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Disagreement, Deep Time, and Progress in Philosophy

Abstract:

The epistemology of disagreement examines the question of how an agent ought to respond to awareness of epistemic peer disagreement about one of her beliefs. The literature on this topic, ironically enough, represents widespread disagreement about how we should respond to disagreement. I argue for the sceptical conclusion that the existence of widespread disagreement throughout the history of philosophy, and right up until the present day indicates that philosophers are highly unreliable at arriving at the truth. If truth convergence indicates progress in a field, then there is little progress in philosophy. This sceptical conclusion, however, need not make us give up philosophizing: That we should currently be sceptical of our philosophical beliefs is a contingent fact. We are an intellectually immature species and given the existence of the deep future we have some reason to think that there will be truth-convergence in philosophy in the future.

Keywords: progress in philosophy; peer disagreement; widespread disagreement; deep time

1. Introduction

The epistemology of disagreement examines the question of how an agent ought to respond to awareness of epistemic peer disagreement about one of her beliefs. [1] The literature on this topic, ironically enough, represents widespread disagreement about how we should respond to disagreement. I argue for the sceptical conclusion that the existence of widespread disagreement throughout the history of philosophy, and right up until the present day indicates that philosophers

[1] The term 'epistemic peer' was coined by Gutting (1984).

are highly unreliable at arriving at the truth. I will endorse the Unreliability Thesis: Philosophers are unreliable at arriving at true philosophical beliefs about the big questions If truth convergence indicates progress in a field, then there is little progress in philosophy. This sceptical conclusion, however, need not make us give up philosophizing: That we should currently be sceptical of our philosophical beliefs is a contingent fact. We are an intellectually immature species and given the existence of the deep future we have some reason to think that there will be truth-convergence in philosophy in the future.

I show that the Unreliability Thesis cannot be rejected by appealing to other–weaker–conceptions of progress. So redefining the concept of progress to exclude truth is not a viable option. I also demonstrate that self-referential worries are unlikely to apply to the Unreliability Thesis. Likewise, denying that philosophers are genuine epistemic peers will not help either. Indeed, the problem is further highlighted by reflecting on the higher-order evidence from disagreement with epistemic inferiors and superiors. While the Unreliability Thesis is unlikely to apply to the hard sciences I suggest that even if it does, it wouldn't make its truth any less likely with respect to philosophy. Finally, while there is more convergence in the new fields that emerge from philosophy, they emerge at least in part because they are no longer dealing with the big questions in philosophy.

I conclude that the human species is currently poor at philosophizing, but that this need not make us give up philosophizing: That we should currently be sceptical of our philosophical beliefs is only a contingent fact about the human species. Perhaps in a few million years there will be truth convergence in philosophy. I argue that this is consistent with the idea that our brains didn't evolve to be good at philosophy because it serves no adaptive advantage. In fact, there are positive reasons to think philosophy will converge on the truth given the existence of *deep time*.

2. Disagreement in Philosophy

The Epistemology of Disagreement

The phenomenon of disagreement in philosophy is not new. The existence of disagreement can be found all the way back in Plato and Aristotle. If one includes philosophical theology in this observation, then early Christian philosophers such as Justin Martyr and Saint Augustine were also enmeshed in philosophical disputes. Disagreement continued into the medieval period and the early modern period is rife with disputes, particularly in metaphysics. With more philosophers than ever in the 20th century and now into the 21st century philosophical disagreement continues to be persuasive. There is rarely, if ever, consensus amongst philosophers both past and present. Indeed, philosophers seem to make their living, at least in part, by disagreeing with one another. Just think of all of the philosophical writing inspired by the thought that a colleague is mistaken. What would we write about if we didn't disagree with each other? Also consider that part of a philosopher's training involves learning to tease out and challenge assumptions in an opponent's argument.[2] So the fact of disagreement in philosophy is hardly a new feature in the field. I trust that anyone with even a tertiary knowledge of the discipline will recognize that this is true.

It's only fairly recently, however, that philosophers have explicitly explored the epistemic significance of disagreement itself. Perhaps this is because we've been too busy disagreeing with each other to pause and reflect on the phenomenon of disagreement itself. In any event, the literature has come to be known as the *epistemology of disagreement*. This literature doesn't so much focus on understanding what the widespread disagreement in philosophy means, but rather focuses on the rational requirements of *individuals* who encounter epistemic peer disagreement.

[2] My own anecdotal experience would suggest that non-philosophers are sometimes irritated by the apparent abrasiveness of philosophers who they see as a people who are prone to disagree with just about everything.

So the literature tends to focus on what to do in *particular* cases of disagreement, rather than on how we should react to *widespread* disagreement. I will attempt to connect these two topics.

The epistemology of disagreement focuses on cases of epistemic peer disagreement. Epistemic peers share (roughly) the same evidence and cognitive abilities. Or at they at least share the same truth-tracking record regarding similar bodies of evidence.[3] When an agent S believes proposition P and becomes aware that an epistemic peer believes not-P, what is she rationally required to do? In trying to become clear about how to answer this question some of the early literature appeals to idealized cases of disagreement. Richard Feldman asks us to consider a case where two people are looking out of a window overlooking the quad and disagree about whether the Dean is in the quad (2007), 207-208. Adam Elga describes a horse race where two equally competent people disagree about which horse won the race (2007), 166-167. David Christensen refers to a case where two friends disagree about how much they each owe on the dinner bill 2007, 193. In all of the cases there is no *dispute independent reason* to downgrade one's opponent from having the status of epistemic peer. The Conciliationist (conformist, revisionist,) position is that without possessing a dispute independent reason agent S is rationally obligated to lower her credence or suspend judgment about whether P. Many argue that the lessons from the idealized cases apply to more complex cases of disagreement, Christensen (2007), 193; Matheson (2015a), 113.[4] So most conciliationists will think that peer disagreement threatens the rationality of many of our philosophical beliefs.[5] Widespread scepticism looms large if a strong version of conciliationism turns out to be true.

[3] I will say more about peerhood in the objections section.
[4] In Lougheed (2017) I argue against this idea.
[5] Of course, numbers matter here. If many peers independently form the judgment that *P* is true, then the existence of only one peer who independently forms the judgment *not-P* does not pose a serious threat to the rationality of believing *P*. For the most part, though, this sort of case doesn't occur in philosophy. Disagreement is often widely distributed in philosophy.

The Non-Conciliationist (non-conformist, anti-revisionist, steadfaster) believes that agent S need not revise her belief that P even in the face of epistemic peer disagreement. Arguments for remaining steadfast nclude appealing to special insight, self-trust, (avoiding) spinelessness, intuition, illicit double-counting, the future benefits of disagreement, that doing so evaluates the right reasons correctly, and the worry that conciliationism is self-referentially incoherent, Bergmann (2009); Decker (2014); Elgin (2010); Kelly (2005); Lougheed (2018); Lougheed and Simpson (2018); Titelbaum (2015); Van Inwagen (1996). Indeed, some non-conciliationists will deny that one needs a *dispute independent reason* in order to downgrade one's opponent from having the status of epistemic peer. It's an open question whether the entire debate between conciliationists and non-conciliationists hinges on the independence requirement; it is certainly a very important aspect of the debate, Christensen (2011), 1; Kelly (2013), 37. Non-conciliationism, if true, denies that widespread scepticism is entailed by the existence of epistemic peer disagreement.

Some of the debate between conciliationists and non-conciliationists can be viewed as a disagreement about how to treat first-order reasons and second-order reasons, Kelly (2010). Conciliationists will say that the second-order fact of peer disagreement should impact S's belief that P, while non-conciliationists will deny that second-order reasons should trump first-order reasons, or count as part of one's total evidence for P. Finally, there are a few hybrid views which advocate for the position that sometimes peer disagreement requires revision and sometimes it does not, Lackey (2010a), (2010b); Kelly (2010). Such hybrid views, then, will only advocate scepticism in a limited number of cases. This brief summary of the literature is sufficient for my purposes.

The epistemology of disagreement literature is in itself interesting. Dozens of articles have been published on it over the last few years and there appears to be no near end in sight. Philosophers continue to disagree about the significance of peer disagreement. It's worth noticing, however, that the literature has almost exclusively focused on disagreement between only *two* epistemic peers.[6] It is plausible that perhaps the lessons from two peer disagreement easily translates to cases of multi-peer disagreement, but that is something that hasn't been clearly established. My suspicion is that there are puzzles about multi-peer disagreement that are currently unexplored. Likewise, it's not obvious that there aren't significant epistemic lessons to be drawn from disagreement with epistemic *inferiors* and *superiors*. For instance, if S disagrees about P with a slight epistemic inferior it may very well be that she still possesses a (partial) defeater for P, even if it is not as powerful as one from an epistemic peer or superior. And even if the literature did a better job of accounting for these variants it would still be ignoring what I most wish to discuss in this project.

Puzzles about epistemic peer disagreement can arise as a purely theoretical or abstract problem. There need not have been any actual peer disagreement in order to generate much of the current literature on disagreement. And for the theoretical debate to be applicable to real-world cases of disagreement there need only be just one case of real-world peer disagreement in order to make the application. But I want to discuss the epistemic significance of the *actual existence of widespread disagreement in philosophy*. This is something that the current literature on disagreement, for the most part, has neglected.

Widespread Disagreement in Philosophy

[6] Matheson (2015a); Boyce and Hazlett (2014); Carter (2014) are notable exceptions. Indeed, Matheson's conciliationist view is that an epistemic election would tell us how S should modify her belief that P. But we don't know the results of the epistemic election so we should be sceptical about whether P.

Thus far I've suggested that widespread peer disagreement is a prominent feature of both past and present philosophical discourse. I've also shown that the epistemology of disagreement literature doesn't really tell us what the epistemic significance of widespread disagreement amounts to for a field like philosophy. In this section I explore different ways of diagnosing *why* there is widespread disagreement in philosophy. Before examining possible explanations it's worth elaborating on what exactly constitutes widespread disagreement. Peter van Inwagen observes that:

> Disagreement in philosophy is pervasive and irresoluble. There is almost no thesis in philosophy about which philosophers agree. If there is any philosophical thesis that all or most philosophers affirm, it is a negative thesis: that formalism is not the right philosophy of mathematics, for example, or that knowledge is not (simply) justified, true belief, van Inwagen (2004) quoted in Chalmers (2015), 4-5.

I don't take convergence on negative theses to represent the type of agreement indicative of the sort of progress I'm interested in exploring here. It is a type of progress, but I'm concerned with progress about the big questions in philosophy. David Chalmers explains that the big questions include things like: 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? Chalmers (2015), 5.[7] Anyone with even a slight knowledge of the history of philosophy and the current state of the discipline will affirm that there is widespread disagreement on the big questions in philosophy. Finally, there is some empirical support for the existence of widespread disagreement found in David Bourget and David Chalmers noteworthy article summarizing survey results of the self-reported beliefs of contemporary philosophers (2014).

[7] Chalmers continues to say that he: will not try to provide a more precise list than this, but any philosopher can come up with a list of 10 or so big questions fairly easily, and I suspect that there would be a lot of overlap between these lists. We could even use these lists to operationally define the big questions: the big questions of a field at time t are those that members of that field would count as the big questions of the field at time t, Chalmers (2015), 5.

3. Why Do Philosophers Disagree?

Philosophers Use the Wrong Methodology

One reason for explaining the existence of widespread disagreement in philosophy is that philosophers use the wrong methods. If philosophers used the right method, we would find more agreement and hence more progress in the field. This diagnosis can be found throughout the history of philosophy. For instance, Kant gives exactly this explanation in the Preface to the Second Edition to the *Critique*. The new methodology he proposes will amount to a Copernican revolution in the field. Recall that he writes that if for a science "it proves impossible for the different co-workers to achieve unanimity as to the way in which they should pursue their common aim; then we may be sure that such a study is merely groping about, that it is still far from having entered upon the secure course of a science" Kant (1998), 106. According to Kant, traditional topics in metaphysics are prone to wide-ranging disagreements. He offers logic as the penultimate example of a secure science and argues that it is complete because it has not taken a single step backwards or forwards since Aristotle, Kant (1998), 106. Although it is now widely acknowledged that Kant's views on logic's completeness are false, he does offer insights into the criteria he has in mind to establish a secure science. Part of what makes logic successful is that it is abstracted away from objects. That is, according to Kant, logic is only concerned with itself and its own form. He says "[h]ow much more difficult, naturally, must it be for reason to enter upon the secure path of a science if it does not have to do merely with itself, but has to deal with objects too" Kant (1998), 107.[8] Other examples include Hume's claim that the *Treatise* was intended to bring appropriate

[8] Even though Kant believes metaphysics will always be a subject of human curiosity, it is not secure partly due to the fact that: For in it reason continuously gets stuck, even when it claims *a priori* insight (as it pretends) into those laws confirmed by the commonest experience. In metaphysics we have to retrace our path countless times, because we find that it does not lead where we want to go *and it is so far from reaching unanimity in the assertions of its adherents that it is rather a battlefield, and indeed one that appears to be especially determined for testing one's powers in mock combat; on this battlefield no combatant has ever gained the least bit of ground, nor has any been able to base any*

empirical methods into the discipline. Likewise, Hobbes claimed that there would be more agreement in philosophy if philosophers would start with clear and sensible definitions (Brennan 2010), 11. So it's possible that widespread disagreement might indicate that philosophers simply employ the wrong methodology. If they used the correct methodology to philosophize there would be more convergence in philosophy.

Philosophy is Inherently Difficult

Another possible explanation of the existence of widespread peer disagreement in philosophy is that philosophizing is inherently difficult. Perhaps there is something inherently difficult in analyzing abstract philosophical concepts. Maybe it is some feature of the very nature of philosophical concepts that makes philosophizing difficult. I won't attempt to state what this feature or property might amount to here. Possibly the fact that philosophical argument is not subject to empirical verification in the way that hard sciences can be verified is part of the difficulty. But the important takeaway is that this is a possible explanation of the widespread peer disagreement in philosophy.

Philosophers Have Different Cognitive Values

Yet another way to explain the existence of widespread disagreement is that philosophers disagree because they hold different cognitive values. Nicholas Rescher "argues that philosophers choose to reject different theses – and thus establish conflicting schools of thought – because they accept different *cognitive values* or weigh the cognitive values differently" Brennan (2010), 14. Rescher understands cognitive values as "the epistemic traits by which we assess a doctrine, e.g.,

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lasting possession on his victory. Hence there is no doubt that up to now the procedure of metaphysics has been a mere groping, and what is the worst, a groping among mere concepts" Kant (1998,) 109-110; emphasis mine.

coherence, plausibility, and generality, importance, informativeness, elegances, etc." Brennan (2010), 14.[9]

If this is the right explanation it has interesting implications for the very possibility of rational disagreement. For instance, Rober J. Fogelin argues that genuine argument is only possible when two agents share many common background beliefs. In this sense, then, argumentation is always context sensitive. These shared beliefs provide "the structure within which *reasons can be marshaled*, where marshaling reasons is typically a matter of citing facts that others already know or of arranging facts in a way that their significance becomes clear" Fogelin (1985), 3. Fogelin continues on to claim that "an *argumentative exchange* is *normal* when it takes place within a context of *broadly* shared beliefs and preferences. I shall further insist that for an argumentative exchange to be normal, there must exist shared procedures for resolving disagreements" Fogelin (1985), 3. In sum, according to Fogelin, genuine argument is only possible when two agents share many beliefs in common. When a significant number of beliefs are shared Fogelin says the result is a normal (or almost normal) argumentative context, Fogelin (1985), 4. He explains that:

> [T]o the extent that the argumentative context becomes less normal, argument, to that extent, become impossible. This is not the weak claim that in such context arguments cannot be settled. It is the stronger claim that the conditions for argument do not exist. The language of argument may persist, but it becomes pointless since it makes an appeal to something that does not exist: a share background of beliefs and preferences, Fogelin (1985), 4-5.

These are deep disagreements and they "cannot be resolved through the use of argument, for they undercut the conditions essential to arguing" Fogelin (1985), 5. In other words, deep disagreements

[9] See also Rescher (1985), 95-115.

represent disagreement over 'underlying principles'. If we understand underlying principles as equivalent to cognitive values, then this explains why we find so much disagreement in philosophy.[10]

We Didn't Evolve to be Good at Philosophy

Colin McGinn argues that humans did not evolve to be good at philosophy since such abstract reasoning isn't an adaptive advantage. The contingent process of evolution resulted in our sort of brain, but had different adaptations occurred we would have a different brain. Chalmers explains McGinn's idea:

> It is sometimes suggested that there is a Darwinian explanation for the lack of progress in philosophy. The rough idea is that we did not evolve to be good at philosophy, since in our evolutionary environment there were no selection pressures that favored philosophical ability or anything that strongly correlates with it, Chalmers (2015), 28.

In other words, we simply didn't evolve to be good at philosophy, so it's not surprising to find widespread disagreement in philosophy.[11]

4. The Epistemic Significance of Widespread Disagreement in Philosophy

Thus far I have offered four possible explanations as to why there is widespread peer disagreement in philosophy: (i) philosophers use the wrong methodology; (ii) philosophy is inherently difficult; (iii) we have difference cognitive values; and (iv) we didn't evolve to be good at philosophy. For my purposes it's not so important *why* we disagree, although it's worth noting that explanations (iii) and (iv) may rule out in principle the very possibility of progress in philosophy *ever*. Regardless of the correct explanation for the existence of disagreement, the epistemic significance of widespread

[10] This line can also be used to defend the idea that disagreements that are ultimately the result of different cognitive values can be rational. I won't evaluate this claim here.
[11] See also McGinn (1993).

disagreement in philosophy doesn't' change. So what is the epistemic significance of widespread epistemic peer disagreement?

The epistemic significance of widespread peer disagreement in philosophy indicates that there is a lack of convergence on the truth in philosophy. This means that philosophers are unreliable at arriving at the truth. Expert consensus is one possible way to confirm truth in a subject like philosophy since empirical experiments cannot be used. But such convergence eludes us. All of this is to say that there is little to no progress in philosophy. This is indeed a highly sceptical conclusions which may seem overly provocative or far-reaching, but upon reflection they can be defended.

Hilary Kornblith is a rare exception of someone who discusses both the issue of epistemic peer disagreement *and* widespread disagreement. He believes that the simple cases of basic math or perceptual disagreements can be quickly solved. They're minor disagreements about areas of general *widespread* agreement so scepticism about math or perception is not a reasonable response to disagreement in these cases. We only need to suspend judgment in these cases until we can re-check and figure out who has made the mistake, Kornblith (2010), 32-33.[12] Kornblith explains that temporarily suspending judgment is not available in a disagreement about philosophy.

Kornblith claims that when there isn't a majority convergence among experts on a philosophical question we ought to suspend judgment. He explains that "[w]e [philosophers] do not have a long history of steady progress on issues, and as a result, the case for deferring to community opinion is thereby weakened" Kornblith (2010), 45.[13] He continues:

> [I]f the history of a field gives us no reason for confidence in the judgment of individual practitioners, then this, by itself, gives us reason to suspend judgment on

[12] See Oppy (2010) and also Lougheed (2017).
[13] Kornblith notes that this is very different from the sciences where there seems to be convergence, if slowly, over time.

> questions that confront the field. If the history of the field shows no track record of success in addressing the issues it confronts, the only conclusions we can reasonably reach is that there is no basis for opinion here on anyone's part at all. It certainly does not give one free rein to believe whatever one pleases… The sad truth, it seems, is that the history of philosophy does not look remotely like the history of science or mathematics when it comes to the dynamics of consensus among its most esteemed practitioners, and this has a striking bearing on the question of its epistemic credentials. One might try to carve out a recent piece of this history, and some particular subject matter, where one believes that real progress is being made and that we are finally getting to the truth on some important issue… But, if we are to take any such view seriously, and subject it to real scrutiny, we would surely find that this view of the particular question at issue is itself a subject of real controversy among acknowledged experts in the field, and so it too must be seen, on careful consideration, as an issue on which we ought to suspend judgment, Kornblith (2010), 45.

He explains that apart from the formal areas that are similar to mathematics, the epistemic status of philosophy has little in common with the sciences. While philosophers form beliefs about controversial philosophical topics, we should acknowledge that in light of widespread disagreement they aren't ultimately epistemically justified in these beliefs, Kornblith (2010), 45.[14] This same worry is true of non-empirical fields such as ethics, politics, and religion. Notice that while this is a sceptical argument of sorts, part of what Kornblith is doing is simply reporting on different facts about disagreement: Disagreement is much more widespread in fields like philosophy, politics, and religion than it is in the hard sciences. There is less convergence in such

[14] Kornblith claims that one would need a very strong independent reason to disagree with expert consensus about a topic, (2010), 46.

fields than there is in the hard sciences. The appropriate conclusion to infer from these facts can, of course, be challenged. But here I think a more plausible conclusion than unreliability will be difficult to find. For the rest of this project, then, I endorse the following thesis:

Unreliability Thesis: Philosophers are unreliable at arriving at true philosophical beliefs regarding the big questions.[15]

This does not require taking a position on whether the Unreliability Thesis is the result of incorrect methodology (as Kant would have it), the inherent difficultly of philosophy and its concepts, or some other reason. The widespread peer disagreement in philosophy implies that the Unreliability Thesis is true. After addressing some objections to the Unreliability Thesis (from here on 'UT'). I will examine how philosophy can continue in light of UT.[16]

5. Objections to the Unreliability Thesis

Alternative Conceptions of Progress

Chalmers says that "[d]espite this lack of convergence, it is hard to deny that the insights of Plato and Aristotle, Hume and Kant, Frege and Russell, Kripke and Lewis have involved significant philosophical progress" Chalmers (2015), 12. While philosophical arguments rarely lead to agreement, they often lead to more sophisticated disagreement. He explains that those who hold a "view learn what extra commitments they need to take on to avoid the arguments. Bad versions of a view are rejected and sophisticated versions are developed in their place. This leads to a sort of eliminative progress where areas of philosophical space are eliminated" Chalmers (2015), 18. So it might be objected that UT unfairly attributes a goal to philosophy that it could never be expected

[15] Or, if one prefers, 'justified' philosophical beliefs, or philosophical 'knowledge', or philosophical 'understanding'.
[16] There are interesting connections between the Unreliability Thesis and religious belief which I do not have space to explore in any detail here. Briefly, suppose that the Unreliability Thesis is also true with respect to religion (which I think is clearly the case). Would expect this to be true on naturalism or theism? One might suggest that the widespread disagreement on religious and metaphysical matters is just what we should expect on naturalism, not theism. The fact of widespread disagreement about religious matters suggests that religious matters aren't easy to figure out. Why is this the case?

to fulfill. Non-empirical fields shouldn't be expected to make progress if progress is measured in terms of expert (truth) convergence over time. Rather, philosophy should be measured by its ability to help us to ask more precise questions. It also helps us to tease out intuitions and assumptions that are normally hidden. Another way of understanding philosophy is that it's a second-order enterprise whose sole purpose is to monitor and control the language that scientists use.[17] Finally, philosophy should be measured by how well it provides structure to the world. Structure is valuable if it is good or beautiful, not just true. Thus, truth convergence should not be the measure of philosophical progress. Or at the very least it should not be the sole measure of progress.

Reply:

It's true that there are these alternate conceptions of philosophy. It's also the case that many philosophers claim that these alternative conceptions are an important part of the philosophical enterprise. While these conceptions are important, they aren't incompatible with also pursuing truth. Likewise, they are held in conjunction with the goal of pursuing philosophical truths. Thus, even if truth isn't both necessary and sufficient for tracking philosophical progress, it is necessary. In other words, it's not that these alternative conceptions aren't valuable, it's that they aren't worth pursuing *on their own* (at least when one has the big philosophical questions in view).

Consider also that these alternative conceptions don't appear to be what many philosophers take themselves to be doing.[18] Most philosophers are making truth claims. We would have to completely reorient our discipline if we are going to stop claiming we are after the truth. Just think of how we would have to start rephrasing our grant applications. We typically think of something

[17] Thanks to Nick Griffin for bringing this to my attention.

[18] This appears consistent with what Chalmers says later: Once one has been doing philosophy for a while, one no longer expects arguments to produce agreement, and one deems an argument good when it merely has some dialectical power. But this is an adjustment of expectations in response to a disappointing reality. Antecedently to doing philosophy, one might have hoped for something more (2015), 22.

like beauty or elegance as good-making features of a theory, but they are only *in addition to* the truth. The truth takes precedent over features like beauty or elegance. And notice that in arguing in favour of a different prioritization one would be appealing to the *truth* of this different prioritization. The entire discipline would have to be reshaped if we stopped explicitly pursuing truth, and it's not clear to me that such a reshaping is possible.[19]

Truth isn't Necessary for Progress Because Progress is Non-Factive

A potential rejoinder to my reply to the above objection is that truth isn't necessary for philosophical progress. The conception of progress this rejoinder appeals to is based on Catherine Elgin's recent work on the concept of understanding (2018).[20] This objection says that even if there is no progress with respect to truth in philosophy (i.e. factive progress) there is progress with respect to understanding (non-factive progress). Elgin suggests that the competing models and theories about what is true is science and philosophy aren't problematic inasmuch as these models and theories contribute to advancing objectual non-factive understanding in these fields. For Elgin, propositional understanding is about an individual proposition while objectual understanding captures an account (2018), 33.[21] She explains that "[t]he cognitive competence involved in understanding is generally characterized as grasping [while p]ropositional understanding involves grasping a fact; objectual understanding consists of grasping a range of phenomena" Eglin (2018), 33. To grasp includes knowing how to wield such understanding in the service of one's epistemic ends. Elgin continues:

> Disciplinary understanding, I argue, is best construed as objectual. In the first instance we understand a range of phenomena via an overall account; only derivatively,

[19] Just think of how the high pressure to publish might be ultimately hurting the discipline of philosophy.
[20] I'm grateful to an anonymous referee for raising this objection and prompting me to think more about the concept of understanding.
[21] See also Kvanvig (2003).

> drawing on the resources of that account, do we understand that or why something is the case. I argue that scientific (objectual) understanding is nonfactive. Although it is not indifferent to the facts it concerns, an account that accommodates those facts need not consists exclusively or predominantly of truths, Elgin (2018), 33.

And:

> [A]n understanding is an epistemic commitment to a comprehensive, systematically linked body of information that is grounded in fact, is duly responsive to reasons or evidence, and enables nontrivial inference, argument, and perhaps action regarding the topic the information pertains to […] Astronomy affords an understanding of the motions of celestial bodies and their effects; astrology does not. Chemistry affords an understanding of the constitution of matter; alchemy does not. Biology affords an understanding of the origin of species; 'intelligent design' does not. An adequate epistemology should, at least for the most part, respect such verdicts, Elgin (2018), 44.

Finally, explanation is not a necessary component of understanding:

> A physician understands the course of a disease, being aware of the sequence signs and symptoms, the duration of the contagious phase, the potential complications, and the ranges of responsiveness to treatment, even if neither she nor anyone else can explain why the disease presents in the way it does, Elgin (2018), 45.

While nothing I've argued for denies that there may be other types of progress, this constitutes an objection to my view because Elgin holds that understanding is the most fundamental form of progress in sciences and philosophy. Since it seems that I've been assuming otherwise (i.e. that truth is most fundamental measurement of progress) Elgin's view, if correct, undermines my argument.

Reply:

There are three initial different responses to this rejoinder. The first is to simply admit that factive progress is less important non-factive progress. Thus, even if it is less important it is still the case that it doesn't occur. While this is a significant concession on my part, I could still say that factive progress is an important goal in philosophy and one it fails to achieve. Still, this makes my argument significantly less interesting and thus isn't very palatable. A second response is to say that factive progress (i.e. truth-tracking) is the one that philosophers do in fact use. Philosophers want to know whether their individual beliefs track the truth. And this is thus closer to propositional understanding than objectual understanding. But the objector could respond that this commits the is/ought fallacy. For even if philosophers care more about factive progress than non-factive progress, it doesn't follow that this is what they ought to care about. [22] Finally, a third initial response is to simply deny that there is non-factive progress in philosophy. This would be an extension of my thesis which initially only included factive progress. However, this response isn't available to me. This is because I've been assuming, at least implicitly, that there may well be non-factive progress in philosophy throughout this paper. It would thus be inconsistent (and ad hoc) for me to deny this now in order to answer this objection. This is so even if it remains an open question as to just how much non-factive progress there really is in philosophy. For my purposes, then, none of these three replies are very helpful.

A more promising response is to address this objection head on. This would involve an extensive review of Elgin (and others) on understanding in order to show either that (i) the concept is fundamentally problematical; (ii) that factive progress is more important than non-factive

[22] Of course, it is an empirical question whether this is in fact what philosophers care about. For the sake of argument I'm assuming that I'm right about this point.

progress or (iii) that understanding is actually factive. I take options (ii) and (iii) to be the most promising. I will briefly say something about defending (iii). Elgin says that:

> Whether this sort of understanding is factive is the question I need to address. Understanding on my view is a (perhaps tacit) endorsement of a fairly comprehensive, interconnected constellation of cognitive commitments. The understanding encapsulated in individual propositions derives from an understanding of larger bodies of information that include those propositions. In understanding the Athenian victory in the Battle of Marathon, Jill grasps how the proposition stating the fact that Athens won fits into, contributes to, is justified by reference to, and figures in the justification of a more comprehensive understanding that embeds it […] The issue that divides factivists and nonfactivists is not whether understanding must answer to the facts, but how it must do so. Following Plato (1997), let us call the required connection between a comprehensive, coherent account and the facts it bears on an understanding's tether. Even if astrology offers a comprehensive, internally coherent account of the cosmos, it yields no understanding because it lacks a suitable tether" Elgin (2018), 45.

Elgin explains that according to Jonathan Kvanvig "an agent cannot understand a topic unless most of the propositions and all of the central propositions that constitute her coherent take on that topic are true. He allows that a few peripheral falsehoods can degrade an agent's understanding of a topic without destroying it" Elgin (2018), 58).[23] Elgin rejects Kvanvig's view for a number of reasons, including the idea that (unlike knowledge) understanding comes in degrees. Space constraints prevent me from detailing the Elgin's debate with Kvavig any further here. My point is that to avoid this rejoinder one can side with Kvanvig's factive view of understanding. This

[23] See also Kvanvig (2003).

response will be more or less appealing depending on how one assesses the debate between Elgin and Kvanvig.

UT is Self-Referentially Incoherent

Another possible objection to UT can be formulated similarly to an objection levelled against conciliationist responses to disagreement. This is the challenge that UT is self-referentially incoherent. The statement 'Philosophers are unreliable at arriving at true philosophical beliefs regarding the big questions' is perhaps partly an empirical claim, but it is also a philosophical thesis about the implications of the concept of reliability. For the philosopher who affirms UT, then, the question is whether she can consistently appeal to it in philosophical arguments since UT is a philosophical thesis (and held by a philosopher). In other words, even if UT is true, it might be irrational for any philosopher to believe it (and use it in arguments).

Reply:

Briefly, it's worth noting that UT is at least in part an *empirical claim* about the existence of widespread disagreement in philosophy. We can go out into the world and check whether there is widespread disagreement in philosophy. There is nothing self-referentially incoherent in such a claim. Likewise, in addressing a similar objection to a similar argument Jason Brennan writes "[e]ven if this defence works, it is embarrassing if this is the best defence philosophy has. Yet, it is not obvious that the defence succeeds. It may just be that all philosophy is unreliable except anti-philosophy philosophy" Brennan (2010), 8. Likewise, "it may just be that a small set of philosophical issues is answered and that philosophical methodology works reliably on a small set of issues, i.e., just in the areas needed to make the sceptic's argument" Brennan (2010), 9.

The epistemology of disagreement literature can also be of help in addressing this question. For instance, one could admit that UT is self-referentially incoherent, but hold that no inductive

method for determining what to believe can coherently recommend an alternative. This is due to the fact that "it is in the nature of giving consistent advice that one's advice be dogmatic with respect to its own correctness. And views on [philosophical progress] give advice on how to respond to evidence. So, in order to be consistent, views on [philosophical progress] must be dogmatic with respect to their own correctness" Elga (2010), 185.[24]

Are opponents really peers?

In connection with the epistemology of disagreement, one might object that UT is false because the empirical claim of widespread peer disagreement is false. Epistemic peerhood requires strict evidential and cognitive equality. Any difference in evidence or cognition could constitute a relevant epistemic asymmetry in a dispute that justifies downgrading one's opponent. So there is widespread disagreement in philosophy, but there isn't widespread *peer* disagreement (King 2012). And it is peer disagreement that's required for UT to be true.

Reply:

In order for UT to be true, it need not be the case that opponents are exact epistemic peers (i.e. they have exactly the same cognition and evidence). Peerhood can be a degreed notion. For instance, the existence of epistemic inferiors and superiors serves to bolster the truth of UT. If one takes a degreed approach to belief, then even epistemic inferiors can cause problems. Maybe a number of only slight epistemic inferiors disagrees with S over whether P. This has some epistemic significance even if it is less significant than disagreement with a peer. Disagreement with epistemic superiors should be given more weight than peers or inferiors. When one considers the disagreements between inferiors, peers, and superiors, the phenomenon of disagreement is even more widespread in philosophy then initially suggested. Thus, even if there are no real-world cases

[24] For additional responses this problem in the disagreement literature see Bogardus (2009); Graves (2013); Pittard (2015).

of exact epistemic peers, the type of disagreement still exists in philosophy which is required to support UT.

Scientists Disagree a lot too

Another objection to UT is that any unreliability thesis will be true of any discipline in which there is widespread disagreement. There is much more disagreement in science than Kornblith's account seems to suggest. The history of science is full of disagreement and controversy. Thus, UT also applies to scientific truths. But, so the objection goes, we should be surer there is progress in science then that scientists don't arrive at scientific truths. One question which arises from this line of objection is why this same response wouldn't also apply to my original formulation of UT about philosophy? Why choose the truth of there being progress rather than unreliability in science, but not in philosophy, given that there is widespread disagreement in both fields?

Reply:

A lot of disagreement can be found in the history of science. The difference between disputes in science and philosophy is that in science disputes often end with convergence on the truth (or at least with expert convergence). Winners and losers are decided with respect to truth in science, even if it takes a lot of time and effort. The same simply cannot be said of philosophy. There is widespread agreement amongst scientific experts on a variety of topics, the number of which is far greater than in philosophy. There is also widespread agreement on many fundamental issues in science, unlike philosophy. Is there anything similar to the agreement amongst scientists about the periodic table in philosophy? Finally, even if this convergence didn't happen in science it wouldn't show that UT is false. It would only mean that UT also applies to scientists.

New Fields Emerge from Philosophy and there is Widespread Agreement in those Fields

Finally, one interesting objection to UT which I borrow from Chalmers is the idea that many disciplines have emerged out of philosophy. He explains that:

> [M]any new disciplines have sprung forth from philosophy over the years: physics, psychology, logic, linguistics, economics, and so on. In each case, these fields have sprung forth as tools have been developed to address questions more precisely and more decisively. The key thesis is that when we develop methods for conclusively answering philosophical questions, those methods come to constitute a new field and the questions are no longer deemed philosophical. So it is only to be expected that the questions that remain are subject to less agreement than those in other disciplines, Chalmers (2015), 25.

If these new disciplines remained part of philosophy we would find more agreement in philosophy.

Reply:

I don't deny that new and distinct disciplines emerge from philosophy. I also don't deny that some of these disciplines (especially the hard sciences) exhibit much more agreement than there is in philosophy.[25] But these disciplines haven't answered any of the big questions in philosophy. It's not as if psychology or cognitive science has solved the mind-body problem. In fact, part of the very reason for different disciplines emerging from philosophy is due to the fact that they are examining *non-philosophical questions*. Or at least questions not philosophical enough to be properly considered part of the discipline. It's also worth pointing out that if one of philosophy's virtues is creating new fields which do in fact get at the truth, it seems to be slowing down very much in that regard, Brennan (2010), 12.

6. Why Philosophize?

[25] There is much less agreement in the social sciences than the hard sciences, especially when considers the fundamental assumptions of each discipline.

In this section I examine reasons as to why we should still philosophize in light of UT. On one hand it's very easy to answer this question: one can continue to philosophize if she so desires to philosophize.[26] On the other hand, it's more difficult to answer this question when it's understood in the stronger, normative sense, as to why we *ought* to philosophize. It's this latter understanding of the question that I'm concerned with answering in this section.

Humans are Only Contingently Poor at Philosophy

I take the most pressing reason to stop philosophizing to be found in McGinn's explanation of disagreement in philosophy which is that we simply didn't evolve to be any good at it. There is little to no adaptive advantage to being good at philosophy, unlike more physical tasks. If this is right, then there is little reason to think we'll get better at it over time. Part of what UT shows us that is that *right now* the human species is particularly poor at philosophizing. McGinn, however, gives the additional reason to suppose that this is a feature about the human species which is unlikely to change. It's true that we can imagine an alien species who are really bad at science but really good at philosophy. Within this alien species there is widespread agreement on philosophical issues, but little disagreement on scientific matters. Maybe when we interact with them we just can't understand the reasons for their philosophical beliefs. Likewise, when we explain to them how to build skyscrapers and how aviation works, they just can't understand us. No matter what we do we can't make each other understand the knowledge in the relevant disciplines. But I think the possibility of such a species is perfectly consistent with McGinn's account. After all, it's possible the cognitive powers of the alien species evolved quite differently from our cognitive powers. That being good at philosophy is an adaptive advantage isn't logically impossible. It's

[26] We might think that humans are free to pursue any of their desires provided they don't violate basic moral norms (e.g. something like Mill's harm principle).

also possible that while humans came about via evolution, the aliens didn't evolve.[27] Chalmers explains that McGinn's idea can be stated as the following:

Unknowability: *[H]umans are just not smart enough to answer the big questions. The idea is that there is some level of intelligence or aptitude that would suffice to answer these questions, but that humans fall below that level*, Chalmers (2015), 30; italics mine.

If Unknowability is true, then there is little reason to think the truth of UT will change in the future. If this is the case, then it's difficult to see what would motivate us to continue to pursue philosophy.

It's worth noting two responses Chalmers offers to Unknowability. First, McGinn needs to explain why his thesis doesn't also apply to abstract mathematics, or theoretical sciences where we find much more convergence than in philosophy (2015), 28. That we didn't evolve to be good at the abstract reasoning philosophy requires seems to equally apply to the abstract reasoning involved in abstract math and theoretical science. Yet we're much better at math and theoretical science, at least when convergence is a measure of success. What explains this difference? Second, Chalmers writes "it remains open that we could answer philosophical questions by first improving our intelligence level, perhaps by cognitive enhancement or extensions" (2015), 31. While I think that these are good reasons to be sceptical of the truth of Unknowability, Chalmers seems to think that cognitive enhancement would be a way avoid it even if it turns out to be true. In any case, I won't focus on developing these objections to Unknowability any further.

[27] Chalmers also points out that Peter van Inwagen is also sceptical about the possibility of philosophical progress. He explains that "van Inwagen argues for this conclusion as follows. He suggests that it is implausible that we are much above that level, given the lack of progress to date, and that it is antecedently improbable that we should be just barely at that level. So it is much more likely that the level lies above us" Chalmers (2015), 30. For more see van Inwagen 2015.

A major concern with Unknowability rests on its understanding of contingency.[28] McGinn believes that the way our brains evolved is a contingent matter, and we're now stuck in the position of being poor at philosophy. But why think we're done evolving? Here's a scenario, albeit a highly speculative one, where we might evolve to become better at philosophy: Technology is rapidly decreasing employment. Where I currently reside in Canada, there are minimum income trials currently underway.[29] We are creating an existential crisis like no other in that we will have all of our basic physical needs met without having to work. So now we have a lot of leisure time, one of the essential requirements needed for philosophizing (which is why philosophy historically was a pursuit of the wealthy, or those who had wealthy patrons). This scenario poses an existential threat to humanity unlike one we've ever experienced before. Perhaps we will evolve to get better at answering philosophical questions in order to deal with the existential threat this type of situation might entail. Maybe just having many more people philosophize than ever before, because everyone has more time, will help use to converge on the truth. The only way to find out whether this is possible is to continue to philosophize.

However, it's not clear that this type of response can answer anything more than the first sense of the question as to why we should philosophize. It doesn't follow from the fact that it is logically possible for something to happen that it is therefore reasonable to act if it will happen. Simply because it's possible that if we continue to philosophize we might evolve to be better at it doesn't provide a normative reason to keep philosophizing. We need something stronger to address the second sense of the question which is asking about the normativity of conducting philosophy.

Deep Time

[28] Thanks to John L. Schellenberg for prompting me to think about my use of contingency further.
[29] By the time of revisions, the trials have been cancelled. But it's likely they will be tried again at some point in the near future.

One of the more promising routes to explaining why we ought to continue to philosophize comes by way of reflecting on time. While Chalmers gestures at the idea that we need more time to answer the big philosophical questions, he doesn't develop the idea in very much detail (and to be fair, he isn't trying to develop it). For instance, he writes that if Unknowability turns out to be false, then:

> [W]e may eventually answer philosophical questions without radical cognitive enhancement. We may need to develop new methods, increased discipline, new sorts of insights, and perhaps there will need to be a conceptual revolution or two, but none of this will lie outside human capacity. It may turn out that there is a curve of increasing philosophical sophistication such that past a certain point on the curve, major progress is possible. We are not there yet, but we are working our way toward it, Chalmers (2015), 31.

Chalmers concludes his piece on progress in philosophy rather optimistically by saying that "we are still learning to do philosophy well. To see how far it can take us, we have to keep doing philosophy" Chalmers (2015), 31. In what follows I will attempt to build on this optimism.

The philosopher of religion John L. Schellenberg introduces the concept of *deep time* in order to expand our understanding of future possible instantiations of religious belief and practice (or what he refers to as religious 'imagination'). I'm going to borrow the concept of deep time and apply it to the idea of philosophical progress. Schellenberg writes that "[e]volutionary time is of an extent almost beyond fathoming – that's why scientists call it 'deep'… Stephen Jay Gould, put it this way: 'an abstract, intellectual understanding of deep time comes easily enough – I know how many zeroes to place after the 10 when mean billions. Getting it into the gut is another matter'" Schellenberg (2013), 3. Schellenberg continues:

> [O]ne needs to think hard about the fact that the perhaps 200, 000-year history of *H. sapiens* is wedged between three and a half billion years of evolutionary development on one side – life's past – and another billion on the other – life's potential future. Consider especially the second figure. A billion years is a period of time ridiculously longer than the 50, 000 years of thinking and feeling that, on a generous estimate, our species has put into religion so far. What *developments* in religiously-relevant thought and feeling might Earth see in so much a time?... Even if we restrict ourselves to the possible future of our own species, the numbers are staggering. *H. sapiens,* though manifesting its religious inclinations and symbolic powers a bit earlier, has at most 6,000 years of organized and systematic religious inquiry to its credit, Schellenberg (2013), 3.

Scientists believe that in its infancy the sun was 30 percent less luminous or hot than its current state. In a widely cited paper K. P. Schroeder and Robert Connon Smith (2008) argue that if the sun increases in luminosity by 10 percent then biological life will be impossible on earth. They predict that this will happen in approximately 1 billion years. While this estimate is widely accepted by the scientific community, Schellenberg (2013), 14; King-Fai Li's (2009) research team from Caltech suggests that this won't happen for another 2.3 billion years. Recent discoveries seem to point in the direction that 1 billion is a conservative figure, Schellenberg (2013), 14-15. Schellenberg suggests that while we often account for the deep past, we usually fail to consider the consequences of the deep *future*. The first line in the following diagram represents how we typically understand deep time, while the second represents how to account for the deep future:

---------- 4.5 billion yrs----------US

----------3.5 billion yrs----US----1.0 billion yrs----------[30]

Schellenberg further writes:

> A deep time perspective on inquiry, in which we trade our human timescales for those of the universe, should have a decided impact. In particular, it's going to seem rather plausible that it might take a lot longer for human intelligence to get anywhere really interesting than we had thought. Many deep layers of matured thought, developed only after much difficult collaboration over unbelievably long periods of time, may need to be laid down before we are in a position to see the deep truth of things (if we ever are), Schellenberg (2013), 47.

In light of deep time and the fact that the human species is little over 2 hundred thousand years old (from the Middle Paleolithic Period), it's apparent that we're still intellectually immature. For instance, Lucy's brain is a third the size of our brains. She would have had the comprehension of physics that we could get a German Sheppard to understand. If our brains triple in size in the future, we may be able to understand things we can't even imagine. It's possible that with enough time humans will evolve and/or acquire the requisite skills to be better at philosophy. It's possible that because we're so early in our history we don't yet see very much convergence in philosophy, but we will in the future. Perhaps with enough time there will be a lot of convergence like there has been in the sciences. That this is a possibility should provide enough motivation to keep philosophizing.

Notice that deep time also gives us a reason to be sceptical that any of the explanations for why there is widespread disagreement and a lack of progress in philosophy somehow in principle rule out the very possibility of progress. For instance, in light of deep time we might develop new

[30] This is modified from Schellenberg (2013), 20.

methods to understand philosophical concepts that are right now very difficult for us to analyze. Given the existence of deep future, there's no reason to think that philosophical concepts are *intrinsically* difficult to understand. We need more time to know whether this is the case.

Importantly, deep time also gives us reason to doubt Fogelin's thesis about the impossibility of rationally resolving (deep) disagreements. First, it's not clear that fundamental frameworks (i.e. holding different cognitive values) demonstrates that reasonable disagreement is either possible or impossible. It merely explains why certain disagreements arise in the first place. In order for it to show that fundamental disagreements cannot be resolved we'd need reasons for denying that we can't have what Fogelin calls genuine argument about the truth value of fundamental frameworks. And Fogelin never offers us such reasons. Second, even if Fogelin is correct, his claim is only contingently true in light of the deep future. It could be that the deep future will provide us with more conceptual tools and cognitive abilities such that we will be able to clearly evaluate fundamental frameworks, even if we don't have shared backgrounds with opponents. Finally, while the evolutionary process is blind, McGinn doesn't give us any reason to think we *couldn't* continue to evolve in such a way to be better at philosophy. He only gives us reason to think we currently aren't well adapted to it. So deep time should give us some optimism for the future of philosophy, or at least minimize our despair.

Again, up to this point our discussion of deep disagreement has still only offered us arguments appealing to *possibility*. While we lack a positive reason to think we *won't* make progress in philosophy, we simultaneously lack a reason to think that *will* make progress in philosophy. Again, this may be enough for someone to rationally pursue philosophy out of preference, but nothing stronger. What we need is some positive reason to think that we'll be better at philosophy if we continue to philosophize into the deep future. Here's the closest I think we can

get to such an argument: Consider that in the sciences there are numerous cases of disagreement leading to the future epistemic benefit of true beliefs about topics that were disputed. Elsewhere, I've argued that these future epistemic benefits will sometimes justify agent S remaining steadfast that proposition P is true, even in the face of peer disagreement. In the 19th century the medical doctor Ignaz Semmelweis claimed there was a connection between hand-washing and a decrease in infant mortality rates. The microscope hadn't been invented so bacteria remained unobservable. Despite the fact that Semmelweis tried to convince his peers of this connection, his ideas were met with universal scorn. However, he defended his ideas in the face of disagreement and helped lead (eventually) to the discovery of bacteria, though he was only vindicated after his death. As John Stuart Mill argued in *On Liberty,* disagreement may well be truth conducive.

A natural objection to this line of argument is that these future considerations provide practical reasons, but not epistemic reasons to pursue a particular line of inquiry in the face of disagreement. The reasons under consideration here, however, are epistemic; they are about discovering future *truths*. Still, there is an important distinction to recognize, though not the one between practical reasons and epistemic reasons. This is the distinction between synchronic epistemic rationality and diachronic epistemic rationality. Epistemologists most often focus on synchronic epistemic rationality. This is about what it is epistemically rational to believe *right now* given the evidence we currently possess. It may well be that we can't generate a strong normative requirement to philosophize from the perspective of synchronic epistemic rationality.

Diachronic epistemic rationality, however, focuses on what it's epistemically rational to believe *in light of future considerations*. We may have good reason to think some piece of evidence will support a proposition in the future without currently possessing the content of such evidence. From the diachronic epistemic perspective philosophizing makes much more sense. We've seen

some progress in philosophy about negative theses. We've also seen lots of progress in many other fields of inquiry. Thus, it's not unreasonable to conclude that we will indeed experience more progress in philosophy in the future. Indeed, we've seen in Chalmers' response to McGinn that there isn't something inherent in abstract reasoning which precludes us from progress. Disagreement in philosophy hasn't at this moment led to truth-convergence, but it will be truth-promoting with enough time. Thus, there could be epistemic benefits to philosophical disagreement over *deep time*.

To conclude this section, there are five additional considerations regarding this argument. (i) It's important to note that this line of argument does not necessarily serve to strengthen the *epistemic rationality* of the philosophical beliefs we hold right now. It's quite probable that widespread disagreement does indeed make them synchronically epistemically irrational. (ii) It is an open question whether there is a coherent conception all-things-considered epistemic rationality which accounts for both synchronic and diachronic reasons. Jonathan Matheson has argued it's possible no such perspective exists (2015b). Indeed, sometimes the perspectives seem to conflict with one another. For instance, in the face of disagreement it might be synchronically epistemically rational to suspend judgment about P, but diachronically epistemically rational to continue to believe and inquire about whether P. (iii) A more detailed version of this argument would have to spell out the specific conditions under which it's rational to pursue a particular line of inquiry. Without such requirements, this argument risks being overly permissive. One could justify belief and inquiry in almost anything with some vague appeal to future epistemic benefits. But I am merely trying to offer a framework for this type of argument in the light of the pessimism about philosophy I express earlier in the paper. (iv) Likewise, a more detailed version of the argument needs to spell out how philosophizing is relevantly analogous to disciplines where progress is made

over time. In other words, why think these benefits will appear in philosophy. I've gestured at some reasons and offered an example. But more work remains to be done. (v) Finally, the argument may suffer from something similar to a collective action problem. It's irrational for me individually to vote because my single vote will make no difference to the outcome of the election. But if everyone reasoned in this way, then no one would vote (and hence one vote would be worth a lot). In light of the deep future, maybe one's individual contribution to philosophy right now will only very marginally contribute to progress (if at all). I don't have the space to detail answers to this question, but this is a problem which a more detailed version of this argument needs to address.

I don't take what I've said in this section on deep time as a decisive answer to the normative question about why we should philosophize. But I do believe it's the beginnings of an argument offering positive reasons in response to the normative question. The existence of deep time, taken together with examples where progress was made in the face of disagreement and the distinction between synchronic and diachronic epistemic rationality, and we have the beginnings of such an argument. A separate project is required to further develop and defend this argument.

7. Conclusion

I argued that the epistemology of disagreement literature helps to bring into focus the problem of widespread peer disagreement in philosophy. There is widespread epistemic peer disagreement on almost every philosophical thesis discussed by philosophers. Widespread disagreement in a field implies a lack of truth-convergence in that field. This led me to defend the Unreliability Thesis: *Philosophers are unreliable at arriving at true philosophical beliefs regarding the big questions.* Alternative conceptions of the goals of philosophy are disingenuous and would require a complete re-defining of the discipline. It's not problematic for a philosopher to employ UT in an argument. There will be little disagreement over the fact that there is widespread disagreement in philosophy.

While there are disagreements in science, the history of the field does tend toward expert convergence. And even if it didn't, this fact wouldn't falsify UT; it would simply imply that scientists are also unreliable. Finally, the disciplines that emerge from philosophy and have more convergence aren't actually addressing the big philosophical questions.

In light of UT I don't think that there has been very much, if any, progress in philosophy (expect in the negative sense). We rarely, if ever, converge on the truth. So why bother philosophizing? I answered this question by suggesting that it is a contingent fact that humans are poor at philosophy. In light of this contingency it's possible that given the relative youth of the human species we may evolve and/or acquire the relevant skills such that we become much better at philosophizing. With enough time there might eventually be expert convergence in philosophy. But this answer only makes it rational to philosophize if it's one's preference to pursue philosophical inquiry.

The stronger answer says we should philosophize because of (i) the existence of the deep future; (ii) relevantly analogous examples in other fields of inquiry where progress was made in the face of disagreement; and (iii) of the important difference between synchronic epistemic rationality and diachronic epistemic rationality. It is diachronic epistemically rational to philosophize, even if it isn't synchronically epistemically rational to philosophize. Admittedly, this is just the beginnings of an argument which requires further details. As it stands, in order to know whether there will be any progress in philosophy, we need to keep fumbling around trying to philosophize for another billion years.[31]

[31] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Philosophy Department Speaker Series at McMaster University (November 2017). This paper benefited greatly from the comments of Nick Griffin, Mark Johnstone, John Schellenberg, and Megan Stotts. Thanks also to very helpful feedback from an anonymous referee. This project was made possible, in part, by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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