

Phil. 270: Thursday, 4/7/20: Moorean Methodology (cont'd); Closure

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 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. (It's kinda empty.) 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.

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 key parts of it express instances of closure principles (the way of auxiliary premises vs. the way of beefing up the base premise)

Well, just for fun (!!), here’s how it comes out, for my hands and BIV, given my favorite way of trying to formulate closure:

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

(The Appearance of Ignorance, pp. 283, 284)

where allcaps KNEW and COMPETENTLY refer to absolutely certain super-knowledge and super-competence

Next.... Nozick and Stine, readings 16 and 17