Scientific Research Publishing

Open Journal of Philosophy, 2026, 16(2), 284-308
https://www.scirp.org/journal/ojpp
ISSN Online: 2163-9442
ISSN Print: 2163-9434

Keeping Wonder Alive: Philosophy as Critical Practice

Isaac Nevo

Department of Philosophy, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer Sheva, Israel
Email: yanni@bgu.ac.il

How to cite this paper: Nevo, I. (2026). Keeping Wonder Alive: Philosophy as Critical Practice. *Open Journal of Philosophy, 16,* 284-308.
https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2026.162018

Received: April 20, 2026
Accepted: May 24, 2026
Published: May 27, 2026

Abstract

Many philosophers have reflected upon philosophy's lack of progress in converging upon truth and its chronic condition of irresolvable disagreement. These reflections raise questions about the possibility of philosophical knowledge. Some philosophers remain "optimists" regarding these issues, believing that philosophical progress and knowledge are possible, some are "pessimists," denying the possibility of progress and knowledge, and some attempt to "segregate" metaphilosophical skepticism, while leaving open a conceptual space for first-order philosophical theories to be taken "seriously." I argue that segregated meta-philosophical skepticism is not a stable position, and that such skepticism rationally "trickles down" to object-level philosophizing. The position I wish to defend is that philosophy should be seen as primarily a critical practice, yielding self-reflection at the limits of human understanding (wonder), rather than a theoretical endeavor aiming at knowledge. Philosophy should be seen as a critical project, seeking Socratic *aporia* rather than Aristotelian *theoria*, the benefit of which is not knowledge but rather the independence of mind and freedom of thought that comes with a commitment to criticism.

Keywords

Metaphilosophy, Skepticism, Progress, Knowledge, *Theoria*, *Aporia*

1. Introduction

In this paper, I wish to present philosophy as primarily a critical, rather than a theoretical practice, aiming not at establishing a "positive" account of reality, or at knowledge thereof, but rather at exposing the limits of human understanding by means of maintaining a critical stance towards all theoretical perspectives. I argue that this shift in orientation regarding philosophy's focus, replacing theory

with criticism as its central aim, can better account for the intellectual benefit of philosophical activity, given the very limited success of philosophy, if any, in establishing any of its theories conclusively, a condition many philosophers have found bewildering and embarrassing. Philosophy's chronic lack of agreement and progress in converging upon the truth of its doctrines is, so I shall argue (in contemporary lingo), not a "bug" but a "feature," i.e., a feature of the very "design" of human thought as a worldly (immanent) activity requiring an unavailable external (transcendent) perspective for its theoretical completion or validation. [1]

Philosophers have often pointed to the condition of chronic disagreement in philosophy over its most fundamental problems. Often, they have sought to assess the implications of this condition, assuming it to be the case, regarding the nature of philosophical theory, the existence, or lack thereof, of progress in philosophy, and the possibility of philosophical knowledge (Christensen, 2007; Dietrich, 2011; Kornblith, 2012; Chalmers, 2015; Kelly, 2016; Shand, 2017; Brake, 2017; Keren, 2023; Tőzsér, 2023; Dellsén et al., 2024; Cappelen (n.d.)). True to disciplinary standards, philosophers are also deeply divided on these interconnected issues, with "optimists" arguing that agreement, progress, and knowledge are all possible in philosophy at least to some degree, and "pessimists" who emphasize the irresolvability of philosophical problems and the consequent lack of philosophical knowledge or progress.[2] The former respond to even chronic disagreement with "steadfastness," taking disagreement to be no grounds for reassessing their (differing) philosophical views. The latter respond to disagreement with "conciliation," accepting disagreement as (higher order) evidence against each of their original views, suspending judgment as to the ultimate truth of any (fundamental) philosophical view. By contrast to both these approaches, a middle ground has been attempted by some contemporary philosophers who start out, on the basis

[1]In less contemporary idiom, the issue here is the ancient (Pyrrhonian) problem of the criterion. To be established as true, a theory stands in need of an objective criterion, but the truth of any such criterion itself requires an objective criterion, and so on *ad infinitum*. The need for a criterion stems from the subjective (immanent) standpoint of any theoretical perspective; the impossibility of any such criterion stems from the absence of an objective (transcendent) perspective. Full skepticism can, however, be avoided by relaxing the demand for absolute objectivity, making do in certain areas with standards such as empirical confirmation or inter-personal convergence. In science, such alternative standards have proven more than adequate, allowing for the fallibility of its theories and their under-determination by available data. The proof of the scientific pudding is in the predictive and technological eating. In philosophy, by contrast, these standards are not available. Neither empirical confirmation nor technological success appears to be relevant, so skepticism remains a concern in philosophy. The alternative proposed here is to view philosophical skepticism not as a threat but rather as a blessing, the blessing of critical self-awareness as a permanent intellectual accomplishment.

[2]Philosophers from Descartes to Kant (and beyond) have complained about philosophy's failure to establish conclusive results and reach scholarly consensus over such results, as regularly achieved in the natural sciences. Mostly they have still attempted, optimistically, to overcome what Kant has called a scandal to philosophy, by means of some new method that would put disagreement to rest. (See Descartes (1952); Kant (1952). A more pessimistic attitude had already been struck by the ancient skeptics, Pyrrhonian and academic, who emphasized the principled lack of a criterion by which philosophical disputes could be settled. Similarly, Hume (1978) abandoned hope for any rational resolution of philosophy's problems, trusting to human nature to determine its own answers where reason fails to overcome its limits.

of chronic disagreement in philosophy, with skepticism regarding philosophical knowledge, while moving on to segregate such skepticism metaphilosophically, rather than refute it, thereby opening, in a more optimistic spirit, a space for philosophical theory to be expressed without the presumption of knowledge or rational proof (Taylor, 1968; Rescher, 1978; Lewis, 1983; van Inwagen, 2004; Beebee, 2018). On these views, philosophy remains a theoretical endeavor, despite inherent limitations regarding knowledge and progress. The suggestion of this paper is that such proposals fail in their attempts to segregate skepticism and do not sufficiently acknowledge the difference between philosophy and science in point of their ultimate intellectual function. On the view I wish to advance, philosophy does not just begin in wonder, moving beyond it to establish some theoretical truth (alongside those of science). Rather, it also ends in wonder, in the sense of recognizing the limits of its capacity to offer a settled understanding of reality. Philosophy should be seen as primarily a critical practice within which theoretical products are to be taken as steppingstones on the road to what has classically been called *aporia*. The mistake is to assimilate philosophical criticism to knowledge production, scientific or otherwise, thereby leading to dogmatism and disputatiousness, but failing to do justice to the intellectual liberty of human thought. It is this intellectual liberty of thought, rather than knowledge, that is the ultimate end of philosophy as a critical practice, the wisdom sought after by philosophers in their relentless efforts to develop and employ critical standards and the concepts through which they can be formulated.

Skepticism has been understood by many to be a self-defeating position, and meta-philosophical skepticism is no exception. Being itself a philosophical theory, skepticism can be conclusively established no better than any other philosophical theory, and it too cannot be claimed as knowledge. But arguments to the self-defeating nature of skepticism do not suffice to establish that there is knowledge, or that progress towards truth, is available in philosophy. Metaphilosophical skepticism, too, is unknowable, but that does not imply that it is false. So, a stalemate ensues; philosophical skepticism cannot be conclusively established or conclusively denied. Viewing philosophy as primarily a critical, rather than a theoretical, practice, without pretensions to conclusively established knowledge, is a way out of this stalemate, a change in perspective regarding the aim and value of philosophy. As Graham Priest (2006) puts it, in philosophy critique is "unchained"; unlike other sciences and disciplines, in philosophy criticism is not instrumental to constructive theorizing; rather, it is the other way around; constructive theorizing is instrumental to ever deeper criticism as testified by philosophy's practice of accepting virtually nothing as beyond challenge and questioning.

Knowledge, of course, remains the ultimate end of science, and within modern science there is no question that much knowledge is discovered, explained, and implemented. In science, too, especially at the cutting edges of new theories, disagreement is rampant, but it is not "chronic" and not irresolvable. Progress can be made in science in the gradual convergence of scientists, within their various

disciplines, on theories upon which they agree, and which can be said to approach truth based on their predictive success and technological utility. The patterns in philosophy are entirely different. Historically, though, philosophy and science were not so sharply differentiated, and one can interpret the dissatisfaction of traditional philosophers with philosophy's narrow practice of criticism as a yearning for knowledge that was ultimately to be satisfied outside philosophy, namely, in science. The history of scientific fields gaining independence from philosophy bears witness to this dynamic: dissatisfaction with philosophy's critical focus leads to scientific, not philosophical knowledge. Once the philosophy/science distinction has become clearer, the difference in their intellectual aims—critical self-awareness vs. knowledge—comes more sharply into focus.

In short, both optimists and pessimists regarding philosophical progress and knowledge, as well as philosophers who attempt to confine skepticism to a metaphilosophical level, presuppose a theory-centered approach to philosophy as aiming, successfully or not, at theoretically approaching truth regarding its fundamental questions. The alternative I propose is to view philosophy as having a different aim, namely, that of permanently advancing criticism, regarding any philosophical view, thereby keeping wonder alive, i.e., finding the ways even our best theories and solutions still fall short of closure and conclusiveness. The point of philosophizing in this way is to keep one's mind open and active, rather than closing it with the acceptance of one dogma or another.

2. Segregating Skepticism (1): Rescher's Orientational Pluralism

Beginning with the observation that, indeed, disagreement in philosophy is rampant and irresolvable, some philosophers have concluded that although knowledge is not to be expected in philosophy, nor progress in the sense of converging upon truth, skepticism regarding philosophical knowledge can still be segregated metaphilosophically, offering philosophical theory a role other than the advancement of knowledge. On these views, philosophy remains a theoretical endeavor, despite its principled inconclusiveness; rather than knowledge it yields epistemologically diminished outcomes, e.g., opinions, plausible claims, perspectives, etc., in relation to which the "irritation of doubt" can be put aside. By relaxing the standards of justification appropriate for philosophical theory, the theoretical orientation of philosophy itself is thought to be preserved, without yielding to either an optimism that denies the depth of philosophical disagreement nor a pessimism, or skepticism, that appears to undermine philosophical practice altogether.

Thus, for example, Nicholas Rescher (1978) concludes in favor of both "orientational pluralism" regarding object-level philosophical theories and metaphilosophical skepticism regarding the epistemic status of such object-level theories. According to Rescher, philosophical claims can "properly" be made "in the language of plausibility" but not "in the language of knowledge and demonstration." He goes on to argue:

> The skeptic is right to this extent—that the operation of *isothenia* at the metaphilosophical level means that here we have a field where actual knowledge must not be claimed in addressing a community, large sectors of which will generally fail to share one's own methodological orientation. (Rescher, 1978: p. 250).

Schematically, Rescher's account is as follows. Philosophical problems arise with the appearance of "aporetic clusters" in pre-philosophical discourse. Aporetic clusters are conjunctions of initially plausible beliefs that are mutually incompatible. Such clusters arise due to the heterogeneity of our pre-philosophical sources of information, e.g., scientific data, daily experience, self-reflective introspection, etc. The philosopher's task is to resolve such incompatibility by revising one or another of the incompatible claims, thereby forming a comprehensive and consistent theory of the subject matter at hand at the cost of giving up one or another belief that did have an initial claim to plausibility. In making such a choice, the philosopher relies on epistemic and probative attitudes and preferences, namely, values, which form her "orientation," but these orientations are themselves evaluative and do not enjoy any independent basis of their own. Others resolve the aporetic cluster differently, resting on their own probative and evaluative orientations, and so orientational pluralism in resolving philosophical problems is unavoidable. No such theory can claim uniqueness, and given that they are incompatible, none could be regarded as epistemologically established, i.e., as knowledge.

Rescher hastens to add that it is a mistake "to say that the absence of *epistēmē* cancels out altogether the rational credentials of the discipline" (loc. cit.). He insists that while metaphilosophical skepticism is unavoidable, it is best to take philosophical problems seriously by way of offering general and comprehensive first order theories to solve them, thereby segregating skepticism regarding the epistemic credentials of such theories within a separate "metaphilosophical" enclosure. It does, however, appear to be problematic. The "rational credentials" of the discipline of philosophy involve its commitment to establishing the truth of its theories with evidence and argument, upon which, presumably, knowledge could justifiably be claimed. But if no such knowledge could be claimed, as testified by philosophy's continued condition of pervasive disagreement and lack of progress, how can those "rational credentials" not be questioned? Probative orientations are not themselves subject to rational assessment, and their adoption remains open to alternatives. Anything resting on them—specific resolutions of aporetic clusters—is equally problematic.

Rescher's answer is that the acceptance of philosophical theories is relative to a probative orientation, and no absolute truth can be claimed, but this is compatible, by his lights, with taking philosophical theories "seriously" within each scheme. In fact, he insists that philosophers ought to accept such orientation-relative theories with full commitment, though only one at a time, while acknowledging the pluralism of such theories and the absence of absolute truth regarding

them. The price of pluralism appears to be a split consciousness on the part of philosophers: object level commitment along with meta level skepticism. One could question the tenability of this resolution. By contrast, though science too does not have any agreed-upon meta level foundation, it does enjoy other qualities—closeness to empirical data, technological applicability, etc.—that make possible, indeed, motivate, object level agreement among practitioners, and relaxed epistemic standards through which knowledge could be claimed.

In some respects, Rescher's account follows a classical pattern, despite his pragmatism regarding the epistemological standards appropriate for philosophical theories. Philosophy proceeds from perplexity to theory by reasoning, argument, and removal of inconsistencies, all aimed at reaching a comprehensive view. For Rescher, philosophy remains theoretical in nature despite his concessions to relativism, pluralism, and metaphilosophical skepticism. Underlying this resolution is what may be called the contemplative view of philosophy, namely an understanding of philosophical practice as aiming at a positive view of the world (or the self, the mind, the requirements of knowledge, and so on) whatever concessions must be made in relation to the epistemic status of such theories. On this view, philosophy is analogous to science, or perhaps even a part of it, and while it may differ from science in its level of generality, or its subject matter, it aims roughly at the same kind of understanding, the understanding that comes from constructing and establishing a theory of the subject matter at hand. Like science, philosophy is a form of contemplation, a subjective view aiming at objective justification. It is in considering this general view that the problems of irresolvable disagreement and lack of progress, in comparison with science, are most disturbing. Rescher's is an attempt to address these problems, with various twists and concessions, but without calling philosophy's fundamental orientation towards theoretical contemplation into question.

3. Segregating Skepticism (2): Lewis's Defensible Equilibria

In a similar vein, David Lewis (1983) claims that there are no "knock-down arguments" in philosophy. As Lewis puts it, "philosophical theories are never refuted conclusively (or hardly ever; Gödel and Gettier may have done it). The theory survives its refutation—at a price" (Lewis, 1983: x). In philosophical argument, "we measure the price." He goes on to explain:

> Our "intuitions" are simply opinions; our philosophical theories are the same. Some are commonsensical, some sophisticated; … But they are all opinions, and a reasonable goal for a philosopher is to bring them into equilibrium. Our common task is to find out what equilibria there are that can withstand examination, but it remains for each of us to come to rest at one or another of them (loc. cit.).

Here, too, knowledge is denied as the outcome of philosophical reasoning, and "opinion" is proposed as an alternative. Philosophical reasoning is presented as

aiming at reaching a defensible equilibrium—one that can withstand examination—between different opinions and considerations, rather than knowledge. For Lewis, the reasonableness of coming to rest at one or another point of such equilibrium is not undermined by the metaphilosophical awareness of the plurality of (presumably inconsistent) equilibria. Furthermore, Lewis does not rule out the possibility that one such philosophical opinion is true, while others are false. It's just that we shall (almost) never have a "knock-down" argument for the truth in question. If there is such a truth, it will remain hidden from us. But, again, the insufficiency of philosophical reasoning to establish truth, or claim knowledge, beyond multiple points of equilibrium, raises questions regarding the nature of philosophy, which is, as traditionally conceived, a sustained attempt to establish the truth of one's "opinions" by means of reasoning and argument. Given Lewis' metaphilosophical skepticism (or modesty), one may well ask what the point is. Why should we, or how could we, "come to rest" at one or another point of equilibrium, knowing full well that we cannot establish the opinions involved and that others are equally available that are incompatible with them? The metaphor of "coming to rest" is a metaphor of arbitrary closure, of ending the debate by fiat, but that's hardly a satisfactory state for philosophy to be in.

As Peter van Inwagen (2004) suggests, coming to rest on a "point of equilibrium," in full awareness of the plurality of equally reasonable, though incompatible, such points that others may reach, can supply no epistemological warrant to whatever beliefs are contained in one's equilibrium. So, if Lewis is right, one "ought to withdraw from the point of philosophical equilibrium [one occupies] and become a sceptic about the answers to all or almost all philosophical questions" (van Inwagen, 2004: p. 342). To this he adds, stressing his own view regarding "the fact of pervasive and irresoluble philosophical disagreements," that "very similar difficulties face anyone who proposes *any* philosophical methodology—provided only that one feature of that methodology is that whatever other goals philosophy may have, one of its goals is to make true philosophical statements." (loc. cit.). Indeed, pervasive philosophical disagreement leads to metaphilosophical skepticism, and such skepticism seeps down to the first level of philosophical theorizing in a way that must render unstable any equilibrium in which philosophical opinions are held. It follows that the goal of making "true philosophical statements" cannot be rationally achieved, and this should raise, at least on traditional (internalist) grounds, a serious question as to the ultimate purpose of the whole enterprise. Philosophers make every effort to make true philosophical statements and supply rational warrant to those statements, but if such warrant is delusory, and known to be so, then the whole practice appears to be (practically) irrational, or else it must be conceived differently, namely, as having some other goal.

Like Rescher, Lewis seems happy to combine opinions held in reflective equilibrium with metaphilosophical skepticism regarding philosophical knowledge, though he is not fully explicit about this combination of views. By contrast, van Inwagen questions the stability, or "rational credentials," of this combination. He

points out that metaphilosophical skepticism is not likely to remain enclosed in its higher-order confinement. The self-aware metaphilosophical skeptic will ultimately have to become a more general skeptic and abandon the "opinion" he holds as a point of equilibrium. Holding an opinion is a commitment to its truth, but skepticism regarding philosophical knowledge should rationally undermine that commitment. Generalizing the case, van Inwagen shows such skepticism to undermine any philosophical methodology (not just reflective equilibrium) provided that the methodology in question is subordinate to the goal of philosophical theorizing, or contemplation, namely, that of making true philosophical statements as at least one of its goals. Implicitly, van Inwagen suggests that philosophy should be understood in terms of other goals, though he does not spell out what these other goals might be.

A Lewisian attempt to address the problem of first-order philosophical commitment appears in a paper by Helen Beebee (2018). Noticing the lack of "rational credentials" regarding the opinions endorsed by philosophers in their search for equilibrium, she raises the question of whether it is at all "legitimate to 'endorse' a position—to have an 'opinion' in Lewis's terms." She goes on to ask:

> It is crucial to the philosophical endeavor, I think, that we *take a view*. So—to return to the first question posed above—does equilibrism [her term for Lewis's approach] require us to rescind from taking a view at all?" (Beebee, 2018).

Drawing on Bas van Fraassen's constructive empiricist philosophy of science, Beebee answers the skeptical question she raises negatively. Van Fraassen distinguishes "acceptance" from "belief" regarding a scientific theory (which may postulate unobservable entities) as two distinct attitudes, where acceptance need not involve belief but only a commitment to address certain problems in a certain way. The scientist need not believe any claim regarding unobservable entities, for which she would have no independent justification, but she can accept a theory postulating them in the sense of committing herself to employing that theory, e.g., for purposes of prediction. For Beebee, such a commitment amounts to "taking a view," but in a way that does not impose unjustifiable beliefs. A similar resolution, she says, is relevant for philosophy as well:

> The aims of science (according to van Fraassen) and the aims of philosophy (according to me) differ, of course: the aim of empirical adequacy in science is very different from the pluralist aim in philosophy of discovering the equilibrium positions that can withstand examination. But in each case, the acceptance of a theory that one cannot rationally believe serves a purpose relative to that aim. In the case of science, the aim of empirical adequacy demands that theories that posit unobservables are developed and tested, and in the case of philosophy, the aim of discovering 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. (op. cit.: 22).

But the distinction between (pragmatic) acceptance and (cognitive) belief, even if it does succeed in blocking trickle-down skepticism (from meta to object level skepticism), which is by no means clear, does not address a more fundamental issue. If we merely accept, without belief, an opinion in equilibrium, how is it that we are "taking a view" of the subject matter at hand? Under this distinction, the view seems not to be "taken" but merely suggested, and the puzzle that motivated a philosopher in developing her theory remains in place (and so does skepticism regarding her "opinion"). In science, we may adopt an instrumentalist view of theory, making do with empirical adequacy in place of truth, because other aims of science are still satisfied, namely, predictability, technological applicability, etc., and we may remain agnostic as to the existence of unobservable entities. In philosophy, however, taking away the pretension of contemplating the world as it is, making do with mere opinions and equilibria, leaves untouched the perplexity and wonder characteristic of philosophical problems. Being told that many incompatible answers can equally be "accepted" is not to remove wonder but leaves it open. Beebee describes the equilibrism she takes from Lewis (namely, metaphilosophical skepticism and object level opinions in equilibrium) as a conservative position with respect to "the practice of first order philosophy" (op.cit.:16), which does not challenge the theoretical orientation of philosophers (though it does diminish its epistemological prospects). But insofar as it leaves philosophical theory at the center, then despite its pragmatism, it also leaves untouched the problem of unresolvable disagreement as a symptom that wonder, or perplexity, had not been theoretically removed and that skepticism remains open regarding the opinion, or the equilibrium, in question. Surely, acceptance without warrant of a philosophical theory, in full awareness of alternative, equally acceptable "opinions," cannot long remain a stable philosophical resting place. At one point or another, skepticism will trickle down. Metaphilosophical skepticism cannot be segregated in the meta level confinement. The skeptic regarding philosophical knowledge must also worry about the rational credentials of her philosophical beliefs or opinions, and equally so about her "acceptances". Otherwise, there remains an arbitrary residue in their formation.

In fairness to these equilibrist positions, it should be said that there is something plausible in their pragmatism. If the ideal of philosophical knowledge cannot be met, and the traditional aim of philosophical theory is to be maintained, then equilibrism appears to offer the second best, namely, a coherent view of how things might be regarding a philosophical issue, an understanding of the options left by a philosophical problem. The puzzle that remains is that there are alternative, equally coherent but incompatible such views, and the decision to "come to rest" at one equilibrium or another cannot be underwritten by conclusive philosophical arguments. There is a practical rationality to the equilibrist philosopher's decision to "come to rest" somewhere rather than pursuing skeptical questioning wherever it leads, though it falls short of traditional philosophical ideals. The equilibrist abandons philosophy's epistemic ideal, settling for the second best, while maintaining

philosophy's traditional epistemic aim, namely that of "taking a view" of reality by theoretical means. A more comprehensive pragmatism would suggest, with John Dewey, the abandonment of the spectator's view of philosophy in favor of viewing philosophy as a critical practice. The alternative that suggests itself is to go the other way around, namely, to abandon the epistemic, contemplative aim of philosophy while maintaining its epistemic standards as bases of criticism. Thereby, turning philosophy into a fundamentally critical rather than a speculative, theoretical endeavor. The work of the equilibrist, and the work of philosophers generally, could then be seen as a basis for deepening criticism, without pretensions to knowledge. Equilibrism suggests how things could be, and rather than "coming to rest" upon one such possibility, the critical philosopher brings different equilibria together so as to ask further questions, never coming to rest on anything.

4. Philosophy's Epistemic Failure

A thorough and systematic account of "philosophy's epistemic failure," namely, the failure of the epistemic tradition in philosophy to overcome its condition of pervasive and irresolvable "dissensus," appears in János Tőzsér's (2023) book-length discussion of the topic. Tőzsér describes the epistemic tradition in philosophy as the attempt, on the part of philosophers, to solve philosophical problems conclusively and supply compelling justifications to substantive philosophical truths. Philosophers, however, have failed to achieve such solutions and compelling justifications, and thus failed to achieve knowledge of substantive philosophical truths, as testified by the enduring condition of irresolvable disagreement on almost every such proposal. In Tőzsér's language:

> The followers of philosophy's epistemic tradition have attempted to solve philosophical problems and promised compellingly justified substantive philosophical truths. Still, there is disagreement in every area of philosophy among philosophers, and this pervasive and permanent dissensus is a salient sign that their efforts have not been successful and their promises were not kept - philosophers are the actors of an epistemically failed enterprise. Put differently, the community of philosophers (to which we belong) has no substantive and positive philosophical knowledge, and philosophy (which we do) has not made the least bit of progress… (Tőzsér, 2023: p. 75).

Indeed, Tőzsér supplies a comprehensive account of such philosophical dissensus within contemporary philosophy and argues that the presence of such pervasive disagreements indicates that the arguments advanced by philosophers could not be considered rationally "compelling," or "knock-down arguments," since otherwise one could expect a scholarly and professional consensus to form around these arguments, as can be found in many other disciplines. So far, this conclusion aligns with what was called above metaphilosophical skepticism, but Tőzsér goes on to derive a darker conclusion. He lists four basic, apparently exhaustive, solutions to the predicament of epistemic failure on the part of philosophy, goes on to

refute each and every one of them, leading himself—the book is mostly written in the first-person singular—to a condition of irresolvable Socratic *aporia*. The four approaches he discusses are as follows:

1) Denial ("I'm the only one"): A philosopher may steadfastly stick to her arguments concerning the philosophical issue she chose to discuss, claiming it to be completely compelling while taking her colleagues' disagreement as indicating a failure on their part, e.g., a failure to understand the strength of the arguments, or to grasp the new method on offer. Such a philosopher takes herself to be an innovator who has finally slain the philosophical beast, while considering all other philosophers to be her inferiors. Tőzsér mentions Descartes, Kant, and Husserl as exemplifying this attitude, and one could think of Quine or Kripke as more contemporary examples. The obvious difficulty with such denialism, regarding the pervasiveness of dissensus, is that it is highly conceited, and those who persist in it can be faulted for lack of self-reflection and a limited ability to look at philosophical problems from a variety of perspectives, as offered by critical reviews and counterarguments. It is implausible that all philosophical dissensus, save one's own view, is based on misunderstanding or is flawed in some other way.

2) Therapy. A philosopher may conclude, with Wittgenstein, that the reason for chronic dissensus in philosophy is that philosophical problems are senseless pseudo problems, and the various solutions offered to them are, similarly, meaningless collections of pseudo sentences. On this view, the way out of this predicament is, in Wittgenstein's phrase, "to shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" (Wittgenstein, 1953: # 309). Tőzsér, however, rejects this therapeutic view of philosophy, taking its problems to be genuine intellectual problems, by showing Wittgenstein's proposed therapy to depend on an implicit substantive philosophical theory regarding language and meaning, which must be taken at face value, if the therapy is to be successful, but which runs counter to its own advice, and is equally criticizable by counter theories of meaning. Tőzsér views Wittgenstein as an anti-philosophical "fanatic" who insists on his therapeutic quietism despite not having a compelling argument for it.

3) Equilibrism. A philosopher may, in the spirit of Lewis, Rescher, or Beebee, abandon the full-blown epistemic aim of traditional philosophy, i.e., the aim of achieving substantive knowledge in philosophy, and opt for epistemically diminished goals such as holding opinions in some defensible equilibrium (Lewis), or even just "accepting" such equilibria without going as far as "believing" the opinions in them. A secondary equilibrist task would be for the philosophical community to encourage and develop alternative equilibria, filling the logical space between them. On such a view, the theoretical effort of philosophers need not be abandoned, and progress in philosophy could be seen as collectively articulating more points of equilibrium to choose from. Clearly, a lot of contemporary work in philosophy could be conceived along these lines. The equilibrist takes philosophical problems to be genuine problems, and the views of critics and opponents to be worthy of serious consideration, leading perhaps to further revisions in one's

own resting place. But ultimately no knowledge claim can be made, and philosophers could continue their efforts albeit under a more modest claim. There is, obviously, a lot to be said for this proposal, but Tőzsér finds it to be ill-advised insofar as knowledge is abandoned as a philosophical hope, and no epistemic responsibility can be assumed by any philosopher for her "opinions." The philosopher who finds a resting place in her point of equilibrium cannot fail to be aware of her lack of knowledge regarding it, and of the availability of other, equally coherent equilibria. Whether or not her philosophical view concerning any substantive issue in philosophy is true remains hidden from her, and she can only offer her view as one possibility among many. She is under a split consciousness—epistemic schizophrenia, as Tőzsér calls it—believing (or just accepting) a substantive view while realizing she has no compelling argument to establish it. Tőzsér sees this as unsatisfactory. Philosophy deals with, among other things, substantive, factual problems, e.g., is there free will in a libertarian sense, or is there only a fully deterministic world, and not being able to answer it compellingly can only be viewed as a failure of rationality.

4) Meta-skepticism. A philosopher may respond to philosophy's predicament of dissensus by opting to suspend judgment regarding all substantive, factual, philosophical claims, following the advice of Pyrrhonian skepticism in this restricted area. So, the meta-skeptic goes beyond the general metaphilosophical skepticism, namely, the denial of philosophical knowledge, to an attitude of withholding belief in substantive philosophical statements (whether or not this leads to any *ataraxia*). However, Tőzsér finds this, too, less than adequate. As is classically known, the skeptic's position is subject to self-defeat, insofar as it rests on a substantive philosophical claim to the effect that no truth (or no substantive philosophical truth, in the present case) can be compellingly justified. But even if some answer could be given to the self-defeat argument (indeed, Pyrrhonean philosophers prided themselves on having no view, including the knowledge-denying view, which they dubbed negative dogmatism), the Pyrrhonean feat of suspending all belief, or all substantive philosophical belief, is hardly a psychologically feasible feat, and ultimately, a very disappointing outcome for the efforts of philosophy.

Having reached an aporetic stalemate by finding reason to reject all four apparently exhaustive options, Tőzsér describes his predicament in the following terms:

> So, what is the phenomenology of my breakdown experience like? "At first go," I can describe it like this: *on the one hand*, I'm inexorably motivated to give answers to philosophical questions that are important to me. *On the other hand*, however circumspect I am in doing my best to appropriately justify my philosophical beliefs, I cannot seriously and sincerely commit myself to the truth of the propositions that I obtained using philosophy's truth-seeking tools. "At second go," it would look like this: *on the one hand,* I would do almost anything to get rid of my epistemic schizophrenia and achieve the desired state of cognitive peace. *On the other hand*, I think that my epistemic

> schizophrenia could only go away, and I could only achieve the desired cognitive peace if I became a kind of man that I don't feel it is right to become. (op. cit. 214-215).

Tőzsér further describes his aporetic condition as a feeling of dead end, of "this ends here," which renders future philosophical thought pointless. Any further philosophy could only be done with irony. Below, I shall attempt to offer a way out by questioning the exclusivity of the epistemic tradition in philosophy. Before turning to that, let me turn to another philosophical skeptic, Richard Taylor (1968), who points in the direction of looking at the varieties of wisdom philosophy might be after.

5. The Aim of Philosophy: Taylor on Knowledge and Wisdom

Taylor views all claims to knowledge in philosophy as mere pretenses. In his words:

> I shall maintain that there simply is no such thing as philosophical knowledge, nor any philosophical way of knowing anything, and defend the humble point that philosophy is indeed the love of wisdom. I believe that philosophers' claim to philosophical knowledge is a pretense. (Taylor, 1968: p. 615).

Taylor argues for this (skeptical) conclusion on various grounds. He points to the failure of philosophers to reach any agreement regarding their theories, to the inconclusiveness of philosophical arguments, depending as they do on premises that are no less philosophically questionable than the conclusions they purport to establish, and to the failure of "linguistic analysis" to establish a knowledge of meaning as a philosophical foundation. His conclusion is that philosophy is to be accounted for not in terms of knowledge but rather in terms of a different kind of wisdom. However, his attempt to spell that out falls back on precisely the same assimilation of wisdom to knowledge (from Socratic *aporia* to Aristotelian *theoria*). Here is the way he puts it:

> And what is it? What is this wisdom that philosophers, by their very name, are supposed to prize above every earthly honor or possession? It is, I think, what Aristotle referred to as the exercise of "theoria," which is a unique capacity of men… It is something that cannot be taught, … as Socrates repeatedly observed. Essentially it seems to me to be this: the power of seeing those things, great and small, needed for the kind of inner and outer life that Aristotle likened to the life of the gods, to which the eyes of most men seem closed. (Taylor, 1968: pp. 625-626).

To which he adds, conceding a notion of truth and knowledge to philosophical wisdom after all, the following:

> The truths embodied in philosophical wisdom cannot be proved but only shown or displayed. The idea of evidence is out of place with respect to them, and such wisdom is therefore not ordinary knowledge. But it is something

> infinitely better, something far more precious than any fact or conclusion that one merely knows (loc. cit.).

Like Rescher and Lewis, Taylor removes knowledge as the appropriate outcome of philosophical theorizing but leaves theory, albeit in the guise of Aristotle's *theoria*, as an object level activity. In this move, philosophy remains contemplative, i.e., engaged in "seeing things, great and small, needed for the kind of inner and outer life that Aristotle likened to the life of the gods...," but, of course, the seeing remains somewhat mysterious, since knowledge of no philosophical truth can be claimed. Here, too, skepticism is likely to trickle down to object-level Aristotelian *theoria*: if knowledge can't be claimed, what is Aristotelian *theoria* a theory of?

Taylor mentions a number of philosophers whose observations have, by his lights, achieved the requisite level of wisdom, even despite the formal strictures of theory in which these observations had been clothed. (Spinoza's non-systematic observations on various emotions, outside the formal structure of his "geometrical system," serve as a traditional example. Other more contemporary examples are found in the observations of William James, Gilbert Ryle, J.L. Austin, and L. Wittgenstein.) These philosophers typically instruct by example. They tell us, in Wittgenstein's famous phrase "don't think, but look," (op. cit. # 66) and through these observations they manage to "show" their students, or readers, truths that are not amenable to standard theoretical accounts, but are nonetheless important truths about humanity. Taylor takes such theoretically inarticulate truths, or observations, to exemplify Aristotelian *theoria* in its god-like comprehensiveness. As he puts it:

> The enemy of wisdom is not so much ignorance as blindness and folly, and wisdom is nourished not by argument but by curious wonder. It will never perish so long as there are perceptive minds that are deeply bewildered and honest, whatever may be the fates of the schools. (op.cit.:629).

This, however, is hardly satisfactory. Appealing to Aristotle's *theoria* is not a good way of supporting skepticism regarding (theoretical) knowledge in philosophy. Aristotle's *theoria* lies at precisely the opposite end of Socratic *aporia*, or wonder, which Taylor also hints at (in the above quotation), as the proper end of philosophy. And so, Taylor's deference to Aristotle leads him back to accepting knowledge (and truth) as the ultimate goals of philosophical theory, only of a kind that cannot receive rational justification or proof. But this is at odds with Aristotle's own conception of *theoria,* which emphasizes demonstration and necessary truths. Taylor is misled here by his still contemplative view of philosophy as a positive perspective, a view of things high and great, which inevitably leads to an understanding of philosophy as a kind of knowledge, and to full-blown skepticism once it becomes clear that such knowledge is not to be had. It would have been more consistent with his admiration of Socrates, as well as the ordinary language

philosophers he mentions,[3] if he were to abandon not just the epistemological pretense of philosophy (the assimilation of philosophical wisdom to knowledge) but also the Aristotelian pretense of philosophy as the aspiration for a quasi-divine perspective on unchanging truths. What Socrates offered was not any such view, not any positive, if unteachable, perspective, as the provenance of philosophy, but rather a view of philosophy as lacking any such perspective, as knowing only that one does not know, i.e., of philosophy as criticism and wonder, of constant *aporia*.

6. Cappelen's Philosophical Commons

A different take on questions of philosophical diversity and progress is suggested by Herman Cappelen in his book *Philosophy is Perfect*: *A Defense of Philosophy* (forthcoming, OUP). According to Cappelen, philosophical dissensus implies that the logical space of possible solutions to philosophy's fundamental problems is gradually being filled with elaborate theories, supported by good arguments, that are placed in "the philosophical commons" by being published, criticized, and taught in a functioning community of critical inquirers. Given the historical duration of philosophical debate, it is likely, so he believes, that the correct answers to what he calls philosophy's very important questions (VIQs) have already been "found" in the collective sense of being placed, along with (nearly) all incompatible alternatives, in the public sphere. Disagreement among individual philosophers continues, and is unlikely to abate, but that is to be thought of as a virtue of philosophical practice and a sign of its intellectual vibrancy and strength. Consensus is not to be expected, and in limited cases where it appears, it should not be seen as a sign of truth. Rather, it is a sociological phenomenon that often stifles intellectual growth and inquiry .

Cappelen concludes that contrary to the views of pessimists, philosophy has been a highly successful discipline that has shown a significant level of progress in finding solutions to its problems. Continuing debate in philosophy serves to further refine the various solutions that have been "placed" in philosophy's commons, and progress takes the form of filling the logical spaces of its problem areas with further details and more analysis and criticism. What remains open are problems of "identification" regarding which of the various solutions to a fundamental question is the correct one, but that should not diminish our appreciation of the fact that the correct solution has already been collectively found. Unlike equilibrists such as Lewis or Beebee, the remaining diversity in philosophy is not seen as an epistemic failure, requiring diminished epistemic claims on the part of individual philosophers as bearers of "opinion" rather than knowledge. By emphasizing the collective accomplishment of "finding" the correct solutions, Cappelen allows the correct views to count as knowledge in the aggregate sense, though not

[3]If anything, the tendencies of the linguistic philosophers mentioned incline towards quietism, in one degree or another, not towards skepticism or aporia. For them, philosophical problems as traditionally conceived are less than genuine problems, and any continuation of the contemplative practice of traditional philosophy tends to be viewed as outmoded.

distributively, and considers that as sufficient for disciplinary progress. Shifting attention to collective accomplishments, Cappelen celebrates philosophical practice and finds a basis for a "hyper-optimistic" view of philosophy .

This, however, leaves us with an open problem of identification, which is not likely to be resolved except by further elaboration and analysis on each side of the main "solutions" to the fundamental problem. Much of what Cappelen is saying can be taken in stride by more skeptical metaphilosophers. Indeed, diversity and dissensus in philosophy are intellectual virtues, indicating the vitality of the discipline, while consensus, to the extent that it is merely sociological, may be a sign of decline rather than success. In the sciences, consensus is thought of as an indication of truth only to the extent that it is not thought of as merely sociological but rather the outcome of free debate and criticism. It is true, however, that such idealized scientific consensus can easily be corrupted by internal academic power structures and resulting biases, and so it remains a problematic indicator of approaching truth. Still, the aggregate, collective focus that Cappelen's hyper-optimism emphasizes leaves open much that skeptics and pessimists have been worried about, and that is the matter of finding out precisely which of the contending alternative solutions to philosophy's main problems is the correct one. Traditionally, philosophers have sought knowledge in the distributive sense of the term (though what that might be remains one of philosophy's unresolved problems). And to the extent that that remains elusive, philosophers are left with their original wonder, which has merely been reframed as a problem of identification. But reframing a problem is not yet solving it .

Cappelen considers philosophy to be a great success in placing the correct answers to the discipline's very important questions in the philosophical commons. He rejects pessimists as "flagellants" who turn a blind eye to philosophy's collective progress and continue to view philosophy as a failure. However, success and failure are end-relative terms. Judging a project, or practice, to be a success or a failure depends on its goals, purposes, or aims. It is a judgment on its fundamental ends. And, of course, a practice may be viewed as a failure in relation to one understanding of its aim, while being seen as successful in relation to another, and vice versa. All through his account Cappelen presupposes that the ultimate aim of philosophy, as with all other inquiries, is the discovery of theoretical truth. Philosophy is seen as a theoretical field which stands at the basis of all other sciences. That is, indeed, a traditional view. Ever since Plato's and Aristotle's rejection of Socratic *aporia* as insufficient, philosophy has been recruited for the search for knowledge. With time however, the various branches of science have separated themselves from philosophy, continuing the search for knowledge independently of philosophy's more fundamental questions. Cognitive science is just the latest development along this process, which began historically with the autonomous development of physics. This suggests a different take on the relation between philosophy and the fundamental aims of the sciences. While the search for knowledge continues in the sciences, it requires separation from the more funda-

mental problems of philosophy, which are less amenable to final resolution. Philosophy continues apace, but not as part of the old search. It is an intellectual but not a theoretical endeavour. Its aim is not discovery, and to the extent that philosophers continue working with that aim, they'll soon find themselves moving on to the sciences, old or new, and separating themselves from philosophy's continued questioning. The aim of philosophy is not discovery of truth but criticism of truth claims; it is a critical, not theoretical practice. In what follows I argue, following Russell, that philosophy not only begins, but also ends, in wonder, i.e., in apprehending the dimensions under which Reality, capitalized, escapes our conceptual grids.

7. Philosophy as Critical Practice

Taylor does give us a hint as to how to proceed. It is to rethink the aims of philosophy by delving into the kind of wisdom, rather than knowledge, that can be pursued by its means. The philosophers we have been considering so far remained conservative, in Beebee's terminology, regarding the contemplative-theoretical goal of philosophy. Acknowledging the condition of irresolvable disagreement in philosophy, these philosophers were led to accept meta-philosophical skepticism, i.e., skepticism regarding the possibility of philosophical knowledge (at least in the distributive sense of the term). Unlike more comprehensive skeptics, who allow no exceptions to their skeptical conclusions, the philosophers here under consideration attempted to segregate skepticism so as not to apply to object level philosophical theories, thereby creating a conceptual space where philosophical theories could still be taken at face value. In so doing, they were continuing the contemplative philosophical tradition of assimilating philosophy to knowledge production, thereby interpreting the "love of wisdom" incorporated in the very etymology of the term as something like a "passion for knowledge." But the difficulties of bringing together metaphilosophical skepticism and object level theoretical commitments should cast doubt on these assimilations. Perhaps a better option would be to reflect again on the aims of philosophy in terms of the kind of wisdom to be pursued. If the wisdom of philosophy is not to be identified with advancing theoretical knowledge, perhaps the embarrassments of disagreement or skepticism could be seen in a different light.

In the *Theaetetus,* Plato presents Socrates as telling Theaetetus that philosophy begins in wonder. It is the necessary first step in philosophical inquiry. But if Socrates is to be taken seriously, then perhaps it should be concluded that philosophy also ends in wonder, i.e., that the condition of *aporia* is not just a temporary phase of philosophical discussion, awaiting correction by means of some theoretical advancement. It is precisely that Platonic/Aristotelian view which leads to the assimilation of philosophy to a knowledge-aiming theoretical activity, and of "the love of wisdom" to "the pursuit of knowledge," while occluding philosophy's critical edge, namely, its commitment—the true meaning of the "love" in its title—to unflinching criticism. In what follows, I shall advance this view.

It goes without saying that "wisdom" is not a single criterion term, nor one with a univocal definition. Like many other general terms, it is best understood as a "family resemblance" term, one for which there is no fixed extension and no clear specification of necessary and sufficient conditions. Rather, there are various cases that are more or less like one another along a variety of dimensions, but no single feature that is common to all. The wisdom of Einstein is not quite the same as that of King Solomon, and both are different from that of Socrates or Budha (not to mention the creative wisdom of Mozart or Salvador Dali). Features like intelligence, cunning, far-sightedness, profundity, experience, rationality, analytic ability, insight, originality, and so on constitute, in Wittgenstein's terms, "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail." (Wittgenstein, 1953: # 66).

Famously, Aristotle distinguished two such dimensions, theoretical and practical wisdom, *theoria* and *Phronesis*, where the former consists in contemplation of unchanging truths while the latter consists in deliberation regarding what is better and worse. Aristotle's assimilation of *theoria* to the demonstration of necessities and of *phronesis* to ethical deliberation has long been abandoned, with theory being applied to contingent matters of fact and practical wisdom extended to decision making generally (not just about the good and the bad). But the basic distinction between theoretical and practical wisdom remains permanently applicable and useful. In different combinations, both appear in different cases. A wise educator imparts knowledge to her students by arranging the circumstances of the students in a way most conducive to learning. There is both theoretical and practical wisdom in this competence. At the other end of the spectrum, one may be a brilliant but practically incompetent scientist or an ignorant but smart manipulator of friends or customers.

And what about philosophers? What is the wisdom they are after? I argue that Aristotle's distinction is not exhaustive. Philosophical wisdom is not theoretical wisdom, as it seems to be incapable of reaching knowledge or any consensus approaching truth, and it is not merely practical wisdom either, as its aim is not some kind of benefit, but is more distinctly intellectual. It has of course been assimilated to either of these poles, by metaphysicians, naturalistic or otherwise, on the one hand, and by pragmatist and therapeutic philosophers, on the other. But neither of these can cover the whole ground. There is, I shall argue, a specific dimension of wisdom, characteristic of philosophy, that is neither just theoretical wisdom nor just practical wisdom; it contains both aspects but is not exhausted by them. I shall call it critical wisdom, i.e., wisdom in criticism, which aims neither at knowledge nor at practical benefit, but rather at the opposite of both, namely, at the reemergence of perplexity, the recognition of cognitive boundaries, the lack of completeness, and the acknowledgement of remaining problems. It is, in a sense, a kind of self-awareness, classically exemplified in Socratic *aporia* as the end of the Socratic *elenchus*. It is, perhaps, an awareness of one's intellectual limits in relation to a world whose secrets cannot fully be disclosed.

There is, of course, a sense in which wisdom requires all three of these dimensions: the theoretical, the practical, and the critical (and also the creative, or artistic). But different cases require different degrees of these qualities. Theoretical wisdom is central for science, but of course methodological deliberation and inter-theoretical criticism are also essential. Practical wisdom is central in decision making, but both theoretical knowledge and a measure of criticism often enter the mix. In philosophy, to return to our main theme, criticism is central while theory and practical deliberation are secondary. The call to philosophize is the call of criticism, the commitment to revealing wonder and perplexity, not hiding them under a cloak of doctrine and dogma.

Viewing philosophy in light of the critical dimension of the wisdom it pursues, namely, as pursuing wonder rather than escaping from it, can serve to account for the metaphilosophical puzzle from which we began. The lack of fundamental agreement in philosophy is not a failure of the philosophical discipline but an aspect of its basic aim, not a bug but a feature, since the basic aim is to advance criticism, namely, the possibility of viewing each theory, or each practical resolution, in light of its remaining inadequacy, or the ways in which it is still incomplete. The underlying assumption in this way of viewing philosophy, i.e., as the never-ending pursuit of criticism, is that completeness in knowledge or understanding is a chimera, an illusion born of the irresolvable tension between the partiality of every human perspective and the transcendence required for validation. A complete view of the world, seeing the world *sub-specie-aeternitatis*, without the limitations of one or another point of view, is a traditional metaphysical ideal but also one that is strictly speaking impossible to achieve. Incompleteness is thus a permanent feature of any perspective on the world, scientific, metaphysical, practical, or any other, and being incomplete, every perspective is an invitation to appreciate its limitedness, an invitation that philosophers are there to accept. The idea that somehow the lack of fundamental agreement in philosophy is a problem is already an assimilation of philosophy to other kinds of intellectual endeavors. When truth is pursued by means of theory, lack of agreement and progress is rightly perceived as a problem, a sign that truth may not have been reached. But when the object of pursuit is criticism, namely, the recognition of incompleteness, the lack of fundamental agreement is precisely what is to be expected.

As noted above, this claim regarding the critical aim of philosophy, as well as the skeptical conclusion which motivates it, is itself philosophical (if also meta-philosophical) and could be understood as applying to itself in a self-defeating manner. This of course is a classical charge against skepticism generally, to which Pyrrhonean skeptics responded by rejecting academic skepticism as negative dogmatism, opting for mere suspension of belief without making general assertions. Here I would only add that the defeat of meta-philosophical skepticism by means of this traditional paradox does not suffice to establish that contrary to such skepticism there is knowledge in philosophy. So, the paradox generates a stalemate. The suggestion of this paper is that the stalemate can be (practically) overcome by

viewing philosophy as aiming at a different goal, namely, criticism rather than theory, issuing in deeper states of wonder, rather than in assurances of truth or justification. This suggestion is not therapeutic, in the Wittgensteinian sense, since it does not aim at quietism (or any kind of *ataraxia*). On the contrary, it aims at the dissatisfaction of wonder, spurring further criticism. It is akin to pragmatism in viewing philosophy as an on-going practice, rather than theory, but the aim of the philosophical practice is not viewed as a Peircean settlement of belief but rather the opposite of that, namely, Deweyan rejection of "the spectator's theory" and the continuation of criticism and wonder.

Philosophy's critical, or aporetic, character can also serve to account for the nature of philosophical theories. These are articulative rather than representational theories. Their aim is neither descriptive nor explanatory, and they do not serve to truly capture some aspect of the world. Rather, their aim is critical, i.e., to articulate ways in which established views are inadequate, or typically, the way in which such established conceptions impose a partial perspective on the aspect of reality that is their subject matter. To do so, distinctions must be drawn, concepts must be developed, alternative models must be assessed, and so on. These are often configured as positive theories despite their critical character: realism, naturalism, nominalism, etc., but the positive character is merely a superficial veneer. Underlying such theories is usually a claim to the inadequacy of the alternative. The positive aspect escapes the full recognition of wonder, thereby missing the point of philosophical activity while assimilating it into theoretical science. But the underlying content of the theories in question is the litany of inadequacies and incompleteness of philosophical attempts at comprehensive pictures of the world. This sounds destructive but there is a constructive side to it, namely, the development of conceptual tools that articulate the ways in which such theories fall short of completeness, tools that have their value in the intellectual accomplishment of continual wonder at the world.

And finally, progress in philosophy can be articulated as progress in thought, in finding ways in which the world is still perplexing, despite the formation of ever stronger and more comprehensive theories. Philosophy does not progress anywhere, if progress is understood as representational progress, i.e., progress towards truth, as can hopefully be found in the sciences. But again, this is not a bug but a feature. Representational accomplishment is not the aim of philosophy, which flourishes rather in criticism. Philosophy does make progress considering its more fundamental aim, namely, keeping perplexity alive to free thought from the enclosure of doctrine. Such progress, of course, does require the elaboration of theories, much as Socratic *elenchus* required definitions, but this use of theories in philosophy is not representational in nature. It does not approach truth, and it does not yield knowledge. Rather, it is designed to yield a critical kind of understanding, not how the world is but how the world is not, namely, an understanding of the ways in which the world exceeds our conceptual and theoretical frameworks. In philosophy, theory is used critically; it is a moment in a more complex

dialectic designed to yield aporetic self-awareness, a voice in a conversation which ultimately appreciates wonder.

But in what ways are perplexity and wonder desirable? If knowledge is the aim of employing theoretical wisdom, and happiness is the aim of employing practical wisdom, wonder is the aim of employing critical wisdom. But what kind of aim is that? We know why we want knowledge or happiness, but why should anyone seek wonder, or perplexity? As normally conceived, wonder, uncertainty, and doubt are uneasy and unstable states of mind. Normally, people seek to overcome them, coming to rest in a state of stable belief. So how can these states of deficiency be thought of as desirable outcomes (of the practice of criticism)? Like both knowledge and happiness, wonder has both an intrinsic and an instrumental value. We obviously value happiness for its own sake, but we also value it instrumentally as contributing to personal health and social stability. Similarly, we value knowledge in both these ways, namely, for its own sake as well as instrumentally for the sake of predictability or technological implementation. Regarding wonder, it is easy to view it as having instrumental value. Wonder leads to inquiry, science, problem-solving, etc., but in what way is it intrinsically valuable? What is the intrinsic value of a state of wonder?

The following is the answer I would like to pursue. The state of wonder is a state of intellectual freedom, a state of liberation in which heteronomous beliefs or acceptances are seen for their limitations, and autonomous questioning begins to take its place. In wonder, we take distance from uncritical beliefs and acceptances, or not sufficiently critical ones, thereby gaining independence of thought. C.S. Peirce (1986) describes inquiry as the struggle to attain belief and remove the irritation of doubt. For him, belief is a habit of action, a disposition to behave in certain ways. These dispositions are inculcated in us well before theoretical inquiry. In Peircean inquiry, belief precedes doubt, and the dynamic of inquiry is to regain stable beliefs, removing doubt. But this epistemic model, which is not unlike other pragmatic-holistic models, is unsuitable for the more critical pattern of philosophy. In philosophy, the aim is not to restore the stability of belief dispositions but rather to question our dispositions, behavioral and doxastic, thereby gaining in autonomy, in freedom of thought. Wonder and perplexity are intrinsically valuable insofar as they are expressions of intellectual autonomy, the very opposite of Peirce's stable habits.

Consider, again, Tőzsér's *aporia* at the end of his dialectical journey. On the one hand, as a philosopher Tőzsér is "inexorably motivated to give answers to philosophical questions," but on the other hand, given the irresolvability of philosophical dissensus, he cannot commit himself to the truth of the propositions that are obtained through philosophy's theoretical tools. Unlike the equilibrists, he cannot overcome "epistemic schizophrenia," or achieve "cognitive peace" by accepting philosophical answers as mere "opinions" or "acceptances." For him, this *aporia* appears as the end of the road for philosophy. So how can the approach offered here, namely, that of privileging philosophy's critical dimension—keeping won-

der alive—at the expense of gaining theoretical knowledge in philosophy, help him in this predicament?

The answer is that "cognitive peace" is the wrong thing to expect in philosophy, and "epistemic schizophrenia" need not be viewed with the horror that the psychiatric term connotes. Cognitive peace amounts to the closure of inquiry, coming to rest at a point of certainty or at least a defensible equilibrium, but that closure, or that resting place, is precisely what philosophy should seek to avoid. The problem with the equilibrist is that she appears to be satisfied with her "opinions," or "acceptances," once they have withstood examination, and happy as well with the community of philosophers advancing alternative and incompatible points of equilibrium, giving short shrift to remaining skeptical worries. Tőzsér finds that this leaves him short of being able to take full epistemic responsibility for the beliefs or acceptances in question and thus denies him the cognitive peace he is after. And he is right. If such cognitive peace is one's aim in philosophy, if philosophy is assimilated to the pursuit of knowledge, equilibrism will remain unsatisfactory. But rather than assimilating philosophy to its (failed) epistemic tradition, being led by its failure to the dead-end he describes, philosophers should free philosophy from the constraints of the epistemic tradition, allowing philosophy to flourish in inexhaustible criticism while taking its fundamental aim to be the processes of questioning rather than the cognitive peace of sheltering under one or another answer.

In short, "the epistemological failure of philosophy," which leads Tőzsér to his end of the road *aporia*, is not the failure to establish philosophical doctrines conclusively, but the assimilation of philosophy to a theoretical practice at the expense of its critical dimension, namely, its focus on the freedom of mind and thought that is gained by acknowledging uncertainty and perplexity. Under this assimilation, philosophical wonder appears as a lack of cognitive peace, or a form of epistemic schizophrenia. With different priorities, these maladies can be viewed as the forms of liberation that they are. From this perspective, philosophical theories are of secondary importance. Like Popper's conjectures, they are there to be refuted, not to be established, though this is so not due to the problem of induction but rather to philosophy's inherent dissensus. (Popper's mistake, however, was to subordinate science to a philosophic ideal, rather than relax its epistemological standards to allow for science's empirical adequacy and practical utility.) As conjectures to be refuted, philosophical theories do have a role to play. In their mutual incompatibility, philosophical theories, or equilibria, supply images of how the world might be, and how distant we are from determining how it is (wonder). This intellectual accomplishment grows with the intricacy of the theories in question, and with it our level of intellectual autonomy grows as well.

It goes without saying that none of the above is very original with this paper. Aporetic self-awareness has been identified as a philosophical outcome since the beginning of philosophy, but an equally long tradition, beginning with Plato, has instrumentalized its value as the starting point of theoretical projects aiming at

securing metaphysical truth and knowledge. Wonder has been demoted to being a step on the way towards a more stable condition, epistemologically and psychologically. It took centuries of constructive attempts at establishing philosophical theories, metaphysical, epistemological, conceptual, or ethical, to reach a point where philosophers like Rescher, Lewis, or Taylor could bring together metaphilosophical skepticism and object-level theorization, and still another step is required. Rather than erecting barriers to the skepticism in their metaphilosophy, finding ways of protecting the integrity of object level philosophical constructions, it is better to accept these object level theoretical constructions for what they are, namely, stepping stones on the road to a more comprehensive criticism of philosophy whose justification lies in the intellectual value of wonder at the problematic nature of our place in the world and the value of thinking critically as an end in itself rather than an instrument yielding some less challenging condition.

The step here envisioned of moving beyond metaphilosophically segregated skepticism to an alternative view of philosophy which emphasizes not the attempt to approach knowledge and truth but rather the importance of maintaining a critical, and self-critical orientation, is foreshadowed in Bertrand Russell's concluding chapter of his popular book *The Problems of Philosophy* (1959 [1912]). In the chapter entitled "The Value of Philosophy," Russell points to the tension between the status of philosophy as a study aiming (like all studies) at knowledge, "the kind of knowledge which gives unity and system to the body of the sciences, and the kind which results from a critical examination of our convictions, prejudices, and beliefs," on the one hand, and the fact that "it cannot be maintained that philosophy has had any very great measure of success in its attempts to provide definite answers to its questions," on the other (Russell, 1959: p. 154). This tension is due to the fact that the questions of philosophy are to a large extent unanswerable: "There are many questions—and among them those that are of the profoundest interest to our spiritual life—which, so far as we can see, must remain insoluble to the human intellect unless its powers become of quite a different order from what they are now" (op. cit. 155). Russell's way of resolving this tension is by way of shifting our perspective on the fundamental aims (or value) of philosophy: "the value of philosophy is, in fact, to be sought in its very uncertainty. …Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thought and free them from the tyranny of custom" (op. cit. 157). For Russell, then, philosophy's pursuit of knowledge is to be viewed negatively, i.e., as promoting uncertainty rather than settled knowledge, and he views the intellectual benefit of that in terms of freedom and personal growth. The chapter (and the book) is concluded with the following statement:

> Thus, to sum up our discussion of the value of philosophy: Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answer can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of

> what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination, and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good. (ibid, 161).

Apart from the last clause, regarding the mind's "union with the universe," in which Russell attempts, perhaps, to squeeze some positive metaphysical juice out of the lemon of critical uncertainty, his conclusion is very much in line with the critical, aporetic conception of philosophy advocated in this paper. Russell is particularly clear about the source of the problem—the metaphysician's attempt to attain an unattainable viewpoint, the view of reality as a unified whole, without a here and now, as possibly God might view it. Russell's point could be articulated as being that the aim of attempting this impossible viewpoint is not the positive aim of reaching any substantive theory but rather the negative aim of enhancing uncertainty, namely, of showing how the universe is "larger," more complex, than what we can capture of it, being limited to merely internal (immanent) perspectives of it. For Russell, we grow with this realization, seeing that the world is not limited to our view of it. The Self expands with the understanding of the "greatness" of the world, and the intellectual freedom it enjoys expands as well, since the awareness of human limitations is also the awareness of the unlimited nature of the world, but that self-awareness is still an aspect of ultimate perplexity, uncertainty, and wonder.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for incisive and helpful comments from and discussions with my colleague Uri D. Leibowitz, on an earlier draft of this paper.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

Beebee, H. (2018). I—*The Presidential Address* Philosophical Scepticism and the Aims of Philosophy. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 118,* 1-24. https://doi.org/10.1093/arisoc/aox017

Brake, E. (2017). Making Philosophical Progress: The Big Questions, Applied Philosophy, and the Profession. *Social Philosophy and Policy, 34,* 23-45. https://doi.org/10.1017/s026505251700019x

Cappelen, H. (n.d.). *Philosophy Is Perfect*: *A Defense of Philosophy.* Oxford University Press. https://philarchive.org/archive/CAPPIP

Chalmers, D. J. (2015). Why Isn't There More Progress in Philosophy? *Philosophy, 90,* 3-31. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0031819114000436

Christensen, D. (2007). Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News. *The Philosophical Review, 116,* 187-217. https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-2006-035

Dellsén, F., Firing, T., Lawler, I., & Norton, J. (2024). What Is Philosophical Progress? *Phi-*

losophy and Phenomenological Research, 109, 663-693. https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.13067

Descartes, R. (1952). *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason* (Trans. E.S. Haldane & G.R.T. Ross). William Benton, Publisher, Britannica Great Books, Encyclopedia Britannica, inc.

Dietrich, E. (2011). There Is No Progress in Philosophy. *Essays in Philosophy, 12,* 330-345. https://doi.org/10.5840/eip20111229

Hume, D. (1978). Introduction. In L. A. Selby-Bigge (Ed.), *A Treatise of Human Nature* (pp. xiii-xix). Oxford University Press.

Kant, I. (1952). Preface to the Second Edition. *The Critique of Pure Reason* (Trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn) (pp. 5-13). William Benton, Publisher, Britannica Great Books, Encyclopedia Britannica, inc.

Kelly, T. (2016). Disagreement in Philosophy: Its Epistemic Significance. In H. Cappelen, T. S. Gendler, & J. Hawthorne (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Methodology* (pp. 374-394). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199668779.013.6

Keren, A. (2023). Disagreement, Progress, and the Goal of Philosophy. *Synthese, 201,* Article No. 45. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-022-04030-0

Kornblith, H. (2012). Is Philosophical Knowledge Possible? In D. E. Machuca (Ed.), *Disagreement and Skepticism* (pp. 260-276). Routledge.

Peirce, C. S. (1986). The Fixation of Belief. *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, (Vol. 3, pp. 242-257). Indiana University Press.

Priest, G. (2006). What Is Philosophy? *Philosophy, 81,* 189-207. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0031819106316026

Rescher, N. (1978). Philosophical Disagreement: An Essay towards Orientational Pluralism in Metaphilosophy. *The Review of Metaphysics, 32,* 217-251. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20127188

Russell, B. (1959). *The Problems of Philosophy.* Oxford University Press.

Shand, J. (2017). Philosophy Makes No Progress, So What Is the Point of It? *Metaphilosophy, 48,* 284-295. https://doi.org/10.1111/meta.12237

Taylor, R. (1968). Dare to be Wise. *The Review of Metaphysics, 21,* 615-629. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20124689

Tőzsér, J. (2023). *The Failure of Philosophical Knowledge*: *Why Philosophers Are Not Entitled to Their Beliefs.* Bloomsbury Academic. http://doi.org/10.5040/9781350340077.

van Inwagen, P. (2004). Freedom to Break the Laws. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, 28,* 334-350. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4975.2004.00099.x

Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical Investigations.* Macmillan Publishing Co.

Lewis, D. (1983). *Philosophical Papers*. Oxford University Press.