Methodological and Metaphilosophical Lessons in Plato's *Ion*

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From a detailed overview of Socrates' exchange with Ion, light is shed on why Socrates' method of *elenchus* requires explicit accounts of concepts at issue. Moreover, Ion's character is shown to provide an object lesson in the tempting vice of intellectual sycophancy.

1. Introduction

The *Ion* is Plato's shortest dialogue. It is also potentially his least philosophically significant. Socrates initiates a conversation with Ion, a successful reciter and interpreter of Homer. He then shows Ion hardly knows what he is talking about. Socrates concludes that Ion's rhapsodic success, given that it is not explained by knowledge, must be because he's under a divine influence. Ion, vain and stupid as he is, gladly accepts the conclusion, noting that it lovelier (*kallion*) to be called divine (*theion*) (542b). Pretty tame stuff, compared to the philosophically and dramatically riveting *Euthyphro* and *Crito.* On its face, even the theoretically underdeveloped *Hippias Major* has more significant content, both in its drama and philosophical substance. Ion himself is not intellectually impressive, which gives weight to the famous remark of Antisthenes that no group of people is more trifling (*elithoteron*) than that of the rhapsodes (Xenophon, *Banquet.* III.6). And in light of this, the elenchus is no great feat on Socrates' part. So there is, it seems, little intellectual drama beyond the cautionary tale of Ion's blunders. In terms of philosophical content to be gained, the *Ion* is regularly linked to the broader Platonic critique and reform of poetry in the *Republic, Phaedrus,* and *Laws*.[1] In which case, the dialogue

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[1] For those who see the *Ion's* conclusion to be positive in assessment, see Shelley (2009), Schraper (1968), Dorter (1973), Elias (1984), Janaway (1992) and Urquhart (2003). For those who take the conclusion to be negative (and on the way to the negative assessments we see in the *Republic*), see: LaDrière (1951), Pappas (1989), Murray (1997), Stern-Gillett (2004) and Warne (2013).

has its philosophical value in terms of the other texts in the Platonic corpus with which it is coordinate. Consequently, the *Ion* is barren in terms of its own philosophical significance.

These interpretive lines, I think, are off the mark. There are two components of the *Ion* that are of real significance.One is a point about Socratic method and requirements for possession of knowledgeable skill (*episteme kai technē*) (532c), another is a metaphilosophical point about character and intellectual practice. The first point is a useful tool for explaining a number of the Socratic aspirations to knowledge and why specific requirements obtain in answering in systematic fashion. The second point is a tool reflecting Socratic and later Academic aspirations of knowing multiple cases and understanding the depth of intellectual conflict. From this perspective, the *Ion* packs quite a punch for a dialogue barely over 12 Stephanus pages long – it teaches a requirement for practical knowledge, and is an object lesson in intellectual character. In what follows, I will identify the core arguments of the *Ion* and then turn to the methodological and metaphilosophical lessons.

2. The Argumentative Structure of the Ion

Socrates initiates the conversation with *Ion*. Consequently the *Ion* is a *dialogue of choice* in contrast with the dialogues Socrates does not initiate, but are results of intellectual ambush (as is the *Meno*), conversational happenstance (as is the *Euthyphro*), or a form of philosophical kidnapping (as is the *Republic*). Socrates actively seeks this exchange with Ion. Given Socrates' digest of his conversational past in the *Apology*, the catalogue of those who disappointed his objective to refute the oracle, Ion could be one of the targets for his questioning. Clearly, Ion himself is not a *poet* (as is reported in the digest at *Apology* 22a-b), but he stands as a representative of a tradition with the greatest poet, Homer, as its progenitor. Equally clearly, the dialogue fits the pattern that emerges in the *Apology* digest: Socrates goes to the poets, asks them interpretive questions, they don't answer well, and Socrates concludes that they do not do what they do with knowledge "but by some inborn talent and by inspiration, like seers and chanting oracles say many fine things without any understanding" (*Apology* 22c). Moreover, the dialogue takes place prior to 412 BCE (as Ion's city of Ephesus is still an ally to Athens), and Aristophanes has Chaerephon a close acquaintance of and active intellectual adherent to Socrates as early as 420 or 417 in the *Clouds* (144-7). This is good reason to place the Delphic Oracle's

proclamation well before the dramatic date of the dialogue, and even if Ion is not one of the *poets* mentioned in the *Apology* catalogue, he and his profession are among those Socrates would be keen on questioning. Consequently, we have a working motive for why Socrates would initiate the exchange.

Socrates' lead-in confirms this hypothesis. He exclaims that it is something to be admired not only to know Homer's verses but to understand them (530c). That is, Ion can not only recite Homer's verses, but he can explain and interpret them. From the start, it is clear that Socrates is looking for someone with significant and weighty knowledge to question. And who better than the leading interpreter of the poet whose work was the cultural touchstone of the Hellenes? In reply, Ion eagerly professes to speak most excellently (*kallista ... legein*) about Homer, and so is clearly keen on showing his mastery of the Homeric corpus.

It is at this point the first significant argumentative exchange begins. It runs almost half the dialogue (530c-536d). I will call it the *Expert Comparator Argument*. It begins with Socrates' reasonable question about whether, in addition to Homer, Ion has also profound (*deinos*) insight about Hesiod and Archilochus (530d). Ion replies that he has no interest in them – he even later says he dozes off (532c) when hearing about these other poets. Homer, he says, is sufficient (531a). Nevertheless, Ion holds that, on a variety of subjects, Homer speaks better (*ameinon*) and the others worse (*kakion*) (531d).

This comparative judgment is strange. Socrates proposes two connected concerns. If one is to compare the quality of two speakers' performances on some subject, one should not only be familiar with what the two speakers say, but one should have some knowledge of the subjects on which they speak. If two people are talking about arithmetic, and we want to determine the better performance, we must not only know the relevant arithmetic but also what the two speakers said (532a). Consequently, Ion must not only be *deinos* about Homer, he must be similarly *deinos* about the other poets and about their subject matter. The findings can be stated as follows:

(1) Ion holds Homer better on many subjects than Hesiod.
(2) If two speakers (A and B) pronounce on some topic (X), then those who sort the better speaker from the worse must:
    (a) know both A's and B's accounts, and
    (b) have knowledge of X.

We have already seen that Ion fails (2a), but Socrates is keen on making (2b) explicit as he turns to this point of what it takes to have such knowledgeable mastery (*episteme kai technē*):

Don't you use the same discipline throughout when you master a subject (*holen technē labiē*)? (532e)

Socrates establishes this commitment by way of three progressively clarifying and ascending examples. First, consider painting. One does not *know painting well* if one can only discuss a limited range of figures or if one can successfully critique only landscapes. Rather, mastery of painting requires that one be able to paint with a variety of painters and a range of different subjects. Mastery of a domain of activity requires that one master all (or at least a wide breadth) of the techniques and styles within it. Second, consider cithary. Again, as with painting, someone with mastery of cithary can discuss a variety of songs, perhaps a breadth of genres. Moreover, when one hears a badly composed song, one can correct it and explain where it went wrong. Third, and finally, consider sculpture. The expert sculpture critic can not only comment on the variety of work and correct others (and presumably him- or herself), but the expert sculpture critic can also "insightfully explain (*deinos ... exegeisthai*)" (533a) the plans for the sculptures of others. That is, those who have knowledgable mastery (*technē kai episteme*) are not only skilled at producing the target items of the domain, but they understand and can articulate the norms and principles that comprise the domain. These examples and requirements aggregate to yield the following complex requirement for mastery of a domain of knowledge, which I call the *Systematicity Requirement*:

(3) A domain of activity (D) is one of knowledgeable mastery (*episteme kai technē*) IFF it is systematic in the following fashions:
    (a) There are rules and procedures unique to D that determine the performances within D and evaluation of the products of those performances, and
    (b) Mastery of D is mastery of those rules and procedures, and
    (c) A subject (S) has mastery of D's rules and procedures IFF
        (i) S can consistently apply those rules and procedures across a broad range of cases, and
        (ii) S can state those rules and invoke them in S's explanations and evaluations.

It is (3c), and particularly in (ii), that seems on its face to be a paradigmatic instance of Socrates' extraordinarily demanding epistemic internalism – a kind that demands that if one knows, especially if one has *expert knowledge*, one should be able to explain all of the background to one's commitments.[2] One should be able to provide insightful explanations

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[2] Note that this requirement on the method of elenchus is not one that takes a stand on the ultimate objective of elenchus, whether as a constructive project of arriving at positive knowledge of a definition (as seen under Vlastos, 1994 and Wolfsdorf, 2003), non-propositional knowledge (as with Futter, 2013), or simply as a protreptic test for interlocutors (as argued by Benson, 2011). The systematicity requirement

(*deinos exegeisthai*). One should be able to define terms, show similarities, note difficulties where they may pop up, and address disagreements.[3] In short, one must have a systematic command of one's knowledge: the truth must be irrefutable, and those who know it can give such an account. Elsewhere, Socrates is clear about this explicitness condition on the Systematicity Requirement. In the *Laches*, he holds that "of that which we know (*ismen*) … we can also say what it is (*eipomen depou ti estin*)" (190c). He is clear with Meno that knowledge dies down true opinion with reasons why (*aitia logismio*) (98a). And Socrates encourages Hippias to reply with the greates precision (*malista akribos eipein*), which should be a small thing (*smikron*) for someone with knowledge (Hip. Maj. 288e).[4] And it is with (3c), again on condition (ii), that Ion fails so miserably. He has nothing beyond his special ability with Homer. It is with such a principle, then, that Socrates infers that Ion must not, then, have knowledgeable mastery of the topics he claims to know. There must be some other explanation, then, for Ion's success. Socrates offers this hypothesis:

Speaking well about Homer is not a subject you have mastered. It's a divine power (*theia … dunamis*) that moves you, as a magnet moves iron rings (533d)

Socrates' reasoning, then, is:

(4) Ion satisfies neither (2a) nor (3c).
(5) *Therefore*, Ion does not make his comparative judgment in (1) with knowledgeable mastery.
(6) If Ion makes the comparison in (1) without knowledge, it must be through a divine power, like the one that moves poets.
(7) *Therefore,* Ion is inspired, like the poets.

The consequences of (7) are significant. The inspiration works from the Muse, through Homer, down through a tradition of transmission of Homer's poetry, to Ion himself. Ion, then, transmits this invisible magnetic force in his performances to his audience. They, too, are

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here stands as a condition for success in the elenctic challenge, not as a stance as to what the elenchus is supposed to induce.

[3] This is closely connected to what Young (2006) and Warne (2013) term the Explanatory Requirement for Real Definition.

[4] Notice further that this condition itself is a requirement even for perversions of the good use of technē. For example, one must know the truth explicitly in order to properly deceive (*Phaedrus* 261e) and one must know the good to some degree in order to construct a successful rhetorical version of it (*Gorgias* 460a).

possessed when he recounts his tales. Following Socrates' analogy with magnets, let us call this the *Magnetic Model*:

Muse → Poet → Rhapsode → … → Ion → Audience.

In short, "the god pulls people's souls through all these whenever he wants, looping the power down from one to the other" (536a). On the Magnetic Model, it is not a skill that holds the array together, but a strange force, a kind of irrational attraction. As a consequence, neither Homer nor the audience nor Ion are in possession of their own thoughts. They are all "possessed (*entheoi*)" (533c) and "out of their minds (*ouk emphrones ontes*)" (534b).

The Magnetic Model pleases both Ion and Socrates. And it explains a number of phenomena that are otherwise curious. The first is the disconnect between Ion's success as a rhapsode and his seeming incompetence in the area wherein he should show some expertise. The second is the recurrence of curious cases of, for lack of a better word, *one hit wonders*. Tynnichus of Chalcis, for example, had only one excellent praise song, despite clearly working on many other songs that amounted to nothing (534d). Were poetic knowledge and expertise the source of poems, the poets' performances would be more consistent.[5]

Ion, despite being pleased at first with the divine possession hypothesis (as it certainly, as he notes, is a good way to be seen by audiences), has two concerns. First, he objects that he is not possessed *during his performances* – were he totally out of his mind during the recitations, he wouldn't be able to keep it together during some very emotional parts. During a certain sad scene, perhaps, he might just lose control altogether, as some in his audience who break down crying. But he doesn't. He must "keep (his) wits and pay close attention (to the audience)" (535e). If he lost his mind, he couldn't put in the performance he needs to or collect his fee afterwards. Call this the *rhapsodic distance qualification*. Again, it may be finer (*kallion*) to *seem* as though he's possessed by the Muse at some moments, but one must see this notion as more a point of promotional strategy.

Ion's second qualification is that he most certainly does not think he's possessed or crazed when he "praises Homer" (536d). The god doesn't influence his commentary. He is

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[5] This seems an appropriate corollary to the Systematicity requirement: If S does not produce works of consistent quality in Domain D, then S does not have *episteme kai technē* in D.

exercising his own thoughts when he does that. He alone is the source of the praise. Call this the *commentary distance qualification.*

Together, the *rhapsodic distance* and the *commentary distance* qualifications completely evacuate the divine inspiration hypothesis. If Ion's performances are divinely inspired, it is either his performance of recitation or his performance of interpretation that are the product of the inspiration. The rhapsodic distance qualification negates the former, and the commentary qualification negates the latter. Given Ion's own description, there is no place for divine possession, so described, to occur.[6]

Ion, of course, doesn't see the implication, and Socrates doesn't press the issue. Socrates, it seems, has two reasons for letting the issue go. First, it's not clear it really matters to Ion either way, since it's more a matter for Ion to be assessed and called (*nomizesthai*) divine (542a) than it is for him to be so. Second (and more importantly), Socrates' main quarry returns with the commentary distance qualification, which is the prospect of interpretive knowledge. If Ion isn't out of his head when he's interpreting and praising Homer, then Socrates' primary target of investigation is back on the table – Ion's knowledgeable mastery in the domains he claims to have particular expertise. It takes precedence over scoring the dialectical point on poetry and rhapsody.

Given this turn, we enter the second significant argumentative exchange in the *Ion.* I call it Socrates' *Expert Expositor Argument* (536d-541a). Socrates returns to the thought behind the earlier *Expert Comparator Argument* – that if one is an interpreter or evaluator of a poet's claims in a domain of activity, one should have knowledge of that domain. Homer presents and Ion comments on a wide variety of domains of activity, and Homer provides sometimes very particular advice. He advises modulating the speed of one's horses when taking a tight turn in a chariot race (537b), that a posset of strong wine, cheese and onions is bracing for wounded men (538e), that lead weights take hooks to the deeper and bigger fish (538d), and that an eagle dropping a still-fighting snake is a portentous omen (539d). These are all topics internal to domains of charioteering, medicine, fishing, and divination respectively. The question is how one could know that what Homer says about a particular topic in these domains is good advice without independently having knowledgeable mastery of those domains. And again, if the commentary distance qualification is correct, Ion must then have this knowledge.

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[6] Trivigno offers a modified version of this point, calling it the "oracular" view (2014).

Earlier, Socrates had posited some conditions of domains when he'd spelled out the Systematicity Requirement. At this point, he reminds Ion that the content or comprising skills of each domain must be unique to those domains. To each domain of activity (*technē*), "a god has granted the ability to know a certain function (*ergon hoia*)" (537c). And so, Socrates reasons, these domains have unique topics and actions (*pragmata*) that define them. Were two areas to overlap, they would be the same area: "If there is some knowledge of the same subject, then why would we say there are two different professions?" (537d). Thus, we yield:

(1) *Doctrine of the Distinctness of Domains:* For any two domains of knowledgeable mastery, they are identical when they comprise the same topics, and distinct if they do not.

With this commitment in place, Socrates opens the *Expert Expositor Argument*:

(2) Homer's poems are composed of advice in many distinct domains.

We know that Ion, as a rhapsode, interprets and commends Homer. Given commitments from earlier, particularly the Systematicity Requirement, we have:

(3) If a domain has a range of topics within its purview, then any S who knowledgeably judges performances regarding those topics can do so only if S has knowledgeable mastery of the domain.

As Socrates says, "they are for him (the expert) to examine and judge (*skopein kai krinein*)" (539d). We are reminded that:

(4) Ion is not a charioteer, fisherman, and so on, but
(5) Ion holds that he is the judge "of all these matters (*hapanta*)" (539c).

A final point is implicit in (4) above, which is that because rhapsody is itself a domain and being a doctor or charioteer are other domains, with different names and different objects of mastery, we can reasonably expect that *rhapsody itself offers no insight into things poeticized in rhapsody*. The consequence is a grand contradiction. Ion holds himself, as rhapsode, a judge of all the domains in Homer's oeuvre, yet he himself has mastered none of those domains.

This is the second time Socrates has caught Ion in this contradiction. Ion claims to have a wide breadth of knowledge, but he has no actual mastery of it beyond the capacity to quote Homer on the matters in question. The second time around, however, Ion sees the issue clearly. Implicitly, he admits his claim to much of this knowledge doesn't have quite the standing he

started with. But there are *exceptions (plēn ... ta toiauta)* he insists, particularly with the art of generalship (540a).

Ion is willing to accept the Doctrine of Uniqueness of Domains for most every case, but the exception is that Ion, as a rhapsode, will know what a general will say to encourage his troops (540d). This is because, according to Ion, all topics of good generalship fall within the domain of good rhapsody, and so: "Anyone who is a good rhapsode is a good general" (541b).

Socrates here presses one last inconsistency. But this time, it is a *practical* inconsistency, rather than the theoretical inconsistencies identified earlier. Ion holds that all good rhapsodes are good generals. Further, if one is skilled within a domain, then that skill transmits to any of that domain's sub-domains. And finally, if one is superlatively skilled within a domain, that superlativity of skill transmits to the sub-domains. By this reasoning, then, Ion concludes that the best rhapsodes will be the best generals. The trouble is, Ion's city needs a good general. So why is Ion not serving as the leader, and instead reciting Homer? The reasoning of the *Practical Inconsistency Argument* (540b-542a):

(1) Anyone who is a good rhapsode (or the best rhapsode) will be a good general (or the best general).
(2) Ion is the best rhapsode
(3) Ion's city needs a general
(4) If one's city needs a general and if one is the best general, one serves as general.
(5) Ion is not serving as general

Again, we yield a contradiction, and Ion seems to see it all too clearly. Socrates returns to his original explanation for the otherwise curious conflict: Ion's performances are not the products of knowledgeable mastery, but are by divine dispensations (*theia moira*), and Ion agrees.

3. Poetry, Inspiration, and Theology

The conclusion of the *Ion* is that rhapsodes (and poets) do not have knowledgeable mastery (*technē kai episteme*) of the domains they talk about. Instead, their performances are the products of a divine dispensation (*theia moira*): they are possessed (*entheoi*) and out of their minds (*ouk emphrones ontes*). This conclusion strikes some as a kind of positive endorsement of poetry and performance. Romantics, like Percy Byssche Shelley, identify the *Ion* as Plato's mystical affirmation of poets and their craft:

Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. (*A Defence of Poetry*: 1109-1115)

But it seems more likely that the thrust of the dialogue is a critical program on poetry and poetic license. Again, this line of interpretation dovetails with Socrates' conversational digest from *Apology 22b* and it meshes with the critical Platonic program on poetry in *Republic* II-III and X. Whatever positive terms Socrates uses in assessing Ion and his profession are more likely ironic than not.

This interpretive trajectory, as I see it, is that the critique of poetry links with a number of other central Platonic *topoi*. The first is the problem of disagreement. The gods disagree about what is pious and good, so their individual proclamations are not certainly reliable (as Socrates argues in *Euthyphro* 7b). So, too, do the poets disagree, as is underscored at *Ion* 531b – Homer and Hesiod are not in agreement on many matters. Being an expert about Homer or Hesiod individually, or analogously just being an adherent of Apollo or Aphrodite, will not provide a rational basis for making a determination of who to take as authoritative on the conflicted matters.

A further concern is that the Xenophanean critical strand of taking Homeric and Hesiodic depictions of the gods as shameful (B11), inappropriate (B26), and pointless (B1), extends to Socrates' program.[7] We see Socrates reject tales of violence between the gods in *Euthyphro* (6a) and *Republic* (381, 389). And he further takes the criterion for appropriate poetry to be one of proper upbringing – the criterion for whether a poet (or rhapsode) speaks well on a moral subject, then, is moral knowledge.

This rationalist resistance to what one might call *The Poetic-Religious Complex* is captured by the very thoughts that those possessed by the Muse are "out of their minds" (534a).[8]

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[7] See Aikin (2016) for an overview of the moral and theological arguments for the Xenophanean program in theological reconstruction and its connection to the Platonic critical stance.

[8] Leo Strauss notes this tension in a broader context, and he articulates the stakes: "If it is confronted with the claim of revelation, and only if it is confronted with the claim of revelation, philosophy as a radically free pursuit becomes radically questionable. Confronted with the claim of revelation, the philosopher is therefore compelled to refute that claim. More than that: he must prove the impossibility of revelation. For if revelation is possible, it is possible that the philosophic enterprise is fundamentally wrong" (2006: 150). Consider, as an extension, philosophy's promise to provide these certainties. There is a widespread worry that this promise in place of religion is a kind of "Second Cave." See, for example, Horkheimer and

The stakes are high in the critical evaluation of Olympianism and the poetry in its service. The standing requirement of knowledge of the *topoi* as the antecedent requirement demands further articulation. The objective here, then, is to identify two significant features of the *Ion* that bear on philosophical method: the requirements placed on knowledgeable mastery that yield *elenctic* arguments and the metaphilosophical lessons to take from Ion's intellectual character.

4. Methodological Consequences

The two restrictions on knowledgeable mastery are the *Systematicity* and *Uniqueness Requirements,* together amounting to the view that knowledgeable mastery of a domain is mastery of a unique range activities, knowledge of the rationale behind their functions, and the ability to articulate that rationale. There are two consequences of the convergence of the commitments. One is clear from its regular deployment in the *Ion*, and the other is less obvious but is relevant to Socrates' broader method.

The first consequence is that the domain of subjects (*pragmata*) about which rhapsody and poetry can justifiably declaim begins to shrink to a vanishing point. This consequence looms clearly at *Ion* 540a, when Socrates draws the *Expert Expositor Argument* to a close and concludes that "the profession of rhapsody <...> will not know everything (in Homer's poem), neither will a rhapsode." Importantly, the removal of the poet and rhapsode from the *technai* of which they speak is parallel to that in the *Republic*, wherein the poet must be a kind of mimic of those who do their appointed business. The poet, then, is a kind of faker at doing or even describing these jobs; the poet's job is to mimic all of them, which is a kind of abomination if justice is doing the one job appropriate to one's nature (*Republic* 396b). It seems Socrates might allow an exception, but it will not be for generalship (as offered by Ion), but of rhapsody and poetry itself. He does not begrudge the poet this the poetic account of poetry – that they "bear songs to us like bees carry honey," that they "gather their songs at the springs flowing with nectar, from the Muse's glades and gardens" (534b). But there is little more, given the *Uniqueness Requirement* that the poet or rhapsode can say in the voice of poet or rhapsode.

Adorno (2002) and the exchange between Altmann (2011) and Bernstein (2013) on this issue. It is in light of similar points that Alberto Ghibellini makes a case for the Straussian tradition to be in a similar *zetetic* idiom (2013: 75).

A question looms, though. Socrates, too, endeavors to interpret and judge (*skopein kai krinein*) the accounts and speeches of others. He judges some good, others not so. He, as a *philosopher*, has no special knowledge of cobbling, charioteering, tanning and the like. Nor does he have knowledge of generalship or statecraft or virtue that regularly attracts his attention. How does Socrates, as a philosopher, judge accounts within these domains when *he himself* has no particular excellence at them?[9] Socrates is no rhapsode (despite his own impressive Homerizing at *Ion* 538c-539c), but yet he judges Ion's account of rhapsody.[10] The Uniqueness Requirement and Systematicity Condition now come home to roost. In the same way that rhapsody has no domain of expertise upon which to declaim, so too for philosophy. How then can a philosopher judge?

A further point is to be made, this time with the *Expert Comparator Argument*. Ion fails this requirement because he does not have anything to say of Hesiod or Antilochus; he can't responsibly or knowledgeably make the comparison without familiarity with the compared poets. But Socrates, too, seems to fail the comparators requirement. As reported in the *Crito*, he's never left Athens except on military duty (53a). How could he, by this rule of comparision, have a well-founded view of Athens' unique appropriateness for him? His model for education for youths in the Kalliopolis is single-minded exposure to the good; there will be no bads with which to make comparison.

Notice that these points converge with Socrates' paradox of ignorance in the *Apology* – he disavows knowledge and wisdom, but holds that his wisdom is in the disavowal (21b). Again, given the *Expert Comparator Argument*'s requirement of antecedent knowledge within a domain for comparative judgment of performances within the domain, Socrates' own evaluations of the speeches of others will not be legitimate – if he does not have knowledge, how does he judge others' and his own cases?

It is worth noting at this point that a levels-distinction that drives Socratic method is a kind of exception for philosophers. Socrates, like Ion, judges the statements of others, even

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[9] Futter (2013) pauses to note that there is a potential conflict between Socrates' claim that he is *learning* from his interlocutors and that he is *examining* their knowledge. Cf. Weinstein, 2014: 326.

[10] This point is important, that Socrates is familiar with Homer and the rest of the poets (as shown in *Republic* 332d, *Symposium* 174b, and *Gorgias* 485d), and he regularly invokes mythological stories (as with the Myth of Er, the account of the souls to close the *Gorgias*, and Theuth in *Phaedrus*). However, Socrates' critique of myth and poetry would not survive the systematicity and comparator requirements were Socrates to *fail* to know any Homer or be able to articulate how myths work.

though he has no knowledge. The difference is that in Ion's case, he never seems to claim or show the second-order knowledge that Socrates' method lays claim to – even in replying to Socrates' arguments. That is, the philosopher may not have knowledge of the particulars (*pragmata*) within a domain of knowledgeable mastery (*technē kai episteme*), but the philosopher knows about the domains as domains. And it is with this structural knowledge of how domains function as particular topics of study and expertise that the philosopher can judge performances; it is because philosophers see that the performances must meet certain prerequisites for real knowledge and mastery. This is what we see with the systematicity requirement.

And it is here that we see the important connection between this second-order mastery that comprises philosophical method and its engagement in specific dialogues. Consider the non-circularity requirement on display at the opening of the *Euthyphro*. Euthyphro has his case against his father, his family holds that what he is doing is impious, and Euthyphro replies that, instead, they do not have the accurate knowledge (*akribōs eideien*) of piety he has (5a). Socrates asks for a definition of piety, and Euthyphro replies that his case is exemplary. Of course, examples are not definitions, and to use a controversial example (in fact, the very case under consideration) is out of order. With the explicitness condition of the Systematicity requirement (c-ii above), we can explain why this is the case. An expert about piety does not just have mastery of individual cases, but can address multiple cases, can identify what has gone wrong in bad cases, and can expertly explain what has gone right in good cases. Compare this on analogy with the sculptors who can expertly explain (*deinos exegeisthai*) other sculptures at Ion 533a. There are not only familiar *semantic* reasons why examples are not definitions (*deixis* must always be to a *this X*), but there are also broader methodological reasons.

5. Metaphilosophical Consequences

Ion cuts a particular intellectual image. He is vain and focused on how he is perceived, as is seen in his focus on dress (530b) and his emphasis on being viewed as divine (542b). He is mindlessly competitive, as seen by his comparisons to other rhapsodes (530d) and his boast that he is worthy of being crowned by the Sons of Homer (531a). In short, Ion is a self-aggrandizing braggart. The trouble is that he is incurious, to boot. He has no interest in hearing or mastering

any of the other poets. He says he simply dozes off (*nustazo*) when they come up. This intellectual character is worth our reflection.

Consider Ion's intellectual servility. He can recite Homer's views in a variety of domains. Ion thereby takes himself to have knowledge of these domains. With Ion, we see two converging phenomena. On the one hand, we have the phenomenon of being committed to the views of one figure only, with no knowledge or interest in that figure's competitors. On the other hand, we have a model for how dogmatism arises: one first makes intellectual allegiances and then comparative judgments in light of them. I will address these two phenomena serially and comment on their metaphilosophical import.

First, there is figure-obsession. We all love the big names. In Ion's case, the big name is Homer. But this name-obsession is not limited to rhapsody. It happens in philosophy, too. Who has not been, at least for a short time, drawn by the allure and prestige of having mastered the thought of a particularly trendy philosopher? Declaiming Cicero's views on something, quoting Aristotle, taking a Heideggerian stance, using Wittgenstein's thought to address a question. Invoking a name does multiple things. It allows us to, as it were, invoke the philosophical muse and have the great name speak through us. Notice also that in doing so, one lays claim to the authority of the name, but none of the responsibility for the views on offer. It is the view of the great name that one relates, so if there are problems, it is the great name's views under attack, not one's own.

This phenomenon of intellectual parrotry creates traditions and schools which then yield degenerate orthodoxies. How regularly has the self-identified phenomenologist, simply out of school-identification, refused to accept a simple form of realism? How often have self-described empiricists, entirely because of their Lockean views on innate ideas, insisted that there *simply must be* a reply to poverty of stimulus arguments? How often do we ask about a philosopher whether they are *real* X-ists or Y-ites? And note the valence of that question when deployed by those who identify with school X or trend Y.

The trouble revealed is that just as mastering Homer on charioteering does not make one an expert on chariot racing, mastering Heidegger's or Aristotle's views on ontology does not make one an expert on ontology. Ion can quote Homer's advice on taking the tight chariot turn, but he has no idea how do defend it against a critic beyond reciting more Homer. Is this not the same with our contemporary philodoxists with the great figures? And here is a great irony about

philosophy. To be good at philosophy, one must know its history, the greats. But to be a good historian of philosophy, one must be good on the topics the greats wrestle with. One should be good in epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics independently and bring that knowledge to bear on the greats and their debates.[11] One must not only know the Plato-Aristotle divide on metaphysics and epistemology, but one should know something about debates about nativism and abstract objects today. To speak well about Cicero's or Thomas's views on Natural Law, one should know the current debates about the open question argument, too. And that requires that one know many figures, many views, great and small. One must resist the temptation to doze off when views one is not so keen on are being presented.

Notice also that Ion's identification is with the undisputed heavyweight poet, Homer. As a consequence, there are only minor competitors. Beyond Hesiod, there is really no competition. And further, Ion may inherit Homer's prestige in mastering the oeuvre. He says it is *sufficient* (*hikanon ... einai*) just to know Homer (531a). *But notice that one who knows only Homer cannot be in the position to know that knowing only Homer is sufficient.* Perhaps one can know that it is sufficient for consistent praise and deference (and this is the only justification Ion can consistently give – that others praise his declamations), but one cannot know it is sufficient for the sake of real knowledge and mastery. And so a lesson is that figure-oriented intellectual work must have severe limitations on the kinds and strengths of claims those who declaim it can make. And, importantly, this is a lesson that those who are fans of the figures may learn from the figures themselves. The great thinkers became great and had the views they had not by being excellent parrots of the views of others, but by thinking on their own on the issues before them. Heidegger got his ontology by thinking about Being and the problem of being dishonest about it. Plato, too, thought about the issues and problems. For certain, their works are dialectical, and they must present their opponents and allies, and so they must take up with the work of others. But they never do so as their parrots. Rather as their conversational partners.

Consider an exemplary ancient philosophical figure and Academic inheritor of the *zetetic* edge of the Socratic tradition, Cicero. He, even in acknowledging that he is often a conduit of others' views, finds himself judging the cases in *propria persona*. And he, further, is pleased that

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[11] And note that this is the case even in the tradition of commentary arising in the later Hellenistic age – one must have mastered the domain before one comments on and clarifies the work of the masters. In this regard, it is worth distinguishing *commentary* from *declamation*. See, for example, Futter (2016) for an account of the requirements of the commentary tradition and its ties to intellectual autonomy.

his school of thought allows him to follow the reasons wherever they lead, that he has true Academic freedom.

… [W]e are freer and less constrained, because our power of judgment is intact and we aren't compelled to defend a set of views prescribed … (*Academica* 2.8)

The second phenomenon to note is that of the order of events that all too often occurs with intellectual work: one makes allegiances and then makes comparative judgments; instead of *vice versa*. It became a later Academic view that school-affiliation had become an impediment to philosophy done well, inquiry honestly taken on.[12] As reported by Cicero:

Other philosophers … labor under two constraints. First, they are chained to one spot by bonds formed before they were able to judge what was best. Second, they make their judgments about subjects they don't know at the weakest point in their lives… (*Academica* 2.8)

And this problem could not be held off by mastering multiple sides of an issue. Socrates notes in the *Hippias Major* that he should "take the other side" (*antilambanesthai*) so as to learn more strongly (*erromenesteron matheo*)" in his discussions (287a). And the Academics, later taking themselves to inherit the ethic of the Platonic dialogue, practice the *pro et contra* method of intellectual exchange. Cicero reports:

It is a considerable matter to understand any one of the systems of philosophy singly, how much harder it is to master them all! Yet this is the task that confronts those whose principle is to discover the truth by the method of arguing both for and against all the schools (*et contra omnis philosophos et pro omnibus dicere*). (*De Natura Deorum*. 1.11)

… our school argues against everything (*contra omnia ... disputatur*) … because we could not get a clear view of what is probable (*probabile*) unless a comparative estimate were made of all the arguments on both sides (*ex utraque parte causarum*). (*De Officiis* 2.8)

The thought is that the order one performs these actions is significant. Assent first and then judgment of merits second *versus* judgment of merits and then assent. The former is rife

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[12] The Academics widely used this observation about the genealogy of one's philosophical allegiances as a reason for remaining skeptics. St. Augustine reports Cicero's line of argument along these lines in *Contra Academicos* (3.7.40), and the key to this reasoning is that one's judgment must be brought to these traditions in order to devise a way to judge which one to which one casts one's lot. The Academics, because they stress the development of rules for good judgment independently of views about truth, promise then to be the school that offers the best options. See Aikin (forthcoming) for a reconstruction of this line of argument.

with rationalization, and this thought is a regular one across the Socratic tradition.[13] Cicero, again, remarks on this ethic when speaking about making friends:

Be a good man yourself, then seek another like yourself (*De Amicitia* 82)

And so it should go with all our allegiances, personal and intellectual.

6. Conclusion

My conclusion is that the *Ion*, despite its brevity and disappointing titular character, is philosophically robust. To be sure, it has significant ties with the broader Platonic critical program with poetry. And for good reason these have been the primary focus for most work on the dialogue. But these ties do not exhaust the *Ion* for its philosophical content. The dialogue provides insight into the explicitness condition for knowledge with what I've called the *Systematicity Requirement*, and this principle helps explain other Socratic methodological commitments. Finally, the *Ion* occasions some significant metaphilosophical reflection, especially for those who are antiquarian in spirit. If we are to do better than Ion, we cannot be mere parrots of the greats, but exercise our own judgment and have our own independent and well-informed views on the subject matter at hand. The irony, of course, is that this view of intellectual autonomy is occasioned by a reading of Plato, a philosophical great that so many parrot. But we are to endorse it not because Plato said it or that it also has Cicero's blessing. It is the same anti-authoritarian appeal of philosophy that called Socrates forward that resonates here. We are called to it, too, and so only then do we call Socrates and his legacy ours.[14]

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[13] See Katja Vogt's observation of Ion's intellectual character as a warning for philosophers: "A rhapsode is the archetypal mouthpiece for other people's thoughts. <...> [W]e find ourselves with thoughts that someone else – who know who – understands, thoughts that travelled from person to person." (2012: 46). For more on the intellectual character Cicero's program is supposed to induce, see Aikin (2015).

[14] Thanks go to Mason Marshall, Robert B. Talisse, Jeffrey Tlumak and members of the Graduate Seminar on Ancient Skeptical Thought at Vanderbilt for comments on earlier versions of this essay.

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