

Article

# AI: Anarchic Intelligence: On Epinoia

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**Abstract:** With a few notable exceptions, the word “epinoia” has not been heard with a philosophical ear since the time of Epicurus and the Stoics. In addition to the scarce mentions it had received in philosophy, epinoia was strewn across the plays of Euripides and Aristophanes and, more so, across the canonical body of Christian theology, from Patristics—Origen, Cyril of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor—to the late Byzantine period. Straddling the divide between the authorities of the nascent Church and those they suspected of heresy, it made a spectacular appearance in Gnostic texts (*The Apocryphon of John*), cryptically embodying the reconciliation of knowledge and life. On the margins of the Christian tradition, first-century CE controversial religious figures such as Simon Magus associated epinoia with the great goddess and the womb of existence, even as, three centuries later, Eunomius of Cyzicus—the theological arch-enemy of the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil and Gregory—deplored it for its hollowness and pure conventionality. In this paper, I argue that epinoia is the figure of anarchic intelligence in theology and philosophy alike. The anarchy of epinoia is its note of defiance: the escape from power it plots is the most serious challenge to power, the royal road to liberation from the oppressive unity of Being, Mind, or Concept.

**Keywords:** intelligence; mind; nous; epinoia; Gnosticism; patristics; phenomenology



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## 1. What Is Epinoia?

With a few notable exceptions, the word *epinoia* has not been heard with a philosophical ear since the time of Epicurus and the Stoics. In addition to the scarce mentions it had received in philosophy, *epinoia* was strewn across the plays of Euripides and Aristophanes and, more so, across the canonical body of Christian theology, from Patristics—Origen, Cyril of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor—to the late Byzantine period. Straddling the divide between the authorities of the nascent Church and those they suspected of heresy, it made a spectacular appearance in Gnostic texts (*The Apocryphon of John*), cryptically embodying the reconciliation of knowledge and life. On the margins of the Christian tradition, first-century CE controversial religious figures such as Simon Magus associated *epinoia* with the great goddess and the womb of existence, even as, three centuries later, Eunomius of Cyzicus—the theological arch-enemy of the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil and Gregory—deplored it for its hollowness and pure conventionality.

The last philosopher to have dealt with *epinoia*, if in a somewhat cursory way, was Jacques Derrida in the preface to Serge Margel’s book *Le tombeau du dieu artisan* (*The Tomb of the Artisan God*). In his short text, titled *Avances*, Derrida breezes through the polysemy of *epinoia*, which crops up in the reading of Plato’s *Timaeus* by Margel, translating it as “*projet, dessein, mais aussi la pensée qui vient après coup* [project, purpose, but also the thought that comes afterwards]” (Derrida 1995, p. 33). Neither this limited list of possible translations nor the time sequence (*après coup*) ascribed to *epinoia* does justice to its unrealized promise. Already within the modest space both Margel and Derrida allot to it, *epinoia* proves to be uncontainable, invalidating the temporal prepositions “before” and “after”—a forward-looking project, it is also an afterthought; Plato’s text at the center of Margel’s attention

is joined by the subsequent “*contexte christologique* [Christological context]” (Margel 1995, p. 90, n. 26)—welling over distinctions between the particular and the general, between one particularity and another, one generality and another: “*la foi en général, la foi chrétienne, la religion chrétienne, la théologie. . . , la théologie chrétienne, la théologie en général, la philosophie en général, la philosophie grecque, la philosophie de Platon, le Timée, etc.* [faith in general, Christian faith, Christian religion, theology, Christian theology, theology in general, philosophy in general, Greek philosophy, Plato’s philosophy, Timaeus, etc.]” (Derrida 1995, p. 34). Its dramatic appearance is anarchic.

The confusion that snowballs around *epinoia* is, itself, far from general or generic. It is due in part to the historical fact that this little-known synonym of concept, among many other of its connotations, has hardly ever been within the purview of philosophy and its systemizing impulse. Migrating from literature (the plays of Aristophanes, such as *Knights*, or *Phoenician Women* by Euripides) to philosophy and on to theology, *epinoia* is not yet another concept but the other of concept, which overlaps against all odds with the concept of concept it also names in a generative, generous, inventive, and extravagant surplus of sense, fusing at times with the sheer nonsense of a sound shorn of meaning.

The *epi-* of *epinoia* is its singular variation on *nous*, mind. The prefix has been interpreted to refer to the temporal preposition “after”: an *afterthought*, *reflection*. Nevertheless, it can mean both precedence and antecedence, as in “epigraph” and “epilogue”. A more accurate translation of *epi-* is *on, at, or close upon*, spatially and temporally, as an antonym of *para-*. *Epinoia* is neither contained by *nous* in the manner of *ennoia* nor does it traverse *nous* after the fashion of *dianoia*. The close proximity of *epinoia* to *nous* implies, on its flip side, *epinoia*’s minimal separation from *nous*, even if it remains right on or at the surface of the mind. An embodied mind and an enminded body, *eponoia* is the skin of intellect, a living interface thinking on and with the sentient extension of bodies. It is experience and relation.

## 2. What’s on Your Mind?

*Epi-noia*: on the mind. When we have something or someone on our mind (say, Georgia in Stuart Gorrell and Hoagy Carmichael’s song “Georgia on My Mind”, famously performed by Ray Charles), the mind turns out to be their support, a fertile surface for the emergence and upholding of whomever or whatever is on it. There is, moreover, always something or someone on our mind, try as we might to empty it. Only exceptionally, thanks to the persistent practice of meditation and certain other spiritual practices, can the mind’s surface feel vacant, hosting nothing. But then it is nothing that is on one’s mind: the nothing that is experienced, feared or desired, and, at any rate, occupying or preoccupying one wholly, to the exclusion of all else.

To have something on one’s mind is not a purely theoretical attitude. It is a matter of non-indifference; to have something on one’s mind is to be up to something, however trivial the intention and however delayed the moment of acting upon that intention. Whatever it may be, the something that is on one’s mind is the outcome of a prior event, whereby one happened to be drawn to, excited or incited by that very thing. Moreover, the event is not a single occurrence; one repeatedly, if often unconsciously, re-commits to it, so long as the something that has initially provoked interest still commands one’s attention. Having something on one’s mind is a sign of involvement and, indeed, of mutual involvement—of co-involvement—with that which is on one’s mind.

The fabric of concepts, in which the mind is wrapped and which doubles as its skin, is tightly interwoven with projects, designs, inventions, and fabrications that are not only of but also for something. The confluence of these in the semantic field of *epinoia* bespeaks their convergence in actuality. A matter of concern stands out from an array of all the possible things that could be on my mind but are not (at least, not at this moment); it bubbles up or pops up unexpectedly, though, assuming that it is persistent enough, I end up recognizing *myself* in it. If I am up to something as soon as I have this very thing on my mind, that is not because I willfully select a target to zero in on. Rather, my concern is practical and

affective, a ripple of my non-indifference, of care. I am pre-occupied by it, at times to the point of an obsession, which is to say that it occupies me *before* I can occupy myself. I am myself, I become myself in the preoccupations that are on my mind and that put me up to something. I am fabricated through them, becoming an “I” under the patient, if no less surprising, guidance of *epinoia*. Is this the “old sweet song” (unnamed, yet mentioned *mise-en-abîme*-style in a song about Georgia) that “keeps Georgia on my mind?”<sup>1</sup>

My resolve to take the spatial overtones of the preposition *on* (*epi-*) in *epinoia* literally is likely to be met with the charge of philosophical catachresis, of misusing a cognitive category, misapprehending it. In addition to turning a blind eye to the conceptual (or para-conceptual) history of *epinoia*, which consists of nothing other than the modulations of its catachresis, this accusation overlooks the relation of *epinoia* to *nous*. The former is both a peculiar expression of the latter and the interface of the mind and the body. The mind it designates is essentially extended—and, in the case of plants, their mind is not only extended but also extending. Spatial terms are as appropriate to it as are cognitive categories.

*Epinoia*, then, is thought expelled outside itself, albeit still in close proximity to itself. Sticking close, circulating on the surface, at the interfaces of the concept and the world, of the mind and the body, of the mind–body and its milieu, *epinoia* is reliant on *nous*, which props it up, subtends, carries, and nourishes it, without, at the same time, integrating it into the system of transcendental mental structures. On the one hand, *epinoia* corresponds in this respect to biological intelligence, understood in terms of an adaptive mechanism indispensable for the survival of organisms in their changing environments, or to the psychoanalytic conception of the ego, probing external reality, as though with mental tentacles, and assessing the compatibility of reality with the demands of the id. On the other hand, indefatigably devising, inventing, thinking *on* and thinking *up* things, contriving them, *epinoia* itself is an ingenious device, a contraption for “cooking” things up, intelligence that is congenitally artificial.

While *epinoia* encompasses everything that is on my mind, it is also a reflective fold, formed the moment the mind glances at itself sideways in the course of entertaining whatever it comes to think of or whatever comes to thought. The mind is on my mind not only in epistemological reflections but also in practical epinoic concerns with its surface and with that which is on the mental surface. Self-consciousness is a much later formalization of the reflective fold, credited with the durability it does not have.

The folding of *epinoia* unto itself creates an interiority of sorts, an impermanent pocket, compatible with the mental surface both epistemologically and axiologically (it does not enjoy a higher valuation than that surface). In acts of invention and fabrication, one is generally aware of *oneself* as the inventing and the fabricating. This does not mean that every stage of these processes is transparent: not infrequently, I cannot say why and how something or someone is on my mind with more or less staying power, why they command my attention and galvanize my psychic energy, nor, even, why I am inventing or fabricating something in the exact way that I am. Very simply, thought being outside itself, and still close to itself, affords it a passing glance at itself from the perspective of relative exteriority, fabricated by that thought itself *qua epinoia*. Self-consciousness and the mirror stage of development are the derivative forms of this fabrication and ought to be interpreted in the light of its essential superficiality, which is also an interfaciality.

Although *epinoia* has a whiff of instrumentality about it (contrivance always produces contraptions, including those of an immaterial kind; moreover, intelligence, in this sense, is an instrumental notion, whether assuring organismic survival or referring to the manipulability of tools deployed for this very purpose), the questions *what for?* and even *why?* are secondary in its actual workings. Georgia is on my mind despite myself, possibly *for nothing*: if “just an old sweet song” keeps it there, inexplicably playing in a loop in my head, then it is not a matter of purposeful preference or rational choice of an object to occupy myself with. The elucidation of reasons, partial as it necessarily is, behind a nagging preoccupation will come about afterwards. More than that, there is no intelligence, including its degradation into instrumental rationality, in the absence of the possibility that

what is on the mind is there for nothing. Rather than the universal good pulling on the strings of particular endeavors and purposeful actions, it is the being and the doing for nothing that power the engine of goal-oriented conduct and the intelligence that directs it, step by step. Or, more precisely, the universal good is, itself, for nothing, since it does not service another, greater good—hence our incapacity to look at it, to see the nothing that it is with the mind’s eye.

More or less fleetingly on my mind, *epinoia* is thought standing outside itself both in space and in time, if still in great proximity to itself. It is not (even) that the shifts in the content of what is on my mind transpire in time; the passage of time is initially registered by means of these shifts, delineating the temporal horizons of my existence and factored into the dynamic structure of *epinoia*. Lost in thought, I am not immersed in myself; I keep wandering around the labyrinths of the neocortex, circulating on the mind’s surface in an ongoing *now* of my preoccupations, right on the thin and breathable film between thinking and the world. Like atmospheric conditions, which keep changing from the passing high clouds to heavy precipitation and bright sunshine, what is on my mind passes, but mental atmosphere (the fact *that* something is on my mind) does not pass. Fleetingness, transience, fugaciousness are themselves intransient, abiding, chronic even. Reflection and invention, memory and anticipation, are all gathered in *epinoia*, marking the inflection points on its winding paths. Before fabricating anything, *epinoia* fabricates the time and space of a life. With this, it allows *nous* to be open and to be openness: finite, changeable, essentially superficial, anarchic.

In its temporal structure, the projective thrust of *epinoia*, yielding a slew of designs, inventions, and fabrications, passes into and for the opposite of its sense as backward-looking reflection, an afterthought. In the middle, at the interface of the mind and the body, it is not averse to the coincidence of opposites, including the metaphysically contrived opposition of self and other or identity and non-identity. A plan carried out, a design realized, *epinoia* is thought that has stepped out of and stepped beyond itself, becoming other to itself: it has become a deed in the world, temporal through and through, traversing every modality of time. But the step that thought takes beyond its inner realm need not reach the desired destination in actuality, be seamlessly actualized, be tattooed on the skin of the world according to an eternal ideal blueprint. *Epinoia* is the fabrication of a world not entirely anchored in the already given potentialities and prescriptions; it is not the technical translation of a plan or a design into actuality, as an objective outcome of mind’s activity. Awash in the connotations of inventiveness, it does not stop at the invention of an external object but keeps reinventing itself.

### 3. Who Is Epinoia?

*Epinoia*. The pronouns are *she/her/hers*. She is on my mind, whenever anything or anyone is on my mind. But in, across, and beside the mind there are other figures of thought in the feminine: *ennoia*, *dianoia*, and *paranoia*. They indwell, traverse, and travel alongside *nous*, who is recognized as the father, or as the Father, well before the Christian era.

*Epinoia* is she and She, “the great goddess”, as St. Paul’s contemporary, Simon Magus, calls her in *Great Revelation* [*Megalê apophasis*]. As the goddess Epinoia, intelligence is personified (and not only figured or configured): the mind is not only of *someone* but also, and more fundamentally, *someone*. This manner of thinking extends all the way to the Medieval period, when angels are referred to as “intelligences” and when, as in the writings of St. Hildegard of Bingen, Mary is compared to “the greenest branch”, *viridissima virga* (*Symph.* 19.1), and, at the same time, to the intellect: “the intellect in the soul is like the *viriditas* [greenness, MM] of branches and foliage on a tree” (*Scivias* I.4.26).<sup>2</sup> As we shall see, Simon’s association of Epinoia with the verdant goddess, a female offshoot (*paraphuada*) of the infinite, prefigures the image of Mary and lends intelligence a vegetal form, the form of transformation, of metamorphosis. (A side question: what are the implications of the premodern personification of intelligence and its un- or disfiguration in modernity for our current chimeras of AI, Artificial Intelligence, or even AGI, Artificial General Intelligence,



which is neither of *someone* nor *someone* and which still exhibits vaguely divine features? The threat of annihilation and the promise of salvation that converge on the figureless and impersonal figure of AI are vestiges of a venerable theological heritage.)

Simon's treatise has reached us thanks to the second- and third-century Christian theologian Hippolytus of Rome, namely, via his *Refutation of All Heresies* [*Refutatio omnium haeresium*]. According to Hippolytus, Simon Magus conveys the following: "There are two offshoots [*duo eisi paraphuades*], having neither beginning nor end [*mête archên mête peras*], from one root. [. . .] And one of these appears from above, which constitutes a great power, the Mind of the universe [*megalê dunamis, Nous tôn holôn*], who manages all things and is a male [*arsên*]. The other offshoot, however, is from below, and is a great female <goddess>, the Intelligence, who generates all things [*Epinoia, megalê <theos> thêleia, gennôsa ta pant(a)*]. From whence, ranged in pairs opposite each other, they undergo conjugal union, and manifest an intermediate interval [*to meson diastêma*], namely, an incomprehensible air, which has neither beginning nor end. But in this is a Father who sustains all things and nourishes things which have beginning and end [*Patêr o bastazôn panta kai trephôn ta archên kai peras echonta*]. Now this power exists in isolation. For Intelligence that subsists in unity proceeded forth from this power and became two [*proelthousa hê en monotêti Epinoia egeneto duo*]. [. . .] And the Father, being rendered manifest to himself from himself, passed into a state of duality. [. . .] As, therefore, he himself, bringing forward himself by means of himself, manifested unto himself his own peculiar intelligence [*tên idian epinoian*], so also the intelligence, when she was manifested, did not exercise the function of creation. But beholding him, she concealed the Father within herself, that is, the power; and it is a hermaphrodite power, and an Intelligence [*kai estin arsenothêlus dunamis kai Epinoia*]. [. . .] For power is no wise different from intelligence [*ouden gar diapherei dunamis epinoias*], inasmuch as they are one. For from those things that are above is discovered power; and from those below, intelligence" (Hyp. Ref. VI.18).<sup>3</sup>

Nous and Epinoia are personified in a Gnostic–mystical key, which has an exact equivalent in the concurrent and later Kabbalist stands in Judaism, where the divine emanations *chokhmah* and *binah*, wisdom and understanding, also sprout from the same root of infinity, *ein-sof*. The theme of sexual difference as it pertains to the Kabbalist emanations (*sefirot*) is similarly significant, even if it is approached with greater flexibility: while *binah* is predominantly heard in the feminine (and even referred to as "the great mother" in the medieval book of *Zohar*) and while *chokhmah* is a masculine "dark spark" of creation,<sup>4</sup> not infrequently, they switch to the other sex. Something of the kind happens in Simon's narrative, in the course of which the Father (Nous) passes from unity to a state of duality, replete with a hermaphroditic character—precisely, as Nous and Epinoia. Where the Gnostic–Kabbalist account is at odds with that of Simon is in the relative positions of each half of the pair vis-à-vis the other half: *chokhmah* and *binah* are on the same plane immediately below the infinite and opposite one another, the former on the right and the latter on the left; Nous and Epinoia face one another otherwise: the one above, the other below.

The placement of Nous and Epinoia relative to one another is a metaphysical upending of material, physical, and (why not?) psychic realities. *Epinoia*, as what or who is on the mind, is a figure of the surface, of mental superficialities and interfaces, which would indicate that her spatial position should be above *nous*. She surfaces from *nous* as the mind's own reflective relation to itself and a self-reinvention, its detachment from itself, albeit not as decisive as that of *paranoia*. Placing *nous* above *epinoia* makes no sense considering their semantics and conceptuality, but it makes sense (actually, it makes the very sense of metaphysical sense) when the gist of the argument is that the world here below is sustained from above by non-worldly and extra-temporal, immutable, and indestructible entities. Regardless of the shape this inverted and perverse sustainability assumes, it is recognizably metaphysical.

Simon's Epinoia and Nous are markedly unequal. She manifests herself from below, He does so from above; She is not named "Mother", He is called "Father"; She generates

without either the power or the energy, without either the potentiality (*dunamis*) or the actuality (*energeia*) of her own, while he gathers potentiality–actuality in his all-sustaining unity. And they are essentially equal. Both are offshoots from one root, flattening the vertical hierarchy of emanations from above and from below. The anarchy (“without beginning”: *mête archên*) and the limitlessness (*mête peras*) of both substantiates their equalization from the side of infinity. Her maternal role is acknowledged circuitously, when Simon notes that Paradise is the womb, *mêtra*, of creation (Hyp. Ref. VI.14).<sup>5</sup> Her verdancy and generativity operate independently of the oppositional pair of potentiality and actuality: *epinoia* is the analog of power (*dunamis*) from below, requiring no such category to do what she does and to attain actuality without potentiality, potency, and potentiation.

It could well be that, akin to the Biblical creation narrative combining two heterogeneous stories about the emergence of the human in Genesis 1:26–28 and Genesis 2:4–25, there are separate traditions merged into one in Simon’s account. How can two offshoots growing from the same root extend from above (Nous) and from below (Epinoia)? If the root is the infinite, then spatio-temporal coordinates (including below / above) obviously do not apply to it; everything and everyone everywhere and at all times *is* that root, or, at the very least, its prolongation. Yet, in the differentiation between the root and the offshoots, with which the portion of the text attributed to Simon commences, vertical orientation is paramount: assuming that the root is below, the offshoots are above, and—with the scheme of earthly growth turned upside down—assuming that the root is above, the offshoots are below. I see only two exit strategies out of the conundrum: (a) to conclude that one of the offshoots usurps the place of the root (which is indeed what seems to happen in the case of Nous), or (b) to seek evidence for a syncretic assemblage of heterogeneous traditions in the same text. Similarly, the assertion that Epinoia generates all things—*gennôsa ta pant(a)*—and, a few lines later, that She “did not exercise the function of creation”—*ouk epoiêsen*—either draws a fine distinction between generation and creation (*genesis* and *poiesis*) or stitches together, with seams that are in some spots at a point of tearing, two or more sources.

The feminization of Epinoia locates sexual difference in her association with Nous, who is nevertheless not related to her externally but, thanks to the emanation of Epinoia out of him, transitions to the state of duality. If, for Origen, the divine vessel of sexual difference is Christ, then Simon’s *Great Revelation* situates it in God the Father, or Nous, inasmuch as S/He is a “hermaphrodite power”, *arsenothêlus dunamis*, internally modified by Epinoia, who is said to be powerless. Aside from the Father and the Son, the metaphysical categories *inside* and *outside* also change places, and do so more than once, until it is no longer clear who or what is inside what or whom: although Intelligence ensues from the power of the Father, beholding him, she conceals him within herself and incorporates a power, which is not her own.

The vertiginous turns of Simon’s text test the *epi-* of *epinoia*, the being-on of that which is on the mind, to the extent that, formally speaking, being-on draws the jagged line separating the outside from the inside, surface from depth, or one surface from another. Already in and of itself, *epinoia* puts to a test the lines of demarcations it draws, because it is an interface of different, even divergent, ontological regimes. The vegetal fecundity of the surface is, more accurately put, the fecundity of the interface, generation from being-on (as a leaf engaged in photosynthesis or a flower spreading its pollen; Goethe, by the way, was well versed in the fecundity of vegetal surfaces and interfaces, which is why he deemed the leaf to be the generic organ of a plant capable of metamorphosing into any other), rather than from being-in (inception, gestation, and so forth), and, further, from the being-on of an organic, rather than an inorganic, kind, tacitly rejecting a mineral surface, hard and supportive, slowly ground into dust, but finally barren. A verdant offshoot said and heard in the feminine, the Intellect does not actualize deeply stored potentialities. Powerless, shorn of *dunamis* and the transitions to *energeia* it prescribes, She tirelessly fabricates without realizing a hidden program, without carrying out a plan of action. Inside out and outside in, Her horizontal inversions contest the vertical ones of metaphysics.

Between Her and Him, everything is fabricated–actualized–energized. The air, in the first instance, bristling with electrostatic discharges, with lightnings. Simon names air “an intermediate interval”, *to meson diastêma*, hinting at the elemental nature of Nous and Epinoia as the sky and the earth. The intermediate element is finite (inasmuch as it is an interval) and infinite (it “has neither beginning nor end”, despite its origination from the conjugal union of Nous and Epinoia). It shares with the logical excluded middle its unthinkability, but it is brought into being, fabricated–actualized–energized. The extremes between which it unfolds are Mind and Intelligence, corresponding to the sky and the earth and signaling that *epinoia* (or Epinoia) is not a straightforward application of Nous to the realities it (or She) is called upon to distinguish. As an interface, a being-on-the-mind, an extended and—in the case of plants—an extending cognition, *epinoia* is already one of the extremes and the middle, which is the atmospheric boundary layer of air touching the earth. The incomprehensibility of the airy *to meson diastêma* has, to a significant extent, to do with the fact that it is and is not *epinoia* (or Epinoia); that the sustaining Father is imperceptibly supplanted by the Mother, whose role and place He usurped at or before the origin. Reversals proliferate, once more: while common sense leads us to believe that there is no intelligence without the mind, which lets it emerge out of sheer abstraction, in truth, there is no mind without intelligence that directs the ray of its attention to the shifting formations of everything that is “on” it and that, from this “being-on”, makes (and makes up) the mind.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. The Gnostic Crescendo of Anarchic Intelligence

Having broken out of the vicious cycle of potentiality and actuality, the positive powerlessness of *epinoia* (or of the great goddess Epinoia) deserves closer attention. Simon reveals that intelligence is analogous to power, seen from below—at any rate, one arrives at intelligence from below: “For from those things that are above is discovered power; and from those below, intelligence”. *Epinoia* is like power, but it (or She) is not power, having an efficacy, a being in force, and a regime of validity all of its (or Her) own. Moreover, powerlessness envelops power, “conceals the Father in herself”, modifies power from within (by rendering it hermaphroditic), and so grows more powerful than power itself, taking care to become powerful otherwise than power.

We arrive at the conclusion that *epinoia* (or Epinoia) is a figuration of the intellect that is anarchic: both lacking a beginning and ontologically insubordinate to power and authority. That is why such an ancient, half-forgotten artifact of thought, which describes the contriving activity of thinking, sounds incredibly contemporary in the twenty-first century; anarchy implies anachronic confluences. Plus, what is on my mind obeys no one, not even me, myself. Who knows what’s on my mind? In a narrower sense, the designs, plans, fabrications, and contrivances that *epinoia* names are not objects of knowledge, while also eluding the sphere of pure subjectivity. *Epinoia* is freedom of thought incarnate.

The epinoic non-objects glide on the mind’s superficies, instead of being stored in its recesses. Their essential superficiality is not quite overcome, not entirely subsumed, in actual objects of knowledge either: *epistêmê* sides with *epinoia* when knowing sets or places itself upon (*epi-stasthai*) something unspecified (presumably, a tried-and-tested support or foundation, but this is mainly a Stoic and an Epicurean conjecture) and, moreover, when it refers to the practicalities of know-how, which resonate with *epinoia qua* “fabrication” (Hanley 2001, p. 4). Whether it pertains to *epistêmê* or to *epinoia*, being-on (here, the boundaries between ontology and epistemology are also smudged) implies a horizontal putting-into-relief of a surface and of multiple interfaces at the antipodes of a vertical arrangement. While the epinoic landscape or mindscape is uneven, the differences it presents do not amount to hierarchical formations. *Epinoia*’s anarchic operativity is thinking without a fixed principle, as well as without the principal Being, which *archê* connotes.

The same anarchic vein runs through Gnostic sources, particularly the second-century CE *Apocryphon of John*. In the Gnostic story of creation, the world is a fruit of Mother-Wisdom (*Sophia*), who has gone astray and envisioned it without the participation of Spirit.

Among her first creations are the rulers or authorities (*archontes*), who complete the work of creation and who are the evil spirits, still detectable in Descartes' philosophy with its suspicion of the malevolent God, *Deus deceptor*, or the "evil demon" out to deceive humanity. The chief ruler, *prôtarchôn*, wishes "to gain power over the psychic [*psuchikon*] and perceptible [*aisthêton*] body" (*Ap. John* II. 20, 12-14) (Robinson 2000, vol. II, p. 117). Yet, his plans are thwarted by *epinoia*, who, unlike the *archontes*, is anarchic. Adam harbors in himself "the Reflection [*epinoia*] of the light, who had been called 'Life' [*zôê*] by him (Gen 3,21 LXX). And she assists [*hupourgeîn*] the whole [creature], by toiling with him, by restoring him [to his] plenitude [*plêrôma*] [. . .]. Then the Reflection [*epinoia*] of the light was hidden in him, in order that the rulers [*archôn*] might not know (her), but that our fellow-sister, Wisdom [*sophia*], who resembles [us], might correct her deficiencies [*husterêma*] by means of the Reflection of light" (*Ap. John* III. 25, 623) (Robinson 2000, vol. II, p. 118). The hiddenness of *epinoia* in Adam does not allow the rulers of the world to gain power over the psychic domain. But what or who exactly is hidden in him?

On the one hand, *epinoia* is the reflection of light, which, while akin to *sophia*, gives that original brilliant wisdom a second chance, with creation gone terribly awry. Presupposing a reflecting surface, *epinoia* is, however, hidden, and it is her hiddenness that inaugurates the dimension of (psychic) depth. *Epinoia* is the fragile and finite consciousness born from the body's relation to itself, its separation from and return to itself, or the self-consciousness born from "simple" consciousness. Reflected and secondary, *epinoia* nevertheless plays a salvific role with regard to both wisdom and the human. She eclipses *sophia* and, at the same time, is a light that is most at home in what, from the standpoint of the powers that be, is perceived as impenetrable darkness, the non-transparency of the psyche to the gaze of the authorities. Whereas in Simon's account, *Epinoia* conceals the Father *Nous* within herself, in *The Apocryphon of John*, she is concealed within Adam (and, by virtue of her concealment, shelters him from harm). And all that is not to mention the Gnostic doctrine (as well as that of esoteric Platonism) of hiddenness in the light: "The powers do not see those who are clothed in perfect light, and consequently are not able to detain them" (*Gos. Phil.* II, 3, 70, 5-7) (Robinson 1984, p. 151).

On the other hand, *epinoia* is also known as life (*zôê*), and the intelligence she represents is indistinguishable from the principle of vitality; in and as *epinoia*, knowledge and life are one. That is why the text includes the words "she assists the whole [creature]. . . by restoring him [to his] plenitude [*plêrôma*]", to the condition prior to the Fall, when knowledge is still not cut off from life. This, too, is a component of anarchic thinking: reflecting life and reflecting together with life not as an object to be analyzed but as the energy of existence received on the superficies of our minds-bodies and sent further along, shared with others thanks to the essentially intermediate act of reflection. *Epinoia* is a shining reflection (a reflected sheen, if you will) that allows one to see for the first time! There is no other way of grasping light and life, of taking in the cosmos—the brilliant order and ornament, which, for the ancient, is also a great living being (*zôon*)—except through the reflected light and the play of epinoic mirrors, even in the reduced state of the conceptual distinction between the sun and its radiance.<sup>7</sup>

According to an alternative version of the text, *epinoia* is "a luminous reflection, who comes out of him [out of Adam, MM] and who is called 'Life' [*zôê*] (Gen 3, 21 LXX)" (*Ap. John* II. 20, 17-19) (Robinson 2000, vol. II, p. 119). The effusion of *epinoia* out of Adam reads like a surrender to the power of the ontological authorities, the un-concealment that hands the psyche and the body over to their controlling gazes. What the reference to Genesis 3:21 evinces, though, is that *epinoia* is hypostatized in Eve, whose Hebrew name Chavvah means "Life". *The Apocryphon of John* specifies this moment in greater detail: "Then, the Reflection [*epinoia*] of the light hid herself in him [Adam]. And in a [desire he (the Chief Ruler) wanted to bring her out from his [rib]. But Reflection [*epinoia*] is that (sort of thing) that [cannot] be grasped. The darkness pursued [*diôkein*] [her] light [but] it did not catch the light" (*Ap. John* III. 29, 12-16) (Robinson 2000, vol. II, p. 130).



Eve is the reflection of the great goddess, the Epinoia of Sophia, who faces Nous in Simon's fragment. The externalization of *epinoia* into Epinoia and into Life does not imply the sort of objectification that would make it (or Her) available to the gaze of and manipulation by the rulers of the world, being caught and grasped. Even on the outside, turned inside out, epinoic hiddenness and elusiveness are preserved. Nor does the effusion of *epinoia* out of Adam mean that none is left within him, just as immersion in deep thought is not cancelled out by whatever floats on one's mind. The reflected shine of *epinoia* is always with us, so incredibly close to us that it *is* us. Why? Because a thinking consistent with life, a living thinking of life, is essentially superficial, interfacial, in touch and engaged with the sphere that is formally "outside". It is a living-thinking that, expelling us outside of ourselves, prompts us to become other and, in the course of infinite finite becoming, to persist as thinking-living beyond any considerations of intelligence. The proximity of *epinoia*, to the point where reflection appears to merge with the reflecting, is the contrivance of self-othering and the fabrication of me-myself in the insistent repetitions of living-thinking.

Within, or at the unstable edge between the inner and the outer, *epinoia* is not to be conflated with a tight mental grip, either—the grip generally associated with the concept. *Epinoia* cannot be grasped also because it (or She) precludes grabbing and grasping in its (or Her) own mode of functioning: it (or She) is neither the imperial Latin *concept* nor the German *Begriff*. *Epinoia* works and plays, fabricates and invents, by letting what is on the mind pass, the mind's atmospheric field remaining fluid or vaporous, and, in case condensation occurs, returning to other states in psychic metabolism and metamorphosis. The pursuit of *epinoia* by the forces of darkness fails for this very reason: what those craving power and control grasp is no longer on the mind, unless the mind is afflicted by fixations or obsessive-compulsive disorders.

Still, no amount of strenuous interpretative effort can extinguish the strangeness of the Gnostic text. Its authors write that the first Adam, in whom "the shadow of the light" dwelt and whose "thinking was against [*para*] all those who had made him" (*Ap. John* II. 20, 29-31) (Robinson 2000, vol. II, p. 121, translation modified) did not have a material body made of the four elements; only subsequently was he recreated in such a body after the council of superior rulers determined that he posed a threat due to the unruly vector of his intelligence. In a signature Gnostic move, materiality as such (or, better, material embodiment, incarnation) spells out a death sentence—not as punishment for the original sin but as a containment measure keeping insubordinate intelligence at bay. The anarchy of *epinoia* is its note of defiance: the escape from power it plots is the most serious challenge to power, the royal road to liberation from the oppressive unity of Being, Mind, or Concept.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Georgia, Georgia/The whole day through (the whole day through)/Just an old sweet song/Keeps Georgia on my mind (Georgia on my mind).
- <sup>2</sup> A critical bilingual edition of Hildegard von Bingen (1998); Führkötter (1978, vol. 43, p. 84).
- <sup>3</sup> Hippolytus, Marcovich (1986, pp. 224–25).
- <sup>4</sup> See my *Exilic Ecologies: Jewish Mysticism and Ecological Thought* (unpublished manuscript).
- <sup>5</sup> Hippolytus, Marcovich (1986, p. 219).
- <sup>6</sup> The elemental opposition of the couple Nous and Epinoia rehearses the Aristotelian pairing of form and matter, *morphê* and *hylê* (preceded by the Platonic *eidos* and *chôra*), within a nearly identical structure of sexual difference. The nuanced view, according to which matter is not only receptive but also continuously gives itself forms in hylomorphic configurations, analogously resonates with the insight into the primacy of Epinoia. Furthermore, the characterization of Epinoia as being without *dunamis*, which is

associated with Nous, elliptically invests her with *energeia* and, more radically still, subtracts her from the ontological machinery of potentiality–actuality.

- <sup>7</sup> Refer to Cyril of Alexandria in *Commentary on John* I.5 on the distinction between light and its radiance and II.1 on the distinction between fire and its heat, as well as *Thesaurus* 4 on fire and light and 12 on sun and its radiance, drawn *tēi epinoiai*.

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