

# “Dishonourable philosopher” as *contradictio in adiecto*

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The basic thesis of the article is that dishonourable philosopher does not really exist and the idea of “dishonourable philosopher” is a nonsense. According to the author, if we deal with the philosopher who acts dishonourably, we can be certain that he was temporarily blinded by something, or probably we deal with a distinguished expert in philosophy, historian of philosophy or writer of philosophical verve but not with a philosopher. In order to prove it, the author refers to the classic Platonic understanding of philosophy as the love of wisdom and to the phenomenology of Max Scheler who perceives a particular moral attitude of a person as a precondition of the ability to look inside the essence of the matter.

**Key words:** philosophy, love, wisdom, *contradictio in adiecto*, art of life, phenomenology

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*Many are the wand-bearers, but few are the mystics.*

(Plato 1995: 69 d, 77)

The title of this article is slightly provocative since it is certainly easy to indicate at least one such philosopher who we can describe as exactly dishonourable or dishonest. Such person deals with philosophy, writes philosophical books and has a lot to say about philosophy but, to put it mildly, the person's moral attitude is not exemplary at all. Therefore, would such common experience of the existence of “dishonourable philosophers” not *prima facie* question the sense of the statement that the expression “dishonourable philosophers” is internally contradictory?

And yet, this provocative idea is something more than a mere provocation. It can be proved that dishonourable philosopher does not really exist and cannot exist, and the idea of “dishonourable philosopher” is a nonsense. Therefore, the popular experience of the existence of “dishonourable philosophers” lies in the mistaken attitude to those people as philosophers. In order to prove it, we have to go back first of all to two philosophical sources; firstly, to the classic Platonic understanding of the philosophy as the love of wisdom and secondly, to Max Scheler who, referring to Plato, perceives a particular moral attitude of a person as a condition for a possibility to look inside the essence of the matter, i. e. exactly the practice of philosophy. It is worth going back to those sources, firstly because they present the source idea of philosophy, and secondly because today they increasingly commonly seem to fall into oblivion.

Upon the beginning of proper deliberations, one should pay attention to the fact that in Platonic philosophy people's beliefs (*doxa*), which may turn out to be wrong, are something different than knowledge (*epistēmē*), the subject of which is truth (understood as that what exists; in Plato's ontology these are ideas, the eternal and unchangeable existence). The said

differentiation is very important since Plato assumes that there is the objective truth, one and the same for everybody, the one that man can learn if certain conditions are fulfilled. The assumption that the objective truth which we can learn does exist is indispensable for the philosophy seen by Plato and his master Socrates to be possible. Philosophy, in their opinion, constitutes the love of wisdom (and also knowledge, *epistēmē*) and the zealous quest for it (Plato 1999: 203 A – 204 B, 68–69). The said “love” and “zealousness” in the quest for wisdom constitute the essential framework of philosophy equally well as the searched object itself, i. e. wisdom. Philosophy is the art of life, the person’s attitude to life, not only a system or a set of statements (Paczkowski 1998: 138–141). One must constantly remember this affective aspect of philosophy to understand the moral condition for practicing philosophy.

The essence of philosophy as a special case of love was presented in Plato’s dialogue *Symposium*. Explaining there what *eros* is and what the stages of such love are, Plato claims that a man learns love gradually, discovering new and more perfect objects of love, and finally makes the greatest discovery in his life – he discovers Beauty Itself (beauty identified in Platonic works with truth and good). The discovery becomes the end of the entire path of developing love, and in that very moment it makes the life of a man acquire the true value. Therefore, we can say that the Plato’s *eros* is the major force that motivates to practice philosophy since philosophy is nothing else but exactly love, the love of wisdom that reveals itself in truth (*aletheia*).

Platonic love is the path upwards, towards what is more perfect and more beautiful; it is the path that leads to the vision of physical beauty through beautiful actions, beauty of science up to the vision of beauty itself. According to Plato, only when a man reaches this vision of the essence of beauty or in other words, when he learns beauty itself, his life acquires the true value. “At that stage of life (...), says Plato, at that stage life becomes to be worth something: at that stage when a man can see beauty itself” (Plato 1999: 211 B–D, 77). The man who learned the highest of ideas (identified with the good itself and truth itself) is not able to become a bad person and lead a poor and ordinary life. We can say that the man who reaches the end of the path of *eros* has a vision of the highest of ideas and feels the true liberation from beliefs and releases himself for ever from the land of *doxa*: “But what, he says, if a man had eyes to see the true beauty – the divine beauty, I mean, pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colours and vanities of human life – thither looking, and holding converse with the true beauty simple and divine. How, in that communion, would a man be enabled to lead his poor life, when he reaches that far and sees that far? Would you not believe that only when beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities for he has hold not of an image but of a reality” (Plato 1999: 211 E – 212 A, 77–78).

Following the path of *eros* means that a person moves from the level of sensual, colloquially speaking, erotic love to the higher level of spiritual love, i. e. the love of other person’s soul. The person reaches the love that could, again colloquially speaking, be called Platonic love (spiritual love not necessarily unrequited). Then, when the man understands that the beauty of soul comes from knowledge, he begins to love knowledge (i. e. philosophy). Only then the vision of the essence of beauty itself, present in anything what is beautiful, is possible.

The statement fundamental for these deliberations indicates that to render it possible to follow the path of *eros*, it is indispensable to adopt a specific attitude, undoubtedly ascetic attitude allowing a man to release himself from the limitations of psycho-physical commotions that make a man resemble an animal. In that context, philosophy is exclusive, not destined for the masses since the masses are not able to adopt such attitude. According to Plato, philosophy

is the art of dying which was clearly presented in the *Phaedo* dialogue. It is the art of dying for the body and its wants, desires, passions, needs, etc.: "In this present life, I reckon that we make the nearest approach to knowledge when we have the least possible intercourse or communion with the body, and are not surfeited with the bodily nature, but keep ourselves pure until the hour when God himself is pleased to release us. And thus, having got rid of the foolishness of the body, we shall be pure and hold converse with the pure, and know of ourselves the clear light everywhere. Which is no other than the light of truth. For the impure are not permitted to approach the pure" (Plato 1995: 67a–67b, 65). According to Plato, the body is, in a sense, the prison of the soul due to its needs and the related passions; it disturbs the practice of philosophy. Only the adoption of ascetic attitude makes the philosopher learn the truth.

An essential condition for practicing philosophy is also the experience of a special kind of soul purification (closely related to the ascetic attitude) – *catharsis* – that provides access to the world of ideas. According to an expert on Plato's philosophy, Giovanni Reale, "purification is made when the soul going beyond the senses acquires the intelligible and spiritual world and unites with it as if with something of a similar kind and nature. Here, absolutely different than in the orphic initiations, *purification constitutes reaching the highest cognition of the intelligible*" (Reale 1996: 255). According to the Plato's metaphor of the cave in his seventh book, *Republic*, the true purification of soul is reached upon leaving the cave of shadows (Plato 1997: 514a and n., 220 and n.), after casting off the shackles of the attachment to the sensual cognition when the philosopher aspires to the true reality and finally to the Good itself.

The aforementioned statements lead to the conclusion that in order to make the practice of philosophy possible, at least two fundamental conditions are necessary: *eros*, i.e. the desire and aspiration for the truth, good and beauty and, related with *eros* itself (despite appearances), asceticism consisting in radical rejection of the world and body and adoption of what is eternal and unchangeable, what constitutes the proper subject of philosophical cognition. If we add to that a spark of wisdom that appears in the soul as a result of the constant and consistent quest for the truth and philosophical deliberations (Plato 1987: 341 c–d, 50), we will produce a nearly complete description of the Platonic idea of philosophy.

Therefore, the essence of philosophy is to follow the path of *eros* towards what is true, good and beautiful. This conclusion shows that philosophy, at least according to Plato, i. e. in its source and most beautiful context, assuming the love of the good, immediately excludes any wickedness. Such understanding of philosophy is certainly also characteristic of Socrates, Plato's master and tutor. He was the first to begin reflections on the human soul and virtue which means that he, not Aristotle, as is commonly believed, is the true author of ethics. Socrates, as we may believe, was a living embodiment of the ideal of an "honourable" philosopher, a true enthusiast of wisdom who fulfils the aforementioned moral condition for practicing philosophy (Olejniczak 2002: 245–263).

Very similar to the philosophy of Plato and Socrates is the philosophical concept of Max Scheler, which should be reviewed very carefully, not only because he refers directly to Plato, but also because it is done nearly contemporarily placing the Platonic idea of *eros* in phenomenology.

It can be noted that for Scheler phenomenology is a certain attitude, i. e. the way of spiritual "looking" (Scheler 1990: 73), which means that philosophy involves the whole person, like in the works of Plato. Similarly to Plato, the specificity of the philosophical cognition as spiritual "looking" demands from the philosopher a certain particularly defined moral attitude. It is a different understanding of phenomenology as compared to the idea of Edmund Husserl

who defines phenomenology above all as a method of spiritual and distant looking that aims at capturing the essence of the matter, not above all as the philosopher's attitude to life.

As mentioned above, Plato differentiated between the human beliefs specified in the dialogues as *doxa* and as knowledge (*epistēmē*) the subject of which, in Platonic ontology, is ideas. Scheler, similarly to Husserl, totally accepts the differentiation between *doxa* and *epistēmē* (Scheler 1987: 262–263). The world of *doxa* is the world of natural philosophy of life, i.e. the world that is given to human beings in a natural, popular attitude. Its characteristic feature is that “together with its structure it is *relativized* to a *special biological organization* of a man” (Scheler 1987: 284), which means that in natural attitude, like in Plato's works, it is impossible to learn the significant. According to Scheler, practicing philosophy begins upon transition from the natural to the philosophical attitude. As long as we adhere to the natural attitude and support the natural philosophy of life, the subject of philosophical cognition remains concealed from us.

The said transition between the belief or the natural philosophy of life (*doxa*) and the knowledge itself (*epistēmē*) can, I believe, be found exactly where Plato deliberates about a particular kind of *catharsis* that enables to look into absolute existence and where Husserl speaks about phenomenological reduction (*epoche*) (Husserl 1982: 26–30) which plays almost the same role as does *catharsis* in Plato's works. The said point of transition from *doxa* to *epistēmē*, i. e. from the natural to the philosophical attitude, Scheler calls the moral kind of “rise”. “Philosophical cognition, says Scheler, leads to a totally *different sphere of existence* that is absolutely *beyond* us, beyond the *sphere of existence of [our] environment*. Therefore, we need this special *rise* to reach the existence of the *world itself*, i. e. we need a special set (*Gefüge*) of above all moral actions to free the spirit from *chains* (...). Those acts are necessary to make the spirit *leave the relativized existence for the life* (and for man as a living creature) and to make it participate in the existence itself” (Scheler 1987: 285–286). What is the characteristic of this moral “rise” which Scheler defines as a form of phenomenological reduction?

The moral “rise” of a person, leading to the philosophical cognition, comprises three fundamental moral acts: love, humility and self-control: “1) love by a spiritual person of the absolute value and existence, 2) humiliation (*Verdemütigung*) of natural Me and ego (*Selbst*), 3) self-control, and only then objectification – constantly co-conditioning in an indispensable manner the natural sensual perception – instinctive impulses of life as ‘physical’ and lived as having their foundations in the body” (Scheler 1987: 286). Only those acts *make it possible* to reach the absolute existence. Love towards the absolute value and existence, releasing man from the living relativization, leads him towards the absolute existence. Humility (humiliation), removing the natural pride of a man, leads him towards the “pure essence of the world”, whereas self-control, removing natural desires in a man, provides him with a complete adequacy of cognition.

The most significant moment of the said “rise” is love. Love, to the highest degree, determines that the cognition of absolute existence becomes possible. It results from the fact that love determines the cognition of values, and those are always provided with every existence and have been provided previously, before the existence, and therefore a proper capture of the values *makes it possible* to reach the existence itself (Scheler 1987: 274–275). The cognition of values through love is the condition for learning the existence; therefore, Scheler can speak openly exactly about an essential relation between morality and cognition. Love is generally the most fundamental emotional experience of a person, and therefore it determines cogni-

tion and willingness (the act of wanting something). "Love is always *the source of cognition and willingness*, the mother of spirit and mind" (Scheler 1998: 25), says Scheler in his essay *Ordo amoris*.

The said moral "rise" has a fundamental meaning for these deliberations. Talking about the "rise" that renders philosophical cognition possible, Scheler declares: "Between those moral attitudes and the possible development in *one* of those fundamental paths (towards absolute existence, evident vision (*Einsicht*), adequacy) there is a non-incident relation or an empiric and psychological but relevant relation combining permanently the moral *world* with the theoretical *world*" (Scheler 1998: 28). Scheler's quoted words indicate clearly that there is no and there cannot be any philosophy without a special moral attitude that constitutes the condition for the possibilities of this particular type of cognition which is the *philosophical* cognition: love which means the desire and aspiration to learn the existence itself, humility that opens to the truth and makes it possible to accept it, and self-control thanks to which the spirit ceases to be a slave of the body. These conditions are similar to those presented by Plato: *eros* and ascetic attitude.

Taking into account the aforementioned assumptions related to the moral condition for practicing philosophy, it is worth asking a question whether it is always true that the philosopher consistently "loves wisdom" and therefore fails to commit any "dishonourable" act. According to Platonic ontology, it is possible provided that the philosopher has already reached the vision liberating from beliefs and learned the Good itself. This act changes the whole life of a person, and therefore it is impossible, as stated above, that the philosopher, if he has already learned the source of wisdom, could remain a dishonourable person. Scheler does not radicalize that moment of personal "release", but we certainly say that the change of moral attitude makes the philosopher incapable of philosophical cognition. However, is such change of moral attitude really possible? Isn't it the way Plato wants it to be, that the light burning in the soul "has been burning since then, fanning itself" (Plato 1987: 341 d, 50) and the man having the true *arrêté* will always (out of necessity!) follow it?

Thus, we reach the point where the critics of the moral condition for practising philosophy discussed in this article refer to an undoubtedly excellent philosopher, Martin Heidegger. Isn't the fact that he joined the Nazi party and agitated for the Nazi government in his speeches as a vice-chancellor the proof that the philosopher, in spite of all, can behave dishonourably? We can analyse this case and other cases in three different ways, taking into account firstly the possibility of a mistake or intellectual blindness, secondly, the fact that the philosopher is not really a philosopher but only an excellent expert on philosophy and a writer, or thirdly, which must be reviewed carefully, that we deal with an act of treachery of what one is (or would like to be) and what one loves. In the case of Heidegger, all three situations should generally be treated as possible.

As we know, to err is human, and there is no reason to believe that the philosopher, even a distinguished one, does not obey this principle. We know that Heidegger soon left the party and regretted membership in it. However, he had remained mistaken for as long as nine months which, in the case of such a distinguished philosopher, seems too long to consider it just a mistake or blindness. It is also possible that Heidegger in his thinking did not reach the moment described by Plato in his dialogues as *catharsis* – liberation from the world of *doxa* and an insight into the highest idea. It is possible, however, we cannot decide on anything here. We can only analyse one more hypothesis whether in cases like the story of Martin Heidegger we do not face the third situation, namely treachery.

We deal with treachery when we leave somebody or something that we love and consider valuable and should remain loyal, but we do it from foul motives. Indeed, treachery of various ideas or friends can occur rather frequently. Why does it happen? What is common treachery we experience in everyday life? It is clear that as long as love lasts, acts threatening the subject of love are impossible. This results from the essence of love which involves the desire to become united with the object of love and respects the high value of the loved object. Love involves reaching the object of love, admiring it, and not destroying and degrading it. Therefore, as long as love lasts, treachery is simply impossible. Therefore, we can say that treachery, even the common one from everyday life, occurs when and only when there is only a semblance of love, i. e. a form of noble deceit of oneself and others, but never when there is love in its true sense because love is a desire and aspiration upwards to the object of love.

The same holds for this special love which philosophy is, the love of wisdom, the love of learning the absolute. As long as we deal with the philosopher, a man who loves wisdom, no dishonourable acts visibly violating the love of wisdom and its sources are possible. Therefore, the treachery of the idea of philosophy is impossible as long as we deal with a distinguished philosopher who has experienced the Platonic “spark” and “burning flame”. Therefore, taking into account the aforementioned statements, we can say that if we deal with a philosopher who acts dishonourably we can be certain that he was temporarily (!) blinded by something or, what is more likely, we deal with a distinguished expert in philosophy, a historian of philosophy or a writer of philosophical verve but not with a philosopher.

Many are the wand-bearers...

Referring back to the expression “dishonourable philosopher”, it is worth noting as a conclusion that according to this concept of philosophy such expression is internally contradictory. One cannot pretend to be a philosopher upon beginning the philosophical contemplation of a certain issue; a philosopher is a constant state. The whole person is engrossed in philosophy, and the philosophical attitude is a permanent attitude that determines the whole life. Therefore, it is impossible for a philosopher (especially for a “distinguished” one) who meets the above said moral requirements to act dishonourably. Consequently, we can finally declare that the expression “dishonourable philosopher”, despite common experience, is absurd.

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MAREK OLEJNICZAK

**„Negarbingas filosofas“ kaip *contradictio in adiecto****Santrauka*

Pagrindinė straipsnio tezė: negarbingas filosofas iš tikrųjų neegzistuoja, o „negarbingo filosofo“ idėja yra niekai. Pasak autoriaus, kai turime reikalą su negarbingu filosofu, galime būti tikri, kad jis buvo ko nors laikinai apakintas arba kad turime reikalą su filosofijos ekspertu, istoriku ar rašytoju, bet ne su filosofu. Autorius tai grindžia remdamasis klasikine platoninės filosofijos kaip išminties meilės samprata ir M. Schelerio fenomenologija, kur moralinė nuostata padeda išžvelgti dalyko esmę.

**Raktažodžiai:** filosofija, išminties meilė, *contradictio in adiecto*, gyvensena, fenomenologija