

ISSA Proceedings 2010 - The Probable And The Problem



1. Introductory remarks

1.1. Questioning the axiomatic principles is no more a contradiction in terms.

Modern philosophers of science, Albert Einstein among them, established the relative status of foundational propositions of any paradigm. In spite of paradigmatic relativity, axiomatic principles do not lose their constitutive role[i].

The progressive axiomatization of sciences and the constitution of theoretical paradigms in many fields of research entitle us to adopt this method for the analysis of doxa – the domain we are interested in. *“Doxa, though it is the general word for ‘belief’, tends to carry with it the hidden, but sometimes operative implication, that the belief in question is an assessment of something”*, says Crombie (1963, pp. 33-34).

1.2. *The intention of speaking about paradigmatic structure of doxa was explicitly manifested by Gianni Vattimo (1993, pp. 90-108)[ii] and probably by many other philosophers.* Consequently, it is not necessary to supply more proofs in supporting our theoretical position. It is important to emphasize that, from our point of view, the paradigmatic analysis of doxa is rather a method than a theory, part of the interlocutors’ critical device. The formal criteria of a theoretical paradigm – coherence, concision, and exhaustiveness, as expressed by Thomas Kuhn (1976), represent the points where the cooperative and rational principles of doxastic argumentation can be critically examined, intuitively by interlocutors, explicitly by theoreticians.

Being an *“assessment of something”*, doxa is dominated by axiology.

We define an axiological paradigm the multitude of empirically axiological propositions (judgments of value, practical decisions, norms, orders, etc.) that can be reduced to a doxa concept. The basic meaning is crystallized in the form of a general definition which grounds the respective ensemble of propositions in a coherent, concise, and exhaustive way. Paradigmatic analysis of doxa refers to traditionally formulated doxastic categories.

2. Premises

Before developing our commentary about the axiomatic principle of doxastic paradigms, some aspects should be clarified:

2.1. Any argumentative process is placed in the horizon of an interrogation.

Going back to Aristotle, we shall find in his *Topica*, the first support of the thesis enunciated above: “Une prémisses dialectique est la mise sous forme interrogative d’une idée admise par tous les hommes” (I, 10; 1932, p.14).**[iii]** The deliberative attitude and the controversial scenario of *logoi* and *antilogoi* have their roots in interrogation. “Denn Zweifel kann nur bestehen, wo eine Frage besteht; eine Frage, nur wo eine Antwort besteht, und diese nur, wo etwas gesagt werden kann” says L. Wittgenstein (1960, p. 82). Interrogative logic**[iv]** supplies the explanation of the intrinsic relationship between question and answer. The main target of the interrogative logic is to transfer the conditions of truth pertinent to the question, to the respective answer, making from both members – the question & reply – a unique issue.

2.2. Doxastic dialectics is the exclusive procedure that can establish the fundamentals of axiology.

Doxastic dialectics controls the logic of belief. It is generally accepted, though in not sufficiently rigorous terms, that doxastic dialectics can be defined as being an exchange of opinions. Given the *Principle of Uncertainty***[v]** that governs the subjectively inflected soft rationality of *doxa* – says the traditional doctrine – the cognitive autonomy of *doxa* is limited. Instead of minimizing the heuristic power of doxastic dialectics, unfavorably considered a preliminary step to *episteme*, we have tried – in another of our studies (Amel, 1999), to prove the cognitive autonomy of the *doxa* in the field of axiology: judgments of value, cultural judgments, practical judgments, etc. Certainly we cannot speak about axiological *episteme*, but we can affirm the reflective target of axiology. Doxastic thinking can be referred to what Kant defines as reflecting judgment: “Ist aber nur das Besondere gegeben, wozu sie das Allgemeine finden soll, so ist die Urteilskraft bloß reflektierend.” (Kant, 1924 Einl & IV, p. 15 XXVI).

2.3. Doxastic dialectics belongs to the cognitive field of probable.

Aristotle, who has a double approach to logic, opposed to the logic of science the logic of contingent, which in our days can be equated with the modal logic: “Le discours selon la science appartient à l’enseignement, et il est impossible de l’employer ici, où les preuves et les discours doivent nécessairement en passer par les notions communes.” (1932, p. 74/1355a). Médéric Dufour, translator of

Aristotle's book, makes an explicit commentary of Aristotle's double approach of logic: "Quant il eut découvert le syllogisme, Aristote comprit qu'à côté du syllogisme scientifique dont prémisses et, par suite, conclusions sont nécessaires, il fallait admettre, pour la Dialectique et la Rhétorique, un syllogisme plus contingent et plus souple, à prémisses et à conclusion probables." (1932, pp. 13-14).

The logic of belief was defined by Hintikka as follows: "There is no reason why what is believed should be true." (1962, p. 5). Hintikka's definition consolidates the conclusions regarding the probable character of doxa.

Even if we acknowledge for the doxastic field contingent roots of rationality, and, consequently, even if doxastic dialectics intermingles dialectical with rhetorical arguments[**vi**], the axiological target of beliefs cannot be reached without criteria of decidability.

2.4. Doxastic dialectics (axiologically oriented) opens conditions for an alternative truth, semantically constituted, and not analytically proved.

Trying to define the nature of 'doxastic truth', called by us (1999) the persuasive truth, the thing we discovered was that such a truth is more profoundly uncertain than can be proved with analytical logic. 'The alternative truth', subjectively and rhetorically involved, actually represents the axiological meaning of the disputed issue. While truth is matched to things by *adequatio intellectus ad rem*, as Plato-Socrates required, meaning represents a noetic content developed in consciousness through sense-giving acts. Due to the subjective 'reality' of meaning, the thesis of reasonableness of contrary statements can be judged in Protagoras' terms: man is the measure of all things.

3. Doxastic dialectics and loci communes

Given the considerations presented above and the known fact concerning doxastic instability due to its 'probable' nature, in this study we shall focus our attention on the mechanism of decidability in the axiologically oriented doxastic field.

The task is procedural: We find it profitable to follow dialectical steps, in order to establish to what extent axiological arguments claim a justification principle. At the first step of our analysis, we shall pass the test of *adaequatio intellectus* (argumentum) *ad locos communes*, particularly, we shall question the relevance of 'common notions', those definitions of doxa which are taken for granted in axiological argumentation. Aristotle, in two of his books, *Topica* and *Rhetoric*, interested in finding methods for practical judgments, emphasized the cognitive

function of loci communes. For him, loci communes represent patterns of a specific type of syllogism, a shortened syllogism, named enthymema, which is based on probable premises (Topica, I, 1). The premises on which practical judgment is based are part of a fund of common notions, and, consequently, enthymema refers to that shared knowledge in an implicit way. Aristotle was the first who uncovered the mechanism of pragmatic rationality. From our point of view, adaequatio intellectus (argumentum) ad locos communes supplies a normative test, deprived of basic evidence. Hoping to reach a higher degree of rationality in the same field, we shall pass to a second step and begin to question the axiomatic power of 'common notions' [vii].

Collective mentality is expressed in an ensemble of 'common notions' which compose the doxastic code. Frequently, people, in their judgments of value, ignore the common code, and make judgments following rather personal codes. And even if in every day practice people proceed spontaneously in conformity with the natural need of having clear codes of communication, it is less known that doxastic dialectics is a procedure by which men establish the 'measure' for doxa.

In which terms can we actually speak about the measure of doxa? Can we find justification principles in virtue of which a doxastic proposition could be considered suitable to ground a certain axiological paradigm? From dialectical point of view, questioning the axiomatic power of 'common notions' means to raise a problem-type question. Given the subjective involvement of doxa, the dialectical process of establishing the measure of doxa extends in consciousness the reason of meaning inquiries.

By "justification principle" we do not understand a reasonable proof of relevance, but the transcendental reason for which an axiological definition could be taken for granted.

4. Doxastic dialectics and the cognitive process

A specification is necessary. In our opinion, doxastic dialectics represents in itself the mechanism of decidability. The interlocutors, by their argumentations, judge the rationality of their beliefs critically. The mechanism of decidability is activated by each intervention. The theoretical role we assume is to emphasize whether the doxastic mechanism of decidability reveals a justification principle, and to name it. While questioning both the subjective and rhetorical involvement of doxa, we have in view the meaning- oriented feature of doxa.

The analysis of doxastic argumentation is usually reduced to the examination of

pro & con opinions, with respect to a 'probable' axiological truth. However, it is impossible to imagine a specific argumentation without acknowledging the cognitive fundamentals of argumentation in general. In an extended sense, in an implicit or explicit way, doxastic argumentation is a procedure of reasonable justification, but placed within a hermeneutical frame. During a true doxastic debate, the heuristic gain is obtained by each arguer by meaning inquiry. Instead of being reductive, meaning stages compose a creative process, at the end of which the intelligible object of doxa is deepened in the arguers' consciousness.

4.1. A comprehensive view of doxa presents many possibilities of arranging meaningful relationships.

The probable nature of the doxastic field engenders paradigmatic conflicts and disputes, by means of which human culture extends its dynamic image.

In conflicts and disputes, the interrogative spirit notifies paradigmatic anomalies or paradigmatic irrelevances, manifested in several ways. Because of many reasons, the irrelevance is due to the difficulty to refer a particular case to an axiomatic basis. In these cases, the critical position questions the relevance of the axiomatic principle: whether its definition is sufficiently coherent, concise or comprehensive. Problems inside a paradigm lead to a problem-type question.

A problem-type question engenders a problematic judgment. Problematic judgments are reflections within the field of the probable[**viii**]. Here we present some examples:

4.1.1. Paradigmatic anomaly: The riddle of Judaism.

'The problem' was exposed by the Israeli philosopher Yirmiyahu Yovel (1998, pp. 21; 24). In order to avoid any misunderstanding, we shall quote a passage from the text where the 'riddle' is explained in terms of a paradigmatic anomaly: " said his early biographer, Karl Rosenkranz, one . Hegel was a Christian thinker, but very heterodox. He placed Lutheran Christianity at the height of the world Spirit, yet as a philosopher, he negated it dialectically. ... In Christian eyes, which Hegel secularized but never abandoned, Judaism's transformation into Christianity is one of the major events in the history of salvation. This is the moment when the redeemer appears on the historical stage and is rejected by his own people. Thereby the Jews depose themselves from their divine mission in favor of Christianity, which absorbs their message while negating its flaws and raising it to a higher, more universal level. Hegel internalized the pattern of this Christian metaphor. He even made it a model of his concept of *Aufhebung*, a concept which

means that something is negated but not annihilated; rather, its essential content is preserved and raised to a higher level of expression. For the mature Hegel, this is a basic pattern of reality and history. Every cultural form makes some genuine contribution to the world Spirit, after which it is sublated (*aufgehoben*) and disappears from the historical scene. Yet the Jews continued to survive long after their *raison d'être* had disappeared – indeed, after they no longer had a genuine history in Hegel's sense, but existed merely as the corpse of their extinguished essence. But how could it be that Judaism evaded the fate (and defied the model) of which it was itself the prime example?"

In the last sentence, Y.Yovel resumes Hegel's philosophical paradigm with respect to which Judaism appears as an anomaly, an "enigma". We call the question raised by Israeli philosopher: "But how could it be that Judaism evaded the fate (and defied the model) of which it was itself the prime example?" a problem-type question.

4.1.2. Paradigmatic break (paradigm refutation): New premises of reception.

(2) "Reality should be applied not penetrated" (Klaus Honneth, 1988, p. 76).

When contemporary aesthetics theorizes the abolition of the prejudice 'art in itself', the intention is to reduce the metaphysical dimension of art. The classical paradigm of contemplative art is refuted. The artist does no more say that the whole reality is invested with revealing power, but reality should be applied not penetrated. By mixing art with reality the real change which is at stake is the 'distance' the receiver does no more take vis-à-vis the object of art. The idea of artistic convention is extended in such a way that it implies a performative premise. The receiver becomes an active participation to a 'possible world', where the points of reference are no more those of usual life. Modern exhibitions are rather like an imaginary itinerary or like a scenario that should be performed while entering it.

4.1.3. Paradigmatic crisis: Wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?

In feeble times, when Gods are dead, what should a poet do? Wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit? That's the question, raised by Friedrich Hölderlin in the Elegy *Brod und Wein*. Disconcerted, unable to synchronize his poetic credo with the weakness of the time he lives in:

(3) Aber Freund! Wir kommen zu spät. Zwar leben die Götter,
Aber über dem Haupt droben in anderer Welt.

Hölderlin feels that a change of poetical vision is necessary:

(4) Aber sie (die Dichter) sind, sagst du, wie des Weingotts heilige Priester,
Welche von Land zu Land zogen in heiliger Nacht.

Heidegger, in one of his philosophical essays, the title of which was inspired by Hölderlin's question: *Wozu Dichter?* displays a large commentary about the moment of poetical turn, announced by Hölderlin. It is easy to translate Heidegger's remarks into our terms: *die dürftige Zeit* is the moment of a new poetic perception of sacredness, the moment of transfer from one paradigm into another: the poetry of sublimity, illuminated by the presence of Gods, becomes anachronistic in *dürftiger Zeit*; visionary poets, finding themselves in deep night, going after *die Spur der entflohenen Götter*, discover the mysterious force which comes from the *Abgrund* (abyss) up: *Die Dichter zogen in heiliger Nacht*. In Heidegger's opinion, who dedicated this essay to Rilke's death anniversary, this is the new poetic paradigm, the poetry of Being. Rilke is the best representative of the new poetic vision, he, the poet of Being, took further Hölderlin's message.

There are an infinite number of similar examples of various kinds explicitly or implicitly questioning the foundation of value definition.

The grounding thesis of arguments is interrogated. The problem-type question opens an argumentative debate on grounding level, and the meaning of the grounding proposition is reevaluated. That is the reason we call the problem-type question a heuristic question.

4.2. Generally speaking, in every day life the most difficult problem is to include correctly a particular case into a paradigm.

Such an enterprise requires fine meaning analysis and power of discernment. Irrelevance of particular cases, with respect to a general proposition, demands explanation regarding the common sense. The rationality of the problem-raising process is judged with hermeneutical means. The process of finding meaning pertinence reshapes the entire cognitive scenario dominated by a specific *doxa* and consolidates the beliefs, in each interlocutor's understanding, by sense-giving acts. The three paradigmatic criteria – coherence, concision, and exhaustiveness – become stages of the meaning synthesis inside the subjective consciousness. As meaning is assumed in a differentiated way by each one, *doxastic pluralism* is a legitimate *doxastic* premise.

The premise of *doxastic pluralism* can induce a wrong conclusion, namely that *doxastic indecidability* is inherent and, consequently, *doxastic dialectics* never

reaches an end. G.H.Gadamer was the supporter of the philosophy of an unlimited dialogue, but, like us, on hermeneutical reasons, and not due to logical shortcomings. For each arguer it is extremely difficult to coordinate the justification procedure with semantic tools, because the process of meaning assimilation is endless. During doxastic dialectics, the role of the arguer who questions the axiomatic principle is actually not to contradict, but to notice possible associative links within conceptual meanings. By raising a certain problem, both interlocutors cooperate in increasing the meaning of basic concepts.

The dialectical procedure of doxa has constitutive finality. The fundamental question of our study, namely the question regarding criteria of decidability within doxastic dialectics, directs the inquiry towards the problem of an original synthesis which represents the subjects' transcendental constitution. That means: when the axiomatic relevance of a particular concept is proved, its meaning is 'objectified' in consciousness under the form of a MORAL OBJECT. The moral object becomes the posteriori referent of doxa[**ix**]. A moral object points to a criteria of Transcendence by which the Subjective Dimension of doxa reaches categorical justification.

By 'moral objects', man gives the measure of things, but he simultaneously establishes for himself a moral measure.

5. Conclusion

While in truth-oriented dialectics the justification principle is expressed by the law of tertium not datur, in meaning-oriented dialectics the justification principle has subjective dimension. Heidegger emphasizes the grounding role of subjectivity: "Die Subjektivität ist die wesenhafte Gesetzmäßigkeit der Gründe, welche die Möglichkeit eines Gegenstandes zu reichen kann." (1957, p.137) Given the premise that doxastic dialectics is meaning-oriented, the referent of doxa has a semantic nature. Its axiomatic power is established by self-reflective proof. Doxastic thinking discovers its own ratio (= measure) in an original synthesis.

The cognitive force of the dilemmatic moment challenges the interlocutors' understanding, by giving them the chance to justify the meaning relevance of their inquiry. Doxastic dialectics engenders cognitive intervals between belief, doxa and opinion - respectively, between belief a noetic act, through which the idea of value is posited in consciousness, doxa the conceptual representation of the idea of value in reason, and opinion the discursive form of belief. When the

justification inquiry is settled, the unity of the three levels is reconstituted under the dominance of a MORAL OBJECT.

The rational procedure of questioning axiological axioms cannot ignore pragmatic criteria: normative and situational. From the normative point of view, a problem-type question becomes relevant in confrontation with the common mentality. The normative test is relative, because common mentality is dependent upon a historically given moment (upon *Zeitgeist*). In spite of the heuristic target of a problem-type question, its opportunity is measured by rhetorical pertinence. There are moments when certain debates are fresh and hot, and moments when they remain irrelevant, in spite of their rational motivation.

In an interview, Gerard Philipe was asked about the reason he was chosen to play a certain type of character (which means the recognition, from the part of the player, of his belonging to a certain paradigm).

(5) "This is a pertinent question", was Gerard Philipe's answer, "but an impertinent one", he added.

NOTES

i In modern mathematical and logical theories, an axiom ceased to be defined as a proposition the truth of which is evident; instead, an axiom is defined in virtue of a paradigmatic condition. We call an axiom a concept, a proposition or a general definition which are able to impose laws of coherence within a system.

ii Gianni Vattimo, in one of his essays, *The Structure of Artistic Revolutions* (a chapter in Vattimo's book, 1993), asks himself a similar question to ours: To what extent is it possible to build a discourse, about arts development, analogous to that proposed by Thomas Kuhn in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*? Vattimo admits that, with respect to arts, such a task is more difficult, but at the same time, much easier (see p.91).

iii See further: "Une problème dialectique est une question dont l'enjeu peut être soit l'alternative pratique d'un choix et d'un rejet, soit l'acquisition d'une vérité et d'une connaissance, une question qui soit telle, soit en elle-même, soit à titre d'instrument permettant de résoudre une question distincte d'elle-même, dans l'un et l'autre de ce genre." (T, I,11; 1967, p. 16).

iv See details about erotetic logic – another name for the interrogative logic (gr. *erotherma* means 'question') – in G. Grecu (ed.), 1982.

v M. Billig (1982) develops the theory of soft rationality (fluid thinking, as he calls it) in argumentation. Well trained in Judaic hermeneutics and antique rhetoric, M.

Billig, who is a socio-linguist, emphasizes the role of rhetoric in thinking and appeals to Quintilianus' Principle of Uncertainty, in this sense: "we can never capture the infinite variants of human affair in a finite system of psychological laws" (1989, p. 62).

vi We refer to Aristotle's definition of dialectic and peirastic arguments (1932, 1940). Dialectic argument – the argument the premises of which are probable and shared by everybody, invoked with the intention to prove its validity. Peirastic argument – the argument the premises of which are probable, invoked with the intention of persuading the interlocutor to accept it.

vii During the history of rhetoric, the concept of loci communes was mistaken for the common notions on which practical judgment is based. Later, loci communes, translated by common places, acquired a depreciative connotation, that of cliché, banality. A better equivalent of what Aristotle calls common notion is the concept of common sense, which preserves the idea that practical judgments have rational basis. New Rhetoric emphasizes the importance to rehabilitate the original meaning of loci communes, in order to rehabilitate Rhetoric itself. See, in Ch. Perelman & L. Olbrechts-Tyteca (1968), remarks concerning the definition of loci communes as store of arguments.

viii Aristotle's definitions of both dialectic and rhetorical arguments (1932, 1940) match the way we define the problematic judgment: problematic judgment refers to what is possible, neither to what is necessary (apodictic judgment), nor to something what is real (assertorical judgment).

ix For more explanation, see R. Amel, 1999 and 2009.

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