



## The Symposium

*Plato (c. 427 - 327 BCE) translated by Benjamin Jowett (1817 - 1893)*

Read by: Geoffrey Edwards      Language: English  
 Length: 2 hours 14 minutes      Style: Solo  
 Genre: Philosophy

Product Formats and Options				
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*The Symposium* is one of Plato's best-known works, written in 385 BCE or later, and appreciated for both its philosophical depth and its literary value. It is a fictional work that depicts a friendly gathering of notable men at the home of tragic poet Agathon in Athens at a symposium, a kind of after-party with drinking and dancing that took place after a banquet. The guests include the philosopher Socrates, the comic playwright Aristophanes, and the general Alcibiades. Eryximachus, a physician, challenges each of them to deliver an extemporaneous speech on the topic of Eros, the God of love and desire. The narrative is structured as a story within a story within a story, told to a friend by Apollodorus, who was not at the banquet himself, but was told the story by Aristodimas, who was there for the event in 416 BCE. Here Eros is recognized both as erotic love and as a spiritual quality capable of calling forth courage, valor, and

great deeds. Unsurprisingly, Socrates declines to praise corporal love and instead relates a tale from a woman called Diotima that tells of the conception of Eros as a child of Porus, god of resourcefulness, and Penia, goddess of poverty, and is thus pitched halfway between wisdom and ignorance as a perennial seeker and lover of knowledge. Like many of Plato's works, *The Symposium* is a dialogue but here the form is a series of speeches that reflect different points of view, as opposed to the give-and-take of question and answer. Here the dialectic is found in the differences and contradictions among the speeches.

**Plato** (c. 428 – 348 BCE) was an ancient Greek philosopher and mathematician considered by many as the greatest metaphysical thinker in history. He was a student of Socrates, a teacher of Aristotle, and the founder of the Academy in Athens, the first institute of higher learning in the West. He was born into a wealthy aristocratic family in Athens. Two events shaped his development: the first was meeting Socrates, who inspired his work; the second was the Peloponnesian War, in which Athenian democracy was replaced by a Spartan oligarchy, subsequently overthrown. His work falls into three periods. The first begins with the death of Socrates and conveys his teaching and philosophy. The second addresses the central ideas of justice, the state, and individual character. The third period focuses on metaphysical ideas and the role of the arts and morality in culture. He was the first to conceive of a method of knowledge, and in doing so articulated many fundamental concepts that remain at the core of logic, science, psychology and philosophy to this day. Historian Alfred North Whitehead once noted: "the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."



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