Chapter Ten

Contemporary Problems with Analytic Philosophy

Abstract: There are several reasons why contemporary 'analytic philosophy' isn't relevant to humanity as a whole. Four factors are discussed: (1) philosophers ignore the influence of 'worldview intuitions,' (2) an absence of a social scientific methodology, and (3) an absence of a theory of definition. This has led to (4) a proliferation of artificial distinctions and stipulative definitions. This chapter discusses 'philosophical progress.'

1) Philosophers Ignore the Influence of 'Worldview Intuitions'

What is an intuition? Charles Parsons (1995) defines an 'intuition' as what a person takes to be true at the outset of an inquiry, or as a matter of common sense (p. 59). David Lewis (1983) and others similarly define an intuition as a kind of belief, or an opinion. Intuitions have been characterized as spontaneous mental judgments (Goldman & Pust, 1998). An intuition is a belief that we are pre-theoretically committed to, inclined to believe, or seems intrinsically plausible. It is a report of 'what we would say' if asked our gut-level opinion about the correct answer to a given question. An intuitive belief can be a 'seems to be the case' and unreflectively tentative; or alternatively an intuitive belief can be strongly held (but not infallible). Persons sometimes have strong pre-theoretical beliefs (e.g., 'the sun moves around the earth,' 'there are moral truths,' 'I know I'm not a brain-in-a-vat') but such beliefs may change (with additional evidence).

Intuitions are the starting point for the development of a philosophical theory. Intuitions differ from empirical beliefs because they more prominently involve an *interpretation* of *the way things are* and (to some extent) are initially *non-inferential* (i.e., without conscious explicit reasons, just taken for granted). Intuitions are evidential data to be explained and scrutinized by a theory. Both 'world-view intuitions' and 'linguistic intuitions' play a role in conceptual analyses.

Worldview intuitions are a person's beliefs about the overall character of a phenomenon (or domain) being discussed. Worldview intuitions are *not* just intuitions about the *physical* world. Instead 'worldview intuitions' are intuitions about everything, including intuitions about 'proper word use,' and intuitions about human psychology and behavior, e.g., if a choice was available, most persons prefer to be freely given a $1000 bill instead of a $1 bill (to maximize utility). For philosophers, world-view intuitions

include beliefs about theism, naturalism, evolution theory, moral realism, semantic theory, possible-worlds realism, empiricism, aesthetics, mathematics, and the practice of philosophy. E.J. Lowe (2000) correctly maintains that one's 'personal metaphysics' about reality is "unavoidable for any rational thinker" including physical scientists (p. 5). One's personal metaphysics is one's worldview.[1] [2]

Linguistic intuitions are narrower in scope and are about the proper application and use of particular concepts. Linguistic intuitions are a subset of a person's world-view intuitions. Linguistic intuitions are beliefs about the use of concepts and sentence meaning. A person's possessing a concept makes one disposed to have beliefs (or intuitions) about the correct application of a concept in various contexts.[3]

Analytic philosophers routinely combine their *worldview intuitions* and *linguistic intuitions*, add a vocabulary, and abductive and deductive arguments to advance a certain thesis or 'theory.' A person's linguistic intuitions include one's vocabulary. In current philosophy, metaphysicians offer theories with extensive vocabularies based upon ancient distinctions, concepts, and problems. A metaphysician's intuitions are influenced by the structure of a realist metaphysical (and formal semantic) worldview and technical vocabulary (e.g., 'object,' 'properties,' 'relations,' 'thing,' 'aboutness,' 'reality,' 'fact'). Metaphysics is the most general of all disciplines seeking to identify the nature, constitution, and structure of *all that there is*. It seeks *a priori* 'conceptual truths.'

---

[1] Historically, in the philosophical world, Plato's prominent worldview was that 'reason' is the source of truth and mathematics serves as an ideal. Aristotle's worldview took empirical 'evidence-based' biology as a source of knowledge. Similarly, Descartes (an idealist) wished to ground science in the sort of certainty associated with mathematical proofs, while Hume (an empiricist) wanted to prioritize empirical evidence over abstract reasoning as the source of knowledge. This debate about a philosophical worldview (about *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge) and methodology continues.

[2] Let's mention a worldview that dominates the world's population, the *theistic worldview*. According to many theists, there exists a supernatural entity **x** knowing of all things (including moral duties) whose moral code should be followed. Because **x** is wholly good and caring, **x** communicates objective moral truths to persons in the form of written texts (and for some, personal messages). Objective moral values are binding on everyone (including those of other religions). For Christians, God is described as being very close to us every day, observing our lives, knowing our thoughts and our words (sometimes before they are spoken). Several major theistic worldviews dominate most of the human race.

[3] A 'conceptual analysis' is the practice of analyzing terms (e.g., knowledge, justification, truth, reference, relevance, intuition, beauty, number) by exploring the normal uses of terms and sentences and the intentions behind them that give a concept a significance (or meaning, intelligibility) in a context. A concept is defined (or explained) in part as a response to hypothetical situations (i.e., the method of cases).

(2) A Question of Methodology: What is Analytic Philosophy?

Despite the ongoing debates about methodology, metaphysicians (usually realists) using formal semantics now dominate (with talk of possible worlds) in all branches. It is clear that contemporary philosophy is presently in an overall state of 'normal philosophy.' "Normal philosophy" is the practice of building upon basic assumptions without questioning them.[4] For many philosophers, mathematical approaches involving modeling languages are promising in responding to philosophical problems and providing relevant analyses. The thoughts of Leibniz and Frege are presently given great respect.[5]

During a period of normal science, which *ideas* have influence and are published in journals depends on *what appears to be convincing* (or at least promising) to other philosophers. But at any single time, there is a limited range of ideas that are under active discussion in philosophy.

Metaphysicians are influential with respect to the publishing world. For research articles submitted to journals, it is expected that an essay should contribute to a (well-defined) debate in which substantive progress can be made. An article should be a fragment within a specialty interest. Production of a short, highly specialized article is expected. Essays are to be abstract and dispassionate similar to the physical sciences and mathematics. The more *rigorous* (i.e., detailed, complex) an essay is, the better its chance for publication. Philosophers *respond* to other philosophers' views. 'Competing' theories and models are discussed. Essays encourage further debate (and publications) among (a small group of) experts' *active interests* within a field. Interests include new (stipulated) distinctions and topics. Publish and flourish.[6]

---

[4] Timothy Williamson (2020) confirms the present state of 'normal philosophy' (p. 99). Debates about methodology are discussed in Chapter Nine, Vol. 1 in DPLK and Essay 2 in ECA.

[5] An investigation of 'metaphysical modality' is one worldview favored. Timothy Williamson (2007) states that "Philosophy can never be reduced to mathematics. But we can often produce mathematical models of fragments of philosophy, and when we can, we should" (p. 291). Hannes Leitgeb, former editor of the journal *Erkenntnis* states on his personal webpage that he is very much in favor of Mathematical or Formal Philosophy, i.e., the application of logical and mathematical methods in philosophy. He states that to make progress in philosophy, the use of mathematical methods is of crucial importance.

[6] Scott Soames (2003) lauds specialization: "Philosophy has become a highly organized discipline, done by specialists primarily for other specialists. The number of philosophers has exploded, the volume of publication has swelled, and the subfields of serious philosophical investigation have multiplied" (p. 463).

Unfortunately, given the norm that essays should be on small, specialized topics for journal publication, there is a substantial bias against ordinary language analysis as a methodology in analytic philosophy.[7] The character of conceptual analysis isn't as technical and complex. And conceptual analysis, using case studies, might threaten the consensus by discussing 'big' worldview ideas. Some ideas just need to be addressed from a global (or big picture) worldview, involving multiple branches of philosophy. But such ambitious essays aren't amenable to short rigorous essays. These essays won't get published. The normal science consensus continues its research on small topics.

The problem of considering 'big picture' arguments puts to test the normative principles of 'fairmindedness' and 'open-mindedness': (1) "Fairmindedness" is putting in the good-faith effort to treat all viewpoints *fairly*, regardless of one's own beliefs, emotional reaction, or community norms (such as peer pressure to agree with a point of view). (2) "Open-mindedness" is to have respect for alternative viewpoints. One must also attempt to avoid "confirmation bias" which can be defined as the human tendency to accept information that conforms with our existing beliefs and *reject information* that *contradicts* those beliefs. It is to accept evidence that confirms what one already believes and to dismiss any evidence that undermines that belief. These are normative concepts.[8]

(3) An Absence of a Theory of Definition

It is strongly prescribed here that a reader of this essay should understand (and know) what a 'definition' is. "Definition" should not be a vague and ambiguous concept. But especially since the writings of Frege and Russell, logic has been prioritized and the concept of 'definition' has been ignored. The absence of a theory of definition has allowed philosophy to become bloated with artificial distinctions, stipulative definitions, and oftentimes *ad hoc* or obscure philosophical questions. The fact that the general public and professional philosophers don't fully understand what a "definition" is, is alarming. The following summary definition of "definition" is important.

---

[7] Besides its traditional *a priori* character, experimental philosophy accusations are also a factor.

[8] The concepts of 'fairmindedness,' 'open-mindedness' and 'confirmation bias,' used in this paragraph are from Jonathan Haber's *Critical Thinking* (2020).

In chapter 6 (vol. 1), I hypothesized the following 'tripartite' disjunctive definition for the concept of 'definition' as a natural kind entity*:*

> **x** is a '**definition**' in a definiendum-to-definiens relationship if and only if it is (1) reportive, or (2) theoretic, or (3) stipulative; (3a) an initial naming assertion, or (3b) an abbreviation, or (3c) a precise formalization for practical, technical, or personal reasons.

This definition is either *true* or *false* as a description of the nature of 'definition.' The challenge to anyone skeptical about this definition is to provide a single counter example. No one has presented a counterexample. No journal will publish a theory of definition.[9]

For most philosophers, a 'theory of definition' isn't even of concern. In Ken Abika's *The Philosophy Major's Introduction to Philosophy* (2021), which intends to offer to a rigorous, but concise account of basic philosophical concepts for students seeking to pursue graduate study, it includes distinctions such as particulars/universals, abstract/concrete objects, singular terms/predicates, object language/metalanguage, extension/intension, properties/relations/propositions, essential/accidental properties, possible worlds, rigid designators, analytic/synthetic truths, *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge and truths, necessary/possible/contingent truths, propositional attitudes, and so on, but the concept of 'definition' doesn't even appear in the Index at the end of the book about topics covered. This is an oversight for the discipline of philosophy because many philosophical concepts are (in fact) stipulated as precise technical formalizations. This is important, since such stipulations are not truth-apt, but require 'acceptance.'

Further, a critical consequence of a tripartite definition is that it would undermine the currently trendy, and researched notion of "conceptual engineering." A conceptual engineer is a philosopher who seeks to assess and improve our representational devices. Jennifer Nado (2021) states that "Conceptual engineers aim to improve or to replace rather than to analyze; to create rather than discover. While conceptual analysts are interested in the concepts we do have, conceptual engineers are interested in concepts we

---

[9] The evidential support for the tripartite theory is based upon the observations of speech and writing patterns found in natural and artificial languages. The theory is about the actual limits (and modes) of how persons can intelligibly specify their use of a linguistic symbol. A major reason that a definition of 'definition' isn't analyzed is that such an analysis requires ordinary language 'conceptual analysis.' The argument form supporting this theory uses abductive reasoning and seeks contingent social scientific truths.

ought to have. Their project is prescriptive rather than descriptive" (p. 1509). But what kind of values and goals should guide our concepts and the entire activity of conceptual engineering? The blurring of the descriptive-prescriptive-normative philosophical discourse allows for an enormous amount of research and discussion![10]

Philosophers' unrestrained use of stipulative definitions and normative suppositions is analogous to the Wizard in the *Wizard of Oz*. In this famous film, the wizard isn't real. There is a mortal behind the curtain perpetuating illusions. Similarly, the complex technical mumbo jumbo of many journal articles is illusory. Philosophers who excessively use initial naming, notational abbreviations, and technically formalized definitions are not helpful. Metaphysical models aren't truly informative. Oftentimes, philosophers unconsciously in their quest for detail, assume a complexity of questions and answers, while ignoring simplicity and communication to society. Creating new distinctions to respond to complex problems often isn't helpful. Further, it should be emphasized that a preference for *simpler* explanations over *complex* explanations is a mark of the 'scientific method.'[11] On the definition here, an "argument" is "a coherent series of reasons, statements, or facts intended to support or establish a point of view."

(4) Progress: The Proliferation of Artificial Distinctions and Stipulative Definitions

Philosophers often compare 'progress' in *philosophy* to the progress found in the *physical sciences* or in *mathematics*. The issue of 'philosophical progress,' and whether there is any, and exactly what it is, is currently being debated.[12]

In "What is Philosophical Progress?" Dellsen, Firing, Lawler, and Norton (2024) state that philosophy clarifies *new distinctions* to facilitate more careful and productive

[10] It is agreed with Deutsch (2020) that the recent 'hype' of 'conceptual engineering' deserves no attention. Engineers attempting to ameliorate 'defective concepts' essentially prescribe their personal formalizations to others. This is a kind of 3c stipulative (non-truth apt) definition.

[11] The scientific method: (1) pose a question, (2) propose an answer (i.e., a 'hypothesis') and then (3) hold the hypothesis tentative while evidence is gathered to prove or disprove it with a spirit of constructive skepticism. In the end, hypotheses that withstand scrutiny from experts become 'theories,' strong enough to be used as a basis for further inquiry.

[12] For example, see Blackford & Broderick (2017), Dietrich (2011), Chalmers (2015), Stoljar (2017), Kitcher (2023), Sarihan (2024), Maslen (2024), Garancini (2025), and Smith (2025).

conversations about philosophical problems. The use of examples and *thought experiments* are a means of articulating a new theory. New and more careful questions are asked. Deductive and abductive *arguments* are offered for and against proposed theories. They recognize conceptual philosophy as "putting people in a position to increase their understanding of a phenomenon—where *understanding*, in turn, is a matter of more accurately or comprehensively representing the network of dependence relations between phenomena" (p. 690).

Philosophy can be compared to mathematics. Mathematics is a mature science (with applications) and only those involved with pure mathematics are pursuing new grounds (i.e., progress). For philosophers who identify philosophy as closely aligned to mathematics, the discipline of 'philosophy' answers non-empirical questions, or so-called 'armchair' questions. Philosophy, roughly speaking, can be done in the head. Armchair activity reveals what is possible. As discussed above, for Williamson (2020) "philosophical progress consists in building better models" (p. 117).

Many times, writings tend to mix both of these conceptual and mathematical approaches. Unfortunately, for both approaches and hybrids, they are often afflicted with (1) arbitrary and idiosyncratic worldview intuitions which often include new distinctions, new vocabulary, and often new problems, (2) a lack of relevance (or interest) outside of the set of professional philosophers who are interested in the particular problem. A typical philosophical article or monograph is irrelevant to the general public.[13] [14] [15]

---

[13] Of course, I'm raising the objection that arbitrary worldview intuitions, new distinctions and terms, new problems, and general societal irrelevance are *problems*. For professional philosophers, their audience is understood to be other philosophers, and there is no problem here. Quine (1981) thinks that with current technical philosophy, the layman shouldn't care (or be curious) about what he does as a philosopher, any more than being curious as what an organic chemist is doing (p. 192). It is widely accepted among philosophers that philosophy is just too complex and technical for ordinary people. It is a specialist's job.

[14] As a solution to these methodology problems, philosophers should recognize (1) the importance of the substance of their worldview intuitions and (2) resist the excessive introduction of new distinctions and concepts being stipulated into a new vocabulary. Philosophy writings of this standard type are not 'social scientific' in evaluating ordinary public concepts, and as a result they are not useful to society as a whole. It is safe to say that the vast majority of academic writings in philosophy fit this unsatisfying profile.

[15] In "How to Philosophize Like an Academic" (2026), Hyde states that research is highly collaborative and proposes an explicit six-step framework for the manufacture of journal articles involving rigorous peer scrutiny. Unfortunately, for the sake of harmony and conformity, this process has led to 'groupthink' with a loss of creativity, uniqueness, and independent thinking.

"Robust Pluralism About Philosophical Progress"

It would be useful to document the problem of excessive artificial distinctions and stipulative definitions with an example essay that exhibits this kind of style. This is the format where writer(s) state some initial conceptual worldview intuitions, introduce *new* distinctions and vocabulary, and then frame these terms in the issues and questions to be asked. This format is illustrated with a portion of "Robust Pluralism About Philosophical Progress" by Jon Bengson, Terrance Cuneo, and Russ Shafer-Landau (2026).

We'll state their abstract and a short portion of their text (pp. 1-3). Their abstract involves numerous technical concepts:

> **Abstract:** This article argues that there are two fundamentally different types of alethic and epistemic progress in philosophy. It is widely assumed that such progress is to be assessed by reference to the quantity or quality of philosophy's product (i.e., a type of output or outcome, such as true answers, coherent views, knowledge, or understanding), rather than to the manner in which philosophy is done- its performance. That assumption is mistaken. Performance progress is not reducible to product progress. This carries implications for debates about peer disagreement, epistemic consequentialism, philosophical methods, and the idea of philosophy as a "spiritual exercise" (p. 1).
>
> ---
>
> *Activities have ends*. Some of these are merely assigned to the activity by their agents, as when a parent opts to play chess with the end of building a child's confidence. Other ends are fitting to the activity, in the sense that their realization constitutes a type of success or excellence at that activity. In the game of chess, checkmating one's opponent is one such end because the success conditions for chess invoke doing just that. Not so for confidence-building. The idea, then, is that some ends figure in the account of the activity itself, specified by the conditions under which the activity is conducted successfully or excellently. Those pinpoint its *proper* ends (p. 2, italics added).
>
> Such ends mark out ways to make progress at the activity. Among the many proper ends of telling a joke are inspiring laughter and revealing one's ingenuity. Stand-up comics make progress in their craft by (inter alia) refining their jokes in ways that arouse greater laughter and better exhibit the creativity and wit behind setup and punch line. Of course, one might tell a joke in order to realize any number of goals— for instance to humiliate one's enemies, distract the victim of a scam, or buy time while waiting for assistance. Though it might be appropriate to

pursue such goals in certain contexts, their realization does not constitute success or excellence at telling a joke per se. They are not among its proper ends; their improvement does not amount to progress at joke-telling.

Yet, it does not follow that all of an activity's proper ends are on par. For some of those ends serve as the *prima inter pares*—the activity's *ultimate* ends. Each of these is not only fitting but also such that there is no other end more fitting; in other words, each is maximally fitting. (It follows from this characterization that so long an activity has one or more proper ends, it is guaranteed to have at least one ultimate proper end). In a soccer match, preventing one's opponent from scoring is a proper end. But if your team also goes scoreless, then it fails to secure an ultimate end: winning. Although other proper ends of this competitive sport, such as exhibiting teamwork and resilience, may be equally fitting, none is more fitting. Unsurprisingly, then, winning serves as an important standard by which to measure improvement: victory is the royal road to progress in soccer. No matter the activity—whether soccer, joke-telling, or chess—its ultimate ends serve as the principal measures of progress at that activity. That they are the most fitting ends of the activity supports viewing them as the most fitting ways of measuring its progress.[16]

Let's now look at philosophy. Like other activities, this one can be undertaken in different modes for varying purposes: political, aesthetic, therapeutic, or social ones, for instance. Here, we set aside these options, many of which are legitimate, in order to focus on philosophy as a species of theoretical inquiry. Among its proper ends are alethic or epistemic achievements such as true claims, coherent views, reasonable attitudes, justified beliefs, knowledge, certainty, understanding, and wisdom.[17] Indeed, it is difficult to deny that realizing one of these achievements would constitute a type of success or excellence at philosophy. Accordingly, when assessing its alethic or epistemic progress, each could serve as a reasonable yardstick. It makes sense to measure progress in philosophy by reference to the number of truths it has identified, the amount of knowledge it has yielded, the extent of understanding that it fostered, and so on.

---

[16] This language about activities, intentional action, ends, performance, success, excellence, and so on, are terms used by Sosa in *Epistemology* (2017) and by other writers. This language is industry-accepted.

[17] "Alethic" is an adjective referring to the logic of truth, necessity, possibility, and contingency. It describes the branch of modal logic analyzing these concepts, such as in "alethic modality." The term "epistemic" is defined as "related to knowledge."

> Which of these are among philosophy's ultimate ends? That's a good question, but we needn't commit ourselves to an answer here. For the proceeding discussion already provides the making of an argument for a pluralistic approach to philosophical progress:
>
> (1) Philosophy has many alethic and epistemic proper ends (a subset of which are ultimate ends).
>
> (2) Each of an activity's proper ends serves as a measure of progress at that activity (and a subset of those ends most fitting measures of such).
>
> So, (3) There are many measures of alethic and epistemic progress in philosophy.
>
> We take this argument to motivate pluralism as the default view about measures of progress in philosophy.

The authors follow-up with three paragraphs of details of relations involving the italicized terms of '*privileged*,' '*fully explains*,' '*directly*,' '*indirectly*,' '*constitutes*,' and '*promote*' to discuss the concept of a "*privileged proper end*." At one point, they state:

> To be an ultimate end is to be a maximally fitting proper end; it is the most fitting way of measuring progress. Something can match this description without it alone explaining why all other measures of progress serve as such, without it alone directly contributing to progress, and without it alone constituting progress. So the notion of a *privileged end* is different from and is not implied by that of an *ultimate end* (p. 2, italics added).

The authors reference the essay of Dellsen, Firing, Lawler, and Norton (2024) who maintain that there is a "single, unified" measure of alethic or epistemic progress in the case of philosophy. They state:

> For these authors, it is a very specific type of understanding, defined in terms of "representing the network of dependence relations between phenomena." This serves as the sole measure of such progress. So their view is:
>
> > … a *monistic* account, in the sense that it holds that it is a single cognitive achievement, namely putting people in a position to increase their understanding, that is constitutive of progress (Dellsen et. al., p. 681).

> Their account allows that other achievements bear on philosophical progress, but only derivatively, insofar as they promote the "single cognitive achievement" that constitutes alethic or epistemic progress—where "achievements promote progress if and only if they cause or probabilify the achievement(s) constitutive of progress" (Dellsen et. al., p. 682).
>
> The next section argues that monism is mistaken. The reasoning targets what we'll call "thinly" pluralist alternatives as well. So the argument, if successful, establishes a robust form of pluralism (p. 3).

Bengson, Cuneo, and Shafer-Landau's remaining argument:

> … incorporates a distinction between *telic* activities (ones whose proper ends lies in their *products*) and *autotelic* activities (ones whose proper ends lie in their *performance*). Under ordinary conditions preparing a meal is a telic activity; success or excellence at the activity is realized by the production of food for consumption. When the food is ready to eat, that end has been fully realized. In contrast, under ordinary conditions, spending time with friends is an autotelic activity; success or excellence at the activity lies in the performance. If you and your friends pass the afternoon together, then the activity's proper end has been fully realized (p. 3).

These distinctions position them to formulate the first part of their argument:

> (1) Telic activities have one type of end, whereas autotelic activities have a different type of end.
>
> (2) If so, then telic activities admit of one type of progress, whereas autotelic activities admit of a different type of progress.
>
> (3) Some activities are both telic and autotelic.
>
> So, (4) Such activities admit of two different types of progress.

In this section the authors provide the following footnote #13, p. 8:

> Though our argument focuses on two categories, *telic* and *autotelic*, we also recognize that *atelic* activities (ones without proper ends), such as staring blankly and wishing upon a star. We emphasize that our use of terminology is somewhat novel. For instance, it differs from that found in linguistics, where "telic" applies

> to any activity or event with a clear endpoint that constitutes its success conditions. It is also importantly different from that found in Suits (1978, 81) and more recently, Setiya (2017, ch. 6). The latter's influential discussion borrows its terminology from linguistics and tracks a distinction to be found in Aristotle's Metaphysics (1048b18-34). Setiya (2017, 133-135) defines telic activities as those that "are aimed at terminal states, at which they are finished and thus exhausted… for which success can only mean cessation." Atelic activities, in his scheme, are those that cannot be completed; their ends can never be fully realized.[18]

Summary of "Robust Pluralism About Philosophical Progress"

After presenting an abstract involving numerous vague and technical concepts, the authors have presented their worldview intuitions about 'activities' to 'ends,' and their relation to 'success' and 'excellence.' This initial discussion presents a kind of metaphysical normative conceptual analysis of ordinary language terms.

The assertion that "Activities have ends" (p. 2) appears to be an axiom (i.e., an implicit definition of these two concepts). The proposition doesn't seem outwardly true or false, or confirmable by empirical fact. Instead, it prescribes that this proposition in combination with the concepts of 'success' and 'excellence' will help pinpoint (or identify) what an activity's "proper end" is. The use of examples and analogies are used to invoke a loose conceptual analysis of "progress" in terms of an activity's proper ends. The technical concepts of 'alethic' and 'epistemic' progress are included. A deductive argument is presented.

A Problem with Analytic Philosophy

Although the above excerpt is just a small portion of a lengthy essay, this *philosophical formula* with its initial setting of a *conceptual landscape* and interpretation of a *philosophical problem* using vague intuitions about some ordinary language terms and adding a labyrinth of artificial technical distinctions (and terms) is a paradigm example of a *non-scientific* analysis. Other less-jargoned essays still standardly begin with new distinctions and terms. This form of stipulation is typical of journal essays.

---

[18] References are to K. Setiya (2017), *Midlife: A Philosophical Guide*. Princeton University Press, and B. Suits (1978), *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*. University of Toronto Press.

Philosophers are much too accepting of creating technical stipulative definitions (which are not truth-apt) and then proceeding with dialogue using those stipulations. Philosophers offering an expansive vocabulary with new and old technical distinctions and techniques involving intuitions about ordinary words (e.g., 'activities,' 'ends,' 'ultimate ends,' 'proper ends,' 'success,' 'excellence,' 'progress,') and logical arguments involving necessity, possibility, and contingency, are *not* making *real progress* in any philosophical domain. The structure of Bengson, Cuneo, and Shafer-Landau's essay is virtually the same style as that of other major philosophers such as Ernest Sosa, John Greco, Linda Zagzebski, Duncan Prichard, Timothy Williamson, and others who offer an expansive vocabulary with many new technical distinctions.[19]

Worldview Intuitions

The three authors acknowledge comments in preparation of their essay from Herman Cappelen, J. Adam Carter, Matti Eklund, Chris Kelp, Mona Simion, among others. The authors and commentators have *strong worldviews*. Let us examine them.[20]

Russ Shafer-Landau, Jon Bengson, Terrance Cuneo

For most of his career, Russ Shafer-Landau, has been a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has written *Moral Realism: A Defense* (2003), and with the two co-authors, has published *Philosophical Methodology* (2022) and *The Moral Universe* (2024). He is founder and editor of *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*.

Jon Bengson is a professor at University of Texas-Austin. His interests include intuition, understanding, skill and know-how, perception, inquiry, moral knowledge, moral action, the foundations of normativity, and philosophical progress.

---

[19] The 'university imperative' of 'productivity' and 'progress' helps drive philosophy departments and philosophers to write and 'discover' new distinctions. To secure funding, philosophy needs its own standard of 'success' and that is publishing. Chairpersons competing for scarce resources want to impress deans with a 'research-active' faculty. Faculty seeking promotions (and personal prestige) want to impress chairpersons with 'productivity.' Many philosophers (amazingly) have over one hundred published works.

[20] Despite their philosophical prominence, I maintain that the worldviews of the three authors and their assistants are essentially misaligned from reality. Although the arguments and vocabulary supporting their views is creative and complex, they are mistaken. The challenge for these authors is to respond to critics. It is easy to ignore criticism and dissident opinion.

Terence Cuneo is a professor at the University of Vermont. He has many published journal articles and several books. His interests include value theory, ethics, philosophy of religion, history of modern philosophy, and epistemology. In "Trusting Moral Intuitions" (2020) published in *Nous*, the authors Shafer-Landau, Bengson, and Cuneo introduce their metaethical intuitions about 'moral intuitions' as follows:

> We develop an argument for a novel version of moral intuitionism centered on the claim that moral intuitions are trustworthy. Our argument employs an epistemic principle that we call the *Trustworthiness Criterion*, a distinctive feature of which is its emphasis on oft-neglected social dimensions of cognitive states, including non-doxastic attitudes such as intuition. Thus our argument is not that moral intuitions are trustworthy because they are regress-stoppers, or because innocent until proven guilty, or because denying their epistemic contribution would be self-defeating, or because they are based on understanding—individualistic claims that have elsewhere used (controversially) in defense of the thesis that moral intuitions are in good epistemic standing. Rather, our argument appeals to the idea that moral intuitions are trustworthy because they are outputs of a cognitive practice, which has epistemically-fecund social elements, that is in good working order. This means that, as John Rawls writes in another context,
>
> > If a person engaged in the practice is asked… to defend what he does, then his… defense lies in referring the questioner to the practice.[21]
>
> On our approach, the trustworthiness of moral intuitions is to be accounted for not in terms of features of the intuitions themselves, but by reference to the broader practice in which the agents who possess those intuitions are engaged.

The authors then proceed to elucidate their notion of a 'moral intuition' and clarify what it is to be 'trustworthy.' New distinctions, new concepts, new terms, pre-existing technical language (e.g., doxastic attitudes), and reference to previous professional writings about moral intuitions are features of their introductory worldview remarks.

Professional philosophy is dominated by the moral realist worldview. In a survey taken by Bourget and Chalmers (2023), 62% of philosophers identify as moral 'realist' and 26% as 'anti-realist.' Given that these moral philosophers decide which essays are published in journals, it is difficult to convince editors that attention should be paid to non-cognitive viewpoints. Fairmindedness and open-mindedness are needed norms.

---

[21] John Rawls (1955) "Two Concepts of Rules" *The Philosophical Review*, 64-1.

Herman Cappelen

Herman Cappelen is currently the chairperson of philosophy at the University of Hong Kong, having previously worked at the University of Oslo, St Andrews, and Oxford. He is the editor of *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*. Capellen is a strong proponent of formal semantics as a philosophical tool and has strong metaphysical beliefs. In *Philosophy Without Intuitions* (2012), Cappelen argues that contemporary meta-philosophers go wrong by assuming appeals to intuitions play an important role in philosophy: it is not true that philosophers rely extensively (or even a little bit) on intuitions as evidence. He says that at worst, analytic philosophers are guilty of engaging in somewhat irresponsible use of 'intuition'-vocabulary. In *Fixing Language* (2018), Cappelen uses the term 'conceptual engineering' as the critical/constructive philosophical enterprise of assessing and improving our 'representational devices' (i.e., concepts). His book is a dense technical treatise about meta-semantics, externalism in language, and conceptual amelioration involving extensive reference to other philosophers who share a taste for dense metaphysical frameworks. Cappelen believes that philosophy is a technical expert's discipline and would be contemptuous of philosophy being practiced as a social science. He would be skeptical about any theory of definition and the descriptive-prescriptive distinction. An understanding of stipulative definitions and prescriptive nature of normative assertions would undermine his work.

J. Adam Carter

J. Adam Carter is a Reader in Epistemology at the University of Glasgow and a prolific journal and book author. He is co-author of *This is Epistemology: An Introduction*, with Clayton Littlejohn (2021) which is a book documenting the historical and present state of standard epistemic concerns. From his university website, his research includes virtue epistemology, know-how, action theory, epistemology of AI, and social epistemology. With respect to "know-how" he says practical knowledge—knowledge how to do things—is equally important to knowing what is true. With ongoing research, he hopes to develop "a comprehensive framework for understanding know-how and its place in a wider web of concepts we rely on to understand and describe

intelligent behavior across a range of activities that we care about and depend on. A novel hypothesis to be explored is that know-how disposes us not to just success but to credit-worthy control. This control, it is proposed, takes a theoretically unified form in both intentional action and judgment, revealing how know-how enhances performance in a structurally symmetrical way when we deliberate and when we act." Carter's virtue epistemology vocabulary echoes that of Ernest Sosa and Duncan Prichard (e.g., 'success,' 'performance'). His work is largely a 'normal science' reaction to his predecessors.

Matti Eklund

Matti Eklund is Chair of Theoretical Philosophy at Uppsala University, with works in metaphysics, philosophy of language, and philosophy of logic. His book *Choosing Normative Concepts* (2017) is about metaethics. His most recent book *Alien Structure: Language and Reality* (2024) reflects his attention to metaphysics and formal semantics:

> What sorts of alien languages can there be? And might reality be such that some alien language represents reality better than familiar languages do? Alien languages are here languages that use different kinds of semantic tools than any familiar languages use. The question of existence of alien languages is interesting in itself: what kinds of languages are possible? But attending to the issue of alien languages also problematizes the relationship between language and reality, and highlights the possibility that reality could have a fundamentally different structure than we otherwise take it to have. Despite the foundational significance of these questions, they have received virtually no explicit attention in the literature. But the book brings up and criticizes existing contemporary work that promises to be at least indirectly relevant. A main claim of this book is that alien languages are possible and that we should be alert to the possibility that reality has alien structure and is best described by an alien language. The book also raises other possibilities regarding this debate. Maybe we should not say that the world has either kind of structure but can be equally well described using either kind of language.

Metaphysics (especially ontology), formal semantics, conceptual engineering, normative concepts, and vagueness, perpetuate the fertile grounds for Eklund's writings. Whether his discourse has any value outside of professional philosophy circles is open to question.

Christoph Kelp - Mona Simion

Christoph Kelp and Mona Simion have collaborated on a number of projects. Kelp is professor of philosophy at University of Glasgow and Simion is with the University of Oxford faculty. Kelp focuses on the issues of virtue epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, philosophy of artificial intelligence, and philosophy of gender and race. Simion's interests are similar. They have co-authored *Knowledge and Conceptual Engineering: The Epistemology, Ethics, and Politics of Meaning Production* (2026) characterized below:

> Suppose that you could change people's way of thinking about the world at its very roots, by changing the concepts by means of which they think. Suppose, further, that this would make the world a better place; that would be quite something. Conceptual engineering is concerned with this remarkable kind of feat. This book is a comprehensive and systematic study of the nature and normativity of conceptual engineering.
>
> This book comprehensively deals with the central questions in the field: the very possibility of conceptual engineering, its success conditions, the epistemic and moral permissibility of conceptual engineering, the nature of conceptual ignorance and conceptual understanding, and duties to engage in conceptual engineering. It also considers the political aspects, such as engineering social kind concepts, the nature of hermeneutical injustice, and conceptual disinformation.

In *Sharing Knowledge: A Functionalist Account of Assertion* (2022) co-authored by Kelp and Simion, the book is described as follows:

> Assertion is the central vehicle for the sharing of knowledge. Whether knowledge is shared successfully often depends on the quality of assertions: good assertions lead to successful knowledge sharing, while bad ones don't. In *Sharing Knowledge*, Kelp and Simion investigate the relation between knowledge sharing and assertion, and develop an account of what it is to assert well. More specifically, they argue that the function of assertion is to share knowledge with others. It is this function that supports a central norm of assertions to which good assertion is one that has the disposition to generate knowledge in others. This book uses a functionalist approach to motivate further norms of assertion on both the speaker and the hearer side and investigates ramifications of this view for other questions about assertion.

Normative issues and prescriptions (not truth-apt) dominate both discussions.

The Impact of Worldviews

The intuitions of these eight philosophers about (1) reality (i.e., how the world is), (2) the status of formal semantics, and (3) what analytic philosophy is supposed to be about, are paramount to their writings. The *strength* of *worldview intuitions* is central to the belief and value systems of philosophers. In earlier chapters, we examined David Lewis, Stewart Cohen, Keith DeRose, Fred Dretske, Peter Unger, Ernest Sosa, John Greco, Linda Zagzebski, Duncan Prichard, and Timothy Williamson. The *strong worldview* that there is a 'descriptive-prescriptive' distinction drives this monograph. Ideally, university philosophers might want to think of themselves as 'rational' and 'informed' and using a 'neutral' methodology of deduction to guide debate. But a philosopher's worldview beliefs are crucial in determining a framework of discussion.[22]

Conclusion

Analytic philosophy is in serious need of rescue from metaphysics and formal semantics with an alternative conceptual analysis style of philosophy that addresses core philosophical issues that interest ordinary people. It is contended in the two volumes of *Descriptions, Prescriptions, and the Limits of Knowledge* that Philosophy should aspire to be relevant like the social science of Economics. Within the discipline of Economics, semi-descriptive assumptions (viz. stipulations, postulates) play a prominent role in theory construction. In the social sciences, scholars seek to describe expectations of how persons will behave on the basis of the beliefs and desires attributed to them. Social science theories explain beliefs and behavior by rendering them intelligible. Models and theories attempt to simulate a world that explains human intentions. Philosophy should not aspire to mimic the narrow-specialized work of physical scientists or mathematicians.

---

[22] The strong proponents of formal semantics as being important in analytic philosophy may be compared to theists. With theism, and the given multiplicity of religions, if you are religious at all, it is overwhelming probable that your religion is the same as that of your parents. Religious belief is inculcated into children. Children become believers for life. Similarly in philosophy, Frege has been placed in the role of one of the highest gods. "On Sense and Reference" (1892) is a sacred text. From it, we learn that linguistic meaning, reference, compositionality, and truth conditions are the concepts that explain language. University professors teach this and test student's understanding. Students become believers for life.