Philosophical Progress, Skepticism, and Disagreement

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Disagreement in philosophy has the tendency to pull us toward philosophical skepticism: skepticism about the extent to which we can know or justifiably believe the philosophical views we defend and advance. One reason for this is because widespread disagreement, whether in philosophy or elsewhere, is typically thought of as a symptom of a larger problem. Where there is pervasive, systematic disagreement there is thought to be little convergence to the truth, where there is little convergence to the truth there is thought to be little progress, and where there is little progress, there is a floundering discipline; a discipline of experts with big opinions to be sure, but with a seemingly unreliable connection to the truth. Disagreement, then, seems to be a good sign, not of progress, but a *lack* of it.

On this picture of things, what is epistemically problematic about disagreement, specifically disagreement in philosophy—i.e., widespread, pervasive disagreement—is that it yields no clear convergence to the truth. On the assumption that large, collective, expert convergence to the truth on an issue is a reliable progress-tracking mechanism,[1] since there is little expert convergence to the truth in philosophy, there is therefore no way of knowing whether (or which) philosophers have latched onto it. The issue, then, is

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[1] Notice that progress needn't necessarily be equated with truth. That is, even if philosophy doesn't produce truth, we might say that it nevertheless progresses in other ways. See Chalmers (2015: 14).

that philosophy seems to be an epistemically unreliable or unstable way of getting at the truth. Call this the *problem of convergence*.

A different route to philosophical skepticism is motivated by how we ought to rationally respond to disagreement itself. The idea here is a natural one. Most experts in some given area are thought to be epistemic peers: they are equally as intelligent, well informed, competent, and unbiased as any other expert in their area when it comes to evaluating and assessing the evidence. What happens, then, when two epistemic peers disagree about the truth of *p*? How *ought* they to respond to such a disagreement? One compelling option is that they should be epistemically modest: their disagreement constitutes evidence of sorts—higher-order evidence[2]—that rationally demands they suspend their beliefs (or lower their credences) in *p*. The thought then goes that, if this is the correct norm of belief revision for *ordinary* disagreement (or expert disagreement concerning non-philosophical matters), then it's also the correct norm of belief revision for *philosophical* disagreement.

Indeed, if some philosophers believe *p*, it's a safe bet that there are (or have been) many other equally as intelligent, competent, well-informed philosophers that believe not-*p*. But if the correct norm of belief revision for philosophical disagreement is to withhold or suspend belief in the face of peer disagreement, then it seems to follow that it would be *irrational* for philosophers to believe the views they defend and advance. Call this the *problem of peer disagreement*.

Both the problem of convergence and the problem of disagreement are interrelated; both lead us into philosophically skeptical waters. Disagreement is the central ingredient in both. This chapter serves as an opinionated introduction to both problems and some of the issues they give rise to, namely, philosophical skepticism and progress in philosophy. Indeed, it's easy to see philosophical skepticism as the contradictory of philosophical anti-skepticism: either we don't have philosophical knowledge, or we do. Both positions can be seen as representing two opposing ends of a spectrum —a spectrum composed of potentially fruitful, intermediate positions. After introducing both topics and surveying the various positions in the literature (§1 and §2), we explore the prospects of having the best of both worlds by

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[2] That is, evidence about evidential relations. Or, put slightly differently: evidence about one's *ability* to evaluate evidence.

presenting an alternative account: a hinge-theoretic, intermediate position that drives a wedge between these two extremes (§3).

1. The Problem of Convergence

Philosophers know the big problems that occupy their thought aren't necessarily new: they have been inherited and passed down from the history of philosophy, ever since human beings began to theorize about themselves and the world. Old puzzles and problems are given new form, new distinctions are made; new tools too. New problems arise from their introduction, but the core issues—"the big questions of philosophy"—mostly remain.

One then starts to wonder why, after all this time, these questions haven't been decisively answered. One starts to get self-conscious, peeking at the other disciplines—physics, chemistry, mathematics—noticing that certain theories within them are no longer taken seriously or have been empirically refuted or proven true. Why haven't *we* refuted external world skepticism or proven that idealism is false or that sense-data don't exist or that moral realism is true? Surely, some philosophers think that they have, but this provides us with no reassurance: there is no consensus about that, and even if there was, it could easily slip into dissension a decade later (as so often happens in philosophy). One, in other words, starts to worry about *progress* in philosophy. For better or worse, that nagging impulse of ours to compare ourselves to others leads us to ask the question: how is philosophy doing compared to other disciplines?—disciplines like our own (on most accounts) that are after truth and knowledge?

Predictably, there is disagreement even about how to answer this question, although it does seem that many philosophers are of the opinion that, while there is admittedly some progress in philosophy, there isn't as much progress as one might hope to find, such as the kind of progress made in disciplines like mathematics and the natural sciences. One main concern, then, is this: why isn't there more progress of *this* sort—of the sort found in the hard sciences—in philosophy? For lack of better terms, let's call those

who think there isn't much progress in philosophy, *pessimists*.[3] Pessimists like Chalmers (2015), Beebee (2018), and Lycan (2019), for example, all draw attention to the methodological shortcomings of philosophy (or at least of some branch of it).[4] The lesson is clear: there is no methodological standard that philosophers agree upon. The hard sciences are typically used by pessimists as a foil to philosophy when it comes to evaluating progress.[5] For many pessimists, one of the reasons why sciences like mathematics and physics make progress is because there is something like a methodological standard in place that governs and constrains the space of inquiry; this standard creates room for convergence—*agreement*—which leads to progress. But there is nothing like this in philosophy. Or so pessimists argue.

What might these methodological standards be? Chalmers (2015) lists several. The hard sciences have methods that have the power to compel agreement which range from proof (in mathematics) to observational/experimental methods (in physics). Methods of proof and experiment usually start from widely agreed upon premises, e.g., axioms in mathematics and certain well-confirmed and well-replicated empirical observations in physics, chemistry, and biology. By contrast, in philosophy, if there are even premises that are widely agreed upon, they are mostly denied without much cost (compare this to the denial of certain mathematical axioms or well-replicated experimental observations). Even premises that Chalmers calls "consensus premises"—premises which, one would assume nobody would deny, such as *there are tables* or *I know that there are tables*—are violated without much consequence. The worst a philosopher can be accused of is logical

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[3] The label is misleading as one might think that the lack of progress in philosophy needn't entail anything "pessimistic." On one kind of pessimistic view, this might be because philosophy isn't like the sciences in the relevant respects, and therefore that it doesn't make the same sort of "progress" as the sciences do. Rather, philosophy, on this view, is closer to the arts, where to speak of progress is to simply speak of new and innovative ways of understanding and expressing and clarifying one's ideas and perspectives. Cf. footnote 1.

[4] See also Brennan (2010), Dietrich (2011), Horwich (2012), and possibly van Inwagen (2004). We might think of Wittgenstein as a thoroughgoing pessimist of sorts. Even if he believed that, unlike mathematics, physics, and other empirical disciplines, philosophy wasn't after truth, but rather conceptual clarity, he thought that by modeling itself after those disciplines philosophy wouldn't progress on that score either.

[5] It's important to note here that both pessimists *and* optimists almost always assume the truth of scientific realism. It's an interesting question, then, how the debate over progress might change once this realism is called into question.

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inconsistency. But inconsistency with common sense? For many philosophers the concern hardly seems to be an urgent one; so long as their theory has some other explanatory virtues, having a "counterintuitive" view can be worth the cost. What's more, there is little cost in invoking or introducing *sui generis* entities, the worst you'll get is an incredulous stare. In sum, philosophical theories are highly general and abstract, and "face the tribunal of experience only at a huge remove" (Lycan 2019: 86). There is too much of a gap between hypothesis and data for us in philosophy to determine whether we are actually getting things right, unlike in the aforementioned sciences.[6]

Yet, though one might feel the pull of pessimism, one can't also help but feel that philosophy has progressed in *some* way since its inception. This feeling is nicely captured by Avrum Stroll when he writes: "[T]he contemporary turf is both familiar and alien; we seem to recognize it as terrain we have traversed in the past, and yet it somehow now looks quite different" (2000: 4). The terrain looks different, we might say, because we *have* made some sort of progress, maybe not on the big questions of philosophy—hence why the terrain still looks familiar—but on other interesting and important issues nonetheless. Indeed, almost all pessimists concede that *some* progress of *some* kind has been made in philosophy, just not the kind of progress "to write a song about" as Lycan puts it (2019: 93). For the most part, then, pessimists can concede that there has been, for example:

- *non-large* collective convergence to the truth on the big questions of philosophy (think of the convergence towards atheism or physicalism).
- *non-collective* convergence to the truth on the big questions of philosophy in the form of various sub-communities converging on true answers to the big questions (e.g., Oxford realists, logical empiricists, etc.).
- large collective convergence to the truth on *(non-big) questions* of philosophy (e.g., that knowledge isn't merely justified true belief and that conditional probabilities aren't probabilities of conditionals, etc.).

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6 See Beebee (2018) for further discussion.

- *large collective advances* (not necessarily involving convergence to the truth) on the big questions of philosophy such as an increased understanding of the issues and distinctions underlying the big questions, the development of better and more sophisticated arguments, methods, formal tools, and so on.

All of this constitutes genuine progress of some sort. But there is progress and there is progress. Substantive progress according to the pessimist involves *sufficiently large collective convergence* to the *truth* on the *big* questions of philosophy. So, while progress is or has been made on the non-big questions of philosophy (or even non-large collective convergence to the truth on non-big/big questions), no progress has really been made on the big questions.

But what constitutes the "big" questions of philosophy? And how is "large collective convergence" being understood? The "big" questions of philosophy are typically taken to be the familiar, perennial questions that frequently feature in the introductory courses we teach, questions that perhaps drew many of us to the discipline in the first place: How do we know about the external world? What is the relationship between mind and body? Do we have free will? These are the kind of big questions pessimists have in mind. Large collective convergence on these big questions, then, following Chalmers, is understood in the following way: an increase in the degree of agreement on an answer to a big philosophical question from the start of some period to the end of some period.[7] Importantly, "degree of agreement" is always understood comparatively: the degree of agreement *as compared to* the degree of agreement one finds in the hard sciences.

That there has been little convergence to the truth on the big questions of philosophy is something most philosophers would perhaps find unsurprising. As Daniel Stoljar writes, "Many philosophers writing today are gripped, if not by outright pessimism, then at least by something close to it..." (2017a: 1–2). Indeed, many philosophers seem to share a view that was once expressed by Bertrand Russell: that philosophers merely have opinions—not knowledge (Russell 1956: 281). David Lewis comes close to saying something similar:

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[7] Importantly, large collective convergence to the truth in a period requires large collective convergence to the *correct* answers to the big questions over that period.

> Our 'intuitions' are simply opinions; our philosophical theories are the same. Some are commonsensical, some are sophisticated; some are particular, some general; some are more firmly held, some less. But they are all opinions, and a reasonable goal for a philosopher is to bring them into equilibrium (1983: x).

And Lycan floats a similar idea, speculating that if there is much philosophical consensus at all it's "far more the result of zeitgeist, fad, fashion, and careerism than of accumulation of probative argument" (2019: 87).[8]

There is more than just anecdotal support for these pessimistic conclusions. Chalmers, for example, takes the results of the 2009 *PhilPapers* survey as constituting serious empirical evidence for the lack of collective convergence, reporting that the degree of disagreement is "striking, if unsurprising":

> Only one view (non-skeptical realism about the external world) attracts over 80% support. Three views (a priori knowledge, atheism, scientific realism) attract over 70% support, with significant dissent, and three more views attract over 60% support. On the other 23 questions, the leading view has less than 60% support (2015: 9).

Of course, the results here are limited. Still, they are highly suggestive and entail that there is at least *some* empirical support for the pessimistic conclusion.[9]

While pessimism about progress (or some version of it anyway) may be the more common view among philosophers, there is still room for a reasonable optimism. While optimists are few and far between, Gutting (2009) and Stoljar (2017a, 2017b) are two recent, outspoken proponents. Compared to Gutting's optimism, however, Stoljar's is a more salient foil to the pessimism we've been sketching here, so we'll focus on Stoljar's account in what follows.[10]

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[8] The sciences are also obviously vulnerable to these forces. The claim should, then, be understood thus: compared to the sciences, philosophy is more vulnerable to such forces (perhaps since there isn't a clear empirical or mathematical way of adjudicating between competing theories and hypotheses).

[9] At the time of writing a new PhilPapers survey was released. For the results see: https://survey2020.philpeople.org. For discussion and comparison with the 2009 survey, see Bourget and Chalmers (ms).

[10] Gutting is a philosophical anti-skeptic, arguing that philosophers have, in fact, attained various kinds of philosophical knowledge in the form of having discovered "new" philosophical possibilities, second-order knowledge about the fruitfulness of certain philo-

Stoljar defends the idea that, pace the pessimist, there *has* been substantive philosophical progress on *reasonably many* big questions.[11] Stoljar's optimism takes aim at a common assumption of the pessimist: that the big questions of the *present* are the very same big questions of the *past*. Optimists like Stoljar think a distinction is needed here, between "topic questions" (questions that introduce a topic or subject matter) and "questions within a given topic" (big or small questions that constitute some topic), and that once we make this distinction it doesn't follow from the fact that topics are perennial, that *big* questions *within* a topic are. The idea, then, is that philosophers ask *different* big questions in different eras. Descartes and Frank Jackson, for instance, are interested in largely the same topic—the relation between mind and body—but are asking *distinct* questions about the subject matter. And according to Stoljar, we've solved the former (the mind-body problem *chez* Descartes) but not necessarily the latter.[12]

Still, the pessimist may take issue with Stoljar's claim that we've solved *Descartes'* mind-body problem. Why think, for example, that we have genuinely converged on whether Descartes' assumption concerning the identification of matter with extension was false as Stoljar claims? (That is, the main assumption allegedly driving *Descartes' formulation* of the mind-body problem that Stoljar thinks we've solved.) If this assumption is a philosophical one, then it's not so clear philosophers have all converged to the truth on this matter. And if Descartes' assumption is implausible or false for empirical reasons, then it's a point against philosophy at least when it comes to progress. Stoljar is right that the details here matter, but it seems we need more of them to properly assess whether the convergence Stoljar speaks of is a legitimate one.

sophical approaches, improved understanding of new distinctions, and so on. Notice, however, that such "progress," according to the pessimist, might go under the label of "large collective convergence to the truth on *non-big* questions of philosophy" or "large collective *advances* on the big questions of philosophy." So the progress Gutting speaks of won't necessarily impress the pessimist since it doesn't constitute progress on the *big* questions of philosophy. It's therefore unclear whether Gutting's optimism is incompatible with the pessimistic conclusion.

[11] *Reasonably many* because Stoljar's optimism isn't committed to the idea that philosophical problems "have essentially been finally solved" (2017a: 7).

[12] For details, see Stoljar (2017b: 108).

2. The Problem of Peer Disagreement

The problem of convergence treats disagreement as a symptom of lack of progress. Disagreement is therefore a problem because it precludes consensus and thwarts progress on the big questions of philosophy. This leads to philosophical skepticism: if lack of progress in philosophy implies that philosophy is an unreliable guide to the truth, then surely philosophers don't possess any philosophical knowledge (or if they do, it's of a very limited and modest sort).[13]

But philosophical skepticism can be induced in a different way: by how we ought to rationally respond to disagreement itself. Sometimes, that is, disagreement with a peer rationally demands that we be epistemically modest, that we suspend our beliefs or lower our credences in p. Here is the argument (adapted from Barnett 2019):

1. A person is rationally required to withhold belief in the face of a peer disagreement given certain conditions (i.e., that such a person knows or has good reason to believe that their interlocutor is a genuine epistemic peer).
2. Many disagreements in philosophy meet these conditions.
3. Therefore, philosophers are not rational in believing many of the views they defend and advance.

The conclusion is that philosophers aren't rational in believing many of the views that they defend and advance. And if they're not rational in *believing* their views, they certainly aren't in a position to *know* that their views are true (assuming knowledge entails belief).

Why think the above argument is sound? The first premise is motivated by a compelling approach to peer disagreement: in a disagreement between two or more *epistemic peers*—that is, agents who are equally as intelligent, well-informed, competent, and unbiased—the rational thing to do is suspend belief. To suspend belief in such cases is to take a broadly *conciliatory* approach to the problem of disagreement.[14] After all, if you and I are epis-

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[13] A pessimist might be able to concede that *some* philosophical knowledge is possible. See footnote 10.

[14] See Elga (2007), Kornblith (2010, 2013), Christensen (2014), Feldman (2010), and

temic peers, know that we are, and find ourselves in disagreement over *p*, how *could* we rationally justify clinging to our respective beliefs? As epistemic peers our disagreement is evidence that we *may not know after all* and that therefore the rational thing to do in such cases is to suspend judgement until new evidence comes along. To continue to maintain our respective beliefs in the face of peer disagreement, would be irrational.[15]

Not everyone agrees, of course. Some think that, in at least some contexts, it's rational to stand one's ground in the face of a peer disagreement. Call this the *steadfast* approach to disagreement.[16] Even if I know that my epistemic peer is equally as intelligent, competent, etc., there is still an asymmetry: *they* got it wrong, and *I* got it right; I reasoned correctly, they didn't. This difference is an important one and allows steadfasters to rationally cling to their belief in face of a peer disagreement. There is a sense, then, in which the conciliatory approach begs the question: the conciliationist assumes from the very start that the disputants have equally competent access to the same evidence. But why should that be granted in the first place? At least this is one way the steadfaster might argue.

So, the first premise above might be rejected. But, like Barnett, we find it compelling, so let's assume that it is true. The second premise says that many disagreements in philosophy resemble genuine peer disagreements, i.e., disagreements between disputants who are epistemic peers. If so, and if conciliationism is the correct norm of belief revision for disagreement, then it follows that philosophers aren't rational in believing many of the views they defend and advance.

Is this second premise true though? Hilary Kornblith endorses a view like this. He says that "It would be reassuring to believe that I have better evidence … [for whether internalism or externalism about justification is true] than those who disagree with me. … that I have thought about this issue longer … or that I am simply smarter than they are, my judgement superior to theirs" (Kornblith 2010: 31). But while it would certainly be reassuring for Kornblith to believe these things, he ultimately concludes that he

doesn't believe them and that "they are all manifestly untrue" (Ibid). So, Kornblith seems to be a philosopher who would accept the second premise. Indeed, we think that it would be hard for many philosophers to deny this second premise largely for the reasons stated by Kornblith.[17] Thus, the conclusion follows: philosophers aren't rational in believing many of the views they defend and advance.

Goldberg (2013) and Barnett (2019) interestingly argue that this conclusion gives rise to "the sincere philosopher's dilemma": Either we philosophers believe the views that we defend and advance or we don't. If we do, then, per the conclusion above, we're being irrational. And if we don't, then our views don't seem to be sincerely held. It's obvious to see how each horn of the dilemma leads directly to philosophical skepticism.

Now, one question we can ask is whether the philosophical skepticism described here is really so unwelcome. If philosophical skepticism is motivated by considerations from peer disagreement, then it seems like an answer to this question largely hangs on whether we've got the right epistemological theory of disagreement. Steadfasters we noted, offered an alternative way forward. But even if the steadfast approach seems compelling in the case of ordinary peer disagreement, it seems harder to motivate when it comes to philosophical disagreement. For assume that the steadfast approach is mostly true: for most cases of philosophical disagreement, disputants should cling to their beliefs, not suspend belief in them. That would mean that many of the steadfaster's philosophical interlocutors aren't as competent as *they* are when it comes to evaluating the philosophical evidence with regard to a host of controversial philosophical issues. When it comes time for the steadfaster to demonstrate *how* their philosophical interlocutors are epistemically worse off, however, what reasons could they give? What evidence could they point to beyond certain premises in certain arguments which simply strike them as more plausible than others? Like Kornblith, the steadfaster might *hope* that they are smarter and more competent at evaluating the philosophical evidence than their peers, but it's hard to really believe that this is actually the case. The problem of convergence introduced in the last section rears its head: with no real methodological standard in philosophy—with no agreed-upon axioms or well-replicated experi-

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[17] See also Christensen (2014: 146–47). See Grundmann (2013) for opposition.

mental observations, etc.—determining which philosopher(s) have latched onto the truth seems to be a lost cause.

In any case, we won't pursue this question any further here. Instead, we want to take up another question, one prompted by Goldberg's and Barnett's sincere philosopher's dilemma. Assuming that something like philosophical skepticism is true, we know that the attitude of *belief* can't be the epistemically appropriate attitude to maintain with respect to our philosophical views. But if not, what attitude *would* be appropriate? In what remains, we'll consider three prominent proposals that have been advanced in the literature. Doing so will also help motivate our own proposal which we introduce in the next section (§3).

Goldberg (2013) takes philosophical skepticism seriously: we don't know or aren't justified in believing many of the philosophical views we defend and advance. But if we don't (or shouldn't) *believe* our philosophical views, what is the appropriate belief-like attitude we do (or should) have with respect to them? That attitude, Goldberg says, is the attitude of *regarding-as-defensible*. Goldberg thinks that the core doxastic attitude of "having a view in philosophy" is captured by this attitude. But how can it be rational to have a philosophical view if one's total evidence precludes belief in that view? Goldberg argues that when we're regarding a philosophical view as defensible we are in effect *speculating that p*: when one speculates that p, one regards p as more likely than not-p but regards the total evidence as stopping short of warranting outright belief in p. Hence, though speculating that p falls short of outright belief, it is still truth-directive.

Barnett's (2019) thinks Goldberg's account is vulnerable to a counterexample and seeks to develop an alternative view that avoids it. Specifically, Barnett argues that speculating that p can't be a necessary condition for one's having a philosophical view. Having an inclination to believe p is enough, because there could be increasing consensus on a view that is at odds with one's own, while one still retains it. Inclinations toward certain philosophical views, moreover, are *insulated* from disagreement. According to Barnett, then, in philosophy we should try to reason in away that is insulated from certain evidence, including the evidence we get from disagreement, in determining our views. The idea is that the higher-order evidence we get from peer disagreement is evidence that we can ignore when defending and advancing our philosophical views.

Insulation is a species of subtractive conditional reasoning: reasoning which involves focusing only on a subset of our evidence, ignoring or brack-

eting the evidence we have and reasoning *as if* it weren't there. So while, all-things-considered, we shouldn't actually *believe* the philosophical views we defend and advance (the evidence we get from disagreement rules against this), we can still be *inclined* toward certain philosophical views and that doing so is still rational insofar as "the view one is inclined towards is in fact the view that the remaining evidence supports" (Barnett 2019: 16).

Notice that Goldberg's attitudinal speculation and Barnett's disagreement-insulated inclination are "belief-substitutes" of some sort. They are attitudes that fall short of outright belief but that are invoked to play a *belief-like* role. Importantly, though they fall short of belief, they are still nevertheless attitudes that can be epistemically rational to adopt. Beebee (2018), however, offers an alternative picture to Goldberg's and Barnett's. In particular, she argues that the attitude of *acceptance* is the appropriate doxastic attitude one should take toward one's philosophical views. She understands acceptance *à la* van Fraassen (1980) which involves a *practical* commitment to a given philosophical research program. So, according to Beebee, we don't (nor should) believe our philosophical views; nor are we inclined toward them or regard them as defensible; rather, we *accept* them. In this respect, philosophy doesn't aim at knowledge *per se*, but rather aims to bring our views into "equilibrium"—a Lewisian-inspired (1983: x) view Beebee dubs *equilibrism:*[18]

> …[I]n the case of philosophy the aim of discovery of equilibria demands that we take on board a set of core assumptions and methodological prescriptions in order to develop and scrutinize an equilibrium position of our own that can withstand examination (2018: 22).

> Equilibrism recommends only that—when the occasion demands—stopping the argument and moving on is a legitimate move to make in pursuit of our collective aim (2018: 17).

Notice that the problem of peer disagreement is no longer much of a problem for Beebee. Each philosopher pursues their own aim of finding an equilibrium at which they can individually "come to rest" while acknowledging that others are doing the same.

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[18] This is not the reflective equilibristic views of Goodman (1955) and Rawls (1971).

To sum up, Goldberg, Barnett, and Beebee are all committed to some form of philosophical skepticism; each have developed views which try to demonstrate how exactly philosophy and disagreement can be made sense of without the attitude of belief. But might there be another way forward? Philosophical skepticism—like many skeptical positions—is a strong conclusion to swallow. And while some version of it may well be warranted in the end, it would be wise to explore alternatives before we commit to anything so dramatic. In the next section, we drive a wedge between these two extremes, and explore the prospects of having the best of both worlds.

3. Philosophical Skepticism, Progress, and Hinges

Recently, Coliva and Doulas (2022) have proposed a hinge account of philosophical disagreement and have explored its bearing on philosophical skepticism and philosophical progress.

Hinges, according to the hinge epistemologist, are those things that must "stay in place" or "remain fixed" in order for justification and knowledge of certain beliefs (typically empirical beliefs) to be possible. Experience as of seeing a hand, absent defeaters, for example, provides justification for the belief that *here is a hand* only insofar as certain assumptions—i.e., *hinges* like "There are physical objects" and "My sense organs work mostly reliably"—are taken for granted. For the reasons one may advance in their favor—broadly alike those provided by Moore's proof for "There is an external world"—would presuppose the truth of these hinges and couldn't thereby be appealed to in order to rationally ground belief in them.[19] While hinges make it possible, together with experience, to provide justification for ordinary empirical beliefs, they are epistemically groundless, neither believed nor disbelieved, known nor unknown.

Drawing on this hinge epistemology framework, Coliva and Doulas argue that just as general hinges make it possible to acquire justification for and knowledge of ordinary empirical beliefs, *philosophical hinges* (which can be thought of belonging to the subset of a more general class of hinges

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[19] Furthermore, as argued by Coliva (2015, 2020) *a priori*, or entitlement-style reasons in favor of them are hard to come by.

mentioned above) make it possible to acquire justification for and knowledge of specific philosophical beliefs. Call these more specific philosophical beliefs, "intra-theoretic," or "internal," philosophical beliefs. The key thought is that by taking for granted the relevant philosophical hinges, reasons for or against these further philosophical claims can be produced; thus, making them rationally held philosophical *beliefs*, which may be so corroborated as to, at least in some cases, amount to *genuine philosophical knowledge*. Conversely, by taking for granted philosophical hinges, it is then possible to provide reasons against philosophical beliefs. Coliva and Doulas' account, then, is friendly to philosophical *anti*-skepticism.

For example, taking for granted that there is an external world allows one meaningfully to debate how physical objects are represented in perception, or what conditions need to obtain for beliefs about them to be true and/or justified or known. Taking for granted that there are other minds then allow one meaningfully to debate how we can know other subjects' specific mental states, whether phenomenal, like pains and tickles, or representational like perceptions and beliefs. And taking for granted the Principle of the Uniformity of Nature we can then go on debating about inductive beliefs and generalizations are possible.

But Coliva and Doulas also agree (albeit for different reasons) with Goldberg, Barnett, and Beebee that our attitude to philosophical hinges, such as "There is an external world," "There are other minds," the Principle of Uniformity of Nature, etc., cannot be one of rational belief and hence cannot amount to knowledge (assuming knowledge entails belief). It's in this respect that Coliva and Doulas' account is *compatible* with philosophical skepticism. Thus, according to Coliva and Doulas, the attitude we bear towards these philosophical hinges is one of *acceptance*. This, in turn, is the attitude of holding a proposition true even if no (*a priori* or *a posteriori*) justification for them can be produced.

A lot of philosophical disagreement, Coliva and Doulas argue, is therefore "intra-theoretical" or "internal":

> *Intratheoretical (internal) philosophical disagreement*: two parties intra-theoretically (internally) disagree iff they hold incompatible philosophical beliefs (while sharing the same philosophical hinges).

This kind of philosophical disagreement, they argue, is rationally resolvable, based on a series of intra-theoretical checks, such as internal coherence, the power of answering a number of problems recognized as central to the do-

main under investigations, without making ad hoc assumptions, and without proliferating entities and faculties beyond necessity, and, whenever appropriate, compatibility with our best scientific results. These requisites typically serve to considerably narrow down the number of admissible philosophical positions. They may not be enough to narrow it down to only one contender, but this should not obfuscate the following important aspects of our discipline. Namely, (1) that disagreement within philosophy may be rationally conducted; (2) that it may be fruitful; and therefore (3) conducive to progress with respect to finding the correct account of a given philosophical issue. (Or else, if several options remain on the table after such a dialectical dynamic, they will have been shown to be ultimately equivalent, on balance).

While a lot of philosophical disagreement may be intratheoretical disagreement, there is also plenty of disagreement about philosophical hinges themselves. Coliva and Doulas characterize such disagreement as follows:

> *Philosophical hinge-disagreement*: Two parties hinge-disagree with one another iff they accept incompatible philosophical hinges.

Now, given that hinges aren't responsive to reasons or evidence, hinge-disagreements don't seem capable of being (epistemically) rationally resolved. However, the choice between the relevant philosophical hinges, while not based on epistemic reasons, will not be entirely arbitrary. For it can be motivated based on a variety of virtues a given philosophical hinge can have. For instance, accepting that there is an external world better coheres with our standing naturalist worldview, which is predicated on the possibility of investigating nature empirically, where nature, in turn, is not taken to be a figment of the human or the divine mind. Furthermore, as argued in Coliva and Palmira (2020, 2021), assuming the existence of an external world and considering this acceptance constitutive of epistemic rationality, as proposed in Coliva (2015), allows one to coherently account for the rationality of the practice of providing epistemic reasons for or against ordinary empirical beliefs. For, contrary to what a skeptic will end up saying, such a practice rests on epistemically rational—albeit unjustifiable—hinges. Yet, these are broadly pragmatic virtues and cannot be used to claim the truth of "There is an external world."

Notice, finally, that on a hinge epistemology framework, philosophy is not necessarily embarrassingly worse off than science, or mathematics. For in science and mathematics there too are hinges, conceived of as theoretical

assumptions or axioms, which may not non-circularly be proved. In science and mathematics too, there is a lot of intra-theoretical debate, and narrowing down of admissible theories (which may not necessarily determine one single correct view).[20] What *is* different is that while in mathematics there is proof and in science there is, often, an *experimentum crucis*, in philosophy there is none. Yet, this is in the very nature of each of these disciplines, and while that may explain the comparatively higher degree of convergence and progress in maths and science, compared to philosophy, it is not a good reason for *wholesale* pessimism about philosophy and the convergence and progress that we can sensibly hope to find or achieve within it.

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[20] Consider, for instance, the alternate accounts of light provided by the corpuscular and undulatory theories of light.

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