

## Robust Virtue Epistemology as Anti-Luck Epistemology: A New Solution

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*Abstract:* Robust Virtue Epistemology (RVE) maintains that knowledge is achieved just when an agent gets to the truth through, or because of, the manifestation of intellectual virtue or ability. A notorious objection to the view is that the satisfaction of the virtue condition will be insufficient to ensure the safety of the target belief; that is, RVE is no *anti-luck* epistemology. Some of the most promising recent attempts to get around this problem are considered and shown to ultimately fail. Finally, a new proposal for defending RVE as a kind of anti-luck epistemology is defended. The view developed here turns importantly on the idea that knowledge depends on ability and luck in a way that is gradient, not rigid, and that we know just when our cognitive success depends on ability not *rather*, but *more so*, than luck.

### §1. THE “GAP”

Virtue epistemologists of all stripes endorse at least a necessary condition on knowledge: *S* knows that *p* *only if* the correctness of *S*'s belief depends (sufficiently) on *S*'s cognitive ability<sup>1</sup>. But what are the conditions under which the correctness of *S*'s belief can be said to depend sufficiently on *S*'s cognitive ability? What is a cognitive ability? Different answers to these questions demarcate different virtue epistemologies.

Importantly, virtue epistemologists also disagree on the matter of whether this necessary condition on knowledge is also a sufficient condition. Following Pritchard here, let's call *modest virtue epistemology* the view that satisfying the virtue condition is necessary, but not sufficient, for knowledge, and *robust virtue epistemology*, the position that *S* knows that *p* *if and only if* the correctness of *S*'s belief depends (sufficiently) on *S*'s cognitive ability.

Robust virtue epistemology (RVE) is a theoretically elegant account of knowledge, one with a host of theoretical benefits, if it works<sup>2</sup>. But RVE has a notorious Achilles' heel. The

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<sup>1</sup> Though *virtue epistemology* is typically viewed as a particular approach to analysing knowledge (and <sup>2</sup> For one thing, proponents of RVE maintain that knowledge is *essentially* a cognitive achievement: a kind of success through ability. As many commentators have noted, this view has special resources for accounting for the *value* of knowledge: as the argument runs—achievements (successes through ability) are finally valuable, knowledge is a cognitive achievement, and so knowledge is finally valuable, and in a way that mere lucky successes are not. See here, for example, Greco (2010), Sosa (2009) and Pritchard (2010).

objection begins with the anti-luck insight<sup>3</sup>: if  $S$  knows that  $p$ , then  $S$  couldn't easily have been incorrect that  $p$ ; so, the conditions for knowledge must be ones that ensure that known beliefs are *safe* (e.g. couldn't easily have been incorrect). The conditions for knowledge specified by RVE provide no such assurance here; therefore, RVE is false.

The problem crystallizes when we consider, following Pritchard (e.g. 2005, 2007), that safety is a property a belief has just in case it is modally robust in the following sense: 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. If the conditions that must be satisfied for a belief to count as knowledge on a given theory entail safety, then, that theory of knowledge preserves the insight that, when  $S$  knows  $p$ ,  $S$  couldn't easily have been incorrect that  $p$ . *But how could a virtue condition specified by RVE ever ensure this?*

One concessionary strategy, pursued by Pritchard (2010; 2012) and Kelp (2012) is to retreat, in the face of this problem, to *modest virtue epistemology*, which, as Pritchard puts it “adds a codicil to the account of knowledge...and thereby make[s] the view Gettier-proof” (Pritchard 2010: 47). The codicil is just an extra condition on knowledge, a safety condition. Pritchard (2012) calls the resulting “dual-condition” view *anti-luck virtue epistemology*.

But why retreat? RVE is not only comparatively more elegant, but it also has—as many commentators have pointed out—resources not shared by the dual-condition view for accounting for the *value of knowledge*. I will not rehearse these arguments here. As Pritchard and Kelp see it, RVE (for all its promise) is an inadequate anti-luck epistemology because a certain *dilemma* prevents RVE from ever adequately ensuring the safety of beliefs that satisfy the virtue condition.

The dilemma can be summed up simply: if the virtue condition RVE relies on is strong enough to get the right result in barn facade cases (e.g. the result that the agent lacks knowledge), then it will be *too* strong to get the right result in default cases of testimonial knowledge acquisition, where knowledge is intuitively present despite the testimonial recipient's abilities seeming to play only a minor role in her believing correctly<sup>4</sup>. But, make the virtue condition weak enough to count these testimonial cases as knowledge, and then, implausibly, agents count as knowing in barn facade cases (and, hence, satisfying the virtue condition does *not* ensure the safety of the target belief).

While this dilemma does seem to pose a problem for RVE, the problem essentially concerns the *strength* of the virtue condition, but could also potentially threaten accounts that define knowledge in terms of some other condition. There is a more direct way to make the argument, which goes straight to the heart of the problem for RVE, specifically.

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<sup>3</sup> The classic view here is Pritchard's (2005). Cf. Riggs (2009) for a control-focused alternative to the modal account of epistemic luck, as well as Lackey (2008) for a criticism of both the standard modal account as well as the control account. Additionally, Madison (2011) offers a nice reply to some recent objections to the anti-luck insight as it stands to motivate a constraint on knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> See here, for example, Lackey (2007) and Pritchard (2010).

Consider that, on RVE, when one knows, this will be because a fact of the following form holds: an agent's believing correctly bears a certain relation to the abilities the agent manifests in forming the target belief. But, a fact of this sort will never itself *entail* that the target belief has the modal profile specified by safety. There is, as it were, a logical gap between the kinds of facts that would make the ability and luck conditions on knowledge satisfied. As Pritchard sees it, this is an intractable problem for RVE.

Just as *there is no formulation of the ability condition that can obviate the need for an anti-luck condition*, so there is no formulation of the anti-luck condition that can obviate the need for an ability condition (Pritchard 2010: 54, my italics).

Levin (2004) has also latched on to this worry. He considers that if RVE were to be an *anti-luck* epistemology, it could only be so if satisfying the virtue condition explains the belief's correctness in a way that can close the gap that leads Pritchard to think a separate anti-luck condition is needed. But, as Levin claims "The trouble is that there is no notion of explanation able to fill the gap" (Levin 2004: 401).

## §2. ENTAILMENT AND THE WRONG KIND OF FACT PROBLEM

It looks then like RVE faces what we can call the *Wrong Kind of Fact Problem*: unlike Pritchard's and Kelp's dilemma, which challenges the material adequacy of the virtue condition, the *Wrong Kind of Fact Problem* challenges RVE on a priori grounds: there is a logical gap between the kind of fact in virtue of which the ability condition would be satisfied and the kind of fact in virtue of which the safety condition would be satisfied. Effectively, then, the a priori argument against RVE maintains that RVE cannot in principle preserve a principle it *must* preserve if RVE is to succeed as an anti-luck epistemology. Call this principle ENTAILMENT.

ENTAILMENT: If the correctness of *S*'s belief depends (sufficiently) on *S*'s cognitive ability, then *p*'s safety is ensured.

Proponents of RVE have recognized that ENTAILMENT needs to be validated, but, as we've seen, this must involve, one way or another, tackling the *Wrong Kind of Fact Problem*.

Of course, the *Wrong Kind of Fact Problem* can be dodged by a proponent of RVE who bites the bullet and denies ENTAILMENT. Sosa (2009), in allowing for *apt* belief (animal knowledge) in cases (e.g. barn façade cases) where environmental luck undermines the safety of

the success, is committed to denying ENTAILMENT (even though Sosa maintains stronger conditions for *reflective knowledge*<sup>5</sup>).

But among proponents of RVE, Sosa is alone in this regard. Unfortunately, those who have tried to validate ENTAILMENT have run into (very different) problems. The most promising attempts here are Turri's and Greco's, and it will be instructive to see exactly *why* they've failed to validate ENTAILMENT.

### §3. TURRI ON ADEPTNESS AND AMPLITUDE

Turri (2011) takes as a starting point Sosa's "triple A" account of performance evaluation: a belief is *apt* for Sosa just in case it is accurate (true) *because* *adroit* (manifesting competence). Turri's (2011) move is to see Sosa's triple-A structure and raise him one.

"I suggest [performances] have a quadruple-A structure. To Sosa's three I add adeptness. A performance is adept just in case its succeeding manifests the agent's competence. For beliefs, adeptness is truth manifesting competence. I further propose that knowledge is adept belief" (Turri 2011: 7).

Turri proceeds to argue that, in Gettier cases, the truth of the agent's belief doesn't manifest competence. Accordingly, Turri takes himself to have solved the Gettier problem.

Now, as Pritchard has demonstrated in numerous works, Gettier cases come in two varieties: cases where *intervening* epistemic luck undermines the safety of the success (e.g. as in Russell's stopped clock case), and cases where *environmental* luck undermines the safety of the success (e.g. as in barn façade cases). Both intervening and environmental luck are instances of a more general kind of epistemic luck that is incompatible with knowledge—what Pritchard calls *veritic epistemic luck*. Now, the requirement that known beliefs are *safe* is nothing more than a statement of the incompatibility of knowledge and veritic luck. So a legitimate question for Turri's (2011) proposal is: does a belief's adeptness ensure its *safety*?

At this point, Turri meets with the *Wrong Kind of Fact Problem*. A belief is adept when the correctness of a belief stands in a certain relation (the manifesting relation) with an agent's competence. But as we saw, this is not the kind of fact that ensures the safety of a belief.

That said, in a more recent work, Turri (2012) explores a more promising proposal, one that (unlike his adeptness account) actually has all the resources needed to validate ENTAILMENT. Here's Turri:

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<sup>5</sup> For Sosa (2009, 2011), *reflective knowledge* can be understood as a kind of *meta-apt* belief—apt belief aptly held to be such. See Carter (2011) for a recent criticism.

Your belief is ample just in case its safety (not just its truth) manifests your competence... Call the outcome of an ample performance an *ample achievement*, and the view that knowledge is ample belief the *ample achievement account of knowledge* or AA+ for short..." (Turri 2012: 11)

This is a very clever move. Turri faces the *Wrong Kind of Fact Problem* head on. The wrong kind of fact, after all, was a fact made true just when an agent's believing correctly bears a certain relation to the abilities the agent manifests in forming the target belief. On Turri's AA+ view, notice that the ability condition is satisfied when a *different* kind of fact holds: one made true when the *safety* of an agent's belief bears a certain relation to the abilities the agent manifests in forming the belief. On this view, the *Wrong Kind of Fact Problem* dissolves. This is the right kind of fact to ensure safety; it does so trivially.

Although the AA+ account offers a straightforward avenue for defending ENTAILMENT, this avenue is closed off if AA+ is not independently plausible. And unfortunately, AA+ runs into a problem that, so far as I can tell, is fatal to the view.

The problem can be illustrated by considering a pair of cases, GOOD and BAD. BAD is the barn façade case. GOOD is the same case, only without the facades. Now suppose Henry (Goldman's protagonist in the barn façade case) could easily have turned down the road that leads to barn façade country, but (on a whim) does not, and so is in a good environment, wherein he forms his safe belief "There is a barn." Henry *knows* there is a barn, but the *safety* of his belief does not manifest his competence. His competence, after all, concerns his ability to recognize barns under normal circumstances. But this is not a competence at positioning himself *in* normal circumstances. That he is in a good rather than a bad environment—the crucial difference maker between what would be for him a safe and an unsafe belief, respectively—manifests not his ability to recognize barns in normal circumstances, nor indeed any ability we can attribute to him at all<sup>6</sup>. Beliefs can be safe, but safety cannot manifest abilities<sup>7</sup>.

The point generalizes as a skeptical problem. AA+ stipulates conditions for knowledge that aren't satisfiable, at least in ordinary cases of perceptual knowledge, when our experiential

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Pritchard (2005) on the point that *reflective luck* is an ineliminable feature of our epistemic situation. That we can't, through the abilities we have, tell we are not in the bad case (simply by relying on the cognitive resources at our disposal) suggests it will never—at least in the perceptual case—be *entirely down to our abilities* when we count as knowing. Compare here Wittgenstein's remark in *On Certainty* that "It is always by favour of Nature that one knows something." As I'll go on to suggest, though, the recognition that knowledge depends to some *degree* on luck is benign insofar as it would appear to threaten skepticism. More plausibly, what would threaten skepticism is the converse suggestion: that knowledge *cannot* depend to any degree on luck.

<sup>7</sup> If it could, then consider that an implication is that the matter of whether we are in a good environment rather than a bad environment is subject to our control. If it that were so, then, *pave* McDowell (1994), the Argument from Illusion can easily be set aside (and without endorsing disjunctivism or factive reasons). We simply say that the knowers, in the good case, have some *ability* to distinguish the good case from the bad case, and *ipso facto*, it follows that there will not be, in principle, relative to the subject's epistemic standing, a possible bad case for every good case. But the fact that there is just the problem of Cartesian skepticism (however one wishes to respond to it.)

condition is compatible with the unsafety of the formed belief. Unfortunately, though, a move like Turri's here, in which the virtue condition trivially implies safety, looked very much like the only obvious way to circumvent the *Wrong Kind of Fact Problem*.

#### §4. GRECO

But Turri's view is *not* the only way to get around the *Wrong Kind of Fact Problem*. Another way to do so would be to (i) *grant* that a fact specifying that some relation holds between a belief's correctness and the agent's abilities would not, *by itself*, ensure safety, while (ii) maintaining that, *in conjunction with some other fact*, it would; and (iii) that that further fact holds. It won't be immediately obvious that this is Greco's strategy, but in fact, this is precisely his strategy.

As Greco (2012) says "In cases of knowledge, true belief is no mere lucky success; rather, *S*'s believing the truth is attributable to the exercise of ability" (Greco 2012: 2) Now, Greco has given two notable accounts of the attribution relation. His previous (2008, 2010) view cashed out this relation in terms of *causal-explanatory salience*: roughly, *S*'s getting to the truth is primarily creditable to *S*'s cognitive abilities just in case *S*'s abilities are a salient part of the causal explanation for *S*'s believing truly. His new view takes a different tack: "A success is attributable to *S*'s ability just in case *S*'s ability contributes to that success in the right way, where 'in the right way' means 'in a way that would regularly serve relevant purposes'" (Greco 2012: 14).

Now, notice that neither of these hits upon the right kind of fact, and so Greco faces the *Wrong Kind of Fact Problem*. But Greco has an ace up his sleeve—a *further fact* which, along with *either* of these accounts of the attribution relation, is supposed to ensure safety. The further fact is a kind of assumption implicit in his thinking, both earlier and more recently. For Greco, when the safety of beliefs is undermined, *luck* is the salient contributor to the success, trumping what he calls the *default salience* of one's abilities, but (and here's the fact): When one's abilities are salient (or, contribute to the success in the right way) *vis-à-vis* the success, however, then it will follow that luck is not.

Putting the assumption more simply: if the success is down to ability, then it's not down to luck, and vice versa. Now, if *this* fact holds, then notice that, from the satisfaction of the ability condition we can deduce the safety of the belief. Call this further fact doing the work here CONTRARIETY: the attribution of a success to ability is *incompatible* with the attribution of that success to luck.

There is some intuitive pull to CONTRARIETY. It is tempting to frame questions for the form: "Did *S*'s coming to believe *p* truly depend on skill *or* on luck?" Even more, Greco is right in thinking that, in canonical cases of knowledge, it's true both that agents' correctness is down to ability and, additionally, not down to luck in a way that is incompatible with knowledge (e.g. unsafe). That said, it turns out that CONTRARIETY is false.

§5. CONTRARIETY VERSUS GRADIENCE

CONTRARIETY, despite its initial appeal, represents an overly rigid and ultimately mistaken approach to thinking about the gradient relationship between luck and ability, as the correctness of our beliefs stands subject to them.

To see the main problem facing CONTRARIETY, let's consider several versions of a basic perceptual case<sup>8</sup>. Suppose Phil is an avid golfer and knows that a 5-iron has fewer degrees of loft than a 9-iron, and accordingly, (as Figure 1 shows), that the face of a 5-iron will look different (e.g. more vertical) than the face of a 9-iron.

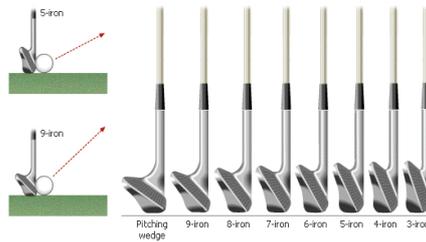


Figure 1: 5-iron versus 9-iron

Consider the following two perceptual cases. In each case, a five-iron is held up (in broad daylight) next to a nine-iron and Phil is asked to tell which is which.

PERCEPTION-CLOSE: Phil is 10 feet away. He correctly distinguishes the two clubs.

PERCEPTION-FAR: Phil is 200 feet away. He correctly distinguishes the two clubs.

In PERCEPTION-CLOSE, Phil's ability to distinguish between the two clubs allows him to easily discern the five-iron from the nine-iron. In PERCEPTION-FAR, while he knows full well what a five-iron looks like and what a nine-iron looks like, this goes nowhere toward his getting it right, as the clubs are too far away for him to tell which club has what he knows to be 9-iron properties and which has what he knows to be 5-iron properties. He guesses correctly.

Now with reference to CONTRARIETY, we may grant that Greco will be right to say that in PERCEPTION-CLOSE, the correctness of Phil's belief depends on ability and not luck, and in PERCEPTION-FAR, luck but not ability. But CONTRARIETY is in tension with an obvious datum: often, cases will be intermediate. Let PERCEPTION-CLOSE<sub>+1</sub> be a case just like PERCEPTION-CLOSE, but in which we add a foot to the distance between Phil and the clubs

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<sup>8</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting further clarification on the problems for the principle Greco appeals to, and how the balance principle avoids them.

such that Phil is now 11 feet away. We can continue, adding “+1” iterations, until we get to PERCEPTION-FAR, where it was stipulated that Phil’s correctness depends on luck, and not ability. The intuition I want to explore, and to which Greco’s proposal is insensitive, is that: with each iteration closer to PERCEPTION-FAR, the correctness of Phil’s belief depends *more* on luck than the correctness of Phil’s belief in PERCEPTION-CLOSE. Of course, Greco’s proposal is incompatible with this observation.

It is evident, with reference to the spectrum of intermediate cases, that safe beliefs aren’t all equally safe, just as unsafe beliefs are not all equally unsafe. Indeed, for two correct beliefs, *A* and *B*, where *A* and *B* are *ex hypothesi* primarily creditable to my cognitive ability, my ability might play a more substantial role in my believing *A* correctly than in my believing *B* correctly. *Mutatis mutandis* for luck. In the default case, the correctness of a belief depends to *some* degree on ability, and to *some* degree on luck (as will be the case in many intermediate cases between PERCEPTION-CLOSE and PERCEPTION-FAR)—an observation that is in obvious tension with CONTRARIETY. The right question then is not Greco’s—*viz.*, *whether* my getting it right depends on luck *or* ability, but rather, *where this dependence stands in the balance*.

But if this is right, then, when evaluating a belief as a candidate for knowledge, what we should be contrasting is the *extent to which* the success of one’s cognitive efforts depends on luck, with the *extent to which* it depends on ability. Put differently: what we should be interested in is whether the agent’s correctness depends on ability *more so* than it depends on luck. Where as Greco’s proposal is committed to rejecting a presupposition of this question (by rejecting that a belief’s correctness can depend on both ability and luck), I suggest we embrace the idea and in the next section will try to develop it further.

## §6. A NEW SOLUTION

Rather than to say (*a la* CONTRARIETY) that the attribution of a success to ability precludes the attribution of that success to luck, let’s instead endorse a preclusion principle according to which what’s precluded, by primarily attributing a cognitive success to one’s cognitive ability, is that that success depends on luck *as much*, or *more*, than that success depends on one’s ability. Call such a principle the *balance principle*:

BALANCE: If the correctness of *S*’s belief that *p* depends (sufficiently) on *S*’s cognitive ability, then it depends on *S*’s ability *more so* than luck that *S*’s belief that *p* is true.

BALANCE, unlike Greco’s CONTRARIETY, is not at tension with the insight that our beliefs (including our knowledge) can be more or less safe, and more or less unsafe. So that’s a start. But, is BALANCE a background fact that will jointly (with the satisfaction of the virtue

condition—the antecedent of BALANCE) entail the safety of a belief? If so, then the *Wrong Kind of Fact problem* can be avoided, and we'll have opened an avenue for defending ENTAILMENT.

I want to now offer such an argument: from BALANCE to ENTAILMENT<sup>9</sup>.

- (1) BALANCE: If the correctness of  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  depends (sufficiently) on  $S$ 's cognitive ability, then it depends on  $S$ 's ability *moreso* than luck that  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is true.

Now, just as safety is represented in terms of possible worlds, we can also represent (with reference to comparative closeness of worlds) the dependence of a belief's correctness on ability *moreso* than luck, by specifying that worlds where the deliverances of the abilities employed the actual world couldn't easily have generated false beliefs are closer to the actual world than worlds where (again, holding fixed the abilities  $S$  employs in the actual world)  $S$  believes falsely. And so:

- (2) It depends on  $S$ 's ability *moreso* than luck that  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is true just in case worlds in which  $S$ 's abilities employed in the actual world couldn't easily have led  $S$  to a false belief about whether or not  $p$  are closer to the actual world than worlds where, holding these abilities fixed,  $S$  forms a false belief about whether or not  $p$ .

To get from (1) and (2) to ENTAILMENT, we need a premise that (as previously mentioned) states that, when a belief's correctness depends on ability *moreso* than luck, that this ensures the appropriate safety of the target belief. And so:

- (3) If worlds in which  $S$ 's abilities employed in the actual world couldn't easily have led  $S$  to a false belief about whether or not  $p$  are closer to the actual world than worlds where, holding these abilities fixed,  $S$  forms a false belief about whether or not  $p$ , then  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is appropriately safe.

From (1-3), we get:

- (4) ENTAILMENT: If the correctness of  $S$ 's belief depends (sufficiently) on  $S$ 's cognitive ability, then  $p$ 's safety is ensured.

And from (4), we can defend RVE as anti-luck epistemology by making the ability condition the knowledge condition:

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<sup>9</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggestions that have led to a more concise presentation of this section.

- (5) ANTI-LUCK RVE:  $S$  knows that  $p$  iff the correctness of  $S$ 's belief depends (sufficiently) on  $S$ 's cognitive ability.

If this argument is successful, then, *contra* Kelp and Pritchard, *we don't need* an additional anti-luck codicil in addition to a virtue condition after all. And *contra* Levin, the virtue condition actually *can* be made to sufficiently close the gap (as we bypass the *Wrong Kind of Fact Problem*.) Even more, no less than Greco, Sosa, Turri and Zagzebski, we can help ourselves to the elegant position that knowledge is, *essentially*, a cognitive success connected in the right way to the agent's cognitive ability—*viz.* that knowledge is essentially a kind of cognitive achievement.

#### §7. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

We defended the plausibility of (1)—*viz.* BALANCE—by way of pointing out the problems with CONTRARIETY. Premise (2) is just the modal representation of the consequent of the conditional already affirmed by BALANCE. Premise (3) however needs some further defence.

Premise (3) claims that the modal profile of beliefs such that their correctness depends on ability more so than luck (i.e. the modal profile articulated in (2)) will be in effect a modal profile that ensures the appropriate safety of the belief.

One somewhat ham-fisted way to defend Premise (3) would be to argue that (3) is in fact trivially entailed by a plausible account of the conditions under which knowledge is incompatible with luck, and then to define these conditions not in terms of Pritchard's veritic luck, but rather, in terms of failing to satisfy the modal profile specified in (2).

This isn't the strategy I aim to pursue. After all, Pritchard's modal representation of safety (e.g. 2005, 2007) seems to get the right results across a range of cases, and this is what lends it its plausibility. Accordingly, a more modest strategy for defending (3), then, will be to show that the modal profile of beliefs as articulated in (2) seems to do as well as safety across a range of cases. We can then say that these modal profile requirements do similar work. And for the purposes of defending (3), that's all that's needed.

And what better test at this stage than to turn now to the dilemma concerning barn façade cases and testimonial cases that Pritchard and Kelp take to show that a virtue condition couldn't preserve safety (and, thus, that an additional safety codicil is needed). To put our new brand of anti-luck RVE to the test against the dilemma, let's first look at the barn façade case, and consider whether getting the right result here (e.g. that the agent lacks knowledge) involves the endorsement of a condition so strong that recipients of testimonial knowledge (in normal circumstances) fail to satisfy it.

Of course, this *first* involves showing that we do indeed get the right result in barn façade cases (where the luck at play is environmental<sup>10</sup>). A natural way to demonstrate this will have us (like virtue epistemologists often do) abstract from the epistemic case to a case of archery. The archery analogue to the barn façade case will be a case where our hero, Archie, hits a target he aims at, though unbeknownst to him, it is the lone target in the field that is not protected by arrow-blocking forcefields<sup>11</sup>. That the shot Archie fires in the actual world is successful depends on Archie’s ability moreso than luck just in case worlds where (holding fixed Archie’s abilities) he couldn’t easily have intended to succeed and failed, are closer to the actual world than worlds where, holding fixed Archie’s abilities, he intends to succeed and fails<sup>12</sup>. But clearly they’re not. The closer worlds here are ones where, holding fixed his archery abilities employed in the actual world, he shoots and misses (thanks to one of the many forcefields). The same explanation applies *mutatis mutandis* in the barn façade case. The correctness of Henry’s belief *<There is a barn>* is not due to Henry’s ability moreso than luck because worlds where, doxastically, he fires and misses are closer than worlds where, holding fixed the perceptual abilities he employs, he couldn’t easily have (doxastically) fired and missed.

Now: does this explanation betray a condition so strong that it’s not satisfied in normal cases of testimonial knowledge acquisition? Consider a normal case of testimonial acquisition, whereby a speaker tells a hearer directions, and the hearer has no undefeated defeaters (e.g. no reason to think the speaker is confused or intending to deceive). Intuitively, this is a case of knowledge. Now, the reason such a case is notorious for RVE proponents to get right is that the agent’s abilities don’t seem to contribute much. As Lackey (2007) and Pritchard (2010, 2012) have suggested, if anything, we seem inclined to credit the speaker’s abilities, not the hearer’s. Fair enough. On my proposal, we can concede this observation to Lackey and Pritchard. Abilities needn’t play any particularly salient role in explaining the hearer’s success—*just a comparatively greater role than is played by luck*.

Whereas Lackey and Pritchard framed their argument by comparing the role the hearer’s abilities play in the hearer’s success with the role the *speaker’s* abilities play (and suggest, I think plausibly, that the speaker’s role is primarily creditable, when framed this way), my view can afford to remain silent on this comparison; the hearer counts as knowing so long as the correctness of the hearer’s belief depends on the hearer’s abilities moreso than it does on *luck*, and this will be the case so long as worlds where the (given the abilities employed in the actual

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<sup>10</sup> Pritchard has, in a number of recent works (e.g. 2010, 2012), argued that cognitive achievement is present in cases where environmental epistemic luck undermines the safety of the target belief, and given that knowledge is incompatible with environmental luck, knowledge and cognitive achievement come apart. Perhaps this is right if we follow (as Pritchard does) the causal-salience line on the attribution relation (e.g. Greco 2008). However, cognitive achievement need not be compatible with environmental luck, *per se*. See Carter (2013) and Jarvis (2012) for some recent arguments to the effect that cognitive achievement can be understood in a way that leaves them incompatible with knowledge-undermining environmental luck.

<sup>11</sup> The forcefield example is Pritchard’s (2010).

<sup>12</sup> See Carter (2013) for a more detailed discussion of this case.

world) the hearer's uptake of the speaker's testimony results in a true belief are closer than worlds where the hearer trusts the speaker (holding fixed the circumstances) and believes falsely.

There are any number of ways to defend this point. We could point to the good reasons reductivists tell us we have to accept testimony in the default case, or we could gesture to arguments non-reductivists give us for why we have a default entitlement to accept testimony. Moreover, as Faulkner (2011) has recently suggested, the norms of trust that have been internalized in our communicative practices provide us epistemic reasons to rely on a speaker's testimony in normal circumstances, and we simply *wouldn't have* such reasons (or, for non-reductionists, such entitlements) if normal cases of testimonial exchange had a subverted modal profile: where (given the abilities we normally employ in the uptake of testimony), the worlds where we believe safely are *further* away than the worlds where we (employing these same abilities) believe falsely.

Finally, one might argue that "Temp" cases are worrying for the proposed view. The Temp case runs as follows:

TEMP: Temp forms his beliefs about the temperature in the room by consulting a thermometer. His beliefs, so formed, are highly reliable, in that any belief he forms on this basis will always be correct. Moreover, he has no reason for thinking that there is anything amiss with his thermometer. But the thermometer is in fact broken, and is fluctuating randomly within a given range. Unbeknownst to Temp, there is an agent hidden in the room who is in control of the thermostat whose job it is to ensure that every time Temp consults the thermometer the reading on the thermometer corresponds to the temperature in the room (2012: 260).

Temp's belief here is safe, though it falls short of knowledge as, intuitively, the safety here seems disconnected from Temp's ability. Pritchard thinks this case indicates that satisfying a safety condition is insufficient, in the absence of satisfying a further ability condition, for knowledge.

Since it is *prima facie* a bad result to have to count the TEMP case as a case of knowledge, I should be clear why the view proposed here does not do so. The reason is simple: it is not the case that the correctness of Temp's belief depends sufficiently on ability—*viz.*, on Temp's ability *more so* than on luck. I agree that Temp's abilities have little to nothing to do with his getting the right result. The only assumption being made here is that the agent's abilities do not *include* anything the hidden jokester does. (Not even a proponent of the extended mind hypothesis would go so far<sup>13</sup>). But given that they do not, we have a case where—*even though* the target belief couldn't easily have been false—and so will satisfy most orthodox modal safety conditions—it remains that the belief does not depend on ability *more so* than on luck (as the correctness of the target belief plausibly depends on ability here not at all<sup>14</sup>.)

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<sup>13</sup> After all, Temp and the hidden jokester do not form anything that resembles a "coupled system"; Temp cannot rely on the jokester for the reason that he is not aware that the jokester is present.

<sup>14</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this issue.

## §8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Robust virtue epistemology, if it is to be a *bona fide* anti-luck epistemology, must ensure, through the ability condition, the appropriate safety of those beliefs that count as knowledge. This is essentially the requirement that RVE defend what I've called ENTAILMENT. The *Wrong Kind of Fact Problem* poses a serious problem for RVE insofar as it aims to defend ENTAILMENT: this is because a fact specifying that the agent's believing correctly bears a certain relation to the abilities the agent manifests in forming the target belief will not, by itself, *entail* that the target belief has the modal profile specified by safety.

We saw that one way around this, *ala* Turri, is to convert the wrong kind of fact into the right kind of fact, by making safety *what it is* that's creditable to abilities, when the ability condition is satisfied. But, it was shown that this move welcomes skepticism.

The other way to address to address the *Wrong Kind of Fact Problem* was to identify some *further fact* which, jointly with the satisfaction of the virtue condition, ensures the safety of the target belief.

But, as we saw, RVE can't pursue this strategy by simply assuming a background condition to the effect that correctness of a belief depends on ability *or* on luck (and so, when depending on ability, then *ipso facto* not on luck). First, as we saw, such a condition itself is true only if the ability condition already (trivially) entails safety, and this simply begs the question against the requirement to defend ENTAILMENT (*viz.* that satisfying the ability condition ensures the safety of the target belief). But, additionally, this kind of background "contrariety" principle is at odds with the important sense in which our knowledge depends on ability and luck gradiently, so that our beliefs are often more or less safe, and more or less unsafe. And this insight rationalized the importance of asking not *whether* an agent's correctness depends on ability or luck, but rather, whether the agent's correctness depends on ability *more so* than luck.

The approach I've defended here takes this gradient insight as a starting point for defending RVE as anti-luck epistemology. The view that when a belief owes sufficiently to ability, then it does not owe to luck has been rejected in favour of a more plausible principle that captures this gradient relationship: The position advanced is that, if the correctness of *S*'s belief that *p* depends (sufficiently) on *S*'s cognitive ability, then *it depends on S's ability more so than luck that S's belief that p is true*. I've shown how, from this insight, we can (with further premises) defend the ENTAILMENT thesis, and in doing so, defend RVE as a kind of *bona fide* anti-luck epistemology.

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