**Kelly & KDR on Moorean Methodology: Does/Did the Skeptic Have a Chance?** Phil. 270, Tuesday 4/9/19, Readings 14 & 15

**Final Exam Question (subject to possible tweaking): Kelly & KDR (Readings 14 and 15):** Explain what Kelly means by his claim that “the skeptic simply cannot win,” and why he believes this claim, making sure to explain what a “Moorean fact” is. Why does KDR think the skeptic is not doomed from the start? When, if ever, do you think a philosophical argument to a surprising conclusion can rationally be resisted, even when one is unable to locate a flaw in the argument? Do you think skeptics have any hope of constructing arguments for radical skeptical conclusions that can make it rational for us to accept those conclusions? Why or why not?

**Background: The “Critical Reasoning Class Approach” to Arguments**

-First, render the argument in outline form, with numbered steps, like this abstract example, with premises, a sub-conclusion, and conclusion:

1. [ ]

2. [ ]

So, 3. [ ] (from 1,2)

4. [ ]

So, C. [ ] (from 3,4)

-Rule for resisting: No fair denying or objecting to (3) or (C): They are argued for, after all. Instead of directly rejecting (C), you must either make the case that it doesn’t really follow from the steps it’s based on (3 and 4), or that one of those bases is false. But since (3) is itself argued for, if that’s where you think the problem is, you can’t just reject (3), but must tell us what’s wrong with the case for it: either it fails to follow from (1) and (2), or one of (1) or (2) is wrong.

-Ultimately, with one notable exception, one who resists an argument ends up having to deny the validity of one of the inferences (deny that one of the steps with a “So” in front of them really follows from the steps listed as its basis), or denying, or objecting to, on grounds of its “implausibility,” or the like, one of the argument’s premises (one of the steps without a “So” in front of it). The exception: A resister can instead make the (murky) charge that some premise (or premises) “beg(s) the question”. But usually, what the dispute boils down to is wrangling over some premise.

-The critical reasoning approach, weaponized: when the Critical-Reasoning-class-trained party is in the role of the presenter of the original argument), they write as if it’s to be assumed that a premise stands until it is quite decisively shot down. This procedure favors the producer of the original argument over their critic: “Well, like all arguments, mine begins from premises, which others might reject. But my opponent has failed to refute my premise; so my premise stands; **SO I WIN**.”

-Critical reasoners often behave differently when they are in the role of the critic of an argument. There they tend to find the premise they want to deny, and then say something like one of these things about it: “But what’s the argument for *that*?”, “But why in the world should we accept *that*?”)

-In a less annoying version of the game, the parties agree to disagree over the truth of some premise of the argument, but, you know, at least they managed to locate the source of their disagreement over C, so that’s progress.

**Background: the methodology of seeking consistent and complete solutions to philosophical puzzles:** 15: p. 43.7-44.2

**Moore in Action, responding to Skeptical Arguments**

-for the general nature of his response: see the passage quoted at 15: p. 40.4

-for Moore’s response to AI in particular, see the passage quoted at 15: p. 41.0

-“reversing the argument”, “one person’s modus ponens is another’s modus tollens”

-Moore seems to be playing by very different rules from those of the Critical Reasoning Class game. He is objecting to the conclusion of the argument. He ends up rejecting a premise of the argument, but his objection to it is comparative: It may be very plausible in its own right, but it’s just not plausible *enough* to support such a counter-intuitive conclusion.

-proposed explanation: Moore is seeing arguments as tools for rationally governing one’s acceptances, rather than as games one wins or loses against opponents. Given this view on what arguments are primarily good for, Moore’s procedure makes sense.

-Who’s “begging the question”?: See 15: p. 42.3-42.8

-So, what are we to do (15: p. 42.9)?, when we have hit argumentative rock bottom (15: p. 43.5)? At this point, what, and all, that the skeptic has going for her is a valid argument from premises that enjoy (let us grant) a good deal of intuitive plausibility. But then, it seems clear that, from among the claims that constitute our puzzle (the skeptical argument’s premises, and the negation of its conclusion), we should reject the one that has the least plausibility or that seems least certain to us (15: p. 44.7). If Moore proceeds in that way, rejecting one of the skeptic’s premises on those grounds, it’s hard to see what the skeptic’s complaint might be. If what the skeptic’s argument has going for it is what’s indicated above, it’s hard to see how she can legitimately object to Moore’s instead following the argument that to his thinking has a better version of that: a valid argument from even more intuitively plausible premises

**Moorean Facts:** Some who accept Moore’s methodology think it leads to claims that are pre-theoretically too solid to be overturned by philosophical arguments. Following David Lewis, these claims can be call “Moorean facts”; they are “those things that we know better than we know the premises of any philosophical argument to the contrary” (Lewis, quoted at 14: p. 179.6; 15: p. 50.7)

**Kelly thinks anti-skeptical claims (claims to know things that philosophical skeptics deny that we can know) are Moorean facts; so the skeptic: can’t win / is doomed / has no chance (of rationally persuading us)**

-he expresses this (along with some explanation of the scope of the “anti-skeptical claims that he thinks are Moorean facts) at 14: p. 181.4, quoted at 15: p. 51.0

**But Kelly has trouble locating the “fundmental norm” of belief revision this can be based on**

-He is looking for theoretic al backing for: “MOORE: One should never abandon one’s belief in a Moorean fact on the basis of a philosophical argument” (187.7).

-He considers and rejects several candidates, before settling on one that, though right, seems trivial:

MORE REASONABLE In resolving conflicts among one’s beliefs, one should always favor those beliefs that it is more reasonable for one to think are true given the totality of evidence and arguments to which one has been exposed. (194.7)

-Kelly is disappointed, because he thinks this norm won’t allow us to explain why it will be always better to favor Moorean anti-skeptical facts over the premises of skeptical arguments. His thought seems to be: “Well, of course, we should stick by the more reasonable of our beliefs when they come into conflict with one another. But why suppose it will always be more reasonable to prefer our commonsense knowledge claims over the skeptic’s premises?”

-So Kelly instead bases his Moorean stance on methodological particularism (starting around 197.3)

**I think we can find the basis for the Moorean stance in one of the fundamental norms Kelly rejects** (here going a bit beyond what’s in 15)

-I like, at least on a certain reading of it:

MORE PLAUSIBLE: One should never abandon a belief in response to an argument when the proposition believed is more plausible than (at least one of) the premises of the argument. (from 14: 189.1)

-But isn’t that pretty much like MORE REASONABLE? Why did Kelly think that if it were true, it would be helpful in a way that MORE REASONABLE is not?

-Answer: Kelly thinks “plausible,” when used literally, refers to initial plausibility, not all-things-considered reasonableness (14: p. 189.5). And he would feel comfortable in declaring that no skeptical premise will have the initial plausibility of commonsense Moorean claims (while he didn’t think he could so pronounce that the skeptic will always lose a contest over all-things-considered reasonableness).

-But then the very feature that would make MP useful if true (that it concerns only initial plausibility) renders MP false: There could be occasions on which we should abandon what has more *initial* plausibility (example at 14: p. 189.7).

-**Solution**: So I say:

-“plausible” needn’t refer to initial plausibility. It has (among others) an “all-in” use: plausible in light of all the considerations available to me/us (15: pp. 45.9-46.1).

-So, let’s accept MP *where plausible is used in this “all-in” sense*. We thereby avoid Kelly’s reasons for thinking it wrong.

-But we then apply MP to the “Moorean situation,” on which we have reached the argumentative starting point of the skeptic’s case, where (well, as we’re currently assuming) all her premises have going for them is their initial intuitive plausibility. (If she has some deeper argument for one of her premises, then we take the premises of that deeper argument to be her argumentative starting point, and apply our Moorean maneuver there.)

-So here, *in the case at hand*, for the skeptic’s premises, all things considered plausibility = initial intuitive plausibility

-So, using MP as we are, Kelly can confidently declare that since the skeptic’s case will always contain one argumentative starting point whose *initial intuitive* plausibility doesn’t exceed that of the relevant commonsensical Moorean fact, and so the skeptic can never win… while not having to worry about his problem with the truth of MP. He’s accepting MP in the sense in which it’s true, but it is also useful *in the relevant situation*, because *in that situation*, the “all-in” sense of “plausible,” on which MP is right, only designates initial plausibility – which is what Kelly is comfortable about pronouncing on.

**Yet I think the skeptic might still have a chance**…