

Summary of the Structure of some Platonic Dialogues

1. The *Idea*

An *idea* is a general aspect, from the Indo-European root word pertaining to seeing (compare the Latin verb *video*). The general aspect is a feature seen throughout all particulars sharing that feature. The general aspect should be distinguished from a concept, which is the abstraction formed in the one's mind from similar particulars. However, the *idea*, being in the particulars rather than the mind, can be dramatized. It is up to the reader to form the concept.

2. The *Eidos*

The general aspect, the *idea*, may be divided into specific aspects (*eidē*, the plural of *eidos*) which together comprise the whole of the *idea*, e.g., the *idea* of Animal may be divided into the *eidē* Animal: of the air; Animal: of the land; Animal: of the sea. The word *eidos* is cognate with *idea*, being another word from the same Indo-European root pertaining to seeing.

3. The *Paradeigma*

The *paradeigma* is a basic minimalist concrete exemplar of an *eidos*, set aside from the examples or *deigmata* which are produced for public consumption. A potter, for example, looks to a *paradeigma* of a type of pot while making pots of that type for sale. A pot made for sale is precisely in the form of that *paradeigma*, but with additional details not intrinsic to the *paradeigma*. The *paradeigmata* of animals would be a generic flying creature, a terrestrial creature, and a marine creature.

4. The *Deigma*

A dialogue could not work with merely generic exemplars, and details must be added to copies from the exemplars to breathe dramatic life into them. There would need to be at least one representative of each *paradeigma* in order to allow the reader to understand the

conceptual underpinning of the dialogue. Were a dialogue to be composed concerning Animal, it might include as participants a penguin called Percy, a lion called Rupert, and a whale called Obadiah. Other *deigmata* would be optional.

5. The Conversation

The conversation would need to contain sufficient hints to allow the reader to understand that the dialogue is about the *idea* Animal, while not actually providing true statements about the *idea* Animal, or even about *idea* itself. The confusions also need to be unforced and driven by the internal logic of the dialogue. In this way, the reader must apply dialectic in order to reach an understanding of the dialogue as a whole, and by extension, of the *idea* Animal.