

Research Problems

Forthcoming in the
The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science
First Online: 4 December 2019

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Available:

Publisher: <https://academic.oup.com/bjps/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/bjps/axz052>

Preprint: <http://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/16673>

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Abstract:

To identify and conceptualize research problems in science, philosophers and often scientists rely on classical accounts of problems that focus on intellectual problems often defined in relation to theories. Recently, philosophers have begun to study the structures and functions of research problems not defined in relation to theories. Furthermore, scientists have long pursued research problems often labeled as practical or applied. As yet, no account of problems specifies the description of both so-called intellectual problems and so-called applied problems. This paper proposes a new conceptual framework of problems that accounts both for intellectual aspects of problems and for their practical or applied aspects. I illustrate the account with an example of a recent research project from evolutionary biology, and I indicate further routes by which to develop the account, especially in connection to empirical studies of science.