

# The Symposium (Penguin Classics)

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A fascinating discussion on sex, gender, and human instincts, as relevant today as ever

In the course of a lively drinking party, a group of Athenian intellectuals exchange views on eros, or desire. From their conversation emerges a series of subtle reflections on gender roles, sex in society and the sublimation of basic human instincts. The discussion culminates in a radical challenge to conventional views by Plato's mentor, Socrates, who advocates transcendence through spiritual love. The Symposium is a deft interweaving of different viewpoints and ideas about the nature of love-as a response to beauty, a cosmic force, a motive for social action and as a means of ethical education.

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Plato (c.427-347 BC) stands with Socrates and Aristotle as one of the shapers of the whole intellectual tradition of the West. He founded the Academy in Athens, the first permanent institution devoted to philosophical research and teaching, and the prototype of all Western universities.

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#### Other Books

The Symposium and the Phaedrus. The Symposium and the Phaedrus are combined here because of their shared theme: a reflection on the nature of erotic love, the love that begins with sexual desire but can transcend that origin and reach even the heights of religious ecstasy. This reflection is carried out explicitly in the speeches and conversations in the dialogues, and implicitly in the dramatic depiction of actions and characters. Thus, the two dialogues deal with a theme of enduring interest and are interesting for both their literary and their philosophical character. In addition to the introduction, the book contains substantial commentaries and thorough endnotes. Key Greek terms are discussed for readers who are unfamiliar with the language. A special feature is a discussion on the importance of the dramatic and literary aspects of the dialogues for interpreting their philosophical content. The introductions deal with the nature of the dialogues themselves as philosophical texts and with Plato's philosophical assumptions and key concepts, as well as with the necessary background of Athenian society. The endnotes clarify any ambiguities and obscurities in the original text, identifying all references to people, places, gods, et cetera. The commentaries are designed to open up the dialogues for the reader, showing the issues that have been debated by commentators and considering some of the responses to them. They are designed to stimulate further reflection.

⌘ ⌘ ⌘ ⌘ ⌘ . (Hugh Tredennick's translation, from *The Last Days of Socrates*, Penguin Classics, [Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1954]). 33. Halperin, "Why Diotima Is a Woman," 120. 34. For a thorough discussion of various suggestions about ..."