

On the Arrangement of the Platonic Dialogues

I. Thrasyllus

a. Diogenes Laertius (D.L.), Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers 3.56:

“But, just as long ago in tragedy the chorus was the only actor, and afterwards, in order to give the chorus breathing space, Thespis devised a single actor, Aeschylus a second, Sophocles a third, and thus tragedy was completed, so too with philosophy: in early times it discoursed on one subject only, namely physics, then Socrates added the second subject, ethics, and Plato the third, dialectics, and so brought philosophy to perfection. **Thrasyllus says that he [Plato] published his dialogues in tetralogies, like those of the tragic poets.** Thus they contended with four plays at the Dionysia, the Lenaea, the Panathenaea and the festival of Chytri. **Of the four plays the last was a satiric drama; and the four together were called a tetralogy.**”

b. Characters or types of dialogues (D.L. 3.49):

1. instructive (ὕφηγητικός)
 - A. theoretical (θεωρηματικόν)
 - a. physical (φυσικόν)
 - b. logical (λογικόν)
 - B. practical (πρακτικόν)
 - a. ethical (ἠθικόν)
 - b. political (πολιτικόν)
2. investigative (ζητητικός)
 - A. training the mind (γυμναστικός)
 - a. obstetrical (μαιευτικός)
 - b. tentative (πειραστικός)
 - B. victory in controversy (ἀγωνιστικός)
 - a. critical (ἐνδεικτικός)
 - b. subversive (ἀνατρεπτικός)

c. Thrasyllan categories of the dialogues (D.L. 3.50-1):

Physics: Timaeus

Logic: Statesman, Cratylus, Parmenides, and Sophist

Ethics: Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus, Symposium, Menexenus, Clitophon, the Letters, Philebus, Hipparchus, Rivals

Politics: Republic, the Laws, Minos, Epinomis, Atlantis

Obstetrics: Alcibiades 1 and 2, Theages, Lysis, Laches

Tentative: Euthyphro, Meno, Io, Charmides and Theaetetus

Critical: Protagoras

Subversive: Euthydemus, Gorgias, and Hippias 1 and 2

d. Thrasyllus' tetralogies (D.L. 3.57-61):

“Now, says Thrasyllus, there are nine tetralogies, if the Republic takes the place of one single work and the Laws of another.

His first tetralogy has a common plan underlying it, for he wishes to describe what the life of the philosopher will be. To each of the works Thrasyllus affixes a double title, the one taken from the name of the interlocutor, the other from the subject. This tetralogy, then, which is the first, begins with the Euthyphro or On Holiness, a tentative dialogue; the Apology of Socrates, an ethical dialogue, comes second; the third is Crito or On what is to be done, ethical; the fourth Phaedo or On the Soul, also ethical.”

e. List of the Thrasyllan tetralogies

- I. Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo
- II. Cratylus, Theaetetus, Sophist, Statesman
- III. Parmenides, Philebus, Symposium, Phaedrus
- IV. First Alcibiades, Second Alcibiades, Hipparchus, (Rival) Lovers
- V. Theages, Charmides, Laches, Lysis
- VI. Euthydemus, Protagoras, Gorgias, Meno
- VII. (Greater) Hippias, (Lesser) Hippias, Ion, Menexenus
- VIII. Clitophon, Republic, Timaeus, Critias
- IX. Minos, Laws, Epinomis, Letters.

These works are labelled as **Notheuomenoi** ("spurious") or **Apocrypha** (i.e., by Thrasyllus): Axiochus (2), Definitions (2), Demodocus (2), Epigrams (2), Eryxias (2), Halcyon (2), On Justice (2), On Virtue (2), Sisyphus (2).

f. Diogenes, continuing, gives a list of the trilogies of Aristophanes the grammarian:

- Republic, Timaeus, Critias (note VIII, above)
- Sophist, the Statesman, Cratylus (note II, above)
- Laws, Minos, Epinomis (note IX, above)
- Theaetetus, Euthyphro, Apology
- Crito, Phaedo, Letters

(“The rest follow as separate compositions in no regular order.”)

II. Albinus

g. Albinus' purpose for the handbook (Εἰσαγωγή ch. 1):

“After all, they have not been written without a certain art or power, nor is it easy for someone unskilled in theoretical work (θεωρίας πείρως) to have technical knowledge (τεχνικῶς γνωρίσαι) of them.”

Maximus of Tyre, *Dialexis* 11:

“**If someone having come upon Plato’s discourses is in need of further explanation**, and if the light that comes from him seems to be dull and he provides little of his clear brilliance, then that person may very well not see the sun rising, the moon’s brilliance, the evening star setting, or the morning star’s arrival.”

D.L. 3.55:

“Now, as you are an enthusiastic Platonist, and rightly so, and as you eagerly seek out that philosopher's doctrines in preference to all others, I have thought it necessary to give some account of the true nature of his discourses, the arrangement of the dialogues, and the method of his inductive procedure...”

h. Albinus' definition of the Platonic dialogue (Εἰσαγωγή ch. 1):

“So, in order that we do not suffer this fate while delving into the dialogues of Plato, let us examine the very thing I started with: what a dialogue really is. Well, it is nothing other than an (uttered) **speech** (Λόγος) composed of **question and answer** (ἐξ ἐρωτήσεως καὶ ποκρίσεως) concerning some sort of political or philosophical **concern(s)** (πραγμάτων) together with a fitting **characterization** (μετὰ τῆς πρεπούσης ἡθοποιΐας) of the **persons** (προσώπων) taking part and the arrangement of (or according to) their **diction** (κατὰ τὴν λέξιν).”

i. Albinus' characterization of our conversations (Ibid.):

“But “regarding the appropriate characterization of the persons introduced,” there are differences in our discussions throughout our lives: some are philosophical, others are sophistic, and some are inexpert and private. We must attribute the appropriate characteristics to each: for the philosophical—**noble** and **simple** and **truth-loving** (φιλάληθες); for the sophistic—the **artfully changeable** (ποικίλη) and **unstable** (παλίμβολα) and **reputation-loving** (φιλόδοξος); and, for the private type—that which is appropriate (for the particular individual) (τῷ δὲ ἰδιωτικῷ τὸ οἰκεῖον).”

j. Albinus' characterization of the dialogues (Ibid.):

A. instructional (ὀφηγητικοῦ)

1. (Appropriate for the) instruction, practice, and demonstration of the truth (διδασκαλίαν καὶ πρᾶξιν καὶ πόδειξιν τοῦ ἀληθοῦς)

B. investigative (ζητητικοῦ)

2. exercise, argument, and refutation of what is false (γυμνασίαν καὶ ἀγῶνα καὶ ἔλεγχον)

k. Albinus' categorization of the dialogues (Εἰσαγωγή ch. 4):

physical: Timaeus

logical: Cratylus, Sophist, Statesman, Parmenides

political: Republic, Critias, Minos, Laws, Epinomis

ethical: Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus, Symposium, Letters, Menexenus, Cleitophon, Philebus

tentative: Euthyphro, Meno, Ion, Charmides, Theaetetus

obstetrical: Alcibiades, Theages, Lysis, Laches

probative: Protagoras

refutative: Hippias Major and Minor, Euthydemus, and Gorgias.

When compared to Albinus, Diogenes has:

added to ethical: Hipparchus and the Rivals (Ἀντερασταί)

added to political: the dialogue concerning Atlantis

left out (at least in the grouping of the types of the dialogues, not among the tetralogies) the Critias, under 'political'

l. Albinus acknowledges the standard reading of Thrasyllus, and gives his methodology (Εἰσαγωγή, ch. 4):

“Some people begin with the Letters, some with the Theages. There are those who separate them out into tetralogies, and they order the first tetralogy into the Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, and the Phaedo—the Euthyphro, since it reports the charge against Socrates; the Apology, since it is necessary that he defend himself; thereafter is the Crito, because of the conversation in the prison; and then the Phaedo, since in this dialogue Socrates reaches the end of his life. This is the opinion of Dercyllides and Thrasyllus; however, they seem to me to have chosen to assign an order based on the dramatic characters and circumstances of their lives, which is perhaps useful for another reason, but not for our present concern. **Instead, we want to discover the start and arrangement of instruction that is in accordance with wisdom (ἀρχὴν καὶ διάταξιν διδασκαλίας τῆς κατὰ σοφίαν εὐρεῖν).** We say, then, that the start of Plato's doctrine is not singular and set.”

m. Albinus provides his imagery for the curriculum of Plato (Εἰσαγωγή chs. 4-5):

(Ch. 4 cont.) “His teaching (or “doctrine,” λόγος), being perfect, is like the perfect form of a circle: just as the start of a circle is not singular and determined, neither is his doctrine. (Ch. 5) Therefore, we will not delve into his teachings in a haphazard manner. When someone needs to draw a circle, for example, he does not draw it starting from any point whatsoever; so, starting from whatever attitude each of us may have with regard to his doctrine, he will delve into the dialogues.”

n. The qualifying factors of a reader involved in identifying the proper dialogues (Εἰσαγωγή ch. 5):

Of course, our attitudes regarding his doctrines (λόγος, sg.) are many and different: one refers to natural aptitude (κατὰ φύσιν), for example, whether one is naturally talented or untalented; one refers to age, for example, whether one is **the right age for philosophizing or past one’s prime**; one refers to motive, **whether for the sake of philosophy or history**; one refers to habit (κατὰ ἔξιν), whether one has been previously instructed or ignorant (προτετελεσμένος ἢ ἀμαθής); and one attitude refers to material conditions (κατὰ τὴν ὕλην), whether one has time for philosophy or is dragged around by circumstances.

o. Albinus’ (first and only) tetralogy, for the ideal student:

(First) Alcibiades
Phaedo
Republic
Timaeus

p. Albinus’ goal of the Platonic education (Ibid.):

“In addition, since it is also necessary to have knowledge of divine matters, so that someone who has acquired virtue is able to become assimilated to them (ὁμοιωθῆναι αὐτοῖς), we will delve into the Timaeus.”

(From D.L. 3.78):

“On good and evil he would discourse to this effect. He maintained that the end to aim at is assimilation to God, that virtue is in itself sufficient for happiness...”

(From Alcinous, Didaskalikos ch. 28):

“The end for many is assimilation to God, which means, for Plato, being intelligent, pious, and just; only in being just; being self-controlled and just; or following him.

q. Albinus' definition of the assimilation (Εἰσαγωγή ch. 6):

By delving into this investigation of nature—and this so-called theology (τῆ λεγομένη θεολογία) and the structure of the universe—we will see the divine with complete clarity (ἀντ<ικρὺς> ὁψόμεθα τὰ θεῖα ἐναργῶς).

r. Albinus' *second* ordering of the dialogues:

<u>Stage/type</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Dialogues</u>
(Stage 1) tentative/purgative	cleanse	Euthyphro, Meno, Ion, Charmides, Theaetetus
(Stage 2) obstetrical	natural concepts	Alcibiades, Theages, Lysis, Laches
(Stage 3) instructional	assimilation to god	“the doctrines relating to physics, theology, ethics, politics, and the regulation of the household”
(Stage 4) investigative (dialectic)	binding concepts to the soul	Cratylus, Sophist, Statesman, Parmenides
(Stage 5) probative/refutative	deal with sophistry	Protagoras

s. (Recall the ideal arrangement, from above:)

<u>Dialogue</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Previous definition</u>
Alcibiades	reverse course	obstetrical (brings to light natural concepts[?])
Phaedo	instruct. concerning the soul, philosopher defined	ethical
Republic	instruct. concerning obtaining virtue	political
Timaeus	instruct. concerning theological/physical (assimilation to god)	physics

t. Neoplatonic ordering of the dialogues of Plato, read in the following order (Anonymous Prolegomena to Plato 26.23-44):

(Ethical)

Alcibiades I

Gorgias

Phaedo

(Logical)

Cratylus

Theaetetus

(Physical)

Sophist

Statesman

(Theological)

Phaedrus

Symposium

Philebus

Second sequence or culmination of the curriculum:

Timaeus

Parmenides

(The bolded texts are in Albinus' ideal tetralogy.)

Appendix (Thrasyllus' tetralogies, D.L. 57-61)

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His first tetralogy has a common plan underlying it, for he wishes to describe what the life of the philosopher will be. To each of the works Thrasyllus affixes a double title, the one taken from the name of the interlocutor, the other from the subject. This tetralogy, then, which is the first, begins with the Euthyphro or On Holiness, a tentative dialogue; the Apology of Socrates, an ethical dialogue, comes second; the third is Crito or On what is to be done, ethical; the fourth Phaedo or On the Soul, also ethical.

The second tetralogy begins with Cratylus or On Correctness of Names, a logical dialogue, which is followed by Theaetetus or On Knowledge, tentative, the Sophist or On Being, a logical dialogue, the Statesman or On Monarchy, also logical.

The third tetralogy includes, first, Parmenides or On Ideas, which is logical, next Philebus or On Pleasure, an ethical dialogue, the Banquet or On the Good, ethical, Phaedrus or On Love, also ethical.

The fourth tetralogy starts with Alcibiades or On the Nature of Man, an obstetric dialogue; this is followed by the second Alcibiades or On Prayer, also obstetric; then comes Hipparchus or The Lover of Gain, which is ethical, and The Rivals or On Philosophy, also ethical.

The fifth tetralogy includes, first, Theages or On Philosophy, an obstetric dialogue, then Charmides or On Temperance, which is tentative, Laches or On Courage, obstetric, and Lysis or On Friendship, also obstetric.

The sixth tetralogy starts with Euthydemus or The Eristic, a prohibitive dialogue, which is followed by Protagoras or Sophists, critical, Gorgias or On Rhetoric, prohibitive, and Meno or On Virtue, which is tentative.

The seventh tetralogy contains, first, two dialogues entitled Hippias, the former On Beauty, the latter On Falsehood, both prohibitive; next Ion or On the Iliad, which is tentative, and Menexenus or The Funeral Oration, which is ethical.

The eighth tetralogy starts with Clitophon or Introduction, which is ethical, and is followed by the Republic or On Justice, political, Timaeus or On Nature, a physical treatise, and Critias or Story of Atlantis, which is ethical.

The ninth tetralogy starts with Minos or On Law, a political dialogue, which is followed by the Laws or On Legislation, also political, Epinomis or Nocturnal Council, or Philosopher, political, and lastly the Letters, thirteen in number, which are ethical.

(In these epistles his heading was "Welfare," as that of Epicurus was "A Good Life," and that of Cleon "All Joy." They comprise: one to Aristodemus, two to Archytas, four to Dionysius, one to Hermias, Erastus and Coriscus, one each to Leodamas, Dion and Perdiccas, and two to Dion's friends. This is the division adopted by Thrasyllus and some others.)

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