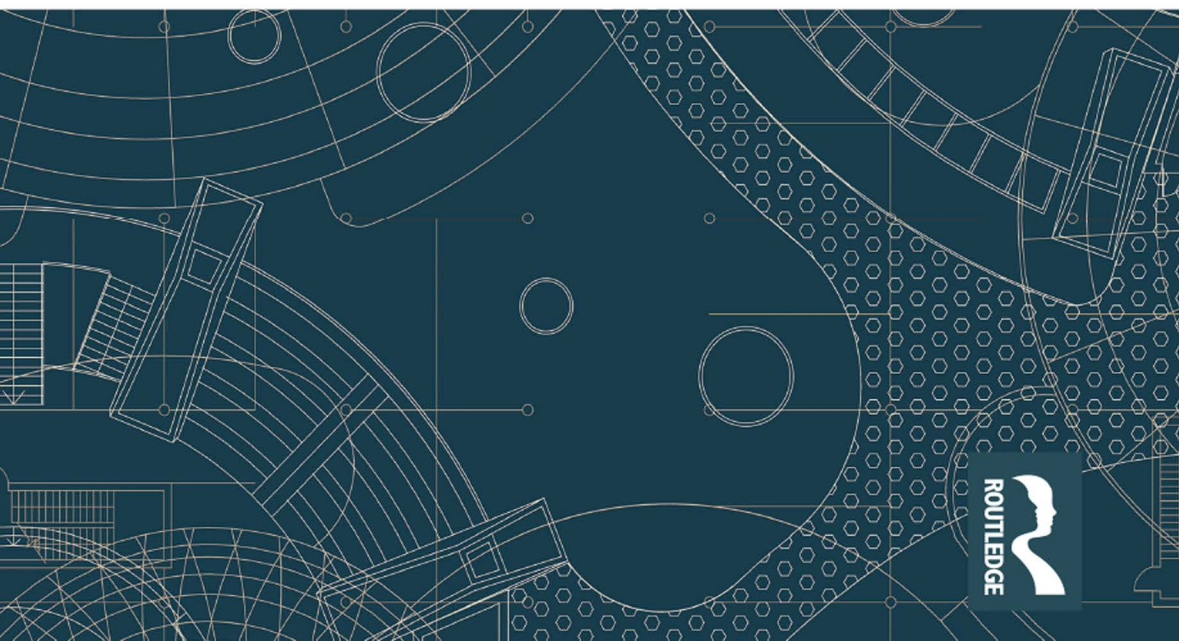
Issues in Ancient Philosophy

THE THEOLOGY OF THE *EPINOMIS*

Vera Calchi



The Theology of the *Epinomis*

This is the first monograph devoted to the theology of the *Epinomis*. It argues that the work offers a revised Platonic conception of the divine better suited to the political-religious imperatives of the post-Classical age.

The *Epinomis* is the 'appendix' to Plato's *Laws* likely written by Plato's student and disciple, Philip of Opus, who is believed to have taken care of the arrangement and posthumous editing of the *Laws* into twelve books. Through a comprehensive analysis of the *Epinomis*' lexicon, and comparisons with the *Corpus Platonicum*, Vera Calchi offers readers an insight into the *Epinomis*' philosophical and historical context, purpose, and legacy. Calchi argues that Philip effectively reshapes Plato's metaphysical language into a theology premised on the immanence of God in the heavens. The resulting account of God's providential activity in the cosmos, which offers a new way of thinking about morality and political order, can be regarded as a major step towards the cosmic theology of the Hellenistic period.

The Theology of the Epinomis is suitable for students and scholars of ancient philosophy, particularly those working on the *Epinomis* and Platonic philosophy. It will also be of interest to those studying the history of religion and theology in antiquity.

Vera Calchi is currently a postdoctoral researcher at Politecnico di Milano, Italy. She earned her PhD in ancient philosophy in 2019 and was a visiting DS at various (non-) European universities. She is the author of *Under the Auspices of Plato: Did Aristotle Read the* Epinomis*?*

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The Theology of the *Epinomis*

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I dedicate this book to my aunt Elena, my spiritual guide in never losing the enthusiasm for life and the opportunities that it offers.

Preface

The divine principle of the *Epinomis*

Through a comprehensive and unprecedented analysis of the *Epinomis*' lexicon and a close comparison between the text and some of the Platonic dialogues, the present book will investigate the theology and the divine principle of the appendix to the *Laws*, also shedding light on further related issues. It will show that the *Epinomis* acts as a bridge between previous theologies and subsequent ones, by bringing Platonic transcendence down to earth, so to speak, and paving the way for the Stoic notion of the immanence of the divine.

A careful study of some main topics about the *Epinomis*, such as an investigation of the presence (or absence) of the Forms[1] – also from a theological perspective – or of the controversial issue of this work's authorship and reception, has already been extensively pursued; by contrast, the nature of the *Epinomis*' divine principle remains an under-researched aspect of the dialogue. For this reason, this book focuses on the very nature of the *Epinomis*' God, constituting the first monograph devoted to its divine principle and a contribution to understanding how the conception of God changed from Plato to the Hellenistic age. The inquiry of this volume analyses the dialogue in relation to various areas – ranging from cosmology to politics – and offers a philosophical perspective that contextualises the appendix to the *Laws* by assigning to it a clearly defined place in time.

The *Epinomis* as a collection of various topics and the snapshot of a specific historical period

In the first place, the appendix to the *Laws* is worth analysing because, despite its brevity (hardly twenty Stephanus pages), it is rich in ontological, epistemological, theological, and ethic-political topics.[2] This surprising multiplicity of issues allows the theology which the author proposes to emerge as the mixture of various disciplines: the answer to the main question of the dialogue (977ab: what does a man need to know in order to be wise and joyful during his mortal life?) is mainly developed through a theological argument (the author discusses the astral visible gods), which in its turn is conveyed by means of an epistemological solution (astronomy as the first science) and explicitly connected to a political aim (the reformulation of polis life in accordance with *sophrosyne*).

Secondly, the religious dimension of the *Epinomis* is surely noteworthy – indeed, noted by many scholars.[3] Particularly remarkable, in this respect, is the role played by the dialogue in its own time, when – as a programme for religious reform – it represented, for Greece, the heralding of new Eastern perspectives. Significantly, the *Epinomis* has been defined as the 'gospel' (in its etymological sense of 'good news') of astral religion, since it proclaims the advent of happiness for men by identifying a God who is somehow new; closer and more accessible to human beings thanks to the observation of the motion of the stars (astronomical deities).

These interesting aspects have been highlighted by a rich – proportionately to the length of the dialogue – literature on the appendix to the *Laws*, yet there are no extensive studies specifically focusing on the nature of the *Epinomis*' divine principle. Thus, confirming the fresh attention and the new value that the appendix to the *Laws* has received in recent scholarship,[4] this book discusses the *Epinomis*' re-shaping of the Platonic divine by stepping into the field left open for research by previous studies and offering an inquiry on what the author of the dialogue left in the shadows: this essay will devote an in-depth analysis to the nature of the divine principle of the *Epinomis*, further expounding the purpose and origin of this work.[5]

The benchmark: a terminological comparison with the *Corpus Platonicum*

While this book addresses a variety of questions, as the *Epinomis*' theology touches upon heterogeneous fields, it maintains a theological focus, particularly through a comparative examination of the late Plato's conception of God and religious doctrine. Without, however, aiming to specifically enter the debate on Plato's understanding of God, which is a much discussed issue,[6] this study necessarily refers to this philosopher, not only because the *Epinomis* is the last dialogue of the *Corpus Platonicum*, but also because whenever one approaches the study of theology in relation to the history of philosophy after Plato, one must consider the person who first coined the term – and hence the concept of – *theologia*, i.e., the first systematic theologian.[7]

The key method of this book, thus, establishes the *Corpus Platonicum* as the main counterpart: by concentrating on the theology of the *Epinomis*, it approaches the question of God in Plato as nothing more than a useful tool for better delineating the *Epinomis*' divine principle. In this sense, the book only aims to shed light on the *Epinomis*' conception of God by comparing it with what Plato considers to be divine.

Indeed, examining the relationship between the appendix to the *Laws* and other works of the *Corpus* by specifically highlighting the connection between them brings out the particularities of the *Epinomis*, enabling us to overcome the idea that this text constitutes a mere complement to the main dialogue, and thus freeing it from its status of appendix – although it is clear that its precise reference to Plato's last work cannot be ignored. In such a way, the *Epinomis* will emerge as a well-rounded and fully independent dialogue, despite the title it bears.[8]

An adequate evaluation of the relationship between the *Epinomis* and those dialogues safely attributed to Plato, examining both the novel elements and the Platonic borrowings compared to the *Corpus*, will require us to determine whether and to what extent the *Epinomis*' theology constitutes a break with Plato's theories. The *Epinomis* indeed seems to reflect the kind of theological discussions that became popular in the Hellenistic period, when religious and metaphysical questions – and answers – were established by partly challenging and partly maintaining the divine principles envisaged by earlier philosophers.[9]

A comparison not only with the *Laws* but the whole *Corpus* shows that even though the divine principle of the *Epinomis* can reasonably be considered to have been borrowed directly from Plato's last work, it had already been present throughout his other dialogues and had then undergone further developments after his death. As we will see, in the *Corpus* there are traces of the evolution of Plato's thought about the divine as the cause of things: while God has no place in Plato's early philosophical system and the theory of Forms, as principles used to explain the world and knowledge cannot be found until after the Socratic dialogues, an increased interest in the World Soul and the Intellect, understood as the cause of movement, led the later Plato to develop a new theory that opened up the concept of the divine to the sphere of change proper to the perceptible[10]; what came next was the de-transcendentalising of Platonic ontology and the transition towards a single, psychic, and providential divine principle in the *Epinomis*. These aspects are made particularly explicit by the author of the dialogue, who, while remaining close to Plato's works in semantic and syntactical terms, also modified Platonic theological terminology to suit his own purposes.

Therefore, the starting point to propose an interpretation of the *Epinomis* that enhances its theoretical autonomy consists in an analysis of the text's vocabulary and argumentative structures; by observing the *Epinomis*' language and drawing parallels with Plato's works, I will provide an account of the *Epinomis*' philosophical system, thereby contributing to its re-evaluation.

Book sections

In providing a coherent account of the theological theory proposed by the *Epinomis*, the chapters of this book, while self-contained, are also closely interconnected, insofar as they address separate yet intrinsically related questions. Throughout all chapters, I will propose a reflection that mainly consists of two parts, corresponding to the analysis of the *Epinomis*' background and legacy, respectively.

After an introduction (Chapter 1) that offers a brief overview of the *Epinomis*' philosophical and historical framework, the first section of the book (Chapter 2 to 5) begins. Through a comparative study of the *Epinomis* and Plato's works, it will try to show the philosophical orientation of the *Epinomis*' recovery of Plato's dialogues, by revealing in what way the former shapes a new conception of God: each chapter from 2 to 5 (included) is concerned with a textual comparison between the *Epinomis* and a dialogue of certain Platonic authorship – not only those texts traditionally considered to be sources for the

Epinomis, but all those dialogues in which extensive syntactical-lexical correspondences can be traced. Chapters 2 and 3 investigate metaphysical elements in the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus* that seem to be echoed in the *Epinomis*. Chapter 4 illustrates how the *Epinomis*' roots are not exclusively to be found within the late Plato: a theory about the presence of Reason in the world is even identified in the *Cratylus*. Chapter 5 offers what might seem like an obvious parallel with the main work, the *Laws*; however, a comparison of this sort is extremely helpful to define two of the main features of the *Epinomis*' God, namely, the oneness and immanence. This chapter links the two sections of the book by completing the first and, at the same time, touching upon the subject matter of the second part (which begins with Chapter 6): again based on a lexical inquiry, Chapter 5 already seeks to define the theology of the *Epinomis* in itself, quite apart from Plato's dialogues.

The second section (Chapter 6 to 8) is devoted to specifically examining and defining the *Epinomis*' theology – in as comprehensive a way as possible – also by highlighting those hints that establish a connection between the appendix to the *Laws* and the later cultural context. This part is therefore mainly devoted to the innovativeness of the dialogue and improves our knowledge on the shift from Plato's philosophy to Stoicism: firstly, Chapter 6 takes the chronology and the context of the *Epinomis* into account by pointing out that its philosophical theology undoubtedly presents certain links with the astral theology developed by the late Plato; then Chapter 7 considers the author's position within the group of the Early Platonists. Finally, Chapter 8 offers a brief conclusion that revisits the major points made in the previous chapters of the book by placing them within a more general framework; by considering possible future research trajectories, it also raises the question of the legacy of the *Epinomis*' theology.

Lexical aspects

To make the reading unequivocal, in what follows I will point out some specific lexical aspects of the manuscript, which mostly concern the choice of some proper nouns, the use of capital letters for some key concepts, the use of synonyms, and the transliteration of the Greek.

Firstly, I should note that I have decided to designate the main character of the dialogue by the name of 'Athenian Visitor'. The *Epinomis* begins with three elderly men tracing Minos' steps on the path from Cnossos to the sacred cave and sanctuary located on Mount Ida in Crete, in the hope of receiving Zeus' guidance and discovering what the best political system and laws are. The conversation left open in the *Laws* is continued by the same characters: the Athenian – the main speaker – and his interlocutors (Megillus the Spartan and Clinias the Cretan). While the last two are called by name, the Athenian is identified only by the polis from which he comes from; acting almost like a judge between the other two, the Athenian summarises and extrapolates concepts from the opinions of the two Dorians, who defend views that are stereotypical of their home institutions. There is some (ancient and contemporary) speculation as to who this unnamed Athenian

of the *Laws* might be, and according to tradition he speaks for Plato. Setting this issue aside, since there is no uncontroversial answer to the question, it must be noted here that, although the Athenian represents the intellectual pursuits of Ionian culture against the less philosophical interests of the Dorians; although he is culturally different from the other two speakers, it is unhelpful to refer to him by the name of 'Stranger' – as critics have sometimes used. Doing so would add an excessively exotic touch, when, in creating a constitution for Magnesia, the new Cretan colony, the Spartan, the Cretan, and the Athenian men come together: they are all Greeks who are not pursuing foreign principles and aims, but behaving in ways that are typical and characteristic of their culture – which in the *Epinomis* is indeed set in opposition to barbarian customs.

A similar observation applies to the author of the dialogue. While the issue of the authorship of the *Epinomis* has been extensively investigated, an overview of scholarly analyses does not reveal any consensus on the matter, which appears to be a rather unsolvable problem.[11] Given this, I will not go into much detail on the issue or dwell on it, but I accept the very reasonable attribution of the *Epinomis* to a milieu close to Plato; the author of the *Epinomis* is thus called Philip of Opus (fourth century BC) throughout the whole book, avoiding other formulas, such as 'Plato's secretary' or 'the editor of the *Laws*'.

Moreover, I would like to clarify the meaning attributed to certain concepts within the argumentation of the present book and the related use of capital or lowercase letters. The Sun and the Universe are understood either as gods or as a celestial body and the physical cosmos, depending on the context, so the initial letter is changed accordingly (by using the upper and the lower case, respectively). Similarly, the Soul has a capital letter when it is specifically understood as *Epinomis*' God and a lowercase one when it is generically mentioned as the most divine part of living beings or referring to the individual human soul; likewise, 'Providence' and '*Nous*' only have a capital letter when they are understood as divine principles.

I should also provide some clarification as to the term 'astronomy' in this book, which is used in accordance with its understanding within the *Epinomis*. Firstly, it must be said that the *Epinomis* does not refer to astronomy *stricto sensu*: the importance of astronomy lies not only in scientific knowledge, but in a rational theology that grounds the new cult of the stars, leading to the attainment of true wisdom. It should be noted that the interest in astronomy in the *Epinomis* stems from a view of the discipline that evolved throughout the whole *Corpus Platonicum*, resulting – in the appendix to Plato's last dialogue – in a close link with the ethical value of planetary motions, i.e., the orderly and harmonious orbital movements that are the visible image of fair behaviour. Plato's understanding of astronomy underwent various developments: it is always associated with the eidetic sphere, until the severing of this link with the *Laws*.[12] The famous anecdote of the *Theaetetus* (173e–174a) about Thales' fall into a well reflects the poor consideration that many people had of the philosopher figure who spent his time looking up at the sky: absorbed in his own thoughts and contemplations, he was seen as distant from earthly things and judged unfit for everyday life; but Socrates

defends the philosopher, who, knowing how to look at sidereal bodies, is able to easily turn his soul from the world of becoming to the sphere of being; from the astral vault to the celestial 'hyper-ouranos', where the transcendent Forms reside. In *Euthydemus* 290c, astronomers (like cooks, surveyors, and accountants) defer to the superior knowledge of dialecticians, who know the supreme science of Forms, the height of – and precondition for – any kind of knowledge. In various works of Plato's, then, astronomy is defined as a form of mathematical knowledge[13]; the case of *Resp*. 527e–531a is interesting: although astronomy is assigned a place in the sequence of studies that make up the typical *cursus studiorum* of the Nocturnal Council's members[14] even in the *Laws* and in the *Epinomis*, unlike in these two dialogues, in the *Republic* it is said to be detached from the divine world precisely because it grasps its objects through the physical faculty of sight, not by discerning eidetic patterns.[15] Therefore, insofar as it represents merely an empirical mode of observation unrelated to thought, astronomy in the *Republic* only perceives physical copies, which, while being the most beautiful of earthly realities, remain material bodies vastly inferior to the truly perfect being. Astronomy is finally claimed to be an extraordinary science in the *Laws* (VII, 821a), and in the *Epinomis* it is the discipline that allows one to recognise divine Providence, i.e., the God-Heavens that takes care of human beings by showing them the path to acquire *sophrosyne* through the celestial movements. In this regard, it is necessary to underline that, although in the *Epinomis* God is associated with the earthly world, the author never raises the question of planets' influence on human life or that of the acquisition of information on terrestrial events based on the study of the movements of celestial objects; in other words, while acknowledging the effects of the heavens on the human world – for applying *sophrosyne* is the only way to lead a peaceful life – the *Epinomis* offers no trace of the doctrine of astral configurations and divination practices, the main components and impulses of the kind of astrology that will take root in later times. Therefore, within the *Epinomis*, we do not find what we would call 'astrology' today, but we should bear in mind that this *techne* might be even said to constitute a single whole with astronomy in Classical Greece.[16]

Having clarified the meaning of 'astronomy', let me also spell out that in the use of legal terms, while seeking to maintain the general juridical meaning of certain words (not least by taking account of the differences between the ancient legal system and the modern one), I will not pursue to find the most exact possible expressions – the ancient law not being the focus of the study. Let me also press the fact that, likewise, I will not focus in-depth on the issue of the 'founded' (or not) nature of religion, i.e., on the polis' interference in religious life instituted by the state, only accepting that Philip of Opus' lawgiver organises and warrants religious facts.

I should also like to point out that in this book I use synonyms of various words, preferring one over the other depending on the context. This is the case with (1) the divine principle: 'God', 'the (universal/cosmic) Soul', or 'the psychic/divine principle/Logos' – see the question of ontological fluidity dealt with in Chapter 1. Even when the masculine pronoun is used, the intention is never to give a personal

character to God; (2) the group of the astral bodies: 'cosmic entities', 'celestial realities', 'sidereal bodies', 'stars' and 'planets'; (3) the dialogue itself: '*Epinomis*' or 'the appendix to the *Laws*' – the formula 'pseudo-Platonic text' has been avoided since, differently from 'the appendix to the *Laws*', which is considered a universally coherent label, it risks engendering confusion by shifting the focus to the question of authorship, which is not an issue the book intends to cover.

A final note on the spelling conventions and transliteration criteria: throughout this book, Greek nouns are not transliterated when the reference is to their occurrences within the *Corpus Platonicum* or they express key concepts in the *Epinomis*' argumentation, to which part of the volume's terminological research has been devoted (e.g., ἀριθμός, δυνάμεις, etc.). The Latinised form (without accent marks) is instead used whenever the nouns in question express broad ideas (e.g., *sophia*), not specific to the *Epinomis* – or specifically discussed in relation to this dialogue. In such cases, the use of the original Greek forms would be misleading since it would draw attention to the lemma rather than the broad concept. In general, I have adopted the following rules for transliteration: the improper diphthongs ᾳ, ῃ, and ῳ are transliterated as *a(i)*, *e(i)*, and *o(i*), respectively; the diaeresis and the smooth breathing are omitted, the rough one is rendered as *h*. Translations from the Greek are from the Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon, unless otherwise noted.

Greek editions

This book is not intended to provide an ultimate and all-encompassing theoretical study that fully explains and links together all the unsolved aspects of the *Epinomis*' theology; indeed, not all the questions and problems that emerge from its analysis of the onto-epistemological research on God – and, more generally, religion – in the appendix to the *Laws*, for systemic reasons, can be answered. Nor is this work intended to replace current interpretative comments. Instead, while still relying on such sources and alongside these models, it is designed to shed light on those aspects of the *Epinomis*' conception of theology that have not yet been treated.

This book will refer to the following editions, translations, and commentaries of the Greek text:

- Tulli M. (2013), *Epinomis*, introduzione, traduzione e commento di F. Aronadio, note critiche di F. Petrucci, M. Tulli (ed.), Bibliopolis, Napoli
- Tarán L. (1975), *Academica: Plato, Philip of Opus and the Pseudo-platonic Epinomis*, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia
- Adorno F. (1971), *Platone. Opere complete*, traduzione italiana di F. Adorno, Laterza, Bari
- Specchia O. (1967), *Platone*. Epinomis*, Introduzione, testo critico e commento*, Le Monnier, Firenze
- Novotný F. (1960), *Platonis* Epinomis*. Commentariis illustrata*, Academae Bohemosloveniae, Praha

- Des Places E. (1956), *Platon, Oeuvres comlpètes*, Tome XII, 2e partie: *Les Lois. Livres XI e XII*, text établi et traduit par A. Diès; *Epinomis*, text établi et traduit par E. Des Places, Les Belles Lettres, Paris
- Taylor A.E. (1956), *Plato*. Philebus *and* Epinomis, translation and introduction by A.E. Taylor with the cooperation of R. Klibansky – Calogero G. – A.C. Lloyd (eds.), Nelson & Sons, London
- Taylor A.E. (1929), *Plato and the Authorship of the* Epinomis, British Academy, London
- Burnet J. (1907), *Platonis opera*, John Burnet (ed.), vol. IV, Oxford Classical Text, Scriptorum Classicorum Biblioteca Oxoniense, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Notes

1 The presence of the Forms within the *Epinomis* has been one of the major themes of debate. Suffice it here to mention that the discussion on this issue (a problematic one, insofar as it also brings up the matter of the authorship of the text) has led to the emergence of two main interpretative approaches: on the one hand, an immanent interpretation of the *Epinomis*' ontology; on the other, an opposite interpretation, which claims that the absence of explicit references to the Forms is not a sign of the rejection of transcendence (just as the similar absence of the Forms in the *Laws* does not automatically imply that Plato changed his metaphysical view in the last period of his life by denying the ontology of the eidetic sphere). See Des Places 1952, pp. 376–83, 1981; Tarán 1975; Gaiser 1986.

2 Cf. especially Des Places 1937, who clearly claims that, within the *Corpus Platonicum*, not only does the *Epinomis* contain the most important mathematical passages, but it is also of great interest for the history of astronomy, and its religious significance has not escaped the notice of early Christian apologists and Neoplatonists.

3 Among the others, see Festugière 1949, p. 204; Cumont 2019 (3), p. 51; Vegetti 1992, pp. 295–318; Simeoni in Alesse – Ferrari 2012.

4 Recent publications on the *Epinomis* include Alesse – Ferrari 2012; Aronadio – Petrucci – Tulli 2013.

5 This book will not focus on what has already been investigated by literature; the approach adopted here is indeed unique in certain respects: this book offers a detailed lexical evaluation that compares the *Epinomis* and various Platonic dialogues, by drawing attention to the cultural and religious context and concentrating on the specific issue of theology. Indeed, even though critics have looked at the historical period of the *Epinomis* by dealing with its theology, no suggestions have been developed by means of an investigation that in this sense systematically compares the dialogue with more than one Platonic work or shows in detail how the *Epinomis*' terminology is particularly revealing of a change in spirit. Not even Frede – Laks 2002, which collects articles that take into account historical developments in the *Epinomis*' time and coeval authors, claims to cover the entire field – indeed, it does not discuss the appendix to the *Laws* at all. Then, the contributions by Theiler (1931) and Aronadio – Petrucci – Tulli (2013) offer observations on the *Epinomis*' time and the milieu in which the dialogue was composed by providing not only commentaries but also philosophical analyses; however, these studies do not focus on the nature of God. Finally, Taylor (1956) draws a comparison between the *Epinomis* and Plato, but this does not extend beyond the *Philebus*.

6 See Dodds 2015 (BUR 6) (1951), p. 285 nt. 67. Rheins 2010 reminds us that over the last century the debates on Plato's theology have primarily revolved around two

approaches that seem to overlap yet are seldom combined: the cosmological approach and the metaphysical one, which focus on interpreting and incorporating into a coherent system, respectively, the three key figures that play prominent theological and cosmological roles in Plato's late dialogues (the World Soul, the *Nous*, and the Demiurge) and the One of the 'unwritten doctrines'.

7 I am not referring here to the conception of theology in the archaic period, which was not a systematic discipline nor even part of religious life (which was nourished by various mythological traditions and cults that did not refer to any theological authority, sacred text, or established doctrine); nor am I referring to the technical usage of the term made by Aristotle or the advanced conceptions of God, such as the one introduced by Philo of Alexandria in terms of unknowability and indescribability. Rather, the reference is here to the theoretical reflection on the divine developed from the fifth century BC onwards, when religious beliefs and philosophical doctrines ceased to coexist in harmony and parted ways. In this respect, cf. *Resp*. II, 379a, where *theologia* is mentioned for the first time and said to have sprung from the conflict between the mythical tradition – which in Plato's opinion consist of morally harmful stories – and rational opinions on the issue of God (insofar as *theologia* means approaching God(s) by means of *logos*).

8 See Tarán 1975, p. 49, who nevertheless argues that the *Epinomis* cannot be regarded as a self-standing work, on account of certain elements suggesting that the author assumed his readership to know that they were dealing with a continuation of the *Laws*, as well as on account of the opening, which creates a connection with the main work through a dramatic sequence presenting the same characters. Cf. Chapter 1.

9 Do gods exist? Do they care about the world and human beings? If so, how? Questions such as these, already raised by Plato and Aristotle, gained importance and were systematically addressed in later periods, in increasingly refined ways. Cf. see Frede – Laks 2002, p. IX.

10 This evolution of the concept of God also involves certain impasses, the greatest of which comes from the conflict between two key passages: at *Resp*. II, 380–2 the divine is defined as that which never changes and which thus belongs to the intelligible sphere; at *Laws* X 891a–899b, the divine cause of all realities is the Soul, which, as a vital principle, is by nature connected to movement and belongs to the world of becoming (see also *Tim*. 34c). Cf. Bordt 2006, pp. 21–2, 43–54; Bovet 1902, pp. 155, 177–9.

11 See Chapter 1.

12 Plato's view of astronomy has been a matter of considerable controversy and is still debated. See, in particular, Kalligas 2016.

13 Cf. *Gorg*. 451c, *Hipp. m*. 367e–368a, *Protag*. 318e, *Theaet*. 145d, 169a, and *Phaedr*. 274c–275b.

14 See Chapter 6.

15 It is possible to trace a meticulous recovery of the *Republic* by the author of the *Epinomis* with regard to the whole *cursus studiorum*: arithmetic, *Resp*. 525d7-*Epin*. 990c6; geometry, *Resp*. 527a6-*Epin*. 990d2; stereometry, *Resp*. 528b1-*Epin*. 990d5; harmony, *Resp*. 531a6-*Epin*. 991b1; and, finally, astronomy and dialectic, respectively, *Resp*. 527b8-*Epin*. 991b5 and *Resp*. 534d9-*Epin*. 991c3 – although these last two disciplines are conceived of in different ways (see Chapter 1). These parallels echo the scheme proposed by Brisson in Alesse – Ferrari 2012, although the lines I have quoted are different. Notwithstanding the drastically divergent ways in which this passage of the *Republic* has been read, it is clear that it strongly reveals Plato's anti-empirical strain, which is to say his condemnation of the use of numbers for purely practical purposes (such as commerce). What is interesting for our purposes is the fact that the hyperbolic results of this ban on sense-perception – e.g., the positing of a 'blind astronomy' or a 'deaf music theory' – implies that, according to Plato, mathematics, even when 'reformed' (i.e., exercised in accordance with the pure knowledge of numbers), is

always inferior to dialectic. The latter indeed remains more virtuous for three main reasons: it makes use only of logos (without having recourse to sensitive instruments or replacing speculation with observation); it provides a synoptic vision; and it enables dialogic discourse. See Vegetti 2010, pp. 187–9.

16 The distinction between astronomy and astrology is largely a modern one. Indeed, in the ancient Greek world, the word 'astronomy' had a far wider range of meanings than today and included both astrological and astronomical aspects, i.e., both sidereal movements and the changes that they produce in things. Concerning the ancient use of the term 'astronomy', see Hübner 1989; Noegel – Walker – Wheeler 2003, p. 220; Repellini in Alesse – Ferrari 2012; Lisi 1991. Cf. also Cumont 2019 (3) (pp. 65–6) and Boyancé 1952 (p. 312), who, in slightly different ways, interpret the issue by indicating that it is necessary to distinguish astral religion from astrology proper: the latter is a form of divination based on a particular system of the universe, according to which the whole course of events is inflexibly determined by celestial alignments; the Greeks, though acquainted with cosmic fatalism, dismissed such a system by distinguishing the scientific data collected by the Babylonians from the erroneous theories they derived from it.


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1 Introduction

The *Epinomis*, a mirror of its times: the transition from Plato to the Hellenistic age

Who is the God of the *Epinomis*? Can this God be called both Platonic and non-Platonic? Through questions such as these, this book aims to provide a complete definition of the theology of the appendix to the *Laws*, by exploring how its religion reflects the sociopolitical structures of the Greek polis at a very peculiar time. The *Epinomis*' theology is here understood as the nature of its divine principle and, more broadly, religious beliefs; the investigation of this God will be conducted in both ontological and epistemological terms (i.e., in relation to the cognitive role of God), by examining the relationship between the cult dedicated to him and the laws in force at the time in which the work was composed, in order to reveal the orientation and philosophical ideas of the dialogue. Though the hazy nature of the speech delivered by the main character, the Visitor from Athens, the following pages will attempt to identify the ontological status of the *Epinomis*' God.

The presumed inauthenticity of the appendix to the *Laws* should not prevent us from identifying connections with dialogues of undisputed Platonic authorship. It is indeed undeniable that many *Epinomis*' passages are thematically based on Plato's dialogues: as we will see, this connection not only involves late works – ones similar to the *Epinomis* in terms of subject or chronology, such as the *Timaeus* or the *Laws* – but also extends to other dialogues from Plato's early and mature period.[1] An analysis of this clear relationship with the rest of the *Corpus Platonicum* allows us to trace an outline of the *Epinomis* and to determine the characteristics of its God; and, in particular, we can achieve an understanding of the topic by running two stages of analysis of the *Epinomis*' theories in relation to Plato's thought: the first stage is to assess the *Epinomis*' recovery of the Platonic tradition, i.e., the similarity between its arguments and Plato's; the second stage is to detect possible novelties, i.e., any theories which are absent from the rest of the *Corpus* and might therefore indicate an overcoming of it.

Comparative in method and outlook, the present book will seek to define the degree of autonomy of the *Epinomis*' philosophy vis-à-vis Plato's, by touching upon various interrelated topics that the *Epinomis* discusses: religious beliefs, ethics, politics, and legislation. The premise and framework of the investigation is the particular historical moment in which new divine characteristics, such as God's providential nature, became increasingly prominent in religious and philosophical reflection.

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The philosophical context of the *Epinomis*

Author, style, and themes

As is well known, the question of the authorship of the *Epinomis* is far from clear: it could be even said to represent the most controversial aspect in the critical literature about this dialogue, with scholars being divided between supporters of Plato's authorship and champions of the inauthenticity thesis.[2] The latter make the incompleteness and rhetorical inconsistency of the dialogue the strong points of their argument and attribute the clunkiness of the text to the limited competence of its author, who was unable to faithfully reproduce his teacher's style. On the contrary, when forced to acknowledge this opacity of the *Epinomis*' phrases and, at least in relation to certain passages, its dissimilarity with respect to the style of the rest of the *Corpus*, those scholars who defend Plato's authorship argue that this defective *modus scribendi* recalls that of the elderly philosopher, who never completed the dialogue, leaving us only an unrevised draft of it. Anyhow, discussing whether the *Epinomis* was written by Plato himself or by one of his disciples seems to constitute an unattainable objective and, besides, it does not lead to any particular advantage of the topic to which this book is addressed; then suffice it here to recall the *Suda* entry 'Philosophos', which credits an anonymous person (i.e., not Plato) with both the arrangement and posthumous editing of Plato's *Laws* into twelve books and the addition of the *Epinomis* to them; and the *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (III, 37),[3] where Diogenes Laertius establishes the identity of this author by establishing that the dialogue was written by Plato's secretary and disciple, a member of the Academy by the name of Philip of Opus – as the *Epinomis*' author will be called in this essay.[4] The present book will thus conduct its analysis based on the assumption that the *Epinomis* is most unlikely to be the work of Plato himself; so the main question becomes: what does the *Epinomis*' author, who is not Plato, show us and why?

Like the issue of authorship, so too is somehow blurred the argument of the *Epinomis*, which, though similar to the *Laws*', undeniably unfolds more discontinuously: at a fast pace, the Athenian makes pregnant concepts suddenly emerge and then momentarily abandons these points, only to take them for granted a few pages later, sometimes even making them the basis of his presentation of central doctrines. The suggestions offered by the Athenian are like swift brushstrokes: through a dry and sharp language, they initially seem to convey illicit proposals, later to turn out as endorsements of the traditional concept of *homoiosis theo(i)*. In a complex tangle of ideas seamlessly following one another, an indication of the right morality emerges when the Athenian – vehement about leaving no other possibility for action except the study of astronomy – ceases altogether to exchange views with his interlocutors: these characters, who already in the *Laws* played a merely supporting role by approving the Athenian's words, so as to confirm faithfulness of them, are now completely deprived of any chance to put forward significant opinions; by revealing to the spectator truths that are inscribed in the heavens and taking part in what he is preaching, Philip of Opus urges citizens to make an immediate change of attitude.