

Stoljar, Daniel, *Philosophical Progress: In Defence of a Reasonable Optimism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. Xi + 186,

*Philosophical Progress* defends the idea that philosophy makes progress against sceptics who maintain that 'philosophical problems are perennials for which it is pointless to expect a solution' (vii). Stoljar's view is that 'some problems have been solved, and we have a reasonable expectation that more (though not all) will be solved in the future' (7). To defend this view, Stoljar distinguishes three classes of questions: *topic questions*, which introduce or define different topics; *big questions* within a given topic; and *small questions*, which 'are highly specific to a particular discussion on a big question' (14). He admits that philosophers still discuss the same perennial topic questions (for example, *what is the relation between mind and body?*), but notes that something similar is true of history and physics; and he admits that progress in answering small questions is not progress enough (12–15). So the bulk of the book is devoted to arguing that there has been progress on 'reasonably many' (15) big questions. Here, Stoljar delineates several types of big question, and argues that many examples of these types have been solved. For example, he sees many philosophical questions as *boundary problems* (ch. 3–4): problems that consist of a conflict between three plausible theses, to the effect that (1) there are facts of a certain kind (for example, psychological facts); (2) all facts of that kind have a certain nature (for example, all psychological facts are physical facts); and (3) not all facts of that kind have that nature (not all psychological facts are physical facts). Stoljar sees many philosophical problems as boundary problems, and argues that many boundary problems have been solved. (Consider Descartes's version of the boundary problem about psychological and physical facts. Since we reject Descartes's conception of matter as extension, we should reject (2) understood in Descartes's way; hence Descartes's problem is solved and progress has been made (58).)

The book is a model of clarity. I would enthusiastically recommend it not only to self-sceptical philosophers and arrogant scientists, but also to students — as an example of philosophical writing as well as for its arguments. And it is extremely thorough, addressing a range of objections to its arguments as well as general considerations that might seem to tell against the existence of progress. I still feel occasional doubt about philosophical progress, but Stoljar has convincingly rebutted every reason for such doubt that I know of.

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