On Luck and Significance

Luck is typically defined in terms of two necessary and jointly sufficient conditions: significance and chance. A commendable literature has arisen on the nature of luck, but most of this work focuses on luck's chanciness condition,[1] which has been explicated in terms of modal fragility, the absence of control, and probabilistically.[2] My focus in this paper is on luck's significance condition. Significance is important. Depending on how one conceives of luck's significance condition, the same event could end up being lucky or non-lucky, a matter of good luck or bad luck, or lucky to different degrees.

There are two claims about luck and significance that receive almost universal support in the literature. First, nearly everyone accepts the following generic account of significance:

> *Significance*: An event, matter of fact, or state of affairs, E, is significant for a subject, S, only if E is in some way good or bad for S.

This account is impartial in two ways. First, it does not demarcate what type of subjects can be the bearer of a significant event. Can events (for example, a house fire or an economic boon) only be significant for sentient persons or can events also be good or bad for different kinds of animals, comatose persons, plants, robots, paintings, and rocks?[3] Second, this account does not explain what it means for an event to be good or bad for a subject. Luck theorists have answered this question

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[1] Exceptions include Ballantyne (2012), Whittington (2016), and Ballantyne and Kampa (2019).

[2] Pritchard (2005; 2014), Church (2013), and Carter and Peterson (2017) each defend different versions of the modal account. Riggs (2009) and Broncano-Berrocal (2015) argue for sophisticated versions of the lack of control account. Rescher (1995; 2014), Steglich-Petersen (2010; 2020), McKinnon (2013; 2014), and Stoutenburg (2015; 2019) are probability theorists. There are also hybrid accounts that define the chanciness element in lucky cases via multiple conditions, for example, the lack of control and modal fragility or the lack of control and infrequency within a reference group, see Latus (2003), Coffman (2007; 2014), Levy (2011, p. 36), and Peels (2017, p. 202).

[3] For relevant discussion, see Rescher (1995, pp. 7-8), Coffman (2007, p. 387), Ballantyne (2012), and Ballantyne and Kampa (2019).

in terms of subjective interests (Pritchard and Smith 2004, p. 19), informed or reflected upon desires (Pritchard 2005, p. 132; Stoutenburg 2015; Stoutenburg 2019), evaluative status or well-being (Rescher 1995, pp. 7-8; Coffman 2007, p. 288), and objective and subjective interests (Ballantyne 2012, p. 331).

Second, nearly everyone in the literature accepts the following restriction concerning lucky events:

> *Significance condition*: An event, matter of fact, or state of affairs is a matter of luck only if it is significant.

The focus of this paper is on whether this condition is true. In Sect. 1, I recapitulate three arguments commonly given in support of the significance condition. In Sect. 2, I recapitulate Garrett's (2013) and Pritchard's (2014; 2019) responses to these arguments. Garrett and Pritchard argue not only that the significance condition is false but that we need to "drop the significance condition on luck altogether" and that "the very idea of adding a significance condition to … luck is wrongheaded" (Pritchard 2021; Pritchard 2014, p. 604). In Sect. 3, I argue that Garrett's and Pritchard's arguments fail in that they inadequately characterize what significance is. In Sect. 4, I recapitulate Milburn's (2014) claim that we have been mistakenly viewing lucky events in terms of whether they are lucky for a subject. According to Milburn, there are lucky events that involve a subject but are not significant for any subject. Thus, not all lucky events are significant. The thought is that it could be a matter of luck how many blades of grass there are on the quad even if the answer to this question is not significant for any subject. In Sect. 5, I argue that it is not obvious that instances of subject-involving luck are lucky. Instead, the appellation 'chancy' may be more fitting. However, this objection is not definitive.

My view is that luck does require a significance condition but not for the reasons typically thought. I argue in Sect. 6 and Sect. 7 that we should view luck as a genus and that there are

different species of luck that fall under this genus. These different species of luck are all part of the same genus in that they are chancy and significant, but what separates them as unique species is that they are significant for subjects in different ways. For example, winning the lottery is lucky in so far as it is chancy and affects one's well-being, but it need not be epistemically or morally lucky. Having true belief in a Gettier case is chancy and epistemically significant, but it need not affect one's well-being or moral status. Lastly, depending on one's views on morality, one could be morally lucky without such luck affecting one's well-being or beliefs. This taxonomy is advantageous in that it captures our intuitions concerning different kinds of luck and chance. Furthermore, although this view is compatible with the generic account of significance defined above, it is not made explicit in the literature. This has led to a lot of confusion about the nature of luck and its role in various philosophical debates.

1. Three arguments in favor of the significance condition

There are three arguments commonly given in favor of the significance condition. First, it seems odd or strange to think of genuinely chancy but non-significant events as lucky. This oddness objection has numerous supporters.[4] Witness Levy:

> an event or state of affairs can count as lucky only if it is significant. It may be genuinely chancy how many hairs fall out of my head today. It may even be metaphysically chancy ... whether I have an odd or an even number of hairs on my head at 12 noon. Nevertheless, it would be *strange* to say that it is a matter of luck (2011, p. 13, emphasis added)

> It seems to me *odd*, to say the least, to say that I am lucky to find that the coin I just drew out of my pocket came out tail first. This event would be lucky, it seems to me, only if something rode on it (I had a bet with someone, or what have you). (2011, p. 13, footnote 2, emphasis added)

[4] This objection originates from Rescher (1995, p. 32) and Pritchard (2005, pp. 132-133).

Levy's reasoning is as follows. First, come up with an example that is chancy but not significant. Is such an event lucky? Intuitively, such events are non-lucky. It would be rather odd or strange and a violation of our folk conception about luck to claim that non-significant events can be lucky. However, if you add to the case that the event is significant, we no longer withhold from describing the case as lucky. Thus, an event is a matter of luck only if it is significant.

A second, related argument holds that luck is necessarily either good or bad (Coffman 2007, p. 386; Whittington 2016, p. 1616). It is true that the word 'luck' is ambiguous regarding value judgments.[5] If one states that "it is a matter of luck that E", then we do not know if E is good or bad for any subject. However, we naturally distinguish between two types of luck (that is, good and bad), and it is usually contextually obvious which type of luck one is referencing. Furthermore, while it might be unclear whether at a certain time a chancy event has a positive, negative, or neutral effect, this is an epistemological problem and not a reason to think that luck involving claims can be non-significant. For example, we might not know at first whether Smith's lottery win is a matter of good or bad luck if we do not know whether he will use his winnings to pay off his debts or refuel his deleterious drug habit. But regardless of this epistemological nuisance, this event must be in some way be good or bad for Smith or another subject for it to be a matter of luck. If this is right, then one could give the following value-based argument in favor of the significance condition:

1) Luck is necessarily either good or bad.
2) A significance condition is the only way to tell whether an event involves good luck or bad luck.
3) Thus, luck has a significance condition.

[5] For an etymological discussion of 'luck', see Rescher (1995, pp. 6-12).

There is a third argument—call this the degrees of luck argument—that is given in favor of the significance condition. Everyone acknowledges that luck is a scalar notion.[6] Some events (for example, being the sole survivor of a plane crash) are luckier than others (for example, winning two dollars at bingo). One way in which luck admits of degrees is via its chanciness condition. Other things being equal, one is luckier to win lottery A compared to lottery B if one is less likely to win lottery A compared to lottery B.[7] But significance can also affect degrees of luck. Whittington (2016) gives the following example:

> imagine two equally sized fair lotteries. In the first lottery, the winner receives $10. In the second, the winner receives $1 million. Intuitively, it seems as if the winner of the second lottery has been luckier than the winner of the first. Yet the odds are equal for both and the lack of control [or whatever type of chanciness one prefers] is equal for both. The only way to explain the difference is to cite the difference in significance. The winner of the second lottery is now significantly financially better off than the winner of the first. (p. 1618)

If this is right, then a significance condition is necessary to fully capture a general feature of luck, that is, that luck is scalar.[8]

2. Pritchard's and Garrett's replies

Pritchard directly addresses the claim that it would be odd to view non-significant but chancy events as lucky. He admits that adding a significance condition "certainly helps the account to match up with our ascriptions of luck, since we don't of course ascribe the property of luck to insignificant events, regardless of their modal profile" (2019, p. 117). But he holds that we generally do not ascribe any properties to insignificant events for an obvious reason, that is, because they are insignificant and we do not care about them. Nonetheless, insignificant events

[6] For discussion, see Church (2013), Pritchard (2014, p. 600), Whittington (2016, pp. 1617-1618), and Broncano-Berrocal (2016).
[7] This "less likely" clause could be spelled out modally, probabilistically, or in terms of control.
[8] Whittington (2016, p. 1618) also gives a second example that shows that significance, itself, admits of degrees and that placing a minimum threshold condition on significance is insufficient.

have many properties independent of how people perceive them, for example, they can be lucky. Along these lines, Pritchard writes:

> we shouldn't expect an account of the metaphysics of lucky events to be responsive to such subjective factors as whether an event is the kind of thing that people care about enough *to regard as* lucky. That's just not part of the load that a metaphysical account of luck should be expected to carry. (2014, p. 604, emphasis original)

Pritchard's argument seems to be as follows. People do tend to think of insignificant but chancy events as non-lucky. However, such folk ascriptions of luck are irrelevant; luck as a metaphysical and objective phenomenon is not concerned with subjective factors such as significance. Thus, the fact that an event is insignificant in no way prevents it from being a genuinely lucky event. What matters is if the event is modally fragile.

Pritchard also directly addresses the value-based argument, and his response could be used to rebut the degrees of luck argument:

> There is a related issue in the vicinity regarding the distinction between good and bad luck. Our practices of luck ascription obviously distinguish between the two, and so one might antecedently expect a theory of luck to incorporate an account of this distinction. But as with the significance condition, I think it would be a mistake to try to build a distinction between good and bad luck [or degrees of goodness or badness] into a metaphysical account of the nature of a lucky event. This distinction instead concerns our subjective responses to lucky events, and is not an inherent feature of lucky events themselves. More generally, our interest ought to be luck as an objective feature of events, which means that we should be wary about drawing too many conclusions from agents' subjective judgements about luck. (2014, p. 604)

Garrett similarly holds that "It doesn't follow that because good luck and bad luck require significance to some person that luck itself does" (2013, p. 214). Garrett illustrates this point by an analogy between the concept of luck and the concept of dog. Whether a dog is a good dog or a bad dog is defined in terms of human needs. However, whether an object is a dog does not depend on such subjective factors. The same holds for lucky events. An event that is chancy and is of positive significance for someone is lucky for that person, and an event that is chancy and is of

negative significance for someone is unlucky for that person. However, whether an event, itself, is a matter of luck does not depend on whether it is lucky or unlucky for a subject.

3. A response to Pritchard and Garrett

Pritchard's and Garrett's views involve a similar line of reasoning:

1) There is an important distinction between *real* versus *apparent* luck.[9] In cases of real luck, whatever conditions are necessary and jointly sufficient for an event's being a matter of luck are assessed objectively, that is, as they actually are. In cases of apparent luck, whatever conditions are necessary and jointly sufficient for an event's being a matter of luck are assessed subjectively, that is, in terms of how a subject (perhaps mistakenly) thinks them to be.[10]

2) Although references to apparent luck are common in our everyday lives and this phenomenon is of interest to psychologists, anthropologists, and cognitive scientists, philosophers are ultimately concerned with real luck, that is, luck as an objective, mind-independent property.

3) An event is significant only if it "is the kind of thing that people care about enough *to regard as* [significant]" but such "subjective responses [are] … not an inherent feature of lucky events themselves" (2014, p. 604, emphasis original).

4) Therefore, any account of luck that contains a significance condition is not concerned with instances of real luck and, as such, is not of philosophical interest.

I agree with Pritchard that there is a meaningful distinction between real versus apparent luck, and some philosophers in the luck literature have advocated for subjectivist accounts of significance. Here are some examples:

> If an outcome is lucky, then it is an outcome that is significant to the agent concerned [luck's] ... very existence … depends upon the significance that the agent attaches to the event in question (Pritchard and Smith 2004, pp. 18-19)

[9] This distinction was first made by Rescher (1995, p. 78). Pritchard uses the words 'metaphysical' or 'objective' instead of 'real' and the word 'subjective' instead of 'apparent'.

[10] If luck involves more than one necessary condition (for example, significance and chance), then if any of the conditions are assessed subjectively then the kind of luck at play is apparent. A problem with Pritchard's response is that his own modal account of luck is subjective. On this point, see Hill (2022).

> 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)
>
> Event E is significant to some degree for S if and only if, upon minimal reflection, S would value E's occurring (Stoutenburg 2019, p. 5105)

These accounts are subjectivist in that they define significance in terms of what a subject either values or would value if availed of the relevant facts.

A strong case can also be made in support of premise 2) as subjectivist accounts of luck are vulnerable to three objections. First, Ballantyne (2012, pp. 328-329) argues that subjectivist accounts lead to a kind of relativism in that they allow for the luckiness of an event to change based on a subject's perspective. If this is right, then it is hard to see how such accounts could be used to solve any luck-related philosophical problems. Second, subjectivist accounts are open to two types of counterexamples. For one, they (I think wrongly) rule out the possibility that an event can be significant for a subject who is incapable of appreciating his or her good or bad luck—examples of which include animals and infants.[11] Subjectivist accounts also cannot account for the fact that a person can be mistaken about the significance of an event even when availed of the relevant facts. For example, even when apprised of the relevant facts, a businessperson or rock star might deny the significance of a lucky break early on in his or her career and wrongly believe that he or she would have been successful regardless.[12] Lastly, as Ballantyne (2012, p. 330) argues, subjectivist accounts are vulnerable to a kind of Euthyphro problem. Suppose S believes that an event is of positive significance for her, and her belief is true. What makes S's belief true? Is it true because S believes that the event is significant for her or because this event is in some way

[11] See Coffman (2007, p. 387), Ballantyne (2012), and Ballantyne and Kampa (2019) for such counterexamples.

[12] See Ballantyne's (2012, p. 322) Rex example and Whittington (2016, p. 1617) for further discussion.

good for S? The former is parasitic on the latter, which is the actual truth maker for the significance of the event.

But, while a compelling case can be made in favor of premises 1) and 2), premise 3) is false. This premise holds that questions about significance depend on the perceptions or preferences of a subject. If this was the only way to conceive of significance, then Pritchard's and Garrett's arguments would be sound. However, significance can also be defined objectively. According to the objectivist, the significance of an event for a subject, S, does not necessarily depend on the perceptions or preferences of S or any other subject. In other words, objectivism is the denial of subjectivism (Ballantyne and Kampa 2019, p. 161). Here are some examples of objectivist accounts of significance in the luck literature:

> an eventuation E is significant by way of yielding fortunate or unfortunate results for someone. It is a function of the difference that E makes for the interests at stake (Rescher 1995, p. 211)

> Significance$_O$: S is lucky with respect to E only if (i) S is sentient and (ii) E has some objective evaluative status for S (i.e., E has some objectively good or bad, positive or negative effect on S). (Coffman 2007, p. 388)

> Individual X is lucky with respect to E only if (i) X has an interest N and (ii) E has some objectively positive or negative effect on N (in the sense that E is good for or bad for X). (Ballantyne 2012, p. 331)

These accounts are subjective in the sense that they are concerned with whether an event is significant for a subject. However, they are not subjective in the sense that their truth depends on the ascriptions of a subject. Instead, these accounts define the goodness or badness of an event for a subject, S, in terms of how the event affects S's interests or well-being, and there is no reason why facts about well-being and interests cannot be objective or mind-independent.

For example, suppose that by chance Popeye happens to purchase and consume the one bag of spinach at the supermarket that is not ridden with *E. coli*. This event is lucky. It is also

significant. But its significance does not depend on whether there is a subject that regards this event as positive for Popeye. Instead, this event is significant for Popeye because eating the untainted spinach promotes his overall health, well-being, happiness, strength, etc. These are all good things for Popeye, and their goodness does not depend on the subjective judgments of any agent. One could imagine a scenario in which Popeye, while sleep walking and unbeknownst to any subject, happens to eat the untainted bag of spinach. This event could still be of positive significance for Popeye (for example, it provides him with adequate nutrition) even though no subject forms any desires, preferences, or beliefs regarding this event. Additionally, if Popeye had eaten the *E. coli* ridden spinach, he would have suffered from bouts of nausea, vomiting, fever, dehydration, etc., and these things are bad for Popeye. What makes these side effects bad? While Popeye likely does have a subjective interest in not feeling sick, the badness of this event depends on biological and natural facts regarding Popeye and the world (Ballantyne 2012, p. 322-323).[13] As such, premise 3) is false, and Pritchard's and Garrett's responses to the arguments in favor of the significance condition fail. They fail in that they rely on a false portrayal of luck's significance condition as subjective (in the relativistic sense of the term).

4. Milburn's argument against the significance condition

A better response to the oddness objection, value-based argument, and degrees of luck argument is given by Milburn (2014).[14] Milburn argues that events can be lucky irrespective of whether they are significant. He begins by noting that philosophers have assumed that "luck is a property of an event in relation to an individual" (2014, p. 580). Such subject-relative accounts hold that an event,

[13] Popeye's own subjective interest in not feeling sick also depends on certain biological and natural facts. As such, it could be argued that when subjective interests are significant, they are significant because they supervene upon objective interests.

[14] To be fair, a charitable reading of Garrett and Pritchard could bring their views in line with Milburn's.

E, is lucky for a subject, S, if and only if X where X is whatever property or properties make E lucky for S. Milburn admits that it is highly intuitive that subject-relative luck involves a significance condition. However, there is another way of understanding luck, that is, via subject-involving luck wherein "luck is not a property of an event in relation to a subject, or the property of a subject in relation to an event. Rather it is the property of an event that involves a subject" (2014, p. 580). Cases of subject-involving luck can be understood via the following biconditional: it is a matter of luck that S Φ's if and only if Y where Y is whatever property or properties that make it such that it is a matter of luck that S Φ's, and Milburn claims that "there is no significance condition for subject-involving luck" (2014, p. 581).

To better understand Milburn's distinction, consider the following example:

> Suppose that the artist in residence at your university conducts an Absurdist Raffle as a work of performance art. He assigns every student and faculty member in the university a number, puts these numbers in a very large hat, and draws one. To "reward" the winner, the artist gives a member of the university administration $100,000 in Monopoly money. Suppose that you are the winner of the Absurdist Raffle [and] … that winning the Absurdist Raffle is and should be completely insignificant for you. (2014, p. 581)

Intuitively, it is not lucky or unlucky *for you* that you won the raffle. This is because whether you win or lose the raffle is not significant. However, although this event is not an instance of subject-relative luck, it is, assuming that the raffle was fair, a paradigmatic example of subject-involving luck. This is because it is a matter of luck *that you* (as opposed to someone else) won the raffle. Compare "It was a matter of luck that you won the Absurdist Raffle" with "You were lucky that you won the Absurdist Raffle." The former expresses a claim concerning subject-involving luck that is true, while the latter expresses a claim concerning subject-relative luck that is false.

This distinction can be used to account for our intuitions regarding the oddness objection, value-based argument, and degrees of luck argument. First, consider the oddness objection.

Suppose that Levy has an odd number of hairs on his head at 12 noon and that the coin he just drew from his pocket came up tails. It would be strange to view these events in terms of subject-relative luck. This is because these events are not significant *for* Levy or anyone else. However, this does not mean that these events are not instances of subject-involving luck. Suppose that the fact that Levy drew the coin from his pocket tail first is genuinely chancy—perhaps because this event is modally fragile, outside of Levy's control, suitably improbable, or what have you. If this is the case, then, similar to Absurdist Raffle, Milburn holds that we ought to view this event as a matter of luck. The fact that this event is not significant for any subject is irrelevant.

Second, the first premise of the value-based argument holds that luck is necessarily either good or bad. Absurdist Raffle and other instances of subject-involving luck act as counterexamples to this claim. Furthermore, Millburn's distinction can account for why one might mistakenly think that all lucky events are good or bad, that is, because such a person is viewing luck involving claims in terms of subject-relative luck, and this assumption is unfounded.

Lastly, Milburn could admit that significance can affect the degree to which subject-relative events are lucky. However, since instances of subject-involving luck are not defined in terms of whether they are significant for a subject, a significance condition is not necessary to capture the degree to which subject-involving events are lucky. So, while Milburn's distinction does not give us a reason to drop talk of luck's significance entirely due to the existence of subject-relative luck, it does provide the significance skeptic with the ability to give counterexamples to the significance condition.

5. A response to Milburn

In response to Milburn's distinction between subject-relative and subject-involving luck, the significance condition apologist could reply that our ordinary usage of the word 'luck' does not

refer to cases such as Absurdist Raffle as lucky.[15] Instead, such cases are thought of as being matters of chance. This makes Pritchard's, Garrett's, and Milburn's views on luck and significance highly revisionary. Furthermore, there is little intuitive pull to the idea that it is a matter of *luck* that S (as opposed to someone else) won the Absurdist Raffle. It is more natural to say that it is a matter of *chance* that S won. This is because we reserve the appellation 'lucky' for events that are chancy and significant.[16] But this is exactly what the predominant view about luck claims.

It is tempting for the significance condition apologist to argue that Milburn's account is revisionary so all things being equal it should be rejected. However, there are reasons to think either that things are not equal or that this move is too quick. First, folk assessments about luck are often mistaken or subject to biases. Perhaps then, as Pritchard suggests, we should not infer too much from such judgments. Second, there is a worry that the dispute is only a terminological issue. When Pritchard talks about luck as an objective phenomenon (that is, in terms of subject-involving luck), perhaps he is just shifting the target of his analysis. If this is the case, then the dispute is merely verbal. The two sides are talking about different things when they use the word 'luck'. Third, it is not satisfying to settle the disagreement over luck's significance condition via contentious intuitions about peculiar cases. It would be better to appeal to stronger reasons in support of (or against) luck's significance condition.

Thankfully, the debate over luck's significance condition does not bottom out here. First, the dispute is not merely terminological. Both sides wish to use their views on what luck is to resolve problems in epistemology and ethics. But since both sides are talking about the same

[15] This point is also made by de Grefte (2019, p. 5).
[16] This is an empirical claim that requires empirical evidence. It is true that most philosophers think that Absurdist Raffle and similar cases fail as intuition pumps, but it would require many carefully designed experiments to show that this is true generally.

phenomenon (say epistemic or moral luck), they are not talking past each other. If there is such a thing as epistemic or moral luck, then there will be a fact of the matter regarding whether all instances of epistemic or moral luck are significant. A fair question to ask then is what the payoff is for viewing lucky events solely in terms of chance? Additionally, one should wonder what the payoff if for viewing cases such as Absurdist Raffle as lucky rather than chancy? On this point, Pritchard argues that accounts of luck that contain a significance condition are subject to "various challenges" that can be avoided if one's account of luck does not contain a significance condition (2014, pp. 603-604). For example, he holds that if one includes a "significance condition as part of one's theory of luck, one is in danger of endorsing [an absurd kind of] pragmatic encroachment about knowledge by default" (2014, p. 604, footnote 20). Additionally, Milburn (2014) argues that understanding cases of epistemic and moral luck in terms of subject-relative luck is problematic and that only subject-involving luck is philosophically important. But this is a mistake. In fact, these views are backwards. The real reason why it is necessary to view luck involving claims in terms of significance is because this is the only way that we can understand what is constitutive about instances of epistemic and moral luck.

6. Epistemic luck requires significance

Suppose that Deckard believes that "there is a sheep in the field" because he is currently observing what appears to be a sheep in the field. However, the object that Deckard is observing is not a sheep but a sheep-like android. Furthermore, and unbeknownst to Deckard, there is an actual sheep in the field mischievously hiding behind a bale of hay (Chisholm 1966). Deckard's belief that

"there is a sheep in the field" is justified and true, but there is almost universal agreement among epistemologists that it falls short of knowledge.[17]

Gettier cases, such as the one above, are often thought to involve a kind of knowledge precluding luck (Unger 1968; Pritchard 2005). However, not all instances of luck are knowledge undermining. Instead, anti-luck epistemologists hold that knowledge is only incompatible with certain kinds or degrees of luck (Pritchard 2005; Riggs 2007, p. 330). For example, Engel (1992) and Pritchard (2021) hold that knowledge claims are undermined only when the level of veritic epistemic luck (that is, luck that one's belief is true) is too high. According to Pritchard, given how Deckard's belief was formed (that is, by looking at an electric sheep), it was a matter of luck that his belief turned out to be true. Furthermore, Pritchard claims that the amount of veritic luck in the Deckard (or any other) case is determined by the closeness of the relevant, nearby possible worlds in which Deckard's belief turns out to be false. Thus, Deckard does not know that there is a sheep in the field because there are relevant, nearby worlds in which there is no longer a real sheep hiding in the field, and, as such, Deckard's belief is false. Deckard's belief involves too much veritic luck for it to be considered knowledge.

In contrast, suppose Rachael is observing a real sheep in the field and based on this evidence forms the justified, true belief that "there is a sheep in the field." Intuitively, Rachael—unlike Deckard—knows that there is a sheep in the field. Rachael's belief is not "Gettier-ed." According to Pritchard, this is because Rachael's belief does not involve much (if any) veritic luck. Given that Rachael is observing a real sheep, there are no (or perhaps very few) relevant, nearby

[17] Some epistemologists will think this is an overstatement. For example, Lycan (2006) holds that subjects do have knowledge in fake-barn cases. But it is debatable whether fake-barn cases are the same as traditional Gettier cases, and my claim is about the latter.

possible worlds in which her belief that "there is a sheep in the field" turns out to be false. Rachael's justified, true belief is safe enough to be considered knowledge.

Ballantyne (2011, 2014), however, argues that luck does not have a place in epistemology. Suppose that all lucky events are significant and that significance affects degrees of luck. Suppose also that knowledge is compatible with some amount of luck but that once the level of veritic luck passes a certain threshold one's belief no longer amounts to knowledge. If this is right, then it follows that two subjects can have equally good evidence for some proposition P but can differ regarding whether they know that P. For example, suppose that Cain and Abel both have equally good but fallible evidence that "there is a sheep in the field"; let us call this proposition P. However, Cain cares nothing (or perhaps very little) about whether there is a sheep in the field, whereas Abel cares a great deal. These claims about significance need not be subjective. The status of the sheep relative to the field might be objectively insignificant for Cain in that this event does not affect his well-being in any meaningful way. Abel's well-being, however, is tied to the safety of his flock. But if the truth of P is not significant for Cain, then it is not a matter of veritic luck for Cain whether his belief that P is true. In contrast, if the truth of P is very significant for Abel, then there will be a large amount of veritic luck for Abel that P is true. Thus, by changing the significance of P for a hypothetical subject, one could "Gettier-ize" or "de-Gettier-ize" any chancy case by increasing or decreasing the amount of veritic luck above or below whatever threshold is required for knowledge.

Both Ballantyne and Pritchard agree that this result is absurd. However, the above argument leads Ballantyne to conclude that:

> luck won't help us intervene in debates over knowledge. The basic problem is simple. If luck can successfully intervene, anti-luck theories won't have absurd consequences; but those theories do have absurd consequences, owing to the special place they give to luck. The solution is to abandon luck. (2014, p. 1397)

But Ballantyne's inference is invalid. One could just as easily conclude that a significance condition has no place in an account of veritic luck. This is Pritchard's (2021) position:

> luck is not compatible with the idea that this [or any other] event varies in terms of how lucky it is relative to the subjective concern of the subjects involved. Instead, whether an event counts as lucky, and to what extent, is determined by the closeness of the relevant possible worlds where the target event doesn't obtain, which is in turn determined by the nature of the actual world. Our subjective responses to lucky events thus don't come into it.

Pritchard's response relies on a false conception of significance as necessarily subjective. But even if significance is viewed objectively, as in the Cain example, the issue of pragmatic encroachment persists.

One potential solution to this problem is to understand epistemic luck in terms of subject-involving luck since there is no significance condition on subject-involving luck (Milburn 2014, pp. 583-584). This switch to subject-involving luck appears plausible. The thought is that it is a matter of luck that Deckard's belief that there is a sheep in the field is true even if this event is not significant for Deckard. But while I agree that the kind of pragmatic encroachment outlined above is absurd, this neither entails that luck has no place in epistemology nor that we can do away with significance altogether. There is a third option, that is, that cases of epistemic luck are chancy and epistemically significant.

First, in the above analyses, it is assumed that if an event is significant for a subject, then it is in some way good or bad for that subject's overall well-being or practical interests. Chancy events can be significant for subjects in this way—call this practical luck. When one wins the lottery or consumes the one bag of *E. coli* ridden spinach at the grocery store, one is the beneficiary or victim of practical luck. Such a person is (un)lucky in how things turned out for them in life. It is a mistake to view luck-related issues in epistemology in terms of practical luck. I do not know

of anyone who thinks that significance thought of in terms of practical interests or well-being has a substantial role to play in Gettier cases. From their conception, Gettier cases have involved trivial beliefs, for example, “there is a sheep in the field”, “the match will light”, “this is a real barn”, “the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket”, etc. What makes a Gettier case a Gettier case seems to be the accidental or lucky way in which the subject’s belief turns out to be true. Whether the subject views the event as significant or whether the truth of the belief is objectively significant for the subject is irrelevant.

However, while Gettier cases do not necessarily involve practical luck, they are still epistemically significant and, as such, epistemically lucky. What do I mean by epistemically significant? I admit that trivial beliefs can be “Gettier-ed”, and whether a belief is true or false may not be of any practical value to a subject. However, there is a minimal sense of value involved with cases of epistemic luck. This minimal sense of value is that there is a significant difference between having true belief as opposed to false belief or no belief at all about a proposition P. True belief is always epistemically significant in that having true belief affects one’s epistemic position. It brings a potential knower one necessary step closer to having knowledge regarding P, whereas if one has a false belief or no belief at all concerning P one does not know that P. Additionally, there is intrinsic value to knowing that P. Even for trivial beliefs such as “there is a sheep in the field” there are meaningful differences between Rachael’s being a knower, Deckard’s having merely true belief, and someone who has false belief (say because she forms her belief that P while looking at a fake sheep and there are no real sheep nearby). Without admitting that there is a significant difference between such cases, it is unclear how someone could even begin to understand Gettier cases.

Furthermore, even if one's true belief falls short of knowledge, there is value in having true belief compared to having false belief or no beliefs at all about P. This point is made by Whittington (2016, pp. 1624-1629). Whittington argues that "all true beliefs at least have instrumental epistemic value in that they are instrumentally required in order to have cognitive contact with reality" (p. 1632). This contact may not be valuable outside of the epistemic realm. For example, having true belief about whether there are an odd or even number of hairs on Levy's head is of no practical significance. But within the epistemic realm, such beliefs are still valuable. For example, if one has true belief about P, then one could also form a true belief about other beliefs that are related to P or that P v Q.

A few points of clarification are necessary. First, some beliefs are more valuable to hold than others. Having true belief about the stock market is more valuable than having true belief about trivial claims. But this is a matter of the practical significance of these beliefs. My claim is that within the epistemic realm all true beliefs have a minimum sense of value. Second, beliefs can be epistemically valuable in that they help a subject maximize his or her true beliefs and/or minimize his or her false beliefs, and this admits of degrees. For example, having true beliefs about the laws of nature is more epistemically valuable than having true beliefs about the number of jellybeans in a thousand different jars. This is because having true beliefs about the laws of nature will allow us to have access to a much wider range of truths than having true beliefs about the number of jellybeans in some jars. The former is more central to our web of beliefs than fringe beliefs about jellybeans. My point is only that all our true beliefs have some epistemic value. Third, an epistemic significance condition is necessary to understand cases of epistemic luck. Instances of epistemic luck are not just matters of chance. In addition to being chancy, they also involve a belief that a subject has that is true or false. This is what distinguishes cases of epistemic luck from

other kinds of luck (for example, cases of practical and moral luck). Lastly, this minimal sense of epistemic significance does not engender concerns about pragmatic encroachment. This is because while epistemic significance delineates cases of epistemic luck from other types of luck, it should not be viewed as affecting the degree to which an already lucky event is a matter of luck. If this is right, then cases of epistemic luck are not counterexamples to the significance condition. All cases of epistemic luck are significant in that they are concerned with whether an agent's belief is true or false and known or merely believed. But this limited conception of epistemic value neither admits of degrees nor leads to any absurd consequences.

7. Moral luck requires significance

According to Thomas Nagel, "Where a *significant aspect* of what someone does depends on factors beyond his control, yet we continue to treat him in that respect as an object of moral judgment, it can be called moral luck" (1993, p. 59, emphasis added). Notice that this definition of moral luck includes a significance condition. This may seem obvious. How could an event be morally lucky for someone but not matter? However, Milburn (2014) argues that moral luck does not involve a significance condition and that the concept should be understood in terms of subject-involving luck. Consider the following counterexample:

> Sam has a liquid lunch. He is quite drunk. He makes it to his car, somehow, and drives the normal way from the bar to his home, past the elementary school as the children are being dismissed. Somehow he makes it home without hitting any children. But he is so depressed he is indifferent to having hit a child or not. To him, the world is equally bad, whether or not he is branded a killer. In this case it, seems that Sam is neither lucky nor unlucky to have avoided hitting any children with his car. It simply doesn't matter to him. (p. 584)

I take it that the intuition is supposed to be that this is a clear instance of moral luck; however, this event is not significant for Sam. Thus, we should reject moral luck's significance condition.

Milburn's counterexample fails in that it relies on an impoverished view of moral significance. First, this example defines luck's significance condition in terms of a subjective account of significance in which the significance of an event depends on the extent to which the event matters to the subject concerned. I have already argued that such subjective accounts should be rejected. Viewed objectively, I think it likely that hitting and killing a child is significant for Sam (let alone the child).

Second, Milburn overlooks that what separates moral luck from other cases of luck is the event's *moral significance* and not whether it affects a subject's well-being or practical interests. Moral luck is a particular species of luck. To borrow an example from Whittington (2016, p. 1624), it might be genuinely chancy whether a person stubs his or her toe. Suppose also that stubbing one's toe is of slight negative significance for the toe-stubbed subject. This event is an instance of bad practical luck for such a person, but it is not an instance of moral or epistemic luck. For an event to be an instance of moral luck, it must be chancy and morally significant for a subject. Regardless, then, of whether hitting the child affects Sam's practical interests or well-being, this event is of moral significance for Sam. Murder is morally significant. Sam's moral standing is affected by whether he kills a child. As such, Milburn's putative counterexample fails. Whether Sam hits and kills a child is chancy and morally significant.

Milburn gives another counterexample that is worth considering:

> Sam decides to have a liquid lunch, and has way too much to drink. Seeing double, somehow he manages to start his car; he drives home on his usual route, past the local elementary school. He does not hit anyone. However, this ensures that he will do some other action ψ, which is just as bad as hitting a child with a car while drunk. (For instance, not hitting a child inevitably results in Sam taking target practice with his bow and arrow in a crowded area and shooting a child.) (pp. 585-586)

Milburn interprets this case as follows:

> it seems wrong to say that it is lucky or unlucky for him that he didn't hit a child. For while his moral standing is different from it would have been if he had hit a child, it isn't better or worse. It follows that we should not understand moral luck as being an instance of subject-relative luck. (p. 586)

First, Milburn's example fails due to the structure of the case. Milburn claims that regardless of what happens Sam's moral standing is not better or worse. This is false. There are two possible outcomes in the case. In one scenario, Sam drives recklessly and hits a child with his car. In this scenario, Sam is morally responsible for driving recklessly. The other possibility is that Sam drives recklessly, shoots his bow and arrow recklessly, and hits a child with an arrow. In this scenario, Sam is morally responsible for driving recklessly and for shooting recklessly. Sam is, arguably, then more blameworthy in the latter case because he is now blameworthy both for his reckless driving (as in the first case) and for his reckless shooting. Thus, Milburn has not shown that this is not a case of moral luck as Sam's moral standing does change due to a lucky difference between the two cases.

Perhaps Milburn's example can be saved by changing the details of the case such that regardless of whether Sam ψ's or does not ψ his moral standing is the same. Even with this qualification, I think this example is confused. First, one might think that such a case is not an example of luck at all. This is because of the fatalistic nature of the case. No matter what happens Sam kills a child. This event is not a matter of chance. This follows regardless of how one defines chance. Arguably, that "Sam kills a child" has a probability of 1, is modally stable, and is under his control. If we read the case in this way, Milburn's counterexample fails. He has not shown that moral luck does not involve a significance condition because he has not given us a case that is lucky.

However, there are other ways of reading the case. It is chancy whether Sam kills a child with his car or with his bow and arrow. But with this clarification in mind, it is unclear how the

counterexample is supposed to work. Suppose that Sam kills a child with his car. This event is chancy and morally significant. Thus, it is an example of moral luck. Suppose, instead, that he kills a child with his bow and arrow. This event is chancy and morally significant. Thus, it is also morally lucky. However, perhaps Milburn is arguing that in either case Sam will be responsible for the death of a child. As such, his moral status is the same. But if this is how the argument is supposed to run, then, again, the correct response is to deny that there is any moral luck in the case. Regardless of circumstantial or resultant factors, Sam will be responsible for the death of a child. It is not a matter of luck that he is a killer. This is a tricky case, but it is unclear how it shows that we should view cases of moral luck in terms of subject-involving luck instead of subject-relative luck. Instead, we need to view moral luck in terms of moral significance to distinguish this kind of luck from instances of practical and epistemic luck. If all we go by is subject-involving luck, then the winner of the Absurdist Raffle or a by chance toe-stubbed subject could be thought of as morally lucky, which is absurd.

8. Conclusion

I have argued that once luck's significance condition is properly understood many of the various challenges that might lead one to be a skeptic regarding luck's significance condition disappear. Importantly, we have distinguished between three kinds of significance: practical (that is, how an event affects a subject's well-being or objective interests), epistemic (the kind of significance involved with having true belief), and moral (that is, how an event affects one's moral status). All lucky events fall under the same genus in that they are chancy and significant, but events can be significant for subjects in different ways, and this in turn differentiates between specific kinds of luck.

This taxonomy captures our intuitions about instances of practical, epistemic, and moral luck and about non-lucky cases such as Absurdist Raffle. Absurdist Raffle bears a resemblance to lucky events in that its outcome is a matter of chance. But Absurdist Raffle is not a matter of luck because it is not significant. Now that we have clarified the different ways in which an event can be significant such that there are no longer legitimate reasons to think that the significance condition is false, there are no longer any reasons to view cases of subject-involving "luck" as lucky. Nothing is lost by viewing cases such as Absurdist Raffle as non-lucky but chancy, whereas something is lost if we view instances of practical, epistemic, and moral luck solely in terms of chance. The moral of the story is that luck's significance condition only causes problems when it is being misunderstood.

Perhaps those who dislike significance will rejoin that we do not need a significance condition to distinguish between various types of luck. They might claim that it is obvious what epistemic or moral luck is. Epistemic luck is just luck that turns up in cases of knowledge, and we do not need to understand anything about significance to recognize the role that luck plays in Gettier cases. Similarly, moral luck is just luck that turns up in cases that involve blameworthiness or praiseworthiness. My response to this objection is that there is a reason why we can obviously differentiate between different kinds of luck, that is, because they involve different kinds of significance.

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