

Agora Paperback Editions
GENERAL EDITOR: ALLAN BLOOM

Plato's Dialogue on Friendship: An Interpretation of the Lysis, with a New Translation, by David Bolotin

Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit, by Alexandre Kojève

Medieval Political Philosophy, edited by Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi

Averroes on Plato's Republic, translated by Ralph Lerner

The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues, translated, with interpretive studies, edited by Thomas L. Pangle

Politics and the Arts, by Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Liberalism Ancient and Modern, by Leo Strauss

On Tyranny, by Leo Strauss

THE ROOTS OF
Political Philosophy

Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues

Translated, with Interpretive Studies

EDITED BY

Thomas L. Pangle

Cornell University Press

ITHACA AND LONDON

Copyright © 1987 by Cornell University

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or parts thereof, must not be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address Cornell University Press, Sage House, 512 East State Street, Ithaca, New York 14850.

First published 1987 by Cornell University Press

First printing, Agora Paperback Editions,
Cornell Paperbacks, 1987

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Plato.

The roots of political philosophy.

(Agora paperback editions)

Includes index.

1. Plato—Political and social views. 2. Socrates—Political and social views.
3. Political science. I. Pangle, Thomas L. II. Title.

JC71.P2213 1987 320'.01 87-47550

ISBN-13: 978-0-8014-9465-9 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Cornell University Press strives to use environmentally responsible suppliers and materials to the fullest extent possible in the publishing of its books. Such materials include vegetable-based, low-VOC inks and acid-free papers that are recycled, totally chlorine-free, or partly composed of nonwood fibers. For further information, visit our website at www.cornellpress.cornell.edu.

7 9 Paperback printing 10 8 6

To the memory of our friend and colleague

JAMES LEAKE

ION

[or, On the *Iliad*]

Translated by ALLAN BLOOM

Socrates, Ion

530a SOCRATES: Ion, welcome. From where do you come to visit us now?
From your home at Ephesus?

ION: Not at all, Socrates, but from the festival of Asclepius at Epidaurus.

SOC.: You don't mean to say that the Epidaurians dedicate a contest of rhapsodes to the god too?¹

ION: Indeed they do, and also for the other parts of music.

SOC.: Tell me, did you compete for us? And how did you do in the competition?

b ION: We carried off first prize, Socrates.

SOC.: You speak well,² and see to it that we conquer at the Panathenaia³ too.

ION: But it will be so, god willing.

SOC.: Well now, I have often envied you rhapsodes, Ion, for your art.

¹Athletic and musical competitions were held in Epidaurus (a town in the Peloponnese not far from Athens) in honor of its patron Asclepius, god of healing. Ephesus was a Greek city in Asia Minor.

²Literally, "you speak well" (*eu legeis*). The idiom—"good" would be a more colloquial translation—is a common one, but the literal sense seems to acquire thematic importance in this dialogue; cf. 531c–532a, 536d. It is related to the expressions "you speak correctly or rightly" (*orthōs legeis*), "you speak truly" (*alēthē legeis*), and, above all, "you speak finely, nobly, or beautifully" (*kalōs legeis*), all of which occur frequently in the dialogue.

³The great Panathenaia was a festival celebrated every four years at Athens in honor of its patron goddess, Athena. There was also a small Panathenaia celebrated every year.

For that it befits your art for the body to be always adorned and for you to appear as beautiful as possible, and that, at the same time, it is necessary to be busy with many good poets and above all with Homer, the best and most divine of the poets, and to learn his thought thoroughly, not just his words, is enviable. Because one could never be a good rhapsode if he did not understand the things said by the poet. The rhapsode must be the interpreter of the thought of the poet to the listeners, but to do this finely is impossible for the one who does not recognize what the poet means. All these things, then, deserve to be envied.

ION: You speak truly, Socrates. For me, at any rate, this part of the art requires the most work, and I suppose that I speak most finely of all human beings about Homer—that neither Metrodorus of Lampsacus nor Stesimbrotus the Thasian nor Glaucon⁴ nor anyone else who has ever lived has had so many fine thoughts to speak about Homer as I.
SOC.: You speak well, Ion. And it is evident that you won't begrudge me a display.

ION: It is surely worth hearing, Socrates, how well I have adorned Homer—so that I suppose I deserve to be crowned with a golden crown by the Homeridae.⁵

SOC.: And I shall surely yet find the leisure to listen to you. But now answer me this much: are you clever⁶ about Homer alone or about Hesiod and Archilochus too?⁷

ION: Not at all, but only about Homer, for that seems sufficient to me.

SOC.: And is there any matter about which both Hesiod and Homer say the same things?

ION: I suppose there are—many.

SOC.: About these matters, then, would you give a finer explanation of what Homer says than of what Hesiod says?

⁴Metrodorus of Lampsacus, a friend of the philosopher Anaxagoras, had interpreted Homer allegorically, understanding the various deities as representations of natural phenomena. Stesimbrotus of Thasos was another early practitioner of allegorical interpretation and apparently composed a book on Homer. Of Glaucon nothing is known.

⁵Originally a guild of poets claiming descent from Homer but generally applied to his admirers (cf. *Republic* 599e).

⁶*Deinos*: literally, "terrible." The word was commonly applied to an effective speaker.

⁷Hesiod's *Theogony* is an early systematization of Greek theology; it was considered only slightly less authoritative than the Homeric poems themselves. Archilochus was generally regarded as the originator of iambic or lyric poetry.

ION: A similar one, about those matters, at least, about which they say the same things.

b SOC.: But what about those matters about which they do not say the same things? For example, both Homer and Hesiod say something about divination.

ION: Certainly.

SOC.: Well then, of the things these two poets say about divination that are similar and those that are different, would you give a finer explanation or would one of the good diviners?

ION: One of the diviners.

SOC.: If you were a diviner would you not, if indeed you were able to explain the things said similarly, know also how to explain the things said differently?

ION: It's plain that I would.

c SOC.: Why, then, are you clever about Homer but not about Hesiod or any of the other poets? Or does Homer speak about other things than what all the other poets speak about? Didn't he tell about war for the most part, and about the associations with one another of good human beings and bad ones, and private ones and those in public works, and about gods' associating with one another and with human beings—how they associate—and about the events in the heavens
d and those in Hades and the begettings of both gods and heroes? Are not these the things about which Homer has made his poetry?

ION: You speak truly, Socrates.

SOC.: And what of the other poets? Don't they make poetry about these same things?

ION: Yes, but, Socrates, they have not made poetry in a way similar to Homer.

SOC.: How then? Worse?

ION: Very much.

SOC.: Homer is better?

ION: Better indeed, by Zeus!

SOC.: Dearest Ion, when there are many men speaking about number and someone speaks best, won't there be someone who recognizes the one who speaks well?

ION: I should say so.

c SOC.: Does this same man also know the one speaking badly, or is it someone else?

ION: The same one, surely.

SOC.: And isn't this the one who has the arithmetical art?

ION: Yes.

SOC.: What of this? In a situation where many are speaking about what sorts of foods are healthy and a single person speaks best, will it be one man who recognizes that the person speaking best does speak best while another recognizes that the person speaking worse does speak worse? Or will it be the same man?

ION: Plainly, to be sure, the same man.

SOC.: Who is he? What name is there for him?

ION: Doctor.

SOC.: Let us say then, in summary, that the same man will always recognize who speaks well and who speaks badly when there are
32a many speaking about the same things. Or if he does not recognize the one who speaks badly it is plain that he will not recognize the one who speaks well, at least about the same thing.

ION: That is so.

SOC.: Then the same man turns out to be clever about both?

ION: Yes.

SOC.: Don't you affirm that both Homer and the other poets, among whom are Hesiod and Archilochus, speak about the same things but not similarly, the former speaking well and the others worse?

ION: And I speak truly.

SOC.: Then if you really recognize the one who speaks well, you
b would also recognize that the ones who speak worse do speak worse.

ION: It's likely, at any rate.

SOC.: Then, my excellent fellow, we won't go wrong when we say that Ion is similarly clever about Homer and the other poets, too, since he himself agrees that the same man will be an adequate judge of all who speak about the same things and since very nearly all the poets make their poems about the same things.

c ION: Then whatever is the cause of the fact that when someone speaks about another poet, I neither pay attention nor am able to contribute anything at all worthy of mention but simply⁸ doze? But when someone makes mention of Homer, I wake up immediately, pay attention, and have plenty to say?

SOC.: That, at least, is not hard to guess, comrade, but it is entirely clear that you are unable to speak about Homer by art and knowledge. For if you were able to do so by art, you would also be able to

⁸*Atechnōs*: literally, "artlessly." The play on this idiom is almost certainly conscious; cf. 534d, 541e.

speak about all the other poets too. For presumably the poetic art is a whole, isn't it?

ION: Yes.

d SOC.: Then when someone grasps any art whatsoever as a whole, for all the arts, the same manner of inquiry holds. Do you have any need to hear me explaining what I mean when I say this, Ion?

ION: Yes, by Zeus, Socrates, I, for one, do. I take pleasure in listening to you wise men.

SOC.: I only wish you spoke the truth, Ion. But presumably you are wise, you rhapsodes and actors and those men whose poems you sing. As for me, I speak nothing but the truth, as is fitting for a private human being. Now see how what I asked you about just now is an ordinary and private thing and how it belongs to every man to recognize what I said—that, when somebody grasps an art as a whole, the inquiry is the same. Let us grasp this by speech: there is an art of painting as a whole, isn't there?

ION: Yes.

SOC.: And there are and have been many painters good and poor.

ION: Certainly.

SOC.: And did you ever know anyone who is clever at showing what Polygnotus the son of Aglaophon⁹ paints well and what he does not but is incapable of doing so concerning the other painters—so that when someone makes a display of the works of other painters, he dozes, is at a loss, and has nothing to contribute but when he is required to give a judgment about Polygnotus, or any other single painter you please, he wakes up, pays attention, and finds plenty to say?

ION: No, by Zeus, surely not.

SOC.: What of this? In regard to sculpture, did you ever know anyone who is clever at explaining what was well made by Daedalus the son of Metion, or Epeius the son of Panopeus, or Theodorus of Samos,¹⁰ or some other single sculptor but before the works of other sculptors is at a loss, dozes, and has nothing to say?

ION: No, by Zeus, I haven't seen this either.

SOC.: Indeed not, as I for one suppose; nor in regard to aulos playing, cithara playing, singing to the cithara, or rhapsody, you never saw a

⁹Polygnotus was the most celebrated painter of the fifth century.

¹⁰Daedalus is the legendary inventor of carpentry, statues that walked, and wings for man; Epeius, the builder of the Trojan horse; Theodorus, a famous sculptor and architect of the sixth century.

man who is clever at explaining Olympus, or Thamyras, or Orpheus, or Phemius the Ithacan rhapsode¹¹ but is at a loss about Ion and has nothing to contribute about what in rhapsody he does well and what not?

ION: I have nothing to say in response to you, Socrates, about this, but I myself know well that I speak most finely of human beings about Homer, and I have plenty to say, and everyone else affirms that I speak well about him, but about the others this is not the case. Now then, see what this is.

SOC.: I do see, Ion, and I am going to show you what it seems to me that this is. For it is not art in you that makes you able to speak well about Homer, as I just said, but a divine power which moves you, just as in the stone which Euripides named Magnesian¹² but which the many call Heracleian. For this stone not only draws iron rings to itself but puts a power in the rings as well to do the same thing the stone does—to draw other rings to them, so that sometimes a very long chain of iron rings is strung hanging one from the other. But in all of them the power depends on this stone. In this way also the Muse makes some men inspired herself, and through these inspired men, others are gripped with enthusiasm and form a chain. All the good epic poets speak all their fine poems not from art but by being inspired and possessed, and it is the same for the good lyric poets. Just as those carried away by Corybantic frenzy¹³ are not in their right minds when they dance, so also the lyric poets are not in their right minds when they make these fine songs of theirs. But when they launch into melody and rhythm, they are frantic and possessed, like Bacchic dancers who draw honey and milk from rivers when they are possessed but cannot when they are in their right minds. And the soul of the lyric poets works in this way, as they themselves say. For the

¹¹Olympus is the legendary musician and aulos player, said to have been taught by the satyr Marsias (see *Minos* 318b); Thamyras and Orpheus were celebrated in legend for their abilities with the cithara; Phemius is Ion's counterpart in the Homeric poems (*Odyssey* XXII 330ff.).

¹²From a district in Asia Minor where magnetized iron could readily be found: Euripides, fr. 567.

¹³The words for "inspired" (*entheoi*) and "gripped by enthusiasm" (*enthousiazontes*) are closely related, both suggesting the notion of "a god within." The Corybantic rites were mystery rites that included frenzied dancing in which the worshipers were guided and inspired by certain demons called Corybantes. There may have been some connection between these Corybantic rites and similar ecstatic forms of worship associated with the god Bacchus (Dionysus). Cf. *Laws* 790d; *Phaedrus* 228d and 234d.

poets tell us, don't they, that culling their songs from fountains flowing with honey and certain gardens and glens of the Muses they bear them to us just like bees, flying as they do. And they speak the truth. For the poet is a light thing, winged and sacred, unable to make poetry before he is inspired and out of his mind and intelligence is no longer in him. For as long as this is his possession every human being is unable to make poetry or oracular utterance. Since they make poems and say much that is fine about things, just as you do about Homer, not by art but by divine dispensation, each is able to do finely only that to which the Muse has impelled him—one making dithyrambs, another encomia, another choral chants, another epics, another iambic verses—while with regard to the rest, each of them is ordinary. For they say these things not by art but by divine power. For if they knew how to speak finely by art about one of them, they would be able to do so about all the rest. On this account the god takes away their intelligence and uses them as servitors along with soothsayers and diviners of the gods so that we hearers may know that these men, who are without intelligence, are not the ones who say things worth so much but that god himself is the speaker and gives utterance to us through them. The greatest proof of the argument is Tynnichus, the Chalcidean, who never composed any poem worth remembering other than the poem which everybody sings and which is very nearly the finest of all songs, being simply, as he himself says, "a discovery of the Muses." In this man the god especially shows us, it seems to me, so that we need not be in doubt, that these fine poems are not human nor belonging to human beings, but divine and belonging to gods, and the poets are nothing but interpreters of the gods, possessed by the one who holds each. To show this, the god on purpose sang the finest lyric through the most ordinary poet. Do I seem to you to speak the truth, Ion?

ION: Yes, by Zeus, to me you do. For somehow you lay hold of my soul with these speeches, Socrates, and I believe that the good poets are interpreters of these things from the gods through divine dispensation.

SOC.: Now, don't you rhapsodes, in turn, interpret the things of the poets?

ION: You speak the truth in this too.

SOC.: Then are you interpreters of interpreters?

ION: Entirely so.

SOC.: Wait now, and tell me this, Ion, and don't hide from me what-

ever I ask you about. When you are speaking epics well and most amusing the spectators, singing of Odysseus leaping on the threshold, revealing himself to the suitors and pouring out the arrows before his feet,¹⁴ or of Achilles chasing Hector,¹⁵ or of one of the pitiful stories about Andromache, or Hecuba, or Priam,¹⁶ are you then in your right mind? Or do you become beside yourself, and does your soul think it is at the scene of the deeds of which you speak in your inspiration, either at Ithaca, or Troy, or wherever the epic takes place?

ION: How vivid is this proof of yours to me, Socrates! For I shall tell without hiding anything from you. When I speak of something pitiful, my eyes fill with tears, and when of something frightening or terrible, my hair stands on end from fear and my heart leaps.

SOC.: What then, Ion? Shall we assert that this man is then in his right mind who, adorned with rich raiment and golden crowns, cries in the midst of sacrifices and festivals, although he has lost none of these things, or who is frightened while standing before twenty thousand friendly human beings, although no one is stripping or harming him?

ION: No, by Zeus, certainly not, Socrates, to tell the truth.

SOC.: Do you know then that you work these same effects on most of the spectators?

ION: Indeed I do know it very finely. For I look down on them each time from the platform above as they are crying, casting terrible looks and following with astonishment the things said. I must pay the very closest attention to them, since, if I set them to crying, I shall laugh myself because I am making money, but if they laugh, then I shall cry because of the money I am losing.

SOC.: You know, then, that this spectator is the last of the rings which I said get their power from one another through the Heracleian stone?

And you the rhapsode and actor¹⁷ are the middle, and the top is the poet himself, but the god through all these draws the soul of human beings wherever he wishes, transmitting the power from one to the other. And just as from this stone, a very great chain is formed of dancers, choral masters, assistant masters, suspended sideways from the rings hanging from the Muse. And one poet is suspended from one Muse, another from another. And we name this "being pos-

¹⁴*Odyssey* XXII 2ff.

¹⁵*Iliad* XXII 131ff.

¹⁶See particularly *Iliad* XXII 33ff., XXIV 477ff.

¹⁷Or "interpreter" (*hypokritēs*).

b sessed," and it is very nearly that, for he is held.¹⁸ And from these first rings, the poets, other men are suspended—some from one, some from another—and gripped by enthusiasm. Some are suspended by Orpheus, some by Musaeus.¹⁹ But the many are possessed and held by Homer. You are one of them, Ion, and are possessed by Homer, and when someone sings from another poet, you fall asleep and are at a loss for something to say, but when someone utters a song of this poet, you wake up immediately and your soul dances and you have plenty to say. For you say what you say about Homer neither by art nor by knowledge but by divine dispensation and possession. Just as those carried away by Corybantic frenzy perceive sharply only that song which belongs to the god by whom they are possessed and have plenty of figures and phrases for that song but pay no heed to others, so you too, Ion, have plenty to say when someone d mentions Homer but are at a loss with the others. And the cause, for which you ask me, of your having plenty to say about Homer and not about the others is that you are a clever praiser of Homer not by art but by divine dispensation.

ION: You speak well, Socrates. But I should be surprised if you could speak so well as to persuade me that I am possessed and am mad when I praise Homer. Nor do I believe I would appear so to you if you heard me speaking about Homer.

e soc.: And I am certainly willing to hear you, though not before you answer me this: about which one of the things about which Homer speaks do you speak well? For surely you don't speak well about them all.

ION: Know well, Socrates, that I do about them all.

soc.: But surely not about those things you don't happen to know and about which Homer speaks?

ION: And what sort of things are those that Homer speaks of and I do not know?

537a soc.: Doesn't Homer in many places have many things to say about the arts—for example, about charioteering? If I can remember the verses, I'll tell them to you.

ION: I'll do it, for I remember.

¹⁸The word meaning "to be possessed" (*katechesthai*) is derived from *echein*, "to have or hold."

¹⁹Musaeus is the legendary inventor of poetry; oracular verses circulated under his name as well as under that of Orpheus (cf. *Protagoras* 316d, *Republic* 363c–64c).

soc.: Tell me, then, what Nestor says to his son Antilochus when he urges him to be careful at the turn in the horse race in memory of Patroclus.

b ION: "And lean yourself," he says, "in the well-polished chariot a little to the left of them. And calling aloud to the horse on the right, give him the goad; give him free rein with your hands, and let the left horse go near to the turning posts so that the nave of the well-wrought wheel seems to graze it, but beware of touching the stone."²⁰

c soc.: That's enough. And who would judge better whether Homer speaks these words rightly or not, Ion, the doctor or the charioteer?

ION: The charioteer, surely.

soc.: Because this is his art or for some other reason?

ION: Because this is his art.

soc.: Then each of the arts has been assigned by the god the power of knowing some work, has it not? For presumably we won't know by medicine what we know by piloting, will we?

ION: No indeed.

soc.: Nor will we know by carpentering what we know by medicine.

d ION: No indeed.

soc.: Isn't it so with all arts—that what we know by one art we do not know by another? But answer this for me first: do you affirm that one art differs from another?

ION: Yes.

soc.: I find evidence of this in my calling one art different from another when one is knowledge of some things and the other knowledge of others. Do you also?

e ION: Yes.

soc.: For if it were ever a knowledge of the same things, in what respect would we assert one to be different from the other, inasmuch as the same things could be known by both? Just as I know that these fingers here are five and you too know the same about them as I, and if I should ask you whether you and I know the same things by the same art—the art of arithmetic—or a different one, you would surely say by the same.

ION: Yes.

8a soc.: Now, tell me what I was going to ask you a moment ago. Does it seem to you to hold for all the arts that the same things must of

²⁰*Iliad* XXIII 335–40.

necessity be known by the same art and that by a different art the same things are not known but that, if it is really different, it is necessary that it also know different things?

ION: It seems so to me, Socrates.

SOC.: Then whoever does not have a certain art will not be able to know in a fine way the things of that art which are finely said or done, will he?

b ION: You speak truly.

SOC.: Would you or a charioteer, then, know in a finer way about whether the verses you just recited were finely said by Homer or not?

ION: A charioteer.

SOC.: For you, presumably, are a rhapsode but not a charioteer?

ION: Yes.

SOC.: And the rhapsode's art is different from the charioteer's?

ION: Yes.

SOC.: And if it is different, it is a knowledge of different things.

ION: Yes.

c SOC.: And what about when Homer tells how Hecamede, Nestor's concubine, gives a potion to the wounded Machaon to drink. It goes something like this: "In Pramneian wine," he says, "she grated goat cheese with a bronze grater, and beside it set an onion as relish for the drink."²¹ Is it for the doctor's art or the rhapsode's to ascertain in a fine way whether Homer says these things rightly or not?

ION: The doctor's.

d SOC.: And what about when Homer says: "She went down into the deep like a lead sinker which, set on the horn of a field-ox, comes in haste bearing woe to ravenous fishes,"²²—would we assert it is for the fisherman's art rather than the rhapsode's to judge of what he is saying and whether he says it finely or not?

ION: Plainly, Socrates, it is for the fisherman's art.

e SOC.: Consider, then. Suppose you were questioning and asked me: Socrates, since for these arts you find in Homer the things appropriate for each to judge, come now and find for me the sort of things with regard to which it is appropriate for the diviner and the diviner's art to be able to ascertain whether they are done well or badly—consider how easily and truly I shall answer you. For in many places in the *Odyssey* he speaks of it; for example, in what Theoclymenes,

539a the diviner of the Melampid line, says to the suitors: "Wretches, what evil is this you suffer; covered over with night are your heads and faces and your limbs below; and wailing is kindled; your cheeks are bathed in tears. Full of ghosts is the porch, and full the hall, hastening b to Erebus under the darkness. The sun has perished out of heaven and evil mist hovers over all."²³ And he speaks of it many places also in the *Iliad*, for example in the Battle at the Wall where he says: "A bird c skirting the host on the left, bearing in his claws a bloody red snake, a monstrous one, alive and still struggling, nor had it forgotten its battle joy. For it bent back and struck its captor on the breast by the neck; and the bird cast it from him to the ground, smarting with pain, d and threw it in the midst of the throng. And he with a loud cry followed the windy blast."²⁴ I assert that these things, and others like them, are appropriate for a diviner to consider and judge.

ION: And you speak truly, Socrates.

SOC.: And you, Ion, you speak truly in saying so. But come now, just as I have selected for you from the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* the sort of things that belong to the diviner, the sort that belong to the doctor, e and the sort that belong to the fisherman, since you are more experienced in Homer than I, so you select for me the sort of things that belong to the rhapsode and the rhapsode's art, those that it is appropriate for the rhapsode above all other human beings to consider and judge.

ION: I assert all things, Socrates.

SOC.: But you don't assert all, Ion—are you so forgetful? And yet it is not fitting for a man who is a rhapsode to be forgetful.

40a ION: What am I forgetting, then?

SOC.: Don't you remember that you asserted the rhapsode's art is different from the charioteer's?

ION: I remember.

SOC.: And since they are different, do you agree they will know different things?

ION: Yes.

SOC.: Then according to your account the rhapsode's art will not know everything, nor the rhapsode either.

ION: Everything, except, perhaps, such things, Socrates.

²¹Ibid. XI 630, 639.

²²Ibid. XXIV 80–82.

²³*Odyssey* XX 351–57.

²⁴*Iliad* XII 200–207.

b SOC.: By “such things” you mean pretty much the things belonging to the other arts. But what sort of things will he know, if not everything?

ION: The things that are appropriate, I for one suppose, for a man to say, and the sort for a woman,²⁵ and the sort for a slave and the sort for a free man, and the sort for one who is ruled and the sort for one who is ruling.

SOC.: Do you mean that the rhapsode will know in a finer way than the pilot what sort of things it is appropriate for a ruler of a ship caught in a storm at sea to say?

ION: No, the pilot will know that, at any rate.

c SOC.: And does the rhapsode know in a finer way than the doctor what sorts of things it is appropriate for a ruler of a sick man to say?

ION: Not that either.

SOC.: Then do you mean such as are appropriate for a slave?

ION: Yes.

SOC.: Do you mean that the rhapsode will know, but not the cowherd, what things it is appropriate for a cowherd who is a slave to say to calm angry cattle?

ION: No, not at all.

SOC.: Then, such as are appropriate for a spinning woman to say about the working of wool?

d ION: No.

SOC.: Well then, will he know such things as are appropriate for a man who is a general to say when exhorting his troops?

ION: Yes, the rhapsode will know such things.

SOC.: What? Is the art of rhapsody generalship?

ION: I would certainly know such things as are appropriate for a general to say.

SOC.: For perhaps you are an expert at generalship too, Ion. And if you happened to be at once an expert at horsemanship and an expert at the playing of the cithara, you could know whether horses were

e being well or badly ridden. But if I asked you, “Through what art, Ion, do you know well-ridden horses? Is it the one by which you are a horseman or the one by which you are a citharist?” what would you answer me?

ION: The one by which I am a horseman, I would answer.

²⁵Or “for a husband to say, and what sort for a wife.”

SOC.: If, then, you are ascertaining those who played the cithara well, you would agree that you ascertain this through the art by which you are a citharist and not through the one by which you are a horseman.

ION: Yes.

SOC.: Since you know military matters, do you know them through the art by which you are an expert at generalship or the one by which you are a good rhapsode?

ION: For me, at least, there doesn't seem to be any difference.

541a SOC.: What? You say there is no difference? Do you say that the art of rhapsody and the art of generalship are one or two?

ION: To me, at least, it seems to be one.

SOC.: Whoever is a good rhapsode, therefore, happens also to be a good general?

ION: Surely, Socrates.

SOC.: And whoever happens to be a good general is also a good rhapsode?

ION: No, that doesn't seem so to me.

SOC.: But that does seem to you to be the case—whoever is a good rhapsode is also a good general?

b ION: Certainly.

SOC.: Aren't you the best rhapsode among the Greeks?

ION: By far, Socrates.

SOC.: Then are you also the best general among the Greeks, Ion?

ION: Know it well, Socrates, and these things I learned from Homer.

SOC.: Then why, by the gods, Ion, when you are the best at both among the Greeks—general and rhapsode—do you go about being a rhapsode for the Greeks and not a general? Or does it seem to you that the Greeks have great need of a man crowned with a golden crown and none of a general?

ION: Socrates, our city is ruled by your people and commanded by your generals and needs no general. But neither your city nor that of the Lacedaemonians would choose me as general, for you suppose you are sufficient.

SOC.: Ion, my excellent fellow, don't you know Apollodorus of Cyzicus?

ION: What's he?

d SOC.: A man whom the Athenians have chosen many times for their general although he is a foreigner. And also Phanosthenes of Andros

and Heracleides of Clazomenae,²⁶ for all that they were foreigners, were elevated to generalships and other offices by Athens when they had demonstrated that they were worthy of mention. Why, then, will she not choose Ion of Ephesus as general and honor him if he should appear worthy of mention? Weren't you Ephesians originally Athenians, and isn't Ephesus a city inferior to none? But Ion, if you speak truly when you say you are able to praise Homer by art and knowledge, you do me injustice. For you profess to have knowledge of many fine things about Homer and say you will make a display, but you are deceiving me. You are so far from making a display that you are not even willing to tell what things you are clever about, although I have been entreating you for a long time. You are simply like Proteus,²⁷ assuming all sorts of shapes, twisting this way and that until finally you escape me in the guise of a general, in order not to display how clever you are in the wisdom concerning Homer. If, then, you are expert at the art, as I just said, you deceive me in promising to make a display about Homer, and you are hence unjust. But if you are not expert at the art but are by divine dispensation possessed by Homer and, knowing nothing, you say many fine things about the poet, you are not unjust. Choose, then, whether you want to be held by us to be an unjust man or a divine one.

542a

b ION: There is a great difference, Socrates. For to be held to be divine is far finer.

SOC.: Then this finer thing you may have from us, Ion, to be a divine praiser of Homer, not one expert at the art.

²⁶Phanosthenes was the commander of an expedition against Andros in 406–405 B.C. (Xenophon *Hellenica* I v 18); Heracleides raised the fee paid citizens attending the assembly, probably in about 393 B.C. (Aristotle *Athenian Constitution* XLI 3). Ephesus detached itself from Athenian hegemony in about 420–415 B.C. For a discussion of attempts to determine the dramatic date of the dialogue on the basis of these and other indications, see the Budé edition (Paris, 1920), pp. 23–24.

²⁷*Odyssey* IV 455ff.

An Interpretation of Plato's *Ion*

ALLAN BLOOM

In Xenophon's *Banquet* Antisthenes asks, "Do you know any tribe more stupid [or simple] than the rhapsodes?" This question, obviously rhetorical, leads the reader of the *Ion* to the further question, "Why in the world does Socrates choose to speak to a man like Ion, a typical member of the tribe of rhapsodes?" Even though Socrates claims that he investigates men with respect to their knowledge and ignorance, it is hard to see why he should think it important to test Ion. Moreover, their conversation is private, so that it cannot be Socrates' intention to show Ion off, or up, to others. Socrates in the dialogues exposes the important kinds of human souls and their characteristic errors. To make this particular discussion a worthwhile enterprise for him, the empty reciter of Homer's poems must represent something beyond himself.

Socrates seems most anxious to have this conversation, since it is he who apparently stops Ion, who shows no particular interest in Socrates or desire to talk to him. Thus the first four exchanges occur entirely at Socrates' initiative, Ion responding in a way which would end the dialogue if Socrates did not return to the charge. Ion is a self-satisfied man who feels no need to render an account of himself or his activity; he knows who he is and what he does; and he knows both himself and his activity to be important. He is as far from the radical self-doubt of philosophy as a man can be. He is willing to talk about

"An Interpretation of Plato's *Ion*," copyright © 1970 by Interpretation, originally appeared in *Interpretation* 1:1 (Summer 1970):43–62 and is reprinted by permission of the author.