

## Abstract

This paper seeks to illuminate the significance of Socrates' entrance into a series of speeches by exploring the connection between love and learning in Plato's *Symposium*. We begin by presenting historical and social contexts relevant to the dialogue and its author. We then turn to the dialogue, outlining the fundamental components of each speech and, moreover, analyzing each speech with the aim of eliciting educational implications which are later highlighted and expanded on by Socrates. We examine these pedagogical connotations through a thorough investigation of each speech, keeping a keen eye on Socrates. We approach our examination of Socrates' speech in two key ways. The first is to examine how the educational implications found within the earlier speeches are later acknowledged and expanded on by Socrates. Furthermore, we also examine the way in which Socrates forms careful alterations of the previous speakers' assertions to provide them with new meanings. Second, we examine Socrates' approach in contrast with the prior speeches. In our examination of Socrates' speech, we find that the structure of Socrates' speech sharply contrasts with the overall narrative formatting of the prior speeches and the dialogue as a whole. We argue that Plato deliberately emphasizes Socrates' approach by constructing a structure that contrasts with previous speeches. For further support of our interpretation, we turn to additional Platonic dialogues with the intent of gaining further insight into his educational approach.



## Historical context

Plato was an Ancient Greek playwright and philosopher born to Athens around 427BCE. Many of Plato's dialogues feature a reoccurring character named Socrates, a philosopher of whom Plato was a student and follower. Plato's writings provide a unique perspective of the characters within them, often capturing and revealing important aspects of their souls. Although the majority of Plato's writings are structured the format of a dialogue, often in the form of a discussion or debate occurring between multiple individuals, Plato's *Symposium* is a unique exception, as it is composed of a series of speeches made in praise of Love, or Eros.



## Thesis:

Plato intentionally constructs the dialogue in a format that highlights the entrance of Socrates to aid in revealing his pedagogical methods and further educational implications.

## Outline of Paper

1. Phaedrus' speech
  - Introduces concept of shame in Eros
  - Identifies relationship between Eros and noble deeds
  - Briefly introduces concept of desire
2. Pausanias' speech
  - Rejects Phaedrus' claim that Eros is noble.
  - Describes Eros as something in-between noble and ignoble.
  - Describes relationship between lover and beloved in which the younger beloved is educated and made better in return for gratification.
3. Eryximachus' speech
  - As a physician, Eryximachus provides an account of Eros in relation to healthiness and unhealthiness.
  - Advocates for temperance in Eros to maintain a healthy and well-ordered life.

## 4. Aristophanes' speech

- Utilizes storytelling to depict a nature of Eros that is incomplete
- Introduces concept of Eros as desire to overcome incompleteness

## 5. Agathon's speech

- Depicts Eros as both beautiful and complete
- Focuses on the aspect of the soul
- Relates Eros to virtue, deeming poetry as wisdom

## 6. Socrates' entrance

- Disrupts pattern of speechmaking
- **Methodology:**
  - Challenges Agathon's assertions on Eros, claims that they are false.
  - Engages Agathon in a discussion through a series of questions.
  - Agathon to admit his ignorance when he contradicts himself, introduction of recognition of lack and shame.
  - Educator (Socrates) encourages and guides the student to seek the creation of new ideas
- Uses storytelling to depict himself being challenged in a similar manner
- Depicts an element of poverty in Eros, described as an in-between, or in-completeness
  - Introduces concept of wisdom in relation to Eros; an in-between of wisdom and understanding in which the individual recognizes their lack and *desires* to overcome that lack.\*\*\*

## 7. Alcibiades' speech

- Further develops concept of desire in relation to Eros
- Emphasizes orienting one's desires towards that of the soul
- Introduces concept of reproduction both in terms of the physical and in the soul
- Describes ascent to contemplation of the beautiful, and transitions to the contemplation of the truth
- Praises Socrates, rather than Eros
- Reveals and illustrates pedagogical methods of Socrates



## Conclusion

The underlying pedagogical implications of the prior participants speeches are revealed and developed upon Socrates' entrance. Due to the unique structure of the *Symposium*, Socrates' entrance is highlighted to demonstrate his methodology. The speech of Alcibiades, Socrates' most famous student, confirms the intentional emphasis on Socrates' methodology through a further description and illustration of the Socratic Method of questioning. In his praise, he details a student first being lured to discuss their assertions. The student then is engaged in a series of questions. In this part of the method, the student realizes and admits their ignorance. In the shame and discomfort of such ignorance, the student turns to the educator for further guidance to develop their understanding.

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