Van der Waerden 1956, S. 256-262.

[7] Hans-Joachim Krämer. Philippos von Opus und die "Epinomis". *Geschichte der Griechischen Philiosophie*, vol. 3, S. 103-120.

[8] Myles Burnyeat qualifies Isocrates as the arch-rival in "Plato on Why Mathematics is Good for the Soul", op.cit., p. 3 and the following. For the

Isocrates had established their schools almost in one and the same year: they competed for the attraction of pupils (and their taxes), and for the attention of the broader public in the polis. Indeed, they competed for almost forty years and, in this competition, Isocrates won when it came to immediate success and material income. Isocrates had approximately 5 times more students than Plato, whereas Plato had succeeded to preserve a limited number of faithful students from aristocratic origin and with more elevated knowledge.

The great competition between the two schools probably reached its extreme in the year 355 BC, when Isocrates published his enormous auto-apology *Antidosis*, in which he re-stated in a neat and systematic form his ideology about general education, higher education as he saw it and the respective disciplines in the academic curriculum. The essence of the challenge he had posed to the Academy is formulated in several sections of the speech, beginning from section 261 till the end, culminating in sections 270 and especially 271. There, the *credo* of his educational practices and teachings is confessed: human nature is incapable of real knowledge and cognition[9].

I have presented a sufficient account and advice on these matters. Concerning wisdom (sophia) and philosophy (philosophia), it would not be fitting for someone pleading about other issues to speak about these terms, since they have nothing to do with all other activities, but since I am on trial for just such matters and am claiming that what some people call ''philosophy'' is not really that at all, it is appropriate for me to define it and to show you what it is, when rightly understood.

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opposite interpretation, exposing the similarities between Plato and Isocrates see the papers of Mauro Tulli and Maddalena Valloza in this volume.

[9] The translation in English is the one by Yun Lee Too in *The Oratory of Classical Greece*. Series editor Michael Gagarin. *Isocrates*. Translated by David C. Mirhady and Yun Lee Too. University of Texas Press, Austin, 2000. I am indebted also to the comments and the introductions to the different speeches in the Bulgarian translation, made by Violetta Gerdjikova and Nikolai Sharankov in the edition *Изократ. Речи*. 2008, Колекция Архетип. Фондация за българска литература. But the ironic comments in respect of Isocrates are entirely my responsibility.

[271] I understand it quite simply. Since human nature cannot attain knowledge that would enable us to know what we must say or do, after this I think that the wise (sophoi) are those who have the ability to reach the best opinions (doxai) most of the time, and philosophers are those who spend time acquiring such an intelligence as quickly as possible.

The challenge of Isocrates is irritating in two aspects. It is not only agnostic from an epistemic point of view, and thus worse than any similar statement expressed by any sophist, but it also implies a miserable conception of human nature. In contrast to it, in my view, the majority of the sophists, with all their individualism and appraisal of the individual abilities, were much preferable as philosophers, at least as people to know, judge and understand.

The challenge of Isocrates with his mediocre vindication of the limited capacities or even the entire absence of capacities of every human being to reach real cognition and understanding what is really important, demanded a response. This debasement of human nature provoked several dialogues in the Academy in the last 8 years of the life of Plato. Aristotle composed at least *ten* (!) dialogues, still being a member of the Academy. Of course, they were not meant to be entirely and exclusively polemical. Two of them are especially instructive. One of them is *De philosophia*, the other is *Protrepticos*[10]. From this perspective the question *who exactly wrote* the *Epinomis* – Plato, Philip or Aristotle - becomes less important than the question *whether it was really written in the Academy in Plato's last years*.

The *Epinomis* might also be read as a response to the challenge. There are several places in the *Epinomis* in which the phrase "human nature" is explicitly mentioned and germane (e.g. in 977 c2 the *understanding* of humans is bounded up with the ability to conceive of number).

[10] Editions of the fragments of the early writings by Aristotle: in the books by Rabinowitz, Ross, Rose, Düring and Untersteiner in the bibliography.

Understanding, *possible* for everyone

The *Epinomis* proposes a lighter version of almost all Platonic views, exposed in the longer (and the usually regarded as "more representative") dialogues, written in Plato's golden decades. Maybe this was a kind of concession: on the one hand, the great *chef d'oeuvres* were too lengthy; on the other hand, they presupposed a very elitist degree of high learning and high education. In order fully to comprehend them some baby-maths will not suffice, as Burnyeat puts it, or correspondingly, some baby-science[11]. On the contrary, the meticulous study of the mathematical disciplines included in the curriculum for the future rulers of the *Republic* is meant to last for decades. The real understanding of the mathematical subtleties, presented in the *Timaeus*, the *Theaetetus* and the *Republic*, is attainable only by people who have spent years (or rather and more realistically decades) for the proper acquisition of knowledge in mathematical astronomy, mathematical harmonics (different from the Pythagorean one), arithmetic, geometry and stereometry.

On the other extreme is total capitulation in the estimation of the rational capacities of the human nature: we as human beings are incapable to understand anything – the position advocated and quite well sold by Isocrates and his disciples.

Here the *Epinomis* comes as a moderate mean between the two irreconcilable extremities. It offers a shorter version of almost all views of the *chef d'oeuvres* dialogues - in respect of length and, in respect of its content, it is a comprehensible description of important views which a human being may hold. The question which inspires the conversion between the Athenian guest and Clinias (and the silent Megillus, who never utters a word) is:

[11] Burnyeat, Myles. 2000. Plato on Why Mathematics is Good for the Soul. In : *Proceedings of the British Academy*, v. 103, ed. Timothy Smiley, p. 4.

What a mortal man must learn in order to be wise?[12] (973b).

he final consolation is sketched thus: *Those who strive to live as nobly as they can during their life and at the end to die a noble death have a good hope of attaining after they die everything for which they have striven* (973 c).

The whole of the dialogue is a kind of exposition of knowledge and understanding, suggesting to the reader that the understanding *phronesis* is given in and attainable as a *potentiality in every human being* (974b). However, only the effort to actualize this capacity leads the very few human beings who successively realize it to accomplish and develop real wisdom. The dialogue starts from the difficulties, endangering the conception of the fetus in the womb, passing through the structure of the Whole and the visible and invisible inhabitants in its realm, adding new sketches to the explanation of the moving of the celestial *dynameis*, etc., and finishing with the trip to the Isles of the Blest after physical death (992b-c). A thin red line throughout the dialogue reminds the reader that this will happen only to the wisest, who have converted their potential *phronesis* into real wisdom. Still, the narration of the Athenian is not burdened with complicated logical arguments or difficult demonstrations provided by high-flying philosophical reasoning or some of the mathematical disciplines, as happens at crucial points of the *chef d óeuvres* dialogues. The *Epinomis* implies them, of course, and even relies on them, but does not enter into the details and the highly problematic nature of the philosophical questions in some of them.

The conceptual background of the previous dialogues

There are several hints and suggestions both in the *Laws* and in the *Epinomis* that, concerning composition, literary form, philosophical content and time of appearance, the *Epinomis* comes

[12] All the quotations from the *Epinomis* in the paper are from the translation of Richard McKirahan, Jr.

as, so to say, the final book of the *Laws*[13]. For instance, an important one is the exclamation of Clinias:

I hope that this is the goal of your laws, that people will sing hymns to the gods and live purer lives, and then meet with the end that is at once best and finest. (980b)

Some scholars are disappointed that the *Epinomis "*dramatically fails" to fulfill the promise for the coronation of the laws and thence comes, according to them, one of the strongest proofs that the dialogue was authored by Philip. This discrepancy is not so striking, because in the Platonic corpus there are also other examples of such compositional interrelations between two dialogues. One dialogue starts *as if* on the following day or a few days after a previous conversation. Despite these compositional devices, the internal logic of the new dialogue and its problematic topics deviate in a new direction, quite different from the ones in the preceding work. Such examples are seen in the beginning of the *Sophist* (216a) and the *Timaeus (17a),* in which the collocutors continue the talk from the previous day—*as if* they have reconvened only and solely to summarize the previous talk—and then a new problem emerges. This is one of the literary techniques through which Plato weaves the intrinsic connections between the dialogues, preserving at the same time their value and significance as separate texts. The same compositional "*yesterday"* comes as the very first word in the *Republic* (327a), but this time with a different literary and philosophical purpose.

What is more impressive in the *Epinomis* is not this undeniable connection with the *Laws* and the exaggerated failure to account for something important, although the conversation happens *as if* on the following day. More remarkable is the general recapitulation of

[13] The place is the same, the *dramatis personae* are the same, and the conversation continues as if on the following day(s).

ontological and theological statements, which are fundamental in the previous dialogues. There is a short, but important, micro dialogue-precision between Clinias and the Athenian guest (between 979d and 981 b) in which the chief concern of the dialogue is not the finalization of the *Laws*, but the ambition to sketch a decent account of the most important issues in theology and theogony and man's proper conduct, in order for his life to be pious and wise. After having asked for help in his prayer, the Athenian reveals:

Since people in the past have failed badly in describing the generation of gods and living things, it appears that I must begin by constructing an account based on my previous one, taking up again my attack on impious accounts, and declaring that there are gods who care for all things, great and small, who are inexorable in matters of justice. I suppose you remember, Clinias, since you have received a written record. What we said then was quite true. The most important point was that as a whole, soul is older than any body. Do you recall? You surely must remember. For what is superior, older and more godlike is obviously so in relation to what is inferior, younger and less honorable, and what rules or leads is in every way older than what is ruled or led. (980c-981 b)

So, in regards to the general philosophical framework, the *Epinomis* seems more strongly tied in the first place with the *Timaeus* and the *Republic*, and also with the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, than solely and exclusively with the *Laws*. It is worth reading it more as the final word of Plato, the solemn re-affirmation of the ontology and theology of the dialogues from the middle period, than as a mere finalization of the *Laws*.

The structure of the "*beautiful bodies*" in the *Timaeus* and the *Epinomis*

In respect of the material structure of the Whole, the *Epinomis* inherits, first, three great ontological axioms from the previously mentioned works, mainly from the *Timaeus*. The fundamental dichotomy between the most divine entity, the soul of the cosmos, and the body of the cosmos, is the first aspect of this heritage; the second one is the praise for the perfect unity between soul and body, which every living creature imitates, following the pattern of the

beautiful symmetry between them on the cosmic level. This conjunction is needed in order for every living being to be perfect, harmonious and healthy. The soul and the body are initially distinct, but at a certain moment they become inseparable in the created cosmos (36d-e). These two ontological pillars in the *Timaeus* are erected again in the *Epinomis* as the most solid basis in the quoted passage above. The third axiom, taken from the *Timaeus*, and restated in the *Epinomi,s* is the number of the constructive bodies. There are five elemental and stereometric bodies, accordingly to the *eikos logos* (981b3).

But here important questions are raised. Are these bodies really corporeal? When Plato speaks of bodies, sometimes he means the bodiless bodies - the intelligible mathematical plains and solid figures, which exist incorporeally in the ideal realm of mathematics and in the intellects of people who think about them. Of course, there are other corporeal bodies and all of them are in the genus of the body of the cosmos created by the Demiurge in the *Timaeus*. The primarily ontological qualities of this generic body of the cosmos are three: first, it is corporeal; second, it is visible; and third, it is tangible. (31 b, repeated several times after that in the Timaeus' monologue).

The *Epinomis* is on the same conceptual track. The first entity, the soul, according to the Athenian guest, is older and invisible, intelligent and intelligible; it shares memory (here remains unspecified with whom or what, but probably with the gods and the invisible *daimones*), and it is capable of making calculations.

Immediately afterwards, the Athenian guest switches to the five physical elements: fire, water, air, earth and ether. All living creatures reach perfection with one of these bodies ruling or dominating in their material compositions. (981c6-8)

The living creatures, whose lives are bound to the earth, are humans, animals, reptiles and plants. They all are genera of living creatures, in the composition of which all the material-corporeal ingredients are used, but under the domination of the earth in the mixture. (981d6)

Next in the enumeration of the Athenian guest come the creatures, in whose composition fire dominates, but also they contain some portions of earth and air, and some miniscule particles of the other

basic ingredients. The creatures with this type of corporeal composition are part of the entity of becoming, perceptible and visible. In conformity with the *Timaeus,* but also stepping a little bit aside, the Athenian guest determines that these are the celestial living beings in the divine genus of the stars. This refers to the stars, to the stellar constellations, whereas the movement of the planets requires and correspondingly receives another explanation – both in the *Timaeus,* and in the *Epinomis.* These divine and living celestial entitiess – the fixed stars and their constellations—possess the most beautiful kind of body and are endowed with the most blissful and best soul. (981e2-6). The celestial bodies have a twofold ontological nature, which raises the dilemma of whether they are either absolutely imperishable and immortal or, though not eternal in an absolute sense, have such an eternal duration (from the point of view of the mortals) of their lives.

The impact of the element which prevails in the composition on the movement of the different types of composite things is also predictable for a reader familiar with the *Timaeus*. Earth impacts chaos and lack of order, and fire leads to regularity. Further, the lack of order in movement is a sign for deprivation of reason and prevents moving creatures from understanding, from divine reasoning; it is a sign of belonging to the animal realm. By contrast, what moves in order is understanding, *phronimos*. The perfectly moving celestial bodies are *phronimoi.* The constant and unchangeable order in their movement attests that they are understanding. Again, this is consistent with what is said by Timaeus in the dialogue named after him. There is one more stable bridge, connecting the *Epinomis* with the core values and fundamentals of the ontology and theology of the emblematic dialogues. The celestial bodies possess reason (nous) and this absolute necessity in this cosmic order is guarded by the three Moirai (982 b-c), as the myth of Er narrates in the final book of the *Republic*.

However, there are striking differences between the dialogues in the aspect of the five bodies. We are familiar with the mathematical explanations of the stereometric structure of the four elements in the *Timaeus* or, to quote it properly, "*the four most beautiful bodies*"(53e). Step by step, angle by angle, triangle by triangle, the reader is instructed how they are built from right-angled triangles of

two sorts – one is an isosceles right-angled triangle, and the other is again right-angled, but the square built on one of its sides is twice as large as the square built on the other. The meticulous description of Timaeus (54d-55c) points to all the details in the construction of the four polyhedra: the tetrahedron, which a few passages later (in 56b) will be determined as the figure of fire, has four equilateral triangles as its faces; the octahedron (determined later as the figure of air), has eight equilateral triangles as faces; the icosahedron (assigned as the figure of water) – with twenty equilateral triangles as faces; and the cube of water has six squares as faces.

Suddenly, the detailed description stops and Timaeus says enigmatically that there is one more combination used by the god for the universal Whole in its artistic painting—a poetic metaphor (55c).

If we follow the description of the construction of "the four most beautiful bodies" and if we use the same language as Timaeus does, it will be very difficult to visualize his punctual explanations, because he speaks of plain and spatial angles and of the two main types, again, "the two most beautiful types of right-angled triangles". Nowadays, the students in mathematics in almost every university elegantly expose this content in more than 50 theorems about the Platonic *polyhedra*, the core of multifacial-solid stereometry. When we refer to this stereometrical beauty, we use a little bit more helpful language and concepts, developed by the mathematicians from Euclid onwards, which assist the visualization of these "beautiful bodies". There are tables and diagrams about the number of the vertices, edges and faces of these five stereometric figures, both in the good editions and translations of the dialogue, and in the respectable companions to the history of ancient philosophy. But still, when we read the text itself, we see that the same content is exposed in a language, which prevents immediate visualization. Timaeus describes these four most beautiful bodies with extremely speculative language. It is not difficult at all even for a beginner in stereometry to imagine a tetrahedron or a cube, but it is almost impossible *to see* in the internal vision of the mathematician the combination of one hundred and twenty initial triangles in twelve spatial angles, as the icosahedrons of the water is constructed!(55 b)

What about the fifth polyhedron? Why it was intentionally omitted? Isn't it beautiful, because, as mathematics since Euclid has

proved, there is one and only one other possible regular congruent polyhedron besides the four mentioned, and this one is the dodecahedron, which has twelve identical faces, which are equilateral pentagons? Isn't there some aesthetic arbitrariness in Plato's predilection for the right-angled triangles as the only type of beautiful triangles? What is wrong with the obtuse angles of the equilateral pentagon? Or is there a problem, arising from the old Pythagorean apocryphal teaching, according to which this plain figure is the immediate visualization of infinity? because of the equilateral pentagram which appears when the diagonals inside the pentagon connecting the non-neighboring angles? which then creates a new inscribed pentagon, in which a new pentagram may be drawn and so on endlessly ad infinitum?

And again, one final important question. If this is the stereometrical figure of the All, or of the Whole, and as the mathematicians since Euclid has proved, even though it perfectly exhausts any given sphere, better than any other regular polyhedron, how does this perfectly congruent dodecahedron correlate with the perfect sphere of the body of the cosmos, so much praised in many instances for its smoothness and evenness, for the conditions it creates for the incessant, regular and constant movement of the celestial sphere and the boundless running of time?

This final question may be posed as the most important one in a whole cluster of questions and objections which Aristotle raises in the final chapter 8 of book Gamma of the *De caelo*. Indeed, throughout books Gamma and Delta Aristotle is engaged with a critical analysis of the inaptness of the four elements, when conceived as polyhedra, as Plato suggests, to lead to the three pairs of physical qualities, that are so decisive for the explanation of nature, as Aristotle desires. Some of these criticisms are completely external to the intention, the logic and above all – the passion— of Plato to convince his pupils and readers of the beauty of the stereometric bodies, with the fascinating ratios in the numbers of their vertices, faces and edges. However, objections arise, especially in chapter 8 of book Gamma. Some of them concern the geometry of the plain figures; others – the stereometrical problem of the exhaustion of the sphere. Others are kinematical, and again – the traditional unsolvable qualitative problems. From what we read in

the beginning of the chapter in 306b3-14, we understand that Aristotle had serious doubts about the possibility of plain figures and solid bodies to filling the space entirely, without any void at all. Obviously, for him the notion that the dodecahedron is the figure which exhausts at maximum the sphere is not conceivable and acceptable. Hence, his cosmology, topology and definition of place were founded on a different basis: on conceptual triad of *peras, periehon and periehomenon*.

These questions most probably had been rigorously debated in the Academy, because Aristotle might have written some of the chapters of the *De caelo* while being a member of the school during the life-time of his tutor. These questions raised about the stereometrical philosophy of nature in Plato are very difficult. Some possible answers might be given if we read the mathematical and cosmological passages of the *Republic* as a counterpart to the stereometry and the cosmology of the *Timaeus*, but the *Epinomis* does not pose the questions at all. There is no stereometry and nothing about the structure of the five bodies is specified.

As regards the general mathematical issues, the Athenian guest is positive about the curriculum of the disciplines, which a mortal person has to study, in order to understand and to become wise (990c-991b). It is the following: to start at an early age with the comprehension of the nature of number, that is to say, arithmetic, and then to pass to geometry, and then to study stereometry and finally to pass to the harmonic and astronomy – this comes last in the course of mathematical education, but is of utmost importance. It is noteworthy that, from all the mathematical subtleties with which the careful reader is familiar from the previous dialogues, there is only one in the *Epinomis*: the sketch of the various proportions in the same passage.

Conclusion: the invisible inhabitants of the bodies

The *Epinomis* does not provide answers to any of the mentioned cosmological problems, but nevertheless the author of the dialogue insists that there are five bodies and that the ether exists not as a certain finest part of the air, as it is in the *Timaeus*(58d), but as one of the five primary bodies. Whoever might be the author, he was aware that the mathematical details in the structures of the polyhedra

are extremely speculative and elitist. Very few are the mortals who can reach high knowledge in this science. It should be stressed also that in the *Timaeus* and *Theaetetus*, not only the content but also the language used in the mathematical passages are extremely and intentionally difficult and intentionally avoid sense-perceptible visualization. Despite his admiration for the beauty of the right-angled triangles, Plato never coins and never uses, in the *Theaetetus* for example, some technical term (e. g. he could coin the term hypothenuse, but he didn't); rather, he refers to all sides of the figure with the remarkable word *dynamis*, and plays with this word and the related verb in a manner which makes the text horribly untranslatable. This same word *dynamis*, which in the *Epinomis* designates the planets-*dynameis*, plays a crucial role in the first philosophy of Aristotle, as we know.

The author of the *Epinomis* wanted every reader to be convinced of what every human could understand: there are five bodies and the ether exists as separate fifth element. Its proper place remains unspecified, but there are no segments in the Whole, occupied only and solely by one of the main bodies. All of them contain some particles of all the rest and one is dominating in the mixtures, which are heterogenous. Thus, the *Epinomis* holds a position at an equal distance from the spatial concept of the ether both in the *Timaeus* and in the *De caelo;* this anticipates the Aristotelian idea of the *symphyton pneuma*.

Instead of mathematical details, the author of the *Epinomis* aimed at the understanding-*phronesis* and the belief of the readers: there are spiritual-and-material invisible creatures everywhere in all these spheres of the cosmos.

The ether is used in the first place and as a primary source for their creation.

We may suppose that soul fashions living things out of it which (like the other kinds of living things) are for the most part characterized by that substance, but which also possess smaller amounts of the other kinds in order to bond them together. After ether, soul fashions a different kind of living things out of air, and a third out of water… it is plausible that soul filled the entire heaven

with living things, employing each according to its character, since all share in life. (984c)

In the hierarchy of living beings, these daimones are next immediately after the gods – the divine celestial deities. So, the Platonic corpus offers a very picturesque iconography of strange personalities and entities, which (will) have their place in the great religions of the Revelation in the following centuries. First, in the *Republic*, according to the myth of Er, there are dreadful men of fire, who prevent the most wicked souls from escaping from the terrible punishments beneath the earth and incarnating again in another physical body. These wild male creatures (616 a) might be regarded as the prototype of devils, and the opposite prototype of divine servants – the good ones are depicted in the *Epinomis*.

The *daimones*, made of ether and air, are wholly imperceptible and invisible. (984e) The demigods, made of water, are "*sometimes seen, sometimes hidden and invisible, provoking wonder through its dim appearance*" (985c).

This seems to be the greatest consolation of the *Epinomis*: we, the mortal human beings are not separated by an immense abyss from the gods. There are divine servants, helpers and messengers, who communicate and consult with the gods about us, who communicate between themselves in order to care for us, and who transmit the prophecies, dreams and mysterious inexplicable connections between some of the human beings in some mystical moments of life. This Platonic idea will have enormous influence in the next millennia - both in late antiquity and the Christian Platonism.

And the divine deeds of all these living, intelligent and sensitive assistants of the gods, shaped by the cosmic soul in all realms of the five beautiful bodies, really do occur, because:

They have a wonderful intelligence, being of kinds that learn quickly and have good memories, and we should say that they know all our thoughts and both love those of us who are noble and good and hate those who are extremely evil, since already with these kinds we are discussing beings that experience pain. (985a)

Text, interpretations and translations:

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