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# ἄρχαί

AS ORIGENS DO PENSAMENTO OCIDENTAL  
THE ORIGINS OF WESTERN THOUGHT

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RESENHA | REVIEW

**Review of E. Kaklamanou, M. Pavlou, A.  
Tsakmakis (eds.), *Framing the Dialogues.  
How to Read Openings and Closures in Plato*  
(2021)**

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MOTTA, A. (2022). Review of E. Kaklamanou, M. Pavlou, A. Tsakmakis (eds.), *Framing the Dialogues. How to Read Openings and Closures in Plato* (2021). *Archai* 32, e-03228.

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**M. Pavlou, A. Tsakmakis (eds.), (2021) *Framing the Dialogues. How to Read Openings and Closures in Plato*. Brill: Leiden-Boston.**

“Every discourse must be organised, like a living being, with a body of its own, as it were, so as not to be headless or footless, but to have a middle and members, composed in fitting relation to each other and to the whole (Pl. *Phdr.* 264c2-6).” In the Platonist tradition, this famous analogy, often repeated in Plato’s dialogues (*Grg.* 505c-d; *Ti.* 69a-b; *Phlb.* 66c-d; *Plt.* 277b-c; *Lg.* 752a), supports the idea that each dialogue is a whole made up of various parts, like the organic structure of a living being. However, the zoological analogy is not enough to justify theoretically the need to also comment on the prologues of the dialogues as part of this unity. Given that the latter cannot be envisaged purely as a matter of rhetorical rules, of the sort laid out in the *Phaedrus*’ case, but must also be based on philosophical contents, a crucial contribution is provided by the *Timaeus* through its teleological perspective, which posits philosophical unity in view of an end. Without this kind of unity, the cosmos cannot be understood and thus neither can the dialogues, which are living beings in as much as they are the microcosmic units constituting a literary cosmos that is the image of the metaphysical one.

Neoplatonic hermeneutics, which invites us to view each section of the dialogue as part of a unified whole – a living being – constitutes the starting point of ‘Framing the Dialogues’, a book that aims to shed new light on the openings and endings of Plato’s dialogues” (Pavlou, Tsakmakis, 2021). The introduction (pp. 1-9) by E. Kaklamanou allows us to set this exciting volume in a precise field of studies, and it takes into account and sometimes criticises the fundamental article by Myles Burnyeat, ‘First Words: A Valedictory Lecture’, in *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 43 (1997), pp. 1-20. The passage from Proclus’ *Commentary on the Parmenides* used by Burnyeat (and also quoted in full in the appendix to his article), and taken up in this collected volume, helps to show how “Proclus’

approach to the Platonic *prooimia* became part of the contemporary discussion regarding the nature of Plato's first words" (p. 1). This book follows in the footsteps of Burnyeat's enlightening considerations – which, however, are limited to the first words of the dialogues – and broadens his perspective to include the closures of the dialogues, even or indeed especially aporetic ones, which can be seen as framing other dialogues. Accordingly, this book is devoted to those beginnings and endings that form the frames for the dialogues, i.e. aspects of that discursive complexity which should be considered a general trait of Plato's writing. More specifically, these frames may be regarded as 1) part of a literary and philosophical strategy and accordingly of that literary craft of Plato's which supports the philosophical message of the dialogue; 2) the expression of an intradiegetic dimension, insofar as they function as commentaries on the dialogues; 3) the expression an extradiegetic dimension, insofar as they contain allusions, motifs and arguments able to connect different dialogues.

The volume generally follows these three interpretative lines without seeking to establish a unified thematic approach and without attempting any reasoned selection of the frames of the Platonic dialogues, because the actual aim is "to unveil the richness, complexity and multifaceted nature of the Platonic frames" (p. 5). This interpretive perspective is interesting and for the most part fruitful, but it also has a limit: for, although each chapter deals with the question of frames in an original and stimulating way, many chapters focus on the same dialogues. Moreover, none of the contributions offer a reading of the *Timaeus*' prologue, to which Burnyeat (pp. 15-16 of the above-mentioned article) devotes a 'metaphysical' interpretation, probably influenced by his Proclean readings. Even a brief incursion into the Proclean interpretation of the *Timaeus* reveals the importance of looking at the kind of unity constructed by Plato: this unity is not only literary but also philosophical, not only biological but also teleological. To further prove the usefulness of the Neoplatonic approach to the contemporary way of reading the dialogues as a whole and the preamble as a part of such a whole, as opposed to merely a charming

dramatic narrative, it seems to me that an analysis even of just the prologue of the *Timaeus* might have contributed in a decisive way to a complete re-evaluation of the literary strategies that Plato deployed for philosophical purposes. This, I feel, is the only criticism that can be addressed to the editors of a valuable book that will certainly prove important for the study of the relationship – or, better, unity – between philosophical argument and form in the Platonic dialogues.

Of the fourteen chapters, eleven are contributions delivered at the conference ‘Framing the Dialogues: How to Read Openings and Closures in Plato’, held at the University of Cyprus in December 2015. Strategically set at the beginning and end of the book, the articles by S. Halliwell (Ch. 1: ‘Where Are You Going and Where Have You Come From?’ *The Problem of Beginnings and Endings in Plato*, pp.10-26) and P. Remes (Ch. 14: *The Prooimion and the Skopos. Proclus' Commentary of the Alcibiades I*, pp. 263-279) form the frame of the book. On the one hand, Halliwell shows that the *Phaedrus* cannot represent a transparent authorial self-reference to Plato’s literary hermeneutics. In order to do so, he reflects on the importance of the mimetic status of the dialogues, on the theoretical framework offered to the exegesis of the dialogues as a whole by the *Phaedrus* – a dialogue whose unity has proved to be an exceptionally controversial topic (p. 12) and which thus represents a special challenge for any interpretation of openings and endings in Plato. Consequently, Halliwell is successful in drawing attention to the complexity of the relationship between the theory and practice of the discursive form in the *Phaedrus*, as well as to the apparent discrepancy between his normative ideal and the various ways in which many Platonic dialogues (esp. the aporetic ones) resist any strong sense of boundedness. On the other hand, Remes develops the idea of holism – proposed in the *Phaedrus* and intriguingly discussed by Halliwell – in relation to Neoplatonism by focusing not on the end of a dialogue but on that end that is the very purpose (the ethical-metaphysical *telos*) of a dialogue. She highlights a link between the preamble and the *skopos*, thereby showing that Proclus read the preambles as having been composed in view of the *telos* of the whole dialogue. For it is not the preamble that lends unity to the dialogue,

because it is not the representation of the whole, but a proper part of that living being that is the dialogue.

Furthermore, as already briefly noted, these two chapters seem to constitute the frame of the volume: although they are not both on Neoplatonism – and although the Neoplatonists tend to derive doctrinal consistency and rigorous rules from the *Phaedrus*' zoological analogy, as Halliwell himself notes (notwithstanding the opposite perspective offered by his impressive new reading of the dialogue) – these two chapters could be seen as commentaries on two of the ancient approaches to the question of preambles discussed by Proclus (*in Prm.* 658.33-659.23, discussed on pp. 264-265) and variously developed by modern scholarship. Proclus seems to be the most influential ancient author able to guide in some way modern approaches to Plato's preambles: for, as underlined by Halliwell, a prelude may allow one to grasp the philosophical content of a dialogue (i.e. the 'nature' of the things discussed). However, another perspective suggested by Proclus – and brilliantly investigated by Remes – appears to have influenced modern readings, because it concerns the moral contents enclosed in a preamble: although in Neoplatonism there is no opposition between the metaphysical and the ethical system – for the ultimate aim is godlikeness – some modern approaches to Plato's preambles, especially ones devoted to the analysis of the characters, show that the moral lessons provided by the dialogues can be learned from the way in which the interlocutors conduct themselves in the opening scenes (see D. Sedley, 'The Stoic-Platonist Debate on the *kathekonta*', in K. Ierodiakonou (ed.), *Topics in Stoic Philosophy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2002, pp. 128-152).

All the chapters are interesting and well argued. It is therefore worth pointing out some of the topics explored – if only briefly, since the density of the chapters prevents me from going into details. M. Finkelberg (Ch. 2: *Frame and Frame-Breaking in Plato's Dialogues*, pp. 27-39) analyses *metalepsis* as a kind of frame-breaking by detecting a narrative strategy that has largely gone unnoticed. C. Capuccino (Ch. 3: *On the Relationship between Διήγησις and*

*Míμησις* in *Plato's Dialogues*, pp. 40-62) reads the proems as the place where Plato makes his voice heard in an allusive way. L. Brisson (Ch. 4: *The Prologue of the Charmides*, pp. 63-69) leads the reader through an interpretation of the prologue of the *Charmides* by showing how a prologue may encapsulate the themes of a dialogue. M. Erler (Ch. 5: *Elenctic Aporia and Performative Euporia. Literary Form and Philosophical Message*, pp. 70-82) offers a very clear piece on the aporetic dialogues, by analysing the positive role of *aporia* as a Platonic literary strategy: his analysis is so convincing that it encourages one to reinterpret the fictitious chronology of the dialogues as a literary tool used to unite literary and philosophical aspects of the dialogues. M. Pavlou (Ch. 6: *Leisure, Philosophy and Teaching in the Protagoras*, pp. 84-106) argues that the outer and inner frames of the *Protagoras* can reveal the theme of leisure which runs through the dialogue like an undercurrent. By focusing on the *Republic's* frames, P. Thanassas (Ch. 7: *Justice as Happiness. Republic and Its Proems*, pp. 107-139) offers a critical and well-reasoned discussion on the tendency to treat the preludes as an aspect of the dramatic form. A. Capra's fascinating chapter (Ch. 8: *The Lysis and the Early Reception of Plato's Beginnings*, pp. 140-153) addresses the issue of the literary reception of the beginnings by analysing the opening of the *Lysis*: the outcomes reached are so innovative that they lead us to read this dialogue with different eyes. K.A. Morgan (Ch. 9: *Eros in the Platonic Frame*, pp. 154-175) establishes interesting links between various dialogue frames under the sign of *eros*, by showing the reason why many of the opening scenes of Platonic dialogues evoke an erotic context. Z. Petraki's chapter (Ch. 10: 'Were You There Yourself?' *The 'Dialectics of the Body' in Plato's Phaedo*, pp. 176-196) focuses on the *Phaedo*, in order to argue that the framed narrative allows us to view Socrates as an 'exceptional dramatic persona'. A. Tsakmakis (Ch. 11: *The Necessity of Writing. The Introduction of Plato's Theaetetus*, pp. 197-219) deals with the *Theaetetus'* framing parts as significant for the dialogue as a whole and for immersing the reader into the fiction of a dialogue which, according to his interpretation, was primarily addressed to individuals associated with the Academy. S. Rangos'

chapter (Ch. 12: *Chance Encounters and Abrupt Endings. On the Preludes and Closures of Plato's Third Thrasyllan Tetralogy*, pp. 220-242) examines the importance of the preludes and closures of the dialogues of the third tetralogy, in order to make sense of Thrasyllus' choice to arrange the dialogues in this way (according to Rangos, Thrasyllus was probably motivated by philosophical rather than dramatic concerns, although I have my doubts on his philosophical interests). D. Horan (Ch. 13: *The Introduction to Plato's Parmenides. What Does It Introduce and to Whom?* pp. 243-262) tries to demonstrate that the *Parmenides'* introduction contributes to emphasizing the closure of the dialogue and the overall reading of the dialogue.

While some aspects could have been developed further (*e.g.* the space reserved for discussing the closures, which in comparison with that devoted to prologues is rather limited, albeit intriguing), the material explored is fascinating and this volume raises excellent questions, deepening our understanding of the relationship between the framed dialogues and their philosophical contents. The book, the sixth volume in Brill's prestigious Plato Studies Series, is well produced and provided with a general index and an index of passages. All in all, the editors have skillfully assembled a rich collection of papers that is likely to attract different readerships.

## Bibliography

PAVLOU, M.; TSAMAKIS, A. (eds.). (2021). *Framing the Dialogues. How to Read Openings and Closures in Plato*. Brill, Leiden-Boston.



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