

Mission

To nurture free & virtuous citizens

Crazy Goal

To read all of Plato's Socratic dialogues and Aristotle's *Ethics & Politics* out loud, in public, for free

Hosted by Joey Lipp, PhD

"But who is a knower of this kind of excellence — the excellence of a human being and a citizen?" — Socrates

τίς τῆς τοιαύτης ἀρετῆς, τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης τε καὶ πολιτικῆς, ἐπιστήμων ἐστίν; — Socrates

"Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters." — Benjamin Franklin

Practices & Promises

1. We aim to understand what a human being is: what is its nature and how does it thrive?
2. We seek the good in all things — but the beautiful most of all.
3. We read, listen, and converse beautifully.
4. We debate ideas, not people.
5. We aim to be philosophically productive on our own selves.

Opening Curiosities

1. Whom do you trust as a source of human and political wisdom?
2. When was the last time you were moved to great emotional highs or lows by a performer?
3. Map is not territory: reality → image of reality (words, painting) → interpreter of image of reality → audience
4. "But who is a knower in this kind of excellence — the excellence of a human being and a citizen?" (*Apology* 20b) Is Ion such a knower? Who, then, can be our teacher of these things?

Ion by Plato: Some Details & Terms

Plato: 427—347BC Ion: active late 400sBC Dramatic date of dialogue: 413

- **ῥαψωδός, rhapsode**: reciter of epic poems; usually a professional reciter, especially of Homer's poems
- **Context 1**: Ion claims that, as a Homeric rhapsode, he knows the skill of a general, so Socrates suggests he make himself available to Athens for service as a general. At the time of this fictitious conversation, Athens has a manpower shortage after the Athenian fleet had been utterly lost on the Sicilian campaign.¹
- **Context 2**: Socrates makes a habit of seeking wisdom in informal conversation with people reputed to be wise. Ion is one such person. See also *Apology* 20a where Socrates talks to Callias, and *Apology* 21c—23a where Socrates relates his experience of speaking with politicians, poets, and skilled craftsmen.
- Critical distinction: **τέχνη, skill** (532d and passim) versus **ἐνθουσιασμός, enthusiasm** (533d—e and passim)

As We Read

- In what city is Ion a citizen? Yet from where has he come at the conversation's opening?
- Which poet does Ion know the best?
- Socrates claims not to be clever at speaking. What characteristic does he claim for his speaking instead?
- What does it mean for Ion to be an interpreter of interpreters?
- What effects do Ion's recitations have on him and his audiences? What does he say about emotions and money?
- What big skill does Ion claim for himself near the conversation's end, in addition to reciting Homer's poetry?
- At the end, which method of knowing do Socrates and Ion assign to Ion's ability as a reciter — skill or inspiration?
- How does Ion's reciting benefit the citizen audiences before whom he performs, if at all?

On Reverse: American Civic Comparanda

Second Treatise of Government by John Locke

America's Founding Documents by various American thinkers

¹Debra Nails, *The People of Plato* (2002).

Second Treatise of Government by John Locke (1689)
A Few Excerpts

Of the State of Nature

II.4. To understand political Power, right, and derive it from its Original, we must consider, what State all Men are naturally in, and that is, a *State of perfect Freedom* to order their Actions, and dispose of their Possessions, and Persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the Law of Nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the Will of any other Man. A *State* also of *Equality*, wherein all the Power and Jurisdiction is Reciprocal, no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident, than that Creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of Nature, and the use of the same Faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without Subordination or Subjection...

II.6. But though this be a *State of Liberty*, yet it is not a *State of Licence*; though man in that State have an uncontrollable Liberty, to dispose of his Person or Possessions, yet he has not Liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any Creature in his Possession... The *State of Nature* has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one: And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all *equal and independent*, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions... And being furnished with like Faculties, sharing all in one Community of Nature, there cannot be supposed any such *Subordination* among us, that may authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another's Uses...

II.14—15. 'Tis not every Compact that puts an end to the state of Nature between Men, but only this one of agreeing together mutually to enter into one Community, and make one Body Politick ... But I moreover affirm, That all Men are naturally in that State, and remain so, till by their own Consents they make themselves Members of some politick Society; and I doubt not in the Sequel of this Discourse, to make it very clear.

Of the Beginning of Political Societies

VIII.95. Men being, as has been said, by Nature, all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of this Estate, and subjected to the political Power of another, without his own Consent. The only Way whereby one devests himself of his natural Liberty, and puts on the Bonds of Civic Society is by agreeing with other Men to joyn and unite into a Community, for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable Living one amongst another, in a secure Enjoyment of their Properties and a greater Security against any, that are not of it. This any number of Men may do, because it injures not the Freedom of the rest; they are left as they were in the Liberty of the State of Nature. When any number of Men have so consented to make one Community or Government, they are thereby presently incorporated, and make one Body politick, where

Of the Ends of Political Society and Government

IX.123. If Man in the State of Nature be so free, as has been said; if he be absolute Lord of his own Person and Possessions, equal to the greatest and subject to no Body, why will he part with his Freedom? ... To which 'tis obvious to answer, that though in the state of Nature he hath such a Right, yet the Enjoyment of it is very uncertain, and constantly exposed to the Invasion of others ... And 'tis not without Reason, that he seeks out, and is willing to joyn in Society with others, who are already united, or have a Mind to unite, for the mutual Preservation of their Lives, Liberties and Estates, which I call by the general Name, *Property*.

IX.124. The great and *chief End* therefore, of Mens uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, is *the Preservation of their Property*. To which in the state of Nature there are many things wanting.

America's Founding Documents
A Few Excerpts

Declaration of Independence: In Congress, July 4, 1776 The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America: When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness ...