

Titles and Abstracts:

Timothy Williamson (Oxford): Progress in Philosophical Model-Building

I will begin by explaining the general model-building methodology in the natural and social sciences, and the kinds of progress that can be expected and are found in model-building science, with respect to both mathematical knowledge of the model's structure and non-mathematical knowledge of its relation to the target phenomenon. For sciences concerned with messy, complicated aspects of reality, such as biology, progress may typically take the form of progress in model-building. I will then discuss the suitability of different branches of philosophy for the model-building methodology, and various ways in which it has been applied to philosophy. Most (though not all) philosophical inquiry concerns the human world, which is nothing if not messy and complicated, and so is well-suited to the model-building methodology. Although understanding of it and of the nature of the progress it affords are not as widespread amongst philosophers as they should be, considerable progress in philosophy has already been made in philosophy by its means. We can expect this aspect of philosophy to become increasingly important.

Finnur Dellsén (Iceland), Tina Firing (Iceland), Insa Lawler (UNCG), James Norton (Tasmania): Two Challenges for Enabling Noeticism

What is it for philosophy to make progress? According to Enabling Noeticism, philosophical progress consists in putting people in a position to increase their understanding, where 'increased understanding' is a matter of better representing the network of dependence relations between phenomena. This presentation details this account and responds to two challenges to Enabling Noeticism, namely that a disjunctive variant is superior and that the account is ambiguous.

Torfinn Huvenes (Bergen): Progress as Knowledge and Understanding

I argue that neither knowledge nor understanding is sufficient for progress. However, taken together, it might be that they are jointly necessary and sufficient for progress.

Herman Cappelen (Hong Kong): Progress in Philosophy: An Optimistic Perspective

I argue for two modest claims: a) Philosophy has made significant progress: philosophers have found the answers (or are close to finding the answers) to many of the most important and interesting questions humans can ask themselves. b) Progress doesn't require convergence; on the contrary, convergence is a sign of a non-rational intellectual discipline.

Kerry McKenzie (UC San Diego): Lifting the Curse? On the Prospects for Progress in Metaphysics of Science

In my paper 'A Curse on Both Houses: Science, Metaphysics, and the Problem of Progress' (2019,) I argued that metaphysics of science cannot make progress in anything like the way science does. The argument assumed that science progresses by producing better approximations to the truth, and its conclusion was grounded in the fact that paradigmatic metaphysical claims do not admit of a notion of approximation. In this paper I consider some objections that have been made to this argument, such as that metaphysics of science can progress by falsification; by increasing

versimilitude; or by increasing understanding. I also consider whether metaphysical theory change can be considered as a 'paradigm shift'. Finding all of these attempts to rescue metaphysics somewhat wanting, and thus a realist approach to metaphysics of science unmotivated, I consider what an instrumentalism about metaphysics in science might look like.

Daniel Stoljar (ANU): Is Understanding the Goal?

Many recent authors have suggested in different ways that the primary goal of philosophy is understanding rather than knowledge. This talk presents an examination and critique of this thesis. I focus particularly on a distinction between reductionist views of understanding, on which to understand something is to be in a certain sort of knowledge state, and non-reductionist views, on which to understanding something is to be in a state distinct from knowledge. I argue that, on a reductionist view, it is inconsistent to claim that understanding rather than knowledge is the goal—the reason is that those who claim that knowledge is the goal have a certain knowledge state in mind, namely, the very one that reductionists identify with understanding. By contrast, on a non-reductionist view, while it is consistent to say that understanding rather than knowledge is the goal, it is nevertheless implausible—the reason is that the knowledge state described by reductionists is a better candidate than any alternative state to be the primary goal of philosophy, even if non-reductionists are right that it is not understanding. Either way, the thesis that understanding rather than knowledge is the primary goal of philosophy is in trouble.

Helen Beebe (Leeds) and Ylwa Sjölin Wirling (Gothenburg): Exceptionalism: Consensus and Belief in Philosophy

The 'equilibrist' view, according to which philosophy aims at achieving a range of viable philosophical theories each of which is in reflective equilibrium, denies that philosophy aims at knowledge, justified belief or truth. That denial has been claimed to imply 'exceptionalism': the claim that philosophy is different in important ways from other disciplines and/or common sense. We argue (*pace* Herman Cappelen) that philosophy *is* exceptional – at least as compared to the natural sciences – in that there is no consensus on broad bodies of philosophical theory – but (*pace* most anti-exceptionalists) that this is not a problem. And we argue (*pace* Daniel Stoljar) that the equilibrist conception of philosophy does not set up a clash between philosophy and common sense. Philosophy is just not oriented around belief – a feature it shares with the sciences as Karl Popper conceives them.

Samuel Baron (Melbourne), Finnur Dellsén (Iceland), Tina Firing (Iceland), James Norton (Tasmania): Is Methodological Disagreement a Threat to Progress?

Many academic disciplines, especially philosophy, are rife with methodological disagreements of various sorts. Their members disagree not only about which methods are most appropriate, but also about how those methods should be used, and indeed the outcomes of properly using a method in a particular case. It is natural and common to think that such methodological disagreements are a threat to the progress of said disciplines. However, the supposed argumentative route from methodological disagreement to lack of progress has not yet been carefully spelled out. In this paper, we formulate, analyze, and evaluate several different arguments that seem to establish such a route. It turns out that the more threatening of these arguments rely on conceptions of what it is to make progress that, we suggest, there are independent reasons to reject. One upshot is thus that methodological disagreement does not plausibly *preclude* progress. With that said, another upshot is that methodological disagreement remains a threat to the extent to which we can *know* that we've made progress in a given instance.

