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The platonic foundation of the "Real" Popper by Lawrence Boland

PABLO GARCÍA Y SANDRA MACERI

CONSEJO NACIONAL DE INVESTIGACIONES CIENTÍFICAS Y TÉCNICAS. UNIVERSIDAD DE BUENOS AIRES.
smaceri@conicet.gov.ar / smaceri@hotmail.com / pabloseba77@hotmail.com

Resumen

Este trabajo intenta mostrar en qué sentido se puede considerar a Popper como un filósofo platónico. Según Lawrence Boland, Popper se basa en Platón respecto de lo que considera el "verdadero método popperiano". Para explicar este acercamiento, hemos dividido este escrito en dos secciones. En la primera, analizamos la interpretación de Boland de la racionalidad dialógico-platónica y mostramos que la interpretación de Boland sobre el primer Platón, con la que disentimos, es la base textual para su interpretación del "auténtico método popperiano". En la segunda sección trataremos de mostrar que el "socratismo" de Popper encierra en realidad dos significados. **Palabras clave:** Racionalidad-dialógico-crítica- fundamentación- verdadero Popper. Boland.

La fundamentación platónica del "verdadero" Popper según Lawrence Boland

Abstract

This work attempts to show in what sense Popper can be considered a platonic philosopher. According to Lawrence Boland, Popper is based on Plato with regard to what he considers the "real Popperian method." In order to explain this approach, we have divided this writing into two sections. In the first one, we analyse Boland's interpretation of the dialogic-platonic rationality and we show that Boland's interpretation of the first Plato, with which we dissent, is the textual base for his interpretation of the "authentic Popperian method." In the second section we will try to show that the Popper's "Socratism" locks up in fact two meanings.

Key words: Rationality, dialogue, critic, foundation, real-Popper, Boland.

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1. Introduction

This work is divided into two main sections. In the first section, “The dialogic-platonic rationality according to Lawrence Boland”, we analyse the interpretation of the dialogic-platonic rationality that this author offers. We begin by giving a global vision of the different types of rationality that are usually admitted; we point out one of them, the communicative rationality, whose concept is reformulated by Boland tying it with the dialogic-platonic rationality. Next, we reconstruct Boland’s proposal of rationality as a much “intersubjective - critical rationality.” We see how Boland lays the foundations of his proposal of rationality on the dialogic-platonic rationality, specifically in *Euthyphro*, *Apology* and *Crito* dialogues. According to our interpretation, this argument is, as we try to demonstrate, questionable. In the following point we offer our reading of the *Euthyphro* according to which Boland does not establish a criterion for the acceptance of a valid interlocutor. Nevertheless, the interpretation that Boland offers of the *Apology*, the *Crito* and the *Euthyphro* conforms the textual base for his interpretation of the Popperian method. Boland’s peculiar vision of the Popperian method is the subject of the second section in which we specifically present the “real” Popper according to Boland. Far from the falsacionist Popper, that Boland denominates “popular”, the real Popper is the one that he calls “Socratic”. In fact, Boland makes use of the first platonic dialogues in order to demonstrate that the real Popper is not the falsacionist Popper but the Socratic Popper, that is to say, the Popper that emphasizes the exercise of the critical reason, as Boland interprets it. Our proposal raises the existence of a third Popper, the “oral” Popper, based on the same source as Boland, i.e., the Seminary of Tuesday evenings during the 50’s in the London School of Economics.

2. Section I.

2.1. The platonic- dialogic rationality by Lawrence Boland.

I.1. Types of rationality: Although the types of rationality can be more than the ones mentioned here, apparently there is often no serious disadvantage in recognizing the following ones.¹

i) The theoretical rationality of Weberian tradition², “that dominates the reality through the thought by means of the production of abstract concepts”.³ It is then incumbent to the theoretical rationality the constitution of the reality by means of theoretical systems of abstract concepts that give account of it like a whole according to its principles and laws.”⁴

ii) The Substantive rationality of platonic-Weberian tradition⁵ that orders the action in patterns of unique value to which all empirical reality must refer.⁶ It is incumbent on to the substantive rationality to make decisions in accordance with reality (the “Real thing”), which has an extra mental character.

iii) The practical rationality, which we will subdivide in three:

a) The practical rationality of Weberian tradition⁷ is that way of life oriented to the world according to purely pragmatic interests, that is to say, a tendency to organize the way of living in a practical and rational way according to personal interests (in a practical and rational way). “The practical rationality

¹ CORTINA, Adela, 1994.

² LÖWITZ, Karl, 2005 (1932).

³ JARAMILLO, Diego, 1998.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵ KALBERG, Stephen, 1988.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷ LÖWITZ, Karl, 2005 (1932).

always indicates a widespread tendency to calculate and solve the routine everyday problems by means of patterns rationality action mean-aim in reference to the pragmatic personal interests.”⁸

- b) The practical rationality of Kantian tradition would be the realm of the authentically moral action or having to be. “The practical rationality of Kant, in a deontological sense, excludes from the scope of the morality all teleological practical rationality for being determined by personal and/ or group interests and inclinations. The supremacy of the must be over the search of a good life sets up a dissociation within the practical rationality that is not easy to resolve/ of non easy resolution.”⁹
- c) The hermeneutic rationality of Gadamer, who emphasizes the phronesis concept as a model of hermeneutical application, it means that as a practical rationality it assures to the practical philosophy its specificity as opposed to the technical planning “as a practical rationality assures to the practical philosophy its specificity opposite to the technical planning.”¹⁰
- iv) The legal rationality of Aristotle, which is oriented to the common good so that each action of every free human being is supposed to be carried on within a unique whole socio-political priority over the individual interest.
- v) The prudential-teleological rationality (of Aristotelian tradition), that deliberates in terms of uncertainty about the most appropriate means to reach an aim. Rules have to be applied to the specific cases taking into account the contextual data and orienting them to the ultimate aim happiness.¹¹

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁹ VARELA, Luis, 2009.

¹⁰ *Ibidem.*

¹¹ CORTINA, Adela, 1994, pp. 32-35.

- vi) The formal –teleological rationality, which implies a rational action from mean to aim that legitimizes a rational mean-aim similar to the rational calculation by reference to rules, laws or regulations universally applied.¹² “The rationality, then, comes united to the freedom of action in which it is freedom itself in the form of a ‘teleological’ rationality: the search of an aim defined by ultimate values or ‘ways of life’ through the free consideration of the appropriate means.”¹³ “Weber alludes also to a ‘valorative rationality’ that governs an action in accordance with values, thus, it is built according to convictions, without taking care of the foreseeable consequences.”¹⁴
- vii) The strategic rationality, which is used by those who consider other interlocutors as means to reach their own aims. This rationality is often treated like instrumental rationality or procedural rationality. “[...] The competitive threat of the surrounding, the external control of the organization and the uncertainty of the strategic topics [...]” are related to this kind of rationality.¹⁵
- viii) The communicative rationality, according to Adela Cortina, is related to the consequentialism in the sense that moral norms are valid according to the consequences that they have on those affected by them whenever they satisfy universal interests. This kind of rationality implies that every human being endowed with communicative competence is a valid interlocutor.¹⁶ Boland identifies, in our opinion, hastily, since he does not examine other types of rationality, the rationality itself with the communicative rationality, but giving it a peculiar turn that relates it closely with the dialogic-platonic rationality¹⁷.

¹² LÖWTH, 2005 (1932), p.33.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁴ VARELA, Luis, 2009.

¹⁵ DEAN, John & SHARFMAN, Mark, 1993, p. 587.

¹⁶ CORTINA, Adela, 1994, p. 32.

¹⁷ We will return to the relation between the rationality of Boland and the dialogic-platonic one. Cf. BOLAND, Lawrence, 2003a; 2003b.

9- The dialogic-platonic rationality, according to what we understand, consists of a regulated way of Socratic refutation¹⁸ between interlocutors suitable for the critical discussion.

It is in this type of rationality that Boland bases his proposal. In order to understand the questionings that we have formulated to the interpretation that Boland makes of the dialogic –platonic rationality, we will start with certain details of the type of rationality that he proposes.

2.2. The rationality according to Lawrence Boland.¹⁹

Boland's rationality supposes, on the one hand, the modification of the dialogic –platonic rationality from the concept of communicative rationality and, on the other hand, the reformulation of the concept of limited rationality. We will study both points thoroughly.

Herbert Simon replaced the figure of an agent who decides rationally by the one of an agent who decides with limited rationality, as a consequence of the three following facts:

- a) The human beings act based on incomplete information.
- b) They can only explore a limited number of alternatives.
- c) They are incapable of assigning exact values to the results.²⁰

¹⁸ This is neither what is known as a “negative moment” of the Socratic method nor the “positive moment” of the method. At least in the early dialogues the rejection is, to our criterion, the type of dialogic rationality that we propose in this work. As well, there is no “positive moment” or catharsis since these dialogues end in *aporía*.

¹⁹ Based on the Lecture given by Sandra Maceri at the *II Congreso Internacional de Investigación de la Facultad de Psicología de la Universidad Nacional de La Plata*, “Psicología y Construcción de conocimiento en la época”, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, La Plata, Argentina, 2009.

²⁰ WATKINS, John, 1970, p. 200.

As mentioned, Boland ²¹ reformulates the concept of limited rationality in such a way that he proposes the critical rationality as a principle of limited rationality.

According to our reconstruction of Boland's arguments:²²

- (i) There is a type of rationality that can be interpreted with the rationality itself, that is identified with the critical rationality (CR) and that consists of the exercise of the refusal of theses of the interlocutor.
- (ii) The CR supposes the principle of bounded rationality and denies that every human being is completely rational, that is to say, maximizer, in the sense of the neoclassic authors, when taking decisions.
- (iii) The CR is related to the "limited emotionality".
- (iv) The limit between the rationality and the non rationality is blurred.

However, the recognition of the limits of rationality does not imply that in the decision act the irrational abuse prevails, although the exercise of the critical rationality for the decision making distrusts the criterion of rationality as criterion of decision.²³

The exercise of rationality must be continuous, indeed because no agent is completely rational. This is an exercise whose aim is to extend the limit of the rationality. That is to say:

- (v) It is necessary that every agent exerts the CR to decide the best thing in each case because every agent is rationally limited.
- (vi) The previous affirmations suppose the existence of limits of practical order for the human rationality.
- (vii) This practical exercise of the CR implies to maximize the critic.

²¹ BOLAND, Lawrence, 1981, pp. 1031-1036.

²² BOLAND, Lawrence, 2008, pp. 2-6; 2003b, pp. 221-8; 1994, pp. 154-72.

²³ SCARANO, 2007, p. 11.

Instead of proposing the election or acceptance of hypothesis it emphasizes its critic or rejection.²⁴ This point of view stresses the critical importance of the problems and the elimination of errors by means of the discussion of problems. Rationalism, in this sense, is synonymous of critical debate and elimination of errors. This is about non justificationist rationalism. A justificationist states that anyone who claims to have knowledge must demonstrate it, with a proof, that the supposed knowledge is true or probable. The inductivism, in this sense, is a justificationist example that failed in the demonstration.²⁵ Boland's rationality is not a conventionalist one either. In the presence of the failure of inductivism, the conventionalists replace the notion of truth or probability by some other criterion like corroboration.²⁶ (viii) In virtue of the previous thing, it is necessary to (re)define the notion of rationality.

According to our interpretation, Boland (re)defines "rationality" as a critical intersubjective debate. This discussion entails the gradual elimination of the errors and, therefore, leads to the best of all the decisions. The learning from the elimination of errors must be systematic and the comparison of the results (successful or not) obtained in fact must be compared with the awaited results derived from the theory. It is necessary to insist here that the learning from the errors is of experimental order.

Thus, the communicative rationality and the principle of bounded rationality are reinterpreted by Boland as a rationality of intersubjective-critic type of platonic tradition. According to this rationality, all men are

²⁴ BOLAND, Lawrence, 1997, p. 263.

²⁵ SCARANO, Eduardo, 2007, p. 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

valid interlocutors since the human rationality is dialogical. And, if we extend this interpretation to the level of behaviour we can say that the only way to determine which rules are moral is within the dialogue between those who carry them out.

This supposes, to our criterion, putting back the debate about the psychologism from Boland, in the sense that the attainment of an intersubjective consensus seems to imply mechanisms of psychological character, although this aspect is not noticed or recognized explicitly by the author.²⁷

However, Boland bases its proposal of rationality on the early platonic dialogues, especially on the *Apology*,²⁸ the *Crito*²⁹ and the *Euthyphro*.³⁰ Below, we will see why, in our opinion, his reasoning is objectable.

2.3. The interpretation of the dialogic –platonic reason.

Let us begin with the affirmation that all the interlocutors are valid to maintain a dialogue in which learning might be possible.

Boland does not formulate restrictions in relation to some criterion to choose an interlocutor like valid. It is certain, nevertheless, that in his analysis of the *Euthyphro* he recognizes that “Euthyphro is obviously an expert [in religious matters] because only an expert would prosecute his own father.”³¹ However, it seems to us that Euthyphro is not an expert for the reason adduced but because he was, in fact, a kind of priest. Whichever case, the important thing is that Euthyphro is a specialist who, as such, is a

²⁷ BOLAND, Lawrence, 2008.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ BOLAND, Lawrence, 1994, p. 260.

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 161.

valid interlocutor to strike up the Socratic dialogue precisely because he is a specialist. In fact, not all the interlocutors are valid: for Plato, the dialogic communication cannot be carried out with anyone. In this sense, there is no place for the assumption that every man, just for the fact of being a man, is rational and reasons dialogically.

Without a doubt, Socrates' interlocutors are chosen by Plato very carefully. It is, in all cases, people who know or claim to know, about the subjects the dialogue proposes. Thus, it is asked to soldier Laches, what is meant by courage, to Charmides, who is a reasonable person, what good sense is; since Lysis is a friend of Menexenus, Socrates asks him what friendship is. Hippias assures to have written a beautiful speech, for that reason Socrates interrogates him about what beauty is. In *Republic I*, the first interlocutor of Socrates is Cephalus, an old and rich man, who speaking about the serenity in the oldness, sustains that the wealth can help the sensible man to be right and also that having lived a right life grants a hope of well-being after death, because justice is the return of what it is owed. From there, Socrates installs the question about what justice is.

As it is observed, opposite to Boland's thinking, not anyone is a valid interlocutor to exert the dialogue of Socratic character. In effect, the interlocutors are valid because they know about the subject to discuss. However, Boland does not seem to be right when he affirms that "Socrates is a student who tries to learn from Euthyphro, the expert"³² because Socrates is not ignorant either. In fact, Socrates knows the answer beforehand. For the same reason, it is not certain either that "Socrates examines himself the same way he does with others"³³ as Boland maintains in his reference to the *Apology* and the *Crito*.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ BLAUG, Mark, 1992 (1980), p. 43.

Socrates knows he knows, or at least gives the impression of knowing which answer he is expecting. It would be pointless that he offers it to his interlocutor, though. The teacher's role is to make the student think, to lead his student –interlocutor to discover the correct answer by means of an educative- dialogical work under the guidance of Socrates that is, in this sense, a teacher: the interlocutor will be constructing the correct answer with the help of his teacher. Only in this way he will be able to see the paradigm (model, concept, definition) to act then according to it. But the paradigm "itself" exists who constructs it. In this context "to construct" means to "discover", to get closer to the eternal paradigm in question. The Socratic dialogue is more like an educative procedure for the education of geometry than a heuristic procedure to reach the empirical truth.

The reference to the paradigm leads us directly to Boland's second affirmation stated above. We will attempt to show that it is not correct to base psychologism on the *Euthyphro* as Boland does,³⁴ because this dialogue, like all the (early) platonic ones, supposes a metaphysical essentialism. In fact, the essentialism is tied to the discovery of the error throughout the dialogue.

The Socratic rejection to the interlocutor's response is not due to the fact that the answer is itself "false", in the sense of not fitting with the observable phenomena, but to the fact that it is inadequate as a definition. For example, "it is pious to accuse to that whoever commits homicide."

According to this, the interlocutor would be refuted or objected by Socrates because of not knowing what X is, though not preventing him from recognizing particular cases or instances of X. Still more, anyone could recognize, use or drink water, although all (or almost all) would be

³⁴ BOLAND, Lawrence, 1994, pp. 154-72.

in a trouble if they had to offer a correct definition of it. If someone is not able to “look at” the paradigm, then he is not capable either to define it correctly. It might be pointed (by chance) a particular case, but it will not be possible to reach a correct definition. The definitions offered by Socrates’ interlocutors are unsuitable since they are, for example, too narrow or too broad. When Laches in 190a 4 -6 defines “courage” as “to remain in the position and not to flee in a battle” gives a definition too narrow since it is possible to be brave not only in the war. However, in 198 the definition of “courage like something beautiful” is too broad, because there might be something beautiful which can not predicate courage, for example a beautiful statue. What we want to emphasize is that Socrates seeks the correct definitions to the question “what is X”, and that definition will be only obtained by “looking” (knowing) the corresponding paradigm. If “the paradigm is not looked” (known), the essence of X is not defined and, in this regard, we are subject to errors, regardless of whether we have developed more or less skilfully in daily life.

This is about learning from the mistakes but not to look for the error deliberately, as a method, as Boland supposes: we encountered over the error but it would be perhaps preferable to know the correct answer in advance, knowing fully the ideas like the Socrates in Plato, who does not learn from the error but who “knows” already from the beginning. This is not about standing the criticism out by maximizing it:³⁵ it is, rather, to refute according to certain rules. If the error arises, this is accepted and it is tried to surpass it, but this is not a methodological procedure, however, it is the consequence of a regulated and directed discussion. In effect, in the

³⁵ SCARANO, Eduardo, 2007.

Euthyphro, the *Crito* and the *Apology*³⁶ Plato proposes to learn discovering the error but following the “Socratic model of the dialogical rationality.”³⁷

Let see how this model works in the *Euthyphro* case.

To the Socratic question “what is piety?” *Euthyphro* responds: “well, I say that what I do now, to accuse whoever commits a crime and commits sin, is piety itself. In case of homicide, theft of temples or another thing this type, even if we refer to the father, mother or any other, not to accuse is impious.” (5de).

Instead of responding what the pious thing is, *Euthyphro* gives examples, among which he mentions his own way to act by having accused his father. Socrates, on the other hand, is not satisfied with the answer received, since his interest does not reside in getting examples of pious acts but in the essence of the piety. The problem is that when giving examples, *Euthyphro* does not realize that in order to affirm that certain acts are pious it is necessary, according to the roles of the Socratic dialogue, to have defined the essence of piety before.

It is proposed then a second attempt of definition.

Socrates explains his aim to *Euthyphro* again:

“Do you remember that I didn’t encourage you to expose to me one or two of the many pious acts, but the own character by which all the pious things are pious?” In fact, you affirmed that by a single character the impious things are impious and the pious things are pious [...]” (6d -9e).³⁸

Socrates expects that *Euthyphro*, instead of mentioning certain pious acts, exposes which is really that character (*eidós*), so that, directing the

³⁶ BOLAND, Lawrence, 2008.

³⁷ We took the expression “Socratic model of the dialogical rationality” from the course *Dialectic and ontology in Plato and Aristotle* taught by Tomás CALVO in the UNAM, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas, 2004.

³⁸ The Greek words are “*eidós*” and “*idea*”.

sight to him and using it as a measure (*paradeigma*) it can be said that an act is or is not pious. (6e 3-7).

So if one knows what piety is, one is qualified to recognize it in the different actions. Returning to the second answer of Euthyphro, let's see how this one is also rejected.

After the first Socratic rejection, Eutifrón offers a second definition: "what pleases the gods is pious, and what doesn't please them is impious." (6e 11-7).

After insisting on the fact that according to the stories of the poets the gods do not always agree, Socrates proposes to his interlocutor to specify together what piety itself is because there is no doubt that there are different opinions and different kinds of disagreement. For example: if the disagreement resides in the number, the magnitude or the weight of two things, the discrepancy would then be eliminated by just counting, measuring or weighing such objects. (7b -c).

This kind of disagreement, then, wouldn't be cause of hates, neither fights nor controversies. In effect, in the natural scope we find patterns objectively valid, which Socrates tries to find for the moral sphere. Therefore, when what causes the disputes and generates the conflicts are judgments about the good and the bad things, the fair and the unfair, the beautiful and the ugly, in relation to which the possibility of resorting to the canons and the universally accepted criteria is excluded, the dissent is explicable. It is especially true, in agreement with the Euthyphro's thesis, because it refers to the differences between actions that please some gods but do not please others. The inevitability of such disagreements reveals that this thesis is unacceptable, since, still accepting that the pious thing is what pleases some gods and the impious thing is what some others dislike.

There wouldn't be a way to determine, objectively, which acts are for them object of pleasure or anger, since what some of them love is detested by others. Consequently, it can't either be known, when the same criterion is used, if the conduct of that who accuses his own father is or not pious and deserves or not the divine approval, because it could have pleased Zeus but not Kronos or Uranus (8a –b).

The second definition is, then, invalid.

Finally, and after the rejection of the other definitions, Euthyphro responds that piety consists of pleasing the gods with sacrifices and prayers. (14b3). But if to make a sacrifice consists of giving gods and to pray consists of begging, piety would be the science of requests and offerings to the gods. (14cd). If we ask something to the gods is because we need to receive what we request, and if we offer something in return, it will be necessary to suppose that they lack what we give them. Piety would be, according to this, certain kind of commercial art between the gods and men. Euthyphro recognizes that they cannot benefit from our offerings, these offerings only show our veneration and tribute to the gods, and our desire to please them. (15a). However, if we admit the previous thing, we conclude that piety is what pleases the gods. Socrates adds that piety pleases the gods for being pious, and not that piety is so for being wanted by the gods. By virtue of the first, piety is an instance to which the gods themselves are subjected, unlike the second alternative that makes of piety the product of an agreement between the gods.

In response, Socrates proposes to start all over again and try to find out "what is X", in this case, piety, but Euthyphro decides to go away and farewell to Socrates.

The dialogue that we have just seen does not consist, as Boland believes, in learning from the error through the criticism, understood as an

exercise of maximizing rejection. In fact, the student achieves the essence of the phenomena under the guidance of the teacher. In effect, before each answer of its interlocutors to the question “what is X?” (where X is piety, courage, good sense, friendship, beauty or justice) the dissatisfaction of Socrates is evident. Socrates interrogates about the essence, about what we could denominate “the-in-itself”. It is thus an apparent contradiction between the multiplicity of beautiful things, fair or pious and the unity of the Idea of Beauty, Justice or Piety. In *Meno* 74 a –c, for example, Socrates says that “since you call all these things with a single name, tell me which one is that only thing that you mean all along”.

Considering what was told up to here, we can talk about a Socratic realism (in opposition to what is known as psychologism) in the sense that Socrates is convinced that this essence, this unit of multiplicity (the Idea), is not the result of a convention at which we arrive by means of a debate using the refutative method but a result that agrees with the really existing and independent thing (5d) and which necessarily must be reached, and that is already present in the mind of the teacher from the beginning of the dialectic process.

2.4. Summary of Section I.

After exposing the different types of rationality commonly accepted without further discussion, we have seen that Boland retakes the concept of communicative rationality reformulating it as intersubjective-critical rationality. We demonstrate how this type of rationality is closely related to the dialogic-platonic rationality to the point that Boland bases this election appealing to the early platonic dialogues, specially the *Euthyphro*, the *Apology* and the *Crito*. As a strategy to show our

disagreement with Boland's interpretation, we have chosen to provide an analysis of the *Euthyphro*, since this is the most extensive dialogue treated by Boland. Our reading seems to make clear that Boland accepts that any rational interlocutor is valid, attributing this characteristic, inadvertently, to the platonic Socrates. He also accepts, though we think in an inadequate way, that the dialectic procedure is a heuristic refutative method that consists of beginning, between two valid interlocutors, a search process and elimination of the error with opened end, that is to say, a process that enables the two participants to reach the new knowledge. However, Boland lays the foundations of the scientific process on what he considers the truth Popper, based on his reading of the first Plato. We will then examine this point.

3. Section II. The Real Popper according to Lawrence Boland.

Although inadequate, as we believe to have shown, Boland's interpretation about the *Apology*, the *Crito* and the *Euthyphro* constitutes the textual base of his interpretation of the Popperian method. Let's take the following quote as illustration:

"[The Socratic dialogue] of Plato provides a good metaphor to help to understand the Popper's conception of the science process; that is to say, that the science is a critical theory without a method that can guarantee a desired result."³⁹ In the Socratic-platonic dialogue, as we saw, the wished result is guaranteed beforehand through a type of knowledge that, appealing to Husserl's terminology, we could call "eidetic intuition", or "immediate capture" of Ideas, reason why Plato and his dialectic method are not a good

³⁹ BOLAND, Lawrence, 1994, p. 160.

antecedent for the method proposed by Boland. Indeed, according to Popper, the limit between the science and the pseudoscience is determined by the fact that scientific theories must be falsifiable, i.e., its consequences must be observable and should give rise to contrast and possible refutation.⁴⁰ But this simple criterion is not enough because, if so, other disciplines such as astrology, psychoanalysis or historical materialism, for example, that fulfil this condition, would be catalogued as scientific, fact that Popper himself denies. A possible alternative would be to suggest that, in order to be scientific, the theories must not only be falsables but also not to have ever been rejected by the facts. Nevertheless, this solution, besides eliminating the elaboration of the horoscopes as a scientific task, could still eliminate what we want to keep as a scientific practice, in the sense that many scientific theories do not totally coincide with each observation.⁴¹ For that reason, for a sophisticated falsacionist, it is possible to modify the theories according to the apparent falsations, to the point of holding the theory up till success.⁴² In this way, Popper would be resembled as a type of “dogmatic” philosopher, as we read in the following quote: “I have always emphasized the need of certain dogmatism: the dogmatic scientist has an important role to play. If we fall in the criticism with too much facility we will never know where the real power of our theories is.”⁴³ It seems, then, that the dogmatism has an important role in the falsacionism. In fact, Popper usually thinks that it is necessary to maintain (not to reject) the theories with apparent falsations.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ SCARANO, Eduardo, 2007.

⁴¹ CHALMERS, Alan, 1991 (1976), p. 93.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ POPPER, Karl, 1995, p. 55.

⁴⁴ SCHILPP, Paul, 1977; SIMON, Herber, 1962 (1947), p. 56.

However, there is no doubt that Popper considers the criticism to the point of magnifying the critical attitude in science. Still, we should wonder what the Popperian criticism consists of, then: how can dogmatism and criticism be recommended simultaneously? The answer we propose is based on a reconsideration of which Boland denominated the “Socratic Popper”. According to our reading of the Popperian texts, Popper is Socratic in two senses. In the first (i), Popper is Socratic as far as Socrates is understood like the Socrates that displays the first Plato to us, the one of the *Euthyphro*.

On the other hand, ii) Popper is Socratic as far as Socrates is the historical Socrates, not the character of the first platonic dialogues. With regard to this last one, in the Lecture given by Popper when he was awarded the Honorary Ph.D. of the Complutensian University of Madrid (Spain) in 1991, he recognizes in the Socratic proposal of philosophy the right path for the scientific task.

“We do not know anything – that’s the first point-. Therefore, we should be very modest –that’s the second point. And we shouldn’t assure that we know when we don’t know –that’s the third point”⁴⁵

This is the central idea of Popper inspired, as he confesses, in Socrates, but in the historical Socrates: we can never be sure of anything, which has important consequences for the way in which we approach epistemology and the critical debate in general. Popper argued that this should make us more humble and modest in relation to the scientific knowledge and make us see, in general, our multiple limitations.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ POPPER, Karl, 2008.

⁴⁶ TURNER, 2002.

The Socratic Popper in the sense (ii) would support Boland's interpretation. In "Scientific thinking without scientific method: two views of Popper", Boland mistrusts the fact that the Popperian method as understood by the epistemologists of the economy is indeed the one that Popper himself would accept.⁴⁷ The real Popper, according to Boland, is the Socratic Popper. In agreement with the "popular" Popper the key of the scientific task, and the science progress, is the falsation: the false theories are replaced by others until they match with the experience. Thus, "even though we can't justify our theories in a rational way, and not even prove that they are probable, we can criticize them in a rational and objective way, looking for and eliminating errors to the service of the truth, thus distinguishing between better and worse theories."⁴⁸

From our point of view, the Popper that Boland rescues is different from the other one— that Boland does not deny - in the sense that, for the Popper of the Lecture, the falsation wouldn't be the key of the scientific activity. By the way, we are not seeking for the falsation of the theories but of their inevitable rejection.⁴⁹ And this rejection is based on criticism. Precisely, the theories are rejected because they do not resist the critics.⁵⁰ However, the difference between the Popper that Boland calls "popular", and the Popper that promotes the methodological criticism, does not reside in the critic but rather in the unrestricted exercise and, that is, "dogmatism" of criticism. Let's see something more of the critical Popper, that Boland calls "Socratic", and whom he considers the authentic one.

⁴⁷ BOLAND, Lawrence, 1994, p. 160.

⁴⁸ POPPER, Karl, 2007 (1972), p. 55.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

⁵⁰ SCARANO, Eduardo, 2007.

Popper proposes the constant exercise of the “critical reason”. As we saw, to the eyes of Boland, this exercise results analogous to the method of Socratic rejection (as we have seen, the Popperian method is showed in action in the *Euthyphro*). In each occasion, an individual is constantly solving problems (“problematic orientation”⁵¹). This proposal presumes that an individual always acts to achieve his objective using means available for it (“situational analysis”⁵²). Boland establishes here the difference with the neoclassic economist: this one conceives the consumer trying to solve a problem that is, by definition, a matter of choice. “It is important to notice that the problematic orientation is always retrospective. The consumer has already made a choice and the economist post hoc tries to explain how this choice was done”.⁵³ It is true that the Socratic Popperian methodology also values the error as it was made by the falsationist method or the method of the popular Popper:

“Science should be seen as a process that is (potentially) in constant flow instead of a process that establishes incorrigible stable truths. There are no infallible methods, neither authorities nor unquestionable facts. Science is scientific thought without scientific method”⁵⁴.

If we ask ourselves which Popper we should call “real”, it would be just a matter of emphasis: the Socratic Popper emphasizes criticism, but criticism is exercised through the refutation and the refutation itself has limitation, as the Popper of the “Lecture” says, when making concessions and accepting a certain dogmatism.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² HUTCHISON, Terence, 1978.

⁵³ SCARANO, Eduardo, 2003, p. 20.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

In addition, the foundation that offers Boland of the methodology of the authentic Popper rests in what we will denominate “oral Popper”, analogous to the “oral Plato”. Popper’s disciples were reporting his *modus operandi* in the Seminar of Tuesday evenings during the 50’s in the London School of Economics but, of course, not all of them refer to the same and turns out to be too complex to reconstruct a method that should be presumed scientific from the supposed practice in class. It would be necessary to examine, then, if (as some consider in the case of Plato) the unwritten Popper expresses the methodology that the real Popper proposed.

4. Conclusion

In this section we have seen that the “Popperian method” can be mentioned in many ways, fundamentally three:

- 1) The Popper that Boland calls “popular”; that would be the false Popper.
- 2) The critic Popper, that Boland calls “Socratic”; that would be the authentic Popper.
- 3) The oral Popper. Since the authentically Popperian rational exercise is, always according to Boland, the one carried out in the Seminar of Tuesday evenings, which is not published, we propose that, before the task of discovering the “real Popper”, we should understand as such the oral Popper.

In this work we have offered, then, a way in which Popper can be considered Socratic in a platonic sense: the “dogmatic” Popper that we read in the “Lecture” would approximate to the Socratic figure when he proposes to maintain the theories against its initial refutations. Furthermore it is a way to understand the Socratism of Popper, closer to the Popper of the Seminar of Tuesday evenings, based on the oral Popper, but not justified by the analysis of the Plato’s texts.

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