

Opponent review of the bachelor thesis *From Desire to Knowledge, the Ascent of Philosophical Eros in Plato's The Symposium* by Zelimhan Vitarigov

The title of the thesis gives the impression that the main topic is Plato's concept of *eros* as presented in the *Symposium*. Nonetheless, the author pays equal attention to other authors, namely to Lévinas and Barthes, and their specific conceptions of love, desire and other topics directly or indirectly related to the Platonic conception of *eros*. More specifically, in the case of the comparison between Barthes and Plato the author explains that his aim is "to engage in meaningful discussion on the various issues raised by the *Symposium* and let each individual weigh the arguments for themselves" (p. 47). This formulation clearly reveals the main shortcomings of the whole thesis, i.e. it has rather unspecific goals, unclear methodology and the selection of the texts and authors is justified insufficiently. The conclusion of this particular discussion (p. 47: "the dimension of love brought by Barthes' attention to language and experience demonstrates that despite the beauty of the Idea, concrete amorous encounters with individuals have the power of pedagogy not too dissimilar to a Platonic dialogue...") clearly indicates that some common points can be found in practically any two authors and texts written on similar topics. This is also the case of Lévinas, although it should be admitted that the comparison between Lévinas' conception of metaphysical desire and Plato's erotic desire (p. 24-36) presents probably the most interesting and most valuable part of the thesis, from the philosophical point of view, at least.

The main argument of the thesis suggests that "eros as desire goes through different stages" (p. 4), the first stage being "the perspective of the lover", the second stage "is of self-transcendence and recognition of alterity", and the third stage being "the leap towards loving and grasping the Beautiful itself". It is unclear whether this conclusion results from an analysis of Plato's account of *eros* in *Symposium*, or whether it is rather a construct made up by the author by means of arbitrary combination of various ideas from Plato, Barthes and Lévinas (see p. 4: "these stages however do not per se correlate to Plato's use of the ladder analogy, this ladder analogy is re-interpreted to include a stage of romantic love, and a stage of self-transcendence / relation to alterity").

In his accounts of the *Symposium*, the author rather underestimates the differences between the various accounts of *eros* presented by Socrates, Diotima, Pausanias, Aristophanes, and Eryximachus, and it is inappropriate to identify all of them with Plato's own position. A more conscious approach is adopted to Alcibiades, who is understood as presenting "implicit critique of Socrates" (p.37).

It should be also pointed out that throughout his thesis the author insufficiently distinguishes between epistemological, ethical and meta/physical aspects of the discussion (i.e. between achieving immortality, gaining knowledge and becoming

better). Some remarks seem to reflect these nuances, but many other passages unfortunately disregard this distinction.

To conclude, with regard to the aforementioned shortcomings of the thesis I suggest grade 3 (“good”).

doc. Hynek Bartoš, PhD.

Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague