



The Topographies of the Philosophical Path, or on the Consequences of Not Wearing Shoes

Abstract: The purpose of the considerations presented in this article is to analyze the status of philosophy in terms of its problem-solving potential, or, more simply, to trace the possible topographies of a philosophical path. The point of departure, but also the central subject of my research, is a passage from Plato's *The Symposium* (201d–204c), containing an emblematic, though ambiguous, description of a philosophical journey. The key problems that this description poses, particularly in the area of its metaphilosophical consequences, certainly deserve a more profound reflection. Therefore, in the subsequent sections of the article, I present – and critically discuss – some of the most significant interpretations of Plato's passage, emphasizing their (meta) philosophical implications. The latter, in turn, are organized according to the categories of the modes of philosophy, as proposed by Sextus Empiricus (*Pyr.*, I, 1–4). On the basis of the proposed reflection upon the topography of the philosophical path and upon the character of the generally accepted model of knowledge, I endeavor to provide an explanation that, while avoiding the reefs of dogmatic consequences of thinking about philosophy, would account for – and acknowledge – the uncertainty inscribed in philosophy, both with respect to particular resolutions and with respect to the possibility of its own self-fulfillment. For this purpose, other narratives of paths, journeying, and pursuits – metaphorically unlike those offered by Plato, prove useful.

Keywords: philosophy, metaphilosophy, Eros, Plato, *The Symposium*, zeteticism, anti-dogmatism, knowledge, wisdom

The road is always better than the inn.

Cervantes

*We are the Seekers and we are the Goal,
We are the Travelers, the Road, and the Inn*

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The subject of my metaphilosophical¹ reflection is the philosophical path perceived primarily in light of its topography, rather than – for example – through

1. Using the word “metaphilosophy,” I refer to a philosophical reflection on philosophy. Offering such an insight, I simultaneously strive to enact the principle of methodological non-deviation

the lens of the consequences of walking this path with the view to achieving a specific goal. In such a perspective, the topography of the path precedes – or ought to precede – the methodology of philosophical inquiry². In this text, I analyze selected literary descriptions of the topography of the philosophical path, focusing in particular on the consequences of their authors' rhetorical choices. Topography, as is known, concerns the morphology of the terrain and its configuration – understood in terms of the characteristics and respective positioning of its landmarks. The Greek verb *τοπογραφέω* means “to describe a place” or to “define the location of a place,” and because it involves such actions, topographic thinking reveals certain characteristics of philosophical reflection as such. It facilitates the recognition of its landmarks, the identification of the distribution of its points of gravity, or the recognition of the demarcation lines between, for instance, the source, the act, and the purpose of philosophy. Above all, however, it allows one to rethink philosophy itself, as abstracted from its historically (and otherwise) constructed profile. It is also worth recalling that the uniqueness of philosophy lies in the fact that it is self-reflective, and perhaps that is why it can plot different trajectories of its own discourse. A philosopher, after all, is a songbird contemplating its own song, but, at the same time, a flying bird pondering on the routes of its travels. In other words, in my musings, I attempt to intently listen to the voice of the bird-philosopher singing about his journey.

The Iconic Model of the Philosophical Path in Plato's *The Symposium*

The starting point, but also the central object of my inquiry, is the passage from Plato's *The Symposium* (201d–204c)³ – a fragment archetypal to the subject under analysis. However, to illustrate my argument properly, I will also refer to other

from the original discipline – philosophy itself. Methodologically speaking, metaphilosophy is a subdiscipline of philosophy, while, for example, metamathematics, methodologically, although it may be a subdiscipline of mathematics, may also be a branch of philosophy.

2. Publication co-financed by the funds granted under the Research Excellence Initiative of the University of Silesia in Katowice.

3. For more important insights on Plato's *Symposium*, see Steven Berg, *Eros and the Intoxications of Enlightenment: On Plato's Symposium* (Albany: Suny Press, 2010); *Plato's Symposium. Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, ed. James Lesher, Debra Nails, Frisbee Sheffield. Hellenic Studies 22. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006; Kevin Corrigan, Elena Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic at Play: Argument, Structure, and Myth in the Symposium* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2004); Alexander Nehamas, “Only in the contemplation of beauty is human life worth living” Plato, *Symposium* 211d,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 15, 1 (2007), 1–18; Mary P. Nichols, *Socrates on Friendship and Community: Reflections on Plato's Symposium, Phaedrus, and Lysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Frisbee Sheffield, *Plato's Symposium: The Ethics of Desire* (Oxford 2006).

narratives that shed more light upon some of the fundamental difficulties associated with, or caused by, the story of Diotima/Socrates/Plato. While it is hardly necessary to justify the importance of this passage to philosophy and metaphilosophy alike, it makes perfect sense to begin this section with a quotation from Diogenes Laertios⁴, who reports that “[...] is said that Socrates in a dream saw a cygnet on his knees, who immediately put forth feathers, and flew up on high, uttering a sweet note, and that the next day Plato came to him, and that he pronounced him the bird which he had seen.”⁵ Thus, the simile employed in the previous section receives interpretive substance: Plato, after all, is “pronounced” a bird. Furthermore, it is worth remembering that the whole story in question is an embedded narrative: it is an account of Apollodoros (who had heard it from Aristodemos), in which Socrates recounts the story of Diotima. However, the beginning of Apollodoros’s account is suggestive: he talks about meeting Socrates, who “was fresh from the baths and wearing his sandals,” stressing that these were “two rare events for him.”⁶

Even if we choose to disregard the issue of Socrates’s infrequent ablutions, the mentioned “rarity” of the occasions when he would wear shoes is (in the universe of Socratic humor) both significant and ironic: as a rule, Socrates would be barefoot. And, as will be seen, it is exactly about the barefoot being that Plato – that is, Aristodemos, and therefore Apollodoros, and therefore Socrates, and therefore Diotima – will speak. It also seems worth mentioning that, when Glaucon nags him about the origins of the story, Apollodoros indicates Aristodemos as his source, using which opportunity he does not fail to emphasize the latter’s physical traits. Aristodemos, in his description, is “a little fellow, who never wore any shoes.”⁷ Although clearly the recurrence of the motif of barefootedness begs a closer

4. Aware that the names of the philosophers of the Antiquity function in the academic circulation in a number of varieties, in my text I attempt to systematically use un-Latinized, Greek names in Latin transliteration, e.g. “Diogenes Laertios” rather than “Diogenes Laërtius.”

5. Diogenes Laërtius, *The Life and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, literally translated by C.D. Yonge (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1915), III, 5. <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/57342/pg57342-images.html> (10.03.2021).

6. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett. Edited, annotated, and compiled by Rhonda L. Kelley, 4 (174a), <http://faculty.sgc.edu/rkelley/SYMPOSIUM.pdf> (5.05.2021). Cf. also Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield, trans. M.C. Howatson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3 (174a), <https://philarchive.org/archive/FREAR-4> (10.05.2021). The Greek original reads: “λελουμένον τε καὶ τὰς βλαύτας ὑποδεδεμένον, ἃ ἐκεῖνος ὀλιγάκις ἐποίει.” See: Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, Κείμενο, μετάφραση, ερμηνεία Ἰωάννης Συκουτρῆς (Αθήνα: Ἰωάννης Δ. Κολλάρου & Σία Α.Ε., 1970.), 11 (174a), http://repository.edulll.gr/edulll/retrieve/7067/1970_symposium.pdf (5.05.2021). All the quotations from the Greek text come from this edition.

7. Plato, *The Symposium*..., 2 (173b). Compare the English translation with the Greek original: “σικρὸς, ἀνυπόδητος ἄει,” Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 7 (173b).

scrutiny, for the time being I will only point to the shoe-related literary parallel that I am going to use, and to which I will also (literally) return at the end of my inquiry. On the one hand, the parallel in question is that between “not wearing shoes” and “ignorance”; on the other – between “being fully shod” and the “belief in possessing knowledge.” I cannot help but feel that, in its own form, this bidimensional parallel looms large in Plato’s text.

The above notwithstanding, it is also reasonable not to dismiss other interpretative leads manifest in the very Prologue to the dialogue – tropes that may prove noteworthy from the point of view of a metaphilosophical, topographic insight. It is already in the second sentence of the *Symposium* that Apollodoros describes his journey from his home in Phaleron to “the city” (identifiable as Athens) as “going up/climbing”⁸ the road. Indeed, even today the trip from Phaleron to Athens requires one to take an ascending path, but one must be very careful not to treat the trajectory of Apollodoros’s journey in any schematic, or monomythical way, as in fact the Greek lexeme *ἀνείμι* (“climb”/ “go up”) also translates into: “sail up” (“out to sea”), to “go up inland,” to “come forth,” “approach,” and even to “go back,” or “return.” Therefore, as I endeavor to demonstrate, in spite of the strong blending of philosophy’s reputation with the concept of “the ascent” (*anabasis*), the passage under study (along with other texts) suggests that the topography of the philosophical path may, in fact, differ from the one stereotypically envisaged. Even the prologue to *The Symposium* makes it clear that Glaucon “was looking for”⁹ Apollodoros, which fact seems to emphasize the fundamentally zetetic¹⁰ dimension of the processes of learning or acquiring new knowledge. Bearing all of the above in mind, it makes sense to try to think about philosophy in the perspective of activities defined by the potentiality of the Greek verbs *ἀνείμι* and *ζητέω* – but also in the context of the importance of footwear in the Platonic discourse. Let us then briefly examine the account of the cygnet-philosopher, paying special attention to his songs dedicated to the routes of his flight.¹¹

8. The semantics of the Greek “ἀνών” / “ἀνείμι” are, unfortunately, lost in the English translations. For comparison, see: Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 3 (172a).

9. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett... 4 (172a); gr: “ἐζήτουσ” see: Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 3 (172a).

10. For a zetetic understanding of philosophy, see Dariusz Kubok, “Comments on the Sources of Greek Philosophical Criticism,” *Folia Philosophica*, 34, *Special issue: Forms of Criticism in Philosophy and Science*, ed. Dariusz Kubok (Katowice 2015), 9–31; Dariusz Kubok, “Kilka uwag o modelach zetetycznych w filozofii polityki: Voegelin – Strauss.” [A few remarks on zetetic models in the philosophy of politics: Voegelin – Strauss.], *Horyzonty Polityki* nr 35 (2020), 125–143; Dariusz Kubok, *Krytycyzm, sceptycyzm i zetetycyzm we wczesnej filozofii greckiej* [Criticism, Skepticism and Zeteticism in Early Greek Philosophy] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2021), 115–146.

11. Focusing on the topography of the journey, I will leave a plethora of major problems that this passage raises aside. Aware of the importance of the issues I omit, I am also aware of the limitations concerning the size of the text of a standard journal article.

The Symposium dedicates much space to Eros,¹² addressing questions concerning “the being and nature of Eros, and then of his works.”¹³ As the text makes clear, philosophy also – or perhaps above all – is love. In the section 204b of *The Symposium*, Plato offers the following inference:

Premises:

- 1) “wisdom is a most beautiful thing” (ἔστιν γὰρ δὴ τῶν καλλίστων ἡ σοφία),
- 2) “Eros is a love of the beautiful” (“Ἔρως δ’ ἔστιν ἔρως περὶ τὸ καλόν),

The conclusion that necessarily follows from these premises (ὥστε ἀναγκαῖον) is the following:

- 3) “Eros is also a philosopher” (“Ἐρωτα φιλόσοφον εἶναι)¹⁴.

Without delving any deeper into the intricacies of the sense of the words *Ἔρως* (Eros) and *φιλόσοφος* (“philosopher,” “the lover of wisdom”), it is important to emphasize that the text indicates the space of their common presence. It is this concurrence that sets up the overall topographic framework of the love thus conceived, conditioning the modes of philosophical activity, to which the concept of *μεταξύ* (or *ἐν μέσῳ*), translating into “between” (or “in the mean”),

12. For more information on Eros in Greek philosophy, and, in particular, in Plato’s work, see Claude Calame, *The Poetics of Eros in Ancient Greece*, trans. J. Lloyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Ursula Bittrich, *Aphrodite Und Eros in Der Antiken Tragodie: Mit Ausblicken Auf Motivgeschichtlich Verwandte Dichtungen* (Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2005); Drew Hyland, “Eros, epithumia, and philia in Plato,” *Phronesis*, 13 (1968), 32–46; W. Joseph Cummins, “Eros, Epithumia, and Philia in Plato,” *Apeiron*, 15 (1981), 10–18; Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); *Eros, Agape, and Philia: Readings in the Philosophy of Love*, ed. Alan Soble. New York: Paragon House, 1989; Lorelle D. Lamascus, *The Poverty of Eros in Plato’s Symposium* (Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016); Giovanni Ferrari, *Platonic Love*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. R. Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 248–276; Lidia Palumbo, *Eros Phobos Epithymia. Sulla natura delle emozioni in alcuni dialoghi di Platone* (Napoli: Loffredo, 2001); Martha Nussbaum, “Eròs and Ethical Norms: Philosophers Respond to a Cultural Dilemma,” in: *The Sleep of Reason: Erotic Experience and Sexual Ethics in Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Martha Nussbaum & Juha Sihvola (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 55–94; Glenn W. Most, *Six Remarks on Platonic Eros*, in: *Erotikon: Essays on Eros, Ancient and Modern*, ed. Shadi Bartsch, Thomas Bartscherer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 33–47; David M. Halperin, “Love’s Irony: Six Remarks on Platonic Eros,” in: *Erotikon: Essays on Eros, Ancient and Modern*, ed. Shadi Bartsch, Thomas Bartscherer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 48–58.

13. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 29 (201d–e), see also: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 44 (201d–e). Compare the English translations to the Greek original: “τίς ἐστιν ὁ Ἔρως καὶ ποῖός τις, ἔπειτα τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ,” Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 133 (201d–e).

14. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 30 (204b), see also: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 147 (204b). See also Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 145 (204b).

is central. By virtue of mutual interconnectedness of Eros and “the love of wisdom,” the term simultaneously determines the broadest frame of philosophy’s topography. The word *μεταξύ*, however, requires that its own “spatial” limits be defined. In passages 201a–204c of *The Symposium* Plato observes that:

- 1) “there is a mean¹⁵ between wisdom and ignorance”
“ἔστιν τι μεταξύ σοφίας καὶ ἀμαθίας” (202a)¹⁶,
- 2) “[Eros] is in a mean between [fair and foul, good and evil]”
“[...] τι μεταξύ [...] τούτοις [sc. καλόν, αἰσχρὸν; ἀγαθόν, κακόν]” (202b)¹⁷,
- 3) “[Eros is] is neither mortal nor immortal, but in a mean between the two”
“[...] μεταξύ θνητοῦ καὶ ἀθανάτου” (202d)¹⁸,
- 4) “[Eros is] the mediator who spans the chasm which divides [Gods and humans], and therefore in him all is bound together.”
“[...] ἐν μέσῳ δὲ ὃν ἀμφοτέρων συμπληροῖ, ὥστε τὸ πᾶν αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συνδεδέσθαι [sc. Θεοί, ἄνθρωποι]” (202e)¹⁹,
- 5) “[Eros] is in a mean between the wise and the ignorant”
“[...] σοφίας τε αὐ καὶ ἀμαθίας ἐν μέσῳ ἐστίν” (203e)²⁰.

By merging the above statements into one, we arrive at the conclusion that “in-betweenness” is determined by the understanding of each of the binaries: wisdom and ignorance, good and evil, mortality and immortality, gods and people. The lovers of wisdom (φιλοσοφοῦντες) are those dwelling “in a mean between the two” opposites (οἱ μεταξύ τούτων ἀμφοτέρων, 204b)²¹. It is worth remembering that these frames of reference, listed together in the same fragment of Plato’s text, represent various orders (epistemic, ethical, temporal, etc.), which suggests that any attempts at delineating strict distinctions between them are unfounded. Such a positioning of Eros-as-philosopher refers to the bipolar principles organizing all-that-is. Genetically, these principles may be called Resource (Poros) and Poverty

15. In his translation, M.C. Howatson prefers the word “intermediate.”

16. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 29 (202a); compare with: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 144 (202a). See also Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 145 (202a).

17. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 29 (202b); compare with: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 145 (202b). See also Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 135 (202b).

18. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 30 (202d); compare with: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 145 (202d). See also Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 136 (202d).

19. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 30 (202e) compare with: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 146 (202e). See also Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 137 (202e).

20. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 30 (203e) compare with: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 147 (203e). See also Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 145 (203e).

21. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 30 (204b); compare with: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 147 (204b). See also Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 145 (204b).

(Penia) – as they are referred to in the text²² – which corresponds to the ontological-epistemological concepts of the One or the Good (ἓν or ἀγαθόν) and the Indefinite Dyad (ἀόριστος δυάς) as the highest principles²³. It should be remembered, however, that the “in-between,” understood in its multifaceted senses, suspended between the extremes, yet occupying the area excluding “pure” oppositions, constitutes the proper space of philosophy. The above notwithstanding, this area is not inhabited by philosophy alone; populating it are also philosophical dialogues and prayers, and even mantic prophecies reverberate there; it is “in-between” that divine commandments and divine grace become manifest; it is there that sacrifices and rites belong²⁴. It is there, “in between,” that we can find it all, whether we are awake or asleep, and it is through Eros-the-philosopher as a “spiritual” or “divine man” (δαίμόνιος ἀνὴρ, 203a)²⁵, or even “a great spirit” or “great divinity” (δαίμων μέγας, 202d)²⁶, the special interpreter-hermeneut (ἐρμηνεύων, 202e),²⁷ the barefoot Hermes,²⁸ through whom “all the intercourse and converse of God with man [...] is carried on.”²⁹ Operating, like others, “in-between,” and responsible for the com-

22. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 30 (203b); compare with: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 146 (203b). See also Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 141 (203b).

23. On that issue, see Hans Joachim Krämer, *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles. Zum Wesen und zur Geschichte der platonischen Ontologie* (Heidelberg Akademie der Wissenschaften: Heidelberg, 1959), Konrad Gaiser, *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1963), Giovanni Reale, *Zu einer neuen Interpretation Platons. Eine Auslegung der Metaphysik der großen Dialoge im Lichte der “ungeschriebenen Lehren,”* erweiterte Auflage (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000); John Niemeyer Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (London: Routledge, 2013); Kenneth Sayre, *Plato’s Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), Dmitri Nikulin (ed.), *The Other Plato: The Tübingen Interpretation of Plato’s Inner-Academic Teachings* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

24. It is worth noting that all of these discourses are conversations, and no conversation proper may exist without love.

25. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 30 (203a); compare with: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 146 (203a). See also Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 137 (203a). It is worth noting that Howatson translates the phrase as “divine man.”

26. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 30 (202d); compare with: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 146 (202d). See also Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 136 (202d). Howatson translates the phrase as “great divinity.”

27. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 30 (202e); compare with: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 146 (202e). See also Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 137 (202e).

28. Eros “has no shoes, nor a house to dwell in; on the bare earth exposed he lies under the open heaven, in the streets, or at the doors of houses, taking his rest” – Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 30 (203d); compare with: “[Eros is] homeless and unshod, ever lying on the ground without bedding, sleeping in doorsteps and beside roads under the open sky.” – Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 147 (203d). See also Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 143 (203d).

29. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 30 (202e); compare with: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 146 (202e). See also Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 137 (202e).

munication between the divine sphere and the human world, he channels his love towards wisdom and thus becomes a wisdom lover. The space “in between” is defined by the abolition of the poles at its extremes: the nature of Eros-the-philosopher is, after all, “neither immortal nor mortal” (οὔτε ὡς ἀθάνατος πέφυκεν οὔτε ὡς θνητός)³⁰.

What, then, is the trajectory of the philosophical journey of *The Symposium*’s participants? What is the topography of the path of the love of wisdom within the “in-between,” “inside” of it? By no means, contrary to what is often assumed, is it a mere upward-going path (*anabasis*), nor merely a descending trail (*katabasis*).³¹ In passage 203e, Plato describes Eros-the-philosopher as “alive and flourishing at one moment when he is in plenty, and dead at another moment, and again alive.”³² Perhaps the best way to express these dynamics is the trope of a (positively construed) struggle, energized and re-energized by the dual nature of the pilgrim: he takes after his father in his inclination toward all that is beautiful and good, yet he inherits his condition of constant privation from his mother. Metaphorically speaking, Eros does have wings to fly, but his bare feet crave the earth. Yet, the central driving force in Eros’s story is unfulfillment. Plato expresses it with words emphasizing the continuity and endlessness of states that always last, and ceaseless, never-ending actions that always occur. Importantly, Eros’s “always” is dual in its nature, echoing the duality of his parental heritage:

1) Taking after his mother, Eros is always poor (πένης αἰεί ἐστὶ, 203c), always in distress (dwelling ever in want) (αἰεί ἐνδεία σύνοικος, 203d), on the bare ground he always lies with no bedding (χαμαιπετῆς αἰεί, 203d, which literally means “always falling to the ground”), whatever he gains always slips away from him (τὸ δὲ ποριζόμενον αἰεί ὑπεκρεῖ, 203e) – but “that which is always flowing in is always flowing out, and so he is never in want and never in wealth”;

2) Taking after his father, he is “always weaving some intrigue of other” (αἰεί τινας πλέκων μηχανάς, 203d). It is worth noting that even without the word αἰεί (always), the phrase διὰ παντὸς τοῦ βίου used in the same passage (203d) –

30. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 30 (203e); compare with: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 147 (203e). See also Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 143 (203e).

31. See, for instance, Dariusz Kubok, *Prawda i mniemanie. Studium filozofii Parmenidesa z Elei* [Truth and Presumptions. A Study in the Philosophy of Parmenides of Elea] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2004), 81–86.

32. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 30 (203e); compare with: Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 147 (203e). The original Greek passage reads thus: “[...] ἀλλὰ τοτὲ μὲν τῆς αὐτῆς ἡμέρας θάλλει τε καὶ ζῆ, ὅταν εὐπορήσῃ, τοτὲ δὲ ἀποθνήσκει, πάλιν δὲ ἀναβιώσκει διὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς φύσιν, τὸ δὲ ποριζόμενον αἰεί ὑπεκρεῖ, ὥστε οὔτε ἀπορεῖ Ἐρως ποτὲ οὔτε πλουτεῖ [...]” Πλάτων, *Συμπόσιον*, 143 (203e).

emphasizing a similar concept – refers, in fact, to constant “pursuit of wisdom,” i.e. to life-long philosophizing.³³

The *always* – especially the *always* which Eros inherits from his mother – has considerable consequences, most important of which is his persistent failure to attain fulfillment. Thus, should we assume that Eros must *always* remain unfulfilled, we would have to infer that he will *never* achieve his ultimate goal, which is wisdom. Still, we must realize that “never” is antonymous not only to “always,” but also to “ever/whenever” – which clearly reveals Plato’s dogmatism. Rather than that of a hopeful zetetic, Plato adopts a stance of a negative dogmatist who has already passed his judgment on the impossibility of Eros-the-philosopher’s fulfillment.

The Typology of Philosophy According to Sextus Empiricus

In the first paragraph of his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* entitled “The most fundamental difference among philosophies” (περὶ τῆς ἀνωτάτω διαφορᾶς τῶν φιλοσοφιῶν) Sextus Empiricus claims that “the most fundamental kinds of philosophy are reasonably thought to be three: the Dogmatic, the Academic, and the Sceptical”³⁴ These three categories serve to differentiate among three specific positions one may take in relation to the activity of (*re*)search (understood as the core of a philosophical effort). The dogmatic philosophy confirms the *finding* of the answer to the question underlying its inquiry as a result of the *completion of the search*. The academic philosophy, in turn, denies the very possibility of finding ultimate answers to the questions that propel its inquiries; the perpetual reach never leads to a firm and final grasp.³⁵ Finally, the skeptical philosophy endlessly continues

33. In this context, it is worth comparing the translations of the passage proposed by Benjamin Jowett and by M.C. Howatson: Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett..., 30 (203d) and Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield..., 147 (203d).

34. “ὅθεν εὐλόγως δοκοῦσιν αἱ ἀνωτάτω φιλοσοφίαι τρεῖς εἶναι, δογματικὴ Ἀκαδημαϊκὴ σκεπτικὴ.” Σέξτος Ἐμπειρικὸς, Πυρρώνειες υποτυπώσεις Α', Β' (Θεσσαλονίκη: Ζήτρος, 2007), I, 4; The translated passage comes from the following edition: Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, translated and edited by Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3; other editions of the Sextus Empiricus’s work include: Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrronism*, translated, with Introduction and Commentary, by Benson Mates (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), <http://www.sciaacchitano.it/pensatori%20epistemici/scettici/outlines%20of%20pyrronism.pdf> (5.05.2021) and Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R. G. Bury. Loeb Classical Library 273. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933).

35. Academic philosophy is, in fact, tantamount to negative dogmatism – it exercises the dogmatic abolition of modal positive dogmatism by questioning the assumption that “the answer can be found.” Thereby, negative dogmatism of the Academic philosophy thus takes the form of the thesis that “it is impossible to find (any/the) answer.” Today, many researchers employ the terminological distinction between “positive” and “negative dogmatism,” however, in the context of the debate

in its efforts and always keeps searching.³⁶ The skeptical philosophy, whose nature manifests itself in its focus on acts of *investigation* and *inquiry* (ζήτησις), is described by the words ἐπιμονή (sticking to something/abiding by something/stopping at something) and ἔτι (still/continuously). In the light of this distinction, the philosophy of Plato in *The Symposium* may be perceived as both skeptical (owing to ἔτι, the inexhaustible passion of seeking without ever stopping) and as negatively-dogmatic (due to the dogmatic acceptance of the “never” as a declaration of the belief in the impossibility to “grasp” the object of inquiry and, thereby, attain fulfillment). Surprisingly, most researchers addressing Greek philosophy tend to concentrate solely on the first of the two components. And while one might be inclined to agree that since the times of Aenesidemus the Academy would embrace skepticism, the Academy of Carneades and Clitomachus manifestly tends towards negative dogmatism, which, given the second component of Plato’s philosophical stance, seems far from accidental. Let us note, however, that the acceptance of “never” may shift the thus based reflection towards the philosophy of the absurd, transforming Eros into Sisyphus. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that while Camus’s “absurd” hero pays an enormous price for his givenness to the “passions of this earth,”³⁷ Plato’s interpretation of Eros-as-philosopher tends towards the acceptance of absurdity owing to love that is neither *from* this earth nor *for* this earth.

Thus, without leaning to either side, one may read the trajectory of the journey of the participants of *The Symposium* as a hybrid trajectory. Arguably, theirs is a journey along the path of zetetic negative dogmatism, that is, a constant quest in defiance of the assumed impossibility of finding the answers to questions motivating the inquiry. To explore this concept in greater detail, in the section below I first present some of the arguments raised by the supporters of such an interpre-

on Sextus Empiricus, J.A. Palmer’s example seems particularly illustrative of the usage of the concept: “Although strictly speaking Sextus does not here [*Pyr.*, I, 1–3] call Clitomachus, Carneades, and the other Academics ‘dogmatics’, his characterization of them as denying that the truth can be grasped clearly amounts for him to a type of dogmatism which the Pyrrhonian seeks to avoid. For the sake of convenience, then, I refer to them variously as ‘negative dogmatists’ or ‘dogmatic skeptics.’” J.A. Palmer, “Skeptical Investigation,” *Ancient Philosophy*, 20 (2000), 351, fn. 1.

36. “Τοῖς ζητοῦσι τι πράγμα ἢ εὐρεσιν ἐπακολουθεῖν εἰκός ἢ ἄρνησιν εὐρέσεως καὶ ἀκαταληψίας ὁμολογίαν ἢ ἐπιμονὴν ζητήσεως. διόπερ ἴσως καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν ζητούμενων οἱ μὲν εὐρηκέναι τὸ ἀληθὲς ἔφασαν, οἱ δ’ ἀπεφάναντο μὴ δυνατὸν εἶναι τοῦτο καταληφθῆναι, οἱ δὲ ἔτι ζητοῦσιν.” Σέξτος Εμπειρικός, Πυρρώνειες υποτυπώσεις..., I, 1–3.

37. “You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He is, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing. This is the price that must be paid for the passions of this earth.” Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, translated from the French by Justin O’Brien (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 108.

tation, even though not all of them may be aware that what they advocate in their writings is, in fact, the ephemeral hybrid of zetetic negative dogmatism. Next, I invoke an interpretation which, quite close to Plato's own position, questions the validity of the negative-dogmatic component. Finally, I propose a solution which opens up the possibility of rejecting the hybrid interpretation of the topography of *The Symposium* and establishes a position that does not prejudge anything – not even its own meta-level infeasibility.

NeverEnding Story, or Seek And Ye Shall (Not) Find

Although the understanding of the philosophy practiced in the spirit of Plato in terms of a “NeverEnding Story” may be emblematic of contemporary interpretive trends, it is, at the same time, surprisingly uncritical³⁸. This is evident in the work of many thinkers – such as Josef Pieper, a philosopher, interestingly, manifesting neo-Thomist, rather than Platonic, inclinations. In his opinion, Diotima's parable leads to the conclusion that ultimate knowledge and philosophizing cannot be reconciled with each other³⁹ – and yet, the thinker proclaims that “[t]o persevere in the quest, to continue the ‘loving’ search for all things worthy to be known, the search for the wisdom that would be total and perfect – to persist in spite of the awareness that the ultimate, finally satisfying answer remains ever elusive: this precisely would mark the true philosopher!”⁴⁰ Clearly, what the passage emphasizes is not the absurdity of the condition of the philosopher, but the heroism inherent in the effort of philosophizing. Pieper's thesis, let us observe, could be expressed differently: despite the knowledge that it is impossible to obtain an answer to questions propelling the inquiry (negative dogmatism), the search for it must persist (zeteticism). Even so, one might still be confused by the descriptive form of this statement, but it is easy to imagine that the author could have also expressed his thesis in the language of normative instruction: one should persevere in a loving search for answers despite the knowledge⁴¹ of the impossibility of ever finding them. Still, however once phrases this idea, the charming allure of absurd heroism overshadows criticism. Thereby, in my opinion, Pieper reduces philosophy to a “loving” fool's errand as the negative dogmatism

38. It is worth remembering that Wolfgang Petersen's famous film of 1984 was a German production, whose original title read *Die unendliche Geschichte*.

39. Josef Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy: The Power of the Mind for Good or Evil, Consists in Argumentation*, trans. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 40.

40. Josef Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy...*, 40.

41. In all probability, speaking of knowledge, Pieper thinks of it in terms of *ἐπιστήμη* rather than, simply, in terms of *δόξα/δόκος*.

at the fundament of his thesis cuts philosophy off from its possible metaphilosophical alternatives. However, the weakness of Pieper's interpretation of the passage from *The Symposium* lies not only in his appeal to irrational, albeit normative, love, whose object – rather than wisdom – is heroism. More importantly, perhaps, its frailty is the lack of the meta-level justification for the claim of the existence of negative-dogmatic knowledge. Where do we get such knowledge? How could we have obtained it, if we are still in the course of philosophizing, still en route to the description of the very activity in which we are involved? The possible answer could relate to Plato's "maternal" element. Since it is knowledge rather than particular dispositions (or burdens) that we inherit from the mother, it is worth asking whether we can agree to the very concept of anamnestic knowledge of negative-dogmatic nature. Have our souls ever seen the impossibility? Are absurdity and unfulfillable hope integral to our composition? And, ultimately, is it possible to truly love someone without hope?

Pieper's "perseverance in the quest," his drive "to continue the 'loving' search" despite the the (alleged) knowledge that it is impossible to obtain a final answer, leads (at the very least) to heroism – a heroism all the more dramatic as it is absurd. It would seem that exhorting others to embrace the same heroism should be construed as its most sublimated form, yet, most often, it is little more than a sign of one's own dogmatism (even if it is negative). The idea of persistence in the search, combined with the assumed knowledge of the impossibility of its fulfillment, seems to be internally flawed by something reminiscent of mental decay: it simultaneously questions the essence of the search and knowledge itself, thereby rendering both these elements dramatically reduced as they become dispossessed of their original function. The search is not a true search, because it is, by definition, impossible to find the object of the quest, while knowledge (negative in its essence) is finally established as certain – despite the fact that it rejects the very possibility of positive finality, just as it contradicts the need for continued search. From its very onset, the philosophical path thus conceived places the wanderer-philosopher (the future swan-philosopher) in a space whose topographic landmarks are those of the heroic discourse. Such heroism, however, can be (and has been) conceived of as – and perhaps also confused for – absurd.

In contrast with Pieper's interpretation, Piotr Nowak argues in his commentary on *The Symposium* titled "Niespożyta biesiada" [The Feast Unconsumm(at)ed] that Eros is not Sisyphus at all, but rather Odysseus, reconciled with the impossibility of ever finding his beloved homeland.

As an eternal, insatiable movement, [Eros] oscillates around [...] extremes [– beauty/ugliness, wisdom/ignorance, gods/humans]. He is a constant pursuit of happiness (*eudai-*

monia). He is Odysseus with no dreams of Ithaca. He shares the quality of immortality with gods [...] and with people – his insatiability.⁴²

Arguably, Eros-the-philosopher looks as awkward in the guise of Odysseus as he does in that of Sisyphus, precisely because Nowak’s argumentation rests upon the same zetetic negative dogmatism as does Pieper’s, relying heavily upon the “never,” which he metaphorically expresses as coming to terms with the unattainability of dreams. Although I do realize that peace, in general, seems to be alien to philosophizing, I find two issues central to Nowak’s argumentation particularly disturbing:

1) how can one love something passionately without simultaneously dreaming about it (a rhetorical constatation);

2) *insatiability* does not coincide with *forgoing one’s dreams*; from the point of view of formal logic, it seems that these two names overlap (a logical constatation).

Nowak sees Eros-the-philosopher in the perspective of the *conjunction* of the two hyphenated components of the dual name. It is, however, quite as possible to *forgo one’s dreams* AND to *be satiated* at the same time, as it is possible to *be unsatiated/insatiable* AND NOT to *forgo one’s dreams*. Let me expand on the latter option in the paragraphs below.

The Plotinian Discrepancy Protocol

Before I address the main point of this section, however, it seems reasonable to focus on an interpretation of Plato’s Eros, which does not discard dreams, but eliminates the component of negative dogmatism. The reading to which I refer is that offered by Plotinus in the *Fourth Ennead*⁴³. In the pertinent passage, the philosopher writes about the dance (*χορεία*) of the soul, which, despite our bodily nature, is not separated from *the One*⁴⁴. Further in the text, Plotinus makes a direct reference to the story of Eros from *The Symposium*, to finally conclude

42. Piotr Nowak, “Niespożyta biesiada,” in: Platon, *Uczta* [The Symposium], translated into Polish by A. Serafina (Warszawa: Sic!, 2012), 133. The author, on the other hand, rightly emphasizes that the trajectory of Eros’s journeys is not exclusively anabastic. See Piotr Nowak, “Niespożyta biesiada” . . . , 139.

43. It is worth remembering that it is to Eros that Plotinus devotes chapter 5 of the “Third Ennead,” in which he analyzes the son of Penia and Poros both from the divine-daimonic point of view and in the perspective of emotions.

44. “Ἐν δὲ ταύτῃ τῇ χορείᾳ καθορᾶ πηγὴν μὲν ζωῆς, πηγὴν δὲ νοῦ, ἀρχὴν ὄντος, ἀγαθοῦ αἰτίαν, ῥίζαν ψυχῆς. [...] Οὐ γὰρ ἀποτετμήμεθα οὐδὲ χωρὶς ἐσμεν, εἰ καὶ παρεμπεσοῦσα ἡ σώματος φύσις πρὸς αὐτὴν ἡμᾶς εἰλκυσεν, ἀλλ’ ἐμπνέομεν καὶ σφζόμεθα οὐ δόντος, εἴτ’ ἀποστάντος ἐκείνου, ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ χορηγοῦντος ἕως ἂν ἡ ὄπερ ἐστί.” Plotinus. *The Enneads*, trans. Lloyd P. Gerson, George

that the soul loves God by nature (*κατὰ φύσιν*) and longs to be united with him⁴⁵. Plotinus is determined to demonstrate the feasibility of fulfilling the soul's yearning. As is often the case, at the lowest level of his interpretation there is an analogy: the mortal, very human, love, which in itself is deceptive, driven by the honeyed, promiscuous whisper of the suitors and limited to their desire for bodily satisfaction, may – in the perspective of someone naïvely in love – be taken for a symbol of the other, *true* love⁴⁶. *Here* – we embrace the bodies; the arms of the lover one are around the beloved. *There* – we can possess Him. The key passage in this matter is the following:

The truly beloved is in the intelligible world, whom one can have intimate contact with by participating in him and relating to him truly, not just by enfolding him externally in our flesh. Anyone who has seen it, knows what I mean. Which is to say: the soul then acquires a new life, when it approaches him, indeed arrives at him and participates in him, such that it is in a position to know that the true provider of life is present, and that the soul is in need of nothing more.⁴⁷

With the real object of love (τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἐρώμενον) we can unite, we may possess it, and as a result – we may want for nothing else. In Plotinus's vision, it is possible to divest oneself of insatiability. From the point of view of his interpretation, such a state would be tantamount to casting philosophizing out by eliminating the elements of *lack* and *desire*. Yet, from the point of view of our inquiry, it is central to realize that on the basis of the reading of the same passage of *The Symposium*, it is possible to formulate an interpretation that – by eliminating the component of negative dogmatism – renders the entire hybrid of zetetic negative dogmatism null and void. Moreover, a reading like Plotinus's demonstrates clearly that the impossibility of finding the object of the search does not have to ensue from the fact of searching itself; on the contrary – the possibility of finding what is sought is warranted, but it comes at the cost of accepting positive dogmatism.

Boys-Stones, John M. Dillon, R.A.H. King, Andrew Smith, James Wilberding, ed. L.P. Gerson. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); VI, 9, 9, 1–11.

45. Plotinus. *The Enneads...*, VI, 9, 9, 33–34.

46. Plotinus. *The Enneads...*, VI, 9, 9, 34–44.

47. “Ἐκεῖ δὲ τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἐρώμενον, ᾧ ἔστι καὶ συνείνα μεταλαβόντα αὐτοῦ καὶ ὄντως ἔχοντα, οὐ περιπτυσσόμενον σαρξίν ἐξωθεν. Ὅστις δὲ εἶδεν, οἶδεν ὃ λέγω, ὡς ἡ ψυχὴ ζῶν ἄλλην ἴσχει τότε καὶ προσιοῦσα καὶ ἤδη προσελθοῦσα καὶ μετασχοῦσα αὐτοῦ, ὥστε γνῶναι διατεθεῖσαν, ὅτι πάρεστιν ὁ χορηγὸς ἀληθινῆς ζωῆς, καὶ δεῖ οὐδενὸς ἔτι.” Plotinus, *The Enneads...*, VI, 9, 9, 44–50; trans. Lloyd P. Gerson, George Boys-Stones, John M. Dillon, R.A.H. King, Andrew Smith, James Wilberding.

Thou Shalt Not Prejudge

The emblematic interpretation of *The Symposium*, of which I have offered Pieper as the representative, leads to the acceptance of the negative zetetic dogmatism. The Plotinian proposition, in its negation of the negative dogmatism, resists – or, at best, gravitates towards – the positive dogmatism, replacing insatiability with satiation (or with the promise thereof). Yet, in my opinion, there is another possibility – an option in which:

- 1) dreams are not forgone,
- 2) insatiability is accepted without prejudging the possibility or impossibility of its satisfaction,
- 3) one does not yield to either negative or positive dogmatism,
- 4) one is not limited to an exclusively anabatic or exclusively katabatic approach,
- 5) avoids the mainstream hybrid of the zetetic negative dogmatism.

The proposition I wish to put forth is based on the acceptance of the zetetic and erotic desire (as is the case with Pieper’s proposition), but at the same time it approves the conjunction of the two sentences below:

- 1) I do not rule out the possibility that I *will find* the object of my search (rejection of negative dogmatism),
- 2) I do not rule out the possibility that I *will not find* the object of my search (rejection of positive dogmatism).

The interpretations I have thus far called “emblematic” or “Pieperian” are based on the premise that the possibility of finding the object of one’s search is ruled out, which is why they eventually fall into the groove of negative dogmatism. Contrary to the above, the proposition offered here arises from the objection to the possibility of the (Pieperian) knowledge of the infeasibility of arriving at a finally satisfactory answer. Such knowledge cannot be anamnestic owing to the positivity of what one could dub “seeing with the eyes of the soul,” and therefore the loving search may be free from prejudgments concerning its effects. In such an approach, the fervor of desire (unmitigated by the chilling awareness of impossibility) is justified, as are the intensity of dreams, insatiability (concerning which one must not prejudice anything, whereby, for example, the attribution of the adjective “eternal” to it would be unfounded), or uncertainty. Concluding the analytical part of this essay, I would like to approach a vision of a philosophy that would be tantamount to the active acceptance of uncertainty, a part of which would be the acceptance of this uncertainty’s *possible* (rather than *actual*) irremovability.

From “beloved” to “the loving one”

In sections 204b–c of *The Symposium* Diotima teaches Socrates that his misconceptions about Eros arise from the fact that he perceives the son of Resource and Poverty as “the beloved” rather than as “the loving one.” Her observation, by (extended) analogy, seems to be true about the whole of Greek philosophy, where the cognizing subject determines the nature of cognition. Acknowledging this fact, Diotima suggests an attention shift from *the object of love* to the *function of loving*. Let us follow her suggestion.

Plato often emphasizes that Eros-the philosopher does not possess beauty or goodness, and therefore he desires them. Note, however, that the lack is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition of desire. It is true that in order to love and desire, one must feel a lack within. The lack, however does not result in desire: there are those (and in no small number) who neither possess wisdom nor lack anything, and therefore they neither desire nor love anything. Bearing this in mind, one may conclude that it is the passage from the lack to the awareness of the lack, which awakens the desire to eliminate it, that is instrumental in the process. It must also be noted that one cannot simultaneously desire or love an object AND be fulfilled, nor can one desire or love an object AND simultaneously find fulfillment in the knowledge of the impossibility of fulfillment. This craving, understood as a seeking-desire (note that Diotima uses the verb ἐπιθυμέω, meaning “to long for,” “to covet,” “to desire” 48) is the core of any philosophical endeavor. And thus philosophy is love, desire, craving for what one does not currently have, which, importantly, does not mean that “Eros is love that is yet to come.”⁴⁹ On the contrary, Eros is love-coming-true-at-present, and, simultaneously, love-hoping-for-a-future-present (the dream component). Projecting Eros as “love yet to come,” one sets somewhat absolutist standards for love (according to the principle of “all or nothing”), as if refusing to accept the fact that Eros is barefoot. The unshod have the same right to love as anyone else, yet their love, grounded in the sensation of the earth felt under the soles of their bare feet, is all the more ardent – the beauty of the beloved object (the attractor) notwithstanding. Therefore, following Diotima’s recommendation, one can posit that love refuses to accept the hegemony of the future tense alone; one may also add that love does not yield to the exclusive rule of the past tense either.

48. Drew Hyland adopts a hierarchy of the varieties of love according to the criterion of the degree of rationality. And so, starting from the bottom, he lists: ἐπιθυμία – ἔρως – φιλία. Drew Hyland, “Eros, Epithumia, and Philia in Plato,” *Phronesis*, 13 (1968), 32–46. His stance is disputed by W. Joseph Cummins in “Eros, Epithumia, and Philia in Plato”..., 10–18.

49. Piotr Nowak, “Niespożyta biesiada”..., 131.

The above is not only related to Eros's parental inheritance, but, perhaps more importantly, it is a function of the fact that *anamnesis* is neither selective memory nor a simple negation of amnesia, but an actual, zetetic, recollection. This is how one needs to think about philosophizing in its most profound dimension: Eros is philosophy, and therefore philosophy is a here-and-now desire, a present longing, and search for objects indicated before. As such, it is not primarily about fulfillment or non-fulfillment: a desiring subject does not desire his object because he knows that his desire will be fulfilled or because he knows that his desire will not be fulfilled. Such putative knowledge adds nothing to his desire, nor does it diminish it. Admittedly, however, rather than in the perspective of loving zeteticism, both in the past⁵⁰ and today people prefer to think of philosophy in terms of fulfillment, which drives them into positions of dogmatism (whether positive or negative). In contrast, the zetetic understanding of philosophy is anti-dogmatic and therefore critical; it does not focus on prejudging the effect of the search, but on the complexity, scope, profundity, and scrupulousness of the search itself. Walking the dogmatic path resembles sailing the narrow strait between Scylla and Charybdis. Let us then take a topographic survey.

Counterpoint: Forgetful Love

As has already been mentioned, love, inherent in philosophizing, presupposes active recall and active dreaming in the present. Eliminating this simultaneous inclination towards the past and towards the future would render the philosophical effort reductivist: for instance, in dogmatism (whether positive or negative) there is no "tomorrow" either because "tomorrow" is not needed, or because it is impossible. In contrast, some philosophical journeys, such as the one embarked upon by Michael Oakeshott, give up "yesterday." In Oakeshott's thought, such an abandonment of the past is related to his vision of philosophy as a radically subversive reflection. This thinker treats all reflection as a dialectical process assuming that the condition of *acquiring* knowledge is *having it* already, which

50. It is worth noting that this brief section of *The Symposium* lends itself to being perceived as an inspiration for a multitude of models of philosophy and a source referred to in later concepts. One could quote such examples as Kierkegaard's *abyss* (which concept Plato expresses with the word συμπληροί), Vogelín's *In-Between*, or any form of zetetic philosophy based on the formula: "But one cannot know that one does not know without knowing what one does not know." Leo Strauss, "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*," in: Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*. Revised and Expanded Edition. Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence, ed. V. Gourcevitch and M.S. Roth (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 196.

means that reflection implies doubting – yet the doubt is not absolute: in Oakshott's vision, knowledge is tainted with ignorance⁵¹.

Subversiveness is what distinguishes philosophy from other types of reflection. For Oakeshott, the topography of the philosophical path takes the form of a climb to the top of a tower. Climbing higher and higher, floor by floor, as new vistas open, the philosopher notices new things. His view changes as he climbs. However, contrary to what one might expect, in this anabatic journey the philosopher's willingness to go further when others stop is not important. The subversive quality of philosophical reflection does not stem from the thinker's heroic desire to keep climbing: its essence lies in his readiness to divest himself of memory. In other words, particular forms of reflection are differentiated not so much by the philosopher's willingness to continue his ascent or his choice to stop, but by his disposition to either remember or to cast away the memories of previous views – and thereby by his readiness to accept or reject the claim that precedent views determine the succeeding ones. Thus, so to speak, Michael Oakeshott perceives philosophy as a “de-anchoring” activity, in which each new view ousts and replaces each old one – and it is insubstantial how tall the tower is; what matters is solely the climber's disposition. Oakeshott himself stresses that the tower *has no top* – or at least the climber-philosopher has no way of knowing whether he has already reached it.

In this way, philosophy is not defined either by its effects, or by the comfort of the privileged view from the floor at which the philosopher stops, but by the sustained propensity to climb combined with a unique kind of amnesia. If we assumed – as in Pieper's model – that the tower indeed has no gable, Oakeshott's interpretation would drift towards the Charybdis of negative dogmatism. If, on the other hand, philosophy were to be understood as a less subversive form of reflection which would allow itself to stop at the level of a still familiar view – such a choice would be tantamount to the consent to being devoured by the Scylla of positive dogmatism. Oakeshott's proposal is thus anti-Platonic with regard to the topography of the philosophical path mainly because it assumes anabatic progression and because it radically rejects memory. And yet, one element of his vision of philosophy seems to complement my own proposition: what seems of particular value is not so much Oakeshott's suggestion of replacing negative dogmatism with an agnosticism of sorts (“the climber has no way of knowing – and thereby cannot know – if he has reached the top”), but the fact that his vision admits a fallibilist reconciliation with uncertainty: the climber-philosopher is not sure whether he has reached the top of the tower, nor whether the place he has reached is the top.

51. Michael Oakeshott, *Political Philosophy*, in: Michael Oakeshott, *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, ed. by Timothy Fuller (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 138–155.

Between Wandering Rocks and a Hard Place of Dogmatism

The attractiveness of the simile likening Scylla and Charybdis to two forms of dogmatism consists in the fact that there exists no course by which Odysseus can safely avoid both mortal perils as he sails homeward. In Book XII of the *Odyssey* (55 ff.) Circe presents the hero with a fundamental alternative in the choice of shipping routes: he may either chart his course 1) through the waters bristling with “wandering rocks” (πλαγκταὶ πέτραι), or 2) sail through the strait, where the six-headed Scylla brings death to sailors striving to avoid the deadly whirlpool of Charybdis. Circe clearly emphasizes that she will not tell him which route is the right one, but, offering to describe them both, she urges Odysseus towards a reflection. The moment when Odysseus is considering his options – his silent pondering, the trajectory of which Homer leaves undescribed – is truly fascinating. One could argue that, symbolically, it was in this decisive moment of reflection that something of fundamental importance for the future fates of the Western culture happened. Odysseus chose the second path – and his choice was also the choice of philosophy⁵². It is then hardly surprising that the dominant reading of Plato’s philosophical path (to stick to Homeric symbolism) results from Odysseus’s choice. The existing interpretations of Plato’s philosophy resemble the heroic struggle narrated by the Homeric epic. Hoping to avoid Scylla (positive dogmatism), some philosophers fall into the vortex of Charybdis (negative dogmatism), others, striving to steer clear of Charybdis, fall victims of Scylla’s voracity. Pieper’s metaphysical model is, in fact, an embodiment of the first possibility: his search is a search *within* the vortex of Charybdis (Charybdisic zeteticism); his path is that of an endless journey – and it does not matter whether its trajectory is anabatic or katabatic, whether it involves climbing a tower or a descent to its fundamentals, and even the fact that Odysseus finally succeeds in making his way through the perilous strait is inconsequential. Furthermore, it is hard to shake the impression that a rather large contingent of researchers still understands philosophy precisely as the eternal “in-between,” as a perpetual lingering betwixt the constant tug of war between Scylla and Charybdis. They seem not to realize that by assuming that this process/state is eternal, and by accepting the perpetuity of non-fulfillment, they have already been sucked into the great maelstrom of Charybdis.

52. See Dariusz Kubok, “Poza Skyllą i Charybdą. Problem fallibilistycznej wykładni poglądów Ksenofanesa” [Beyond Scylla and Charibdis. The Problem of the Fallibilist Interpretation of Xenophanes’s Views], *Ruch Filozoficzny*, t. LXXII/2017, 79–100.

But Odysseus could have chosen differently⁵³. So can we. We can still go back, forgoing our former choices and their consequences, and, returning the crossroads, we may choose to go the other way. We can sail the waters where the treacherous wandering rocks (πλαγκταὶ πέτραι) lurk beneath the surface. Circe honestly describes the mortal dangers of this route, painting a lurid picture of the remains of wrecked ships and dead human bodies amid the waves. And yet – the memory of the ship Argo, which has passed that way, remains vivid: the fact that the Argonauts succeeded (because Jason was favored by Hera) negates such dogmatically interpreted categories as “never,” “always,” “eternally,” “endless,” etc.

It is worth noting that, apart from “wandering” or “roaming,” the Greek word *πλαγκτός* also means “wandering in mind,” “erring,” and even “distracted” (LSJ). The course plotted through the sea of Wandering Rocks takes one *beyond* positive and negative dogmatism, which share a common standard of knowledge – *ἐπιστήμη* – wherein positive dogmatism assumes the certainty of knowledge and negative dogmatism assumes the certainty that one may exclude the possibility of knowledge. Meandering among the Wandering Rocks would accept the fallibilistic⁵⁴ and doxal standard of knowledge – for instance, understood in the spirit of Xenophanes’s *δόκος* or Parmenides’s *δόξα*. This consent towards uncertainty, wandering, and conjecture may be associated with one’s choice to refrain from passing judgments concerning the possibility/impossibility of reaching fulfillment in one’s *zetetic-erotic* philosophical endeavor. After all, if both Odysseus and Jason succeeded, then – metaphilosophically speaking – we do have choices: we may choose the route leading us between Scylla and Charybdis, but we may also retrace the course of the Argo.

No Footwear, Full Footwear and a Third Way

In conclusion, let us return to the issue of wearing shoes. In section 203c of *The Symposium*, Eros is defined as *σκληρός* (tough, hard), *ἀρχμηρός* (rough, squalid), *ἄοικος* (houseless, homeless), and *ἀνυπόδητος* (unshod, barefoot). Leaving other terms aside, let us concentrate on this last concept. The memory

53. In my opinion, the philosophical Eros is not “Odysseus without dreams of Ithaca,” because 1) he does not seem to resemble Odysseus, 2) whoever he is, he does dream, but not about Ithaca. Above all, however, Odysseus embodies a model of the philosophy of finitude, a philosophy of the return to the point of origin. Although one comes back transformed, in such a vision of a philosophical path one’s trajectory follows a repetitive pattern: departure–journeying–return. By this token, Ithaca, though it must have changed over the years, remains partly familiar and tame.

54. Following Susan barnadete’s terminology, I define fallibilism in terms of two interconnected theses: “no beliefs are, epistemically, absolutely secure” and “some beliefs are more secure than others”). See Susan Haack, “Theories of Knowledge: An Analytic Framework,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series*, 83 (1982–1983), 145, 148.

of the sensation of bare feet touching the ground – as well as his roughness, squalor, or homelessness – are to emphasize the “maternal” nature of his weakness and the permanence of privation that can never be eliminated. Metaphilosophically speaking, for many scholars, this genetic (maternal-paternal) duality of Eros’s nature determines the impossibility of the fulfillment of efforts, the unshakeability of the burden that must be carried, and – simultaneously – an ardent desire: a distinctive combination of the traits pointing to zetetic negative dogmatism. In my opinion, however, the quoted passage offers no more than a starting point for further reflection, an account of an anabatic-katabatic struggle rather than a description of the course of the search or the *dénouement* (non-*dénouement*) of its drama. The image of two bare feet suggestively brought forth by Plato’s pre-determines the result of the search only too overtly, and it does so in a negative-dogmatic fashion, while the philosopher either pretends not to be aware – or truly is not conscious – of the fact of having fallen into the maelstrom of Charybdis.

It should be remembered, however, that Plato reads his Eros-philosopher in the perspective of Odysseus’s choice to sail through the strait between Scylla and Charybdis. The barefoot Eros is recalled by Socrates, who, quite ironically, against his custom, is shod, which simultaneously reveals the philosopher’s attachment to this world and his enslavement by it. Consequently – in the dominant interpretation of *The Symposium* – such rhetoric produces a dramatic image of the eternally unfulfilled, insatiable, struggling hero, who has gained knowledge of the impossibility of fulfillment from some unknown source (and thereby “knows” that his umbilical cord attaching him to the “maternal” legacy cannot be severed). One should not, however, forget that Odysseus’s decision could have been different. For a philosopher, the choice of a route among the Wandering Rocks – and thereby the choice of accepting uncertainty, the possibility of losing one’s bearings, admitting presumptions, consenting to the temporariness of assumptions – combined with the resolution to refrain from prejudgments concerning the outcomes of the quest, may still be an alternative. Should such an interpretation be adopted, the zetetic dimension of love and desire implies the concurrence of both memory and dreams in the present, as well as the elimination of the dogmatic visions of the end, including, above all, the arbitrary assertion of the eternal non-fulfillment or ultimate fulfillment of the philosopher’s quest.

The choice of this path – the path of Jason and the Argonauts – is significant. As traditional accounts report, when Jason stood before King Pelias in Iolkos, none of those present knew him, the hum of uncertainty hovering over the crowd. Suddenly, the ruler noticed that the man before him wore only one sandal, his other foot bare. According to Pindar’s *Fourth Pythian Ode*, terror overwhelmed the king, who froze at the sight... And it is (above all) because I choose to refrain from a priori decisions about the form of the fulfillment of a philosopher’s

goals as well as from arbitrary judgments about the possibility or impossibility of such a fulfillment that, when trying to imagine a thinker, I do not seem to be able to invoke the portrait of the fully shod Odysseus or Sisyphus. It is not even the picture of Eros with both his bare feet on the ground that comes to my mind. Instead, I see Jason, who evocatively expresses the uncertainty (the possibility of fulfillment) inscribed in philosophy by showing the world only one shod foot. The other remains bare.

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