

MAKING PHILOSOPHICAL PROGRESS: THE BIG QUESTIONS, APPLIED PHILOSOPHY, AND THE PROFESSION*

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Abstract: The debate over whether philosophy makes progress has focused on its failure to answer a core set of “big” questions. I argue that there are other kinds of philosophical progress which are equally important yet underappreciated: the creative development of new “philosophical devices” which increase our ability to think about the world, and the broadening of philosophical topics to ever greater adequacy to what matters. The conception of philosophy as defined by a narrow “core” set of questions is responsible for skepticism about progress, as well as for philosophy’s “marketing problem” — its failure to reach the general public. I argue for abandoning the distinction between “core” and “marginal” questions. The greater openness of philosophy to methodological diversity and diversity in topics, especially applied topics, will make a distinct kind of progress: in the breadth and completeness of the questions asked, phenomena investigated, and theories generated. Such openness may also make philosophy more hospitable to more diverse practitioners. This would also be conducive to progress, in the sense of reaching true answers to philosophical questions: greater diversity of philosophical practitioners has epistemic benefits, such as increasing objectivity.

KEY WORDS: progress, meta-philosophy, applied philosophy, epistemic justice, objectivity, feminist epistemology, diversity

There are few circumstances among those which make up the present condition of human knowledge, more unlike what might have been expected, or more significant of the backward state on which speculation on the most important subjects still lingers, than the little progress which has been made in the decision of the controversy respecting the criterion of right and wrong . . . after more than two thousand years the same discussions continue, philosophers are still ranged under the same contending banners, and neither thinkers nor mankind at large seem nearer to being unanimous on the subject . . . ¹

How can anyone review the last century of professional philosophy and deny that there has been progress? As logical positivism was abandoned and ethical and political questions taken up with new energy and new hermeneutic tools, as feminist philosophy, philosophy of race and disability, and LGBT philosophy emerged, and as experimental philosophers began

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¹ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2010), 7.

empirically testing armchair philosophical intuitions, no one could deny that there has been change. But what is at issue is whether such change constitutes progress, which is typically understood as collective advance toward true answers to the core philosophical questions. Indeed, insofar as new methods and new questions have diversified the discipline, they might be seen as a step away from the convergence taken as definitive of progress.

Mill's comments of more than a hundred fifty years ago could have been written (with some stylistic changes) by philosophers of today — and, ironically, such repetition of the same themes is support for the “No-Progress View,” that “philosophy does not and cannot make progress.”² Those who doubt that philosophy can make progress point to the lack of agreement among philosophers on the core questions of philosophy, the continuation of debates on the same topics, and the revival, with minor changes, of centuries-old positions. Philosophy notoriously seems to circle back to the same questions, even over millennia, suggesting that truth eludes philosophers — and hence that there is no progress in philosophy, as there is in the sciences, where near-universal consensus gradually emerges on discoveries which revolutionize the field. In an entertaining fable, Eric Dietrich — a defender of the No-Progress View — imagines Aristotle coming to a twenty-first century university campus, where he is shocked and befuddled by lectures in physics, astronomy, and biology. What he hears there is literally inconceivable to him. Only the metaphysics and ethics classes are familiar — and there, he is one of the best students.³

Advocates of philosophical progress, however, could describe this iteration of debate as an ascending spiral, rather than simply a circle.⁴ They could point out that Aristotle — even if we imagine he spoke English! — would not understand many of our concepts.⁵ Each time the debate returns to the same questions, with apparently similar positions, the views are more nuanced, and perhaps more importantly, clearly erroneous views have been eliminated. While philosophy has not yet reached incontrovertible answers to the fundamental questions — due perhaps to burdens on judgment⁶ and philosophy's openness to uncertainty⁷ — it can, at least, eliminate error and refine the rival positions. On a Socratic view of progress, philosophy makes progress by eliminating incoherence and false beliefs. As Rebecca Goldstein articulates this aspiration, philosophy aims

² Eric Dietrich, “There Is No Progress in Philosophy,” *Essays in Philosophy* 12 (2010): 329–44, at 342. Dietrich discusses two other prominent doubters, Thomas Nagel and Colin McGinn.

³ Dietrich, “There Is No Progress in Philosophy,” 334.

⁴ Professor John Haldane made this analogy in a philosophy lecture at St. Andrews in the 1990s.

⁵ Thanks to Simon Hope for this point.

⁶ See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 54–58.

⁷ A feature noted by Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 91.

“to render our human points of view more coherent” by eliminating “internal tensions and contradictions” in our thought, which are often obscured by our “unexamined presumptions.”⁸

But some defenders of philosophical progress are more optimistic that philosophy can reach truth on the fundamental philosophical questions — not just eliminate error and incoherence — even though they acknowledge that philosophy has not made (enough) progress and they seek to diagnose this state of affairs. I will call this the “Pro-Progress View.”⁹ By contrast, proponents of the No-Progress View argue not only that philosophy has not made progress, but that it cannot. The No-Progress and Pro-Progress views share a roughly similar understanding of what progress in philosophy would be: professional philosophers agreeing on true answers to a core set of philosophical questions.

Goldstein’s aim, in developing a Socratic conception of progress that focuses on increasing coherence in moral beliefs, is to defend philosophy against charges of uselessness made by nonphilosophers, and it is bracing to note that philosophical navel-gazing about our own ability to make progress has its counterpart in critics from outside philosophy, who question the relevance of the philosophical enterprise. In and out of the academy, philosophy has a marketing problem.¹⁰ As philosophy has become increasingly specialized, many of its debates have become inaccessible to nonphilosophers (or even philosophers outside that specialty) — and this inaccessibility means that it is unclear why those outside the specialty should care about many of these questions. Far from appearing progressive, philosophy has been called obsolete. Philosophy is also seen as homogenous, which could explain the lack of progress: from the right, it is seen as disproportionately composed of liberal atheists, and from the left, as disproportionately composed of white males, both in the professoriate and the curricula.¹¹

⁸ Rebecca Goldstein, “How Philosophy Makes Progress,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 4/14/14, <<http://chronicle.com/article/Is-Philosophy-Obsolete-/145837>>.

⁹ See for example David Chalmers, “Why Isn’t There More Progress in Philosophy?” *Philosophy* 90, no. 1 (2015): 3–31; Timothy Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).

¹⁰ Thanks to Orlando Samões for this phrase.

¹¹ Goldstein (*ibid.*) cites physicist Lawrence Krauss as one high-profile critic of philosophy as obsolete; the recent film *God’s Not Dead* showcases the stereotype of the atheist philosophy professor, while much recent discussion has addressed the homogeneity of professional philosophy. In September 2013, for example, *The New York Times* devoted 5 columns to discussing the lack of women in philosophy (beginning with Sally Haslanger, “Women in Philosophy? Do the Math,” 9/2/13, <<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/02/women-in-philosophy-do-the-math/>>), and more recently it published a column criticizing American academic philosophy for its Eurocentric focus (Jay Garfield and Bryan Van Norden, “If Philosophy Won’t Diversify, Let’s Call It What It Really Is,” 5/11/16, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/11/opinion/if-philosophy-wont-diversify-lets-call-it-what-it-really-is.html>>).

In my view, philosophy's marketing problem — its difficulty in making itself accessible and apparently relevant — and the No-Progress View stem from the same conception of philosophy. I agree that reaching truth on the "big" philosophical questions would be one kind of philosophical progress; like David Chalmers, I am a "pluralist about [philosophical] progress."¹² But my contention is that the view of philosophy reflected in the dominant understanding of progress is unnecessarily restrictive and obscures the progress — and the contributions — philosophy does make. Questions beyond the "core" matter equally — and recognizing this might not only help with the marketing problem, but help the discipline claim the progress that has been made and, furthermore, improve the quality of philosophical research. Reducing gate-keeping will, I will suggest, improve philosophical reasoning — which is surely conducive to progress. Philosophical progress is tied to how we understand philosophy itself and to philosophy as a profession.

I. PROGRESS IN PHILOSOPHY: THE DEBATE

We use the term "progress," applied to philosophical debate, metaphorically. Progress implies moving toward a destination or, at least, in the right direction. Motion is not sufficient for movement to be progress — walking in circles, or moving away from one's destination, would not be progress. Advancing toward a goal, or in the right direction, is what defines movement as progress, rather than aimless wandering. Progress must be defined relative to some goal or some indicator. Just because philosophical views have changed over time, thus, does not entail that they have made progress.

To know what philosophical progress consists in, then, we need to know the goal of philosophy, or its measurement of progress. Classically — for example, as Socrates says in *The Republic* — the goal of philosophy has been truth or freedom from error.¹³ But "truth" alone doesn't tell us enough: Truth about what? Not, evidently, the truths of mathematics or biology (in contemporary philosophy anyway); philosophy seeks the true answers to the core philosophical questions. As Chalmers lists the "big questions," they include: "What is the relationship between mind and body? How do we know about the external world? What are the fundamental principles of morality? Is there a god? Do we have free will?"¹⁴

Skepticism about philosophical progress often arises from comparison between philosophy and the sciences, where we can find disciplinary

¹² Chalmers, "Why Isn't There More Progress in Philosophy?" 14.

¹³ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (New York: Penguin, 2003), 198–204.

¹⁴ Chalmers, "Why Isn't There More Progress in Philosophy?" 5. Bertrand Russell gives a similar list, *Problems of Philosophy*, 90.

convergence on revolutionary new theories. Chalmers, like others, explicitly sets progress in the sciences as one benchmark for philosophical progress: “The measure of progress I will use is collective convergence to the truth. The benchmark I will use is comparison to the hard sciences.”¹⁵ In most areas of philosophy, such convergence on the truth has not been reached (because no convergence has been reached); there is still little agreement on the *summum bonum*, free will, or the mind-body problem. As Dietrich puts it, while science “lurches” forward, philosophy “does not even stumble forward.”¹⁶

Chalmers supports what could be dubbed a Less-Progress View (there has been less progress in philosophy than the sciences) with an empirical premise: professional philosophy lacks the near-universal agreement about truths found in sciences. He draws on a survey that finds extensive disagreement among philosophers on a wide range of philosophical questions. Strikingly, there is convergence of more than 80 percent agreement on only a single question.¹⁷

Of course, one might claim that there has been more convergence on truth than the survey suggests. Chalmers, like others in the debate, acknowledges that there have been some philosophical discoveries that have filtered into near-universal acceptance. These include, for example, the discovery that “contingency is not equivalent to a *posteriority*.”¹⁸ Previously, philosophers had taken the necessary *a priori* and contingent *a posteriori* as exhaustive categories; yet it became clear that we had, all along, been using the contingent *a priori*. This discovery is widely admitted to be progress. But if the goal of philosophy is true answers to the “big” questions, it is clear, at least, that consensus on these has not emerged.

It might be objected that philosophy really has made progress in one area: there has been collective convergence on some ethical and political beliefs, such as the equal status of women and the wrongness of racism and slavery. Such views have changed significantly since Aristotle’s time, and philosophers — like society more generally — have converged on true beliefs (bracketing contentious issues about the truth-status of moral claims). As Goldstein puts it, philosophy has at least succeeded at “increasing our moral coherence”: “And this is progress, progress in increasing our coherence, which is philosophy’s special domain. In the case of manumission, women’s rights, children’s rights, gay rights, criminals’ rights, animal rights, the abolition of cruel and unusual punishment, the conduct

¹⁵ Chalmers, “Why Isn’t There More Progress in Philosophy?” 4, and compare Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 8, Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, 90, and Dietrich, “There Is No Progress in Philosophy,” 329–33.

¹⁶ Dietrich, “There Is No Progress in Philosophy,” 331–32.

¹⁷ Chalmers, “Why Isn’t There More Progress in Philosophy?” 7–9. See Dietrich, “There Is No Progress in Philosophy,” for similar points.

¹⁸ Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, 280. See Chalmers, “Why Isn’t There More Progress in Philosophy?” 12–16, and Dietrich, “There Is No Progress in Philosophy,” 340–41.

of war — in fact, almost every progressive movement one can name — it was reasoned argument that first laid out the incoherence.”¹⁹

Unfortunately, however, it is controversial that *philosophy* can really claim credit for moral progress. While Mary Wollstonecraft, Mill, Simone de Beauvoir, and even Plato gave arguments for women’s equality, insofar as their views remained in the minority, it’s not clear whether this was philosophy making progress so much as individual philosophers making progress. At the very least, I suspect philosophers did not collectively converge on such truths before the general public did. Moreover, the *cause* of social progress involved factors other than philosophical argument: for example, in the case of women’s equality, the development of reliable birth control. Further, in some contemporary issues philosophy seems to lag behind. For example, Susan Moller Okin’s groundbreaking work in political philosophy, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, was published in 1987, a decade after the second wave of feminism in the 1970s — a movement which enabled more women to enter the profession and produce work like Okin’s. Again, the earliest philosophical article on same-sex marriage was published in 1995 and the next two in 1999 — while the first U.S. lawsuit for same-sex marriage was held in Hawaii in 1991.²⁰ On this issue, the philosophical vanguard was in step with the broader social vanguard, not driving it.

Rather than philosophy discovering moral and political truths, it might be thought that philosophers have changed their moral and political views as society has changed. As Dietrich puts it, philosophers “catch up” with society, rather than the other way around, on issues such as slavery.²¹ This suggests a fascinating area for historical research: To what extent has philosophy sparked moral progress as opposed to reflecting it? If Dietrich’s empirical claim is correct, undermining the “But There is Progress in Ethics!” view, it appears that philosophical progress is limited to points such as the possibility of necessary *a posteriori* knowledge — not nothing, but not an answer to free will, right and wrong, or the existence of God.

Much debate, then, has focused on explaining why philosophy has not produced collective convergence on the truth like the sciences — and whether it can do so in the future. Mill’s explanation, in *Utilitarianism*, was that science proceeds from the particular to the general, but philosophy — or ethics, at least — needs a general theory or principle before it can classify particulars.²² Science can build a general theory from empirical evidence; in ethics, the rightness or wrongness of an action cannot

¹⁹ Goldstein, “How Philosophy Makes Progress.”

²⁰ By Adrian Wellington, Ralph Wedgwood, and David Boonin, respectively, according to a search on philpapers.org; sincere apologies if I have missed any earlier work.

²¹ Dietrich, “There Is No Progress in Philosophy,” 332.

²² Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 8. Thought experiments might be thought a counterexample to this point; but their use must be limited to prevent question-begging.

be judged in absence of the general theory. Empirical evidence is either absent for or irrelevant to problems like the existence of God, free will, and the mind-body problem. Mill explains the lack of progress by pointing to the kinds of questions that philosophy asks — questions that cannot be answered by empirical observation. Indeed, I agree with the No-Progress View to the extent that the relative difficulty of proof of big philosophical questions (such as the existence of God), together with the burdens on judgment, makes collective convergence on any answers highly unlikely.

Other explanations for the lack of progress point to the intellectual limits, or psychological characteristics, of humans. Bertrand Russell suggests that many philosophical questions are of a kind simply “insoluble by the human intellect.”²³ Another explanation is that we necessarily inhabit a subjective viewpoint in tension with the objective viewpoint the questions assume.²⁴ Chalmers reviews other psychological and sociological hypotheses for the widespread disagreement among philosophers. For example, perhaps “philosophers are rewarded for disagreement more than” scientists; but this, even if true, does not seem to account for the difference between “the human genome project and the mind-body problem.”²⁵

The hypothesis that something about the psychology of professional philosophers explains the widespread disagreement is tempting. What strikes me in the survey results Chalmers cites is the single question on which more than 80 percent of philosophers agree: “non-skeptical realism about the external world.”²⁶ The only significant agreement among philosophers is that the external world exists and we can know this — whereas a full 18 percent of professional philosophers deny some part of this. Given that these views would be seen as straightforwardly delusional in other contexts, this draws attention to a crucial aspect of philosophical practice: the willingness to entertain and accept beliefs which fly in the face of common sense, or even the evidence of the senses, if the argument leads in that direction. This seems to fall out from a dogged pursuit of truth — or it may reflect other personality characteristics of philosophers, such as stubbornness. However, this explanation must account for why such personality types are drawn to philosophy — and this shifts the focus back to the content of philosophical questions.

One line of defense against the No-Progress View has been to articulate some sense other than convergence on truth in which philosophy does in fact progress. Perhaps the benchmark of science is the wrong comparison in the first place. (Indeed, understanding truth as the goal of science might be seen as naïve: science produces theories, not truths, which are

²³ Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, 90; and see Chalmers, “Why Isn’t There More Progress in Philosophy?” 30–31, on this point.

²⁴ Nagel’s view, discussed by Dietrich, “There Is No Progress in Philosophy,” 337–38.

²⁵ Chalmers, “Why Isn’t There More Progress in Philosophy?” 27–28.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

later discarded in favor of new, better, theories.²⁷) One might argue that the purpose of seeking true beliefs in the sciences is to serve other human goals and purposes: fighting disease, creating new technology to serve our ends, and so forth. If the further purpose of philosophy differs from those of the sciences, then the measure of progress in philosophy may differ.

Indeed, the conception of philosophy as scientific would be jarring to those who sharply distinguish philosophical from scientific reasoning.²⁸ Perhaps it would be more apt to look for comparisons in other humanities disciplines. Although such disciplines might also converge on true beliefs — for instance, the authorship of the plays attributed to Shakespeare — they are more likely to be defended not in terms of such progress, but in how they enrich the lives of the individuals who study them. Such an account must be careful not to assimilate philosophy to other disciplines. Goldstein writes, rejecting the view that “philosophy is best viewed as inward-expressing literature,” “in which case give me poetry over philosophy.”²⁹

Russell rejects the comparison with science while developing a distinctive account of the value of philosophy. He distinguishes utility to the general population from value to the individual student of philosophy. Philosophy does not have the general utility that the sciences do. It has a value to individuals who study it (and only indirectly to the larger population, through them).³⁰ Although philosophy aims at knowledge, Russell concedes that many of its questions “must remain insoluble to the human intellect”³¹ and it is unlikely to result in “definitely ascertainable knowledge.” However, its value lies precisely in this difference from science: it can “keep alive [in its students] that speculative interest in the universe which is apt to be killed by confining science to definitely ascertainable knowledge.” Its value does not depend on knowledge to be acquired, but rather its ability to cultivate uncertainty and “a sense of wonder” and to “enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom.”³²

Taking up Russell’s view of philosophy, one might respond to the No-Progress View that progress, understood as collective convergence on the truth, is irrelevant to its value. Studying philosophy, engaging in systematic, focused, careful thinking about fundamental questions, is valuable to the individual practitioner. Of course, this response is vulnerable to the philosophy-as-inferior-form-of-X problem that Goldstein identifies — if

²⁷ Cf. Daniel Austin Green and Roberta Q. Herzberg, “Progress and Regress,” in the present volume, p. 175.

²⁸ Thanks to Simon Hope for this point.

²⁹ Goldstein, “How Philosophy Makes Progress.”

³⁰ Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, 89–90.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

³² *Ibid.*, 90–91.

philosophy is valuable as a kind of meditation, just give me yoga! Or if it is valuable for its intellectual challenge, give me geometry or crossword puzzles!

It could be pressed that philosophy has distinctive benefits to the individual practitioner not found in other areas of endeavor, such as a “sense of wonder,” or the enlargement of thoughts. One might think, like Socrates, that the process of examination itself makes life worth living. Or, one might think that studying philosophy is the best way to serve other goals: being a reflective and thoughtful person, having sharper critical thinking skills, doing better on the LSAT. As we tell our students, critical thinking skills are transferable; like the truths of the sciences, they are useful for the multiplicity of pre-existing human ends.

This does suggest a different conception of philosophical progress. Philosophical training in critical thinking requires us not to take any results for granted, and so each new philosopher has to go through all the steps for him- or herself. Philosophical achievements might be like sandcastles that get washed away, because each argument has to be thought through again by each new generation. Thus, progress in philosophy consists in engaging more people, rather than in collecting truths.³³

While I am sympathetic to this Russellian suggestion, I think it is also the case, as Socrates suggests, that we want true answers about how to live (or about the existence of God, and so on). Isn't reaching the truth the purpose of cultivating philosophical skills of argument and reasoning — and not merely sharpening our skills or preserving our sense of wonder? Thus Chalmers insists on truth as a primary goal of philosophy in the face of the claim that this conception is “overly scientific . . . We should not think of philosophy as a quest for the answers . . . [but] for something else: understanding, clarity, enlightenment.”³⁴ While cultivating personal development, transferable skills, and philosophical acumen are indeed valuable, what seems distinctive about philosophy is its focus on reaching the truth; that is the purpose of these skills. Moreover, to put it somewhat crudely, an account of progress shouldn't entirely ignore the *products* of philosophical reflection in favor of the people reflecting. After all, if engaging more people is the primary goal of philosophy, and each generation can learn philosophical skills by thinking through old arguments, why do we need to keep doing research?

These points also call into question Goldstein's suggestion that “[p]hilosophical progress is perhaps less accurately measured in the discovery of answers and more in the discovery of questions, which often includes the discovery of the largeness lurking within seemingly small questions.”³⁵

³³ The views in this paragraph were suggested, almost verbatim, by Agnes Callard in conversation. Many thanks to her!

³⁴ Chalmers, “Why Isn't There More Progress in Philosophy?” 14.

³⁵ Goldstein, “How Philosophy Makes Progress.”

Philosophical progress does not just consist in formulating questions. The hallmark of philosophy is the attempt to answer them.

However, Goldstein's comment suggests yet another conception of progress in philosophy. Philosophy both generates new questions and creates new ideas, models, and tools for answering them. Chalmers, for example, allows that there has been progress that does not consist in discovering the truth: deeper understanding of the issues, new views, and new methods. In "Must Do Better," Timothy Williamson suggests that we need greater methodological rigor to address "the hard questions with which most philosophers like to engage."³⁶ Williamson points out that there has been significant development in philosophical models and methods, and urges the development of still more. Indeed, he suggests that much progress in philosophy has been in creating new methods.³⁷ Both Chalmers and Williamson take this kind of progress as ancillary to the goal of truth.

In what follows, I want to suggest that we take the development of new topics, models, and tools for thought as progress in philosophy in its own right. New models, as Williamson suggests, may make it more likely that we reach the truth; but new topics, models, and tools are also progress in themselves. Moreover, they also extend the range of truths that we are seeking. In the next section, I challenge the conventional view of philosophical progress by suggesting we stop focusing on true answers to the "big" questions as essential to it.

II. PHILOSOPHICAL DEVICES AND THE CORE OF PHILOSOPHY

The conventional conception focuses on progress in philosophy primarily as (i) reaching truth (ii) on a core set of questions. But this de-emphasizes two important features of philosophy. The first is the development of new models, tools for thought, conceptual schema, and theories. The second is philosophy's relentless expansiveness, its openness to new questions and annexation of new intellectual territory. I want to suggest that these features yield other, equally important, conceptions of progress.

Dietrich's "No-Progress" response to the suggestion that philosophy makes progress by developing new theories, conceptual schemes, and so on is that such developments are just "modernizing."³⁸ They are more or less window-dressing, not true answers to the "big" questions. But what this overlooks is that there are entirely *new* questions, new views, and new concepts — it is simply not true that philosophy is only reiterating the same debates, with the same positions.

First, the debate tends to downplay or ignore the products of a creativity distinctive to philosophy, which generates perhaps the most widely

³⁶ Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, 278–92.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 279–81, 286–87.

³⁸ Dietrich, "There Is No Progress in Philosophy," 333.

recognized and intriguing philosophical ideas. Philosophy notably uses examples and thought experiments — such as Plato’s cave, Descartes’ evil demon, brains in vats, Hobbes’ state of nature — and heuristic devices — such as the original position. It introduces new conceptual schemes such as possible worlds and, in ethics and political philosophy, various utopias. All of this involves a creativity that the conventional conception of philosophy as collecting truths obscures. Philosophical creativity furnishes us with new concepts, models, and tools for thought: what I will call, for short, philosophical devices. It creates names for things previously unnamed (notably, many philosophers have had their terms of art) and adds concepts and conceptual systems to the world.

The suggestion that part of the value of philosophy consists in creating such products might be confused with an understanding of philosophy as literary or aesthetic. Goldstein, as noted above, rightly rejects the view of philosophy as literary self-expression.³⁹ I am not suggesting we see philosophy as literature — its aim is not to create pleasure or to entertain, it does not choose words by their sound, it puts imagination in the service of reasoning.⁴⁰ Philosophy can have literary qualities, but they are not its point. Philosophical devices are used to articulate truths about the world or to help us understand it.

Undeniably, many famous moments of philosophy — Plato’s cave, Nozick’s experience machine, Descartes’ evil demon, Thomson’s violinist, the ubiquitous boy drowning in a shallow pond — are not themselves truths, nor answers to questions, but ways to motivate or think about questions. These thought experiments can help disassociate us from our usual habits and biases to see things differently. They can help us see how the world might be very different from appearances. Some such tools extend what we can think. For example, Rawls’s original position provided a new hermeneutic tool to model a fair choice situation, allowing subsequent critics to advance their own conclusions about what members of the original position would choose, changing the parameters or pointing out undefended assumptions in Rawls’s depiction (such as risk aversion or the parties’ relation to future generations). Kant’s Formula of the Universal Law enriches our conceptual space with the idea of a universalizability constraint on willing. A distinct kind of progress is the opening of a new conceptual terrain. Autonomy and heteronomy, perfect and imperfect duties, the idea of possible worlds — these give us new ways to think about the world. Readers may come up with their own examples. Philosophy makes progress when it creates better tools or models for thinking or opens up new realms for philosophical thought.

³⁹ Goldstein, “How Philosophy Makes Progress.”

⁴⁰ On the contrasts between philosophy and literature, see Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3–53.

It might be thought that some such creations are regressive. Take Thomson's violinist: from some perspectives, this thought experiment may seem deeply misguided, and its introduction might therefore be seen as leading the debate away from truth. But the example enables the critic to articulate why pregnancy is so disanalogous to providing a violinist with life support. Of course, there may be reasonable dispute over which tools have merit. So pick your favorite philosophical device, and consider whether it has a value independent of helping us reach the truth.

Philosophical devices are distinguished from, say, literary or rhetorical devices by their fitness to reaching truth through a certain kind of reasoning, but their value is not reducible to their instrumental value in reaching truth. At the risk of trespassing into philosophical aesthetics, I want to suggest that just as a new play, song, or poem *of merit* has value in itself, new philosophical devices *of merit* have value. Whatever noninstrumental value such creations have, I suggest that philosophical devices similarly have such value.

But these devices also have instrumental value, in helping us make progress along an indicator *other than* truth: our ability to speak and think about the world. They add to the storehouse of ideas that articulate and shape and help us understand the world and each other. While such devices might also have instrumental value in the search for truth about the independently existing world, we can also attribute value to them, drawing on Idealist or social constructionist views, as contributing to what exists. As Henry James wrote to H. G. Wells: "[i]t is art that *makes* life, *makes* interest, *makes* importance, for our consideration and application of these things, and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process."⁴¹ Philosophy may do so less beautifully than art, but it too can make certain aspects of existence more salient, interesting, complicated, or nuanced. Some philosophical creations enrich our thinking like a storehouse of conceptual furniture.

Until this point, I have not said much that is controversial about progress in philosophy. Almost everyone debating it concedes that there has been progress in tools and methods. Indeed, Williamson focuses on methodological progress, although he focuses on rigorous formal methods, while I am including thought experiments, allegories, and conceptual schema. I have been suggesting that we should accord all of these more importance than is generally done in considering whether philosophy makes progress.

But now I want to extend this point by rejecting the "big" questions as the primary goal of philosophy and suggest that philosophy makes

⁴¹ Cited in Robert Pippin, *Henry James and Modern Moral Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 14. Pippin suggests we read James as an Idealist; I do not endorse Idealist metaphysics but hope the reference helps to suggest how ideas might be thought to shape or create reality.

progress as it broadens its areas of concern beyond them. While some of my examples — Descartes' evil demon, Nozick's experience machine — help us think about the “core” philosophical questions (knowledge, the good), others do not: Thomson's violinist, or the drowning boy. We should reject the weight that is given to a narrow set of historically defined questions in measuring philosophical progress and consider philosophy's extension and application in different areas as a form of progress.

This takes us to my second point: philosophy's openness to new questions. The violinist and drowning boy thought experiments help us with relatively new philosophical topics, abortion and famine relief. In my view, no topics should be off the table *a priori* as unphilosophical or marginal; the evaluative distinction between margin and center in philosophy should be abandoned altogether. The morality of abortion, or the nature of gender or race, may be just as philosophically important and interesting as the “big” questions.

Understanding philosophy as defined by a core set of historically defined questions or topics contributes to what Kristie Dotson calls “a culture of justification” in philosophy.⁴² By this, she means that an onus is put on those engaged in nontraditional work or working on new topics to justify their status as philosophical by showing how they are connected to the central themes and questions of philosophy. (Her phrase is easily misunderstood: she is not rejecting the process of giving reasons for, or justifying, beliefs.) This “culture of justification,” of course, occurs in a social context in which academic philosophy does not carry much cultural weight; when the “Philosophy” section in bookstores carries books on aromatherapy, drawing a line between what is, and is not, philosophy, may seem particularly urgent. Sometimes — for instance, in an “Introduction to Philosophy” class — it is helpful to spell out certain demarcations, such as between philosophy and rhetoric or philosophy and religion.

But the phenomenon Dotson describes works invidiously against competent and trained philosophers with the effect of restricting entry into the domain of philosophy. For example, I have repeatedly heard the assertion that feminist philosophy, or feminist epistemology, is not, and cannot be, philosophy, or that topics such as marriage are not philosophical topics — or definitely not core topics, even if they may be permitted to inhabit the margins. Martha Nussbaum writes of how she was discouraged from undertaking philosophical analysis of ancient Greek tragedies (despite the fact that ancient Greek philosophers closely engaged with them) while pursuing a graduate degree in philosophy.⁴³ Anecdotally, I have heard many versions of this complaint: philosophy faculty or students being told that their topics (disability, immigration, sexual assault, sexuality, race, aesthetics, all of Kant's ethics) were not philosophy — or, at best, were marginal.

⁴² Kristie Dotson, “How Is This Paper Philosophy?” *Comparative Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2012): 3–29, 5–8.

⁴³ Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 12–13.

Dotson's point is that such gate-keeping renders professional philosophy inhospitable to diversity, by which she means diversity in race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, and (dis)ability, as well as diversity in methodological approaches such as "Eastern, applied, engaged, fieldwork, field, public, experimental, literary approaches."⁴⁴ This exclusivity arises from an excessive focus in professional philosophy on requiring practitioners to legitimate nontraditional work as philosophy by showing its connection to the traditional preoccupations of the discipline. It might seem that such gate-keeping is in some instances appropriate: we could imagine a mathematical gate-keeper instructing someone who is just writing squiggles, "that's not math." But Dotson's point is that the question — some variation on "How is this philosophy?" — is frequently addressed to practitioners who should be presumed to be engaged in philosophy. Someone just writing squiggles, after all, would not be in a graduate program or faculty position in math; yet it is in such contexts that the challenge is issued. Epistemically, it is pretty clear that ruling out unfamiliar or innovative topics or methodologies is somewhat limiting to a discipline. Without asking new questions, or trying new methods, such a discipline is indeed unlikely to make progress.

The debate over progress I examined above took philosophical progress to be defined by answering a set of traditional core questions. Dotson's argument suggests that defining philosophy in relation to a set of traditional core questions is implicitly reactionary. She argues instead for a philosophy based on "praxis," investigating questions arising from people's experience, with the recognition that these will be as diverse as the people involved. Quoting Philip Kitcher, she writes that such philosophical questions will "emerge from situations in which people — many people, not just an elite class — find themselves."⁴⁵ This of course prompts a question as to what makes these questions philosophical — and here we will perhaps be forced to point to methodology such as the use of logical argument, a focus on conceptual inquiry, or even profundity (looking beyond conventional or apparent answers). What I want to adopt wholeheartedly from Dotson's view is the suggestion that applied topics or those arising from lived experience be treated on a par with any other philosophical questions, thus dissolving the distinction in importance between the core and the margins. Openness to a broader range of philosophical topics as equally philosophical — particularly applied topics — requires rejecting the distinction between the core and the margins.

Professional philosophers often seem to view the applied realm of philosophical inquiry as of less interest, certainly marginal if philosophical

⁴⁴ Dotson, "How Is This Paper Philosophy?" 5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

at all.⁴⁶ Applied topics are surely not included in the lists of the “core” questions. By “applied philosophy” I mean philosophy that focuses on questions involving empirical data, starting from lived experience, or, as the Society for Applied Philosophy defines it, has “a direct bearing on areas of practical concern”; below I’ll give a number of examples.⁴⁷

Theorizing about the applied — bringing philosophy to experience — is crucial to philosophy. Our experience directs our attention to what matters. Treating applied philosophy and philosophy starting in lived experience as fully and legitimately philosophy is important not only for the reason Dotson gives — that it will make the discipline more hospitable to diverse practitioners — but also because it allows philosophy to tackle questions which are more relevant and by many measures more important. First, applied philosophy may be more likely to reach truth or a more accurate understanding in some areas, and this is one reason it is more likely to progress. But I am also making the further claim that expansion into new areas is itself a form of philosophical progress — along the indicators of reaching truth *about what matters* or generating a more complete view of the world.

First, applied philosophy is more likely to achieve truth or accuracy in some areas for the same reasons that nonideal theory is. Charles Mills criticizes ideal theory in ethics, characterized as presenting an idealized social ontology (such as assuming everyone has equal power), assuming idealized capacities, knowledge, or social institutions, ignoring oppression, or assuming strict compliance.⁴⁸ (As one who sometimes engages in ideal theorizing, I think that both ideal and nonideal theory have a role within philosophy, so long as the ideal is not confused with the actual, as Mills acknowledges!) When the actual, nonideal, world is not taken into account, idealized models falter: for example, they fail to respond to injustice because they ignore it, they design institutions vulnerable to real-world failure because they do not take noncompliance into account, or they prescribe similar treatment for people who are relevantly dissimilar.

Nonideal theory begins with actual conditions rather than idealized assumptions. It is not identical to applied philosophy: one could approach applied questions using idealized assumptions. But applied philosophy would include much nonideal theory, whereas reflection abstracted from the empirical risks falling into idealizations. For example, if a person with a disability chooses to philosophize about her situation or to investigate the injustices experienced by people with disabilities, her work is by Mills’s definition nonideal theory. Nonideal theory can offer better

⁴⁶ This is an empirical claim; it is based on my experience and anecdote. I would love to be proved wrong!

⁴⁷ See the definition given by the Society for Applied Philosophy, <<http://www.appliedphil.org/view/about.html>>.

⁴⁸ Charles Mills, “‘Ideal Theory’ as Ideology,” *Hypatia* 20, no. 3 (2005): 165–84, at 168–69.

prescriptions to address injustice and design better institutions for actual conditions than ideal theory. That is, it can come closer to the truth on these questions.

Second, broadening the range of philosophical topics makes progress in another way: by increasing the important truths sought and insights gained. A broader set of topics, informed by experience and practical concern, is more likely to be adequate to the range of human experience, reflecting the variety of human situations and articulating, or making visible, previously unarticulated, or hidden, experience. This might yield a better accounting of ethical phenomena in our subjective experience, such as Bernard Williams's exploration of regret or Lisa Tessman's examination of moral failure (the experience of being pressed by demands on all sides which are impossible to fulfill). Or they could articulate a particular kind of wrong, such as Miranda Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice (how the knowledge claims of some are trusted less than the knowledge claims of others). Being able to say something about such phenomena, by naming and describing them, is considerable progress.

This is not to imply that such progress — opening up new territories through applied philosophy — only takes place within ethics. We find it in any branch of philosophy of science which informs itself about scientific practice and empirical research — such as philosophy of physics, biology, or psychology. We find it in philosophy of artificial intelligence. And we find it in experimental philosophy's use of experience to test philosophical claims about intuitions, which can yield insights about how underlying biases drive intuitions.

Before proceeding, I want to give a few concrete examples, drawing on the areas of philosophy I know best, and sketching in a few related areas. I would ask the reader to consider similar contributions in his or her own philosophical field. These developments are removed from the core questions of philosophy, yet, in my view, they are huge steps forward.

A major twentieth century contribution within feminist ethics was the development of care ethics from psychologist Carol Gilligan's empirical work on gendered moral reasoning.⁴⁹ Care ethics staked out a distinctive new moral position with a focus on interdependency, nurturing, and, in some versions, maternity. I do not think that early versions of care ethics give us the true moral view; but the creation of care ethics moved ethical theory toward greater adequacy, incorporating previously ignored aspects of experience.⁵⁰ Within a range of moral and political theories, care ethics has spurred theorizing more adequate to the range of human ethical experience. To sharpen the point: it is a great improvement to moral theory to incorporate care, even if the theory is not true (as early versions

⁴⁹ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁵⁰ See my *Minimizing Marriage: Marriage, Morality, and the Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 81–88.

of care ethics were not). Theory is amplified in a way that reflects more of human experience. This is not mere refinement of previously held positions, but an important addition.

Similarly, feminist philosophers such as Okin argued for the centrality of the family in political philosophy, showing how its political importance had been ignored. Feminist investigations of justice in the private sphere focused on women's equality and examined how wider social pressures shape interpersonal relationships, that is, how "the personal is political." Political philosophy has since turned with new interest to questions of justice in the family, children's and parents' rights, procreation, and marriage, opening new — and important — areas of inquiry.

Within gay and lesbian philosophy, Calhoun developed an account of what she claims is the distinctive form of lesbian and gay oppression — displacement. Because lesbians and gays can pass as straight, they can (she argues) avoid direct discrimination as most women or racial minorities cannot. But law displaced them from the central institutions of American life (marriage and the military), thereby marginalizing them. Her analysis highlights a form of oppression structurally different than that faced by women or racial minorities.⁵¹ It adds to our understanding of what form oppression might take.

These are a few detailed examples. The list could go on and on: Simone de Beauvoir's distinction between sex and gender, Susan Brison's work on the effects of sexual violence on identity, Alison Jaggar's work on the epistemic importance of "outlaw emotions," Lisa Tessman's work on moral failure, Ami Harbin's work on disorientation, Carlos Alberto Sanchez's work on immigrant identity, Charles Mills's work on the nature of blackness, Kristie Dotson's work on invisibility, and Helen Longino's work in feminist philosophy of science, on how the biases of our perspectives complicate our accounts of objectivity, and many more. This is not to mention work on the metaphysics of race, racial and transracial identity, essentialism and intersectionality, global justice, or disability.

These contributions — and others, in philosophy of the sciences, experimental philosophy, and throughout the rest of philosophy — were made possible by applied philosophy. They articulated the previously unarticulated and asked new questions about matters of great practical concern. I want to adapt Mill's comments about progress in philosophy: just as science makes progress by starting with particular cases, so too philosophy can make progress by starting with the empirical — with practical questions, scientific research, or lived experience.

A view of philosophy that denies that these are important forms of progress because they do not answer the "big" questions is unreasonably,

⁵¹ Cheshire Calhoun, *Feminism, the Family, and the Politics of the Closet: Lesbian and Gay Displacement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

and arbitrarily, narrow. It might be objected that valuing the “big” questions more is not arbitrary: there is a reason — namely, these questions are more foundational. But, for one thing, their very formulation may include biases that applied philosophy can reveal, such as a culturally specific understanding of free will, morality, or God. For another, why is the more foundational more philosophically important? Presumably it is for the Cartesian reason that more foundational truths ground less foundational truths. But not only is the project of discovering indubitable first premises from which we can demonstrate all other truths overly ambitious, we can make progress in applied questions without settling these questions. I do not need to know the truth about the nature of justice to know that slavery is wrong. Moreover, the examples I gave above suggested how philosophy can make progress without reaching truths, by making our theories more complete and increasing our ability to think about the world. While we can distinguish the more and less foundational, making this an *evaluative* distinction — between greater and less philosophical importance, or “core” and “margins” — is not only implausible when we consider the importance of many applied topics, it also has bad effects.

III. BREADTH, OBJECTIVITY, AND THE PROFESSION

So far I have focused on how applied topics, and a broader understanding of the philosophical, can yield a more complete understanding, and one more attuned to what matters. I am not claiming that breadth alone is valuable, since breadth could encompass the banal or trivial. For instance, there are many TV shows — philosophy will not increase our understanding insofar as it philosophizes about more, rather than fewer, TV shows. But if philosophy is driven by our interests and experience, as Dotson suggests, it is more likely to track what matters, and hence yield more insights on matters of great practical concern and other significance, and this is a kind of progress.

But broadening the scope of philosophy to embrace applied philosophy on equal terms relates to progress in another way: it creates conditions conducive to progress, understood as reaching the truth. This is because broadening the range of “legitimate” philosophical topics by reducing gate-keeping and the “culture of justification” has epistemic benefits. Dotson argues that the “culture of justification” makes philosophy inhospitable to diverse practitioners (diverse in both identity and approach). The homogeneity of philosophy, however, has epistemic costs. In what follows, I argue that greater diversity in the profession (again, in terms of identities as well as approaches) will provide epistemic benefits conducive to progress, understood as reaching the truth. There are epistemic advantages to a wider representation of different subject positions and different methodologies (which, on Dotson’s hypothesis, follows from accepting a broader range of topics as philosophical).

It might be thought that diversity is epistemically advantageous because a larger pool of philosophers will yield more talented individuals. For example, on Mill's optimistic account of the progress of modernity, the reduction of arbitrary barriers to entering a profession will increase the number of high-quality candidates.⁵² Of course, even when such barriers are removed, those formerly excluded might still face informal barriers or discrimination. In any case, my argument does not rest on this Millian point.

Diverse representation improves the quality of the investigation process, so that diversity is conducive to progress. There has been extensive discussion within feminist epistemology of how greater diversity improves inquiry. Helen Longino, for one, has addressed the problem of objectivity in science in light of the fact that subjective bias affects scientific inquiry.⁵³ There is evidence that ineliminable bias affects the outcome of inquiry, by affecting, for example, what we see as worth investigating, or which reasons seem strong to us. This has led some theorists to question the possibility of objectivity itself — if we are all subjectively biased, objectivity is impossible.

On Longino's view, we can reconcile ineliminable subjective bias with the possibility of objectivity. She argues that the epistemic norms of scientific practice are shaped by social "background assumptions." These assumptions influence empirical results. As they reflect the social positions of the investigators, the best way to neutralize their influence on inquiry is to ensure equal participation of a diversity of practitioners in the collaborative, social enterprise of science. In short, objectivity is intersubjective.

I think that similar considerations apply to philosophy. Much of philosophy is shaped by subjective bias — what questions we find interesting in the first place, what seems intuitive or reasonable. This is why philosophical debates sometimes seem to reduce to differing intuitions about key points. These biases are likely to reflect our background social positions as well as personal qualities of temperament, style, and so forth. But the influence of such subjective bias is undesirable to the extent that it does not track the strongest reasons, but arbitrary factors of upbringing and identity. The best way to correct for the effect of such biases is to cancel them through the representation of various groups and personality traits.

⁵² John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, ed. Susan Moller Okin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1988), 18. I am avoiding the dubious argument for free speech in *On Liberty* here.

⁵³ Helen Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990) and *The Fate of Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002). Other views might well be mentioned here. Feminist standpoint theory holds that occupying a specific standpoint gives privileged access to knowledge inaccessible from other standpoints (what it is like to experience injustice as a woman, for instance). Also relevant is Iris Marion Young's work on diversity and democracy in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

Rawls's original position is a good example. Rawls intended the original position to eliminate certain biases by asking philosophers to consider what they could accept from any social position, by placing the inquirer behind the veil of ignorance. But one flaw is that Rawls, as a white male philosopher at an elite university, characterized the choice situation with different sensitivities than would a married woman, a working single mom, people of color, people with disabilities, people with different attitudes to risk, and so forth.⁵⁴ For example, feminists such as Jane English and Okin pointed out that Rawls's assumption that contractors were "heads of households" effectively eliminated considerations of justice within the family. This is an example of how diversity (in this case, English's and Okin's differently gendered experience) neutralized bias (the assumption that heads of households would represent the interests of all members) to create a better model.⁵⁵ As more representatives of relevantly different positions participate in inquiry, the greater the claim to objectivity. To quote Janet Jakobsen (speaking in a different context), "the universal must be pieced together" from different perspectives.

The recent literature on epistemic injustice has similar implications. Miranda Fricker "characterizes the primary form of epistemic injustice [as] testimonial injustice," which occurs when someone's testimony, her credibility as a knower, is doubted or dismissed due to prejudice — such as stereotypes about race or sex.⁵⁶ The problem with epistemic injustice is not only an ethical problem, it is an epistemic problem. As José Medina writes: "Racist and sexist ideologies make us all cognitively worse off: they instill distrust, they lead people to overestimate or underestimate their cognitive capacities; and they are the breeding ground for all kinds of biases and prejudices that distort perception, judgement, and reasoning."⁵⁷

As Medina develops his account of epistemic justice, social prejudice and privilege lead to epistemic virtues and vices. Medina's solution to these cognitive effects of racism and sexism parallels the political imperative of integration: what he calls epistemic interactionism seeks to provide equal representation in a community of inquirers. The idea is that the process of hearing and responding to diverse voices will correct the epistemic vices created by prejudice and privilege.

In fact, there is some empirical evidence of such effects in the context of juries. Using mock juries to analyze decision-making, experimental psychologist Samuel Sommers found that more racially diverse

⁵⁴ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 128–29; Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 95.

⁵⁶ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and The Ethics of Knowing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

⁵⁷ José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 27. Medina's view departs from Fricker's in ways I cannot go into here.

juries reasoned better: “diverse groups would exchange a wider range of information than all-White groups. This finding was not wholly attributable to the performance of Black participants, as Whites cited more case facts, made fewer errors, and were more amenable to discussion of racism when in diverse versus all-White groups.”⁵⁸ Of course, it might be thought that there are relevant differences between such mock juries (in which the mock defendant was African-American) and philosophers.

In the context of philosophy, eradicating the distinction between core and marginal questions would be one step toward the kind of equal voice Medina prescribes (in his view, it is crucial not just that there be diverse representation, but that different inquirers have chances to make their voice heard). The evaluative distinctions between different areas of philosophy, or between the core and the margins, might generate their own epistemic vices. For example, more progress might be possible if researchers on the “big” questions treated the work of feminist metaphysicians and epistemologists as *relevant* to their inquiries. This doesn’t mean that they must accept such arguments, but that they do not automatically dismiss them as irrelevant. Or, again, political philosophy would be strengthened if political philosophers thought through the extent to which their views depended on assuming the existence of just families with children reared by women’s unpaid labor. These arguments suggest that philosophy is likely to be done better — to be less influenced by arbitrary bias and epistemic vices — if practitioners are drawn from relevantly different groups (including different approaches as well as identities).

It might be objected that greater diversity will reduce the likelihood of collective convergence on the truth, since it will likely create more disagreement. However, it seems plausible that an epistemically superior process is more likely to yield the truth in the long run. It might also be objected that I am assuming that philosophers’ views will inevitably reflect their identities — for example, that women will always bring “a woman’s perspective.” Here we must be careful. Not all members from under-represented groups in philosophy will reflect their group identity in their work, nor should they be expected to do so. A female philosopher, for instance, might have no interest in philosophical feminism — and her freedom to have no interest in it is important. Expecting minorities to be experts on topics related to their identity can be a form of tokenism — for example, when they are assigned classes on such topics even though the subject matter is outside their area of competence! (Assigning a specialist in mathematical logic to teach a class on feminist philosophy simply

⁵⁸ Samuel Sommers, “On Racial Diversity and Group Decision Making: Identifying Multiple Effects of Racial Composition on Jury Deliberations,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90, no. 4 (2006): 597–612, at 597. Thanks to Kayleigh Doherty for drawing my attention to this article.

because she is a woman would be unduly burdensome, for example.)⁵⁹ And we should avoid essentialism — for example, assuming it is women’s nature to have a caring perspective. But it is plausible — and a glance at who writes on what topics gives some confirmation — that members of historically under-represented minorities will be more likely to write on topics related to their experiences as group members than nongroup members are to write on those topics.

It is odd that discussion of progress in philosophy has proceeded in a vacuum from the changing demographics of the profession and the changing philosophical topics that have arisen as members of previously excluded groups with different experiences have entered professional philosophy. The reason is that such topics are not counted as the “big” questions that measure philosophical progress. But that distinction itself diminishes the quality of philosophical reasoning by narrowly restricting the range of topics and methodologies (and as a result, practitioners), while eliminating the distinction could correct for bias and certain epistemic vices. And this epistemic improvement would be conducive to progress.

To be clear, I am not proposing any specific means for increasing representation in philosophy. Such means could range from affirmative action to extracurricular initiatives aimed at increasing representation of minorities to pedagogical measures combating “stereotype threat” in the classroom. I am simply arguing that greater inclusiveness has benefits for philosophical reasoning.

This is not an ethical argument for diversity, although I believe those can also be given. There are many unethical practices (such as sexual harassment) that contribute to lack of diversity. But that is not my point here. Diversity of viewpoints and perspectives brings epistemic advantages. We will reason better if we reason from more perspectives. Thus, such diversity is conducive to progress, understood as reaching the truth.

IV. CONCLUSION

Where does this leave us? In my view, it is unlikely that there will be collective convergence on some of the core questions of philosophy precisely because reasoning about them depends on intuitions that reflect different subject positions. There may be progress within the discipline on some other questions — perhaps, in applied ethics and political philosophy (such as the fairest way to allocate the costs of climate change, or the morality of factory farms). It is possible philosophy could lead rather than follow in these areas, and more likely if such questions are treated not as peripheral but of the same value.

⁵⁹ This problem is discussed in Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs and Yolanda Flores Niemann, *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* (Boulder, CO: Utah State University Press, an imprint of University Press of Colorado, 2012).

In contrast to the traditional understanding of philosophy, I have highlighted two other features distinctive to it: (i) the creative development of new models, tools for thought, conceptual schema, distinctions and (ii) its openness to new philosophical questions. New philosophical devices provide a kind of conceptual architecture for our thought and expression, making progress in our ability to think about the world. The greater openness of philosophy to methodological diversity and diversity in topics — especially applied topics — will make a different kind of progress: in the breadth and completeness of the questions asked, phenomena investigated, and theories and insights generated. It may also make philosophy hospitable to more diverse practitioners. The greater diversity of practitioners in turn is likely to increase objectivity and reduce epistemic vices of privilege. If this is right, then the greater representation of diverse groups within the profession is conducive to progress. Finally, abandoning the evaluative distinction between “core” and “margins” may help solve philosophy’s marketing problem, by allowing it to embrace topics of practical concern as fully and legitimately philosophical.

What I have said here flies in the face of a great deal of tradition. However, it has the merit of articulating a position not widely articulated within the debate on progress and drawing on my own experience. And that, I think, is how we make progress in philosophy.

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