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THE PURPOSE OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE SPLENDOR OF ANECDOTES

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Abstract. *Starting from pejorative use of the words philosophy and philosopher, which is the author's way to draw the readers' attention to one more specificity of philosophy in relation to other spiritual disciplines, he wants to offer a condensed answer to an intrinsic question - what is the purpose of philosophy. In his pursuit of the answer, the author starts from an emphasis he places on the significance of anecdotes about philosophers that, in his opinion, sometimes offer an answer to the above question. The author advocates revalorization of the value of philosophical anecdotes in writings on the history of philosophy because they contribute to the*

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The words "philosophy" and "philosopher" denote, if we rely on the history of meaning, "love of wisdom" and "a lover of wisdom". However, in addition to their authentic meaning, both of them have, certain changed, pejorative denotations, particularly in everyday speech. A struggle between the basic and pejorative meanings of the words philosophy and philosopher has been going on since ancient times, which is yet another specificity of philosophy in comparison with other disciplines of the spirit. No jokes have ever been played with any name of any other science, which has been quite often a case with philosophy ever since the sophists.

A pejorative use of the word philosophy is nowadays probably more frequent than its original one, even in our language. To philosophize, in jargon, if it does not directly imply to talk nonsense, undoubtedly means to think incoherently. In a belletristic text "Živeo život Tola Manojlović"¹ of my fellow-student Moma Dimić, the word philosopher, as used by the main character of his book, denotes an astute person. The greatest

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¹ "A Life Story of Tola Manojlović"

philosophers in the village are those who stand out for shrewdness in shirking. Elsewhere, the word "philosopher" denotes a clumsy and impractical human being, a person with blurred ideas about many things, the most confusing being the idea of what (s)he should do with her/himself.

Science does not tolerate any pejorative use of its name; in other words, no science is an object of jokes *en masse*. Generally, the objectives of any science are clear and its purposes practical. Things get more complicated when it comes to philosophy. The purpose of philosophical investigations is "... disentanglement from illusions, delusions and prejudice, as well as elimination of common beliefs to provide opportunity for a discovery and a break-through of authentic scientific ideas..." (Zaječaranović, 1991; 14). For this reason philosophy, lacking readily apparent purposefulness, had to put up with the rage of practical minds incapable of understanding its purpose.

It seems that all this began with Thales, generally viewed as the first philosopher. Once, when he, contemplating the stars, fell into a well, his maid's sarcastic comment was - what on earth makes him gaze at the stars when he is incapable of keeping his feet on the ground safely? However, Thales showed that philosophers could be practicers as well and, more so, that they could, if determined, convert their brains into cash. According to an anecdote, while contemplating the stars, Thales predicted an abundant olive harvest in the forthcoming year; hence, he bought off all the presses in the town. Being that his prognosis came true, renting out of presses brought him wealth. Having shown how philosophers can employ their knowledge to gain wealth, Thales abandoned this goal. His attitude was that a job of philosopher was to possess knowledge, not wealth.

Other philosophers, too, showed no particular benevolence for wealth. It seems that money-loving and philosophy are at perpetual variance, as if wisdom and material greed do not go hand in hand. Diogenes of Sinope, the best practical demonstrator of the cynic philosophy, did not conceal his disdain for both wealth, and civilizational achievements. And while Diogenes fostered scorn for his social milieu, the Stoics responded to the scorn shown by their milieu for their humble philosophical selves by their philosophy. They created their philosophy in order to be able to bear their own living stoically (*Sustine et abstine* = sustain and abstain). They sought and found happiness in the silence of everyday events, in the quiescence, even though their objective circumstances offered no opportunities for a happy life.

It was philosophy itself that helped "the Last Roman", as Boethius (480-525) used to be called, where hardly anything or anyone else could help him. It is interesting that while kept prisoner he sought consolation in philosophy, rather than in creed (religion). Seeking consolation and having found it himself in philosophy, Boethius wanted others as well find it in philosophy and his philosophy. If this had not been his aim he would not have written "*De consolatione philosophie*" (The Consolation of Philosophy). Later, Jaspers would write the following about him: "Boethius is the last delightful figure whose *Consolatio philosophie*, due to its underlying course, beauty and authenticity, belongs to the basic literature of any man who philosophizes" (1967; 258). Boethius was imprisoned on a charge of plotting treason against Theodoric, King of the Ostrogoths. However, not even prison can dispossess a wise and literate person of his ability to write, and even less to think.

Well before Boethius, similar misfortunes befell a philosopher who, intending to prove indivisibility of space, kept dividing it infinitely. It was Zeno of Elea. He, too,

fought against tyrants, whether Nearchus or Diomedon (for all the tyrants of the world are the same) no matter when or where they lived or what names they bore. A tyrant brought a painful death to Zeno which he met with dignity. When put to tortures, he acted in a provocatively courageous, even impudent manner. As witnessed by some people, he had bitten the tyrant's ear when he, allegedly, wanted to whisper his secret to him. Other chronicles say that he spat at the tyrant, but not with the saliva but with a piece of his own tongue that he had bitten through to show that betrayal could not be expected of him. So, philosophers have always stived, particularly after Socrates, to grow into a paradigm, either personally, or through their own philosophy.

Those and the similar adventures of philosophers inspired Karl Jaspers to notice in his "Introduction to Philosophy" that "... to philosophize means - to learn to live and to know how to die" (1967; 229). It seems that some philosophers, bearing in mind only the latter purpose, were inclined to declare Hegesias to be the best interpreter of philosophy. The writer of a "handbook manual" "Suicide by Starvation" did not teach how one should live and die, but only how to die being that hedonists could not meet their satisfactions in life. This "death promoter", a dangerous scientist of a dangerous discipline was forbidden to lecture in Alexandria. His teachings meant a self-burial of hedonism. It remained unknown, as it appears, whether he, as Socrates, lived and died following his own principles, or merely induced others to die, while he himself lived a blissful and long life.

When Jaspers determined that the purpose of philosophy was to teach people how to live and die, he most certainly had in mind Socrates' paradigm or he might have thought of Seneca while he commented in his "Treatise on Blissful Life": "For nothing concerns me if I lack a mouthful of bread when I have freedom to die whenever I want (59), or "That is why man has to push his way to freedom; and it cannot be attained in any other way except by indifference for the destiny". (35) If life for Socrates was worth only if it was dignified, for the Stoics he was adiaphoron, something insignificant, indifferent.

Several above paraphrased anecdotes indicate that the purpose of philosophy may be perceived and inquired in a way which differs from the one considered customary ever after Hegel's "Lectures on the History of Philosophy". The Hegelian system perceives truth as a whole, and philosophy had ambitions to embrace time by the thought. To let such things as anecdotes fill up considerable space in the expositions on the history of philosophical ideas was considered inappropriate, i. e. appropriate only for immature phases of the development of this discipline. With the exception of Russell's "History of Western Philosophy", the authors of this particular kind of books avoided to quote anecdotes.

Until the appearance of Luciano de Crescenzo, philosophical anecdotes (anecdotes dealing with lives, ideas and behavior of philosophers) kept losing their historical-philosophical glamour. The credit for the restored glory of philosophical anecdotes deservedly goes to this Italian philosopher - amateur, mechanical engineer by vocation, who wrote his extraordinary "History of Greek Philosophy" showing no hesitation to quote anecdotes and write in an anecdotic manner. In any case, the book is written very wittily since its author saw philosophy and its purpose as a spiritual entertainment, a feast.

Philosophical anecdotes are the best instrument for keeping, preserving, and emphasizing paradigmatic qualities of a certain person, be it any option of that person, life attitude, idea or, generally, some human commitment. Allow me then, for the sake of illuminating the values of philosophical anecdotes, to paraphrase a verse of our poet -

philosopher who says that not a bit (of the philosophical wealth) is ever lost in an anecdote, it is only condensed in it. Life intentions, ideas, points of view of any philosopher, or anything else, have a perfect habitation in a philosophical anecdote. For this reason it is not only a banal story. Anecdotes about Diogenes of Sinope, for example, even if completely invented, are appropriate exclusively for this philosophical person, i. e. for the paradigm established not only in the history of philosophy, but also in the history of civilization.

Philosophy functions much in the same way as arts: it is the most useful when its intentions are not utilitarian. Like an idea about totality, or consciousness on the purpose of human existence, philosophy is itself most fully when usefulness is not its direct aim. In ancient times it was autonomous about religion, arts and science. In middle ages, however, they say that it fell to the level of a servant of religion (*ancilla theologiae*). From then on, it makes efforts to be a master, a ruler of all knowledge or at least its guide and evaluator. Then, with the positivists and Marx, it developed a wish to change the world, immediately and directly, (which keeps changing regardless of the impact of philosophy). Has it not transgressed its own limits then, announcing its present post-modern, and, as it is a likely story, non-productive, non-creative condition. The only thing I still don't know is whether for good? If this evaluation of the present state of affairs is correct, I don't know how anecdotes could ever help it? Unless they maybe throw light onto the situation from inside thanks to its ability to mock it?

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SVRHA FILOZOFIJE U SJAJU ANEGDOTA

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Polazeći od pežorativne upotrebe reči filozofija i filozof, čime je želeo da skrene pažnju na još jednu specifičnost filozofije u odnosu na druge duhovne discipline, pre svega u odnosu na nauku, autor želi da na sažeti način odgovori na temeljno pitanje - čemu filozofija. On to čini polazeći od isticanja značaja anegdota o filozofima, koje po njegovom mišljenju, ponekad nude odgovor na postavljeno pitanje. Autor se zalaže za revalorizaciju vrednosti filozofskih anegdota pri pisanju istorija filozofije, upravo zbog toga što one doprinose osvetljavanju svrhe same filozofije.

Ključne reči: *filozofija, filozof, anegdota, paradigma, svrha*