

Study Questions: Plato, *Ion*

Read the entire dialogue once all the way through at one sitting. Then read the *Ion* a second time, using the study questions as a guide to the main points and arguments. Be sure to think about these questions very carefully. And don't be intimidated by the Greek names. In general, you can pronounce them phonetically.

1. What is a rhapsode and how, in the opening section, does Socrates characterize the skill of the rhapsode? What is the difference between a rhapsode and a poet?
2. In the first examination of Ion, Socrates gets him to agree that he has a special skill which is limited to the works of Homer. What is this skill? Describe it in your own words. In what sense is it limited to Homer's works?
3. What is Socrates' point about distinguishing the good and the bad? What does this have to do with Ion's skill as a rhapsode?
4. Socrates claims that Ion speaks "without any art or knowledge". What does this mean and why does he say it?
5. What, according to Socrates, is the difference between art and inspiration?
6. Socrates offers an argument by analogy in which he compares magnetism and inspiration. What is the argument and what conclusion does Socrates reach?
7. In what sense are poets also interpreters? What do they interpret?
8. What are the implications of the argument that poets and rhapsodes are both interpreters?
9. What is the dilemma that Socrates poses when, in the concluding passage, he accuses Ion of being a deceiver? (This is a complicated passage. See if you can sort out all of the threads that Plato pulls together here.)

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