Sheffield, Frisbee C. C. *Plato's Symposium: The Ethics of Desire*. Oxford University Press, 2006. x + 252 pp. Cloth. \$99.00—

In this study of the *Symposium*, published in the Oxford Classical Monograph series, Sheffield (henceforth S.) presents a revised version of her Oxford D.Phil. thesis. S. articulates her analysis of the dialogue in seven chapters, preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusion. The book ends with a useful appendix on the debate concerning the kind of psychological theory underlying the *Symposium*, i.e., whether it is “Socratic” (as in the *Meno*) or compatible, if not identical, with the tripartite psychology of the *Republic*.

In the introduction S. explains that the *Symposium* will be analyzed in terms of the ethical dimension of desire. The book is centrally concerned with the way in which the different speakers in the dialogue articulate the connection between what is praiseworthy or *kalon*, what is conducive to individual happiness, and what kind of educational strategies might best serve “to produce good and flourishing individuals” (p. 7). Though S. is aware that it would be very fruitful to analyze the specific ways in which different characters in the dialogue are made to express in dramatic fashion—i.e., in their dealings with each other as well as in the rhetorical choices that inform their speeches—different ways to approach the problem of *eros*, her analysis of the speeches prior to that of Socrates is limited to a short summary of each. S., who is familiar with the literature on most of the technical issues related to Diotima's account of *eros*, does not seem acquainted with the many studies that have approached the *Symposium* from the perspective of its dramatic structure. Thus in Ch. 1, p. 9, footnote 9, she claims that “prior to Halperin's article much of the debate over the significance of the prologue's recycled narrative centered on the question of the dialogue's historicity”. This is an overstatement, since Halperin's article appeared in 1992, and, to name just one example, S. Rosen's book on the *Symposium* (which first appeared in 1969), devoted 38 pages to the prologue, discussing in detail the very issues that S. rightly calls to our attention (Apollodorus' and Aristodemus' character traits, the potential for transformation exhibited in their erotic attachment to Socrates, and the problem of fanaticism with respect to philosophical education). A similar point could be raised concerning all the speeches that precede Socrates' intervention and in particular the speech of Aristophanes, which is summarized by S. in little more than one page and a half (pp. 22-23). Given that, when analyzing Diotima's speech, S. comes back over and over again to the difference between Socrates' and Aristophanes' views of *eros*, the book would have benefited from a more substantial engagement with Aristophanes' speech, as well as with the most relevant secondary literature on it.

S.'s main argument is developed in chapters 2 to 4, which address the speech of Socrates, while ch. 5 responds to Vlastos' famous charge that Socrates' account of *eros* fails to do justice to the love of persons. In chapter 2, S. takes her bearings from a close analysis of the Penia/Poros myth. *Eros*' nature, as Diotima explains, is intermediate between Penia's state of deprivation and Poros' resourceful character. S. argues that a) *eros* is constituted by two functional aspects: *aporia* (the realization that something is *kalon* and that the desiring agent lacks it) and *euporia* (the deliberative aspect of *eros*, i.e., the capacity to scheme after the beautiful); b) that since both *aporia* and *euporia* entail cognitive processes, *eros* is essentially identical with rational desire. This is an Aristotelian reading of this section of the *Symposium*, since S. interprets *eros* in light of the notion of *proairesis* (*N.E.*, VI.2, 1139a20); other central issues in the dialogue are also interpreted by S. in Aristotelian terms. In ch. 3 ("Socrates' Speech: the Aim of Eros", pp. 75-111), S. tries to solve a much debated problem: when Diotima moves from an account of *eros* as desire for happiness to an account of *eros* as reproduction in beauty, is she opening an unbridgeable gap between the desire for the good and the desire for immortality, as some scholars have argued? S. maintains that throughout Diotima's speech there is an intimate connection between reproduction in beauty and desiring the secure possession of the good. Her argument runs as follows: a) *eros* aims at *eudaimonia*, i.e., at the secure possession of a good which is believed to be constitutive of happiness; b) beauty has a role to play in the attainment of *eudaimonia*, because it provides the environment for our erotic *ergon* (our characteristic activity), i.e., reproduction. Diotima affirms that all human beings are pregnant both in body and in soul (*Symp.* 206c). S. interprets being pregnant as a natural state of potentiality, and giving birth as its expression (p. 89). Diotima further specifies that those pregnant in body will give birth to children, while those pregnant in soul are pregnant with "wisdom and the rest of virtue" (*Symp.* 212a1-5). The latter are subdivided in two categories: those engaged in productive activities such as law-making and poetry (belonging to the lower mysteries), and those engaged in philosophy (belonging to the higher mysteries). In all such cases, S. argues, "the *ergon* of *eros* works for the good of the agent (...) all of the aforementioned reproductive activities—heroic deeds, law making, and philosophical activity—are ways in which a certain good is expressed for the particular desiring agent in question. For each type of desiring agent, then, giving birth in the presence of beauty is a way of attaining beautiful and good things" (pp. 90-91). Giving birth in beauty, according to S., does not merely correspond to the work of genesis (see discussion at pp. 99-110). While Diotima describes genesis as continuous replacement of the old with the new, hence as a value-neutral process, reproduction in beauty has a twofold ethical dimension: firstly, it allows the desiring agents to manifest virtues that are potentially present in them. Secondly, by producing something that they

deem good (laws, poems, children, *logoi*, etc.) different desiring agents secure for themselves those things that they believe responsible for *eudaimonia*. It is not clear how S.'s reading is an improvement on the reading of those who interpret the gap between the desire for the good and the desire for immortality as unbridgeable, since S. seems to create a different gap (between the account of genesis and the account of reproduction in beauty), with similarly undesirable consequences.

In ch. 4 S. focuses on the difference between the lower mysteries and the higher mysteries in order to explain how different desiring agents are spurred by *eros* to produce virtue and why only some produce true virtue. S.'s reading of the ascent passage in Diotima's account employs the Aristotelian distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis* to explain some fundamental differences between lovers of honor and philosophers. S. concludes that the philosopher who has completed the ascent will gain immortality not by producing something external to himself (or, as other interpreters have surmised, by educating others), but, rather, by achieving a perfection of soul which nothing can threaten and in which lies true *eudaimonia* (p. 151). The consequence of this Aristotelian reading, however, is that immortality is now reduced to nothing more than a metaphor, and the reader is left wondering why such an important aspect of Diotima's account should be given a new meaning at this point in the speech without any real support from the text.

The book is pitched to an audience of specialists, but the arguments are very clearly presented, so that graduate students, too, might find it helpful, especially with regard to the conceptual structure of Diotima's speech. It is surprising, however, that a book published by Oxford University Press should suffer from so many editing and typographical errors (one repeated typographical error is the superimposition of two or more characters: for example, at p. 43, "object" is misspelled because "j" and "e" are superimposed; p. 63 in the sentence "For a philosopher who has been educated by Diotima" both "For" and "Diotima" are misspelled; p. 76, in the title "Eros and Eudaimonia", *eudaimonia* reads "*eimonia*", and at p. 77, footnote 1, Didaskalikos becomes something like Daskalikos, with the first letters superimposed and hence unreadable; p. 80, "in a few years' time" becomes "in a few years, time"; p. 83, in the title "The *ergon* of *eros*: human nature, creative activity, and the good" the last comma appears between "t" and "y" in the word "activity"). It is to be hoped that subsequent printings of this study will address this problem.

Alessandra Fussi
Department of Philosophy
University of Pisa
fussi@fls.unipi.it