

## Progress Equals Change

“Does knowledge lead to progress in human thought?” One may come up with various perceptions of this relatively simple question. Consider my explanation as one of many solutions to a problem. For this solution, allow progress to be defined as “change,” the movement from point A to point B. May knowledge be understood to be any information that is somehow acquired by one of the five senses that human beings possess. We will also define “human thought” to be many sequences of information processing. Thus, adding knowledge is the same as adding more information to the sequences of the human thought, hence changing these sequences. As we have classified progress to mean “change,” we must come to the conclusion that knowledge indeed leads to some kind of progress in human thought.

As history has demonstrated, humans rebel against change, such as with the case of the Impressionists. Van Gough painted some of the most stunning paintings the world has ever known. However, his style of painting was different from the accepted style of the time, and so he died a pauper, his artwork having been rejected by society. Thus, although new knowledge, in the form of art, was introduced, a change in the general art style did not take effect. One may even say that no progress has taken place. However, let's not forget that progress is gradual. It is true that initially, Van Gough's paintings were not accepted. However, although the general public did not accept Van Gough, he was idolized by some young artists of his time, who paid him the biggest compliment by imitating him and his style. Eventually, the whole community caught on to the Impressionistic style, and now, “The Sunflowers” was recently bought at the Christie auction for an unfathomable sum of \$100 million dollars. It is evident that slowly but surely, progress has taken place in the fine art society, and thus, the statement of knowledge leading to progress in human thought still holds true.

Many argue that progress must be a change for the better. With this, the modern “computer age” is considered an era of progression, while the Taliban rule in Afghanistan is not. However, everyone's perception of “better” is different, and this makes it

impossible to tell whether progress has truly taken place. For instance, I may believe that cleaning my room will make it a less comfortable place to live in, while my mother firmly insists that a clean room is a happy room. When I clean my room, a change has clearly taken place, as the appearance of the room is different. However, using the argument that progress must be a change for the *better*, did progress take place in my room? I perceive that the appearance of the room has taken a turn for the worse while my mother rejoices. Thus, according to me, progress did not take place, while my mother thinks the opposite. This is the reasoning behind defining progress as simply “change.” It takes care of the perception differences, and only states the simple facts. Yes, the appearance of my room has changed: I know this, as I was the one cleaning. The knowledge that my room has changed has led me to the belief that my room state has progressed. Therefore, I think differently about my room, and thus, the progression of the room from dirty to clean has led to progress in my train of thought.

Of course, to all arguments, there must be counterarguments. Some may believe that religion hinders progress, as it only allows for one-track thinking. For example, if I were Catholic, I would most probably not search for knowledge about Judaism. Therefore, I would not acquire new knowledge about Judaism, and I will not make progress in the study of Judaism. However, it is my belief that religion inspires progress as well as hinders it. Just look at the Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo’s inspiration came from the Bible, and in this sense, religion furthered progress. Others may say that if you believe yourself to have achieved perfection in an area, you will stop exploring that area, and thus, your progress in that area will stop. For example, if I earn 100% on my next T.O.K. essay, then I am likely to assume that I have no need for improvement. This thought is what will stop me from working harder to improve and gain more knowledge about T.O.K., and if I do not gain more knowledge, no progress in my thought process can take place. On the other hand, if I do not spend my time pondering over TOK, I will spend that time perfecting another skill, which will create progress in my knowledge in another field of study.

The various debates over this matter result primarily from the fact that people’s definitions of progress differ as widely as their personalities and beliefs. Although there are many counter-arguments to this, by defining progress to mean a simple word

“change” allows one to conclude that most knowledge does lead to some kind of progress in human thought.

**Juliya Iosfin**  
**Block F**