

Book Report on Plato's *Symposium*

Plato's *Symposium* is a philosophical work based on a series of speeches on Love in ancient Greece. *Symposium* reveals the questions of the entity of love, the purpose of love, love worthy of praise, and interpersonal relationships through love. One should mention that *Symposium* is the first major philosophical work on love in Western literature that combines the elements of tragicomedy and philosophical study. It is based on the speeches of Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon, Socrates, Diotima, and Alcibiades. All thinkers reveal the entity of love, its virtues, its characteristics, and types. Consequently, this paper intends to summarize Plato's *Symposium* and reveal its weaknesses and strengths.

Summary

The introductory dialogue occurs between Aristodemus and his friend, and Aristodemus expresses his satisfaction from the philosophical conversation. The introductory dialogue provides the indirect narration structure. It is difficult to say to the reader or to Plato Apollodorus tells the story. However, it happened long ago and was related to symposium or drinking party. Aristodemus and Socrates go to a party organized for Agathon who won the competition for the best performance of tragedy. The introductory dialogue informs that at this symposium the men not only eat and drink but give speeches in praise of love (Plato & Bernadete 20). It means that philosophers and thinkers have their opinion on love and its entity.

The speech of Phaedrus regards love as the god who is the most ancient. He states that love provides the greatest guidance and goods. Guidance is done through shame and pride. Pride is received when the lovers act well, and shame is the result of shameful behavior. Phaedrus believes that lovers are necessary for building the best system of society. It means that lover and beloved can do a lot when they are together. For example, they can go for a battle together as

love provides them with the courage and bravery. Phaedrus remembers the example of Achilles and his beloved Patroclus. However, the philosopher insists on the necessary conditions that can build the successful relationships. Thus, the relationships should focus on the development of the mind of the beloved and the personality (Amir 7).

The speech of Pausanias is devoted to the praising of love. The philosopher insists that relationships that glorify the physical characteristics of the lover are wrong. The boy who has the relationship should develop his mind to make them harmonic. The beloved should be socially encouraged, and the lover should be socially discouraged. Pausanias thinks that love and Aphrodite are interrelated. Thus, he determines two kinds of love: Urania (Heavenly Aphrodite) and Pandemos (Common Aphrodite). The nobility and praise of love are preconditioned by its feelings and sentiments. Common love is more typical for the body rather than soul as it presupposes sexual act that is between a male and female. Heavenly love refers to the soul and mind; therefore, it is pure and innocent.

The speech of Eryximachus expands Pausanias' vision of love. The philosopher believes that love is typical not only for humans. It is everywhere in the universe including the world of plants and the animal kingdom. It means that love is omnipresent. Moreover, the thinker empowers love with the ability to direct humans and gods. The difference between Eryximachus and other thinkers is that he is a doctor and underlines the parallel between love and medicine. Eryximachus states that human body can express two species of love: in health and disease. Thus, medicine is guided by love and intends to create the harmony in the body and treat from the discordant elements that can destroy this harmony. Eryximachus agrees with Pausanias when it comes to heavenly love can be felt by the good people.

The speech of Aristophanes pays much attention to human nature and its relation to the mythical account of love. First, the philosopher defines three kinds of human beings: males, females, and androgynous who combine male and female features. The males come from the sun; the females are the outcomes of the earth, and androgynous come from the moon. Aristophanes supposes that love is the pursuit of wholeness. It means that one half should find another. It is more than sex; it is in human heart and soul. The philosopher thinks that men and women must bring love to its perfect state. It is evident that love is preconditioned by human behavior and feelings. Consequently, the central idea of Aristophanes' speech is the origin of sexual love. Moreover, the philosopher addresses the motifs of folklore and myth to explain the entity of love (Pinson 8).

The speech of Agathon is devoted to the qualities of god. One should say that Agathon does not agree with Phaedrus' meaning of love. Thus, the philosopher thinks that love is the youngest god. Thus, he determines the following virtues of love: wisdom, bravery, moderation, and justice. Love is the strongest pleasure as it has the greatest moderation. Socrates praises the speech of Agathon, but he has some questions to the philosopher. First, he is interested whether love is the love of anything or love of nothing. Second, Socrates wants to understand the beauty and ugliness of love. The philosopher shares his experience in love that he has learnt from Diotima. Consequently, Agathon's speech focuses on the entity of love rather than its functions. Moreover, the philosopher tries to reveal the moral character of love that is more than relationships between males and females.

Plato's *Symposium* also includes Diotima's questions to Socrates related to beauty and ugliness of love. Thus, Diotima thinks that love is not a god but the child of god and one should relate it to the notions of poverty, spirit, and resource. Diotima believes the function of love is to

reproduce. The results of reproduction of lesser men are children. Intellectual men reproduce their ideas and share them with other people. Consequently, Plato's *Symposium* provides Diotima's speech on love. According to Diotima, love is something between mortal and immortal, rich and poor, ignorance and wisdom. It means that there is no definite answer what love is. Moreover, she believes that love can be good and exist forever when it strives for immortality. Diotima thinks that everything that can love is pregnant as the main function of love is to give a birth and reproduce.

The last speech is made by Alcibiades who says the entrance, the main part, and conclusion. One should mention that Alcibiades is strongly influenced by Socrates' words. Consequently, his speech is devoted to praising admiration with Socrates' as a philosopher and personality. Alcibiades believes that Socrates can seduce and bewitch people with his speeches. It means that he demonstrates respect to Socrates. Although, Alcibiades is drunk, his speech is full of sense and facts that confirm his arguments. Moreover, Alcibiades compares Socrates to the wonderful flute that produces music. Such speech proves that Socrates is a leader, and he has the authority among other philosophers and thinkers. Thus, Alcibiades states that Socrates is beautiful as a personality and full of the ideas to share with other people. One should say that the symposium ends in disorder as Socrates comes back to the discussion next day.

Pausanias' Speech

Pausanias' speech is the most compelling as it is related to the theme of virtue. The strength of this speech is that it establishes the good and bad sides of love. It means that Pausanias' speech is based on this division. Moreover, the philosopher underlines the importance of the necessary conditions for the successful relationships. It is evident that Pausanias realizes the difficulties that love presupposes. Furthermore, he thinks that physical beauty cannot

reinforce love as it is vulgar. Consequently, Pausanias believes that virtues can be cultivated by societal rules and law. It is obvious that good love expresses virtues and bad love is deprived of them. I like Pausanias' speech as he determines more than one kind of love dividing it in common and heavenly. Common love is bad because it is directed toward human bodies, and it is the easiest way to get what you want. Heavenly love is good because it is directed toward soul and mind.

Socrates' and Diotima's Accounts

To my mind, the role of Diotima is very important for the symposium as she is a woman and she introduces her idea of love. Moreover, one should say that she provides the lessons of love to Socrates. From another side, one can say that there are not satisfactory as they address their relationships that lead to nothing. It means that they have made mistakes. Furthermore, they both cannot explain to what extent love is beautiful and ugly.