

# Plato symposium



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The concept of love is one that has been hotly debated for ages, and who better to debate the issue than a group of drunken men. In Plato's Symposium, which is defined as an event of drinking and intellectual conversation, Socrates and six other men each come to the party with a prepared encomium on love. By the end of the symposium, a general conclusion is met: that there are two types of love and the most virtuous love is the love of wisdom. Each of the men present their speeches on love, which may seem different, but essentially they parallel what Diotima's opinion of love is, a unhurried and careful ascent to truth.

So, each speaker's encomium gets the audience closer and closer to the truth. After, Phaedrus's speech on love, the legal expert, Pausanias, begins by developing the idea of the duality of love; though it is primarily under the umbrella of homosexuality, only touching briefly on heterosexual love. It is his claim that love exists in the form of Aphrodite Pandemos (common love,) and Aphrodite Uranis (heavenly love.) Common love being based on sensuality and producing children; while heavenly love being based on companionship, involving mental and soul-oriented pursuits. Virtue is of high importance to him, and says that heavenly love only goes bad if one lover's intention is exploitation.

cv writing service leicester Ultimately, Plato rejects the glorification of sexual love, or common love, and puts the asexual love and pursuit of wisdom and beauty on a pedestal.

Socrates, Plato's mouthpiece, places philosophy above the arts which the other men use for comparisons, including medicine (Eryximachus,) comedy

(Aristophanes,) and tragedy (Agathon.) Socrates also references every speaker, as if to say his encomium possessed the ultimate truth that only could have been reached by the process of having the other men build up to it; this is another suggestion of Diotima's notion of love being a dutiful ascent, or journey, to truth. The Symposium also contains this idea that love is best exemplified by Socrates himself: a passionate lover of wisdom and beauty, although he is neither wise nor beautiful. This conclusion is reached because of Diotima's description of love as a force that moves between man and god. Diotima states, "For wisdom is a most beautiful thing, and Love is of the beautiful; and therefore Love is also a philosopher: or lover of wisdom, and being a lover of wisdom is in a mean between the wise and the ignorant. And of this too his birth is the cause; for his father is wealthy and wise, and his mother poor and foolish. Such, my dear Socrates, is the nature of the spirit Love."

(Symposium.) An additional question is raised: why should one seek love so strongly. Diotima suggests that people seek love, or beauty, for the simple reason that it provides them with happiness. Plato's theory or forms also comes into play as Diotima explains how philosophy is more virtuous than common love. "For he who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to visit beautiful forms; and first, if he be guided by his instructor aright, to love one such form only-out of that he should create fair thoughts; and soon he will of himself perceive that the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another; and then if beauty of form in general is his pursuit, how foolish would he be not to recognize that the beauty in every form is and the same! And when he perceives this he will

abate his violent love of the one, which he will despise and deem a small thing, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms; in the next stage he will consider that the beauty of the mind is more honourable than the beauty of the outward form. (Symposium) The concept of love, as illustrated by Symposium, is easily contrasted with another dialogue by Plato: Phaedrus. In this dialogue, common love is again seen as degrading and heavenly love exalted. Suggesting that there should be a balance between common love and heavenly love, Socrates uses a metaphor of a charioteer, an obedient horse, and a reckless horse.

As the charioteer is being driven towards the one he loves, the obedient horse is controlled by his shame, while his partner races toward the object of desire with wanton lack of control; this wears the horse out, so the charioteer and good horse drag the other horse towards the form of beauty. The reckless horse ultimately passes away of fright when face to face with the boy and the lover's soul follows the boy, or thing of beauty, in admiration and awe. This metaphor is used to portray Socrates' opinion that love should be a balance of human self-control and divine madness.

This appreciation of the madness of eros comes as a stark contrast to Symposium, in which Socrates states that one should pursue wisdom through beauty. Socrates declares that madness must be complimented with reason, learning, and self-control for art or love to have value. It is baffling that Socrates would show admiration for the irrational aspects of human life and the emotions involved. However, it is this perspective proposed in Phaedrus, that I agree with the most. Humans are driven by their need to

procreate and practice common love, but who is to say that common love cannot evolve into heavenly love.

I believe it is possible for two lovers to practice the lesser form of erotic love, but through time begin to climb the ??? ladder of love??? through balancing self-control and the madness of love. Works Cited  
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