Anti-luck Epistemology, Pragmatic Encroachment, and True Belief

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Two common theses in contemporary epistemology are that ‘knowledge excludes luck’ and that knowledge depends on ‘purely epistemic’ factors. In this essay, I shall argue as follows: given some plausible assumptions, ‘anti-luck epistemology,’ which is committed to the first thesis, implies the falsity of the second thesis. That is, I will argue that anti-luck epistemology leads to what has been called ‘pragmatic encroachment’ on knowledge. Anti-luck epistemologists hoping to resist encroachment must accept a controversial thesis about true belief or a dubious claim about luck and value and interests.

All of this should come as a surprise. Arguments for pragmatic encroachment usually highlight the relationship between knowledge and action, rather than highlight some (putative) feature of knowledge itself. The argument I’ll offer links together work on three ordinarily unconnected topics within epistemology: anti-luck epistemology (e.g., Pritchard [2005] and Riggs [2007]), pragmatic encroachment (e.g., Fantl and McGrath [2002] and [2007] and Hawthorne [2004]), and the value of true belief (e.g., Kvanvig [2003: ch 2] and Grimm [2008]).

In the end, the argument may lead theorists away from anti-luck epistemology and toward related approaches not concerned to eliminate luck. I shall suggest that ‘luck-free’ views may avoid the troubles that beset anti-luck epistemologies.
I Anti-luck Epistemology and Luck

I shall begin by explaining what anti-luck epistemology is, elucidating the operative notion of luck by drawing on recent work on the nature of luck.

Anti-luck epistemology is a product of reflection on justification and knowledge after Gettier (1963). Let’s recollect a classic Gettier-style example, due to Chisholm (1966: 23, fn 22):

SHEEP DOG. While gazing over a field, you see what looks to be a sheep and come to believe there is a sheep in the field. And you’re right: just beyond a hill in the middle of the field, there is a sheep. It’s out of view, though, and you have no idea it is there. What you see is a dog, convincingly dressed up as a sheep. You have a justified true belief that there is a sheep in the field.

Does that belief count as knowledge? Conventional wisdom says that you don’t know that a sheep is in the field because your belief is true by luck. A justified true belief is not enough for knowledge because of this luck. And it came to pass that epistemologists received their slogan: ‘knowledge excludes luck.’

This truism about luck is a critical starting point for many contemporary discussions of knowledge. Engel (1992), Greco (2003), Pritchard (2005) and (2007), Riggs (2007) and (2009), Becker (2008), and Coffman (2010) all take the truism and go on to develop ‘anti-luck’ epistemologies. Their shared strategy is to understand knowledge by way of saying something about the kind of luck that precludes knowledge in a Gettier example (‘knowledge-precluding luck’ hereafter).

As it happens, their views are diverse. For example, Pritchard imposes a safety condition on knowledge and defines knowledge-precluding luck in terms of a belief that’s true in the actual world but false in many nearby possible worlds. Both Riggs and Greco invoke virtue-theoretic elements and characterize knowledge-precluding luck in terms of the potential knower’s (lack of) ‘credit-worthiness.’ And Becker, an advocate of process reliabilism, proposes that knowledge-precluding luck involves a true belief formed by an unreliable process or held on an ‘unsafe’ basis. Setting their differences to the side, any anti-luck epistemologist will endorse the following thesis: whether someone is posi-

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1 Some have resisted the trend: see Hetherington (1999) and (2011: ch 3), for example, and Madison (2011) for discussion.
tioned to know some proposition $p$ partly depends on whether she is positioned to hold a non-luckily true belief that $p$.

Before we consider how accounts of knowledge-precluding luck relate to luck simpliciter, we should note a further sort of diversity among theorists. Those who invoke luck to explain Gettier examples are joined by others who at least describe Gettier examples in different terms. A ‘gettiered’ belief is said to be true by ‘accident’ (Unger [1968]) or a ‘felicitous coincidence’ (Klein [1971]); Gettier himself said that such belief was true by ‘sheer coincidence’ (1963: 123).

It is notable that Pritchard treats at least some views that appeal to accident and coincidence as anti-luck views, rather than treating them as another species of view that falls under the same genus as anti-luck views. For instance, Pritchard says that Peter Unger ‘cashes out his anti-luck epistemology in terms of a clause which states that it is ‘not at all an accident that the man is right about its being the case that $p$’’ (2005: 126, cf. 131-2).

But, curiously, Unger doesn’t even once use the term ‘luck.’ What if accident and coincidence happen to be critically different notions than luck?

Indeed, one possibility is that Unger and his ilk are not anti-luck theorists, strictly speaking — and that Prichard is mistaken to march theories that use accident or coincidence beneath the ‘anti-luck’ banner. Perhaps some theorists mean to endorse ‘anti-accident’ or ‘anti-coincidence’ epistemologies, leaving luck out. That’s something I wish to keep open. As we proceed, then, we should be mindful that there may be alternatives to anti-luck theories in the neighbourhood.

It is important to appreciate how recent accounts of knowledge-precluding luck are related to luck simpliciter. As Pritchard remarks:

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2 It is also worth adding that all of the anti-luck theorists I have in mind are fallibilists. They think that a subject’s knowing $p$ is consistent with that subject being positioned such that she could make a mistake about $p$. (There may be an ‘infallibilist’ response to the argument I offer in §III, but we can leave it shelved, since it won’t be viewed as viable by theorists.)

3 I’d like to thank an anonymous referee for pressing me to reflect more on this issue.

4 Some theorists speak of Gettier examples as featuring ‘luck or accident’ and seem to presuppose the two notions are interchangeable: see, for example, Zagzebski (1999) and Carolyn Morillo’s view as discussed by Pritchard (2005: 126). An important question is whether these notions are in fact interchangeable. Now and again, ‘chance’ shows up instead of ‘luck,’ ‘accident’ or ‘coincidence,’ as we find in Clark (1963: 46) — the first published discussion of Gettier (1963). Pritchard (2005: 126-7) and others deny that accident or chance are interchangeable with luck.

5 Pritchard draws from Unger (1968: 158).
'Central to the anti-luck epistemological research project is, of course, an account of luck, since without this very little can be usefully said about epistemic luck' (2007: 278). So what is luck?

Recent work on luck’s nature is a ‘spinoff’ of discussions in epistemology, free will, ethics, and distributive justice. In those discussions, the notion of luck appears to play a key role. Debates about ‘moral luck’ hang on whether an agent can be praised or blamed for actions, and the consequences thereof, which lie beyond the agent’s control (see Williams [1981] and Nagel [1979]). Some political philosophers, picking up themes from John Rawls (1971: 74-5), propose that justice requires transferring resources gained by luck from well-off citizens to those who were not lucky in the ‘natural lottery’ (see Arneson [2008]). And so the task of clarifying luck itself is thought to illuminate these sorts of philosophical issues. Theorists have proposed various necessary (and jointly sufficient) conditions for luck and — just as one might anticipate — there is little agreement. By various accounts, a lucky event is outside the lucky subject’s control (‘lack of control’); such that it occurs in the actual world but not in a wide range of nearby possible worlds (‘modal fragility’); such that there was a large chance it wouldn’t have happened.6

I will here focus on one universally endorsed necessary condition. It is widely thought that luck involves at least an event (or fact or obtaining state of affairs) that has significance for a subject. In order for an event to be significant for someone, she must have interests or welfare: if an event is lucky (or unlucky) for her, then it is somehow good for (or bad for) her. Significance is needed to distinguish a merely unlikely event from a genuinely lucky one. An unlikely landslide that didn’t affect anyone, for example, is not lucky because it is significant for no one.7 The need for significance is also suggested by common talk of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ luck: winning a lottery is good luck whereas having your mountain bike stolen is bad luck. Such talk only makes sense insofar as lucky events can be good or bad for subjects.

To see how this feature of luck simpliciter is relevant to knowledge-precluding luck, recall SHEEP DOG. In that example, the event that is supposed to be lucky for you is forming a true belief that a sheep is in the field. Luck requires significance and that, in turn, requires interests —

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no interests, no luck. So, we can ask how having a true belief regarding that sheep is good or bad for you. What makes it significant for you?

There is no agreement on an answer. That’s because there is no agreement over how to understand luck’s significance. I cannot address all of the details of the debate over significance here, but two main competing accounts are as follows:

L1 Subject S is lucky with respect to event E only if (i) S is sentient and (ii) E has some objectively positive or negative effect on S. (Rescher [1995] and Coffman [2007])

L2 Subject S is lucky with respect to event E only if (i) S is capable of ascribing significance to E and (ii) S would do so were S apprised of the properties of E in virtue of which E has a positive or negative effect on S. (Pritchard [2005: ch 5] and Riggs [2007])

L1 grounds significance in the actual impact of an event on someone’s interests or welfare. And L2 makes significance a matter of an ascription of significance to an event by the subject — if not actually then counterfactually. These two necessary conditions help us appreciate an important dispute regarding truths about luck:

**Constructivism**: Truths about luck depend upon a subject’s standpoint in the sense that luck-facts only obtain in virtue of an ascription of significance by an actual or possible subject.

**Realism**: Truths about luck obtain independently of any subject’s standpoint in the sense that luck-facts don’t obtain by virtue of an ascription of significance by an actual or possible subject.

Within the discussion of luck, Constructivism and Realism find supporters. Pritchard says his L2 implies that luck is ‘in the eye of the beholder’ (2005: 143). According to L2, an event is lucky for someone just if she would ascribe significance to that event were she apprised of the rel-

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8 See another essay of mine (forthcoming) for details.

9 L2 follows the paraphrase of Pritchard’s ‘(L2)’ due to Coffman (2007: 386). There are more refined accounts of significance in the spirit of L2: in another essay, I discuss these accounts (forthcoming: §§2-3). It is worth noting that insofar as these other accounts are committed to Constructivism, they’ll permit the argument given below in §III to proceed.
relevant facts. So, if she wouldn’t find the event significant when apprised of the facts, it isn’t lucky for her. Pritchard thus affirms Constructivism. E.J. Coffman (2007) and Nicholas Rescher (1995), on the other hand, go in for Realism: whether an event is lucky, they say, depends on its objectively positive or negative effects upon a subject’s interests or welfare. Even if someone would (or does) fail to find an event significant, it may be lucky nonetheless.

Recent work by anti-luck epistemologists embraces the significance condition on luck. We can see this in a few ways. First, many of the theorists who have explicitly claimed that luck requires significance have also themselves defended anti-luck views: here we may think of Pritchard (2005), Riggs (2007) and (2009), and Coffman (2007) and (2010). Second, Zagzebski’s widely-noted recipe for generating Gettier-style examples presupposes that luck requires significance (see [1994] and [1999: 107-8]). Gettier-style examples, she says, involve ‘double luck’: being caught in a misleading scenario is bad luck (and, thus, bad) for the subject but forming a true belief nonetheless is good luck (and, thus, good) for the subject. Finally, much of the literature on anti-luck epistemology critically engages with Pritchard’s theory and thereby seems to tacitly accept significance as a necessary condition on luck. Theorists sometimes quibble with Pritchard’s modal characterization of luck, to be sure; but, as best I can tell, no one has rejected Pritchard’s theory by denying the significance condition. According to me, that’s because significance is just part of what most anti-luck theorists take luck to be.

Let us return to SHEEP DOG and see how the two pictures of luck fill in knowledge-precluding luck. According to L1, having a true belief about the sheep is lucky for you only if that event has an objective effect on your interests. The fact that you are lucky to believe truly obtains independently of any subject’s ascriptions of significance. L1 is consonant with the idea that having a true belief about the sheep is good (or


11 Work in the philosophy of action that invokes luck also typically assumes the significance thesis: see, for example, Levy (2011: 13).

12 Thanks to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to explain why most theorists in fact assume luck requires significance. What I regard as reluctance among theorists to go in for mere ‘loose talk’ about luck (i.e., ‘luck’-talk that doesn’t entail significance) owes something to Pritchard’s designs for the anti-luck undertaking, I surmise: ‘Central to the anti-luck epistemological research project is, of course, an account of luck, since without this very little can be usefully said about epistemic luck’ (2007: 278). But later in §III we’ll consider the possibility that this trend is mistaken and that a ‘significance-less’ notion is the one worthy of attention.
bad) for you, even if you or others don’t (actually or counterfactually) ascribe significance to it. And on L2, you are lucky to have a true belief only if were you able to ascribe significance to your having a true belief, you would do so when apprised of its effects on you. Whether you have knowledge-precluding luck depends on your (actually or counterfactually) ascribing significance to your having a true belief.

Thus concludes our brief tour of anti-luck epistemology. The two general ways to understand knowledge-precluding luck are animated by different thoughts about luck’s nature. In §III, I will argue that either way of understanding knowledge-precluding luck is subject to an argument that pushes anti-luck epistemologists toward pragmatic encroachment, a controversial thesis about the value of true belief, or a dubious claim about value and luck. Coming up next are a few words on pragmatic encroachment itself.

II Purism and Pragmatic Encroachment

An orthodox position in epistemology, at least since Gettier, is that true belief counts as knowledge because of ‘purely epistemic’ or ‘truth-related’ factors — evidence, reliability, proper functioning, counterfactual relations, and the like. If Red’s true belief that $p$ is knowledge but Brown’s true belief that $p$ isn’t, then there must be a difference between these two with respect to their evidence, reliability, or the like. The difference between Red and Brown cannot depend on non-epistemic, non-‘truth-aimed’ factors. A touch more carefully, the orthodox view:

Purism: For any two possible subjects S and S*, if S and S* are alike with respect to the strength of their epistemic position regarding true proposition $p$, then S and S* are alike with respect to being in a position to know that $p$. (Fantl and McGrath [2007])

Purism has recently been challenged by theorists exploiting links between knowledge and action (see Fantl and McGrath [2002] and [2007] and Hawthorne [2004]). A standard argument for pragmatic encroachment goes as follows. Take two subjects who have identical epistemic qualifications (evidence, reliability, etc.) and then show they are not alike with respect to their position to know some true proposition because their practical circumstances differ — that is, one subject has ‘high stakes’ whereas the other has ‘low stakes.’ This threatens Purism because it locates a difference in knowing in something non-epistemic.

I will now give an argument that pushes anti-luck epistemology in some unexpected directions, one of which is pragmatic encroachment.
III A Challenge for Anti-luck Epistemology

The argument I shall present presses the anti-luck epistemologist to accept one of four positions — none of which is clearly welcome and some of which are clearly unwelcome. Either anti-luck epistemology implies that Purism is false or it can’t explain why subjects in Gettier examples lack knowledge or it must be paired with a controversial thesis about everyone’s interest in true belief or it must detach luck from interests. So: what will it be? I won’t myself settle the question, but I will discuss the costs of taking up each option.

Some terminology to begin. I shall call epistemic facts whatever determines the strength of ‘purely epistemic’ factors like evidence, reliability, and so on. I will refer to facts that fix what someone is in a position to know as position-to-know facts. Finally, I’ll call the factors that determine whether an event is significant for a subject significance facts.

It is critical to appreciate how these three sorts of facts are related on anti-luck epistemology. Supposing that Purism is true, position-to-know facts supervene on epistemic facts in the following sense: two subjects with identical epistemic facts always have identical position-to-know facts. To challenge Purism, just find a pair of possible subjects who have identical epistemic facts and different position-to-know facts. It so happens that on anti-luck epistemology, significance facts can be relevant to fixing position-to-know facts. For instance, if having a true belief regarding a sheep on the basis of the relevant sort of visual experience is significant for you, that event may be a stroke of knowledge-precluding luck for you. Of course, that sort of luck prevents you from knowing. Thus, by underwriting or giving rise to knowledge-precluding luck, significance facts can figure into position-to-know facts.

Note well: by initial appearances, significance facts are distinct from epistemic facts. That is, significance facts don’t seem to be determined by epistemic facts. What fixes the strength of someone’s evidence or her degree of reliability, for example, is not what fixes whether an event is significant for her. And given that significance facts seem to be distinct from epistemic facts, we might wonder: what if there can be a difference in position-to-know facts between two subjects that is due to a difference in their significance facts? That question summons a surprising possibility:

Two possible subjects have identical epistemic facts, different significance facts, and differ with respect to their position-to-know facts.

If this is indeed a genuine possibility, a difference in significance facts between two subjects can make a difference in their respective posi-
tion-to-know facts. This suggests that, given anti-luck epistemology, position-to-know facts supervene on both epistemic facts and significance facts, not on epistemic facts alone. That is just to say, given the possibility, there are no differences in position-to-know facts without differences in either epistemic or significance facts.

Anti-luck epistemologists will accept the above possibility or they will dismiss it. I shall argue there are four main options they can take up and each one comes with potentially unwelcome consequences. Recall that, according to anti-luck epistemology, whether someone is positioned to know that some proposition $p$ depends in part on whether she is positioned to hold a non-luckily true belief that $p$. And, as outlined in §1, a standard thought about luck’s nature has it that (a) an event is lucky for someone only if it is significant for her in virtue of her (subjective or objective) interests. Now, either (b) two possible subjects who are identical with respect to epistemic facts can have different significance facts or (c) they can’t have different significance facts. If two such subjects can have different significance facts [i.e., (b)], either (d) they can differ with respect to their position-to-know facts due to a difference in their significance facts or (e) they can’t so differ. And here we find four options, one of which theorists must adopt. I will discuss the costs of each one in detail below.

- Accept (b) [that two possible subjects who are identical with respect to epistemic facts can have different significance facts] & (e) [that they can’t differ with respect to their position-to-know facts due to a difference in their significance facts]. Cost: knowledge precluding-luck fails to explain why subjects in Gettier examples lack knowledge.

- Accept (b) & (d) [that those two subjects can differ with respect to their position-to-know facts due to a difference in their significance facts]. Cost: Purism is false.

- Accept (c) [that two possible subjects who are identical with respect to epistemic facts can’t have different significance facts]. Cost: affirming a controversial, non-obvious thesis about the value of true belief.

- Deny (a) [that an event is lucky for someone only if it is significant for her in virtue of her interests]. Cost: implausibly detach value and luck from interests.

Before discussing each option, let’s consider an example that will serve to advance the argument. Imagine that Green and Blue are in a
situation much like SHEEP DOG. They’re looking over the field, gazing at what appears to be a sheep. They form true beliefs that a sheep is in the field. Though a sheep is just out of view, what Green and Blue see is a dog masquerading as a sheep. Suppose that the very same epistemic facts hold for Green and Blue, but that different significance facts hold for them. Having a true belief regarding that sheep is good for Green, for she prefers or desires true beliefs to false ones. Not so for Blue. He is apathetic and (befitting his name) deeply depressed. In fact, suppose that Blue has no preference or desire to have a true belief that a sheep is in the field; he just doesn’t care. So, having a true belief about the sheep is neither good nor bad for him. On its face, a ‘disinterested’ subject like Blue appears to be possible, so let us grant this assumption and move on.\(^\text{13}\)

This example is consistent with an anti-luck epistemology, outfitted with either L1 or L2. Putting L1 to work first, we’ll see that Green’s true belief is straightforwardly ‘true by luck.’ Since Green prefers having true over false beliefs, having a true belief is lucky for her. And knowledge-precluding luck strikes, so Green’s position-to-know facts are affected — that lucky event prevents her from knowing a true proposition. On the other hand, Blue can’t be lucky with respect to having a true belief about that sheep; we’ve assumed that he lacks the relevant interest. Consequently, Blue’s true belief is not due to knowledge-precluding luck.

A similar story applies to an anti-luck epistemology that implements L2. As with L1, L2 naturally permits the possibility that Green and Blue have different significance facts. To see why, recall that L2 implies Constructivism; luck is ‘in the eye of the beholder.’ Let’s stipulate that Green believes truly because of knowledge-precluding luck. That is to say, Green has a true belief and if she were apprised of that event’s effects, she would ascribe significance to it. But L2 can’t guarantee that Blue would also ascribe significance to the relevant event were he apprised of its effects — whatever those happen to be. Given L2, there can be no assurance that a subject in a Gettier example must ascribe significance to her having a true belief. That being as it is, two subjects in quite similar circumstances might well have different significance facts. And so, on L2, Green’s position-to-know facts are affected: she is prevented from knowing by luck.

What about Blue’s position-to-know facts? Are Green and Blue in different positions with respect to knowing there is a sheep?

\(^{13}\) For the reader inclined to attribute to Blue an objective, non-desire-based interest in having a true belief, I say: keep it in mind. I will discuss the possibility below.
If they are in different positions, Purism is false. Any anti-luck epistemologist wishing to avoid pragmatic encroachment will say that Green and Blue are in the same position. We can refer to that position as *almost-knowing*. I will argue that saying Green and Blue both almost-know makes trouble for anti-luck epistemology. This is the first option.

Anti-luck epistemology implies that Green almost-knows because her belief is true as a matter of knowledge-precluding luck. But what about Blue? How has he wound up almost-knowing? The answer, we’ll remember, can have nothing to do with knowledge-precluding luck. We have assumed that Blue has no relevant interests; he can’t have luck regarding his true belief about that sheep. Yet, there must be something that determines his position-to-know facts. That something — we may dub it ‘X’ — makes Blue almost-know and, critically, X is independent of any significance facts. Quite plausibly, X also holds for Green. (Argument: assume that Green and Blue differ only with respect to the interest in having a true belief about the sheep in the field. Blue has X even though he lacks the interest in question. But Green and Blue are identical in whichever respects ensure Blue has X. So, Green also has X.) Now if X holds for Green, then, independent of significance facts, Green almost-knows, just as Blue almost-knows. Thus, if Green and Blue are in the same position with respect to knowing, then luck and thus significance facts play no unique role in fixing position-to-know facts.

Faithful anti-luck epistemologists will resist that consequence. According to them, luck is no mere feature of Gettier examples. They think that luck explains why Gettier examples are not instances of knowledge. But if Green and Blue have the same position-to-know facts, luck is a mere ‘third wheel.’ It does nothing that isn’t already done (by X). It plays no explanatory role. Once again: if significance facts play no unique role in fixing position-to-know facts, then there is a perfectly proper way to characterize Gettier examples without calling upon luck. Of course, accepting the first option is tantamount to giving up on anti-luck epistemology, a position given life by the idea that luck prevents subjects in Gettier examples from knowing. Rather than exploring knowledge-precluding luck, epistemologists who accept this option might explore knowledge-precluding X instead.

We shouldn’t forget that Gettier examples are sometimes characterized using notions like *accident* and *coincidence*, as I noted in §I. And it may be that these alternative notions don’t entail the ‘significance’ condition. Even if they do, theorists could surely build an appropriate

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14 Here are two examples that suggest as much. Imagine a man named Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck meets and greets another man with the very same name. They
notion that makes no use of significance. Theorists who go this way are exploring knowledge-precluding X. Importantly, that departure from anti-luck theories is motivated: if Gettier examples can be explained without appeal to luck, a ‘luck-free’ approach is simpler than anti-luck theories (all things being equal).

For better or worse, faithful anti-luck epistemologists shall not take up the study of knowledge-precluding X; giving up on luck would mean giving up on their theory. The first option isn’t for them. What is? To save their view, they can adopt one of the following three positions.

The second option: anti-luck epistemologists can say that Green and Blue are in different positions when it comes to knowing there is a sheep in the field. The idea, more fully, is that Green and Blue have different significance facts and thus they can differ with respect to their position-to-know facts due to a difference in significance facts. Their difference in position-to-know facts may be understood in one of two ways. For one, given that ‘knowledge excludes luck,’ it may be that Green’s lucky true belief does not amount to knowledge whereas Blue’s non-lucky true belief does. Alternatively, it may be that although Blue and Green both fall short of knowledge, Blue somehow sneaks closer to knowing than Green does. Either way, the anti-luck epistemologist may say that having interests makes it harder for Green to know than it is for ‘disinterested’ Blue to know. The upshot is pragmatic encroachment: taking this second option implies that Purism is false because identical epistemic facts but different position-to-know facts hold for Green and Blue. I anticipate this option won’t gain wide acceptance among anti-luck epistemologists.

Here is the third option: theorists can say that Green and Blue cannot have different significance facts. A natural reason to say that significance facts can’t vary for the pair appeals to the special value of true belief. Discussions of the value of knowledge and the aim(s) of inquiry have found some theorists affirming the following thesis: that every epistemic subject has a standing general interest in the truth for its own sake. If everyone has a general interest in the truth, then a true belief about

note this with disbelief and soon recognize they also share the same birth date. Their similarity is a coincidence. Yet saying it is coincidental is perfectly consistent with the assumption that it has no significance (good or bad) for either Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck. Another example suggests that accident doesn’t entail significance: you know how to spell ‘pandemonium,’ but due to an unintended pencil slip you misspell it in your diary. That was an accident. It’s arguable, though, that this event has no significance for you. So, it is at least plausible that accident and coincidence don’t imply significance. That said, I surmise we would need a firmer grip on these notions to establish the point.
the sheep is even significant for depressed Blue. But that implies Blue’s portrayal above — as utterly ‘disinterested’ in having that true belief — is in fact impossible in one respect. In the example, I envisioned Blue as having no interest in having a true belief because he is ‘disinterested.’ That is not what’s impossible: Blue might well lack a desire or preference to have a true belief. Yet even supposing Blue has no subjective interest in true belief, the thesis at issue implies that he must have an objective, non-desire-based interest in such a belief. According to the thesis, then, it is impossible that Blue has no interest (be it subjective or objective) in having a true belief. And so the thesis implies that both Green and Blue always have significance facts which ensure that having a true belief regarding the sheep is a stroke of luck for them.

Taking the third option circumvents pragmatic encroachment, all right, but at a cost. It isn’t obvious that we have a standing general interest in the truth for its own sake. Imagine you have a true belief regarding an outstandingly trivial matter: the number of grains of sand in Billy’s sandbox (see Sosa [2003: 156]). It seems implausible to say that having that true belief is in your interest. If it is really in your interest, we need an argument to counterbalance the apparent implausibility. But, importantly, any argument that tells in favour of the thesis is controversial; questions about the value of true belief and our interest in true belief are widely disputed among philosophers. Though some anti-luck epistemologists may be willing to accept the thesis, many will resist it. Accepting the thesis, anyhow, brings dialectical responsibilities.

Before moving on, it is worth observing that the third option is easier to handle on L1 than on L2. The thesis about our general interest in true belief may not sit comfortably with L2. Here, significance facts depend on the (actual or counterfactual) ascriptions of subjects when they’re apprised of the relevant effects of events. And L2 comes bundled with Constructivism: the thought that truths about luck are ‘in the eye of the beholder.’ Yet suppose a subject did not ascribe significance to her having a particular true belief when apprised of the relevant facts. Then having that true belief would lack significance for her. On its own, L2 furnishes no reason to rule out this possibility. Critically, though, if having a true belief could fail to be significant for some subject, then the

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15 See, for example, Kelly (2003: 64-5), Kvanvig (2003: ch 2) and (2008), Lynch (2004), and Grimm (2008). It is plausible that theorists who endorse the claim that true belief is always valuable (Kvanvig and Lynch, for instance) will also affirm the claim that we have an interest in having true belief. Suppose we have a general interest in accumulating value. If having a true belief is always valuable, then adding another one is always in our interest (all things being equal).
thesis that we have a standing general interest in having true beliefs seems to be threatened.

An anti-luck epistemology that includes L1 won’t face such trouble. L1 implies Realism regarding luck: truths about luck obtain independently of subjects’ ascriptions of significance. And perhaps certain facts make it true — if it is true — that having a true belief is always significant for every subject. It may be just those facts that also give everyone a standing interest in true belief. But then it won’t be possible that having a true belief fails to be significant for a subject whenever she has an interest in that selfsame event. Given L1, our (alleged) interest in having true beliefs and the significance of having a true belief can walk in step.

We have come to a fourth and final option: anti-luck epistemologists may reject the standard thesis that an event is lucky for someone only if it is significant (good or bad) for her in virtue of her interests. This thesis, if accepted, is part of what forces theorists to adopt some of the options canvassed earlier; rejecting it allows them to continue to talk about luck (rather than X) while avoiding both pragmatic encroachment and the thesis that everyone has a standing general interest in the truth. If the thesis is cast off, then Green and depressed Blue may have the same significance facts even though their interests are different.

We can appreciate the costs of the fourth option by reflection on these two claims. Here is the first:

\[ (i) \text{ Merely having a true belief can be valuable for someone even if it does not advance any interest she has.} \]

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16 E.J. Coffman deserves credit for recognizing this possibility.

17 We can arrive at (i) as follows. (1) If luck doesn’t require significance (that is, goodness or badness) in virtue of interests, then having a true belief can be lucky for S even if it is not good or bad for S in virtue of S’s interests. (2) Assumption: if an event is good luck (or bad luck) for S, then it is valuable (or disvaluable) for S. (3) So, if having a true belief can be lucky for S even if it is not good or bad for S in virtue of S’s interests, then having a true belief can be valuable for S even if it is not good or bad for S in virtue of S’s interests. [from (1) and (2)] (4) Assumption: if an event is not good or bad for S in virtue of S’s interests, then that event does not advance any interest S has. (5) So, if having a true belief can be valuable for S even if it is not good or bad for S in virtue of S’s interests, then having a true belief can be valuable for S even if it is not good or bad for S in virtue of S’s interests, then having a true belief can be valuable for S even if it does not advance any interest S has. [from (3) and (4)] (6) Thus: if luck doesn’t require significance in virtue of interests, then having a true belief can be valuable for S even if it does not advance any interest S has. [from (1), (3), (5) by HS]
(i) connects with debates about the value of true belief. Consider a representative passage from Jonathan Kvanvig, where he defends the thesis that having a true belief is always valuable from an objection due to Ernest Sosa (2003). Writes Kvanvig:

Sosa demurs concerning the claim that truth itself is valuable, however. He says:

At the beach on a lazy summer afternoon, we might scoop up a handful of sand and carefully count the grains. This would give us an otherwise unremarked truth, something that on the view before us is at least a positive good, other things equal. This view I hardly understand. The number of grains would not interest most of us in the slightest. Absent any such antecedent interest, moreover, it is hard to see any sort of value in one’s having that truth. (Sosa 2003)

Sosa doesn’t think that just any truth is valuable to believe and does not understand any account of value that isn’t dependent in some way on antecedent interests. But we do have an interest in the truth, both pragmatic and purely intellectual. (2003: 41)

Kvanvig goes on to argue that Sosa’s ‘sand’ example is not a clear counterexample to the thesis that true belief is always valuable. What’s critical here is that Kvanvig doesn’t question Sosa’s assumption that values depend on interests. Indeed, Kvanvig appears to accept that assumption. This is an instance of a general trend in discussions concerning the value of true belief: values are typically assumed to be dependent on interests. But accepting (i) effectively detaches values from interests. Therefore, a commitment to (i) — and, thus, the fourth option — seems to be worth avoiding.

And there is another claim that follows from denying that luck requires significance in virtue of interests:

(ii) An event can be an instance of good luck for someone even if it does not advance any interest she has.¹⁸

Suppose that theorists embrace (ii). Then they will be led towards admitting that objects without interests can ‘get lucky.’ This consequence will

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¹⁸ Here’s how to arrive at (ii). (1) If luck doesn’t require significance (that is, goodness or badness) in virtue of interests, then an event can be lucky for S even if it is not good or bad for S in virtue of S’s interests. (2) If an event can be lucky for S even if it is not good or bad in virtue of S’s interests, then an event can be lucky for S even if it doesn’t advance any interest S has. (3) So: If luck doesn’t require significance in virtue of interests, then an event can be lucky for S even if it doesn’t advance any interest S has. [from (1) and (2) by HS]
strike us as dubious and rightly so. What would stop ‘medium-sized dry goods’ from being lucky? Of course, we don’t think that inanimate objects — like rubber ducks, window panes, and chainsaws — can have good or bad luck. To say that inanimate objects have luck is a category mistake. Plausibly enough, being the recipient of luck involves having (subjective or objective) interests. Yet the fourth option prevents theorists from accommodating this natural feature of luck because it detaches luck from interests. That is a quite serious cost and it is likely enough for theorists to turn up their noses at this option.\(^{19}\)

IV Conclusion

I have argued that anti-luck epistemologists should embrace pragmatic encroachment, accept a controversial thesis about our interest in true belief, or detach value and luck from interests. The alternative is to stop talking about luck. Indeed, one suggestion here has been that perhaps — just perhaps — luck isn’t at the bottom of Gettier examples. Suppose that epistemologists abandon the ‘significance’ condition on luck and instead pursue a different notion, built out of the ‘lack of control’ and ‘modal fragility’ elements of luck. Perhaps they’d then endorse ‘anti-accident’ or ‘anti-coincidence’ epistemology. By going after something other than luck, anyhow, epistemologists would bypass problems outlined in §III. It may be that the pursuit of anti-luck conditions on knowledge has moved the discussion away from the relevant (‘purely epistemic’) phenomena — that theorists have been pursuing the wrong idea by thinking about luck. The argument of this essay gives theorists some reason to (continue to) explore ‘luck-free’ alternatives.

Yet, as I see it, no part of the argument here needs to be taken as hostile to anti-luck epistemology. Some of its advocates may gladly embrace one of the latter three options, understanding what I have called a ‘cost’ as an outright advantage of their theory or perhaps a position they have

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19 Objection: people sometimes utter sentences like, ‘That house is lucky to have survived the tsunami.’ And so there are plausibly lucky inanimate objects. In reply, I follow Coffman (2007: 387) in recommending that such talk is either shorthand for a claim about subjects with interests (‘They’re lucky the house survived…’) or an indirect way of making a probability claim (‘It was so unlikely the house would survive…’). At bottom, the propriety of the relevant utterances is not good evidence that ‘non-interested’ beings can have luck. For more on this score, see something else I’ve written (forthcoming).
already adopted. I expect, though, that not all anti-luck epistemologists will feel quite so lucky.\(^{20}\)

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