

ION

After some introductory banter, Socrates talks about how he envies rhapsodes (professional reciters of poetry who stood between poet and audience, performed at games, festivals, private occasions, and explained what they recited, p. 5), Ion's profession for at least these 2 reasons:

1. Physically, because they are all dressed up to look their best, as beautiful as they can.
2. Philosophically: because they work with many fine poets, including Homer as the best poet and most divine, and they have to learn his thought, not just his verses, that is, what the poet actually means.

For Ion, learning to explain Homer was the hardest part. And he readily admits that Homer is his specialty, not Hesiod or Archilochus.

On subjects, where Homer and another poet say the same things, Ion would be just as good in his rhapsodizing. However, on subjects where they the poets say different things even on the same subjects (e.g., divinization), Ion is not as good in his rhapsodizing.

However, Socrates shows Ion that it is possible for the same person to make distinctions between who is speaking well and who is speaking poorly on a subject (arithmetic, nutrition, etc), and if he does not know how to pick out a bad speaker, he won't know a good speaker either. The result is the same person is clever regarding both speakers.

Consequently, Ion is equally clever about Homer and the other poets. The reason is that as Ion has admitted, the same person will be an adequate judge of all who speak on the same subjects and that most all poets do treat the same subjects.

So Ion, then, has a question for Socrates: if what Socrates says is true, then how does he explain the fact that Ion is uninterested and bored with other poets besides Homer? But when Homer is mentioned, he is wide awake and ready to go.

Socrates BIG answer is this: Ion does not speak about Homer on the basis of technique or mastery or knowledge, but rather under inspiration. BECAUSE IF ION'S ABILITY TO SPEAK ON HOMER CAME BY MASTERY, TECHNIQUE, KNOWLEDGE, HE WOULD BE ABLE TO TRANSFER THIS MASTERY TO ALL THE OTHER POETS AS WELL. 532C

Indeed, whatever subject there may be, the same discipline applies to it throughout. So, whether it is painting or sculpture or flute-playing or cithara playing, the same discipline applies to all who do these things, and all can be evaluated on the basis of whether or not the discipline of that subject is manifested or not.

Ion agrees that this may be true, but that in his case, he speaks more beautifully about Homer than other poets, on Homer he has much to say, and he says it well as all agree. Here is Socrates answer: it is by divine inspiration and not by mastery or technique that Ion, and the poets and other rhapsodes, do their thing! Here are Socrates's basic points:

1. Homer is not a subject Ion has "mastered," but rather it is a divine power that moves him. Just like a magnet not only pulls iron rings but puts power into them and are able to do what the magnet does, so the Muse makes some people inspired himself, and through these people a chain of others is "suspended."
2. No epic poet, if they are good, are masters of their subject matter; rather, they are inspired, possessed and that is how they utter beautiful poems. The same is true of lyric poets and dancers, for they are not in their right minds when they write or dance, but are possessed of Bacchic frenzy
3. A poet is not able to make poetry until he is inspired, goes out of his mind, and loses his intellect. (Does this apply to biblical prophets?) To possess one's intellect means an inability to make poetry or sing prophecy!
4. Conclusion: BECAUSE IT IS NOT BY MASTERY THAT THEY MAKE POEMS OR SAY MANY LOVELY THINGS ABOUT THEIR SUBJECTS, BUT BECAUSE IT IS BY A DIVINE GIFT, EACH POET IS ABLE TO COMPOSE BEAUTIFULLY ONLY THAT FOR WHICH THE MUSE HAS AROUSED HIM.

In Ion's case, the muse only inspires him to recite Homer! If it were by mastery, they could do all other poems and poets, but they can't. Hence, it is by inspiration.

5. The reason why the god or muse takes away the poet's mind is because so that those who hear will know that it is not them that speak, but that it is the god/muse that speaks through them. These poems, therefore, are not human or from humans but are divine and from the gods. Poets are nothing but representatives of the gods, possessed by whoever possesses them. And to show that, the gods deliberately chose worthless poets to convey the most beautiful poetry through.

Ion agrees with Socrates assessment (surprise, surprise). A rhapsode, then, is a representative of a representative, for the poet reps the god, and the rhapsode the poet.

When a poet speaks or a rhapsode recites, are they in their right minds? No, but rather in a state of enthusiasm. And so is the audience. So the impact of the muse on the poet is conveyed by the rhapsode to an audience, as the last of a series of magnetic rings, that also loses its mind. Hence, the god/muse pulls the peoples' souls though all these wherever he wants

MUSE/GOD→POET→RHAPSODE→ AUDIENCE (possessed, held by god/muse)

Now is a second major argument, Socrates shows that not all professions are alike, and that they differ from each other because of the different subjects they deal with. What we learn by mastering one profession we will not learn by mastering another. And a person who has not mastered a given profession will not be a good judge of things that belong to a profession he has not mastered.

Yet, Homer speaks of a charioteer, a doctor, a fisherman. WHO, THEN, WILL BEST BE ABLE TO JUDGE OF THESE MATTERS, ONE WHO IS A MASTER IN THEM OR A RHAPSODE WHO HAS NO MASTERY IN THEM?

No rhapsode has mastery in any of these fields, for a rhapsode's profession is different from them all, and if he can't learn another's profession by mastery of his own rhapsodic profession, then how can he know anything rightly about it?

Will a rhapsode ever know better than a navigator, doctor, cowherd, spinner, general about sailing, medicine, shepherding, weaving, and the military? No according to Socrates, for he is not a master of any of these fields!

However, Ion flabbergasts Socrates by saying he knows as well as other masters in other professions, even though he has not studied that other profession.

The argument concludes with Socrates trying hard to show Ion that he is not a master general in the army, but a mere rhapsode. What enables Ion to praise Homer is not knowledge or mastery of any profession.

If Ion were a master of a subject, he would give Socrates a demonstration. But if he is not a master of his subject, he is possessed by a divine gift and doesn't know anything. How does Ion want Socrates and others to know and remember him? As a man who does wrong by not giving a demonstration, or as someone divine or divinely inspired? Ion prefers the latter and Socrates agrees as someone divine.

Conclusions:

1. Poetry and rhapsody is not a techne or a mastery, but rather is done by inspiration, an inspiration that affects the audience as well.

The Ion argues that art is the result of the irrationality of the creative process which leads Plato to a doubtful evaluation of artistic gifts. Hence artistic creation is not a form of cognitive understanding.

In Book X of the *Republic*, Since the poet whose creations are poor things by the standard of truth and reality, and since his appeal is not the highest part of the soul, but to one which is inferior, there is justification in not admitting him into a well ordered commonwealth because he stimulates and strengthens an element which threatens to undermine reason. 29

2. Poetry and rhapsody as an inspiration means that they possess no technique or mastery of the subjects about which they write and speak.

Hence, poetry is permitted to speak in ways that one in real life would never speak. Inspired, not technical poetry is licensed to say what it pleases for poetic purposes. But in real life, the standards and language would be different.

Regarding tragic poets in Book X of the Republic, Homer especially, do they really know and understand all the things they talk about and describe (technical matters, human conduct, religion, etc)? No it is third removed from reality, nothing more than semblances, and easy to produce with no knowledge of the truth. Indeed, if the poets could do what they write about, then they would do those things, and not write about them, but rather be written about by the poets, be the hero whose praises are sung, rather than the poet who sings them.

3. Hence, poetry and rhapsody are non-cognitive, inspirational activities, and as a result, their social utility is suspicious.

From Republic X: Drama waters the growth of the passions and sets them up in control, when in reality they should wither away; for the goodness and happiness in life depends on their being held in subjection. And pleasure and pain usurp the sovereignty of law and of principles recognized as the best.

If poetry can prove itself useful to the commonwealth, it would be welcomed back. But if it cannot so prove itself, then it must be rejected the way a lover renounces at great cost a passion which he knows is harmful. The choice is between becoming a good man

and a bad one, and poetry, like wealth, power, or honor, should not tempt us to be careless of justice and virtue.

4. What was Plato's target? Poetry in general and Homer specifically? Or on Ion and his guild of rhapsodes? Is it a platonic attack on sophists? It may be an attack on poetry in general and Homer specifically since poetry had a potentially corrupting influence, and Homer himself was the chief corrupter (see Republic 2-3).
5. Poetry is seen as a gift from the gods as an achievement of divine inspiration, but it reduces the roles of poet and rhapsode as a mere medium of the divine. To what extent is poetry an inspiration or a craft (or human art or science)? Divine gift or human task? Can it be both? Ion thought he was wise, believed he had knowledge, but he knew that he knew not.
6. A problem for Plato. In books 2, 3, 10 of the Republic, Plato rejects some and then all of serious Greek poetry. But if poetry is an inspiration of the gods, then how could he reject it all en toto? Also, if poets and rhapsodes are inspired, they ought to howler, shriek, and dance—true poetic madness in other words. But when they write and speak, they are obviously not in this condition. What then was Plato's purpose?
 - a. He sought to make his theory of inspiration believable; poets really are madly inspired and this to the greater glory of poetry itself.
 - b. He is attacking poetry for its crazy claim to inspiration and is an attack on the great glory of poetry itself.
 - c. He is critiquing poetry, showing its shortcomings, and suggesting its need to be supplemented and interpreted by the philosophers.

Hippias Major

In this dialogue with Hippias, an obnoxious sophist, Socrates wants to know what the FINE is in everything that is fine!

What is it to be fine? What is it that makes things fine. It is a study in definition of a concept, something new its time and interesting in any time.

Socrates had no specific theory of definition, but he does show here what conditions a definition of the fine should satisfy. They are these:

1. Fine must be one and the same in every fine thing.
2. It must always be fine.
3. It must be what makes fine things fine.

This is the apparent beginning of the ontology of the forms: the fine is a form, a real something, and an unchanging nature.

The fine is also a good and a beneficial thing, though not identical with either, THE good or THE beneficial, though the fine partakes of both, as the name itself would suggest.

In any case, on to the dialogue and its content.

The use of the word “fine” (kalon) in reference to Hippias, fine and wise (281a); fine thoughts and fine words (282b); fine situations of money making via wisdom, sophistry (282d); fine things said (282e); fine evidence (283a); most finely of men (284a); most finely how to teach (284a); knowing things most finely (285b); fine activities (286a); finely put together speech (286a); fine activities (286b); fine customs (286b); etc.

The key question about the nature of the fine and the foul, especially in relation to speeches. 286c-286e

Strategy of the dialog: Socrates will assume the role of his accusers regarding the fine and the foul, and he will interact with Hippias who provides the answers about this subject (from which Socrates will supposedly learn). But it seems he is setting up Hippias to skewer him!

I. Is the Fine, Fine Things

If all things are just by justice, and wise by wisdom, and good by goodness, then all fine things are fine by the fine! 287c-d

There is a difference to be made between THE FINE, and a fine thing, and it's the former, not the latter that Socrates wants to know about.

All those things you say are fine, will they be fine if the fine itself is what? Shall I say that if a fine girl is a fine thing, those things will be fine BECAUSE OF WHAT? 288a

This includes fine mare, fine lyre, fine pot, etc.

However, the fine cannot be defined by fine things, because some fine things in comparison to other fine things become foul things: pots are foul compared to girls; girls are foul compared to gods. So then, the fine itself, by which everything

else is beautified and is seen to be fine, is itself a girl, or a pot, or a horse, or a lyre? It can't be!

II. Is the Fine Whatever is Appropriate? 290c-291c; also 293e

Is a wooden or a gold spoon appropriate for a pot of fine bean soup?
But how do you determine which spoon is appropriate and thus which is fine?

Also in 294a: Is the appropriate what makes each thing be seen to be fine or to be fine? Like putting clothes on a bum, it makes him appropriate and thus fine.

Not really, for it is a deceit, a covering up of something that is not truly fine. Hence, we must try to say what it is that makes things fine, whether they are seen to be fine or not. 294c. Also see 294e

III. Is the Fine the Sort of Thing that will Never Be Seen to be Foul by Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime? 291d

But again, he has asked for the fine itself, not fine things. What fineness is is the issue, not just the sort of thing that will never be seen to be foul by anyone, anywhere, anytime. 292d

For this would include the gods, and heros, and children of the god. But what is fine for some is foul for others, and what is foul for is fine for some. 293b-c

IV. Is the Fine Whatever is Useful? 295c

Eyes are fine when they see, that is, they are useful. And many other examples in 295d

Summary: we look at the nature something's got, its manufacture, its condition. Then we call what is useful "fine" in respect of the way it is useful, what it is useful for, and when it is useful. But anything useless in these respects we call foul. Ability is fine, inability is foul. 295e

And men are able to do bad work as well as good, But if the fine is the ability, then the fine is foul, and the foul can't be fine. Hence, the fine is not the useful, defined by ability. 296d

In a refined sense, the useful and able for making some good, that is the fine. 296e

V. Is the Fine that which is Beneficial?

But if a cause is not its effect, and an effect is not its cause, then if the fine is the cause of the beneficial, then the fine cannot be the beneficial because cause and effect are different. 296e-297d

VI. Is the Fine What Which Makes Us Glad? 297e

The fine is what is pleasant through hearing and sight.298a

But other things are pleasant through other senses, say taste and touch, but we would not want to call them fine (eating is fine; loving making is fine). It doesn't make sense.

So, revise the thesis: the part of the pleasant that comes only be sight and hearing is the fine. 299b

But then whatever is not pleasant in these two ways is not fine.