

Popper vs. Kuhn: The Relevance of Absolute Truth

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I was breeding over a paper on Socratic Pedagogy, and in difference to Boghossian (2006), I do see a way to reconcile the Socratic with the constructivist method.

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The main point of Boghossian's (2006) criticism is that the Socratic method builds on the premise of an absolute truth to be discovered which Constructivism refutes. Starting with Socrates' *elenchus* as discursive method to find a truth, the problem whether there can be hard facts is still a subject of debate on many dichotomies: materialists vs. idealists, objectivists vs. subjectivists, determinists vs. constructivists, behaviourists vs. mentalists, and many more (cf. Stoll, 2014)[\[1\]](#). It can, however, be argued that the question of relative or absolute truth is of little relevance when it comes to Socratic or constructivist methods.

Today, the idea of an absolute truth is hidden in Popper's (1935/2002) idea of falsification. Computer scientists need to define Boolean values, i.e. *true* and *false*. Defining *false* as zero, there has been a widespread practice to define *true* binary as *not false*. The same implicit assumption lies in Popper's logic of falsification. By refuting everything that appears contradictory, there is a hidden postulation that whatever remains is the (at least transient) truth. Focusing on the process of truth discovery, however, one must assume that people who try to find it are fallible and the absolute truth remains as an ideal that may never be reached. Nevertheless, the method of approaching this ideal appears valid. Thomas S.

Kuhn's (1962/2012) therefore models scientific paradigms as a consensus of prevailing, accepted fundamental assumptions of the scientific community. Then, the Socratic discourse (*elenchus*) may be used to achieve a consensus within the current scientific paradigm, which is a close enough approximation of facticity, of which ultimate truth may be an ideal archetype.

Practical Application

I combined Socratic discourse with constructivism in many business settings whenever several people were at a table and debating on a subject with apparently irreconcilable views. It is best supplemented with a Platonic technique called *ars construendi vexilla* (ger. *Fahnenbildung*[\[2\]](#); n.d.). *Ars construendi vexilla* has been revived by German constructivist thinker (and Jesuit monk) Rupert Lay (n.d.)[\[3\]](#). To refine a list of brain-stormed individual positions, in a first step, using Socratic *elenchus*, the precise meaning of the terms used is worked out, so that everybody understands what is meant and unnecessary generalizations, contradictions, and insubstantial claims are eliminated. In a second step, the essence of each position is transformed, considering the motives of its holder, honouring the constructive approach. This sequence eliminates all arguments that were brought forth as a distraction from other, underlying sensitives. In a third step, the transformed items may be classified as mandatory, sufficient, or important, finally ignoring "only important" items. In most cases, after performing *elenchus*, *constructivist transformation* and *ars construendi vexilla* on a list of initial claims, a consensus among all participants could be found.

Conclusion

I consider this method to be a close match for a combination of Socratic and Constructivist method in a mutual learning experience, guided by a moderator who takes the place of a teacher, and whose knowledge lies in the method.

References

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[1] I always wanted to cite my own paper next to Popper and Kuhn ...

[2] Unfortunately, I did not find any English language references.

[3] The mere existence of a Jesuit monk constructivist and the resulting ontological conflicts promote taking a look at Rupert Lay's work.