

## Abstract

Xenophon's *Symposium* is a charming Socratic dialogue that depicts an amiable evening of food, wine, entertainment, and conversation shared between Socrates, a few of his (Socratic) companions, and certain (Athenian) gentlemen. The subtle playfulness that characterizes their exchange conceals a light-hearted, yet surprisingly philosophical inquiry regarding the rival claims of virtue, articulated and defended by the Socratics, on the one hand, and the gentlemen, on the other, each side claiming and defending the excellence of their competing ways of life. The symposium is animated by a playful tension, or contest (*agōn*) between the Socratics and the gentlemen, a tension which remains mostly sublimated and unseen. These two ways of life – one, the life of *gentlemanliness*, pursuing nobility and political virtue; the other, the life of *philosophy*, pursuing wisdom and self-sufficiency properly understood. These two ways of life thus emerge as rivals, even within this playful setting. Their rivalry represents a competition in how best to live, a contest that resonates beneath the surface of the symposium, which itself closes with a surprising account of conjugal erotics and the power of love (*eros*) in guiding human beings toward virtue and happiness.

## Bio

Dr. Gish is Professor in The Honors College at the University of Houston, where he teaches courses in the history of political thought as well as the College's signature Great Books course, "The Human Situation: Antiquity and Modernity." He is the author, most recently, of *Xenophon's Socratic Rhetoric: Philosophy, Erōs, and Virtue in the Symposium* (Lexington 2022), the only monograph length commentary on this dialogue. He is also the co-author of *Thomas Jefferson and the Science of Republican Government* (Cambridge 2017), a study of the political thought in Jefferson's only published book, "Notes on the State of Virginia." And he is the contributing co-editor for *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Xenophon* (forthcoming). He is currently at work on two books projects - one, an account of Thomas Jefferson's diplomatic career in France; and the other, a political study of Machiavelli's princes.