

THE SYMPOSIUM BY PLATO

The Symposium by Plato

Name

University

Tutor

Course title

Introduction

There is no doubt, Socrates is regarded to be the most influential figure in philosophy, not only due to his achievements in this sphere, his renouncement of wealth and a lifetime emphasis he placed on attempting to better define and understand the notion of truth, but also due to the fact that he inspired many philosophers who would carry on his work after his forced suicide, which was caused by a court of law in the interest of justice. After a certain time one of Socrates' students, Plato, would become the major force in philosophy in his own right. Best known for his writings featuring Socrates as the protagonist, Plato's early works represented quotations and ideas that could be directly attributed to Socrates; later in Plato's life, however, he seems to have utilized Socrates' ideas more as an extension of his own ideas. A good example of this is Plato's *The Symposium*. This research will not only offer a brief overview of this work, but also discuss how this work fits into the overall discipline of philosophy. In conclusion, upon the completion of the research, this book written by the key philosopher will be related to the discipline from which it sprouted.

A Brief Overview of the Work

While the modern vocabulary typically defines a 'symposium' as a gathering of experts to speak on a given subject or subjects, the origin of this definition can be traced back to Plato's book entitled *The Symposium*. In this work, the narrator describes a dinner party, attended by prominent figures including Socrates, of course, known as one of the greatest thinkers of his time, especially, concerning the subject of truth; Diotima, a woman who (as Socrates claims throughout the work) had taught him everything he knew about love; Agathon, probably one of the most famous authors of the Greek tragedy; Aristophanes, known as one of the greatest

comics of his time; the renown politician Alcibiades, and Eryximachus, a prominent physician and an expert in the medical science. With such an impressive guest list, as it should have been expected, the party became quite an interesting event.

The dinner was given in honor of Agathon, who at that point had just achieved a major success in the critical acclaim received for the staging of some of his tragic works on the Greek stage. Although Agathon was the main guest of the event, Socrates became in many ways the centre of attention of the party when he appeared, fashionably late, claiming that he had been deep in thought and had lost the track of time, thus, came late to the party. After the meal, a suggestion was made that with such a prominent gathering of thinkers at one party, a deep discussion should take place. Ultimately, it was decided that a discussion on love should unfold, which took the form of each of the most prominent guests being encouraged to speak in praise of the god of love.

Thus, love became the topic of the gathering; within the course of the guests' speeches, love was classified into several different manifestations. *Heavenly love* was presented as the new level of consciousness that lovers who truly feel something romantic for each other achieve after sharing a passionate contact, as opposed to *common love*, which would be very similar to what would today be called empty lust, whereby people share intimacy merely in the pursuit of physical gratification, void of any affection or deep feelings for the participants in the act. Eryximachus expanded the conversation by putting forth the assertion that love is more than the physical acts between people, with or without personal feelings. He also makes the point that love can be expressed through music, drama, and the like...

...References

Plato. (1999). *The Symposium*. London: Penguin Classics.