

**Philosophy and Progress**

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**PHILOSOPHICAL PROGRESS AND  
EVOLVING CHALLENGES : AN  
EVALUATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE  
TO JESSICA WILSON**

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**Abstract**

This article attempts to revisit the concept of philosophical progress. Is philosophy making progress? If yes, to what extent? In recent times, philosophers have believed a variety of positions regarding the answers to these issues, ranging from the belief that no progress has been made at all, whatsoever others argued that philosophy has addressed every major philosophical questions. These opinions, however, are challenging to analyze and assess, in light of the fact that they are based on different perspectives about the circumstances under which philosophical advancement might occur. Reexamining the concept of philosophical

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progress is one of its plans. In this article, the following issues will be addressed: firstly, to explain concept of progress in philosophy; secondly, to analyze the debates about the prevalence of philosophical progress; thirdly, to expound three challenges to philosophical progress with special reference to Jessica Wilson; fourthly, resolutions to overcome the philosophical challenges. This article closes with some reflections on philosophical progress in the future.

**Keywords:** Progress in philosophy, Development, History of philosophy, Philosophy in future.

## Introduction

One of the most debated topics in meta-philosophy is philosophical progress. The question of whether philosophical progress historically has received significant attention. Philosophers have been increasingly interested in issues related to philosophical progress, especially in the contemporary ages. The question of whether philosophy is progressing at all, if philosophy will progress in the future, and whether philosophy is progressing more slowly than science (and if so, why) are all up for debate. This argumentative discussion has induced different responses. The philosophical community appears to be dominated by pessimism. There has been no advancement in philosophical history, according to the modest pessimists. Even the prospect of future philosophical advancement is questioned by the extreme pessimists. On the other hand, there is still a certain amount of optimism, though for different reasons. Philosophy, in the view of the global optimist, advances society overall by offering solutions to significant issues such as the issues confronting the outside world. The chosen optimist contends that philosophy has advanced society by providing solutions to specific kinds

of issues or by enhancing our problem-solving techniques. Pluralist optimists contend that philosophy progress through accomplishing many objectives, such as expanding philosophical themes and developing innovative philosophical tools. By the instrumental optimist argues that philosophical progress trails behind in terms of broader advancements, like those in science.

### **Progress in Philosophy**

We should explain the idea of progress before discussing philosophical progress. Progress is a sort of development. A system's qualities undergo a specific transformation during development. It is always directed, irrevocable, regular, and ordered. This modification introduces new trends into the system. Here, we run the risk of slipping into a logical trap because neither the new nor the development itself is invariably progressive. Thus, development's direction and progress are so related. Nonetheless, this suggests that we are dealing with a values issue because it raises the question of who and how the guidance has been provided. Both teleological rigorous and causally interpretive approaches can be used to understand this difficulty regarding the development's direction (Vladimir, 2013).

The idea of philosophical development is evaluative: it proposes about how philosophy has improved over time. As a result, we can assess how philosophy has changed over a given time period if we have a solid understanding of philosophical progress. It can also be applied to evaluate the historical relevance of a particular philosophical claim or argument. The idea of philosophical progress, however, is only helpful if it aids in the understanding of historical trends in which philosophy has outperformed other fields. That is to say, the concept of

philosophical progress is only valuable if it aids in our comprehension of the ways in which philosophy has evolved over time. Consequently, a philosophical idea of progress is required only to the extent that it provides a conceptually helpful means of understanding philosophy's history (Shan, 2022).

According to Rescher (2014):

Philosophical progress here refers to the progress in philosophy as advance in the intellectual realm, which is contrasted with the progress of philosophy as the improvement in the professional or institutionalised realm (pp.1-2).

In this context, philosophical progress is defined as the philosophical development as an intellectual advancement, as opposed to philosophical development as an improvement in the institutionalized or professional sphere.

It is remarkable how far philosophy has come in the past century. Brock (2017) argued that, philosophy is an ancient academic discipline that endeavors to provide dependable answers to inquiries concerning the universe and the mind. By its very nature, philosophy struggles to determine the most effective approaches to solving problems in a wide range of diverse fields. Philosophers occasionally find a method that works, and they use it to start a new branch of philosophy and create a new science in that area. One of the greatest philosophers in history, Aristotle, is credited with creating both biology and physics. Chemistry may have been invented by ancient philosophers like Thales and Empedocles. The study of philosophy has influenced linguistics, psychology, and economics during the past century or so. The pursuit of trustworthy approaches is philosophy. And philosophy's achievements in discovering those techniques

are the foundation of all science. As a result, advancements in science might be seen as advancements in philosophy.

The concept of philosophical progress should be seen as relative and beneficial for understanding the development of philosophy throughout history. There is no agreement on which philosophical approach to use when addressing philosophical problems. Instead of definitive answers, there exist numerous conflicting perspectives, debates, and deliberations.

Throughout history and by different philosophers, philosophy has pursued various objectives. However, five lasting goals particularly deserve focused consideration. Kamber (2017, p. 133) describes that include:

- (a) exposing logical fallacies and other flaws in arguments;
- (b) giving definitions, theories, problems, and concepts more clarity;
- (c) improving people's moral character and wisdom;
- (d) developing a perspective that enhances our comprehension of how everything is interconnected.
- (e) addressing philosophical issues.

Regarding the first two objectives, philosophy has undoubtedly advanced. Philosophers now have more powerful tools than ever before to expose flaws in arguments thanks to centuries of progress in logic and semantics. It goes without saying that these instruments are employed to evaluate arguments made by people within and outside of philosophy. Additionally, the precision with which philosophers analyze ideas, issues, definitions, and theories has increased. The continuous development and improvement of crucial distinctions is largely responsible for this advancement.

Basically, reasoning is the investigation of reliable methods. And philosophy's success in discovering those techniques is the source of all science. Thus, philosophical advancement might be understood as a byproduct of scientific progress (Brock, 2017).

### **The Debate about Philosophical Progress**

The question of whether and how far philosophy advances has garnered a lot of attention lately. Here, we summarize some of the positions that have been adopted and examine in more detail a recurrent theme:

#### **Pessimism regarding Philosophical Progress**

Philosophical pessimism (Dellsena, Lawlerb & Norton, 2021) generally maintains that philosophy has either not progressed at all or has not progressed enough in comparison to a given standard, like the progress of other prosperous sciences. Those who are pessimistic about philosophical progress contend that we should not anticipate significant progress in the future since we have not witnessed much in the past. Philosophers who are extremely pessimistic claim that philosophy never progresses (Dietrich 2011; Mironov 2013). Dietrich makes the incredibly gloomy claim that "philosophy does not and cannot progress" (2011, p. 343). Philosophical progress, according to Mironov (2013), is impossible. However, a more prevalent perspective is a mild pessimism (Chalmers 2015; Blackford 2017), which holds that although philosophy may occasionally progress, it has only made and will continue to make little strides.

Pessimistic arguments typically proceed as follows (Dellsena, Lawlerb & Norton, 2021, p. 3) :

- (a) something is said to be a necessary condition for philosophical advancement,
- (b) There is a claim that this requirement has not been satisfied, or has not been sufficiently satisfied, and
- (c) The conclusion is that philosophy has not progressed enough or has not advanced at all.

The most often stated prerequisite is philosophical consensus, or more accurately, the gradual convergence of philosophers' answers to philosophical problems over time.

### **Optimism about Philosophical Progress**

The optimistic perspective on the progress of philosophy (Dellsena, Lawlerb & Norton, 2021) suggests that philosophy has advanced significantly or, at the very least, to a satisfactory extent when compared to a certain standard, such as the advancement of other well-established sciences. Optimists have mainly relied on refuting pessimists' arguments because optimism and pessimism are inherently opposed.

There is much more convergence than pessimists have thought, according to some optimists, citing factors ranging from a lack of convergence to a lack of development (Stoljar, 2017). Cappelen, on the other hand, maintains that philosophy has substantially addressed all of its major issues. Cappelen is more pessimistic than moderate optimists like Rapaport and Stoljar, but they still make an effort to argue that philosophical issues have been and will continue to be resolved (Norton et al., 2021).

According to Timothy Williamson (2018), rather than finding universal, unchanging principles, contemporary scientific advancements may more frequently take the form of creating

progressively better models. He thinks that this also holds true for philosophical progress. Williamson contends that if philosophy utilizes formal model-building techniques in a more intentional and reflective manner, it can achieve greater success than it has thus far. Philosophers should not use this as their only or main approach, but it could help to make philosophical ideas more understandable and further philosophical progress.

In a similar vein, Philosophical progress has also been made, according to Daniel Stoljar (2017), who supports his claims with specific examples. He claims that evidence for this can be found in the ways in which earlier philosophers like Descartes and Hume addressed particular issues, as well as in our growing comprehension of the constitutive structure of the universe. In spite of the vast body of knowledge and reasoning that philosophy draws from, Stoljar nevertheless points out that philosophy is still a relatively young academic field. We can therefore inquire as to how much progress is realistically expected at this point (Blackford & Broderick eds., 2017).

### **Three Challenges to Philosophical Progress**

Jessica Wilson (2017) argues in her article *Three Barriers to Philosophical Progress* that disagreements regarding standards, which can be subjective and ambiguous, are just as problematic for philosophy as disagreements regarding conclusions. From a positive perspective, this circumstance essentially suggests that methodological research is far from over. However, there are three obstacles to philosophical progress (Wilson, 2017, p. 91):

Barrier-1: Intra- Disciplinary Siloing

Barrier-2: Sociological Determinants

Barrier-3: Bias



**First:** In philosophy, there is an excessive amount of ‘siloeing’ (Wilson, 2017, p. 94) within disciplines. Put another way, philosophers only read works in their own specialized fields. Each little field lays out its own models for what is publishable exploration. Individuals engaged in a specific subfield of philosophy find themselves cut off from both the rest of philosophy and the public outside of academia. Their writings are understandable only to fellow initiates. Only other initiates can comprehend their writings. The assumptions held within these closed communities are frequently found to be incorrect or even absurd when subjected to more in-depth intellectual inquiry.

Jessica Wilson offers one illustration from the field of modern metaphysics. ‘Grounding’ (Wilson, 2017, p. 94) has been the subject of much discussion and controversy lately. According to Jonathan Schaffer, Kit Fine, and others, earlier attempts to explain concepts like as supervenience, causality, reduction, and the mind-brain link in terms of metaphysics were improper because they were too semantic or linguistic. Grounding is a new concept that is purportedly needed. It is said that the neglected Aristotelian conception of metaphysics—that is, “what grounds what” (Wilson, 2017, p. 98) will be revived by this new concept of grounding.

As Wilson (2017) brings up with undisguised irritation, that leads to rebranding the old bike with a different name and then saying misleading things about the old bike. Some understandings of the idea were clearly metaphysical and aligned with the idea of grounding as described by Schaffer and Fine. In 1990, Jaegwon Kim invited to attend his summer seminar on supervenience at the National Endowment for the Humanities

(NEH). Since then, some philosophers have been working to expand on the Aristotelian concept of metaphysics, which they have always possessed. New literature on ‘Grounding’ (Wilson, 2017, p. 98) has sprung out, but it does not advance our knowledge of the mind-body link or philosophical issues in general. However, graduate students who were not around to witness the supervenience debate in the 1980s take Fine and Schaffer’s words at face value and believe that, prior to the coining of the term grounding, they were all ignorant of the true issues and misunderstood metaphysical concepts.

**Second:** As an additional example of the essentially similar siloing phenomenon, Wilson (2017) addresses it as a separate problem in academic philosophy: philosophers often choose philosophical positions due to social considerations rather than sound epistemic arguments. There are no metaphysically required connections between different entities, according to the ‘Humean dictum’, which is widely accepted in contemporary metaphysics. This viewpoint is not supported by science or common sense, as Wilson argues. The extreme empiricist epistemology, which is now almost completely discredited, is the only support for the Humean perspective. Despite this, scholarly networks seem to be filled with Humeans. The theory of causation attributed to Hume, which asserts that all causal relationships are contingent, still remains a possibility. According to Wilson’s theory, this is because David Lewis is acknowledged in the metaphysical community as the originator of the ‘Humean dictum’. This leads to the question of whether David Lewis’s fame is truly warranted.

**Third:** Philosophers also have a tendency to concentrate on imaginary topics rather than the actual problems at the core of

their discipline. James A. Lindsay and Peter Boghossian (2017) have expounded smoothly on this issue. Philosophical magazines (of which there are very many) are packed with useless, unintelligible articles that nobody at any point peruses. Philosophy conferences are strange get-togethers of strange people saying incomprehensible things (there are too many of them). Nobody in the book points out that this is clearly caused by the way academia is organized, with professors being rewarded and judged solely on the quantity of journal publications and conference talks they give, regardless of the caliber or substance of those publications or talks (Hannan, 2024).

### **Solutions to overcome the philosophical challenges**

Jessica Wilson (2017) concludes with a few quick recommendations for how we can begin to break through the previously identified obstacles, even before methodological research concludes. To move previous intra-disciplinary siloing, rationalists ought to begin growing their domain past their liked or recognizable structures, in manners showing academic expected level of effort. Considering that most contemporary work is accessible internet based through effectively accessible files, there is not a remotely good reason for obliviousness or its spread.

In order to transcend the idea that sociological variables determine philosophical focus, philosophers must make it apparent in their publications and lectures that the majority of frameworks and related statements are now (at most) temporary. Nevertheless, it is important for graduate students and others to maintain a critical attitude towards dialectical assertions, particularly those authored by distinguished philosophers who often have limited exposure to ideas outside their specific areas of study.

When it comes to bias, this approach is unlikely to be effective in the majority of philosophical situations due to the multitude of methodological factors at play. However, focusing on specific criteria of assessment can partially counteract bias caused by “flexible standards” (Wilson, 2017, p. 102). So we will rather specify an extensively Buddhist methodology, what begins by recognizing the vexatious truth of both positive and negative inclination. Be aware of your tendency to be kind and caring toward the elite white man and to belittle or mock the non-elite, non-white, non-male, etc. That is not genuine, you tell yourself in a kind and loving manner. After then, focus on listening to what the other person is truly saying (Wilson, 2017).

About a century ago, in order to aid in the development of philosophical conclusions, numerous new methods as well as the refinement of many older methods were established. Observational way of thinking draws on experimental science. In formal philosophy, formal reasoning is employed. The analysis of language forms the basis of the semantic mode of thought. On phenomenological reflection, phenomenology depends. Analysis of gender role is a key component of feminist philosophy. Philosophy from different cultural traditions is incorporated into cross-cultural philosophy. Analyzing philosophical conclusions empirically is a source for experimental philosophy (Chalmers, 2015).

### **Future Issues in Philosophical Progress**

Thinking about the future helps us to understand where we are right now. Future focused thinking is closely related to present-focused thinking. Our opinions regarding the proper methods of conducting philosophy extend beyond the current

era and encompass the future as well. According to Timothy Williamson (2018): “Progress in philosophical theories makes for progress in philosophical methods, and progress in philosophical methods makes for progress in philosophical theories” (p. 142).

It is our hope that philosophy will eventually find new and more definitive ways to address its problems, ways that are as foreign to us as our approaches were to the Pre-Socratics. Indeed, one of the main issues facing systematic philosophy is the development of such techniques. The greatest philosophers have generally been the greatest and the most self-conscious and methodologists. However, we have to assume that philosophy will have to settle for the available techniques in the near future (Williamson, 2007).

Future philosophical research is probably going to combine multi-dimensional approaches more. It is possible that we are approaching a postmodern era, but it is unquestionably not a post-philosophy era. Progress is likely to be made in the future by highlighting the differences between philosophy and science. In the past, it seemed that philosophy’s only chance of survival was by identification with the sciences.

But philosophy in the future ought to be viewed as something more than a response to the materialism of daily existence. It is the goal of philosophy to comprehend and conceptualize that materialism. In comparison to authoritarian and socialist ideologies, the principles of liberalism in politics and economics have been defined and defended by some intellectuals, but this field is still relatively unexplored. Conceptual research will be necessary to prepare for the free market’s impending hegemony. Unfortunately, there might be a decrease in interest

in political philosophy as a result of the apparent end of the conflict between various political systems, and it would be almost obvious how the free market affects our society and individuals given its widespread influence. Philosophers have a responsibility to address the wide range of significant philosophical issues that arise from the structuring of any kind of society or economy. Philosophy will be perceived as retreating from the central facets of our everyday existence and experience if we do not take care of them and instead leave them to others (Leaman, 1998).

Golding (2011) suggested that philosophical progress is achieved by going from philosophical problems to philosophical solutions. Questions, positions, and arguments are among the products of philosophy that mark significant turning points in the overall journey towards an unidentified solution. Philosophical progress, to put it another way, occurs whenever we resolve an initial problem by replacing an incongruous or inadequate conception with one that is congruous and adequate. Even though we are not yet in a position where we can defend ourselves against competitors or face new issues and advancements, this is still progress.

The idea that a philosopher should be detached from the realities of the real world was one of the philosophical conceptions that was previously criticized. Philosophers have, of course, used their practical or applied philosophy to address contemporary practical problems. We could anticipate an increase in the future. Philosophers will inevitably be involved in a society that is wealthier and more educated because they will want to reflect more deeply on what they are doing (Leaman, 1998).

Philosophers have conjectured about artificial intelligence for many years, but not much has been done to improve the Big Data infrastructure and machine learning algorithms that are already in place and will revolutionize society. We can anticipate that philosophers will pay more attention to Big Data and expert systems as they begin to revolutionize knowledge production and decision-making in the fields of science, finance, and medicine. The significance of social media's impact on the individual and society will increase in terms of politics, ethics, and philosophy of mind (Ladyman, 2017).

Ladyman believed that the involvement with non-Western philosophical traditions and the rise of feminist philosophy are two of the most important recent advancements in academic English-language philosophy. It is believed that this trend will continue to be crucial to philosophy's future. We may anticipate the emergence of a global philosophical culture that takes into account every significant idea ever held by humans and acknowledges the variety of sources from which they have come. Understanding the development of ideas in non-Western traditions will change the history of philosophy. Since European philosophers are still interested in logic, mathematics, science, and the analytic tradition, an increasing number of analytic philosophers are studying non-Western philosophical traditions across the globe, we expect the divide between analytical and continental philosophy to disappear. We believe philosophy will become more diverse and cohesive in the future, as well as more engaged and scholarly

### **Concluding Remarks**

Philosophy, according to Jessica Wilson, suffers from ambiguous and conflicting standards in addition to

disagreements over important discoveries. In her view, this leads to unfair treatment of the contributions made by women and other groups, entrenched institutional resistance (such as too much respect for top researchers), and isolated areas within the discipline. All of these impede progress. Wilson argues that this results in the reuse of ideas (even by reputable philosophy professors who should have a better understanding), inadequate evaluation of high-quality work, and the neglect of solid principles.

Philosophical progress is achieved by moving from philosophical issues to philosophical solutions. Questions, stances, and arguments are among the outputs of philosophy that mark significant turning points in the entire journey towards an unidentified solution. In addition, philosophical progress also happens when we make progress toward resolving philosophical issues by posing queries, developing arguments, and modifying solutions. The most important task for anyone with any interest in meta-philosophy is, without a doubt, developing a superior track record of philosophical achievement.

After that, we can just focus on doing philosophy as well as we can, trying to think of novel ideas, methods, and theories that can eventually help us find the answers to the questions. After all, we are still developing our philosophical skills. We need to keep studying philosophy in order to see how far it can carry us.

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