

Duncan Pritchard and the Epistemic Luck Problem

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to critically analyse Duncan Pritchard's discourse of the epistemic luck (EL) problem. It does this by articulating Pritchard's anti-luck epistemology which is an attempt by him to resolve the scepticism that arises from the question of EL in knowledge practice. The problem of EL is how to reconcile the role of luck in knowledge practice. Given that knowledge and luck are incompatible because luck undermines the formation of true beliefs, sceptics argue that we cannot conclusively establish the certitude of our epistemic claims. Against this sceptical argument, in his anti-luck epistemology, Pritchard defends epistemic certitude, regardless of EL, by theorising the modal conditions of safety and sensitivity presented by anti-luck epistemologists. The paper adopts the method of qualitative analysis to: (i) expound the problem of EL and examine the paradox of EL, (ii) critically review Pritchard's modal analysis of the problem of knowledge and EL. It concludes Pritchard's anti-luck epistemology provides an alternative reading of the problem of EL which is a commendable contribution to contemporary epistemology.

Keywords: anti-luck epistemology, epistemic luck, safety, scepticism

INTRODUCTION

On general understanding, knowledge is purely a cognitive achievement based on the epistemic agent's ability, and not even slightly, a product of luck. In other words, if S knows that p, then S's belief that p is not true by luck. Given that the Gettier problem, among others, have shown that knowledge as justified true belief (K=JTB) can, and is a subject of luck, anti-luck epistemologists try to resolve the issues about how luck undermines epistemic practice, specifically, how luck interferes with knowledge acquisition. To plausibly resolve this, we need a satisfactory account of the relationship between knowledge and luck, which will embrace and resolve the Gettier problem, scepticism, and the internalist-externalist debate. Such epistemic account would have to reconcile the ubiquity thesis (UT) and the incompatibility thesis (IT). Duncan Pritchard's anti-luck epistemology is an attempt to provide such an account of knowledge.

In the light of the above, the present paper aims to analyse Pritchard's contributions to the epistemic luck (EL) discourse. It articulates Pritchard's anti-luck epistemology which is an attempt by him to resolve the scepticism that arises from the question of EL in knowledge practice. To this end, the paper adopts the qualitative method of analysis to; first explicate the problem of EL, secondly, it examines the paradox of EL, thirdly, it critically reviews Pritchard's modal analysis of the problem of knowledge and EL. Thereafter, the paper concludes that Pritchard's anti-luck epistemology provides an alternative reading of the problem of EL which is a commendable contribution to contemporary epistemology.

WHAT IS EPISTEMIC LUCK?

It is commonplace to consider that knowledge excludes luck, therefore, any candidate for knowledge must be manifestly and appropriately derived from the knower's cognitive abilities. This anti-luck and pro-cognitive abilities conception provides the grounds for epistemologists to delineate

the prerequisites for knowledge possession. The emerging result is that we have two conditions for knowledge: truth and belief. Thus, S knows that p, *iff* S believes that p, and S's belief that p is true. So conceived, knowledge is nothing more than a mere true belief (TB), a conception that is unsatisfactory to many epistemologists. To construe knowledge as mere TB would, several times, be nothing more than a lucky success without credit to the cognitive agent. For the successful attainment of TB, knowledge requires that the TB must be appropriately formed.

The classical account to resolve the unacceptable scenario that knowledge is mere TB is traced to Plato, who argued in the *Theaetetus* that a cognitive agent must have sufficiently good reasons for her TBs, if the TBs are to qualify as knowledge.¹ Hence, the conception that knowledge is justified true belief (K=JTB). Until Edmund Gettier's argument that K=JTB is subject to EL,² epistemological efforts over a long period of the history of western modern philosophy, were to establish how we can successfully attain the conditions of truth, belief, and justification, in knowledge formation. Gettier's project generated immediate reactions aimed to reformulate the epistemic conditions that will meet the anti-luck intuition and defeat his counterexamples. Given the unsuccessful attempts to provide a satisfactory reformulation of the epistemic conditions, we are somewhat justified to assume that the anti-luck intuition, and, a fortiori, the epistemic luck phenomenon, is initially unclear. Therefore, we need to put the problem in proper context and perspective.

The explicandum – epistemic luck, involves belief formation that is luckily true. Generically, it refers to ways in which TBs are formed as a result of chance, accident, coincidence, or fortuity.³ That is, when TBs are

¹ Sophie-Grace Chappell, "Plato on Knowledge in the *Theaetetus*," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019), ed. Edward N. Zalta, 8, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/plato-theaetetus/>>.

² Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis*, 23: 6 (1963), 121-123.

³ Mylan Engel Jr, "Is Epistemic Luck Compatible with knowledge?" *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 30: 2 (1992), 59, <DOI:10.1111/j.2041-6962.1992>.

products of lucky guesses, wishful thinking, fallacious or invalid reasoning or even through a testimony meant to deceive, but turned out to be a report of the truth. These constitute an agent's formation of TBs for which she deserves little or no credit at all. Therefore, we understand EL as a situation where cognitive success is attained in a lucky fashion.⁴

THE PARADOX OF EPISTEMIC LUCK

The paradox of EL lies in the scepticism that arises when we juxtapose three relevant epistemic theses, namely: (i) The knowledge thesis (KT), which states that we know, at least, the things around us from common sense confirmations. (ii) The Incompatibility Thesis (IT), which is the view that knowledge is not compatible with luck. And (iii) the Ubiquity Thesis (UT), the view that luck is unavoidable in cognitive affairs. These theses are antecedently plausible but collectively inconsistent; they generate a paradox, which justifies scepticism. For example, if cognitive luck is unavoidable (UT), and it is correct that knowledge is not compatible with luck (IT), then, it would be false that we know the things around us from common sense confirmations (KT). If we cannot correctly repudiate any of these theses individually, then we cannot rightly do so on account of one or the other two theses; definitely not the KT, because we have a sense of conviction that we know, at least, some things. Unless this paradox is resolved, scepticism would be logically entailed, and even justified.

To decrypt this paradox and avoid a further grip of scepticism, we have to reconcile the IT claim with the equally evident UT claim, which may require that we totally reject IT, or at least, make it less conclusive. If the sceptic already has a foothold in the view that some form of luck is present in knowledge, as it seems she does, to unrealistically deny that luck plays a role in knowledge acquisition would be, according to Guy Axtell, to provide

⁴ Fernando Broncano-Berrocal and Carter Adam, "Epistemic Luck," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2017), <www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/epistemic-luck>.

her a ladder.⁵ Therefore, in order to develop an anti-sceptical argument against this challenge, we need a critical analytic investigation of EL to, at least, understand the exact role, if there is any, it plays in belief formation.

Historically, we have three accounts of luck: (i) The accident or chance account, which is the view that luck is a chance or accidental event that cannot be accommodated in a plausible account of knowledge.⁶ (ii) The lack of control account, which is the view that an event is lucky if its occurrence is not within the control of the agent.⁷ (iii) The risk account, which is a close possibility of occurrence understood from two perspectives: (iii a) The modal risk, the view that an event is at the risk of occurrence at a particular time if it would occur at that time in a large proportion of close possible worlds. And (iii b) The probabilistic risk, the view that an event is at the risk of occurring at a particular time only if there is a high probability that it will occur at that time.⁸ For Pritchard, “an event is lucky, *iff* it obtains in the actual world but does not obtain in a wide class of nearby possible worlds in which the relevant initial conditions for that event are the same as in the actual world.”⁹ According to this account, luck is a chance event in the actual world, because even with the conditions under which the event occurs in the actual world, present in a wide class of nearby possible worlds, the event does not occur in the wide class of nearby possible worlds. Therefore, we can claim that Pritchard’s idea of luck falls within the accident or chance historical account of luck, which is (i) above.

⁵ Guy Axtell, “Epistemic Luck in light of the Virtues,” in *Virtue Epistemology: Essays on Epistemic Virtue and Responsibility*, ed. A. Fairweather and L. Zagzebski (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2001), 167.

⁶ Cf. Peter Unger, “An Analysis of Factual Knowledge,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, 65: 6 (1968), 157-170, <www.jstor.org/stable/2024203>.

⁷ Cf. Wayne D. Riggs, “Luck, Knowledge, and ‘Mere’ Coincidence,” *Metaphilosophy*, 45: 4-5 (2014), 627-639, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/meta.12109>>.

⁸ Cf. Fernando Broncano-Berrocal, “Luck as Risk and the Lack of Control Account of Luck,” in *The Philosophy of Luck*, ed. D. Pritchard and L. Whittington (New York: John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 2015), 3-26.

⁹ Duncan Pritchard, “Anti-Luck Epistemology,” *Synthese*, 158: 3 (2007), 277-297, <[DOI:10.1007/s11229-006-9039-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-006-9039-7)>.

These explications of luck provide the grounds for us to index the primary ways in which luck features in knowledge acquisition.

To this end, Mylan Engel Jr presents an analysis of epistemic luck in which he differentiated between evidential luck and veritic luck, and explicated how they influence belief-formation. According to him, evidential luck obtains when an agent is “epistemically lucky in virtue of the fact that she is lucky to be in the evidential situation she is in but that, given her evidential situation, it is not a matter of luck that her belief is true.”¹⁰ This means that it is a matter of luck that the agent has the evidence by virtue of which her belief is true.¹¹ For example, suppose that X, a cleaner is inside the restroom of one of the rooms in a hotel to clean it. Suppose also that Y, the manager of the hotel goes into the same room to make a secret phone call in which he ordered the murder of Z, the hotel owner, completely unaware that X is in the restroom. X is clearly lucky to be in the evidential situation to know that Y ordered the murder of Z. Therefore, it is a matter of evidential luck that X possesses the evidence that Y ordered the murder of Z, nevertheless, X has evidence by virtue of which X’s claim that Y ordered the murder of Z is true. This notion of luck is compatible with knowledge because it does not act directly on the agent’s formation of belief.

Veritic luck, on the other hand, obtains when the agent is “epistemically lucky in virtue of the fact that, given her evidential situation, it is simply a matter of luck that her belief turns out to be true.”¹² In this situation, it is purely a matter of luck that the agent’s belief is true. Take for instance; given the same scenario in the example about evidential luck above, suppose X did not hear Y give an order over the phone that Z should be murdered, yet X claims that Y ordered the murder of Z. Suppose further that it turns out to be true that Y ordered the murder of Z. It is only lucky that X’s claim that Y ordered the murder of Z turns out to be true. This is

¹⁰ Engel, “Is Epistemic Luck Compatible with Knowledge?” 67.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

not compatible with knowledge because it acts directly on the agent's formation of belief. The agent does not know based on the evidence available by virtue of which the claim is true; it is just a matter of luck that her claim turns out to be the case. This is the type of luck we find in Gettier-styled cases.

Many epistemologists agree with Engel that veritic luck is incompatible with knowledge, and on this basis, we can safely assume that Engel moves us closer towards resolving the EL paradox. At least, he identifies the type of luck that is compatible with knowledge and the type that is incompatible with knowledge. Pritchard extends the success of Engel's analysis by lucidly presenting a more comprehensive picture of the epistemic luck phenomenon using a modal analysis.

Pritchard's modal analysis requires that any event of luck must meet two conditions: (i) the modal condition, and (ii) the significance condition. The modal condition requires that a lucky event must occur in the actual world and not in a wide class of nearby possible worlds.¹³ For example, that X is lucky to be born with a dimple, considering the constancy of persons born with dimples, that he might not have been born with a dimple in all nearby possible worlds. The significance condition states that "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."¹⁴ The specific importance of the significance condition is that no event is lucky to an agent, when such event is not significant to the agent. If X does not consider being born with dimples significant, regardless of the modal condition, being born with dimples would not be luck for X.

Based on these conditions, Pritchard identifies three types of benign epistemic luck,¹⁵ namely: (i) Content epistemic luck, which is the

¹³ Duncan Pritchard, "The Modal Account of Luck," *Metaphilosophy*, 45:4/5 (October 2014), 594-619.

¹⁴ Duncan Pritchard, *Epistemic Luck* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2005), 132.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

occurrence or existence of the fact known – that it is lucky that p is true. (ii) Capacity epistemic luck, which concerns the existence or the abilities of the cognitive agent – that it is lucky that the agent is capable of knowledge. (iii) Evidential epistemic luck, which occurs only when the agent acquires the evidence that she has in favour of her belief by luck. These varieties of epistemic luck are consistent with knowledge since they do not undermine belief-formation. Belief-formation is undermined when a belief is true by luck (lucky TB).

A lucky TB entails a situation where “S’s true belief is lucky *iff* there is a wide class of nearby possible worlds in which S continues to believe the target proposition, and the relevant initial conditions for the formulation of that belief are the same as in the actual world, and yet the belief is false.”¹⁶ This is veritic epistemic luck (VEL). It concerns the truth of the belief in question, interferes in epistemic inquiries, and even if all epistemic conditions are met, it would still be a matter of luck that the belief is true. VEL is the type of luck associated with Gettier’s counterexamples. Therefore, the problem of EL in Gettier’s anti-K=JTB is not the problem of luck per se, but specifically, the problem of VEL. Consequently, the task of resolving the problem of EL is to provide an anti-veritic luck condition for knowledge acquisition. This is the task of anti-luck epistemology.

PRITCHARD’S ANTI-LUCK EPISTEMOLOGY

In general, anti-luck epistemologists propose two modal conditions: (i) sensitivity, and (ii) safety, to deal with the problem of EL. According to the sensitivity condition, “if S knows that p , then S’s true belief that p is such that, had p been false, S would not have believed p .”¹⁷ This implies that a subject does not believe a case that is not so in the nearby possible worlds – S does not believe that p when in the nearby possible worlds, it is not p (that is, $\sim p$). According to Ernest Sosa, for instance, “a belief by S that p is

¹⁶ Pritchard, “Anti-Luck Epistemology,” 280.

¹⁷ Duncan Pritchard, *Knowledge* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4.

‘sensitive’ *iff* were it not so that p, S would not believe that p,”¹⁸ for a belief to be knowledge, it must be sensitive *simpliciter*. Sensitivity is premised on the idea that knowledge is sensitive to the belief being both true and fact-sensitive. In other words, if S believes that p, and p is in fact true, S’s belief that p is sensitive because if it is not true that p, S would not believe that p. And the fact that S’s belief that p is sensitive to the fact that p, implies that S knows that p. Both Fred Dretske’s explication of conclusive reason¹⁹ and Robert Nozick’s reformulation of the tripartite conditions²⁰ support the sensitivity condition.

The safety condition may be considered either as enhancing or replacing the sensitivity condition, just in case the latter is faulty. For example, Sosa argues that the principle of exclusion—for S to know a fact p, all incompatible alternatives to p must be ruled out by S—makes sensitivity implausible because to “rule out” an alternative means it is not the case. Sosa argues further that to constitute knowledge, a belief must be safe rather than sensitive. For him, S’s belief that p is safe “*iff*: S would believe that p only if it were so that p.”²¹ By implication, S would only hold the belief that p when it is the case that p, and S’s holding that p guarantees that p is safe.

It may seem that safety is analogous to sensitivity but Sosa argues otherwise that since subjunctive conditionals do not contrapose, safety is not equivalent to sensitivity.²² Safety is the counterfactual contrapositive of sensitivity, so it is different from sensitivity, if they are just contrapositives, they would be equivalent, but they are counterfactuals, and the equivalence of contrapositives apply only to factials.²³ To buttress this point further,

¹⁸ Ernest Sosa, “How to Defeat Opposition to Moore,” *Philosophical Perspectives*, 13 (1999), 141, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2676100>>.

¹⁹ Fred Dretske, “Conclusive Reasons,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 49: 1 (1971), 1-22, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00048407112341001>>.

²⁰ Robert Nozick, “Knowledge,” in *Philosophical Explanations*, ed. Robert Nozick (Cambridge: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 475-490.

²¹ Sosa, “How to Defeat Opposition to Moore,” 142.

²² *Ibid.*, 149-150.

²³ Cf. Francis Offor, *Essentials of Logic* (Ibadan: BookWright Publishers, 2014), 85-93.

Sosa explains that S's belief that p is sensitive *iff* had it been false, S would not have held it, that is, $\sim p = \sim B(p)$. Whereas S's belief is safe *iff* S would only hold that p because it is true that p, that is, $B(p) = p$.²⁴ Sosa settles for safety over sensitivity because sensitivity only tracks truth in nearby possible worlds and not in all possible worlds (particularly a sceptical or demon-influenced world where beliefs cannot be sensitive to facts). Safety, on the hand, tracks truth in all possible worlds.

If it is the case, as Sosa's argument presages, that sensitivity is faulty, and therefore, fails, and safety is correct, and therefore, successful, can we argue that safety would eliminate veritic luck in knowledge acquisition? Pritchard is unwilling to pursue such line of argument; he insists that the accounts of safety as construed by Sosa and others does not completely eliminate veritic luck.

Pritchard rejects the sensitivity condition on the basis that it does not track the truth in all close possible worlds but focuses alone on the closest not-possible worlds, and therefore, cannot account for beliefs that track truth in sceptical worlds. Alternatively, the safety condition is basically that S has a TB which could not easily have been false, which means that if S meets all the relevant epistemic conditions, and forms the belief that p in the actual world, her belief would be true in close possible worlds in which she forms the same belief on the same basis.²⁵ The notion of close possible worlds accentuates the fact that S not only forms a true belief in the target proposition in the actual world, but also in close possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions for that belief are the same as in the actual world. Given this basic idea of the safety condition, Pritchard argues that it is closest in spirit to the anti-veritic luck project.

However, Pritchard insists that safety, as construed so far, does not completely capture the epistemic conditions for knowledge because it

²⁴ Sosa, "How to Defeat Opposition to Moore," 146.

²⁵ Duncan Pritchard, "Knowledge cannot be Lucky," in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, 2nd Edition, ed. M. Steup, J. Turri and D. Pritchard (West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2014), 156.

entails basic cases and some non-basic cases of eliminating veritic luck. By basic cases, he means when an agent retains her belief in both the actual world and in the close possible worlds, sustained by the same basis which originally gave rise to it. The non-basic cases involve an agent retaining her true belief, sustained by an entirely different basis.²⁶ If this is the case, we need a revision of safety to allow it to respond to veritic luck and meet the anti-luck intuition satisfactorily.

Pritchard undertook the project of reformulating the safety condition in such a way that it will satisfactorily respond to the anti-luck project without compromising the basic idea of safety, while at the same time, it incorporates the intended aim of the sensitivity condition. Consequently, he proposed the ‘Safety II’ condition, which states that “if an agent knows a contingent proposition *p*, then in most nearby possible worlds in which she forms her belief about *p* in the same way as in the actual world, that agent only believes that *p* when it is true.”²⁷ The addition of “in the same way as in the actual world” provides some important ramifications that makes Safety II avoid the pitfall of the earlier formulation of the safety condition. But it does not get us very far by itself because it is weak. Also, the use of “most” to qualify nearby possible worlds, excludes *every* nearby possible world, which makes knowledge still susceptible to VEL. Thus, Pritchard again revises Safety II to meet with this difficulty by providing a stronger account as ‘Safety III.’ Namely, “S’s belief is safe *iff* in nearly all (if not all) 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.”²⁸ Revised in this way, Safety III avoids the error of false beliefs in all relevant nearby possible worlds and it is able to explain a wide range of cases involving the elimination of VEL. Does this imply that the problem of EL is resolved? Pritchard does not think so. He argues that Safety III does not satisfactorily

²⁶ Pritchard, *Epistemic Luck*, 155.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

²⁸ Pritchard, “Anti-Luck Epistemology,” 283.

evade the tension between knowledge and EL because there is another malign form of EL, identified as reflective luck, that undermines knowledge.

Reflective luck is discernible in Linda Zagzebski's argument that "the value of the truth obtained by a reliable process in the absence of any conscious awareness of a connection between the behaviour of the agent and the truth he thereby acquires is no better than the value of the lucky guess."²⁹ In other words, it is a matter of luck that S knows, if S is not aware of the connection between her ability to know and the knowledge she acquires. Thus, Prichard avers that,

For all S, the truth of S's belief in a contingent proposition, p, is reflectively lucky, if and only if, S's belief that p is true in the actual world, but, "given what S is able to know by reflection alone," false in most nearby possible worlds in which the belief is formed in the same manner as in the actual world.³⁰

Daniel Breyer lucidly expresses the idea of reflectively when he describes "a belief [as] reflectively lucky if it is a matter of luck that the belief is true, given what a subject is aware of on reflection alone."³¹ Therefore, reflective epistemic luck (REL) is the lack of adequate reflectively accessible grounds in support of one's belief (the conscious awareness of one's ability). Such conscious awareness of one's ability is not figured into Safety III because the safety condition is generally an externalist theory. Whereas, the demand that the agent possesses adequate reflectively accessible grounds in support of her belief speaks to the

²⁹ Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtues and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 304.

³⁰ Duncan Pritchard, "Scepticism, Epistemic Luck and Epistemic Angst," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 83: 2 (2005), 198. <DOI:10.1080/0048400500110867>.

³¹ Daniel Breyer, "Reflective Luck and Belief Ownership," *Acta Analytica*, 25 (2010), 133.

internalist theory. The externalists hold that justification for an agent's belief is purely on external factors, while the internalists argue that the justification of an agent's belief rests on internal components. Since Safety III does not consider the 'conscious awareness' that is *only* a product of an agent's reflective position, even though it successfully eliminates veritic luck, it does not eliminate reflective luck. How, then, can we formulate an anti-REL condition?

In an attempt to formulate an anti-reflective luck condition, Pritchard argues that, for S to know that p, it means that S's belief that p is internalistically justified; and S's belief that p is justified *iff* S is able to know the facts which determine that justification by reflection alone.³² As Pritchard himself would admit, the Cartesian 'evil demon' sceptic would not be satisfied by this. She would argue that there is nothing reflectively available to the subject that could show to her that her belief in the anti-sceptical proposition is true because there is no phenomenological difference available to the agent in such sceptical scenario to enable her to know that she is not a victim of this scenario. Therefore, she cannot have an internalistic justification for her belief, even if true; and so, she lacks knowledge because internalistic justification (which she does not have) is necessary for knowledge.

The lack of knowledge in anti-sceptical propositions entails a lack of knowledge in a wide class of everyday (anti-sceptical) propositions because reflectively, our cognitive responsibility is restricted (perhaps, due to the demon's influence). The truth of our everyday propositions is determined by the denial of the sceptical hypothesis that we are under such sceptical influence. Therefore, since such denial is impossible because of lack of internalistic justification, our everyday propositions are ineliminably subject to REL. If we merge the claims of epistemological internalism with the sceptical argument, we shall be confronted with outright scepticism. Pritchard describes this as epistemic *angst*. That is,

³² Pritchard, *Epistemic Luck*, 42-44.

A general fear about the nature of our epistemic position which is not due to any *specific* empirical challenge to our putative knowledge. Instead it is caused by the discovery, in the context of reflection, that the ultimate scope of our cognitive responsibility is severely restricted.³³

By this, he means that we cannot take cognitive responsibility for the truth of the anti-sceptical assumption upon which the cognitive responsibilities we standardly attribute to ourselves are grounded. He thus, claims that no theory of knowledge (internalist or externalist) can adequately allay the problem of epistemic *angst*, which is the source of scepticism. Consequently, upon the claim that scepticism is an existential problem, he admits that instead of the continuous search for an epistemic response to scepticism, we should take up the pragmatic response, which licenses the beliefs needed by the agents involved on pragmatic grounds rather than discard them on epistemic grounds.

Pritchard's submission to the scepticism informed by epistemic *angst* has been criticised by the likes of John Greco, Mark McEvoy, Christopher Kelp, Jennifer Lackey, Jason Baehr and Erik Olsson. Greco, for instance, argues that the use of "nearly all (if not all)" in Pritchard's formulation of Safety III is ambiguous; while "nearly all" is a weak interpretation of safety, "if not all" is a strong interpretation.³⁴ On the construal of "nearly all," Safety still gives room for a cluster of possible worlds where the belief can be false. On the construal of "if not all," knowledge would be denied even in standard cases of knowledge because there will always be some nearby possible worlds where an agent forms a false belief in the same way as in the actual world. In which case, we may hardly have any instance of *bona fide* knowledge. If Greco's criticism is correct, Pritchard's Safety condition would have failed to eliminate VEL as

³³ Pritchard, "Scepticism, Epistemic Luck and Epistemic Angst," 204.

³⁴ John Greco, "Worries about Pritchard's Safety," *Synthese*, 158: 3 (2007), 301.

Pritchard supposed. If, on the other hand, Greco's criticism is mistaken, Pritchard would have to provide a satisfactory account of the ambiguity implied in his usage of the two locutions in question anyway. In response to Greco, Pritchard avers that there is no need choosing between either of these interpretations or even hold them as separate entities, since when properly understood, they both predict the same conclusion. For, regardless of the "nearly all (if not all)" locution, they share the same intuition of not allowing any nearby possible worlds in which an agent forms her belief in the same way as in the actual world, yet the belief is false. Otherwise, the belief is unsafe and hence, no knowledge. For Pritchard, the nearby possible worlds are the ones that must be significant to the agent. Suppose in an instance of knowledge, there is some nearby possible worlds that affect the truth of the agent's belief, we should ask if this possible world is significant to the agent? If yes, the agent's belief is not safe, and thus, no knowledge. If no, we are not affected by such possible worlds because they are insignificant, then the agent's belief is safe, and therefore, a *bona fide* knowledge. Given this entailment of Pritchard's Safety, regardless of the locution at play, Greco's objection (and its likes) is mistaken; on the account that they neglect the significance condition that is key to Pritchard's proposal.

Lackey and Kelp separately argue that Safety is not a necessary condition for knowledge. According to Lackey, the safe knowledge of an agent does not eliminate veritic luck in the agent's TB.³⁵ She uses the analogy of the southern safe barn in which an agent visits her childhood town and forms the belief that there is a barn, which corresponds with her swift sight of the location of her childhood house, where she saw the only real barn of the town. Considering the agent's deep interests for childhood roots, the swiftness of the look, and the location of the barn, which could be nowhere but the location of her childhood house, due to a strict and unwavering policy, then her belief is safe because there could be no possible

³⁵ Jennifer Lackey, "Review: Pritchard's Epistemic Luck," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 56: 223 (2006), 284-289, <www.jstor.org/stable/3542994>.

worlds where she looks elsewhere. Yet, despite her safe belief, she is still subject to veritic luck because she was only lucky that her belief that there is a barn there is true. On his part, Kelp employs Bertrand Russell's analogy of the grandfather clock to argue that the presence of the actual world already rules out the possibilities of any possible worlds.³⁶ Pritchard's response to Lackey is that the agent's belief that there is a real barn is not safe, because there will always be nearby possible worlds where she looks at a fake barn, for example, a situation in which the community relaxes the strict and unwavering policy.

CONCLUSION

Pritchard's contributions to contemporary epistemology which among others include his modal analysis of the nature and varieties of EL, embraced central questions in epistemic inquiry. For example, the Gettier problem, epistemic justification, and radical scepticism. His contributions to these issues are illuminating and relevant to contemporary epistemology. His reformulation of the safety-based account of knowledge in an externalist fashion seems to appropriately eliminate veritic luck, and therefore, provides a plausible resolution to the Gettier problem. Also, his anti-luck epistemology addressed the debate between the internalists and the externalists about our epistemic practices. He provided an insightful analysis of the dialectic between internalism, externalism, and scepticism. Regardless of his sympathies with the externalists, he elucidates the complaints of the internalists on plausible grounds. The objections to his anti-luck epistemology notwithstanding, Pritchard's contribution to perennial epistemic issues is commendable. His anti-luck epistemology clarifies the right sense in which knowledge excludes luck and provides an alternative reading of the problem of epistemic scepticism. He does what most epistemologists prior to him have merely gestured at, when he

³⁶ Cf. Christopher Kelp, "Knowledge and Safety," *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 34: 1(2009), 21-31, <DOI:10.5840/jpr_2009_1>.

embraced the task of identifying the exact role of luck in knowledge inquiries.

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