

Introduction to Socrates and Plato

If we were to assign the title of “greatest influence” on the language of Christian theology, after Jesus and the Scriptures of course, it would have to be Plato. Plato does not fall directly under this era of philosophy, but without him we would know little to nothing of his mentor and inspiration, Socrates. Socrates was a teacher and so we rely mainly on Plato who was his student. At the same time, Plato is a filter. Plato tells stories about Socrates, so he advances Socrates’ philosophy and his own at the same time. Think of it this way: Plato tells stories or aspects of stories from Socrates teaching which promote Plato’s way of thinking, kind of a ‘selective philosophy’. We might say something similar about the Gospels; as John tells us, “*There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written.*” (John 21:25).

Still scholars tell us that the ‘early Socrates’ of Plato’s early writing may reflect more closely Socrates’ actual thinking. From that we can guess that as Plato’s thoughts emerge and develop, Socrates may become more of a mouthpiece as time goes on, but couched within a recognizable true Socrates. If that were not true then more of a ruckus would probably have been raised at the time. **Understanding Aside:** When we talk about authorship in this time (and probably until ‘modern’ times), we have to be aware of the idea that one might write quotes from or ‘in the thought or vein of’ the character mentioned as the author. That is to say, *this is what so-and-so said or would have said had he said it*, so we can ‘attribute’ it to him, ergo he is the ‘author’ of the piece. This was a widely accepted practice and is visible even in the Scriptures.

Who Is That Guy Behind Those Platonic Dialogues?

With the aforementioned in mind, what can we say about Socrates? A bunch. Ultimately, for Socrates, it was all about living, and living right at that. He flouted many of the social norms of the day and directly attacked many, like the Sophists, who had political influence, because he felt their thinking and their lifestyles did not reflect the ‘examined life’. He was not afraid, at least in Plato’s telling, to broach any subject, lifestyle or mannerism. In the end he was condemned to drink poison at a trial from which he should have escaped punishment. In the *Apology* (from the Greek for *defense*), a ‘transcript’ of the trial and some ‘subsequent’ dialogues, we see that instead he turns on his detractors and supporters alike to keep to his principles and stubbornly make his point. Needless to say, it did not extend his life.

Enough of the man; how did he view the world? Unlike the Sophists, he does not stop at sensations, at opinion based knowledge; his ‘investigations’ tended to scrutinize the more intimate part of man, by what makes a human a human: reason. Like the Sophists, he was not concerned with metaphysics, saying simply that nature is under the direction of gods. He concentrated all his attention on the search for moral concepts; he was convinced that the practice of morality could only be accomplished by having an objective concept of justice. From this rose his opposition to the destructive ideas which Sophists espoused.

First and foremost Socrates is a teacher. He is not the first full-time teacher in Athens (as we saw above in the Sophists among others). He is different in that he is not only teaching but challenging the notions of other teachers and political and moral leaders. Now a cynic might say

that like the sophists he was just looking for a buck and so had to discredit the competition, but as they did not die for doing the same thing, one has to lend a bit more credence to Socrates as a 'gadfly' and trouble maker for a cause.

Socrates states in Plato's *Apology* that the whole direction of his life is due to the Oracle's at Delphi answer to a simple question his friend Chaerephon asked of it: *who is the wisest man?* The Oracle's answer was "*Socrates.*" This 'simple act' set Socrates, a famous general, on the path to understand why he was the wisest of men. According to him (or his PR man, whoever you choose to believe), he did not see himself as wise so he set out to understand this Oracle. It was not his fault that those he sought out, those whom he saw as wise, were unable to answer his simple questions.

Natural Law

Something I probably should have covered earlier but will do so here because I like the placement better is a concept known as 'Natural Law'. In a nutshell, within each of us lies an innate knowledge of how things should be, i.e. a natural or (human) nature-based, hard-wired knowledge. We would attribute this to the "image and likeness" of God within us as Genesis tells us. But these Greeks have only met few Jews and have not really taken the time to have been influenced by their thoughts on the Law. Still, as with our understanding, Socrates recognizes that it differs from secular or human law in that human law is imposed from the outside. Natural Law is interior and is considered the basis for secular Law.

To the Sophists Natural Law meant "the right of the stronger" (*Republic*), that is the one who can impose his will (*usually* through rhetoric). Socrates saw it more as an innate understanding of right and wrong.

The Socratic Method

Socrates is perhaps best known for, or perhaps the best known thing associated with his name, his dialectic method of inquiry, what we call the "*Socratic Method.*" Basically, dialectic is discourse between two or more people holding different points of view about a subject, who use reasoned arguments to establish the truth of the matter they are discussing. It is an extremely precise tool for allowing two people to hone their thoughts while they speak with one another. Technically, it is not a match of wits but a rational culling of superlative statements to the benefit of both parties.

That aside, the method to the madness of Socrates seems truly rooted in his immersion into his times. Socrates seems to embody many of the thoughts and theories of his day. His search for wisdom and understanding brings him into contact with the movers and shakers of politics, philosophy, and science. For this reason he discusses a great many subjects which may seem odd in that we present Socrates as mainly an ethical-moral philosopher, but it is not odd in *why* he discusses a great many things.

Whenever a concept is being proffered, espoused, or ranted about, Socrates often leaps into the fray asks everyone else to define it, ostensibly because he is ignorant and needs their wisdom in the matter. People are always trying to help poor Socrates understand. They are patient as he continues to ask questions, to draw out meaning from the individual. This process, which Socrates thought of as 'midwifery', we call his 'method'

This questioning honed the person's *own* understanding, and we would think of it as an informal form of logic, as we have discussed before. Socrates' directed questioning was often sly but served to remove poor premises and lead to logical thinking. His rhetoric is based in drawing out the truth from within the person, questioning until they saw the fluff in their thoughts, as opposed to the Sophist's external imposition of truth. For him, generalities should only be used when sufficient cause could be shown that they could be; reason alone should be the rule by which we judge them and that eventually we could arrive at general concepts by which other concepts could be judged, and so on and so on. Function and meaning go hand in hand – wisdom was right action.

For Socrates, wisdom was the end.

Virtue

Another term we hear him use often is *Virtue*, but what does Socrates mean by the word we translate as 'virtue'? First let us start with what it is not. For Socrates *ignorance*, not malice *per se*, is why one does evil. To know good is to do good. Therefore wisdom and learning are not just virtues in and of themselves as we would think of them, they *are* Virtue.

Virtue is knowledge/wisdom and knowledge/wisdom is virtue. What the wise man does is virtue and what the virtuous man does is wisdom. Ignorant and unwise people are not virtuous because they cannot act virtuously. Still, they are not evil, because since they are ignorant they are not responsible. It is really impossible to do wrong voluntarily because you would really only do good voluntarily. Therefore Virtue and Wisdom also go hand in hand. Socrates asks what good are worldly possessions or power if you do not have the sense to use them? That becomes especially pertinent when say, we are the powerful person wielding them. As Jesus would say, "*what profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?*" (Mark 8:36)

Wisdom leads to right living. For Socrates that is paramount. That is the reason we gain wisdom. By working from the particular (usually a particular circumstance) we can gain wisdom and see general patterns which, in turn, further guide us in the particular. Socrates called this a 'unity of virtues', in the sense of all things being one.

This sense is why we classify Socrates, at least the one presented mainly by Plato, as an ethical philosopher, because for him, all things, all knowledge, all learning are about living right. For this reason "*the unexamined life is not worth living.*" (Apology, 38a) This is not an intellectual hubris; knowledge is virtue and virtue is everything – to live any other way is a waste.

The Dichotomized Man

Above I talked about the "Unity of Virtues" but that is not to be confused with a unity of all things. In another reaction against his times Socrates believed in 'duality.' Humans were body *and* soul. In terms of ontology or being, the idea of the 'soul', i.e. that thing which is separate from the 'body', is that which makes us, well, *us*. This is somewhat different from other *Weltanschauung* (world-views), like say the Hebrews, who saw the person as unity, that is, the 'head' and the 'heart' made up the person. So who cares, right? Well what the concept of a separate soul does is allow within Western philosophy the idea of the after-life (which will eventually creep into Hebrew thoughts as well). We brushed against this in the early Western philosophers section. The idea of heaven, the idea of something beyond us becomes more

immediate, more ethical in nature here, as opposed to concepts like 'the Mind' which we saw in earlier pre-Socratic thought.

Think back. Is everything *one* or is everything *plural*? This dichotomy places Socrates squarely within the Pluralist's camp but more importantly means that not only can I be outside of something else, but also that something else can be outside of me, as well as both together. Take a long drag on that thought cigarette and hold it. (*you know how to argue don't you Steve? You just put your two premises together and cognate....*) Because of this, Virtue plays into Socrates' understanding of the soul and vice versa.

The Early Dialogues: Questions, I Got Questions... (Ethics, Religion, Psychology and Epistemology)

Once more, due to the nature of our inquiry, let us sift through and reduce Socrates' thoughts to some quick one-liners. Socrates' ethical/theological (I will tie them together) and epistemological (how we *know* things) understanding can be found in the early dialogues of Plato, which as discussed are probably the closest thing to Socrates' thought as we can divine. The fight here is opinion versus knowledge, ignorance versus virtue.

Reading Philosophy

As a pretty major aside here, as earlier sections were given in order to help with the beginning of *thinking* philosophy, this section is the introduction to beginning to *read* philosophy. Reading can be difficult, especially in translated works. Depending on how the translator chooses to translate (*word for word; meaning for meaning; timeframe, etc.*), how contemporary the philosopher's thought or culture is to our own, just to name a few, we can have more or less difficulty in plowing through the text. In the end most of the thought are thoughts which are familiar to us in one form or another. Still, we are seeking to understand what the author is *trying to tell us*, not necessarily *what we think is being said*. The ultimate goal is to be able to pick up a work and read it from beginning to end, all the while marking arguments and conclusions as we go along, finally gleaning some understanding after we are done. Be aware that this may take more than one reading!

In fact it is really a three-step process. Think about what we have discussed so far and why. Well, this is why. First we want to be able to *objectively* read a work or series of works. In this step we are really just seeking to hear what the author is trying to tell us, that is the work in and of itself (or the body of work), free of our own thinking on the subject. Second, we want to examine it within a context, still objectively, understanding the author's subjective and environmental influences and how that plays into the work. Thirdly, we begin to examine it for the purpose of 'usefulness' to us, i.e. *critically*, using the tools we have stuck into our belts as a work of influence in our own thoughts.

We do not just want to depend upon the learned and consumed commentaries of others. We want to read the texts themselves and not take it for granted that is what they say or what they mean for us. Therefore think of this exposition as a good 'reading list' for us to start with. Rather than tackling whole body of a single work, we will start with ideas, and see if we can recognize these ideas within the text. For now, baby steps.

Putting It Together

So, without getting into the nitty-gritty of the texts we can see the powerful influence Socrates has, not only for his time but for all times to follow. His inability to be satisfied with the status quo (or whatever the Greek equivalent of that phrase is) drove him to examine everything and everyone all by asking questions. Do not worry that Socrates was an idiot by protesting his ignorance, as “*methinks my lady doth protest too much.*” Socrates is crafty and vicious in his pursuit of wisdom. He defers and grovels, cajoles and angers, praises and self-deprecates, but he is a bull dog for virtue.

This chapter is primarily a hands-on activity, so the conclusions to draw from its reading are mainly of the personal type. Socrates has some very definite ideas about how the world works/should work and he is not afraid to share them. We can get a sense from this short reading set of his ‘method’, and the effectiveness (and annoyingness) of it.

There is another small point here. Hopefully from this reading session, some of his sense of humor comes through too.

Homegame

Question: Even with all of his protestations, does Socrates use rhetoric similarly to the Sophists (i.e. as a blunt object)?

Activity: Let us look at one short work from the early period as a whole, *Ion*; a seemingly odd discussion with an actor.

Technical Terms

Art: *techne* = skill or craft, as in the *art* of medicine.

Knowledge: *epistome* = knowledge of or about a thing (sometimes *inspiration* or *science*), as in a doctor *knows* about the flu.

So in this case, you go to your doctor feeling achy and sniffing and coughing. The doctor *knows* this is the flu and he *does* something to make you feel better.

OTTO: Don't call me stupid....

WANDA: To call you stupid would be an insult to stupid people. I've known sheep who could outwit you. I've worn dresses with higher IQs, but you think you're an intellectual, don't you, ape?

OTTO: Apes don't read philosophy.

WANDA: Yes they do, Otto, they just don't understand it.

WANDA: What would Plato do?

OTTO: Apologize.

A Fish Called Wanda (1988)

Plato: Ion

Personae

- Socrates
- Ion – an actor (*rhapsodes*) from Ephesus

530a **Socrates** Welcome, Ion. Where have you come from now, to pay us this visit? From your home in Ephesus?

Ion No, no, Socrates; from Epidaurus and the festival there of Asclepius.

Socrates Do you mean to say that the Epidaurians honor the god with a contest of rhapsodes also?

Ion Certainly, and of music in general.

Socrates Why then, you were competing in some contest, were you? And how went your competition?

Ion We carried off the first prize, Socrates.

530b **Socrates** Well done: so now, mind that we win too at the Panathenaea.

Ion Why, so we shall, God willing.

Socrates I must say I have often envied you rhapsodes, Ion, for your art: for besides that it is fitting to your art that your person should be adorned and that you should look as handsome as possible, the necessity of being conversant with a number of good poets, and especially with Homer, the best and divinest poet of all, and of apprehending

530c his thought and not merely learning off his words, is a matter for envy; since a man can never be a good rhapsode without understanding what the poet says. For the rhapsode ought to make himself an interpreter of the poet's thought to his audience; and to do this properly without knowing what the poet means is impossible. So one cannot but envy all this.

Ion What you say is true, Socrates: I at any rate have found this the most laborious part of my art; and I consider I speak about Homer better than anybody, for neither Metrodorus of Lampsacus, nor Stesimbrotus of Thasos, nor Glaucon,⁵ nor any one that the world has ever seen, had so many and such fine comments to offer on Homer as I have.

530d

Socrates That is good news, Ion; for obviously you will not grudge me an exhibition of them.

Ion And indeed it is worth hearing, Socrates, how well I have embellished Homer; so that I think I deserve to be crowned with a golden crown by the Homeridae.

Socrates Yes, and I must find myself leisure some time to listen to you; but for the moment, please answer this little question: are you skilled in Homer only, or in Hesiod and Archilochus as well?

531a

Ion No, no, only in Homer; for that seems to me quite enough.

Socrates And is there anything on which Homer and Hesiod both say the same?

Ion Yes, I think there are many such cases.

Socrates Then in those cases would you expound better what Homer says than what Hesiod says?

Ion I should do it equally well in those cases, Socrates, where they say the same.

531b **Socrates** But what of those where they do not say the same? For example, about the seer's art, on which both Homer and Hesiod say something.

Ion Quite so.

Socrates Well then, would you, or one of the good seers, expound better what these two poets say, not only alike but differently, about the seer's art?

Ion One of the seers.

Socrates And if you were a seer, would you not, with an ability to expound what they say in agreement, know also how to expound the points on which they differ?

Ion Of course.

531c **Socrates** Then how is it that you are skilled in Homer, and not in Hesiod or the other poets? Does Homer speak of any other than the very things that all the other poets speak of? Has he not described war for the most part, and the mutual intercourse [discussion] of men, good and bad, lay and professional, and the ways of the gods in their intercourse with each other and with men, and happenings in the heavens and in the underworld, and origins of gods and heroes?

531d **Socrates** Are not these the subjects of Homer's poetry?

Ion What you say is true, Socrates.

Socrates And what of the other poets? Do they not treat of the same things?

Ion Yes; but, Socrates, not on Homer's level.

Socrates What, in a worse way?

Ion Far worse.

Socrates And Homer in a better?

Ion Better indeed, I assure you.

Socrates Well now, Ion, dear soul; when several people are talking about number, and one of them speaks better than the rest, I suppose there is someone who will distinguish the good speaker?

531e **Ion** I agree.

Socrates And will this someone be the same as he who can distinguish the bad speakers, or different?

Ion The same, I suppose.

Socrates And he will be the man who has the art of numeration?

Ion Yes.

Socrates And again, when several are talking about what kinds of foods are wholesome, and one of them speaks better than the rest, will it be for two different persons to distinguish the superiority of the best speaker and the inferiority of a worse one, or for the same?

Ion Obviously, I should say, for the same.

Socrates Who is he? What is his name?

Ion A doctor.

532a **Socrates** And so we may state, in general terms, that the same person will always distinguish, given the same subject and several persons talking about it, both who speaks well and who badly: otherwise, if he is not going to distinguish the bad speaker, clearly he will not distinguish the good one either, where the subject is the same.

Ion That is so.

Socrates And the same man is found to be skilled in both?

Ion Yes.

Socrates And you say that Homer and the other poets, among whom are Hesiod and Archilochus, all speak about the same things, only not similarly; but the one does it well, and the rest worse?

Ion Yes, and what I say is true.

532b **Socrates** And since you distinguish the good speaker, you could distinguish also the inferiority of the worse speakers.

Ion So it would seem.

Socrates Then, my excellent friend, we shall not be wrong in saying that our Ion is equally skilled in Homer and in the other poets, seeing that you yourself admit that the same man will be a competent judge of all who speak on the same

things, and that practically all the poets treat of the same things.

Ion Then what can be the reason, Socrates, why I pay no attention when somebody discusses any other poet, and am unable to offer any remark at all of any value, but simply drop into a doze, whereas if anyone mentions something connected with Homer I wake up at once and attend and have plenty to say?

532c **Socrates** That is not difficult to guess, my good friend; anyone can see that you are unable to speak on Homer with art and knowledge. For if you could do it with art, you could speak on all the other poets as well; since there is an art of poetry, I take it, as a whole, is there not?

Ion Yes.

532d **Socrates** And when one has acquired any other art whatever as a whole, the same principle of inquiry holds through all the arts? Do you require some explanation from me, Ion, of what I mean by this?

Ion Yes, upon my word, Socrates, I do; for I enjoy listening to you wise men.

Socrates I only wish you were right there, Ion: but surely it is you rhapsodes and actors, and the men whose poems you chant, who are wise; whereas I speak but the plain truth, as a simple layman might.

532e For in regard to this question I asked you just now, observe what a trifling commonplace it was that I uttered—a thing that any man might know—namely, that when one has acquired a whole art the inquiry is the same. Let us just think it out thus: there is an art of painting as a whole?

Ion Yes.

Socrates And there are and have been many painters, good and bad?

Ion Certainly.

Socrates Now have you ever found anybody who is skilled in pointing out the successes and failures among the works

of Polygnotus son of Aglaophon, but unable to do so with the works of the other painters;

533a and who, when the works of the other painters are exhibited, drops into a doze, and is at a loss, and has no remark to offer; but when he has to pronounce upon Polygnotus or any other painter you please, and on that one only, wakes up and attends and has plenty to say?

Ion No, on my honor, I certainly have not.

Socrates Or again, in sculpture, have you ever found anyone who is skilled in expounding the successes of Daedalus son of Metion, or Epeius son of Panopeus, or Theodorus of Samos, or any other single sculptor, but in face of the works of the other sculptors is at a loss and dozes, having nothing to say?

533b **Ion** No, on my honor, I have not found such a man as that either.

Socrates But further, I expect you have also failed to find one in fluting or harping or minstrelsy or rhapsodizing who is skilled in expounding the art of Olympus or Thamyras, or Orpheus, or Phemius, the rhapsode of Ithaca, but is at a loss and has no remark to offer on the successes or failures in rhapsody of Ion of Ephesus.

533c **Ion** I cannot gainsay you on that, Socrates: but of one thing I am conscious in myself—that I excel all men in speaking on Homer and have plenty to say, and everyone else says that I do it well; but on the others I am not a good speaker. Yet now, observe what that means.

Socrates I do observe it, Ion, and I am going to point out to you what I take it to mean. For, as I was saying just now, this is not an art in you, whereby you speak well on Homer, but a divine power, which moves you like that in the stone which Euripides named a magnet, but most people call “Heraclea stone.” For this stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a power whereby they in turn are able to do the very same thing as the stone,

533e and attract other rings; so that sometimes there is formed quite a long chain of bits of iron and rings, suspended one from another; and they all depend for this power on that one stone. In the same manner also the Muse inspires men herself, and then by means of these inspired persons the inspiration spreads to others, and holds them in a connected chain. For all the good epic poets utter all those fine poems not from art, but as inspired and possessed, and the good lyric poets likewise;

534a just as the Corybantian worshippers do not dance when in their senses, so the lyric poets do not indite those fine songs in their senses, but when they have started on the melody and rhythm they begin to be frantic, and it is under possession—as the bacchantes are possessed, and not in their senses, when they draw honey and milk from the rivers—that the soul of the lyric poets does the same thing, by their own report. For the poets tell us, I believe, that the songs they bring us are the sweets they cull from honey-dropping fountains

534b in certain gardens and glades of the Muses—like the bees, and winging the air as these do. And what they tell is true. For a poet is a light and winged and sacred thing, and is unable ever to indite until he has been inspired and put out of his senses, and his mind is no longer in him: every man, whilst he retains possession of that, is powerless to indite a verse or chant an oracle. Seeing then that it is not by art that they compose and utter so many fine things about the deeds of men—

534c as you do about Homer—but by a divine dispensation, each is able only to compose that to which the Muse has stirred him, this man dithyrambs, another laudatory odes, another dance-songs, another epic or else iambic verse; but each is at fault in any other kind. For not by art do they utter these things, but by divine influence; since, if they had fully learnt by art to speak on one kind of theme, they would know how to speak on all. And for this reason God

534d takes away the mind of these men and uses them as his ministers, just as he does soothsayers and godly seers, in order that we who hear them may know that it is not they who utter these words of great price, when they are out of their wits, but that it is God himself who speaks and addresses us through them. A convincing proof of what I say is the case of Tynnichus, the Chalcidian, who had never composed a single poem in his life that could deserve any mention, and then produced the paean which is in everyone's mouth, almost the finest song we have, simply—as he says himself — “an invention of the Muses.” For the god, as it seems to me,

534e intended him to be a sign to us that we should not waver or doubt that these fine poems are not human or the work of men, but divine and the work of gods; and that the poets are merely the interpreters of the gods, according as each is possessed by one of the heavenly powers. To show this forth, the god of set purpose sang the finest of songs through the meanest of poets:

535a or do you not think my statement true, Ion?

Ion Yes, upon my word, I do: for you somehow touch my soul with your words, Socrates, and I believe it is by divine dispensation that good poets interpret to us these utterances of the gods.

Socrates And you rhapsodes, for your part, interpret the utterances of the poets?

Ion Again your words are true.

Socrates And so you act as interpreters of interpreters?

Ion Precisely.

535b **Socrates** Stop now and tell me, Ion, without reserve what I may choose to ask you: when you give a good recitation and specially thrill your audience, either with the lay of Odysseus leaping forth on to the threshold, revealing himself to the suitors and pouring out the arrows before his feet, or of Achilles dashing at Hector, or some part of the sad story of Andromache or of Hecuba, or of Priam, are

535c you then in your senses, or are you carried out of yourself, and does your soul in an ecstasy suppose herself to be among the scenes you are describing, whether they be in Ithaca, or in Troy, or as the poems may chance to place them?

Ion How vivid to me, Socrates, is this part of your proof! For I will tell you without reserve: when I relate a tale of woe, my eyes are filled with tears; and when it is of fear or awe, my hair stands on end with terror, and my heart leaps.

535d **Socrates** Well now, are we to say, Ion, that such a person is in his senses at that moment,—when in all the adornment of elegant attire and golden crowns he weeps at sacrifice or festival, having been despoiled of none of his finery; or shows fear as he stands before more than twenty thousand friendly people, none of whom is stripping or injuring him?

Ion No, on my word, not at all, Socrates, to tell the strict truth.

Socrates And are you aware that you rhapsodes produce these same effects on most of the spectators also?

535e **Ion** Yes, very fully aware: for I look down upon them from the platform and see them at such moments crying and turning awestruck eyes upon me and yielding to the amazement of my tale. For I have to pay the closest attention to them; since, if I set them crying, I shall laugh myself because of the money I take, but if they laugh, I myself shall cry because of the money I lose.

Socrates And are you aware that your spectator is the last of the rings which I spoke of as receiving from each other the power transmitted from the Heracleian lodestone?

536a You, the rhapsode and actor, are the middle ring; the poet himself is the first; but it is the god who through the whole series draws the souls of men whithersoever he pleases, making the power of one depend on the other. And, just as from the magnet, there is a mighty chain of choric performers and masters and under-masters suspended by side-connections from the rings that hang down from the

Muse. One poet is suspended from one Muse, another from another:

536b the word we use for it is “possessed,” but it is much the same thing, for he is held. And from these first rings—the poets—are suspended various others, which are thus inspired, some by Orpheus and others by Musaeus; but the majority are possessed and held by Homer. Of whom you, Ion, are one, and are possessed by Homer; and so, when anyone recites the work of another poet, you go to sleep and are at a loss what to say; but when some one utters a strain of your poet, you wake up at once, and your soul dances,

536c and you have plenty to say: for it is not by art or knowledge about Homer that you say what you say, but by divine dispensation and possession; just as the Corybantian worshippers are keenly sensible of that strain alone which belongs to the god whose possession is on them, and have plenty of gestures and phrases for that tune, but do not heed any other. And so you, Ion, when the subject of Homer is mentioned, have plenty to say, but nothing on any of the others. And when you ask me the reason

536d why you can speak at large on Homer but not on the rest, I tell you it is because your skill in praising Homer comes not by art, but by divine dispensation.

Ion Well spoken, I grant you, Socrates; but still I shall be surprised if you can speak well enough to convince me that I am possessed and mad when I praise Homer. Nor can I think you would believe it of me yourself, if you heard me speaking about him.

Socrates I declare I am quite willing to hear you, but not until you have first answered me this: on what thing in Homer's story do you speak well? Not on all of them, I presume.

536e **Ion** I assure you, Socrates, on all without a single exception.

Socrates Not, of course, including those things of which you have in fact no knowledge, but which Homer tells.

Ion And what sort of things are they, which Homer tells, but of which I have no knowledge?

537a **Socrates** Why, does not Homer speak a good deal about arts, in a good many places? For instance, about chariot-driving: if I can recall the lines, I will quote them to you.

Ion No, I will recite them, for I can remember.

Socrates Tell me then what Nestor says to his son Antilochus, advising him to be careful about the turning-post in the horse-race in honor of Patroclus.

Ion "Bend thyself in the polished car slightly to the left of them; and call to the right-hand horse"

537b "and goad him on, while your hand slackens his reins. And at the post let your left-hand horse swerve close, so that the nave of the well-wrought wheel may seem to come up to the edge of the stone, which yet avoid to touch." (*Hom. Il. 23.335 ff*).

Socrates Enough. Now, Ion, will a doctor or a charioteer be the better judge

537c whether Homer speaks correctly or not in these lines?

Ion A charioteer, of course.

Socrates Because he has this art, or for some other reason?

Ion No, because it is his art.

Socrates And to every art has been apportioned by God a power of knowing a particular business? For I take it that what we know by the art of piloting we cannot also know by that of medicine.

Ion No, to be sure.

Socrates And what we know by medicine, we cannot by carpentry also?

Ion No, indeed.

537d **Socrates** And this rule holds for all the arts, that what we know by one of them we cannot know by another? But before you answer that, just tell me this: do you agree that one art is of one sort, and another of another?

Ion Yes.

Socrates Do you argue this as I do, and call one art different from another when one is a knowledge of one kind of thing, and another a knowledge of another kind?

537e **Ion** Yes.

Socrates Since, I suppose, if it were a knowledge of the same things—how could we say that one was different from another, when both could give us the same knowledge? Just as I know that there are five of these fingers, and you equally know the same fact about them; and if I should ask you whether both you and I know this same fact by the same art of numeration, or by different arts, you would reply, I presume, that it was by the same?

Ion Yes.

538a **Socrates** Then tell me now, what I was just going to ask you, whether you think this rule holds for all the arts—that by the same art we must know the same things, and by a different art things that are not the same; but if the art is other, the things we know by it must be different also.

Ion I think it is so, Socrates.

Socrates Then he who has not a particular art will be incapable of knowing aright the words or works of that art?

538b **Ion** True.

Socrates Then will you or a charioteer be the better judge of whether Homer speaks well or not in the lines that you quoted?

Ion A charioteer.

Socrates Because, I suppose, you are a rhapsode and not a charioteer.

Ion Yes.

Socrates And the rhapsode's art is different from the charioteer's?

Ion Yes.

Socrates Then if it is different, it is also a knowledge of different things.

Ion Yes.

Socrates Now, what of the passage where Homer tells how Hecamede,

538c Nestor's concubine, gives the wounded Machaon a posset? His words are something like this: "Of Pramneian wine it was, and therein she grated cheese of goat's milk with a grater of bronze; and thereby an onion as a relish for drink." (*Hom. Il. 11.639-40*) Is it for the doctor's or the rhapsode's art to discern aright whether Homer speaks correctly here or not?

Ion For the doctor's.

Socrates Well now, when Homer says:

538d "And she passed to the bottom like a plummet which, set on a horn from an ox of the field, goes in haste to bring mischief among the ravenous fishes" — (*Hom. Il. 24.80-82*) are we to say it is for the fisherman's or for the rhapsode's art to decide what he means by this, and whether it is rightly or wrongly spoken?

Ion Clearly, Socrates, for the fisherman's art.

Socrates Then please observe: suppose you were questioning me and should ask:

538e "Since therefore, Socrates, you find it is for these several arts to appraise the passages of Homer that belong to each, be so good as to make out those also that are for the seer and the seer's art, and show me the sort of passages that come under his ability to distinguish whether they are well or ill done"; observe how easily and truly I shall answer you. For he has many passages, both in the *Odyssey*, as for instance the words of Theoclymenus, the seer of the line of Melampus, to the suitors:

539a "Hapless men, what bane is this afflicts you? Your heads and faces and limbs below are shrouded in night, and wailing is enkindled, and cheeks are wet with tears: of ghosts the porch is full, and the court full of them also, hastening hell-wards 'neath the gloom: and the sun is perished out of heaven, and an evil mist is spread abroad;" (*Hom. Od. 20.351-57*)

539b and there are many passages in the *Iliad* also, as in the fight at the rampart, where he says:"For as they were

eager to pass over, a bird had crossed them, an eagle of lofty flight, pressing the host at the left hand, and bearing a blood-red monster of a snake, alive and still struggling; nor had it yet unlearned the lust of battle. For bending back it smote its captor on the breast by the neck, and the bird in the bitterness of pain cast it away to the ground, and dropped it down in the midst of the throng;" "and then with a cry flew off on the wafting winds." (*Hom. Il. 12.200-7*) This passage, and others of the sort, are those that I should say the seer has to examine and judge.

Ion And you speak the truth, Socrates.

Socrates And so do you, Ion, in saying that. Now you must do as I did, and in return for my picking out from the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* the kinds of passage that belong severally to the seer,

539e the doctor, and the fisherman, you have now to pick out for me—since you are so much more versed in Homer than I—the kinds which belong to the rhapsode, Ion, and the rhapsode's art, and which he should be able to consider and distinguish beyond the rest of mankind.

Ion What I say, Socrates, is—"all passages."

Socrates Surely you do not say "all," Ion! Can you be so forgetful? And yet forgetfulness would ill become a rhapsode.

540a **Ion** Why, how am I forgetting?

Socrates Do you not remember that you said that the art of the rhapsode was different from that of the charioteer?

Ion I remember.

Socrates And you also admitted that, being different, it would know different things?

Ion Yes.

Socrates Then by your own account the rhapsode's art cannot know everything, nor the rhapsode either.

Ion Let us say, everything except those instances, Socrates.

540b **Socrates** By “those instances” you imply the subjects of practically all the other arts. Well, as he does not know all of them, which kinds will he know?

Ion Those things, I imagine, that it befits a man to say, and the sort of thing that a woman should say; the sort for a slave and the sort for a freeman; and the sort for a subject or for a ruler.

Socrates Do you mean that the rhapsode will know better than the pilot what sort of thing a ruler of a storm-tossed vessel at sea should say?

Ion No, the pilot knows better in that case.

540c **Socrates** Well, will the rhapsode know better than the doctor what sort of thing a ruler of a sick man should say?

Ion Not in that case either.

Socrates But he will know the sort for a slave, you say?

Ion Yes.

Socrates For instance, if the slave is a cowherd, you say the rhapsode will know what the other should say to pacify his cows when they get fierce, but the cowherd will not?

Ion That is not so.

Socrates Well, the sort of thing that a woman ought to say—a spinning-woman—about the working of wool?

40d **Ion** No.

Socrates But he will know what a man should say, when he is a general exhorting his men?

Ion Yes, that sort of thing the rhapsode will know.

Socrates Well, but is the art of the rhapsode the art of the general?

Ion I, at any rate, should know what a general ought to say.

Socrates Yes, since I daresay you are good at generalship also, Ion. For in fact, if you happened to have skill in horsemanship as well as in the lyre, you would know when horses were well or ill managed:

540e but if I asked you, “By which art is it, Ion, that you know that horses are being well managed, by your skill as a horseman, or as a player of the lyre?” what would your answer be?

Ion I should say, by my skill as a horseman.

Socrates And if again you were distinguishing the good lyre-players, you would admit that you distinguished by your skill in the lyre, and not by your skill as a horseman.

Ion Yes.

Socrates And when you judge of military matters, do you judge as having skill in generalship, or as a good rhapsode?

Ion To my mind, there is no difference.

541a **Socrates** What, no difference, do you say? Do you mean that the art of the rhapsode and the general is one, not two?

Ion It is one, to my mind.

Socrates So that anyone who is a good rhapsode is also, in fact, a good general?

Ion Certainly, Socrates.

Socrates And again, anyone who happens to be a good general is also a good rhapsode.

Ion No there I do not agree.

Socrates But still you agree that anyone who is a good rhapsode is also a good general?

541b **Ion** To be sure.

Socrates And you are the best rhapsode in Greece?

Ion Far the best, Socrates.

Socrates Are you also, Ion, the best general in Greece?

Ion Be sure of it, Socrates and that I owe to my study of Homer.

Socrates Then how, in Heaven's name, can it be, Ion, that you, who are both the best general and the best rhapsode in Greece, go about performing as a rhapsode to the Greeks, but not as a general?

541c Or do you suppose that the Greeks feel a great need of a rhapsode in the glory of his golden crown, but of a general none at all?

Ion It is because my city, Socrates, is under the rule and generalship of your people, and is not in want of a general; whilst you and Sparta would not choose me as a general, since you think you manage well enough for yourselves.

Socrates My excellent Ion, you are acquainted with Apollodorus of Cyzicus, are you not?

Ion What might he be?

Socrates A man whom the Athenians have often chosen as their general, though a foreigner;

541d and Phanosthenes of Andros, and Heracleides of Clazomenae, whom my city invests with the high command and other offices although they are foreigners, because they have proved themselves to be competent. And will she not choose Ion of Ephesus as her general, and honor him, if he shows himself competent? Why, you Ephesians are by origin Athenians, are you not, and Ephesus is inferior to no city?

541e But in fact, Ion, if you are right in saying it is by art and knowledge that you are able to praise Homer, you are playing me false: you have professed to me that you know any amount of fine things about Homer, and you promise to display them; but you are only deceiving me, and so far

from displaying the subjects of your skill, you decline even to tell me what they are, for all my entreaties. You are a perfect Proteus in the way you take on every kind of shape, twisting about this way and that, until at last you elude my grasp in the guise of a general, so as to avoid displaying your skill

542a in Homeric lore. Now if you are an artist and, as I was saying just now, you only promised me a display about Homer to deceive me, you are playing me false; whilst if you are no artist, but speak fully and finely about Homer, as I said you did, without any knowledge but by a divine dispensation which causes you to be possessed by the poet, you play quite fair. Choose therefore which of the two you prefer us to call you, dishonest or divine.

Ion The difference is great, Socrates; for it is far nobler to be called divine.

542b **Socrates** Then you may count on this nobler title in our minds, Ion, of being a divine and not an artistic praiser of Homer.

Determine Three 'Ideas' From This Work

Idea	Passage(s)	Reason(s)
1.		
2.		
3.		

A Quick Analysis

Some of the ideas Socrates seems to be investigating are art, knowledge, inspiration, expertise. From where do the better natures we participate in derive?

