Philosophy Moves

David Kelley

University of Auckland

In this paper, I introduce the notion of 'philosophy moves': prominent tropes featured in contemporary academic philosophy. Moves are more than patterns – they are tools for advancing and enriching philosophical debates. By recognizing these patterns in the philosophical literature, we collect an ensemble of moves for deployment in novel contexts, each with the potential to forge new paths of philosophical investigation through a given topic. The moves featured in this paper are constructive and progressive, with the potential to push past stalemates and open up a wider conceptual landscape. Following a presentation of five exemplars taken from the philosophy of biology literature, I show how different moves could be made within a current interdisciplinary debate. Overall, I aim to demonstrate that recognizing these patterns is insightful pedagogically and potentially useful when put to use as part of one's philosophical methodology.

1. **Introduction**

Philosophy typically concerns itself with arguments. Many arguments resemble one another. Standard valid and invalid forms of deductive arguments were identified millennia ago. But there are further resemblances beyond simple argument forms that one can identify within philosophical discourse. One can take note of similar kinds of problems and solutions offered in numerous philosophical contexts. We note how philosophers may, in familiar ways, prospectively consider a range of options given an existing problem and lay them out in an identifiable manner. We notice similar strategies deployed to clarify or reframe concepts. We repeatedly observe common types of responses to objections. Many have construed these identifiable patterns as 'moves' – options to support or respond to an argument, or more broadly advance the ongoing debate. Presumably this vernacular is drawing on a loose analogy with games involving strategy, such as chess (making a move in chess involves changing the game state such that your opponent faces a new set of conditions in which to respond). Thinking of arguments, objections, and responses as a series of actions helps us to track the steps in reasoning, while also considering the alternative arguments, objections, and responses. Philosophy moves are a way of conceptualizing philosophical debate in terms of moving pieces, iterative exchange, and weighing the stakes of reasoning one way over another. We can see each token move as potentially of a type identifiable independent of the particular context.

Given that standard moves are tropes of the discipline, it is arguably worthwhile to sketch these identifiable actions of argument and classify them (even if informally). This could be useful for pedagogy (teaching students standard moves alongside other named

tropes, e.g., informal fallacies); discourse (summarizing arguments or efficiently analyzing available paths of argumentation); categorization (grouping papers by moves rather than topic, for a range of purposes); and prospective implementation (signposting to the reader in abstracts or following a section heading). I suspect many are already thinking in this manner, but as of yet, have no standard way of relating this in discourse. Perhaps this isn't a problem for nonce terms we can be sure all philosophers will recognize (e.g., a 'Euthyphro situation'). But we often resort to describing this or that kind of move in terms that may not be as familiar. Therefore, a treatment of at least an initial set of perennial philosophy moves is a worthwhile meta-philosophical undertaking.

The undertaking I have just described can be broken into manageable chunks. In this paper, I will take only the initial step in illustrating a few candidate standard philosophy moves and provide examples for each. My thesis is thus a rather modest one. There are recognizable tropes usefully called, as we often do, 'moves'. Acknowledging them and sketching the recognizable forms they sometimes take is a useful and insightful contribution that paves the way for more work in this area.

What I'm calling 'philosophy moves' can be situated alongside Alan Hájek's valuable work on 'philosophy heuristics'. Hájek has produced a range of useful techniques for *doing* philosophy, one of which is 'begetting new arguments out of old' (Hájek 2014). My own contribution might be seen as building on and contributing to his project, offering novel examples and exploring an interdisciplinary terrain. While aspects of what follows could be considered alternative framings of some of Hájek's heuristics (e.g., continuity thinking, responding to arbitrariness, (Hájek 2016)), the moves presented

below are different than several of Hájek's in notable respects. One way to distinguish the overall methodology of the moves in this paper is as a particular two-step process (demonstrated in sections 2 and 3). First, we identify the dialectical structure of one debate (i.e., identify and abstract a move from a previous context), then attempt to emulate that dialectical structure in another debate (i.e., make the move in a new context). Hájek provides us with tools to make our arguments as best we can, and to pursue important questions when we find them lacking. Several of the heuristics are about 'checking' for ways to challenge or undermine an argument (useful both for developing one's own argument and critiquing those of others); or to aid in 'making one's implicit commitments explicit' (Hájek, 2014: 291). I focus more specifically on progressive moves with the potential to resolve impasses, open up a wider conversation, or otherwise move a body of literature forward constructively. Thus, the philosophy moves presented herein can be seen as catalysts for advancing conceptual debates.[1]

2.   **Moves**

In this section, I feature five philosophy moves. I will exemplify each with related examples from the philosophy of biology. I use these examples for two reasons. Firstly, featuring related examples from the same subfield will allow for a fruitful discussion in section 3. Secondly, an injection of new perspectives from different fields can fuel discovery. Yet the potential for innovation comes with the risk of added confusion. For example, when a familiar idea within one's own field bears some resemblance to a less

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[1] Thanks to Emily Parke and Antony Eagle for encouraging this framing.

familiar idea from another field, it is easy to conflate them (Ghiselin 1974: 541-42). The examples that follow feature concepts such as 'species' and 'life' that are significant in multiple disciplines. The moves featured below may be particularly valuable when clarifying and advancing interdisciplinary conceptual debates.

Move #1: Pluralism. *'Neither X, Y, nor Z are exclusively correct. The suitable account is a pluralist view which accommodates them all'.*

To exemplify this move, consider that there is no agreement on a definition for the biological taxon 'species'. This often comes as a surprise to those not familiar with the literature. Species have been variously grouped by biologists and others according to evolutionary relationships, interbreeding capacities and geographical clustering, or overall phenotypic similarity (among other ways). This means we must evaluate species claims (e.g., about whether two populations are of the same species or how many species are in a genus) according to the sense in which people use the term 'species' (e.g., as a deme or particular chunk of a phylogenetic tree). However, if we take each of these senses to be legitimate, then we accept there are different types of species in the world. Species count as species because of phylogenetic relation *or* interbreeding capacity *or* phenotypic similarity, etc. Articulations of this position will vary (e.g., with an ontological or epistemological emphasis), but the main point is this: we can abandon the quest to settle on a single species concept (for a more nuanced discussion, see Ereshefsky 2022).

Pluralists reject that there is, or needs to be, some single comprehensive and authoritative account of X. Different conceptions of X will be met by different

corresponding criteria. Whichever criterion (or set of criteria) is fulfilled does not change that the candidate counts as X. X can mean different things and each meaning can be employed legitimately.

To be clear, pluralism does not follow from cases in which multiple conditions must be met to fulfil an overall criterion. A plurality of proposed criteria may feature in a single, non-pluralist account. It is common for philosophical accounts to enumerate a number of necessary conditions which are jointly sufficient for X. Additionally, it is important to distinguish monistic functional accounts of phenomena that are multiply realizable from pluralist accounts.[2] A pluralist account will feature different conceptions of X with different, but equally legitimate, ways to count as X, i.e., by satisfying different sets of qualifying criteria (e.g., sharing similar phenotypic features or sharing an evolutionary history).

One potential advantage of making this move is that it helps move along a debate which, while having fully inventoried the detailed arguments and counterexamples, risks becoming stagnant.

> One of the appeals of pluralism for biologists themselves has been that it
> provides a diagnosis for resolving or perhaps altogether avoiding a debate at an
> apparent impasse… the adoption of pluralism is a way to represent not so much
> diversity but underlying, core agreement within the biological sciences. It

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[2] Adopting a functionalist account to accommodate several competing criteria by allowing for multiple-realizability is arguably another candidate philosophy move. An example is Clarke's multiply realizable account of biological individuality in which various criteria can be redescribed as individuating mechanisms (2013).

constitutes the diagnosis of a hidden consensus on which the science can build, bypassing what might otherwise be taken to be irresolvable disagreement limiting scientific progress (Wilson 2005: 13).

However, one potential problem with this philosophical move is that, for some cases, we risk 'throwing in the towel' – making the move prematurely or otherwise without warrant. Instead of promoting further debate, we neutralize it by offering a solution which accommodates all the competitors' views. Knowing that pluralism is an available and common trope, scholars may be perversely incentivized to be the first to offer a pluralist view on X. But this is more than a sweet spot dilemma in which too early is bad form and too late risks being scooped. Aptness conditions for making this move, whatever they may be (minimally, sufficient discernment of the debate being considered), are not simply that there exist two or more competing accounts. Furthermore, while pluralists will provide reasons for why more than one conception of X is useful or legitimate (for some purpose or within some field), we are left to wonder what unites these distinct concepts (see also Mitchel 2022 and Cusimano and Sterner 2019).

Move #2: The Tripartite Distinction. *'We can organize our analysis of this concept by distinguishing ontological, epistemological, and methodological claims'.*

Generally, this tripartite distinction is useful for organizing claims or categorizing the implications that follow from adopting some position. An ontological claim is about

what exists. An epistemic claim is about what we can know and how we know it. A methodological claim is about how we might best investigate the target phenomenon.[3]

This trio was proposed by Ayala as a way to organize thinking about reductionism in biology (Ayala 1974). Ontological reductionism is the claim that living things are collections of smaller non-living things (e.g., molecules). There is no separate substance or additional lifeforce that adds to the biological arrangement of the physicochemical processes that make up biological systems. Epistemological reductionism holds that biological theories, laws, and principles are reducible to chemical and physical theories, laws, and principles. Descriptions of biological processes can be redescribed by those of chemistry and physics, and so knowledge of the former is accessible by way of our knowledge of the latter. Methodological reductionism holds that we should strategically investigate and aim to provide explanations of biological systems in terms of lower levels of organization.

This move can be used as a specific method of disambiguation within the process of conceptual analysis by explicitly addressing three senses in which a term may be used to make different types of claims, i.e., three different propositions for consideration. One might also like to relate close relatives of this move that do the same work, for example where authors distinguish weak, moderate, and strong versions of a claim that loosely map onto claims about what is useful, epistemically necessary, and objectively real. Or consider an approximation of this move: Peter Godfrey-Smith's 'Three kinds of

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[3] Terminology may vary, e.g., 'metaphysical" instead of ontological, and "instrumental" instead of "methodological" (but where "instrumental" is neutral in regard to realism versus anti-realism).

Adaptationism' (Godfrey-Smith 2001). Adaptationism broadly refers to an approach to explaining the features of living things according to the effects of natural selection. 'Empirical adaptationism' says that natural selection is in fact powerful and ubiquitous. 'Explanatory adaptationism' makes an evaluative claim: natural selection is the most important theory we have to make sense of the apparent design of nifty critters.[4] 'Methodological adaptationism' prescribes a way to do research: organize your efforts by investigating and testing adaptationist hypotheses about interesting features of living things.

The philosophical move itself can be descriptive or prescriptive. In Godfrey-Smith's case, he is distinguishing three ways the term has previously been used in the literature. But there might also be instances when one anticipates the need to disambiguate a concept in advance (to prospectively ward off misunderstandings) and offer the tripartite distinction regardless of common usage. Or even if there is no such need, an original term or novel concept may be distinguished this way by the author that introduces it, choosing to qualify a single term rather than coin three novel terms (for reasons of pedagogy or style, for example if the concept is modelled on or analogous to another concept by which the tripartite distinction can apply).

There may be circumstances in which, while no single term requires disambiguation, making this move is useful for taxonomizing similarly sounding, but importantly different, claims. Consider how we might usefully organize claims about the agency of organisms. One might claim that living agents are natural kinds and that organisms are

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[4] This does not conform to the move's 'epistemological' category, which why I say this is an *approximation* of the move.

living agents (Wilson 2005). This is an ontological claim – a claim about reality. Or consider a different kind of claim, that a refusal to recognize the agency of organisms is inconsistent with theories which rely on agreement about organisms' active role in creating the selective environment in which their descendants will compete evolutionarily (Walsh 2015). This bears on an epistemic claim – a claim about what is rational to accept or reject. By contrast, one may, with a different emphasis, claim that there is heuristic value in theorizing about organisms as if they were agents (Okasha 2018). The latter is a methodological claim – a claim about fruitful avenues of research. One can hold any combination of these three logically independent views.[5] A criticism or defence of one is not necessarily a criticism or defence of the others.[6]

When suitably called for, the benefits of making this philosophical move are clear: it distinguishes different ways a term is used to make different types of claims. More generally, it helps us organize various issues within a topic into relevant categories (e.g., Ladyman 2007; Malaterre and Chartier 2021). Such distinctions are the bread and butter of philosophy, clarifying the conceptual space, repairing past and minimizing future crosstalk.[7]

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[5] Thanks to Sam Woolley for pushing me to emphasize this point.

[6] Of course, distinguishing different kinds of claims is only part of the work to be done here. In order to compare and contrast these claims we would also need to distinguish the various senses of 'agency' we encounter in the literature. For example, ontological claims about agency are not necessarily strong claims, as when the sense of agency is a minimal one.

[7] Thinking closely about moves themselves may lead us to make meta moves, for example, applying this move to the previous one (Move 1). One might choose to distinguish three kinds of pluralism in the following way: ontological, about the plurality of distinct real entities in the world picked out by each concept; epistemological, adopting numerous theories simultaneously (e.g., from incommensurable scientific paradigms) giving rise to a plurality of distinct concepts; methodological, about the plurality of approaches that help us understand our subject (e.g., reductive and non-reductive).

One potential disadvantage of such a move is that one must sacrifice parsimony on the altar of clarity. There may be cases in which preferable theoretical unity could be achieved by designating one of the three as authoritative, and construing others as mistakes or misapprehensions without introducing the nuanced taxonomy. For example, if the concept really is methodological in nature, it may be more confusing to introduce novel ontological and epistemic varieties simply to then present an argument against them.[8]

Move #3: Conceptual Gradience. *'It's not fully this way or that way, Rather, it is somewhere along a spectrum – this concept admits of degrees'.*

A unique example of this move comes from the philosophy of biology literature on individuality. This example is particularly interesting to feature because, intuitively, 'individuality' is precisely the sort of quality we might think *cannot* admit of degrees. Either something is or is not an individual, right?

Not so for biological individuality.[9] Delineating biological individuals is difficult for at least two reasons: vagueness and ambiguity (Clarke and Okasha 2013). Many feel the latter is best addressed in terms of pluralism: biologists refer to different types of things as individuals according to their ends (see Move 1). Our present focus is on vagueness. (The subsequent move addresses *both* ambiguity and vagueness). This move concerns

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[8] Then again, doing exactly that might be one's preferred method of showing why only one version is coherent or applicable.

[9] If this is upsetting to metaphysicians, one can throughout this section exchange "individuality" for a more specific term it may refer to in each case, e.g., "organismality." After all, some philosophers of biology prefer this route, e.g., Queller and Strassmann 2009.

biological systems which are themselves not clearly individuals. Note that this is not an epistemic limitation. We have no difficulty inspecting coral reefs, honeybee colonies, slime moulds, lichen, etc., and articulating why they are borderline cases: it is not clear whether these are collections of individuals or themselves individuals. Now, this does relate to ambiguity because, while one might be an individual in one sense (e.g., metabolizing unit of ecological interaction), it might be a collection of individuals in another sense (e.g., multi-genomic entities). However, within each sense or conception of individuality, there will always be unclear cases (e.g., something is more or less of a population, unit of selection, etc). The living world aggregates and collaborates in weird and wonderful ways resulting in the appearance of 'partially realized' individuality.

So then, the move is to say that individuality admits of degrees. If the criterion for biological individuality is sufficient functional integration, then there are biological entities that are more or less functionally integrated. Similarly, individuals achieve genetic homogeneity, histocompatibility, and bear adaptations to varying or lesser degrees (see e.g., Harper 1977; Pradeu 2010; Folse III and Roughgarden 2010). If the criterion is being a unit of selection, some are more or less paradigm units of selection as opposed to collections of them. This latter point highlights a simultaneously baffling and obvious point: individuality is a product of evolution. Long ago on this planet, only unicellular life formed populations and participated in natural selection. There were no multicellular individuals. At some point, selection began to act on collections of single celled organisms (Szathmáry and Maynard Smith 1995). Thus, many vague cases can be heuristically thought of as 'in between' levels of a compositional hierarchy.

An advantage of this move is that it tells us how to make sense out of borderline cases. The criterion of individuality is more or less met. This move removes the presumption of binary categories such that we can plot various biological entities along a continuum (between non-individual and individual).

One potential disadvantage is that some may find the result rather epistemically unsatisfying, especially if applied without sufficient motivation, rigor, or sophistication. It is an easy move we could make of many things superficially. We may live in a world in which many phenomena defy binary categorization, but we prefer to minimize resorting to qualified, fuzzy concepts. Making this move calls for expert discernment of the relevant folk theoretical trade-offs.

Move #4: Multi-Dimensional Models. *'Criterial pluralism + conceptual gradience = multi-dimensional model of X'.*

This move involves unpacking concepts using multi-dimensional models, making use of elements from Moves 1 and 3.

Many philosophers of biology have debated the question *What is life?* Traditionally, the answer philosophers have tried to provide is a definition, providing necessary and sufficient conditions to capture all cases of life as it is and could ever be. Featured prominently in the literature over recent decades is a perennial sequence of proposed criteria followed by problems with them. Should life be defined in terms of thermodynamic principles? The side effect of these kinds of definitions is that they include intuitively non-living ordered systems such as crystals. What about

metabolism? It isn't easy to specify a conception of metabolism that doesn't include candle flames. What about certain biomolecules like DNA? This seems plausible but commits us to ruling out life as it could be on alien planets or realized in artificial substrates. How about defining life in terms of evolution? On its own, a criterion of evolution includes non-living systems which evolve (e.g., languages) and furthermore, unlike other definitions, maps a definition of life primarily to collections of living things, which intuitively are not, as a collection, alive.

We have a plurality of criteria about which experts disagree. This philosophy move involves not only adopting this plurality, but also putting them to use in a multi-dimensional model. Making use of several criteria is not unlike what we do with cluster concepts, where we incorporate a range of characteristic properties, perhaps none more essential than others. However, for this move, we combine it with the option of a non-binary instantiation of such properties. This is exemplified by Malaterre who incorporates multiple candidate life criteria into models which rank systems as more or less alive (Malaterre 2010). We can plot phenomena of interest within the space of a multi-dimensional model of life. Placement within the multi-dimensional space is set by the degree to which it possesses various properties (e.g., metabolism) represented by axes ranging from 0 (does not possess the property) to 1 (fully possesses the property).[10]

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[10] See also Birch (2020) and Godfrey-Smith (2009) for multi-dimensional representations of animal consciousness and Darwinian Populations, respectively.

Here we combine the advantages of two previous moves (1 and 3). We can make sense of borderline or otherwise non-paradigm cases and we can accommodate different ways in which some phenomenon falls under the concept.

The same is true for disadvantages. We might question whether we have *resorted* to multi-dimensional models before exploring cleaner, more satisfying alternatives. While this move allows for more precise plotting in conceptual space, it does not necessarily make the concept easier to theorize and communicate about. Also, making this move without further development leaves some potentially important details unspecified. For example, are all the properties of equal importance? If not, how are we to 'weight' each dimension?[11]

Move #5: Kind to Particular. *'There is disagreement about this well-known kind. But it's not a kind, it's a particular'.*

The final move featured in this section prescribes an ontological gestalt shift. This move takes us from thinking about X as a kind to thinking about X as an individual (see Reydon 2021).

Michael Ghiselin makes this move regarding species (Ghiselin 1976; see also Hull 1976). Traditionally, species have been thought of as kinds or classes, implying that members of species be thought of as instantiations of a type. However, Ghiselin argues that

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[11] Thank you to John Matthewson.

species are not kinds or classes. Rather, species are particulars – they are individuals. On this view, the organisms that make up a population are not instantiations (as if species were universals) or members (as if species were classes) - rather they are parts. Naturalists otherwise uncomfortable with abstract entities can rest assured that species are, in fact, concrete entities. One implication of making this move is that species cannot be defined by shared essential properties, ruling out any species concept that would require them. Thus, we can see how making this move is one response to the species debate introduced previously in our discussion of Move 1.

Quayshawn Spencer uses this move in his work on race, arguing that race (in the United States) is an individual, not a kind (Spencer 2014).[12] Mariscal and Doolittle make the same move regarding life on Earth, arguing that life as we know it is a particular (a monophyletic clade), not a kind (Mariscal and Doolittle 2020; see also Hermida 2016).

One potential advantage of this move is that we can rescue a concept from logical incoherence. Instances of conceptual incoherence might result from partially updated concepts which have changed over time (e.g., as the result of new empirical findings). For example, Haber shows that common views about species subscribe to inconsistent propositions entailing that species both do and do not have essential properties (Haber 2016). Adopting Ghiselin's individuality thesis helps us avoid this. If conceptual change

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[12] Instances in which authors adopt similar titles to pay homage to their academic predecessors arguably serve as sociological evidence for the recognition of recurring tropes, i.e., philosophical moves, being applied in different contexts. Spencer titles his paper to intentionally mimic Ghiselin's: 'A Radical Solution to the Race Problem' (using 'race' instead of 'species'). Having said that, sometimes this convention is used without mimicking philosophical moves, and instead e.g., indexes a critique to its target.

perennially gives rise to similar problems, then this move may be useful in a range of contexts from time to time.

One disadvantage of making this move is that it risks supplanting previous concepts, rather than helping to fully update them. That is, there may be cases in which the logical utility is clear, but the reframing proposed might go too far such that the reframing of X, in effect creates X'. Perhaps the best way to think of X all things considered, is *not* as an individual, despite what thinking this way might achieve. Reframing kinds as individuals potentially circumvents endless disagreement about necessary and sufficient conditions for kinds, but the tidiness of making this move might come with messier costs. One way to put this is that the side effect of making this move is that it may legitimize other moves we had aimed to close off to our interlocutors (e.g., toward pluralism, i.e., the 'throwing in the towel' aspect).

3. Application

In the previous section I have outlined five philosophy moves. There is plenty of more work to do, recognizing and semi-formalizing additional moves in the literature. However, I won't develop any others in this paper. In this section, I will suggest how our recognition of moves might be put to work. By doing so, we can provide ourselves with another set of move-making examples.

Consider the debate on biological individuality from our discussion of Move 3. Retrospectively, we could classify some types of responses to the problem of biological individuality with reference to standard moves. Prospectively, each move has the potential to expand and advance this debate.

In the presentation of Move 1 (pluralism), I outlined a scenario in which the criteria featured in competing accounts of what it is to be a species can be incorporated into a single account – a pluralist account. An analogous move can be made for biological individuality: there are different kinds of biological individuality (e.g., evolutionary individuality and physiological individuality (see Pradeu 2016)). The different senses and competing accounts all have legitimate roles to play.

We might use Move 2 (the tripartite distinction) to consider whether a claim about some biological system being an individual is ontologically, epistemologically, or methodologically motivated (see Ruse 1989). This move might be reconceptualized as an organizing heuristic used to guide one's survey of the topic (i.e., conducting a literature review), grouping claims about biological individuals accordingly.

We have already discussed Move 3 (conceptual gradience) in this context: biological individuality can admit of degrees. Whatever criterion you think must be satisfied for something to count as a biological individual, we can think of that condition as more or less met (see e.g., Clarke 2013; 2016).

Some take a similar approach to individuality as those that do to life in our discussion of Move 4 (multi-dimension models). That is, (paradigm) individuality is something more

or less achieved by satisfying multiple criteria to a degree as represented in a multi-dimensional model (see Godfrey-Smith 2009).[13]

With Move 5 (kind to particular), we saw that members of a population can alternatively be thought of as parts (of populations *qua* individuals). Making this move means recognizing that species, while not kinds, are *individuals of a kind* (i.e., individuals of a sort - species are a particular thing, but they are not organisms). Adopting this move enables a conception of organisms such that they not only *have* parts (contributing to their own individuality) but *are* parts (contributing to the individuality of the species) (Haber 2016).

We have briefly characterized a few families of (existing or potential) views about biological individuality in terms of the standard moves they make in response to the given problem space. This characterization can be insightful. For example, applying a move first used in the context of species to a recent debate about organism-level biological individuals leads to a new problem for philosophical development: it would seem that the properties of evolving populations (the latter said to be individuals based on Move 5) are those which would disqualify parts ('members') of the population from being counted as individuals due to high conflict among their parts. Perhaps then, we should investigate whether and why cooperative collectives count as individuals for

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[13] Santelices (1999) deserves mention for modelling biological individuality in a similar way, using three dimensions. However, in Santelices' model, phenomena are represented at the *vertices* of a cube. By contrast, Move 4 makes use of multiple *continuous* dimensions such that phenomena can be plotted anywhere along the axes and thus any place within such a cube (as with Godfrey-Smith's model).

different reasons than competitive collectives count as individuals. This arguably opens up a fresh conversation about individuality criteria.[14]

So again, classifying some views in terms of moves they make in response to prior views can be insightful in itself. But it is not ridiculous to also suggest that there may be forward-looking methodological utility that comes with keeping such familiar tropes 'ready-to-mind'. Not all problems will call for standards tools. Nor will standard tools that fit be the best tools. But some tools get the gears turning.

In this paper, I have chosen to feature examples from the philosophy of biology such that we could relate the various examples to the five featured moves in useful and insightful ways. However, to further make my case about methodological utility that will appeal to a wider readership, I will offer an anecdote (to exemplify the sort of context in which the opportunity to draw on this methodology may arise) and some quick examples for other areas of philosophy.

I recently attended an interdisciplinary workshop.[15] Participants were discussing 'complexity science'. Some were talking about an approach to tackling complex problems. Others were talking about the complexity of the target systems. I had the pleasure of being useful to my peers by suggesting the application of Move 2, describing

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[14] There are a number of ways to explore this new conversation. A start would be exploring potential distinctions (e.g., 'ecological competition' and 'evolutionary competition') and laying out different implications from the application of competing concepts (e.g., species concepts). For example, one might argue that sexual reproduction within a deem is the key source of intra-species cohesion that justifies the ascription of individuality at the species level. This is a different means of cohesion than is achieved in e.g., physiological individuals, in which independent lineages with a shared evolutionary fate collaborate metabolically, rather than via obligate reproductive reliance.

[15] Te Pūnaha Matatini Centre for Complex Systems and Networks. Annual Hui. Auckland, 2022.

comments about approach as methodological, comments about complex target systems as ontological, and introducing into the conversation an epistemological question about how theories of complex systems and their components understood at different levels of analysis might be related. It wasn't perfectly spot on, but it did indeed help clarify the ongoing discussion. Furthermore, I was, in my head, working through other potentially useful moves (e.g., multiple ways for something to count as complex, dimensions of complexity).

Here are some additional suggestions for wider application that seem initially plausible:

A pluralist position (Move 1) may be tenable for a range of aesthetic concepts. One can argue there are equally legitimate accounts of what makes something beautiful or sad, or what qualifies as art, or what qualities make one capable of being a judge of such things.

Move 2 (the tripartite distinction) might be usefully applied to one's inventory of metaethical debates about the objectivity of moral facts, whether and how such facts are knowable, and how we might best achieve a moral life (e.g., by direct or indirect means).

One could use Move 3 (conceptual gradience) to reframe discourse otherwise articulated in terms of the presence or absence of rational capacities (in the philosophy of mind and action). For some accounts, it might be more accurate or advantageous to track the relevant thresholds for such capacities along a continuum.

In philosophy, we sometimes refer to 'cluster concepts' - most famously that of a game. Cluster concepts may be modelled with more nuance by using a multidimensional framework (Move 4) in which we can represent more or less of each quality that makes up the cluster (e.g., such that we can identify the various distinct ways 'gameness' may be exhibited).

Languages and other aspects of culture evolve. Move 5 (kind to particular) might make for an interesting pedagogical tool within this context, as words and their meanings are no more approximations of some timeless mould than are organisms instances of species.

I argue that the methodological application of philosophy moves is one potential source of inspiration and novelty. That is, at least sometimes, thinking through a list of familiar standard moves could be useful. Algorithmically testing variously shaped pegs into any given hole of philosophical concern may be clumsy (or 'kludgey,' (Koopman and Hoffman 2003)), but nothing comes for free - the suitability of any given move to a problem still has to be defended.[16] A working familiarity with an inventory of philosophy moves are at least potentially useful. Even the failing of a tool to suit its problem may help generate the right one.[17]

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[16] Within the philosophy of science, Reichenbach distinguishes between "the context of discovery" and "the context of justification." No method of the former has any bearing on whether something counts as science or not. I'm suggesting something similar here about producing philosophy. Scrying, dreaming, or scrolling through lists of philosophy moves are all potential modes of discovery. How you get there doesn't matter, so long as what you end up with works (in terms of being a good argument). See Reichenbach (1949).

[17] Hájek writes: "When ingenuity fails you, sometimes you can just run systematically through the relevant cases until you find one that meets your needs" (Hájek 2014: 307).

4. **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have suggested philosophical discourse often features distinctive tropes that, while known by some philosophers, have yet to be explicitly acknowledged as such. I have presented a few candidate 'standard philosophy moves' exemplified by instances of their application in the philosophy of biology literature. At the heart of this paper is the modest suggestion that the mere acknowledgement of these patterns in our discipline is useful for a number of purposes.

While I have highlighted what I consider potential advantages and disadvantages of each move, I leave it to the reader to evaluate these moves in terms of their relative epistemic merit. Some may be seen as paradigm philosophical moves, others as non-ideal options to which we reluctantly resort. Some may be perceived as mostly epistemically virtuous, others somewhat epistemically vicious. Perhaps the most appropriate attitude is that moves should not be, even informally, prejudged – rather, we should evaluate each applied trope in its context.

Future work in this area will deliver additional examples from more diverse areas within philosophy.[18] No doubt, those who read this will recognize these familiar tropes (or close relatives) from instances of them within one's subdiscipline of specialization. There are also other ways to build on this work, for example by supplying rules of aptness for each move and inventorying available counter-moves.[19] Additionally, the

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[18] It would make for an interesting empirical project to track memetic spread and adoption of tropes in philosophy papers over the years.

[19] Note that by highlighting advantages and disadvantages of each move in section 2, we have already noted some guidelines for application (e.g., *when needing to make sense of borderline cases, consider Move 3*) along with what one might say to

very notion of 'moves' can be subject to further analysis. Is this notion best left permissive, accommodating a range of distinctive philosophical tropes, or should it be made more precise (with clearer conditions for individuating moves)?[20]

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counter them (e.g., Move 1 *does not alone provide any explanation of what links the plurality of concepts*). Thanks to John Matthewson and Emily Parke for the suggested framing of 'aptness conditions' and 'available counter-moves'.

[20] Thanks to Antony Eagle.

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