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In Defence of Virtue Epistemology

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Abstract. In a number of recent papers Duncan Pritchard argues that virtue epistemology's central ability condition—one knows that p if and only if one has attained cognitive success (true belief) because of the exercise of intellectual ability—is neither necessary nor sufficient for knowledge. This paper discusses and dismisses a number of responses to Pritchard's objections and develops a new way of defending virtue epistemology against them.

1. Introduction

The central thesis of virtue theories of knowledge is that knowledge is cognitive success—true belief—that is attained because of the exercise of intellectual virtue or ability. Virtue theories promise to provide the key to the solution of a number of pressing problems in the theory of knowledge. For instance, virtue theories offer an appealing explanation of the value of knowledge. We generally regard successes attained because of ability as distinctively valuable: A shot that finds the target because of great skill, to give just one example, is intuitively more valuable than a shot that finds the target despite inability or a skilled shot that misses the target. It is intuitively even more valuable than a shot that is skilled and finds the target but does so only because of a couple of accidents that cancel out each other's effects. In order to explain the value of knowledge virtue theorists can avail themselves of the idea that knowledge is just an instance of this more general phenomenon: Knowledge is *cognitive* success because of *intellectual* ability. Knowledge thus inherits the distinctive value we accord to success because of ability in general.¹

However, the problem of the value of knowledge is not the only count on which virtue theories may hope to score. They also hold out the hope of providing a solution to one of the most difficult problems in the theory of knowledge: the Gettier problem. Virtue theorists often

point out that success because of ability contrasts with merely lucky success. Applied to the cognitive domain, true belief attained because of intellectual ability contrasts with true belief that is merely luckily true. However, it is by now widely agreed that the problem in Gettier cases is that the subject's belief is only luckily true. If this diagnosis of the Gettier problem as well as the virtue theorists' claim that success because of ability contrasts with merely lucky success are correct, there is reason to believe that gettierised subjects do not believe truly because of intellectual ability. That is to say, there is reason to believe that gettierised subjects do not satisfy the condition placed on knowledge by virtue theories. Thus, virtue theories hold out the hope of providing a solution even to the Gettier problem.²

There is thus excellent reason to believe that a virtue theory of knowledge will be a powerful tool for epistemologists. However, Duncan Pritchard has recently adduced a couple of arguments which, if sound, show that virtue epistemology faces serious problems.³ The first one is intended to show that the central condition placed on knowledge by virtue theories is actually not sufficient for knowledge, while the second one purports to demonstrate that it is not even necessary for knowledge. In this paper I will discuss Pritchard's arguments and some recent responses to it. I will provide reason to believe that, while Pritchard's argument is ultimately unconvincing, none of the proposed responses is fully satisfactory either. Finally, I will provide a new and better response to Pritchard's argument.

2. Pritchard's first argument

Before we get started on the argument, I'd like to express agreement, at least for present purposes, with Pritchard on at least one point, *viz.* that successes that are attained because of the exercise of ability are *achievements*.⁴ Given that this is so, the virtue theoretic conception of knowledge is equivalent to the thesis that knowledge is a (cognitive) achievement. Accordingly, in what follows I will use the two theses interchangeably. Now, one might think that the equivalence between the two theses is actually good news for virtue

epistemologists since the idea that knowledge is a cognitive achievement is in itself rather plausible so that, if anything, the virtue theoretic conception of knowledge receives additional support from the equivalence. On the other hand, of course, if Pritchard's argument against the virtue theoretic conception of knowledge is successful, then, given that achievements are successes because of ability, it will also show that knowledge isn't a cognitive achievement. Therefore, the two theses stand and fall together.

Let's now move on to Pritchard's first argument. At the heart of it is the following case. Suppose Archie, a skilled archer, goes to a shooting range, selects a target at random and fires a skilled shot which hits the target right in the centre. Intuitively, Archie's success constitutes an achievement. His success is due to the exercise of his arching ability. At the same time, maintains Pritchard, this intuition remains even if we suppose, additionally, that, unbeknownst to Archie, he is shooting at the only target at the range that has not been fitted with a forcefield that would repel any shot fired at it.⁵

Now this case causes trouble for virtue theories because, claims Pritchard, it is formally analogous to the case of Henry who drives through the countryside, looks at the only real barn in a field otherwise full of barn façades and forms a true belief that he is facing a barn. The sabotaged targets in Archie's case play the role of the barn façades in Henry's case, while the one non-sabotaged target in Archie's case plays the role of the one real barn in Henry's case. Pritchard's point here is, of course, that since the two cases are formally analogous and since it is plausible that Archie's success is because of the exercise of his arching ability, we must now concede that Henry's true belief that he is facing a barn is because of his barn-spotting ability also. At the same time, however, intuitively, Henry's belief does not qualify as knowledge. Therefore, concludes Pritchard, cognitive success that is because of intellectual ability is not sufficient for knowledge.⁶

Pritchard offers the following diagnosis of why virtue epistemology fails to pass the correct verdict in this case. First, he distinguishes between two different ways in which a

given success can be lucky. On the one hand, luck can “[intervene] between ability and success.”⁷ A variation of Archie’s case in which luck intervenes in the way envisaged is one in which Archie’s shot is first blown off course by a freak gust of wind and then brought back on target by a second gust. On the other hand, however, the luck that may afflict a given success can also be “environmental”⁸ as it is in the original case in which he shoots at the only non-sabotaged target at the range. Now, Pritchard argues that luck that intervenes between success and ability is incompatible with achievement. By way of evidence, Pritchard points out that, when Archie’s shot is blown off and back on target, intuitively, he has not attained an achievement. This intuition is backed up by the observation that his success is not because of the exercise of his ability but because of the whim of the wind. As opposed to that, argues Pritchard, achievements are compatible with environmental luck. Here the original case of Archie is cited by way of evidence. Given that achievements are incompatible only with intervening luck but not with environmental luck, there is excellent reason to believe that the virtue theoretic condition is bound to be insufficient for knowledge. After all, as the case of Henry in Barn Façade County illustrates, knowledge is incompatible not just with intervening luck but also with environmental luck.⁹

3. Sosa’s response to Pritchard’s argument

Even if one is unable to find fault with Pritchard’s argument, one might wonder whether a suggestive analogy like the one of Archie should be strong enough to dislodge so fruitful and powerful a theory as we have found virtue epistemology to be. Indeed one may wonder whether the theoretical advantages of accepting a virtue theory of knowledge could not be strong enough to resist, for instance, the intuition that Henry does not know. Such a view has recently been defended by Ernest Sosa.¹⁰ By Sosa’s lights, Henry does know that he is facing a barn and our intuition that he doesn’t know is explained away. In order to achieve this, Sosa first draws a distinction between “animal” and “reflective” knowledge.¹¹ Animal

knowledge is defined as correct belief that is attributable to—or, alternatively, that is because of—intellectual ability. Sosa also calls this “apt belief”.¹² As opposed to that, reflective knowledge is second-order animal knowledge or “apt belief aptly noted”.¹³ That is, it involves correct belief that one’s belief is apt that is attributable to intellectual ability. The thought then is that Henry’s belief that he is facing a barn constitutes animal knowledge—as his cognitive success is attributable to intellectual ability—but not reflective knowledge—as, certainly, in a situation in which so easily he could have been looking at a barn façade, the correctness of his belief that he believes aptly is not attributable to the reflective ability that delivers this belief. Our intuition that Henry does not know is explained as due to the fact that he lacks reflective knowledge.¹⁴

How convincing is Sosa’s story? One important question here concerns just how much of a cost it is to accept the counterintuitive result that the cognitive agent in a case like Henry’s has knowledge. And one may think that the correct answer here is: “Not a very substantive one.” After all, the cases that are most prominent in the literature are rather extravagant: they involve barn façades, perceivers who look at kaleidoscopes controlled by cunning jokesters and the like. Plausibly, accepting counterintuitive results in cases as extravagant as these is a manageable cost to the theory. It is noteworthy, however, that some fairly mundane versions of these cases can be given. Here are two of them:

Liz has a new colleague Tony Twin who has been working in her office for the last couple of months. Liz and Tony interact frequently on a professional basis and stop for some small talk when they run into each other in the small town they now both call their home. Unbeknownst to Liz, Tony has an identical twin brother, Toby, who still lives the city the two brothers grew up in. Today Toby has come for the first time to visit his brother in his new town. Liz looks out of the window of her kitchen, sees Tony pass by and forms a true belief that this is what happened. However, Toby is just around the corner. Had she looked out of the window a couple of minutes later, she would have seen him walk by in which case she would have acquired a false belief.

Gina Gemstone, a diamond expert, is holding a handful of fake diamonds that thanks to a new technology are so carefully crafted that they cannot be distinguished from real diamonds except by elaborate laboratory procedures. By some accident, one real diamond found its way into the bunch. Gina picks a stone at random, which happens to be the real thing, and checks it for authenticity using a method that allows her to decisively

discriminate real diamonds from all kinds of fakes except the ones produced by the new technology. Since the inventors of the new technology have been careful to keep its existence a secret, Gina does not know about it. So she forms a belief that she is looking at a real diamond.

Both cases have essentially the same structure as the one of Henry but are much more mundane. After all, it is easily imaginable that cases like these happen and I would be somewhat surprised if history had not witnessed at least similar ones. So, if extravagance of the problematic cases matters to just how big the bullet is that Sosa has to bite in accepting the counterintuitive results, then the above considerations reveal it to be bigger than one might have thought in view of the cases dominant in recent literature.

However, there is even better reason to resist the verdict that the cognitive agent in such cases knows. Suppose, as is certainly possible, that some cognitive agent is good at acquiring animal knowledge but very bad at acquiring reflective knowledge for a certain field of propositions. For instance, suppose that Gina Gemstone is very good at implementing the procedure that determines whether a certain stone is a real diamond but has false beliefs about how the procedure works that play a crucial part in the formation of beliefs that her first-order beliefs are apt. In such a situation it would seem that Gina is capable of acquiring animal knowledge but not reflective knowledge about whether a certain stone is a real diamond. Now, one problem that Sosa's view faces is that, for such a "reflectively weak" Gina, there is no knowledge-related difference between her belief acquired in a situation in which she picks up the only real diamond from a bunch of fakes and forms a true belief that it is real and a situation in which there exists no type of fake that her procedure would not distinguish from the real thing: in both cases she acquires animal knowledge but fails to acquire reflective knowledge. That seems to be the wrong result, however. After all, there is an intuitive difference between the two cases, *viz.* that Gina acquires knowledge in the latter case but not in the former.

Further problems for Sosa's view arise when conjoined with a thesis that has enjoyed an increasing amount of popularity amongst epistemologists in recent years, *viz.* that knowledge is the epistemic norm for certain speech acts. One widely discussed candidate here is assertion.¹⁵ Even if this turned out to be mistaken, however, there is still a strong case to be made that knowledge is at least the epistemic norm for informative speech acts such as informing, telling and the like.¹⁶ Given that it is, if we admit that cognitive agents like Gina, Liz and Henry have knowledge, we accord them the epistemic authority to perform the corresponding informative speech acts.¹⁷ However, it would seem unwise to accord them such authority in situations in which so easily they might have said something false. This is particularly clear in the case of Gina. In a situation in which she is looking at the only real diamond from a bunch of fakes it would be very unwise to accord her the epistemic authority to tell a potential buyer that the diamond she is holding is real. These considerations suggest, then, that Sosa will be unable to accommodate the attractive knowledge rule of informative speech acts. And that is, of course, a further cost to the theory.

Of course, Sosa could revise the knowledge rule of informative speech acts and construe the norm for informative speech acts in terms of reflective rather than animal knowledge. However, this move is not without disadvantages either. To begin with, he will have to accept that a reflectively weak Gina does not have the epistemic authority to perform the relevant informative speech acts even when there exists no type of fake the procedure wouldn't allow her to identify as such. Again, however, that appears to be the wrong result. Moreover, Sosa will have to accept that cognitive agents who do not possess the reflective abilities and concepts needed to acquire reflective knowledge can never have the epistemic authority to perform informative speech acts. And that does not seem right either. After all, it is plausible that small children can felicitously inform us about various facts about themselves and their environment even before they have the reflective abilities and concepts required for

reflective knowledge.¹⁸ If so, they must also have the epistemic authority to perform a speech act of informing.

Finally, let's ask what the cognitive achievement involved in perceptual, i.e. animal knowledge that a certain person is Tony, a certain stone a real diamond or a certain structure a barn amounts to. It seems plausible to me that this achievement—in the cases under consideration at least—consists in the identification by perceptual means of the person as Tony, the stone as a real diamond and the structure as a barn. However, such identification always involves the *discrimination* of the person/object/kind of object from other persons, objects and kinds of object. More specifically, it is very plausible that such identification involves discrimination of the person/object/kind of object from all other persons, objects and kinds of object that exist in one's environment. However, in Henry's as well as in Gina's and in Liz's case, such discrimination has not taken place. Liz is in no position to discriminate Tony from Toby and neither Gina nor Henry is in a position to discriminate the real specimen from the fakes (at least not from their positions relative to the objects and with the methods available to them). Plausibly, then, in all of these cases, the cognitive achievement involved even in the bare perceptual, i.e. animal knowledge that a certain person is Tony, a certain stone a real diamond or a certain structure a barn has not been attained. In this way, then, there is further reason to resist the suggestion that cognitive agents in cases like Liz's, Gina's or Henry's possess animal knowledge.

I take it that in conjunction these considerations make a fairly strong case that the strategy of biting the bullet and allowing cognitive agents in the above cases to have animal knowledge is unsuccessful. If so, of course, our response to Pritchard's argument had better preserve the intuition that such cognitive agents do not know.

4. Greco's response to Pritchard's argument

The question then is whether there is a way of construing the virtue theoretic conception of knowledge such that Henry fails to satisfy the crucial condition whilst still allowing that Archie does succeed because of the exercise of ability. Greco thinks there is: He provides a general account of ability and ventures to put this account to use in order to get the cases right. To be more precise, Greco proposes the following account of ability:

S has an ability A (R/C) [i.e. to attain result R in conditions C] relative to environment E = Across the set of relevantly close worlds W where S is in C and in E, S has a high rate of success in achieving R.¹⁹

This account of ability relativises ability possession to an environment and a set of conditions: to possess an ability to do something is to possess an ability to do it in a given environment, E, and conditions, C. Moreover, Greco places a reliability condition on abilities so construed: to possess an ability to do something in a C/E pair is to attain a high rate of success in doing it at relevantly close worlds in which these C and E are held fixed. This account of ability is then exploited in an argument that Henry is in a C/E pair relative to which he fails to attain a high rate of success across relevantly close worlds when it comes to spotting barns and thus lacks the ability to spot barns, while Archie is in a C/E pair relative to which he continues to succeed at a high rate at relevantly close worlds and thus possesses his arching ability. Greco secures this result by arguing that the C/E pair in terms of which a given ability is defined may vary depending on two factors: first, the nature of the ability at issue and, second, the conversational context in which the attribution of ability is made.²⁰ Regarding contextualism about attributions of ability, Greco claims that attributor context fixes the relevant practical reasoning context. The purposes and interests of the practical reasoning context in conjunction with certain facts about the nature of the ability at issue then supply the C/E pair. If the agent successfully attains the result in question at a high rate of relevantly close worlds in which C and E thus supplied are held fixed, the corresponding attribution of ability will be true. For the purposes of the present discussion, it does not (or at least not obviously) matter whose

practical reasoning context is determined as the relevant one by attributor context. Rather, what matters is how the purposes and interests of the practical reasoning context and the nature of the ability, once fixed, supply the C/E pair that fixes the truth conditions for the attribution of ability in context. Here Greco tells us that, in Archie's case, the presence of sabotaged targets is "not deemed relevant for determining whether [Archie] has the ability in question [i.e. to hit the target]".²¹ This suggests that, by Greco's lights, in Archie's case, our purposes and interests provide a C/E pair that makes no reference to targets that are fitted with hidden forcefields. Since, relative to such a C/E pair, Archie continues to be successful at most relevantly close worlds, in the context at issue, we can truly say that Archie has his arching ability. As opposed to that, in Henry's case, and in cases involving intellectual abilities more generally:

[I]t does matter how S's [i.e. the cognitive agent's] performance would be affected by [misleading sources of information, i.e. barn façades and the like] in the environment. Given the nature and purpose of our knowledge-related abilities, it is centrally relevant whether S can reliably negotiate such aspects of her environment."²²

So Greco seems to be suggesting that, in Henry's case, our purposes and interests supply a C/E pair that does make reference to barn façades. Since in such C and E Henry does not continue to attain a high success rate at hitting upon the truth about the presence of a barn at close worlds, in the context at issue, he cannot truly be said to even possess the relevant intellectual ability and, therefore, does not satisfy the ability condition on knowledge.

In order to assess Greco's proposal, let us first ask what, according to Greco, these intellectual abilities are abilities to do. Or, in Greco's terms, what is the result, R, delivered by the intellectual abilities that figure in Greco's virtue theoretic conception of knowledge?

There are two possible answers that naturally suggest themselves:

- (1) R = knowledge: the intellectual abilities that figure in Greco's conception of knowledge are *abilities to know*.
- (2) R = true belief: the relevant intellectual abilities are *abilities to form true beliefs*.

Now, the answer to the question Greco envisages is (2). This is clear in his discussion of a case parallel to the one of Henry where he says: “Relative to the environment she is in [i.e. one in which misleading sources of information abound], S does not even have an ability to form *true beliefs* of the relevant sort.”²³ There is good reason for Greco to construe the relevant intellectual abilities as abilities to form true beliefs rather than abilities to know. After all, construing the abilities that figure in his conception of knowledge as abilities to know renders the conception of knowledge circular. At the very least, this means that he will foreclose the possibility of providing a reductive account of the nature of knowledge. However, that would be a cost to the view. After all, recall that one of the professed benefits of a virtue theory of knowledge is that it holds out the hope of providing a solution to the Gettier problem.²⁴ This can be the substantive result as which it is advertised only if the virtue theoretic conception of knowledge turns out to be a reductive, non-circular analysis of knowledge. On the other hand, if the relevant abilities are construed along the lines of (2), a reductive account of the nature of knowledge is still very much a live option. In this way, then, there is not only excellent textual evidence that Greco construes the intellectual abilities that figure in his conception of knowledge as abilities to truly believe, but there is also good reason for him to do so.

One initial problem for Greco here arises from the fact that purposes and interests are known to vary (across people, for the same people across times), while our intuition that cognitive agents in cases like Henry’s lack knowledge is stable across contexts: there is no context in which we consider a cognitive agent like Henry in Barn Façade County and find that, intuitively, he knows that he is facing a barn.²⁵ Greco thus faces a familiar threat for conceptions of knowledge that allow for context-sensitivity of at least some of the epistemologically interesting terms in the degettierisation condition for knowledge, *viz.* that there will remain contexts in which the relevant context-sensitive term does not take the

semantic value needed to predict ignorance, while our intuition that the subject does not know remains even in this context.²⁶

To give just one example of how Greco's proposal is affected by this threat, consider a context in which we are interested in the question why, even in Barn Façade County, Henry will reliably form true beliefs about the presence of a barn when facing one (i.e. when facing a real barn). It is plausible that at least part of the right answer will be that he possesses the ability to form true beliefs about the presence of a barn.²⁷ Thus we have constructed a context in which our purposes and interests are such as to make true an attribution of the ability to form true beliefs about the presence of a barn to Henry. Even so—and this is the point about the stability of our intuition that gettierised subjects lack knowledge—we have not now constructed a context in which Henry can truly be attributed knowledge that he is facing a barn. On the contrary, the intuition that Henry lacks knowledge remains. Given that this is so, Greco's response to Pritchard comes under pressure. After all, our intuition that Henry lacks knowledge was supposed to be explained by the fact that in the relevant context, Henry must be denied the ability to form true beliefs about the presence of a barn. The fact that we have a case in which the intuition remains but Henry can truly be attributed the relevant ability then is bad news for Greco.

Just how bad news is it? Unless Greco is prepared to change some parts of his response to Pritchard, it seems that he will have to accept that the sentence 'Henry knows that he is facing a barn' expresses a truth in the context under consideration. And that, one may initially think, is pretty bad news. On the other hand, perhaps the damage can be limited—or even avoided entirely—if it can be argued that this sentence cannot truly be *asserted*. The obvious way of pulling this off would be to argue that the assertion of this sentence effects a context change, and that 'ability to form true beliefs about the presence of a barn' takes a different semantic value in this new context such that Henry must be denied this 'ability'. Of course, in order to do this, Greco needs a story as to how this context change is effected.

Since, according to him, it is our purposes and interests that determine the semantic value of the relevant ‘ability’, this story will have to be a story about how the knowledge attribution changes our purposes and interests in such a way as to deliver the desired result.

Now Greco does tell a story that promises to do the job for him. Greco endorses the following two theses: first, a thesis he attributes to Timothy Williamson²⁸ and John Hawthorne²⁹ to the effect that knowledge is the norm of practical reasoning. Meanwhile, the second thesis is due to Edward Craig.³⁰ According to Greco, this thesis states that the job of the concept of knowledge is to flag good information and good sources of information.³¹ These two theses, according to Greco, support the further thesis that “a primary function of our knowledge language is to flag information for use in practical reasoning.”³² Given that this is so, claims Greco, there is reason to believe that knowledge cannot come too cheaply:

[T]he information-sharing function of our knowledge language puts pressure on the standards for knowledge in an upwards direction. The standards for knowledge cannot be so low as to make knowledge widely unusable.

The upshot is this: even if the standards for knowledge vary across practical environments, they will not vary widely (or wildly) across those environments, and this is ensured by the functions that knowledge and knowledge language play in our practical and social activities.³³

Furthermore, Greco is clear that what goes for standards for knowledge goes for interests and purposes as well:

[I]nterests and purposes will be stable across different contexts of practical reasoning. Likewise, as we saw in the case of standards for knowledge, the need for sharing knowledge across different practical environments creates pressure towards stability.³⁴

If Greco is right that the primary function of our knowledge language is to flag good information for use in practical reasoning and that this does create an upwards pressure on the standards for knowledge as well as the interests and purposes, it becomes plausible that an attribution of knowledge—i.e. the use of knowledge language—will effect a change in interests and purposes in cases like the problem case above. With the thesis about the function of our knowledge language in play, Greco may be able to defuse the threat arising for

conceptions of knowledge that allow for context-sensitivity of the epistemologically interesting terms in the degettierisation condition.

Of course, the success of Greco's strategy here will depend on the plausibility of the thesis concerning the primary function of our knowledge language. Since he ventures to support this thesis by appeal to the knowledge norm of practical reasoning and the Craigian thesis concerning the job of the concept of knowledge, it will depend on the plausibility of these two theses. Both theses, however, are far from uncontroversial. I, for one, am convinced that Craig's argument for the thesis concerning the job of the concept of knowledge fails.³⁵ Since Greco defers to Craig for support of this thesis, this would, of course, also reflect badly on Greco's overall argument. On the other hand, the thesis that knowledge is the norm of practical reasoning is hotly debated.³⁶ Significantly, Jessica Brown explicitly argues that the knowledge norm of practical reasoning cannot be taken to be a fixed point from which to defend substantive epistemological theses.³⁷ Clearly, if successful, Brown's argument puts Greco, who ventures to do just this, once again under serious pressure.

Instead of rehearsing these arguments and passing a final verdict on Greco's position, I would like to highlight just how much theoretical machinery Greco ends up wheeling in to get his response to Pritchard off the ground:

- (1) A specific conception of the nature of ability
- (2) A contextualist semantics for attributions of ability
- (3) A thesis concerning the relation between knowledge and practical reason
- (4) A thesis concerning the job of the concept of knowledge

In view of the fact that at least theses (3) and (4) are highly controversial, it seems plausible to me that even if Greco can prevent this whole edifice from collapsing and still succeed in blocking Pritchard's argument, it would certainly be desirable to have a response to Pritchard that does not rely on managing the delicate balance of a number of theses some of which must be considered controversial. I will provide precisely such a response in the following section.

5. A better response to Pritchard's argument

In my books, Pritchard's argument fails because the cases of Archie and Henry are disanalogous in a crucial respect. Now, I grant that it is not easy to spot in what way exactly the two cases are disanalogous. After all, both cases share a number of apparently important features. In both cases the agents attain the relevant successes. Moreover, in both cases the environments contain a threat in virtue of which both agents could easily have failed to succeed. For that reason their respective successes are afflicted by what Pritchard calls environmental luck. But if this kind of luck is compatible with achievement and if, additionally, this kind of luck undermines knowledge in Henry's case, how can the two cases be disanalogous in any respect pertinent to whether the thesis that knowledge is a cognitive achievement can be rescued?

In order to answer this question, I would like to draw attention to the following intuitively plausible thesis concerning achievements: achievement contrasts with *success by fluke* in the sense that if a given success is attained by fluke, it does not qualify as an achievement. Notice, by way of evidence for this thesis, that a given attribution of achievement can normally be challenged by a claim that the success at issue was attained by fluke. This is what's happening, for instance, when a parent praises one child for passing a difficult exam and the other one points out that the first one merely fluked it. Similarly, one can reject an attribution of achievement by admitting that one succeeded by fluke—for instance, when a friend praises one for making a difficult pot and one admits that it was a mere fluke. Finally, assertions or thoughts of the form “He attained the achievement by fluke” appear inappropriate.

Now, on the face of it, it may seem hard to see how the thesis that achievement contrasts with success by fluke is any different than the thesis that achievement is incompatible with luck. After all, one might be inclined to think, a fluky success just is a lucky success. In consequence, it may be hard to see how it could allow us to make any

progress towards a response to Pritchard's argument. Importantly, however, appearances are misleading. The two theses are importantly different, at least given, as does Pritchard, that one understands the notion of lucky success in terms of *easy failure*³⁸—or, given a standard possible worlds semantics of the relevant modality, equivalently: in terms of *failure at nearby possible worlds*.³⁹ Easy failure is neither necessary nor sufficient for fluky success. To see why the sufficiency claim is false consider the following case. The by far strongest competitor in the upcoming race, Ralph Racer, is in lane five. Now suppose that a demon is watching over the race determined to prevent racers on lanes with even numbers from winning. Ralph wins the race as expected. In this situation, Ralph might very easily not have succeeded. That this is so becomes particularly clear once one considers the situation in terms of the possible worlds semantics for the relevant modality: at a wide range of nearby possible worlds, the demon decides to prevent runners on odd lanes from winning or, alternatively, Ralph is on a lane with an even number in which case, of course, Ralph does not win the race. Yet, intuitively, his success isn't by fluke. After all, he was by far the strongest runner in the race and he won the race for that reason. To see why the necessity claim is false suppose Ralph Racer is by far the weakest competitor in the race. However, by a series of coincidences, all the other racers cannot complete the race. In this situation, intuitively, Ralph Racer wins by fluke. In order to make the case one in which nonetheless he could not easily have failed to win, just suppose, additionally, that there is a demon watching over the race who would have prevented the other racers from winning if they hadn't all dropped out. Again, that this makes the case one in which he could not easily have failed to succeed becomes clear once the situation is considered in terms of the possible worlds semantics for the relevant modality: The stipulation that the demon would have prevented the other racers from winning if they hadn't dropped out ensures that Ralph wins not only in the actual world but also at nearby possible worlds so that he couldn't easily have failed to win.⁴⁰ These considerations show that fluky success and lucky success in Pritchard's sense come apart. Given that this is so, it is

possible that flukiness is a property that is not shared by Archie's and Henry's successes and hence one that may allow us to establish that the two cases are disanalogous in a crucial respect.⁴¹

Notice, next, that our intuitive verdicts about the two cases do indeed come apart with regard to the flukiness of the success. Intuitively, when Henry forms a belief that he is facing a barn in an environment in which barn façades prevail, his cognitive success—the fact he hits upon the truth—is by fluke. As opposed to that, there also is an intuition that when Archie hits the bulls-eye whilst practising on a non-sabotaged target his success is not by fluke even when we assume that the target he is practising on is the only non-sabotaged target at the range.

The question that obviously arises at this stage is whether we can do more than advert to these intuitions about flukiness. I think we can. To begin with, it is important to see that whether or not a given success is fluky may depend on facts about the environment. For instance, whether Ralph Racer's victory—in a non-demon scenario—is fluky will depend on how strong his competitors are. If Ralph is up against a bunch of seven-year-old children, his success will typically not be by fluke. If on the other hand, he is up against the top seven runners in the world (himself being merely an amateur), it is hard to see how he could succeed except by fluke. In this way, then, whether or not a success is fluky may depend on facts about the environment.

Second, which facts about the environment are relevant to assessments of fluky success may vary depending on the *nature of the achievement* at issue. Ralph Racer's *victory* in the race may be but a fluke—for instance, when he wins only because all other competitors, who are stronger than Ralph, drop out due to injury. Accordingly, we will deny that the victory is an achievement of his. However, the success involved in running the distance in a certain period of time may not at all be fluky. Here we may well truly attribute to him the corresponding achievement. It becomes clear, then, that which environmental facts are relevant to assessment of fluky success varies from one kind of achievement to another.

Notice that this puts us in an even better position to argue that Archie attains an achievement when shooting at the only non-sabotaged target at the range whilst Henry does not attain an achievement when looking at the only real barn in a field full of façades. After all, there are different types of achievement—athletic and cognitive respectively—involved in both cases. And we have now learned that the environmental facts relevant to the assessment of fluky success may vary depending on the nature of the achievement under consideration. Now, one may think, this fact in conjunction with the fact that we do have diverging intuitions about the two cases gives us fairly good reason to think that they do indeed afford contradictory verdicts.

But is it possible to make the case stronger than this? Again, it seems to me that it is. To see how, let's ask exactly why it is that Ralph Racer's victory is fluky and hence no achievement whilst his running the distance in a certain period of time is not fluky and hence still constitutes an achievement. The correct answer, it seems to me, is that the achievement involved in winning the race by its very nature makes reference to the other competitors. After all, the achievement crucially involves *prevailing against the competitors*. Accordingly, when it comes to assessments of flukiness certain facts about the other competitors cannot be ignored. For instance, if the other runners are much stronger than Ralph, it is hard to see how he could win the race except by fluke. Accordingly, achievement seems to be out of the question. As opposed to that, the achievement involved in running the distance in less than a certain period of time makes no reference to the other competitors. That's why Ralph can attain this achievement even when up against much stronger runners. Now, it seems to me that the case of Henry is analogous to the case of winning the race in the following way: As we have seen in Section 3, the achievement involved in acquiring perceptual knowledge that Henry is facing a barn, for instance, consists in the identification by perceptual means of a structure as a barn. As we have also seen, such identification crucially involves the discrimination of the kind of object from all other objects, kinds of object etc. that exist in his

environment. So, in the case of Henry, the achievement at issue by its very nature makes reference to the other objects, kinds of object etc. that exist in his environment. Accordingly, when it comes to assessments of flukiness certain facts about this environment cannot be ignored. In particular, just as Ralph Racer, when competing against much stronger competitors, cannot win the race except by fluke, so Henry, when in an environment in which barn façades prevail, cannot hit upon the truth about the presence of a barn before his eyes in the way that he does except by fluke. So, for Henry, too, achievement is out of the question. As opposed to that, the case of Archie appears to be analogous to the case of running a distance in a certain period of time: Just as the latter achievement can be attained even when Ralph is up against very strong competitors, so the former achievement can be attained even when Archie is shooting at the only non-sabotaged target at the range.⁴² We thus have reason to believe that the two cases are disanalogous and that only Henry's success is fluky. That, of course, is bad news for Pritchard's first argument.

But now recall that Pritchard rested his case not only on the analogy between the two cases but also provided a diagnosis of why virtue epistemology went wrong. If my response to Pritchard's argument is successful, then this diagnosis must be mistaken as well. So where does it go wrong? The answer to this question is that the crucial thesis that achievements are compatible with environmental luck is false—even when the notion of environmental luck is understood in the way envisaged by Pritchard. The following version of the case of Ralph Racer brings this point home: Ralph is up against much stronger competitors but wins the race because, due to a series of coincidences, all other competitors drop out. In this case, Ralph is lucky to win in Pritchard's sense of the term. After all, very easily one other competitor could not have dropped out in which case Ralph would not have won the race. Moreover, the type of luck at issue here is environmental. After all, it concerns what happens on the other lanes. Yet, his victory does not qualify as an achievement. So, we have a case in which environmental luck undermines achievement. So, even given Pritchard's own premises, the thesis that is

crucial to his diagnosis of why virtue epistemology fails is mistaken: achievements are not generally compatible with environmental luck. Instead, whether and how achievements are compatible with environmental luck depends at the very least on the nature of the achievement at issue. And the above arguments provide reason to believe, contrary to what Pritchard claims, that the kind of environmental luck that afflicts Henry's belief is not compatible with the cognitive achievement that would be involved in acquiring knowledge as it renders his cognitive success fluky.

Before moving on to Pritchard's second argument, let me briefly compare my own treatment of Pritchard's first argument with Sosa's and Greco's. The difference between my proposal and Sosa's should be fairly obvious. I do not grant subjects in cases like Henry's even animal knowledge of the target proposition. Given that I don't, it should also be obvious that my proposal can avoid the problems that ensued for Sosa's account. What are the differences between my treatment of Pritchard's argument and Greco's? To begin with, while Greco's aim is to defend a specific conception of ability and on that basis to argue that Henry must be denied the *ability* relevant to knowing that he is facing a barn, my goal is to show that Henry does not satisfy the conditions for the achievement involved in knowing that he is facing a barn. True, if Henry must be denied possession of the relevant ability, then he does not satisfy the conditions for the achievement at issue either. However, even if it turned out that Greco is wrong about the nature of ability and/or the semantics of attributions of ability, my solution will work. After all, even if an account of ability/semantics of attributions of ability is true according to which Henry possesses/can be attributed the ability to form true beliefs about the presence of barns in Barn Façade County my argument that he does not satisfy the conditions for the achievement will still go through. Second, while Greco ventures to explain the difference between the cases of Henry and Archie in terms of differences in the nature of the abilities at issue and by appeal to the context-sensitivity of attributions of ability, in my treatment of the cases differences in the nature of the achievements at issue do the bulk

of the work. Relatedly, third, my treatment does not need to appeal to either of Greco's two controversial theses in order to avoid true knowledge attributions to gettierised agents. That is to say, it can remain neutral on the question whether knowledge is the norm for practical reasoning and whether the job of the concept of knowledge is to flag good information, good sources of information and/or good informants.

Finally, let's ask how my account fares with respect to the case that caused trouble for Greco, i.e. the case in which we are interested in the question why, even in Barn Façade County, Henry will reliably form true beliefs about the presence of a barn when he is facing one. The problem for my account, it may seem, is that when we are considering this question, it seems natural to say that it isn't by fluke that Henry attains the relevant cognitive success. If so, it may seem, my account faces the same difficulties as Greco's. After all, as was observed in the discussion of Greco, the intuition that Henry does not know remains. In order to deal with this problem, I would first like to point out that there is a multiplicity of cognitive achievements amongst them knowledge, justified belief, understanding and reliable belief. These cognitive achievements have different attainment conditions (although, of course, they may share some attainment conditions). Accordingly, relative to the different achievements, there will be differences as to what it takes to avoid success by fluke. Now notice that in the context at issue in the present case, the question concerns Henry's reliable cognitive success in the specified circumstances. In this way, the salient cognitive achievement in this context is reliable cognitive success in those circumstances. If so, in this context, 'success by fluke' means success by fluke relative to the achievement of reliable cognitive success in those circumstances. It is plausible, however, that Henry has what it takes for non-fluky success so understood. (It seems that his ability to discriminate barns from other objects in normal circumstances will do the job.) The intuition that Henry's success isn't by fluke can thus be accommodated.⁴³ At the same time, it does not follow that it must be conceded that Henry can also be truly attributed knowledge that he is facing a barn or even that the sentence "Henry

knows that he is facing a barn” is true in the context. Knowledge is a different cognitive achievement with different attainment conditions. What it takes for non-fluky success here will also be different. As I have argued above Henry does not have what it takes to satisfy the attainment conditions for this cognitive achievement (at least not given his position relative to the objects and the methods available to him). He cannot avoid this kind of fluke. In this way, the intuition that there is no context in which Henry can truly be attributed knowledge that he is facing a barn can be retained as well and the potential problem this case poses for my solution to Pritchard’s argument can be avoided.⁴⁴

6. Pritchard’s second argument and a response

However, there is a second argument that Pritchard levels against virtue theories of knowledge. The aim of this argument is to show that one can have knowledge without satisfying the virtue theoretic ability condition, without attaining a cognitive achievement. At the heart of Pritchard’s argument is a case in which the heroine, Jenny, arrives at the train station in an unfamiliar city and asks the first passer-by she encounters for directions to a famous landmark. Her interlocutor, a knowledgeable resident of the city, tells her that the landmark is 200m to the right, say. As Pritchard points out, intuitively, Jenny’s corresponding testimony-based belief counts as knowledge.⁴⁵

Now, Pritchard wants to say that Jenny’s true belief does not constitute a cognitive achievement. However, one might initially wonder exactly why one would want to say that. After all, suppose that, upon leaving the train station, Jenny sees a sign that says that the landmark is 200m to the right. Intuitively, the true belief she forms in this situation qualifies as knowledge. However, it is just as plausible that her belief qualifies as a cognitive achievement. After all, it would seem that she has hit upon the truth because of the exercise of a combination of intellectual abilities, *viz.*, at the very least, the ability to identify the road sign as a potential source for the desired information and the ability to interpret what it says.

Now the reason one might wonder why exactly one would want to deny that in the original case Jenny attains a cognitive achievement is that the two cases appear to be analogous in all relevant respects. After all, in the original case, Jenny hits upon the truth because of the exercise of very similar intellectual abilities: the ability to identify the passer-by as a potential source for the desired information and the ability to interpret what he says. The only obvious differences between the two cases are that the potential source of information is different—a sign in one case and a person in the other—and that in one case written word is interpreted whilst in the other one spoken word is interpreted. In other words, one is a case of written testimony while the other one is a case of verbal testimony.

Given that the two cases are thus similar, I take it that Pritchard will have to do some work in order to make plausible the suggestion that Jenny does not attain a cognitive achievement in the verbal testimony case. And, indeed Pritchard provides a number of reasons for this. Here they are:

- (1) The cognitive success of receivers of testimony such as Jenny “piggy-backs” on the cognitive efforts of her informant in a way inconsistent with *bona fide* cognitive achievement.⁴⁶
- (2) “[W]e would not intuitively regard the truth of the agent’s belief as being because of her cognitive abilities. Indeed, if anything, we would think that her cognitive success was down to her *informant’s* cognitive abilities.”⁴⁷
- (3) Jenny’s cognitive success is not “best explained” in terms of her intellectual abilities so that her cognitive success is not because of these abilities and hence cannot constitute a cognitive achievement either.⁴⁸

Let’s ask how convincing Pritchard’s reasons for denying Jenny a cognitive achievement are. It seems to me that, on reflection, there is not very much mileage in the first suggestion. After all, people’s cognitive achievements “piggy-back” on the cognitive efforts of others all the time. For instance, when Jenny hits upon the truth about the distance to the landmark by reading a road sign her cognitive success “piggy-backs” on the cognitive efforts of the surveyor who measured that distance. Or when a philosopher uses a mathematical theorem the proof of which eludes his mathematical abilities in a proof of some other theorem, his

cognitive success “piggy-backs” on the cognitive efforts of the mathematician who gave the proof of the theorem relied on.⁴⁹ At the same time, it seems that in both of these cases, the agents’ cognitive successes constitute cognitive achievements. By the same token, the mere fact that Jenny’s cognitive success “piggy-backs” on the cognitive efforts of others is not enough to show that she doesn’t attain the cognitive achievement at issue.

The second and the third reason Pritchard provides for believing that Jenny does not attain a cognitive achievement are intimately related. The second reason ventures to make plausible the suggestion that Jenny’s cognitive success is not because of ability by allusion to the proposition that if anything her success is due to her informant’s ability. The third reason has it that her cognitive success isn’t because of intellectual ability as the exercise of intellectual ability does not best explain her cognitive success. Both of these reasons appear to rest on a very specific conception of the because of relation at issue in the virtue theoretic conception of knowledge according to which a given success is because of the exercise of ability just in case such exercise best explains the success. This is clear in case of the third reason which obviously presupposes this conception of the because of relation. Regarding Pritchard’s second reason notice that, given this conception, the proposition that, if anything, Jenny’s cognitive success is due to her informant’s ability provides a clear reason to believe that Jenny’s cognitive success is not because of the exercise of any intellectual ability of hers and hence not a cognitive achievement. After all, what the proposition now amounts to is that either nothing best explains her cognitive success or her informant’s ability does. In neither case, the exercise of her intellectual abilities best explains Jenny’s cognitive success. The conception of the because of relation under consideration thus provides a very neat explanation of how Pritchard’s second reason for denying that Jenny attains a cognitive achievement is supposed to work. In view of this fact and the fact that there is no obvious alternative explanation available, I take it that we have some, albeit defeasible, reason to believe that the second reason does indeed turn on this conception of the because of relation.

Now the major problem that arises for Pritchard at this juncture is that, at least given the account of achievement Pritchard presupposes, there is independent reason to believe that this conception of the because of relation cannot be correct. Ernest Sosa has argued this point convincingly in the following passage:

Perhaps, for example, what in the circumstances is explanatorily most salient concerns why the agent retains his competence, or why the situation remains normal. Thus the evil demon in charge may systematically spoil the competence of agents in an archery competition, or the circumstances of their shots, while making an exception of our successful archer for one of his shots. For that one shot he does not disable the competence or spoil the circumstances. Against that background, what then is explanatorily salient, when we ask why that shot was successful, concerns more the doings of the demon than those of the archer. Despite that the archer does surely hit his target aptly: his shot is accurate because adroit.”⁵⁰

What Sosa’s case shows is that a success can qualify as an achievement—in Sosa’s terms it can be “apt”—even though, in the context at issue, something other than the exercise of the agent’s ability best explains it—in Sosa’s terms something else is “explanatorily salient”. Given that this is so, the because of relation at issue in the success-because-of-ability conception of achievement cannot be construed in terms of best explanation.

Let’s pull the various results together then. Recall that we started by being puzzled that Pritchard wanted to deny that Jenny’s verbal testimonial knowledge constitutes a cognitive achievement as the case was analogous in a number of apparently important respects to a case in which it is fairly uncontroversial that Jenny not only knows but also attains a cognitive achievement, *viz.* the one in which she acquires her knowledge on the basis of written testimony. Accordingly, we noted that Pritchard will have to do some work to establish the envisaged conclusion. The above discussion reveals, however, that none of the reasons Pritchard adduces in support of this conclusion holds water. “Piggy-backing” on the efforts of others is, contrary to his first suggestion, not generally incompatible with cognitive achievement. Moreover, the conception of the because of relation that we found reason to be presupposed by his second and third suggestions cannot be correct given the success-because-ability account of achievement that his discussion also presupposes. In view of these facts, we

may take it that Pritchard has failed to provide sufficient reason to believe that Jenny does not attain a cognitive achievement. At the same time, the analogy with the written testimony case seems to provide support for the contrary suggestion that Jenny's knowledge in the verbal testimony case does constitute an achievement.

In personal communication, Pritchard has objected to this argument by pointing out that the verbal testimony case is disanalogous to the written testimony case in that, in the verbal but not in the written testimony case, Jenny's cognitive success depends largely on *trust*. In the written testimony case, Jenny has excellent independent reason to trust the road sign. After all, she knows, for instance, that road signs are generally put into place by the local authorities, which have a vested interest in not deceiving its citizens or visitors to the city. In this way she has excellent reason to trust the road sign in this case. As opposed to that, the thought is, in the verbal testimony case, Jenny has no parallel independent reason to trust her informant. A slightly different way of putting the worry is that the two cases are disanalogous because, while Jenny is able to identify the road sign *as a credible source of information*, she is not able to identify the passer-by as such.

Once again, however, the objection fails to convince. As a first observation, notice that, when out to acquire testimonial knowledge, we are typically fairly discerning whom we direct ourselves to. For instance, when I want to know by what date I need to pay off my credit card in order to avoid being charged interest, I will not ask the first passer-by I encounter in the streets. Rather, I will take my question to someone at my bank or credit card institution. Similarly, when I want to know whether my photographs are ready for pick-up, whether I need a visa in order to enter a certain country, who will be speaking at the upcoming conference or whether my girlfriend will be able to make it to the party on Saturday. I would be very unwise, to say the least, to address the first passer-by on the street with these questions. Rather, I will take them to the people at the photo shop, the embassy of the country I am planning to visit, the organiser of the conference and my girlfriend respectively. Notice

that, in all of these cases, just as in the case of written testimony, I do have excellent independent reasons to trust my informants. And the reasons I have here are very similar to the ones Jenny has in the written testimony case: I know that my informants have a vested interest in not deceiving me, in some cases I also know that deception brings with it a risk of repercussion etc. That is to say, in those cases I can identify my sources of information as credible. In fact, we put a lot of effort into structuring our society in such a way that credible sources for the information we need to get by in our everyday lives are easy to identify as such. So, even if Pritchard were right in claiming that Jenny has no independent reason to trust her informant, the case would be the exception rather than the rule.

This point can even be further strengthened. After all, even when Jenny initially has no independent reason to trust her informant, it might well be that the way her informant behaves in conversation provides her with such reason. Factors such as whether the informant appears eager, whether her smile or friendliness seems genuine, whether the focus of her pupils suggests that she is attentive and various other things that we routinely pick up in interactions with other people may give Jenny independent reason to trust her informant as the conversation develops.⁵¹ Again, it seems to me that the interpretation of Jenny's case in which we have the strongest intuition that she acquires testimonial knowledge is one in which she acquires independent reason to trust her informant, to identify her as credible. So, the range of cases disanalogous to the written testimony case that poses a potential problem for virtue theories is narrowed even further. In view of this fact then, even if Pritchard turned out to be right in that there are some cases of verbal testimony that are importantly disanalogous to the case of written testimony, the range of such cases appears to be small enough that denying that Jenny's testimony-based belief qualifies as knowledge may well become an option for the virtue epistemologist.

I do not believe, however, that it is necessary to make even this rather small concession here. To see why not, notice, first, that even if the two cases are disanalogous in

the way envisaged, it is a further question whether the way in which they are disanalogous serves to establish that Jenny fails to attain a cognitive achievement. That is to say, it is a further question whether lack of reason to trust her informant on Jenny's part, her inability to identify her informant as credible translates into a failure to achieve. And it is far from clear that it will do so. After all, the account of achievement we are working with says nothing about reason to trust. If lack of reason to trust were to undermine achievement in certain cases of testimonial knowledge, that would have to be because, in the absence of it, the receiver of testimony would not succeed because of ability. This thesis would need substantial independent defence, however.

As things stand, then, we have no reason to believe that in the potentially problematic cases no cognitive achievements are attained. The arguments Pritchard provided in support of the idea that there aren't were unsuccessful and the mere fact that the case is disanalogous to the road sign case certainly isn't enough to establish the point. On the other hand, of course, if Pritchard is right and the cases are disanalogous, we also have no reason to believe that Jenny does attain a cognitive achievement. Accordingly, in what follows I provide reason to believe that Jenny's cognitive success *is* attributable to her abilities and hence that she does attain a cognitive achievement.

Let's start by looking at what exactly happens in the case in which Jenny acquires knowledge by verbal testimony. To begin with, even though Jenny asks the first passer-by, she certainly does not select her informant at random. After all, she asks a human passer-by and not a dog, for instance. Moreover, presumably, Jenny would not have asked just anyone who first passed by. For instance, she would not have asked people whom she regards as untrustworthy or not sufficiently competent such as, among others, small children, the obviously confused or the dodgy. So, what is really going on in this case is that the first passer-by meets Jenny's criteria for a suitable informant and so Jenny does exercise intellectual abilities in picking her informant.⁵² Now suppose that the abilities she exercises

would, in her circumstances, lead her to (nearly) only select informants that are such that they will tell her that the landmark is 200m to the right only if they know that this is so. If they don't know it, they will either qualify their statements in suitable ways such as: "I *believe* it's 200m to the right" or just tell her that they don't know. If, in addition, Jenny has abilities that allow her to interpret the force and content of her interlocutor's speech act and forms her belief in accordance with the strength of the statement—in particular, she will believe outright and without qualification that the landmark is 200m to the right only if her interlocutor makes an unqualified statement to that effect—it becomes much more plausible that Jenny's cognitive success is because of the exercise of intellectual ability. To repeat, her cognitive success is then attributable to a combination of her informant-selecting ability as well as certain linguistic and doxastic competences. Given that this is so, of course, she may well attain a cognitive achievement. (Notice also that this is borne out by the (partial) conception of 'because of' I have sketched in section 5 according to which success because of ability contrasts with fluky success. After all, in this situation, it is certainly not by fluke that Jenny attains the relevant cognitive success.)

Of course, the success of this argument hinges on whether the assumption is true, that is, on whether the abilities Jenny exercises would, in her circumstances, lead her to (nearly) only select informants that will make the statement about the directions to the landmark only if they know it to be true. Notice that whether it is true will depend not only on how good Jenny is at selecting informants but also on facts about the environment. The more knowledge-friendly the environment, the easier it will be for her to be such that she would (nearly) only select informants that will make the relevant statement only if they know it to be true. At the same time, notice that as we make the environment less knowledge-friendly—for instance, by increasing the number of bad informants present—the intuition that Jenny acquires testimonial knowledge becomes weaker and weaker. If, for instance, we set up the case in such a way that Jenny asks the only trustworthy informant in a group of jokesters who

appear equally trustworthy but would have intentionally misdirected her for fun, there is a clear intuition that Jenny's testimonial belief does not qualify as knowledge.⁵³ The moral of the story is that to construe the case in such a way that Jenny can truly be said to know, she needs to be placed in a suitably knowledge-friendly environment. It is far from clear that in such an environment, her informant-selecting abilities would not lead her to (nearly) only select informants who will make the statement about the directions to the landmark only if they know it to be true. In fact, it seems plausible to me that in the cases in which our intuition that Jenny knows is the clearest, her informant-selecting abilities satisfy this criterion. Given that this is so, we have reason to believe that, provided that we construe the case as one in which the intuition that Jenny acquires testimonial knowledge is clearest, the assumption on which the above argument depends is also true and hence that Jenny's cognitive success is attributable to intellectual ability, that she does attain a cognitive achievement.⁵⁴

These considerations suggest, then, that even if the verbal testimony case is disanalogous to the case of written testimony in that Jenny can identify only the road sign as a credible source of information, there is reason to believe that Jenny's cognitive success is because of intellectual ability.⁵⁵ Given that this is so, of course, Pritchard's second argument against virtue epistemology fares no better than the first one.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, then, it has become apparent that neither of Pritchard's arguments is ultimately convincing. The argument that the virtue theoretic ability condition on knowledge/cognitive achievement is not sufficient for knowledge fails because the central cases of Archie at Sabotage Shooting Range and Henry in Barn Façade County are disanalogous in that Henry's but not Archie's success is fluky. Since fluky success is incompatible with achievement, Henry does not attain a cognitive achievement. Pritchard's argument thus fails to establish that the virtue theoretic condition on knowledge/cognitive

achievement is not sufficient for knowledge. At the same time, the argument against the necessity of this condition/cognitive achievement for knowledge does not fare any better. First, the vast majority of cases of knowledge by verbal testimony are analogous to cases of written testimony in which it is uncontroversial that a cognitive achievement is attained. Second, reflection on the intellectual abilities involved in the reception of testimony—the ones involved in the selection of informants and in the interpretation of what they say—suggest that cognitive success of receivers of testimony, even in the few cases that are not analogous in this way, may well constitute a cognitive achievement. When a receiver of testimony is such that, in her circumstances, she would (nearly) only select informants that will provide the relevant information only if they know it, correctly interprets force and content of their speech acts and forms her belief accordingly, it is plausible that her cognitive success is because of intellectual ability and hence qualifies as a cognitive achievement. Since neither of Pritchard’s arguments works out in the way envisaged, virtue epistemology remains a live option in the debate over the nature of knowledge—perhaps more so than ever.⁵⁶

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Notes

¹ See [Greco Forthcoming], [Pritchard 2007].

² See e.g. [Greco 2003], [Sosa 2007] and [Zagzebski 1996]. It is worth pointing out that this solution to the Gettier problem would not be on par with the long list of failed proposals the literature witnesses. These proposals have characteristically reacted to the most recent Gettier case by proposing a set of conditions that deals with it (see [Kirkham 1984]). In this way, they were *ad hoc* rather than principled: they provided no reason why the proposed condition should be the anti-Gettier condition. A solution of the above form does exactly what previous proposals have failed to do. Since it takes a plausible and widely accepted diagnosis of the Gettier problem and shows why, if this diagnosis is correct, there is reason to believe that in Gettier cases the proposed condition on knowledge will not be met, it provides reason to believe that it is the anti-Gettier condition.

³ For instance, in [Pritchard 2007], [Pritchard 2008] and [Pritchard Forthcoming]

⁴ [Pritchard 2007, §4], [Pritchard 2008, 26], [Pritchard Forthcoming, 6]

⁵ [Pritchard 2007, §4], [Pritchard 2008, 30-1], [Pritchard Forthcoming, 7-8]

⁶ [Pritchard 2007, §4], [Pritchard 2008, 30-1], [Pritchard Forthcoming, 8]

⁷ [Pritchard Forthcoming, 7]

⁸ [Pritchard Forthcoming, 7]

⁹ [Pritchard 2007, §4], [Pritchard 2008, 30-1], [Pritchard Forthcoming, 7-8]

¹⁰ [Sosa 2007] Notice, however, that Sosa does not describe the view as a response to Pritchard's argument.

¹¹ [Sosa 2007, 24]

¹² [Sosa 2007, 24]

¹³ [Sosa 2007, 32]

¹⁴ Some may think that Sosa's story is particularly appealing as it captures the intuition that there is something right going on in the case from an epistemic point of view. In view of the objections to follow, I don't think that this intuition is best accounted for by crediting Henry with animal knowledge. I will provide an alternative account of this intuition in my own response to Pritchard's argument (section 5).

¹⁵ The classical defences of the thesis that knowledge is the norm of assertion can be found in [Unger 1975], [Slote 1979] and more recently [Williamson 1996] and [Williamson 2000].

¹⁶ One proponent of the more restricted thesis is Alan Millar [Millar Forthcoming, 230]. I have also defended this thesis in [Kelp 2007].

¹⁷ [Williamson 2000, 257]

¹⁸ A psychological study showed that even a slow-learning child was able to say things such as "I lost a shoe" already at the age of two years and six months. [Pinker 1995, 270] Another child performed informative speech acts such as "Fraser, the doll is not in your briefcase" or "I got peanut butter on the paddle" even before the age of two. [Pinker 1970, 271] As opposed to that, sensitivity to sources of knowledge (such as "I saw it", "Will you tell me?") can be found only around the age of three. [Bartsch 1995, 62] Certainly, in order to be credited with reflective knowledge—apt belief aptly noted—one will at the very least have to exhibit sensitivity to sources of knowledge. After all, how could one note that one's belief is apt—i.e. that it is because of ability—unless one also had at least a rough idea of how it is formed—i.e. unless one had at least a rough idea what kind of ability is involved? In view of these considerations, it becomes less and less plausible that making reflective knowledge the epistemic norm for informative speech acts will be a viable response for Sosa.

¹⁹ [Greco 2007, 61]

²⁰ [Greco 2007, 66]

²¹ [Greco 2007, 67]

²² [Greco 2007, 67]

²³ [Greco 2007, 67, *my emphasis*]

²⁴ Recall that Greco himself intends his virtue theoretic conception of knowledge to deal with the Gettier problem. See [Greco 2003]

²⁵ Compare, for instance, Stewart Cohen on this issue: “Surely it is very strange to suppose that there is *any* context of ascription in which one can truly say of S [a gettierised subject] that he knows that there is a sheep on the hill [the gettierised belief].” [Cohen 1998, 298, *my italics*] Notice that it would be particularly strange for Greco to bite the bullet and allow that gettierised subjects can sometimes be truly attributed knowledge. After all, he is trying to rebut an objection that his virtue-theoretic conception of knowledge faces Gettier-style counterexamples. If he now concedes that gettierised subjects can sometimes be truly attributed knowledge, the question arises why he could not already have conceded to the original objection.

²⁶ Berit Brogaard argues this point forcefully in [Brogaard 2004]. She shows that all the major contextualist theories of knowledge in the literature succumb to this threat and tries to avoid it by proposing a contextualist theory according to which context determines what kinds of epistemic conditions are imposed on knowledge. Significantly, in order to avoid the threat, Brogaard imposes a *context-insensitive* degettierisation condition (a version of safety) that may in some contexts be supplemented by a harder-to-satisfy condition for knowledge (such as a sensitivity condition).

²⁷ At the very least, it would seem that it might responded: “Partly because he possesses the ability to form true beliefs about the presence of a barn” where this response is both natural and intuitively correct. Since contextualist theories in general take this to be a strong indication that the statement is also true (cf. [DeRose 2005]), Greco’s conception of ability, since contextualist in nature, had better predict that it is also true.

²⁸ See e.g. [Williamson 2000]

²⁹ See e.g. [Hawthorne 2004]

³⁰ See [Craig 1990]

³¹ [Greco 2007, 60], [Greco 2008, 429] The thesis Craig actually defends is that the job concept of knowledge is to flag good informants. This is significant because Craig sharply distinguishes the concept of a good informant from the concept of a good source of information and associates the concept of knowledge with the concept of a good informant rather than a good source of information. [Craig 1990, 35-44] Furthermore, Craig never states that the job of the concept of knowledge is to flag good information. Strictly speaking, then, Greco misrepresents Craig’s thesis. I will not discuss whether an accurate representation of Craig’s thesis would continue to support Greco’s thesis about the primary function of our knowledge language. Instead I will assume that it does.

³² [Greco 2008, 429] See also [Greco 2007, 60]

³³ [Greco 2008, 429]

³⁴ [Greco 2008, 430]

³⁵ More specifically, my worry here is that the concepts of good informant and of knowledge come apart in ways Craig cannot account for. At root, the problem arises from cases in which, intuitively, someone is a good informant because the processes leading him from belief to assertion will reliably lead him to assert only the truth on a certain matter whilst, at the same time, intuitively, she isn’t a knower because the processes leading to the formation of her beliefs on the matter are highly unreliable. Since developing this argument fully requires a paper of its own, however, I will not attempt to tackle the issue in any more detail here.

³⁶ Apart from Williamson and Hawthorne, Jason Stanley is also a major champion of this thesis (e.g. [Stanley 2005] and [Hawthorne 2008]). As opposed to that, the thesis is contested, for instance, in [Douven 2008] and [Schiffer 2007].

³⁷ [Brown 2008]

³⁸ It is very clear that Pritchard understands the notion of lucky success in this way. Consider, for instance, the following remarks about Archie who shoots at the only non-sabotaged target: “[Archie’s] success is lucky in the sense that [he] *could very easily* have been unsuccessful.” [Pritchard 2008, 30 and Forthcoming, 7, *my emphasis*]. Alternatively, we find: “The archer’s success is thus lucky in the sense that it *could very easily* have been a failure.” [Pritchard 2007, §4, *my emphasis*] Parallel remarks can be found in the discussion of the barn façade case: “Nevertheless, the agent’s belief is still lucky in the sense that she *could very easily* have been mistaken.” [Pritchard 2008, 31, *my emphasis*], “Nevertheless, her true belief is epistemically lucky—in the sense that she *could easily have* been wrong...” [Pritchard Forthcoming, 8, *my emphasis*] and “Thus, his belief is only luckily true in that he *could very easily* have been mistaken in this respect.” [Pritchard 2007, §4, *my emphasis*]

³⁹ Pritchard himself subscribes to a conception of luck according to which, roughly, a lucky event is one that does not occur at a wide range of nearby possible worlds [Pritchard 2005, 128]. So, assuming the possible worlds semantics for the relevant modality should be unproblematic here.

⁴⁰ Notice, however, that the falsity of the sufficiency claim is what is really crucial to the success of my argument. What I intend to argue is that, in Pritchard’s cases, Henry’s but not Archie’s success is fluky. For this to be possible easy failure must not be sufficient for fluky success. Whether it is not necessary is of little importance. After all, the case I intend to show is a case of fluky success, i.e. Henry’s, is also one in which the cognitive agent might easily have failed to succeed.

⁴¹ One question one may want to ask here is whether these cases are best understood as targeting Pritchard’s modal conception of luck. While I believe that there are problems for Pritchard’s conception of luck I am unsure whether I would want to say that these cases show that it to be flatly false. Most importantly, it seems to me that there is a sense in which Ralph Racer’s success in the first problem case is nonetheless lucky as well as a sense in which his success in the second problem case is nonetheless not lucky. So, it seems to me that it is compatible with my cases that Pritchard’s conception of luck captures a sense of ‘luck’. Note, however, that even if Pritchard does succeed in capturing a sense of ‘luck’, I do take the above examples to indicate that it is not the one that is incompatible with achievements. (By way of evidence, notice that, intuitively, in the first but not in the second problem case, Ralph’s winning the race also constitutes an achievement.)

Another question one may want to press me on concerns the relation between the notion of fluke and the notion of luck. Here I am inclined to say that the notion of fluke also captures a sense of ‘luck’ (albeit a different sense than the one captured by Pritchard’s modal conception of luck). What sense? The sense of ‘luck’ incompatible with achievements. (Again, the cases of Ralph Racer provide *prima facie* evidence for this.)

In view of this I am inclined to accept the following argument:

- (1) Knowledge is a cognitive achievement.
- (2) Plausibly, then, the sense in which knowledge is incompatible with luck is the sense in which achievements more generally are incompatible with luck
- (3) Pritchard’s modal conception of luck does not capture the sense in which achievements are incompatible with luck (but what may be called the ‘fluke conception’ of luck does)
- (4) The sense in which knowledge is incompatible with luck is not captured by Pritchard’s modal conception of luck (rather, it is captured by the fluke conception). (For further argument on this see [Riggs Forthcoming].)

Of course, as presented, this last argument makes assumptions—specifically, (1)—that appear to blatantly beg the question against Pritchard. Notice, however, that even Pritchard grants that (1) is intuitively appealing, but that a plausible theory of knowledge will, *ultima facie*, be

compelled to deny it. What the arguments I provide in this section show is that, given ‘luck’ is understood in terms of the notion of fluke, we do not have to deny (1). Pritchard’s conclusion that (1) must be denied thus becomes optional. Given that (1) is intuitively plausible, all else equal, it is plausible that we should endorse both (1) and the conclusion of the argument (4).

To return to the question whether the above cases are best construed problematising Pritchard’s modal conception of luck, it now seems to me that what the answer to this question is will depend on how exactly this question is understood. If the question concerns whether they show that Pritchard’s conception of luck is flatly false, I’d say the answer is ‘not obviously’. For all the cases show, Pritchard’s conception of luck captures a perfectly admissible sense of ‘luck’. If, however, the question is whether they show that Pritchard fails to capture the sense of ‘luck’ that is incompatible with knowledge, I am inclined to say that they at least make a contribution towards showing this.

⁴² Notice, furthermore, that we could easily construe the case of Ralph Racer in such a way that all the surrounding tracks, on which he might easily have run instead, are sabotaged, for instance, by demons in which case Ralph would have failed to run the distance in the time he did. Still, this does not make his success on a non-sabotaged track fluky and hence does not threaten his achievement. The two achievements under consideration are analogous in this respect as well.

⁴³ And simultaneously the intuition that there is something right going on in Henry’s case from an epistemic point of view: Henry does attain a cognitive achievement albeit not the one that would be involved in knowing that he is facing a barn.

⁴⁴ True, in order to do this I have to appeal to contextualism about the term ‘fluke’. However, this contextualism strikes me as uncontroversial. Its main tenet is that the meaning of ‘fluke’ is fixed by the achievement salient in a context.

⁴⁵ [Pritchard 2007, §4], [Pritchard 2008, 29], [Pritchard Forthcoming, 9] This case can also be found in [Lackey 2007].

⁴⁶ [Pritchard 2007, §4]

⁴⁷ [Pritchard 2007, §4] A similar remark can also be found in [Pritchard Forthcoming, 9].

⁴⁸ [Pritchard 2008, 30]

⁴⁹ A similar case can be found in Greco’s discussion of a closely related argument by Jennifer Lackey (see [Greco 2007, 64]).

⁵⁰ [Sosa 2007, 86]

⁵¹ The potential role of subtle cues in the acquisition of testimony has also been pointed out in [Lackey 2008, 89-90].

⁵² It is noteworthy that Pritchard acknowledges this much ([Pritchard 2007, §4], [Pritchard 2008, 29-30], [Pritchard Forthcoming, 9-10]). What he denies is that the involvement of Jenny’s intellectual abilities is substantial enough to make true the attribution of a cognitive achievement.

⁵³ This is no surprise given that we now have set up the case in such a way that it essentially has the same structure as the barn façade case. It will be no surprise either that, in my books, the reason why Jenny lacks knowledge is that, in such an environment, Jenny’s cognitive success, which depends substantially on her informant-selecting abilities is fluky in much the same way that Henry’s cognitive success in Barn Façade County is fluky.

⁵⁴ It should be noted that my approach to this kind of case is similar in a number of respects to the approaches of other virtue theorists—notably [Greco 2007] and [Riggs 2009]—who stress that testimonial knowledge crucially involves the exercises of ability on the part of receivers of testimony and that therefore cognitive success is attributable to them.

⁵⁵ Notice that even in the verbal testimony case Jenny still identifies a credible source of information. She just does not identify it *as such*. It seems plausible to me that this is enough to acquire testimonial knowledge. Notice, however, that even if it should turn out that it isn’t,

the present defence of virtue epistemology remains in good standing. After all, the correct verdict about the case of Jenny should then be that she does not know.

⁵⁶ Acknowledgements: Duncan Pritchard, Jake Chandler, the participants of the European Epistemology Network Conference 2009 and especially the two anonymous referees of *Synthese* for a number of very helpful comments on this paper.