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# T he philosophy of Josep Lluís Blasco. The transcendental view

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### abstract

In this article we will do a survey of the life and works of Josep Lluís Blasco, who was professor of the Theory of Knowledge at the University of Valencia. We will see his relationship with the Marxism and politics during the Transition, the impact of logical positivism and Wittgenstein's work versus metaphysics in completing his thesis, the impressions from Quine's work and the challenges of his naturalism, etc. All in all, we will present Josep Lluís Blasco's change of viewpoint from analytical philosophy to a more Kantian transcendentalism.

### key words

Transcendentalism, metaphysics, Wittgenstein, logical positivism, Quine, analytical philosophy, naturalism, Kant.

Philosophy has never had good press in our land. Truth be told, it is not surprising, given the historical circumstances. Even before Franco, the most rancid scholastic metaphysics one can imagine had been imposed on the universities<sup>1</sup>. If philosophy needs anything, it is honest work, research, comparison, debate and criticism. To say it simply, it is academic work, "a professor's job" to quote Fuster. Philosophy without an academy to work carefully and interrelate with other academies is one of the worst forms of knowledge. And that, more or less, is what Josep Lluís Blasco found when he entered the University of Valencia

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1 There is a famous, legendary says Pla, story about Law Professor Arana, who interrogated his students (who usually didn't have a clue of what he was talking about and depended on classmates to whisper them the answers) about whatever topic they were discussing –Kant, Rousseau, etc.– but only demanded the refutation. Pla quotes "You didn't know the theory, but you have said something to refute it. Not bad....(and Pla continued with his characteristic irony) I don't think that high culture has risen so high as that which us shown by such true and unchallengeable facts" (J. Pla, *El Quadern Gris*, Barcelona: Destino, 1997, p 332). And this was 1919.

at the end of the 50s and beginning of the 60s, but aggravated by the presence of Francoism.

Despite all these structural lacks, when he started his studies Blasco had two ideas in mind that were as difficult to carry out as they were ingenuous, or were so difficult because they were ingenuous. We refer to Blasco's attempt to prepare a doctoral thesis which dealt with the idea of totality in Whitehead, Heidegger, Marx, Wittgenstein and neopositivism. One must consider the size of the task proposed. But on top of that, he proposed the formulation of a new philosophy. The problem, as he would soon realize, was that a Valencian in the 60s had no chance of doing this in the university. Just the same, Blasco's philosophic interests did not disappear and were directed, precisely toward the line of thought that wanted to eliminate philosophy as an independent part of knowledge.

## Blasco and Marxism

There is a fundamental biographic element that marks Blasco's intellectual life. In 1974 he entered political life as a leader of PSAN (The National Liberation Socialist Party). It must be said that the party had a clear Marxist bent. Marxism was the ideological style at the universities during the sixties and seventies. Curiously, this Marxist style put us on a par with the rest of Europe for the first time in decades. However, there continued to be differences because the other countries had had more time to digest Marxism and its variations. Certainly, the force of Communism in Europe had not diminished, and had revived with phenomena such as May 1968 in Paris or "The summer of love" in the USA (especially in California), but actions like Stalin's massacres (brought to light by Khrushchev during the destalinization) and the repression of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 had brought about the first doubts about the socialist paradise.

In all these tumults, Blasco served as a bridge between the Marxists and the analytics. The Marxists accused the analytics of spending their time on unimportant things, technicalities that ignored real societal problems. On the other hand, the analytics accused the Marxists of lacking the necessary analytic, logical and scientific rigor and of spending time on pseudoscientific theories (Marxist dialectic). And Blasco was in the middle of the dispute. As a defender of analytic philosophy, he had to agree with the analytics' accusations; as a politician with a Marxist bent, he had a clear concern for social conscience.

Dialectical materialism was supposed to be the new knowledge that would solve humanity's problems. The great advances in 19th century science (especially physics and chemistry) were of the nature to which all knowledge, or

what one wished to call knowledge, must aspire. This is what Marx wanted (and Engels moved ahead with) as dialectical materialism: turn it into a science; even more, into the only science. The problem was that it included two irreconcilable terms. Materialism is the heritage of ideas from the Illustration (especially Holbach) where matter is the only thing which exists. Dialectic, on the other hand, is a direct inheritance from Hegel and the idealistic thinking, and is the basis for the motor of history and its change. The combination of the two terms in dialectical materialism can never be considered science, as the latter is a quantitative knowledge while the former is always qualitative.

In a well-known prologue to Galvano della Volpe's *Logical Materialism*, Blasco exposed the errors of trying to make Marxism science and logic into the only science, the only philosophy and the only logical system all at the same time. This Marxist tendency wanted to eliminate philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge.

Della Volpe believed that mathematical logic was an invention of the logical positivists, and therefore derived from their philosophical position. This viewpoint is erroneous, not only historically, but because logic, says Blasco, "is a science which substitutes all content with symbols, and analyzes the structures to which these symbols are submitted, according to certain operations which can be done on and among them(...) it is a science as neutral as mathematics"<sup>2</sup>. If logic is an abstract construct that uses symbols, it has nothing to do with whether logical positivists, Wittgensteinians, existentialists, Trotskyists or Maoists work in the field of study. The problem is that Della Volpe, accepting the analytics' accusations, confuses and mixes concepts. The use of dialectics in political and social fields is acceptable. The problem is to try and create a logical or scientific dialectic. "There are dialectic relations between master and slave, between state and people, between social classes, but I see no possibility of using the term dialectic for the relationship between «p» and «¬p» or between «2» and «¬2»"<sup>3</sup>.

Scientific knowledge is characterized by the ability to do experiments and make predictions and, therefore, implies a form of verification, a degree of confirmation or, at least, of falsifying propositions. The problem of scientific dialectic is that it claims to be logical, epistemological and empirical science, all at the same time. Logic is an abstract and formal construct and, as such, is governed "by the principle we could call internal tautology, based on the defi-

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2 J. L. Blasco, *La Nau del coneixement, Catarroja; Afers*, 2004, p. 64.

3 J. L. Blasco, *Op. cit.*, p. 66.

nitions and rules which are the source of a logical system”<sup>4</sup>. Any application of logic as the world’s logic (be it dialectical or not) would fall into metaphysic and isomorphic dogmatism (as we will see later with Wittgenstein). To confuse the world with the theory which tries to encapsulate it is an error which leads to dogmatism. To quote Blasco:

“Dialectics may be the method of study for the contradictory role that science plays at the moment in society’s development (it is a liberating medium, but controlled by the dominant class...) a study which principally leads to praxis, and requires a praxis aimed at overcoming present contradictions. But scientific logic is not a logic of praxis, and even less a logic of contradiction; and as a result physics, contrasting hypotheses (be they to verify or to refute), predicting results... without taking the contradictions of the present social moment into account in its internal logic”<sup>5</sup>.

Blasco has no qualms with the Marxism when it comes to worries about man’s social problems (he calls it anthropocentric Marxism). In fact, as has been said before, politically he is in the orbit of Marxist thinking but, as a good analytic, he doesn’t mix ideas. When speaking of epistemology, logic, science, etc., he is definitely an analytic philosopher, and in politics an anthropocentric Marxist. To put it in visual terms: in epistemology Blasco wears an analytic suit; in politics a Marxist suit.

Dialectics cannot be logic nor scientific methodology nor the two things at once. “It is not contrary to science to struggle against dialectic, it is the historic moment which does not allow science to be what its logic should be: an instrument in the struggle against all types of oppression”<sup>6</sup>.

As much as historic materialism (that is, dialectical materialism applied to social and historical questions) has been dogmatic and has become, according to Blasco, obsolete, it has served as a “lesson in humility to philosophy: philosophical thought does not guide society (...) but serves as a theoretical reply, as human nature enjoys a natural need for speculation, theorizing without limits, about the problems which society’s complex evolution presents”<sup>7</sup>.

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4 *Ibid*, p. 69.

5 *Ibid*, p. 71.

6 *Ibid*, p. 73.

7 *Ibid*, p. 360.

Marxism has never been able to construct a consistent epistemology, although Marxist dialectic wanted to claim itself to be a science. This tendency to reduce philosophy's task to a science was not exclusively a Marxist domain. As we will see later on, some logical positivists and Quine defended similar positions. The Marxists contrapose the terms science and ideology. The associated risk was that it wanted to be a science which did not permit revision of itself or its methods. Thus Marxist science became just as dogmatic as other ideologies, as it permitted no internal criticism. Its method was untouchable, and therefore its conclusions were absolute truths. A science that could not be reviewed. A science converted into dogma.

The problem that Blasco noted was that the Marxists did not differentiate between theoretical and practical reason. The transformation of the world is not work for theorists, and theorists' errors can be overcome. Errors in practice, on the other hand, are irreparable. And if this distinction between theoretical and practical reason is not made, the result is a "mechanical" reason of praxis and doctrine becomes official, the supreme unquestionable reason applied to an infallible government. It becomes the only truth. Philosophy's task is not to transform the world, as Marx encouraged in his famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, but, according to Blasco "philosophic thought is and must be the slave to society's passions"<sup>8</sup>.

As we have noted, this attempt to reduce philosophy to a science carries the risk, repeatedly noted by Blasco, of falling into dogmatism, of being unable to perform any criticism outside of it which would allow a careful analysis of science, which discovers its basis and limits. This is the task reserved for philosophy.

## Blasco and logical positivism

Blasco's interest in the logical positivists springs from the fact that they were trying to overthrow metaphysics and epistemology as the main problem in the basis of knowledge. As they were one of the most influential groups in philosophy in the twentieth century, Blasco analyzed them to look for their errors, but also where they were correct. One thing must be made clear: the analysis of the Circle of Vienna was not a major concern in the rest of European and North American thought in the 70s and 80s. And this was true because the movement had influenced and been understood, adapted or rejected in all the major centers of thought. And here is one of the problems which faced Blasco and

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8 *Ibid*, p. 360.

his generation. The intellectual life of the country, especially in the universities, had been devastated by the Franco regime and the omnipresence of scholasticism (if the mishmash of Thomism and Spanish nationalism can be given such a name). In England there was no need to explain logical positivism and its posits, because they had already been studied: Carnap and others had been to explain the ideas and Russell and Wittgenstein had debated and rejected (some, including Blasco, would say refuted) them. But in these climes that was an impossible dream.

That is why we find Blasco writing a book like *Significance and Experience*, a monograph on neopositivism, as late as 1984. We find him doing the work that Ayer had done in England in the 30s and 40s<sup>9</sup>, but with the difference that Ayer was a follower and defender of logical positivism and Blasco was a fierce critic. Why did he talk about neopositivism if he thought it erroneous? Because Blasco, following his skeptical tendency to defend reason but not dogmatize it, considers the contributions of Carnap, Neurath and the rest of the Circle to be very important for modern thought, especially for analytic philosophy, which will be his final selection (but not as the only possible philosophy).

While in other lands logical positivism is no more than a stronghold of limited interest, now part of the philosophical canon within university philosophy programs along with Aristotle, Descartes and Kant, here we see that talking about Schlick is like speaking Greek. In an era in Spain monopolized by the Scholastics, in philosophy and by the Marxists (always clandestinely, but still the fashion in the universities of the time) in politics, the entry of analysis was like fresh air in the musty minds of the times. If Fuster said that Russell was more a disinfectant than a philosopher, one can say the same of analytic thinking: it recommended rigorous analysis, use of logic and mathematics, precision and criticism as weapons. All of these characteristics are valuable on their own, but in the decades of the 60s and 70s they had a crucial importance and were the values that Blasco would defend the rest of his life.

All the same, if the logical positivists really interested him, it was because they thought about and offered a heartless critique on the problems of ontology, epistemology and the justification of knowledge. For this reason he went back to them.

The first problem when talking about the Vienna Circle is that it was a heterogeneous group of physicists, logicians, mathematicians and philosophers:

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9 The figure and influence of Ayer in the study of logical positivism is fundamental, and Blasco is no exception to the rule. One only need remember the resemblance in the titles of Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (translated to Catalan by Blasco himself) and Blasco's *(Language, Philosophy and Knowledge)*

Philip Frank, Kurt Gödel, Karl Menger, Hans Hahn, Herbert Feigl, Moritz Schlick, Otto Neurath, Rudolf Carnap, etc., and the lines of thought varied considerably<sup>10</sup>. Just the same, to call them logical positivists or logical empiricists gives us an idea of the basic quality of the group: its tendency toward empiricism as the source of knowledge, or at least as the confirming agent of knowledge. In addition, it was characterized as a group open enough to establish links with other thinkers: Reichenbach, Hempel and the rest of the Berlin Circle; the Warsaw logicians like Lukasiewicz and Tarski; Bohm and the Copenhagen quantum mechanical school, etc. Placing itself in the empiricist tradition, it followed Hume's flamboyant recommendation:

“If, convinced of these principles, we take a glance at the libraries, what havoc we must wreak! If we take, for example, any theology or scholastic metaphysics tome and ask “Does it include abstract reasoning on quantity or number? No. Does it include experimental reasoning about the questions of facts or existence? No. Then into the bonfire, because it can't have anything but sophistry and illusion”<sup>11</sup>

We see that one of the most important characteristics will be the constant, harsh attack against metaphysics. This is important because metaphysics reflects on epistemology and ontology, on what is in the world, its characteristics and how we can know about it. Even though the word metaphysics had a bad sound to Blasco's ear, and that of any student in the Franco era –since the scholasticism taught then was called metaphysics, and so it had a musty air to it, dogmatic and intellectually too light weight to be condemned to the flames– metaphysics talks about ontology and epistemology, the most important topics for Blasco.

The logical positivists, by leaning to empiricism, will try to carry out the task of showing that metaphysics and its presentation are senseless. Therefore the debate was aimed at analysis of language and tried to determine which is acceptable and correct (and can be called presentation) and which is not. Sense is understood in an exclusively enunciative way, that which teaches about the world, that has cognitive value. They don't deny the existence of other senses, such as emotion or aesthetic, but these have no cognitive value and do not belong to any field of knowledge. This is the “empiricists' criterion of

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10 For example, the phenomenalism defended by Schlick is not the same as Neurath's physicalism (or changes of opinion in some of them, such as Carnap who went from phenomenalism in his 1928 book *The Logical Construction of the World* to Physicalist postures with all their epistemological and ontological consequences.

11 D. Hume, *Investigació sobre l'enteniment humà*, Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1998, [translation J. M. Sala-Valldaura, edition V. Camps] p. 205.

significance”, which tries to establish a clear, precise criteria for demarcation. Metaphysics, if it wishes to be part of a field of knowledge, must be able to demonstrate the correspondence of each of its statements with some fact of reality, and thereby show that their statements are sensible.

The logical empiricists, as they only accept two kinds of statements (tautological or analytic, which don't tell us about the world, and synthetic or empiric, which do) put the dilemma to metaphysics: as your propositions are not analytic, only empiric remains, but as they have no empiric procedure to determine their truth, they are senseless. The metaphysical statements can be seen and taken, thanks to the neopositivist language analysis, for what they really are, pseudo statements with no connection with experience and no cognitive value.

We see that philosophy's task is reduced to one activity, clarification of propositions, those of science, through logic-syntactic analysis which lets us see their formal structure. The influence of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is clear<sup>12</sup>.

Philosophy ceases to be knowledge and becomes analysis<sup>13</sup>. As the heterogeneous group it was, not all the Vienna Circle acted the same way. For example Schlick, being closer to Wittgenstein, allowed himself to theorize about philosophy as an investigation of significance, not truth. Carnap, on the other hand, understood that analytic activity had a therapeutic value: by showing that metaphysics was no more than senseless pseudo statements, it meant that the old metaphysical problems were not solved, but were dissolved.

Referring to one of the tasks of philosophy, reflection on the limits of knowledge, it is not resolved, but that such research has been deleted. Blasco, recalling the words of Hume, says: “This igneous radical idea proposed to burn all reasoning that is not logical or empirical eventually does not make sense, in that it denies a discourse on the meaning: if the fact of thinking about the limits of meaning is meaningless, no speech can be meaningful”<sup>14</sup>.

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12 For example “The aim of philosophy is the logical clarification of thought. Philosophy is an activity, not a doctrine” (L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, Barcelona: Laia, [translation and edition J. M. Terricabras], 1981, aphorism 4.112). The problem is that the positivists misinterpret the thesis of *Tractatus*. When they read that metaphysics lacks propositions, it does not mean that Wittgenstein rejects it, but that he puts it in the plane of the ineffable, a series of ontological, gnoseologic and, for Wittgenstein, ethic and aesthetic (mystic) considerations, inseparable from the overall work. All the importance that Wittgenstein gives to metaphysics is rejected by all the neopositivists.

13 All philosophy is the criticism of language” (*Ibid.* Aphorism 4.0031).

14 J. L. Blasco, *Op. cit.*, p. 150.



The most radical of all, Neurath, is who best exemplifies the problems of neopositivism. His physicalism, and ultimately that of the rest of the logical empiricists (as we saw before), is characterized by the so-called “protocolary propositions”<sup>15</sup>, which are separable precisely because of their linguistic form<sup>16</sup>. Thus, through the inductive method, the proposals would be replaced by a system of physical determinations in a search for a language research as scientific as possible, replacing the physical-trivial language which requires proper names to ensure the observational character of the proposition<sup>17</sup>. Their desire to eliminate all metaphysical discourse leads them to remove even philosophy. If for Wittgenstein it was necessary to keep silent about of what you could not say, Neurath admits that there are times to keep them quiet, but not because there is something which can not speak of (which is meaningless) but because there is nothing to talk about. Neurath, in a pure inquisitorial style, prohibits any use of words is not reducible to logical syntax<sup>18</sup>.

Neurath’s coherence condemns him to the flames, as logical positivism’s task is as a scientific and analytic philosophy, which clarifies language, and it cuts so sharply that it eliminates itself. This job eliminated it. And therein lies the contradiction of neopositivist thinking. In trying to eliminate all non-empirical and non tautological statements (experience or logic), there is no philosophical exit left, and the result is solipsism or the elimination of the validity of scientific knowledge. The famous metaphor of the ship<sup>19</sup> exemplifies the impossibility of the antimetaphysical work. If the ship is a whole, with no privileged propositions, the principle of verification is lost, as appeal to the real world is not permitted, the dock where you could repair the ship, but all the statements are part of the ship and there is no way to separate the verifiable from the meaning-

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15 There are as many protocolary propositions as nonprotocolary, but all are real propositions to Neurath.

16 For example: “Otto’s protocol at 3:17: (Otto’s linguistic form of thinking at 3:16 was: (at 3:15 Otto perceived a table in the room)” (A. J. Ayer (comp.), *El positivismo lógico*, Mèxic: FCE, [translation L. Aldama et al], 1965, p. 208).

17 J. Echeverría, *Introducción a la metodología de la ciencia; La filosofía de la ciencia en el siglo XX*, Madrid: Càtedra, 1999. Especially chapters 1 i 2.

18 Blasco’s allusions to Neurath’s dogmatism (and to all logical positivism, but much more noted and carried to extremes by Neurath) are constant and strong.

19 We are sailors who must rebuild our ship on the high seas, never able to dismantle it in port and rebuild it with the best material. Only metaphysic elements can be removed without leaving a trace. One way or another, there are always imprecise “linguistic conglomerates”: as part of the ship. While we can limit the imprecision in one place, it always appears increased elsewhere” (O. Neurath, “Propositions protocolares”, a Ayer (comp.) 1965, p. 206-207).

less. Carnap's attempts to solve this forced him to accept, in the middle of the 50s, that there were parts of theory not verifiable by experience<sup>20</sup>, as the most important statements of accepted physical theories don't satisfy the demands of empirical logic. That is, Carnap was obliged to accept generalizing theories with respect to data of experience and scientific knowledge. As metaphysics was defined as a unit with no enunciative meaning nor any reference to reality, when Carnap accepts that part of the statements are non-experiential, the metaphysical house of cards falls.

The idea that the meaning of a statement can be determined in isolation from the other statements has been one of the major problems of traditional empiricists until Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* or Russell's logical atomism. This error is one of the dogmas of empiricism so highly cited by Quine. In Blasco's words: "Clear and simple, there are no elementary propositions in natural nor in scientific languages"<sup>21</sup>. All statements are related in a network where its meaning depends on its position and that of the other statements in the network.

The attempt to eliminate all metaphysical arguments fell into its own trap, as such a declaration is metaphysical because it includes concrete ontology and theory of knowledge. And so the neopositivist statement was correct, it would be "the judge who sentences himself when he rules his sentences invalid. And this is no more or less than a paradox: if the sentence is valid, then it is invalid, and if invalid, it turns out to be valid"<sup>22</sup>.

For Blasco, the key to the Vienna Circle is the return to the importance of rigorous analysis of language and use of the most recent logical and mathematical tools in the service of the philosophical task. This influence is most clearly felt in the Anglo-Saxon world where it sparks the philosophy of language movement in England (Oxford and Cambridge) and its later extension to the United States. The paradox, noted by Blasco, was that this movement, which came from the heart of Central Europe, had no impact on continental philosophy. So continental philosophy continued marked by Marxist views with Hegelian roots on one hand, by Heidegger's thinking on the other, and finally by the various French schools (existentialism, personalism, deconstructionism, etc)<sup>23</sup>.

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20 Finally drifting toward probabilistic logic.

21 J. L. Blasco, *Op. cit.* p. 145.

22 J. L. Blasco, *Significado y experiencia*, Barcelona: Península, 1984, p. 106.

23 Blanco feels no love for French philosophy in the past century "different French styles, always changing" (Ibid p. 6) nor for so called postmodernism: "This so-called postmodernism is no more, in philosophy, than a mass media product" (J. L. Blasco, *La nau del coneixement*, Catarroja: Afers, 2004, p. 360).

## Blasco and the second Wittgenstein

Blasco's contact with Wittgenstein did not begin until more than halfway through his university studies<sup>24</sup>. In those days, the 60s, analytical philosophy of ordinary language had established itself in the English speaking world. As a direct descendant of the writings (published during the 50s, when Wittgenstein was dead) and of his classes in Cambridge, the analytic trend, divided between Oxford and Cambridge) had made itself known and the Viennese thinker resonated in all the prestigious philosophical fields.

Although it was very difficult to reach Wittgenstein's thinking in the Valencia of those days, Blasco managed to get hold of the Viennese's work. Its impact was immediate:

"When I finished my thesis I had worked through Whitehead and Heidegger's view of totality and wanted to study what Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle had to say about them. When I reached this point I stopped my work on the idea of totality: I'd run into a line of philosophy that didn't fit in my thinking because it was a line that fully rejected metaphysics and considered questions about being to be meaningless (...). In the end, that discovery caused me to abandon my early project, completely metaphysical, and start a thesis on Wittgenstein and analytic philosophy"<sup>25</sup>

Wittgenstein's life, although it sounds like a catch phrase, was like something from the movies. Son of one of the richest and most influential families in Europe, life seemed to constantly shine on him. The family fortune (his family owned one of Europe's largest iron and steel works) permitted the family to live in the best conditions at the end of the 19th century. As patrons of the Vienna of the era, his family lived among the *crème de la crème* of Austrian culture. Composers, painters and writers strolled through their salons (Brahms, Mahler, Klimt...). Ludwig developed around geniuses and the idea of genius pursued him the rest of his life.

There is a reason for giving this biographical data. His work has a great deal of mystery, points which are difficult to grasp, sometimes impenetrable, the result of his form of thinking and of expression. His tendency to hermetism and to aphorisms gave him the air of mystery so characteristic of geniuses and fascinating for those of us who aren't geniuses. So it is not surprising to find affirma-

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24 It was the same Blasco who, entering his third year of studies, asked Carlos Paris, professor of the Foundations of Philosophy and History of Philosophical Systems, to explain Wittgenstein in one of the classes.

25 X. Serra, "Josep Lluís Blasco (1940-2003)", *Afers*, XVIII: 44, 2003, p. 211.

tions in Blasco's writings like: "the darkness and ambiguity of Wittgenstein"<sup>26</sup>, "reflect on Wittgenstein is a challenge to one's philosophical imagination"<sup>27</sup>, or mention "the sibylline Wittgenstein"<sup>28</sup>. Seeing this darkness, it is no surprise that Blasco always showed care and modesty<sup>29</sup>.

Despite this darkness, from very early on Blasco proposed himself the task of Wittgenstein's aphoristic style of treating philosophy to a more constructive notion.

In his first work, *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein presents all his thinking in numbered aphorisms and, through a logical analysis of language, tries to establish the limits of language and, thereby, of knowledge and thought. Language and the world share the same structure. The isomorphism implies that if the structure of language can be reduced to a logical form, then the world has a logical. Logic is the essence of language and the world. Logic is transcendental<sup>30</sup>.

We have already commented on the problem of this stance when dealing with logical positivism. It is impossible to separate the statements, but their meaning comes from their relation to other terms. Another interesting point is that the defense of this essentialist view of language leads inevitably to solipsism (a warning given by Wittgenstein<sup>31</sup>).

Reevaluation of his philosophical position brings Wittgenstein back to the analysis of language. But now language will be considered as something historic, social, more clearly manifest in its use or praxis. Language is no longer an immobile structure but a series of different uses made explicit by human action.

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26 J. L. Blasco, *Lenguaje, filosofía y conocimiento*, Barcelona: Ariel, 1973, p. 109.

27 J. L. Blasco, *La nau del coneixement*, Catarroja: Afers, 2004, p. 225.

28 J. L. Blasco, *Lenguaje, filosofía y conocimiento*, Barcelona: Ariel, 1973, p. 202.

29 "The first part (that of suggestions on Wittgenstein's works) requires a capacity for philosophy that not everyone has, and the second (systemizing the concepts of the work) runs the risk of weakening or betraying it". (J. L. Blasco, *La nau del coneixement*, Catarroja: Afers, 2004, p. 225).

30 We see how Wittgenstein's influence in the neopositivists was decisive. We referred to the fact that logical positivism defended the so called empirical criteria of significance. Logical analysis of language permitted separation of meaningful language (scientific statements) from meaningless (metaphysical) and verifiable from no verifiable. But as we mentioned before, Wittgenstein's interest is specifically in what can not be said, but can be demonstrated. This, although meaningless, is inevitable. Philosophy has been reduced to an activity, to establish the statements as true or false without saying anything about reality. Philosophy has nothing to say about the world, but must demonstrate.

31 "And what the solipsism wants to say is completely correct, but it cannot say, but must demonstrate" (L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, Barcelona: Laia, [translation and editing J. M. Terricabras], 1981, aphorism 5.62).

Therefore, analysis must be brought to these uses, to human action, forgetting all a priori and ahistorical pretenses. The meaning of words does not come from their internal structure (syntax) but from their use in each situation. These different contexts of use will be what Wittgenstein calls “language sets”.

Language, says Wittgenstein, is like a toolbox, each tool stored according to its function. The philosophers’ mistake was take them out of context, away from their “language sets”. Philosophical problems come when we disorganize the words, when they use their place and are in sets they don’t belong to. The philosopher’s job is, from this line of Wittgensteinian thinking, to indicate the correct use of each tool or illuminate situations of misuse. “Philosophy is a struggle against bewitching our understanding by use of our language”<sup>32</sup>, the Austrian thinker reminds us. So it seems that philosophy has a therapeutic function, illustrating misuse and showing how, in fact, there is no problem because philosophy “leaves things as they are”<sup>33</sup>. Blasco easily accepts that there is a therapeutic part to Wittgenstein<sup>34</sup>, but has strong criticism for the ordinary philosophers of language in Cambridge because they reduce everything to this therapeutic vision, and even more, as the only therapy, a sort of psychoanalysis (for example, Wisdom). Basing himself on the same texts by Wittgenstein<sup>35</sup>, Blasco defends the existence of various forms of therapy, and they have nothing to do with psychology; they are logical, conceptual therapies.

For some followers of Wittgenstein, once the therapeutic task has been achieved, the philosophy disappears. Blasco, on the other hand, defends a constructive part in Wittgenstein’s thinking. Following the Oxford school (Austin, Strawson, Ryle), he puts himself in the constructive position of analytic philosophy, defending that there can be no therapy without diagnosis, and therefore, a prior analysis. It is the step from Wittgenstein’s profound grammar to categorical analysis.

As much as he is a clear defender of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, he can’t help being critical, especially of the Viennese thinker’s refusal to elaborate a constructive theory. “Wittgenstein tries to say that there is no specific

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32 L. Wittgenstein, *Investigacions filosòfiques*, Barcelona: Edicions 62, [translation and editing J. M. Terricabras], 1997, paragraph 109.

33 *Ibid*, paragraph 124.

34 It would be difficult, if not impossible, to not accept the therapeutic vision after reading paragraphs like this: “Philosophy’s treatment of a question is like treating an illness” (*Ibid*. paragraph 255).

35 “There is not a method in philosophy, but there are methods, or as some would say, diverse *theraies*”. (*Ibid*. paragraph 133).

kind of philosophical problem, as there are in mathematics and physics, which have solutions. According to him, philosophical problems are not resolved, but dissolved.”<sup>36</sup>. When he reduces all of philosophy’s task to describe and not explain<sup>37</sup>, there is little left to build. If philosophy does not solve problems, but dissolves them, little is left of philosophy, impeding a powerful philosophical theorizing. Wittgenstein’s extremely ascetic view of philosophy, carried to extremes by some of his followers, takes philosophy to the limits of survival.

## Blasco and Quine

The figure of Quine, along with those of Wittgenstein and Kant, are central to the reflections and studies that Blasco carried out in the last three decades of his life. Contact with Quine’s philosophy took hold in the beginning of the 60s. At that time in Valencia a group of students forms around Manuel Garrido. Of its two grand initiatives, the creation of the magazine “Theorem” and the organization of the International Symposium of Logic and Philosophy of Science, it is the latter which interests us. In 1974 the symposium was organized on Quine’s philosophy and thinking. The peculiarity was that Quine himself would be there and offer a commentary or response. This characteristic is what gave it an air above that of other symposia organized in Valencia. The presence of the person who is the topic of the symposium (not only Quine, but Strawson, Pears, and Hasenjäger among others, a fact which sparked the idea of the ambitious project and dealing with vanguard philosophy) is a suggestive and unusual situation.

In the congress dedicated to Quine, Blasco gave one of the talks. In it one can see the critical spirit (in this case directed at ontological relativity and Quine’s ontic commitment) which would stay with him his whole life. But more than just criticism, in this early paper by Blasco<sup>38</sup>, he indicates possible problems he has found, never with demagogic superiority but with the skeptical and antidogmatic position that all serious thought should have<sup>39</sup>.

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36 J. L. Blasco and T. Grimaltos, *Teoria del coneixement*, València: PUV, 2003, p. 57.

37 “All explanations have to disappear and be replaced by descriptions” (L. Wittgenstein, *Investigacions filosòfiques*, Barcelona: Edicions 62, [translation and editing J. M. Terricabras], 1997, paragraph 109).

38 Early, but not the first time that Quine appears in Blasco’s work. The philosopher is cited in Blasco’s thesis bibliography in 1965.

39 He says in *Significance and experience* “Self criticism is a virtue of free spirits” (p. 68). And reiterates: “Serious philosophy is always beginning so philosophers should be skeptics.”; “The

The interest in Quine comes from the fact that his is principally directed at the ontological problem, of what is and how we can know it. The ontological and epistemological problems go together, and any metaphysical response which hopes to be accepted must satisfy both. After the fierce attacks of the logical positivists against metaphysics, Quine returns the philosophical view to ontology, but in an original and provocative form.

The range of Quine's thinking is as ample as it is interesting, but we will focus on his reflections on ontology, philosophy and what Quine called naturalism. Naturalism is Quine's attempt to give philosophy a scientific status. It consists in cognitive problems as psychophysical processes and analyzes them in that form. It begins with the unarguable premise that knowledge is a natural function of humans, as the biological being that he is, and therefore knowledge must be treated like all other physical and biological problems.

So now a problem which considered philosophy, epistemology or the theory of knowledge, is reduced to a psychophysical problem which must be answered from the corresponding scientific field. Science and philosophy are one, a continuum, which is the same as saying that philosophy disappears into the network of science. Quine makes it very clear:

“The philosopher's job, then, differs from that of others (scientists) in the details, but not in a drastic way as those who imagine the philosopher has an advantage beyond the conceptual scheme of his role. There is no cosmic exile. The philosopher can not consider or revise the fundamental conceptual scheme of science and common sense without a conceptual scheme, the same or another equally in need of philosophical scrutiny as the one he is using. The philosopher can scrutinize and perfect the system from within, appealing to coherence and simplicity, but that is the theoretical method. The philosopher has the resource of semantic ascension, but so does the scientist. And if the theoretical scientist, in his remote ways, is obliged to save the connection with non-verbal stimulation, the philosopher, in his remote ways, must save himself, too. It is true that we can hope for no experiment to establish an ontological truth, but that is due, simply, to the fact that all results are connected with the irritations of sensitive surfaces in diverse ways through the labyrinth of the intervening theory”<sup>40</sup>.

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danger of dogmatism (...) has a confirmed antidote in the history of thought: skepticism in any of its forms or manifestations.” (J. L. Blasco, *La nau del coneixement*, Catarroja: Afers, 2004, p. 359 and p. 307, respectively).

In the previous text Blasco tells us that there are two basic ideas: “the first is that there is no cosmic exile, philosophy is not man’s external contemplation of the world and of knowledge, it is in the world and as much review as all conceptual schemes (scientific or common sense) we use to interpret the world. The second is that the scientist and philosophers’ tasks differ in detail, but not in methodology: both must appeal to coherence and simplicity (two golden rules in scientific methodology) and save the connection with sensorial data, as remote as they may be”<sup>41</sup>.

This attempt to naturalize epistemology is united to its holistic concept of meaning. As we mentioned when talking of neopositivism, one unsolvable problem seemed to be empirical criteria of significance, which assigned a direct relation with a worldly object to each, isolated statement, giving it meaning. Quine rejects this stance, defending the view that a statement’s meaning is related to that of nearby statements, and therefore it is impossible to establish meaning in isolation. This inscrutability of reference, as Quine calls it, has as a consequence that meaning comes with the whole theoretical set, a semantic holism. The dogma of empiricism (the basic system of knowledge) together with analytic/synthetic differentiation, was rejected by Quine in favor of a holistic conception of semantics, and therefore of epistemology and ontology.

This holistic conception, insists Blasco, “allows Quine to introduce Tarski’s thesis into epistemology, at least its fundamental point: the relativity of the truth of a statement to the language it belongs to; and this is because of the well-known Tarskian definition (‘p’ is true in L if and only if p) always defines the term true relative to a language; thus true is a metalinguistic predicate”<sup>42</sup>. From that p one can derive “1) proof is only relevant from a constituted theory (or view); therefore there is no absolute truth, nor does it make sense to speak of such; 2) from holism comes the principle of conservatism: unless there are insurmountable difficulties, we tend to conserve views and theories; 3) nothing in a person’s conceptual scheme is immune to review; 4) conservatism and simplicity, principles for selecting theories, are pragmatic principles”<sup>43</sup>.

If the unit of empirical meaning is all of science, as Quine would say, then epistemology falls into it and is reduced, as said before, to pure psychology, a neuropsychology of psychophysical elements which are responsible for

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275-276.

41 J. L. Blasco and T. Grimaltos, *Op. cit.*, p. 29.

42 J. L. Blasco, *La nau del coneixement*, Catarroja: Afers, 2004, p. 210.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 211.



knowledge. It is impossible to reflect from outside of science. Quine states it like this:

“I see science, not as some propaedeutic a priori or basic task for science, but as a continuum with science. I see philosophy and science as crew on the same ship– a ship that, to return to Neurath’s image, as I like to do, we can only rebuild while floating on the sea. There is no vantage point, no “first” philosophy. All scientific discoveries, all scientific conjectures that are plausible nowadays are therefore, to my view, as welcome for use within philosophy as outside of it”<sup>44</sup>.

Just the same, this thesis has two difficult problems. The first is circularity. If all knowledge is reduced to science, including philosophy in its epistemological vein, it is difficult to justify scientific knowledge without falling into circularity, because the same scientific knowledge justifies the validity of the knowledge. Reducing epistemology, and therefore philosophy, to a field of scientific knowledge produces this sort of paradox. Science may or may not describe the form of knowledge (inputs) as psychophysical elements but the explanation and justification of what comes out (outputs) comes from epistemology.

The second problem, intimately related with the first, is the normative character of epistemology. If epistemology is naturalized, as Quine would wish, it loses all normative capacity to indicate limits and order reasoning in its search. In Blasco’s words:

“The epistemological normative supposes a reflection on scientific knowledge itself. To reduce epistemology to natural science is to eliminate epistemology. This exterior reflection does not imply a search for absolute bases: the ship can never enter the dock, but the philosopher, the theorizer of knowledge, must watch it from outside to offer an analysis of its functioning and be able to offer advice (only epistemological) so that the ship doesn’t sink”<sup>45</sup>.

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44 W.V. O. Quine, *La relatividad ontológica y otros ensayos*, Tecnos, Madrid, [translation M. Garrido and J. L. Blasco], 1974, p. 162.

45 J. L. Blasco and T. Grimaltos, *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

## Blasco, Kant and the first Wittgenstein

Blasco's view of philosophy has a very curious trajectory: from the Wittgensteinian analytical school, passing for Quine's holism and ending up with Kant and Wittgenstein's transcendentalism. His progressive distance from Quine's thinking (the attempts to conciliate Quinean naturalism with the Blasco's first transcendentalist drift in the beginning of the 80s<sup>46</sup>) to his explicit rejection (in the 90s<sup>47</sup>) which turns his view back to Wittgenstein's work. It is not surprising that all the criticism of Quine's work from the 80s onward, in his research in transcendentalism, is supported with arguments and texts of the Viennese thinker. So we see Blasco's need to view philosophy from a transcendental viewpoint as the only escape from intellectual impasse brought about by Quine's naturalism.

Much as Blasco never rejected the idea that diverse forms of philosophy can, and do, exist<sup>48</sup>, there is a dimension of philosophy inherent in it: "philosophy is, from its very origin, analysis: analysis of thought and being, and of the conditions of one and the other"<sup>49</sup>. And this analysis leads to epistemology, the theory of knowledge, and more concretely, to the justification of speculative thought. And philosophy continues to be autonomous in its actions for one reason:

"These problems (the epistemological and ontological) cannot be eliminated. Science is always based on assumptions about worldly entities and how we can know them. Reflection on these assumptions is necessary. What can be eliminated is the bad philosophy, the dogmatic philosophy"<sup>50</sup>.

For philosophy to do this task, there must be a transcendental method which is not stopped by reductions nor circular arguments and which let it think about the limits of knowledge and the justification thereof. That is, a normative, transcendental epistemology. For this reason, Blasco directs his atten-

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46 To be exact, in 1982, with the article "The meaning of ontology in W.V.O. Quine" in "The ship of knowledge"

47 Xavier Serra places it in 1993, when Blasco taught the class "Is it possible to naturalize epistemology?" in a seminar on Artificial Intelligence and Philosophy in Valencia.

48 "Philosophy is not a question of schools, and less of sides: the methods and problems must be interchangeable and we must return to the agora where we can all talk and be aware that we are discussing the same thing. (J. L. Blasco, *La nau del coneixement*, Catarroja: Afers, 2004, p. 32).

49 J. L. Blasco, *La nau del coneixement*, Catarroja: Afers, 2004, p. 275.

50 Xavier Serra, "Josep Lluís Blasco (1940-2003)", Afers, XVIII: 44, 2003, p. 215.

tion to one of the most important defenders and founders of transcendentalism, Immanuel Kant.

A reading of Blasco's writing lets us quickly capture his interests and concerns: names like Wittgenstein, Quine, Strawson, etc. appear repeatedly in a natural way for one who has chosen analytic philosophy. But there is one name which is nearly omnipresent in the writings, cited or mentioned in passing, and that is Kant. Most clearly in his final work it becomes clear the importance and the study undertaken of Kantian thought, especially in its defense of transcendental thought.

Blasco establishes real connections in his thinking (with the necessity to reflect on knowledge and set limits to reason, establish a priori conditions, etc.) but in a skeptical, critical form. His transcendentalism is not immobile like Kant's, but:

“So I propose a transcendental discourse which is more flexible, historic and constituent than the rigid, apodictic and necessary Kantian model (...) [A] “transcendental logic” as an attempt to join in one discourse the epistemic base of syntax (metasyntax) and of experience (metaempiricism) [that] can establish a field of thinking (almost impossible, as Wittgenstein noted) in which the logical and empirical conditions of knowledge are joined”<sup>51</sup>.

This drive for transcendentalism which was started by Kant, to create an epistemology of epistemology as Blasco liked to quote Sosa, would lead him to revisit *Tractatus* for a rereading of the second Wittgenstein. As we have seen, Wittgenstein's thinking triumphed in the Anglo-Saxon world, creating various schools. The most representative, Oxford and Cambridge, fought for the most adequate interpretation of the almost always obscure Wittgensteinian texts. From the start, Blasco was in a constructivist position, that of Oxford, and not the simple therapeutic Cambridge school.

Just the same, Blasco put Wittgensteinian thought in an analytic view, of course, far from transcendentalism. In his first work, *Language, Philosophy and Knowledge*, Blasco rejects the transcendentalism in the second Wittgenstein's work<sup>52</sup>. It is not until the end of the 80s that Blasco looks back at Wittgenstein and sees the transcendentalism that he didn't, or couldn't, see before.

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51 J. L. Blasco, *La nau del coneixement*, Catarroja: Afers, 2004, p. 291.

52 “All our knowledge is developed in the framework of our linguistic structures; therefore analysis of these structures is in some ways a priori to human cognitive activities: “We can also give the name philosophy to that which is possible before all discovery and invention”. (Ph. U., 126) It does not try to affirm that philosophy has a transcendental character for Witt-

Transcendentalism in the first Wittgenstein's work is clear to all readers. *Tractatus* calls forth a transcendental vision of life and the philosophic task, a solipsistic "I" marking the limits of the world and knowledge. In fact, a Kantian, "I". *Tractatus* takes us on a journey to the heights where, finally, the reader of the propositions, "through them, climbing, scales above them. (To say it this way, one must hurl out the ladder after having climbed). One must overcome these statements; then one can see the world correctly"<sup>53</sup>.

To see the world correctly is to see it from above, from on high. One who wishes to see the world correctly must be above it. Grab *Tractatus's* ladder and climb it.

This interpretation of the first and only work published by Wittgenstein during his life was and undeniably is correct. But in *Philosophical Investigations* and the rest of the works of his second stage we can find the same transcendental vision. It's clear that there is a very important turn in his thinking, in how he focuses problems. Where the first Wittgenstein appeals to logic and syntax, the second appeals to pragmatism and use. As Blasco later points out<sup>54</sup>, Wittgenstein's epistemological position will be, just as in *Tractatus*, transcendental; a transcendental positing of philosophy (at least in the extended form of the word). More than just try to solve the problems of language (therapy) it also "serves to clarify the profound grammar of the terms"<sup>55</sup>.

It is obvious, strictly speaking, that the transcendentalism of the second Wittgenstein is not the same as that of the first. Where *Tractatus* seeks the fundamental universality and necessity of logico-transcendental conditions, *Philosophical Investigations* seeks a critical examination of the prior conditions (non-empirical) of the cognitive intersubjective discourse. And it continues to be a transcendental position related to Kant's notion of *Critique* (and, by the way, the same therapeutic notion of the philosophic task). In short, Wittgenstein abandons the pure transcendentalism of *Tractatus* but his transcendental perspective continues.

In his *Philosophical Investigations* we read:

"One of the principal sources of our incomprehension is that we don't embrace the use of our words with our look. Our grammar lacks a

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Wittgenstein, but at least that Wittgenstein doesn't destroy philosophy, as is generally stated (J. L. Blasco, *Lenguaje, filosofía y conocimiento*, Barcelona: Ariel, 1973, p. 175).

53 L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, Barcelona: Laia, [translation and editing J. M. Terricabras], 1981, aphorism 6.54.

54 In his article "The meaning of conceptual epistemology" in *The Ship of Knowledge*.

55 J. L. Blasco, *La nau del coneixement*, Catarroja: Afers, 2004, p. 233.

panoramic quality. The panoramic representation gives us this comprehension which consists, exactly, in the fact that we ‘see connections’. This gives us the need for intermediate members.

For us, the concept of the panoramic representation has a fundamental importance. It designates our form of representation, our way of seeing things. (Is it ‘cosmovision?’)<sup>56</sup>.

Wittgenstein speaks of embracing with a look, of synoptic vision. More exactly, he talks of *übersehen*. It is a general vision, global, from on high. Philosophy is a task of global vision<sup>57</sup>. The philosopher, to be a real philosopher, must be able to distance himself.

“The philosopher is not a citizen of any community, and this is what makes him a philosopher”<sup>58</sup>.

The philosopher is one who can distance himself from his peers to do his job. For Blasco, the philosopher does not have to go so far as to leave the community, as Wittgenstein suggests. Cosmic exile is not necessary. But to do his job properly, distance is necessary. Certainly Blasco agrees with Quine that the philosopher and the scientist travel in the same ship, but in it “there might be helicopters which let us see the malfunctions of the cognitive ship from above, as the helicopter is a ship which needs revision”<sup>59</sup>.

The coinciding of the vision and the task of philosophy by Blasco is surprising. Even more surprising is the similitude of images used by Blasco and Wittgenstein: go up the ladder and climb it, synoptic vision, view from above, the helicopter that lets the philosopher rise and see the ship from above. In another surprising coincidence, Wittgenstein stresses that “thinking, in a way of speaking, can fly, it doesn’t need to walk”<sup>60</sup>.

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56 L. Wittgenstein, *Investigacions filosòfiques*, Barcelona: Edicions 62, [translation and editing J. M. Terricabras] 1997, paragraph 122.

57 We find the same thing in “Genealogia dels fenòmens psicològics”: “I don’t search for exactness, but for a synoptic view”. L. Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, Mèxic: UNAM, [translation O. Castro and U. Moulines, edition G. E. M. Anscombe], 1979, paragraph 464.

58 *Ibid.* paragraph 455.

59 J. L. Blasco and T. Grimaltos, *Op. cit.*, p. 33. The metaphor is taken from Dancy who, curiously doesn’t stop to explain it either: “This is the reason Blasco is so complacent with Neurath’s sailor parable, the sailor who must repair his boat while sailing in it. We must keep the ship of science intact, in general, while we examine and repair defective parts. We can’t anchor in a safe port and leave the ship in a Hegelian helicopter”. (J. Dancy, *Introducción a la epistemología contemporánea*, Madrid: Tecnos, [translation J. L. Prades], 1993, p. 265).

60 L. Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, Mèxic: UNAM, [translation O. Castro and U. Moulines, edition G. E.

Going back to Blasco's words, cited before:

“The ship can never enter the dock, but the philosopher, the theorist of knowledge, must be able to contemplate it from outside to give an analysis of the functioning and thereby elaborate advice (solely epistemological) so that the ship doesn't sink”<sup>61</sup>.

This is the philosopher's task: place oneself above to see what problems the ship has, and see what problems might appear in the future. The philosopher must use transcendentalism, marking the path of reason in the search of knowledge, standardize and establish the limits of the knowledge of science and not reduce it to a part of science.

“Reason [notes Blasco] has the singular destiny of deciding its ideals and setting the rules which permit it to achieve them”<sup>62</sup>.

Due to this destiny of reason, the advice that the philosopher gives must be temporal, revisable, historic, conditioned by scientific advances because, as we can't forget, the helicopter must land and fix the ship. But the philosopher is the only one who can rise above and see the ship synoptically: embrace it with a look. The philosopher is the only one who can see the ship from above.

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62 J. L. Blasco, *La nau del coneixement*, Catarroja: Afers, p. 290

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