

Io - A Structural Analysis

1. The *Idea*

Dianoia (διάνοια) is literally “thinking through”. It is the activity of the *nous* or mind.

2. The *Eidos*

The two specific aspects of *dianoia* dramatized in this dialogue are the apparent and the real. Real *dianoia* is holistic and coherent, for otherwise it would not be thinking from beginning to end. It seeks out contradictions in order to remove them, and thereby to attain consistency. Since other people form part of the holistic environment, real *dianoia* also aims to extend this activity to them. Given that truth is good, the attempt to make other people think dialectically must be seen as beneficial. Apparent *dianoia*, by contrast, may work hard at interpreting limited pieces of intent; but it remains far from holistic, allowing discrepancies between the parts examined. The effort is intended to produce the appearance of good, with no concern for the harm done to others. They are harmed not only by their acceptance of falsehoods as if they are truths, but also by the enervation of their *nous* which is encouraged not to think through beyond each compartmentalized episode.

3. The *Paradeigma*

The Dialectician is of course the best minimal representative of true *dianoia*, and the Rhapsode is an excellent representative of apparent *dianoia*. Both *paradeigmata* are as extreme and as static as required to represent the *eidē* accurately.

4. The *Deigma*

The Dialectician is again represented by Socrates, although we should not confuse this *deigma* with the historical Socrates. The *deigma* is exactly the *paradeigma* of the Dialectician to which have been added various inessential details from Socrates, to make the *paradeigma* come alive, and possibly to make a few incidental points about the historical Socrates

regarding how he was and how he appeared. We know little about Io beyond this dialogue, but we may assume that he was a successful rhapsode, and Plato needed a fairly credible example of what is admittedly a very extreme character who finds it impossible to escape compartmentalized thinking. This flawed character needs to be able to appear successful and expert to the Many.

5. The Conversation

Socrates meets Io, apparently without witnesses, at the height of the rhapsode's success. Io has devoted great effort to mastering, presumably, the whole of Homer, and has paid particular attention to the performative interpretation of each Homeric episode, in a way that makes him appear to be an expert not only in poetry, but in everything that "Homer discusses" (cf. "Plato says"). Socrates systematically challenges Io's claim to goodness by devaluing his agency and reputation while paying lip-service to his excellence. Io remains for the apparent admiration, but is exposed to increasingly absurd and incoherent *dianoiai* parodying his own conception of Homeric *dianoiai*. Io never breaks, but bends to the absurdities, finally accepting that, in the opinion of Socrates at least, he possesses no rhapsodic *technē*, so long as he continues to appear to be an excellent rhapsode through divine dispensation. While the *deigmata*, by necessity, cannot change, the reader is invited to undertake the very activity that Io does not.