

## Anti-Luck Epistemology and Safety's (Recent) Discontents

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**Abstract** *Anti-luck epistemology* is an approach to analyzing knowledge that takes as a starting point the widely-held assumption that knowledge must exclude luck. Call this the *anti-luck* platitude. As Duncan Pritchard (2005) has suggested, there are three stages constituent of *anti-luck epistemology*, each which specifies a different philosophical requirement: these stages call for us to first give an account of luck; second, specify the sense in which knowledge is incompatible with luck; and finally, show what conditions must be satisfied in order to block the kind of luck with which knowledge was argued to be incompatible. What I'll show here is that the *modal account of luck* offers a plausible story at the first stage and leads naturally to equally plausible lines to take at the second and third stages, at which a *safety* condition on knowledge is squarely motivated. There are, however, recent challenges—advanced by Jonathan Kvanvig (Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 77: 272–281, 2008); Kelly Becker (2007); and Jennifer Lackey (Australasian Journal of Philosophy 86(2):255–267, 2008), among others—to the plausibility of the safety-based anti-luck project I've sketched here at each of its three stages of development. Once I've made precise the challenges, I'll show why none implies that we abandon the commitments of the safety-based anti-luck project at any of its stages. What we should conclude, then, is that a safety-condition on knowledge is motivated by independently defensible accounts of (1) what luck is; and (2) just how knowledge should be thought incompatible with it.

**Keywords** Knowledge · Epistemic luck · Gettier · Safety

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A widely-held assumption in epistemology holds that in order for someone to count as knowing, it must not be a matter of luck that the belief she has is true;

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consequently, it is increasingly thought that theories of knowledge must include an appropriate *anti-luck* condition. Now, what an anti-luck condition should look like is a point of much contention, and this is in part because there are substantive disagreements about just how a belief's owing to luck should be thought incompatible with knowledge, when it is. Even more basically, though, there are disagreements about what, after all, luck is supposed to be, as it applies to events more broadly. This much suggests that an anti-luck account of knowledge is one that should be pursued in several steps. In particular, we'll need to get straight on three key matters—matters which are ones Duncan Pritchard (2005) takes to reflect 'three-stages' essential to the anti-luck project. He says: "First, we offer an account of luck. Second, we specify the sense in which knowledge is incompatible with luck. Finally, third, we put all this together to offer an anti-luck analysis of knowledge." (Pritchard 2007a, b: 2) Thus:

*Pritchard's Three Anti-Luck Tasks*

- (1) Give an account of luck
- (2) Specify the sense in which knowledge is incompatible with luck.
- (3) Show what conditions must be satisfied in order to block the kind of luck incompatible with knowledge and incorporate them within a theory of knowledge.

Against this background, I want to focus on an increasingly popular account of luck which, following Jennifer Lackey (2008), I'll call the *modal account of luck* (MAL)—an account defended most notably by Duncan Pritchard (2005):

MODAL ACCOUNT OF LUCK (MAL):

- (1) If an event is lucky, then it is an event that occurs in the actual world but which does not occur in a wide class of the nearest possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions for that event are the same as they are in the actual world (Pritchard 2005, p. 128).
- (2) If an event is lucky, then it is an event that is significant to the agent concerned or would be significant, were the agent to be availed of the relevant facts (Pritchard 2005, p. 132).<sup>1</sup>

MAL, upon first glance, seems to get right straightforward cases of lucky events, such as lottery wins. If my lone ticket wins a reasonably large fair lottery, it stands that were we to hold fixed the relevant initial conditions (i.e. my having bought a ticket in that lottery), then in most nearby worlds, I'll not be celebrating but lamenting my losing ticket. Of course, if MAL is right, then luck must essentially be a modal intuition—an intuition we have about events (significant to us) that could have easily been otherwise. That said, Pritchard adds the second condition to MAL to distinguish lucky events from events that are chancy but not lucky—e.g. ones that could easily have not occurred but about which no one cares (e.g. the chance occurrence of two rocks balancing on top of each other perfectly—on Neptune).

<sup>1</sup> Lackey's description of MAL is in her 2008 "What Luck is Not" p. 9.

Now, applied to the sort of events we're interested in—true beliefs—Pritchard's MAL account becomes:

LUCKY TRUE BELIEFS (LTB) *S's* true belief is lucky *iff* there is a wide class of possible worlds in which *S* continues to believe the target proposition, and the relevant initial conditions for the formation of that belief are the same as in the actual world, and yet the belief is false. (Pritchard 2007a, b: 3)

LTB easily gets the right result in Gettier cases; for example, Smith continues believing that the man who will get the job has 10 coins in his pocket in a wide class of worlds where he had more, fewer or no coins in his pocket. Also, LTB gets right cases where we take it that *environmental luck* undermines knowledge; for example, Henry continues believing what he sees is a barn in a wide class of possible worlds in which he's looking at a barn façade<sup>2</sup>—as Alvin Goldman's (1976) case goes.

This much counts in favor of the thought that, not only is LTB a plausible account of epistemic luck in that intuitive cases of luck are explained by it, but it's also one that seems to be specifying a sense of luck that would be *incompatible* with knowledge. And thus, it is looking like LTB might be promising both for our task of giving an account of luck as well as for Pritchard's second task, which is to specify the sense in which knowledge is incompatible with luck. (Pritchard 2007a)

Moreover, notice that LTB does not count as lucky the sort of true beliefs that depend on luck in a way that is compatible with knowledge. For example, suppose by dumb luck I slip and fall in such a way that I notice, while on the ground, that there is a dollar underneath the refrigerator. My true belief that there is a dollar under the refrigerator depends on luck in the sense that most nearby worlds are ones in which I don't acquire the evidence for believing this that I have in the actual world. However this sort of luck, which Pritchard calls *evidential luck* is innocuous in the sense that knowledge is not undermined by it. LTB is not concerned with true beliefs lucky in this way; this is because LTB holds fixed the relevant initial conditions that give rise to the belief, and these will require holding fixed that you formed the belief about the dollar on the basis of the evidence you had from your vantage point on the floor, where you clearly spotted it. LTB, as Pritchard intends it, is meant to capture what he calls *veritic luck*—the sort at issue when we say that it is a matter of luck that the belief formed was true. Importantly then, *LTB is not an account of the conditions under which it's lucky that we have true beliefs*. Instead, it's an account of the conditions under which *it's lucky that the beliefs we have are true*—luck Pritchard quotes Peter Unger as describing to be the kind that “comes between the man and the fact.” It's this sort of luck—veritic luck—that according to Pritchard, we should think of as incompatible with knowledge, and the sort that LTB is meant to capture as it would apply to true beliefs.

If this much is right, then we've made headway past the task of just giving an account of luck; we'll have answered the questions associated with the first *two* steps of the anti-luck project in that we've said what luck was via MAL and specified the

<sup>2</sup> Kvanvig (2008) “Critical Notice of Pritchard's Epistemic Luck” contests that this is obviously true; he thinks it would be only if the intentions and practitioners of the barn erectors are held fixed. I'll be discussing his idea here in a later section of this chapter.

sort incompatible with knowledge in terms of the sort picked out by LTB—the sort that would make it lucky that a belief we have is true.

All that would be left, if LTB is correct, is to show how a theory of knowledge could ‘block’ the sort of luck that LTB specifies. Because LTB counts as lucky those that—to put the idea simply—couldn’t (holding fixed the relevant initial conditions) easily have been false, we can see that the third step of the anti-luck project would have our theory of knowledge include a symmetrical condition that requires known beliefs *couldn’t* (holding fixed the relevant initial conditions) easily have been false.

This is precisely the strategy Pritchard (2005) pursued in his book *Epistemic Luck*, the most comprehensive account of the relationship between knowledge and luck to date. On Pritchard’s (2005) account, the condition needed by a theory of knowledge to ensure that known beliefs couldn’t easily have been false is a *safety condition*. This is the requirement that:

*Safety*: S’s belief is safe *iff* in most near-by possible worlds in which S continues to form her belief about the target proposition in the same way as the actual world, her belief continues to be true.

The obvious symmetry between *safety* and LTB reveals an important point about the relationship between the second and third components of the anti-luck project when the account of luck is modal. That is, *once we’ve got* a modal account of the sort of luck incompatible with knowledge, the final step will naturally be to say that knowledge requires a belief lack these modal properties. Thus, if knowledge-incompatible luck occurs when true beliefs could have easily been false, then knowledge will require that they lack this property: that they *couldn’t* easily have been false, and so the corresponding modal condition on knowledge must ensure (as *safety* aims to) *this*.

Pritchard’s account of luck has been the most widely discussed to date, and unsurprisingly, there have been a variety of objections to it. Now that we’ve seen the close connection between the three tasks of an anti-luck project, it should be an obvious point that an objection at any of the three stages will also threaten an anti-luck account at its other two stages. Let’s refer then Pritchard’s own approach, as a collective response to the challenges posed by each task, the *safety-based account of knowledge*—an account that relies on MAL at the first stage and LTB at the second stage. In the next section, we’ll consider some of the most important recent objections to the *safety-based account of knowledge* and in doing so, determine whether its plausibility stands up to its popularity.

## 1.

While Pritchard’s *safety principle* counts as safe mundane beliefs we take ourselves to know (e.g. such beliefs are not ones about which we could have easily been wrong), it also accommodates our intuitions about standard Gettier cases and *environmental luck* (fake barn) cases—e.g. by ruling that the true beliefs at issue in these cases won’t be *safe*. This is all good; however, Pritchard (2007b) has recognized that SP runs into trouble when we consider what it has to say about lottery propositions—i.e. propositions such as “My ticket is a loser”—which we

hold on the basis of excellent statistical grounds. SP counts these propositions as *known* even though, intuitively, we don't know such propositions because we don't *know* we'll lose the lottery. This result occurs for SP because it counts lottery propositions as safe: our belief that our ticket is a loser remains true in most nearby worlds, which are worlds in which we've lost the lottery.

How can SP avoid counting lottery propositions as known? Pritchard suspects that one way to do this would be to strengthen the account of safety so that lottery propositions would fail to count as safe. He supposes that such a strengthened account might be:

(SP\*) *S*'s belief is safe *iff* in nearly all (if not all) near-by possible worlds in which *S* continues to form her belief about the target proposition in the same way as in the actual world the belief continues to be true. (Pritchard 2007a, b: 6)

Presumably, since some nearby worlds are worlds when the ticket wins and the belief that it loses is false (even though most nearby worlds aren't like this), it's false on SP\* that you know your ticket will lose (as this belief wouldn't be safe). Beefing up safety in this way seems like a mistake, though, because it leaves safety too strong a requirement to suppose it is satisfied in cases where we intuitively *do* know.

Pritchard notes that a worrying case here is Sosa's "rubbish chute" case:

On my way down to the elevator I release a trash bag down the chute from my high rise condo. Presumably, I know my bag will soon be in the basement. But what if, having been released, it still (incredibly) were not to arrive there? That presumably would be because it had been snagged somehow on the way down (an incredibly rare occurrence) or some such happenstance (Sosa 2000, 13).<sup>3</sup>

Although presumably Sosa's rubbish chute case is one where you have knowledge,<sup>4</sup> it wouldn't count as such on the strengthened SP\* because the relevant belief doesn't qualify as safe—some worlds very close to the actual world are ones where the bag gets snagged and the target belief is false.

We can see that the prospects of blocking knowledge-undermining luck by appealing to a safety requirement is doubly threatened by the combinatorial challenge

<sup>3</sup> This is Pritchard's (2007b: 6) quotation

<sup>4</sup> Two points are germane here: first, it's important not to think of the rubbish chute case as a case about knowledge of the future. The target proposition is not "The bag *will* be in the basement" (uttered as one drops the bag) but instead "The bag *is* in the basement" (uttered after one has dropped the bag). Issues concerning future knowledge are thus not going to be relevant here. Secondly, it might be pointed out that a more plausible way to describe one's knowledge here is knowledge that it's *likely* that the rubbish is in the basement, not knowledge that it *is* there. The fact that this is a plausible way to describe what one knows about the rubbish doesn't undermine the fact that we take the stronger claim—that one knows the rubbish is in the basement—as a putative example of everyday knowledge. After all, to doubt that one knows the rubbish is in the basement, after it's been thrown it down a smooth chute that has (with the help of the laws of gravity) always resulted in the rubbish landing in the basement in the past, would be to yield far too much to the skeptic. Consider that if one *didn't* know the rubbish were in the basement on the epistemic grounds the case assumes, then by parity of reasoning, one would also fail to know (for example) that a pebble dropped from the top of the Grand Canyon ever landed at the bottom, given that the pebble (upon nearing the bottom) is out of sight. Indeed, too much is yielded to the skeptic if a knower must prove that the laws of nature relevant to some proposition did hold in a particular case, even when there was no reason to doubt in that case that such laws would hold.

of the Lottery Problem and the Garbage Chute Case. Basically, it seems like a theory of knowledge requires a stronger safety requirement than SP in order to prevent lottery propositions from counting as known, but once strong enough to imply that lottery propositions aren't safe, then the notion of safety seems to be too strong to preserve that we have knowledge in garbage chute cases by failing to count *those* beliefs as safe. A catch-22.

Now if this conundrum shows that the safety requirement for knowledge isn't plausible, then this calls into doubt not just the prospects that a theory of knowledge with a safety condition would have for effectively accommodate the luck intuition, but *also* whether our corollary account of the sort of luck incompatible with knowledge was right in the first place. For *if it was*, then a safety condition—defined in perfect symmetry to the knowledge-incompatible luck it's meant to block—should not allow for a disconnect (as appears to be the case in the Lottery Problem and Garbage Chute Cases) between beliefs that are safe and beliefs that are known.

Pritchard's (2007b) way out of this dilemma has been to revise his original account of safety (SP) to make it stronger than it originally was, not *as* strong as SP\*, and yet weak enough to preserve that garbage-chute beliefs (appropriately understood) will be safe. Here's the revised account:

SP\*\* S's belief is safe iff in most near-by possible worlds in which S continues to form her belief about the target proposition in the same way as in the actual world, and in all very close nearby possible worlds in which S continues to form her belief about the target proposition in the same way as in the actual world, the belief continues to be true. (Pritchard 2007b: 8)

Is this strong enough to prevent lottery propositions from qualifying as safe? Pritchard thinks so for the reason that some *very close* nearby worlds will be ones in which S's belief is false; his reasoning is that "the possible world in which I win the lottery is a world just like this one, where all that need be different is that a few coloured balls fall in a slightly different configuration." (Pritchard 2007b: 7) As Kvanvig (2008) has pointed out, Pritchard fails to give us any principled way to sort 'very close' nearby worlds from merely 'nearby worlds,' and as a result, he worries that the distinction is one that could be applied in an *ad hoc* way.<sup>5</sup> In reply, Pritchard denies that we should be expecting some especially refined formulae for ordering worlds; he takes it that intuitive notions about what worlds are closer than others will suffice for possible-world semantics to be useful to the project of clarifying modal notions. I'm inclined to agree with Pritchard here, although it should be worth taking up elsewhere the general worry that Kvanvig's objection raises.

That said, let's now see why SP\*\* is also supposed to handle the garbage chute case. Here Pritchard thinks that it's important to see how very minor details of the case affect our intuitions. His idea is that, first, unless there is something on which the bag might easily snag to, then it's not clear that "there are very many (if any) near-by possible worlds in which his belief is false." (Pritchard 2007b: 7) And if that's so, then SP\*\* gets the right result by counting the belief as safe. However, if we include within the details of the case that there is something in the chute on which the garbage bag "is *almost* snagging on each time," (Pritchard 2007b: 7) then

<sup>5</sup> See Kvanvig (2008) "Critical Notice of Pritchard's *Epistemic Luck*".

SP\*\* fails to count the belief as safe, though this Pritchard thinks would be the right verdict since, with these details in place, Sosa's belief *really could* easily be false—and it would not be intuitive to say that he *knows* it will arrive safely at the bottom.

If Pritchard's right to think that amending SP in the form of SP\*\* gets around these problems, then—in order to keep the needed symmetry intact—we need to also amend the corresponding account (LTB) specifying the conditions under which a belief will be lucky in a way incompatible with knowing. Thus, LTB will now read LTB\*\*:

LTB\*\*: S's true belief is lucky iff in most near-by possible worlds in which S continues to form her belief about the target proposition in the same way as in the actual world, and in *some very close* nearby possible worlds in which S continues to form her belief about the target proposition in the same way as in the actual world, the belief is false.

## 2.

In his recent "Critical Notice of Pritchard's *Epistemic Luck*," Jon Kvanvig (2008) raises several challenges to the thought that a theory of knowledge can rely on a safety condition such as Pritchard's in order to accommodate the luck intuition. Among these objections is the criticism that an account placing a safety condition on knowledge will fail to preserve closure. Siding here with the majority, I take it to be a strike against a theory of knowledge if it indeed must deny closure. And further, we may note that if an account of knowledge that relies on safety must reject closure, then this would seem to call into doubt our more general presumption that a modal account of luck would best capture what a theory of knowledge must answer to in accommodating the anti-luck intuition.

Kvanvig's argument on grounds of closure is as follows:

*Kvanvig's Closure Argument for Safety*

1. Safety doesn't get the right result in standard (Ginet) fake barn cases unless the practices and intentions of the Wisconsinites are held fixed.
2. But if safety requires holding such practices and intentions fixed, then cases can be constructed where closure fails.
3. Therefore, safety gets the right result in standard fake barn cases only if it gives up closure.

Kvanvig defends (1) by arguing that if we *don't* hold fixed the intentions and practices of the Wisconsinites that (in the original Ginet barn façade case) led them to salt the valley with barn facades whilst leaving one real barn, then "there will be little reason for thinking that there are fake barns in any nearby worlds...and thus little reason to think that in a fair number of nearby worlds one's perceptual belief that the object is a barn is false." (Pritchard 2007a, b: 6) But *why* would there be little to suppose this? Here his point is an interesting one. Kvanvig says:

After all, it is exceedingly unlikely that the Wisconsinites' approach to boredom or the desire to engage in frivolity is directed precisely this way, and it could easily be that none of the other remotely likely combinations of

intentions and practices would have any empirical results involving fake barns. (Kvanvig 2008: 6)

The idea then is that without holding fixed whatever the Wisconsinites' intentions and practices were that culminated in their erecting barn facades in the actual world, we can't rely on the thought that nearby worlds are ones that include the barn facades in the vicinity of the real barn, and *thus*, we lose our explanation for why the "there's a barn" belief in the actual world is not safe—i.e. we can no longer explain why nearby worlds are ones where the hero fails to know it.

If Kvanvig's defense of premise (1) is correct, and the barn-erectors' intentions and practices must be held fixed across worlds, then according to premise (2) an implication is that closure must be given up. His defense of premise (2) involves a thought experiment—one where we stipulate that the intentions and practices of the Wisconsinites in the actual world are ones where "chance" is built into their practices. Kvanvig has us suppose that: "At each barn site, they flip a fair coin to decide what to do. If the coin lands heads, they replace the barn with a red fake barn. If the coin lands tails, they paint the barn green and leave it in place." (Kvanvig 2008: 8)

Now, given that the odds that what you point to when saying "there's a barn" *really is* a barn are about 50/50, it's clear that your belief "there's a barn" isn't safe, and so your belief "there's a barn" isn't one you know. And further, if your belief was instead "there's a green barn" you wouldn't know that either; after all, you don't even know that it's a barn. Problematically, though, Kvanvig says "the 'green barn in the field' belief is safe because in every nearby world in which you form this belief, your belief is true. But then closure fails for safety, since you know that the green barn belief entails the barn belief." (Kvanvig 2008: 8) Given that the Wisconsinites left only the real barns green (and that we're holding this as part of what's fixed in nearby worlds), the presence of the red barn facades doesn't threaten the safety of the green barn belief because nearby worlds are ones where you believe something is a green barn only if it is. And then the problem is that that belief is safe (and counts as knowledge) while we know that it entails the "there's a barn" belief, which was itself not safe and not knowledge. And so closure fails for safety because the safety account implies that you can know some *p* and know that *p* entails *q* while failing to know *q*.

Kvanvig claims that Pritchard's attempt to dodge this problem<sup>6</sup> would work only if the requirement were lifted that the intentions and practices of the Wisconsinites be held fixed, a requirement we may lift only on the pain of failing to get the right result in the original fake barn case.

What this case may well show is that on an account of knowledge with a safety condition, knowledge fails to be closed under known entailment. However, Kvanvig suspects that a related closure principle that trades on *competent deduction* rather than *known entailment* could be preserved on a safety account. On the view that knowledge must be closed under *competent deduction*, the idea is:

*Closure for knowledge (competent deduction):* If S knows *p* and S competently deduces *q* from *p*, then S knows *q*.

<sup>6</sup> Kvanvig cites Pritchard as supposing that in a wide-class of nearby worlds, the Wisconsinites will failed to have painted some of the barns red and left some facades green, and so the belief 'there's a green barn' isn't safe given that the belief fails to be true in a number of close nearby worlds.

As opposed to:

*Closure for knowledge (known entailment):* If S knows p and S knows that p entails q then S knows q.

Because beliefs reached by competent deduction are “paradigmatically safe” (Kvanvig 2008: 9) there will be no threat from the problem case to the view that knowledge is closed under competent deduction; you count as knowing the “there’s a barn” belief only in instances in which you competently deduce it from the ‘green barn belief’—where as closure under known entailment counts you as knowing the barn belief so long as you know the green barn belief.

The extent to which this result is unwelcome depends on the importance of preserving closure for knowledge over known entailment. Given that the modal account of luck appears to be otherwise quite intuitive in that it gets standard and tough cases right, and that the most promising way to capture modally the sort of luck that’s incompatible with knowledge is one for which the symmetrical requirement for blocking it will be a safety condition, we might reason that a safety requirement for knowledge is motivated more strongly than the closure principle across known entailment that seems to be at odds with it. And moreover, even if closure over known entailment is rejected, this much is—at least according to a recent view shared by Timothy Williamson and John Hawthorne—not a bad thing: closure over competent deduction is, by their lights, the sort of closure principle we should have actually been worried about preserving in the first place.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.

If the luck relevant for undermining knowledge is as the present safety-based proposal claims, then the fact that we are restricted to an account on which knowledge is true belief connected in some way to ability is in no obvious trouble. As I’ve suggested earlier on in the chapter, it remains open for us to show how true belief is connected to ability in cases of knowing in a way that ensures such true beliefs will be relevantly safe. *Now*, that said, it *would* be a problem for us if the sort of luck that undermines knowledge could only be satisfied by some condition that requires we stray from our original true-belief-through-ability template. And this is precisely what Kelly Becker (2007) has recently suggested, and so it’s needed that his point be addressed.

According to Becker, there are two strands of *veritic* epistemic luck, and therefore, an anti-luck account must have two separate components, one for dealing with each. Becker, following Pritchard, takes *veritic* epistemic luck to be the sort of luck usually thought to undermines knowledge. Knowledge can be undermined, he notices, in some cases in which beliefs are true though produced by unreliable processes. For example, I might believe correctly what the weather is like by reading tea leaves. Though my belief is true, this process is unreliable, and it’s just a matter of luck that my belief wasn’t false. Contrast this case now with fake barn cases, where my true belief *is* the result of a reliable belief-forming process. According to

<sup>7</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

Becker, the knowledge-undermining luck in the former case consists in the fact that an unreliable process produced a true belief. We block that luck by requiring for knowledge that beliefs be reliably produced; this will straightforwardly prevent beliefs that owe to this sort of luck from counting as knowledge. A reliability condition doesn't help the latter sort of veritic luck, though, and so this sort of luck requires a modal condition.

If Becker is right, then we've overlooked something important—that is, that *two* kinds of luck are incompatible with knowledge.<sup>8</sup> This would require that we no longer take LTB\*\* to capture the essential features of lucky true belief incompatible with knowledge; even more, it would require that the true-belief-through-ability account be modified to include an additional process-reliabilism condition to deal with both kinds of knowledge-undermining luck.

I'll argue now that Becker is mistaken on both these points. In doing so, I want to first show that he's wrong to suspect that there is a unique strand of veritic luck that we must employ a reliabilist condition to handle. On this point I want to draw attention to his reasoning, which begins with the correct observation that we can make a distinction between two sorts of luckily true beliefs that fail to count as knowledge: some of them, such as the true belief reached via the method of reading tea leaves, were produced by unreliable belief forming processes, and others, such as true barn beliefs in fake barn country, are produced by reliable belief forming process. While this is true, it is a mistaken to draw the inference Becker does that this distinction motivates the thought that there is a strand of epistemic luck—to which a distinct condition on knowledge must answer to—that has anything to do with reliability. For one thing, we can expect that an evidentialist will be inclined to provide a competing diagnosis of the tea-leaf and fake barn cases and could run a parallel argument about luck as follows:

*An evidentialist parallel diagnosis:* whereas the tea-leaf case is one in which the agent's lucky true belief was one for which her belief failed to fit the evidence, the barn façade case is one in which the agent's lucky true belief was one that did fit the evidence. Therefore, (in line with Becker's reasoning), there are two kinds of luck incompatible with knowledge: luck that undermines knowledge when the true belief fits the evidence, and luck that undermines knowledge when the true belief doesn't fit the evidence. Thus, we need two anti-luck conditions to treat both kinds: we treat the first kind with an evidentialist condition, one that requires a belief fit the evidence. And then, because the second kind of knowledge-undermining luck occurs when true beliefs do fit the evidence, we need a modal condition to accommodate this latter sort.

Is there any reason to prefer Becker's story to the evidentialist's? There would be only if perhaps you, like Becker, already hold a reliabilist theory of knowledge to be true. (Becker defends a reliabilist account of knowledge in his 2007 book). But we should certainly not expect that an account of the sort of luck incompatible with knowledge is one whose specification requires an antecedent commitment to reliabilism.

We might ask, then, whether Becker's suggestion could be generalized in a way that is threatening to us. That is, we should ask whether the fact that some of the instances

<sup>8</sup> Becker goes on to argue for a non-veritic variety of epistemic luck that he thinks is incompatible with knowledge, but the example he used to defend this was not compelling enough to sufficiently motivate it.

where knowledge undermines luck are ones where we're justified (in a wide sense) in holding the true belief we do and others aren't suggests that there must be two 'kinds' of knowledge-undermining luck, each which requires a separate condition? This would be so *only if* the modal account of luck we are using (LTB\*\*) fails to deal with both kinds. On closer inspection, though, it seems that we can capture this luck in a way that requires no special consideration to how the belief was produced.

To see this point more clearly, consider Becker's case of the sun-worshiper<sup>9</sup>—a case where a belief is (allegedly) safe though paradigmatically unjustified.

Smith believes that the earth revolves around the sun. As a sun worshiper, he believes this solely for religious reasons. Presumably, worlds where it is false that the earth revolves around the sun are more distant than nearly all those in which Smith even exists; a fortiori they are most distant than worlds where Smith (exists and ) believes the earth revolves around the sun. Thus his belief is safe, even when assessed relative to the method used: believing that the earth revolves around the sun based on heliocentric religious beliefs. In all the nearby worlds where he believes it based on this method, it's true. (Becker 2008: 699)

According to Becker 'Smith does not know that the earth revolves around the sun, and the reason is that his belief-forming process is unreliable'. (Becker 2008: 699) What Becker misses here is that we need not specify the unreliability of the process to explain why it is not knowledge anymore than we need to specify the fact that Smith's heliocentric religious beliefs lacked appropriate evidence.

LTB\*\* simply tells us that *however* the belief was produced, this is something we have to hold fixed when we go from the actual world to nearby worlds and assess whether the belief continues to be true. If the belief was unreliably produced, unsupported by evidence, etc., these are simply things that LTB\*\* indiscriminately tells us we need to count as part of the relevant initial conditions that gave rise to the belief. Once we hold all this fixed as part of the relevant initial conditions leading to the Smith's belief, we see that the sun-worshiper case isn't really one of 'safe belief' (as Becker supposes) failing knowledge *via* failing some independent reliability condition. Becker supposes the sun-worshiper's belief is safe given that (1) the belief about whether the earth revolves around the sun is based on *heliocentric* religious beliefs, and (2) the earth revolves around the sun in most (all) nearby possible worlds. But this isn't enough to get Becker what he wants. Even though the earth revolves around the sun in most (all) nearby possible worlds, so long as we hold fixed what is epistemically relevant to specifying the *way* Smith formed the belief he did in the actual world, there will be nearby worlds where the earth continues to revolve around the sun but Smith's religiously grounded belief about the matter turns out differently: that is, holding fixed what's epistemically relevant to specifying the *way* Smith formed his belief in the actual world, there will nearby worlds where he is seduced to a cosmic view just as easily by moon worshipers, or worshipers of the north star as he was by the heliocentric view he embraces on religious grounds in the actual world. In those nearby worlds, his belief about that around which the earth revolves turns out false, and so his belief in the actual world is unsafe.

<sup>9</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing out the relevance of this case.

That Becker fails to show that an anti-luck condition requires reliability on top of safety points back to the more general remark made: the sort of luck that undermines knowledge doesn't attach to distinctions *within* the relevant initial conditions held fixed. Luck undermines knowledge just when the conditions that gave rise to the belief, being what they are, could have easily yielded us a falsehood.

#### 4.

A final set of objections I want to consider to the modal account of luck I've been defending here alongside the thought that a safety condition would be best suited to handling it is one advanced recently by Jennifer Lackey. Lackey, who it should be noted argued with equal force against non-modal "lack-of-control" accounts of luck (e.g. those according to which an event's being lucky for S just means that the event was out of S's control) claims that that the modal account of luck fails to specify conditions that are either necessary or sufficient for an event's being lucky.

If Lackey's right here, then this would be an unwelcome result to say the least. Indeed, if Lackey is right that luck can't be accounted for modally, then it's not clear how the project of accommodating the anti-luck insight is supposed to begin—as the obvious starting point will have reached a dead end. For Lackey, there is no third alternative, just the following somewhat depressing discovery: she says, "Proponents of the [lack-of-control] and [modal account of luck]...are looking in the wrong places for capturing luck since both views propose conditions that are neither necessary nor sufficient for an event's being lucky. Hence, we see in the current philosophical literature what luck is *not*—it is *not* a matter of the absence of either control or counterfactual robustness. We have, unfortunately, yet to see what luck *is*." (Lackey 2008: 17)

Setting aside here her critique of lack-of-control accounts of luck, we'll see now whether the arguments she gives to our modal account of luck actually warrant that we surrender it in exchange for Lackey's own defeatism.

#### 5.

The necessity condition<sup>10</sup> Lackey takes aim at is one that applies to the modal account of luck that we considered at the outset:

MODAL ACCOUNT OF LUCK (MAL):

- (1) If an event is lucky, then it is an event that occurs in the actual world but which does not occur in a wide class of the nearest possible worlds where the relevant

<sup>10</sup> Lackey's intention of rejecting that the modal account of luck [MAL] captures conditions necessary for an event's being lucky should be distinguished from the recent projects of Juan Comesana (2005) and Chris Kelp (2008) who have rejected the idea that safety (which itself arises out of MAL) is a necessary condition for knowledge. While I've not been able to discuss each and every challenge to the modal account of luck and the safety condition it requires, a brief note concerning Comesana (2005) and Kelp (2008)—and in particular, why I didn't consider their particular challenges here—is for the reason that I think that Pritchard (2007b) in his paper "Safety-Based Epistemology: Whither Now?" gives a satisfactory reply to Kelp's Frankfurt-style objection, and that this objection was a stronger one than Comesana's.

initial conditions for that event are the same as they are in the actual world (Pritchard 2005, p. 128).

- (2) If an event is lucky, then it is an event that is significant to the agent concerned or would be significant, were the agent to be availed of the relevant facts (Pritchard 2005, p. 132).<sup>11</sup>

As a caveat, I should mention that I'm considering this objection now, rather than earlier, because I wanted to first motivate and defend the anti-luck project that arises out of MAL so that we have the right sort of perspective for assessing what's at stake if this account must be given up at the first stage.

Now, to be precise: Lackey's rejection of the necessity condition for MAL requires that she defend that an event can be lucky while, at the same time, *not being such* that it occurs in the actual world but not in a wide class of the nearest possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions for that event are the same as they are in the actual world. She tries to do this with her BURIED TREASURE case:

BURIED TREASURE (Lackey): Sophie, knowing that she had very little time left to live, wanted to bury a chest filled with all her earthly treasures on the island she inhabited. As she walked around trying to determine the best site for proper burial, her central criteria were, first that a suitable location must be on the northwest corner of the island—where she had spent many of her fondest moments in life—and, second, that it had to be a spot where rose bushes could flourish—since these were her favorite flowers. As it happens, there was only one particular patch of land on the northwest corner of the island where the soil was rich enough for roses to thrive. Sophie, being excellent at detecting such soil, immediately located this patch of land and buried her treasure, along with seeds for future roses to bloom, in the one and only spot that fulfilled her two criteria.

One month later, Vincent, a distant neighbor of Sophie's, was driving in the northwest corner of the island—which was also his most beloved place to visit—and was looking for a place to plant a rose bush in memory of his mother who had died 10 years earlier—since these were her favorite flowers. Being excellent at detecting the proper soil for rose bushes to thrive, he immediately located the same patch of land that Sophie had found 1 month earlier. As he began digging a hole for the bush, he was astonished to discover a buried treasure in the ground. (Lackey 2008: 7)

Lackey claims that Victor's discovery of the buried treasure is both (1) a lucky event, and (2) one that fails to count as such on Pritchard's modal account of luck. Therefore, she claims, Pritchard's account of luck does not specify conditions necessary for an event's being lucky.

Let's grant that Victor's discovery is a lucky event and take issue with Lackey's thought that MAL fails to count it as such. Her reasoning is that "Victor's discovering a buried treasure when he did is an event that not only occurs in the actual world, it also occurs in a wide class of the nearest possible worlds where the

<sup>11</sup> Lackey's description of MAL is in her 2008 "What Luck is Not" p. 9.

relevant initial conditions for such an event are the same as in the actual world.” (Lackey 2008: 7)

Now, given that the original account of safety (SP) is one Pritchard discarded for his preferred account (SP\*\*) which was able to deal with the conundrum raised by lottery propositions and the garbage chute case, we should note that this required us to amend the original account of the conditions under which luck undermines knowledge from LTB to LTB\*\*. Plausibly, the original account of lucky events will need to be amended also so that it stands in symmetry with the others.

MAL\*\* An event is lucky iff in most near-by possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions for the event are the same as in the actual world, and in *some very close* nearby possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions for the event are the same as in the actual world, the event doesn’t occur.

If we hold fixed Victor’s intentions and knowledge of rose-bush-thriving soil, and hold fixed as well Sophie’s intentions and soil-detecting abilities, Lackey is right to suppose that Victor’s discovery occurs in a wide class of nearest possible worlds. However, it remains true that there are some *very close* nearby worlds in which all of these things are held fixed and yet the event doesn’t occur. This much will be enough for MAL\*\* to count the event as lucky. In defense of this suggestion, just consider that even if we hold fixed all of the intentions and knowledge of soil that Lackey wants us to hold fixed, there are worlds *very close* to the actual world where, despite all that has been held fixed, Sophie buries her treasure in a slightly different spot just a few feet away—perhaps she’s had a momentary lapse of concentration. These worlds, as well as ones in which Victor digs a foot or so in the other direction, or is preoccupied or in a hurry, as ones that are both (1) very close to the actual world; and (2) not ones where he finds the treasure. And so, *even if* Victor finds the treasure in a wide class of possible worlds with the relevant initial conditions fixed, the event is nonetheless lucky so long as we can hold these same conditions fixed in very close nearby worlds where he fails to discover the treasure.

## 6.

Lackey supposes that *whimsical* events that are of significance to us constitute counterexamples to the thought that the two conditions of the MAL (the first of which we’re now replacing with MAL\*\*) are jointly sufficient for an event’s being lucky. For example, Lackey imagines a case where she, on a whim, decides to go to Paris, and that this turns out to be significant for her. She says that MAL counts this as a lucky event, although according to Lackey it’s not; “For even if my choosing to go to Paris for the weekend is based on a whim, I am still consciously choosing to perform this action and am, therefore, responsible for whatever consequences—either positive or negative—result from it.” (Lackey 2008: 14) Her thinking here reflects that she thinks that two features of case count against the whimsical trip to Paris being lucky: first, the fact that it is a product of conscious choice, and secondly, that she is responsible for whatever consequences result from it. We can respond to both of these suggestions: Abelard presumably made a conscious choice to introduce himself to Heloise, though this fact shouldn’t lead us to think that he was not lucky

to have met the love of his life—the direct result of this conscious choice. Similarly, a lottery winner’s decision to take the financial risk associated with playing is one by which she is responsible for “whatever consequences—positive or negative—that result from (her decision to gamble)” (Lackey 2008: 14) in a contest where she willingly incurs some risk for an opportunity for reward. After all, the bill for the ticket was mailed to her and so was the winning check. But this would does not prevent her win from being lucky. Thus, Lackey’s reasons for denying that whimsical events are lucky don’t hold up. And on top of that, it’s worth noting that we actually talk about whimsical events that turn out to be significant to us as lucky. For example, if I am soul seeking and just happen to grab a book that changes my outlook and gives me hope, I’d refer to the event of my having come across that book as lucky, even though I’ll admit it to be a result of my own choice and responsibility.

So ultimately, then, Lackey’s challenges to the necessity and sufficiency conditions of our modal account of luck fails to sufficiently cast doubt upon it. We saw that the worry expressed by BURIED TREASURE can be dealt with simply by adjusting our account of lucky events from MAL to MAL\*\* to bring it into symmetry with what Pritchard showed to be the most attractive formulation of safety, SP\*\* (and to which we also modified our account of knowledge-undermining luck LTB\*\*).

## 7.

At the end of the day, then, it looks like the attention given to the modal account of luck and the resources it offers for engaging in anti-luck epistemology are not without cause. It has satisfactory resources for meeting each of the three tasks of the anti-luck project, and I’ve shown that it is not undermined by recent objections that challenge the account at each of the three stages. This much I think motivates a safety condition on knowledge; however, I hesitate to draw the stronger conclusion which is that a safety condition can do ‘all the work’ within an analysis of knowledge. After all, the anti-luck intuition should be thought to stand alongside an equally compelling intuition about knowledge, which is that knowledge arises from ability. Does satisfying the anti-luck condition entail that the ability condition will be satisfied? It’s not at all clear that it would<sup>12</sup>; this much suggests that perhaps the most defensible account of knowledge will require an ability condition alongside a safety condition. Just how such an account would be developed, however, is an issue to be taken up elsewhere.

<sup>12</sup> For one thing, the satisfaction of an ability condition requires that cognitive successes be primarily attributable to an agent’s cognitive abilities—that a belief satisfy a modal safety condition is a matter that would be insensitive to this sort of attributability. For a belief to be safe, the relevant initial conditions simply need to be the sort that (held fixed) would yield true beliefs in nearby possible worlds. Safety could thus be satisfied even if the attributability of the success in the actual world isn’t primarily to an agent’s abilities but instead to some other feature of those initial conditions of the belief-forming process that get held fixed.

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