

Phil. 270: 11/30/21: Kelley & KDR on Moorean Methodology: Does/Did the Skeptic Have a Chance? (Plus: Intro to Closure) Readings 14, 15 (+Prep for 16)

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”, “the G.E. Moore shift”: names for the maneuver Moore uses here
- This move is of very general application: It can be used against any kind of argument, especially when the argument's conclusion is counter-intuitive, not just arguments for skepticism
- problem 1: Is Moore begging the question?
- problem 2: Is he treating the argument unfairly? His approach certainly seems different from that of what I think of as the “Critical Reasoning Class Game”
- problem 3: Will this methodology lead us to be objectionably conservative (reluctant to change our views in response to arguments)?

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.
- I imagine argumentative opponents, but this can be easily put in terms of how to evaluate an argument (when, say, you're deciding to go along with it, or resist it, or whatnot, in your own thought, without engaging with anybody else).

-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?

Back to Moore, and some Moore-inspired methodological thoughts

-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. And at first (through "let alone all four"), without even identifying which premise fails. He ends up rejecting a premise of the argument (Russell's 4th assumption, the first premise of AI), but his objection to it is comparative: It's not that the premise is found to be implausible, or that it in some other non-comparative way fails. It may be very plausible in its own right, but it's just comparatively 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 (I claim).

-Moore's procedure seems to be: accept the conclusion of an argument only if all the premises of the argument are more "certain" (to use the word Moore seems to most often use here) than is the opposite of the argument's conclusion. But if the opposite of the argument's conclusion itself seems more certain than any of the argument's premises, instead reject that premise (or the least certain of them, if more than one premise is less certain than the opposite of the argument's conclusion).

-So, applied to AI, the skeptical argument we're focused on, which has two premises, the three plausible claims in question will be:

1. I don't know that not-H
 2. If I don't know that not-H, then I don't know that O.
- ~C. I do know that O

And Moore is saying: You know, ~C seems more certain than does 1, so I'm going to reject 1 rather than ~C

-But should we generally seek to identify which plausible claim in the bunch we choose to reject? Some musings on the methodology of seeking consistent and complete solutions to philosophical puzzles: 15, pp. 43.7-44.2

-Who's "begging the question"? See 15: p. 42.3-42.8

-Defense of Moore's approach: 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 them is a valid argument from premises that enjoy (let us grant) a good deal of intuitive plausibility. But then, it seems clear that if we are going to reject one of 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 "fundamental norm" of belief revision this can be based on

-He is looking for theoretical 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...

I think we can find the basis for the Moorean stance in one of the fundamental norms Kelly rejects

-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 (here going a bit beyond what's in 15) 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'd be 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.

Kelly's stance, laid out at 14: pp. 181.3-181.6, might be a very extreme one indeed, according to which he not only Moores the skeptical arguments that have already been dreamt up, but preemptively Moores skeptical arguments that we haven't even seen yet, but that might be coming around the bend – though my best guess (see my attempt to interpret Kelly at 15: p. 51.3-51.7) has him making a claim not quite that strong, and as instead claiming that no way of working out the details of any of the skeptical arguments that we (epistemologists) are aware of will yield an argument to a radical* skeptical conclusion which is such that it would be reasonable for us to follow it to that conclusion. *See Kelly's note 5 at 14: p. 204.6 for his account of what counts as "radical" here; but basically, we can take it to be thorough-going "external world skepticism"
-But, at any rate, I'm opposing Kelly by suggesting that the skeptic might not be doomed to defeat from the outset with respect to even a very well-known old chestnut of a skeptical argument that we epistemologists (and certainly Kelly himself) are all familiar with.

Yet I think the skeptic might still have a chance...

-Even though we have reached the parties' argumentative starting points in our "Moorean situation" (15: p. 46.2), so there are no deeper positive arguments to consider, there may still be this kind of factor to take into consideration: damage-controlling explanations for why the claim one rejects enjoys the plausibility it has ("explaining away" that plausibility): 15: pp. 46.5-49.5, 52.6-52.8
-"Moorean choice" → "enlightened Moorean choice" (phrase at 15: p. 48.4)

Closure and Skepticism

-how "closure," which looks like a principle explaining how knowledge expands, fuels skeptical arguments:

It all looks so positive and wonderful: If I know this, and this entails that, I'm all set to know that, too! But one person's modus ponens is another's modus tollens, after all, so the skeptic can powerfully argue: "Hey, but you don't/can't know that, at least not in that way, so you must not know this, after all."

-a quick tour of the project of trying to formulate the closure principle properly (including the main fork in the road, and generalizing to MPC), with a look or two at what our skeptical argument (AI) looks like if we try to make its 2nd premise an instance of an advanced closure principles:

-Single- and multi-premise closure, from simple to slightly more advanced forms, down one of the two main paths:

- 1 $K(p) \ \& \ p \Rightarrow q \quad K(q) \quad K(p_1) \ \& \ K(p_2) \ \& \ \dots \ K(p_n) \ \& \ (p_1-p_n) \Rightarrow q \quad K(q)$
- 2 $K(p) \ \& \ K(p \Rightarrow q) \quad K(q) \quad K(p_1) \ \& \ K(p_2) \ \& \ \dots \ K(p_n) \ \& \ K[(p_1-p_n) \Rightarrow q] \quad K(q)$
- 3 $K(p) \ \& \ CD(p \Rightarrow q) \quad K(q) \quad K(p_1) \ \& \ K(p_2) \ \& \ \dots \ K(p_n) \ \& \ CD[(p_1-p_n) \Rightarrow q] \quad K(q)$

Where $CD(p \Rightarrow q)$ means: the subject has competently deduced q from p , and has thereby come to have the attitude of knowledge toward q , if they didn't have that attitude toward q already

-Single- and multi-premise closure: the start of the other path:

- 2 $K(p) \ \& \ p \Rightarrow q \quad PK(q) \quad K(p_1) \ \& \ K(p_2) \ \& \ \dots \ K(p_n) \ \& \ (p_1-p_n) \Rightarrow q \quad PK(q)$

Where $PK(q)$ means: the subject is in a position to know that q

-Down either path, one must face: the Problem of the Aggregation of Risk

-And, at my best shot at it, the complicated form of AI ends up looking like this (after weakening the second premise to make it an instance of an advanced closure principle that contains a fix for the Problem of the Aggregation of Risk, and then compensates for this weakening by beefing up the argument's first, "base" premise):

1S+. I don't know that I'm not a BIV, and, even if I KNEW that (*I have hands entails I'm not a BIV*), and if I were to COMPETENTLY deduce *I'm not a BIV* from *I have hands*, I would not thereby come to know that I'm not a BIV

2CU-. If I know that I have hands, and if I do not already know that I'm not a BIV, then if I KNEW that (*I have hands entails I'm not a BIV*), and if I were to COMPETENTLY deduce *I'm not a BIV* from *I have hands*, I would thereby come to know that I'm not a BIV

So, C. I don't know that I have hands

where allcaps KNEW and COMPETENTLY refer to absolutely certain super-knowledge and super-competence (*The Appearance of Ignorance*, pp. 283, 284)

For comparison, here's Simple AI:

1. I don't know that I'm not a BIV

2. If I don't know that I'm not a BIV, then I don't know that I have hands

So, C. I don't know that I have hands