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## **Succeeding Competently:**

### **Towards an Anti-Luck Condition for Achievement**

**Hasko von Kriegstein – Ryerson University, Ted Rogers School of Management**

Abstract:

Achievements are among the things that make a life good. Assessing the plausibility of this intuitive claim requires an account of the nature of achievements. One necessary condition for achievement appears to be that the achieving agent acted competently, i.e. was not just lucky. I begin by critically assessing existing accounts of anti-luck conditions for achievements in both the ethics and epistemology literature. My own proposal is that a goal is reached competently (and thus an achievement), only if the actions of the would-be-achiever make success likely, and that this is the reason why she acts that way.

Keywords: achievement; competence; luck; value of achievement; value theory; well-being

#### **1. Introduction**

Nobody thinks that winning the lottery is an achievement. By contrast, one only needs to google-search 'Warren Buffett achievement' to find writers falling all over themselves describing Buffett's outstanding achievements. What Buffett has in common with lottery winners is that they both have made hugely profitable investments. The most obvious difference between them is the amount of luck involved. There is a strong sense, then,

that achievement and luck are antithetical: a successful outcome being the result of luck appears to undermine its status as a potential achievement. We may say that, a successful outcome can count as an achievement, only if it has been reached competently. What exactly this amounts to, is the subject of this article.

The question is important in the context of value theory because, if an objective list theory of the good life is correct, we should expect achievements to figure prominently on the list. Thus, it is a gap in the Western philosophical tradition that achievements have not been discussed as widely as other putative values such as beauty, knowledge, friendship, or pleasure. This has begun to change as ethicists have paid increasing attention to achievements over the past couple of decades (Keller 2004, 2009; James 2005; Hurka 2006a; Crisp 2006; Portmore 2007; Bradford 2012, 2013; von Kriegstein 2017a), culminating in Gwen Bradford's monograph length treatment of the subject (Bradford 2015). Ethicists discussing achievement tend to acknowledge the need for an anti-luck condition without specifying what exactly that would mean. Two exceptions are Gwen Bradford and Thomas Hurka who conceive of anti-luck conditions in terms of epistemic states. The first goal of this article is to argue that this strategy fails (section 2).

Closely related questions to the one I am asking here are also being discussed in the context of what is often called *robust virtue epistemology* which argues that the concept of knowledge can be explicated in terms of achievements (most prominently Sosa 2007, 2011, 2015; Greco 2010, 2012). In this context the distinguishing mark of an achievement (as opposed to a lucky success) is typically taken to be that the success has to be attributable to the agent's abilities. I will discuss one such suggestion, made by John Greco, in some detail in section 3. The literature regarding robust virtue epistemology has grown increasingly sophisticated over the past decade (see e.g. Turri 2011; Littlejohn

2014; Carter et al 2015; and the papers in Fernandez 2016). It would be impossible, in a single paper, to trace all the subtle suggestions that various authors have made in response to real or perceived weaknesses of the basic model. In addition, not everything that happens in that literature is relevant to the interests of ethicists. Most prominently, the question whether knowledge is type-identical with a species of cognitive achievement, which motivates much of the discussion among epistemologists, is of only secondary concern to ethicists concerned with the value of achievements more generally. The second purpose of the current paper is, thus, to extend an invitation to ethicists to avail themselves of the resources that the epistemology literature has provided. Hopefully, this will lead to fruitful cross-pollination between ethicists and epistemologists regarding their shared interest in the concept of achievement.<sup>1</sup>

Having critically discussed (prominent examples of) two types of anti-luck conditions for achievements in sections 2 and 3, I will turn to developing my own account based on a modal safety condition (section 4). The basic idea behind the view I will be advancing is that a goal is reached competently (and thus an achievement) only if the would-be-achiever makes success likely through their actions.

Before diving in, a brief methodological note: spelling out the competence (or anti-luck) condition for achievement is part of the larger project of answering the question: what exactly are achievements? This is a question prior to the question of ultimate interest to value theory: in virtue of what are achievements valuable (if they really are)? However, we cannot completely separate these two questions. Simply

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<sup>1</sup> Bradford (2014) is the only paper I am aware of that attempts to combine the ethics and epistemology literature. In that paper, Bradford tries to move the epistemological debate forward by importing insights from the ethics literature. I am attempting the opposite here.

following linguistic intuitions about the word ‘achievement’ is not likely to lead us to a single well-defined concept. Thus, in searching for an account of achievement, it will be helpful to keep in mind that we are looking for a class of events that are plausibly bearers of intrinsic value.<sup>2</sup> This may allow us to decide between competing conceptions of achievement that provide similarly strong fit with linguistic intuitions. After all, if we did not have a strong sense that achievements have such value, we would not be interested in them in the first place.

## 2. Epistemic Accounts

Consider what I will call

*Bradford's Slogan*: someone's causing of an event can be an achievement only if this person *knows what they are doing*. (See Bradford 2015, 64)

This may seem to be just an expression of the truism that an account of achievements needs to include an anti-luck condition. However, *Bradford's Slogan* is not quite that innocuous. Expressing the need for an anti-luck condition in this way stacks the deck in favour of conceptions that spell it out in terms of knowledge. Bradford and Hurka offer different versions of such epistemic accounts. I will discuss these accounts in the following two sub-sections. The ways in which they fail provide reason to believe that epistemic accounts are not a promising route to take.

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<sup>2</sup> I am aware of the cross distinctions in value between final/instrumental and extrinsic/intrinsic Korsgaard (1983); Rabinowicz/Roennow-Rasmussen (1999). Since the extrinsic/intrinsic distinction is immaterial for current purposes, I will follow continued practice in the ethics literature by using ‘intrinsic’ to denote what in those more exact terms would be called ‘final’ value.

## ***2.1 Bradford's 'Competent Causation'***

*Competent Causation* is Bradford's term for the kind of relationship between agent and goal that satisfies the anti-luck condition for achievement (Bradford 2015, ch.3). Starting from the idea that achievement requires that the agent knows what she is doing, she develops an account of competent causation in terms of justified true beliefs (JTBs) (which she treats as a proxy for knowledge).<sup>3</sup>

Bradford begins by observing that when we are consciously causing something, we have beliefs about the causal effects of our actions. For example, when I am driving from A to B, I believe that stepping on the gas will accelerate the car, that turning the steering wheel left will move it to the left, that taking a right at the second traffic light is the quickest route to B, and so on. According to Bradford, the more of my beliefs about the causal chain leading from my actions to the result are justified and true, the more competently I am driving my car. She adds that determining the degree of competence is not merely a matter of counting justified true beliefs. Beliefs are weightier if they concern more of the causal chain. So, my belief that moving down my foot will exert pressure on the gas pedal has less weight than my belief that moving down my foot will accelerate the car which, in turn, counts for less than my belief that my actions will lead to my car ending up at B. Finally, degree of competence depends on how much there is to know about the activity in question. Bradford suggests that the degree of competence equals the weighted sum of the JTBs that the agent has about the activity, divided by the weighted sum of the possible JTBs one could have about the causal chains involved in the activity. This allows her to capture the apparent fact that one needs fewer justified true beliefs for

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3 The following sketch of Bradford's view does not do justice to the sophistication of her account. It should nevertheless suffice as a reference point for current purposes.

a given level of competence when engaging in a simple activity (such as tying shoes) than when doing something more complicated – such as building a complex nanomachine (Bradford 2015, 65-70).

There are two problems with this account. First, it falsely implies that every justified true belief about an activity an agent may (fail to) have increases (decreases) their degree of competence. But there are many facts about an activity, knowing which has no effect on how competently the activity is carried out. Consider Bradford's example of Rudy:

*Competent Driver:* Rudy is driving his Smart Car. He is a good driver but he does not know much about cars. He thinks, for example, that the car is powered by Duracell AA batteries. (see Bradford 2015, 65)

Bradford plausibly contends that Rudy is competently moving his car from A to B, but that he is not competently causing the pistons in the engine of the car to move. She goes on to claim, however, that Rudy would be a more competent driver, if he knew how the engine works (Bradford 2015, 66). This is implausible. Rudy has much to learn about cars and doing so would presumably make him more competent in some respects (for example, he could be a more competent mechanic, or he could talk about cars more competently). But it would not make him drive from A to B more competently. All the knowledge that is relevant to how competent a driver he is, concerns what he has to do while driving. When giving out driver's licenses we do not award extra points for knowing how the engine works. Nor should we. A driver's license attests that its holder can competently drive; knowledge about engines is irrelevant to that.

The example of driving also serves to illustrate the second problem with Bradford's view: no set of justified true beliefs is sufficient for competence. Rudy's friend Ben might know everything there is to know about cars, what one has to do when driving, how to react to unforeseen events on the road, and the route from A to B. If Ben has never

been in a car before, no amount of such knowledge will make him a competent driver. As Gilbert Ryle puts it:

A soldier does not become a shrewd general merely by endorsing the strategic principles of Clausewitz; he must also be competent to apply them. Knowing how to apply maxims cannot be reduced to, or derived from, the acceptance of those or any other maxims. (Ryle 1949, 31)

Competently reaching a goal is not a matter of knowing many truths about how to reach the goal. Of course, the two are strongly correlated; generally, somebody who knows much about an activity is more likely to carry it out competently than someone who knows little about it. But, as the examples of Rudy and Ben show, competence and knowledge can come apart.<sup>4</sup>

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4 Since 'competent causation' is a technical term for an anti-luck condition, some deviation from the ordinary notion of competence would be acceptable. However, Bradford's account fares no better, if we understand it in terms of luck. If Rudy learns more about how cars work, his driving from A to B does not become less lucky. Similarly, a hockey player cannot eliminate luck from his play, by studying the physics underlying ice-skating.

Ben's case may seem different. While he is not a competent driver, we might be tempted to credit him with having met the anti-luck condition, if he uses his knowledge to get from A to B without making any mistakes. But it could not have just been Ben's knowledge that made him succeed, for we can imagine someone knowing all the same things and wracking the car backing out of the driveway. The correct description of the case would be that, in addition to knowledge about driving, Ben had an unusual talent to turn this propositional knowledge into "body knowledge". This allowed him to skip what most people need to become competent drivers: practice. Usually practice supplies what is needed beyond knowledge to become a competent (non-lucky) driver. In Ben's case, practice was replaced by talent.

## 2.2 Hurka's 'Justified Optimism'

Part of the problem with Bradford's proposal is that knowing many of the details of a process is irrelevant to an agent's competence. Hurka's proposal for an anti-luck condition avoids this problem. Hurka suggests that, to fulfil the anti-luck condition, "[w]e must accompany each of our goals by a justified belief that we will achieve it." (Hurka 1993, 106). This account handles the cases of Rudy and Ben with ease. Rudy, but not Ben, is justified in believing that he will safely drive from A to B.

One may worry about (the practical analogue of) Gettier-type cases. What if an archer with a justified belief that she will hit the target is startled by a strange noise when releasing the arrow which shoots up in the air at an unintended angle, but hits the target nevertheless, because of an unexpected gust of wind?<sup>5</sup> This would satisfy Hurka's anti-luck condition but is no more an achievement than Gettier's classic examples instantiate knowledge (Gettier 1963). But we should not assign too much weight to such worries.<sup>6</sup> It is fair to assume that Hurka, just like Bradford, simply uses JTB as a stand-in for knowledge. It is worth making this explicit though, because, once formulated in terms of knowledge, Hurka's anti-luck condition seems a lot less intuitive. It sounds strange to say that reaching a goal is a lucky success (not an achievement), unless the agent *knew* in advance that she would succeed.

To bring this point home, consider that Hurka's anti-luck condition rules out achievements by pessimists.

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5 This example is an adaption from Prichard (2010), 35. Cf. Sosa (2011), 4.

6 Hurka does not discuss whether his condition is merely a necessary or also a sufficient condition. If the former, Gettier cases might be handled by further conditions. The following arguments show that his condition is not necessary either.



*Able Pessimist*: Karl thinks little of his abilities as a philosopher. But he loves doing philosophy and, being independently wealthy, he applies to graduate school with the goal of obtaining a PhD. In fact, Karl is an excellent philosopher. He is accepted and finishes his PhD being regarded one of the best students coming out of his prestigious program in a long time.

Karl clearly achieved his goal. But he fails Hurka's anti-luck condition, because he did not know that he would succeed. That is not because he lacked the ability or the competence to succeed, but simply because he did not think he would. But whether I am optimistic or pessimistic about my chances of success should have no bearing on whether my success is an achievement or not.<sup>7</sup>

Hurka might reply that Karl would be justified in believing that he will succeed, if he were to form such a belief; and that is all that is required. There are two problems with this suggestion. First, consider Karl's cousin Carla, who is just as able, enthusiastic, and wealthy as Karl, but not generally pessimistic. Unlike Karl she has excellent (though misleading) evidence that she is a poor philosopher, because she has consistently received negative feedback from senior philosophers. If Carla persists and gets her PhD, it would be an achievement, but she would not have been justified in believing that she would succeed.

The second problem is that we need to know what justifies (or would justify) Karl's optimistic belief. Hurka has a coherence model of justification (Hurka 1993, 106), but it might well be inconsistent for Karl to think that he will have success in graduate school (not to mention Carla). The problem is not Hurka's internalist picture of epistemic

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bradford (2015), 74-5.

justification. No formal account of justification could answer to our purpose.<sup>8</sup> What we need, instead, is a substantive answer to the question what justifies people in thinking they will be successful. If we wanted to stay in the framework of an epistemic anti-luck condition, it would be natural to look to things the agent knows about how to achieve the goal. Karl, while lacking the belief that he will succeed, knows a lot about how to get a PhD. So maybe we should just specify how much the agent has to know about how to reach the goal in order to count as achieving. But we have been down this road before – this was Bradford's suggestion – and found it a dead end. It must be something else that justifies the belief that one will reach one's goals.

The solution is simple: what usually justifies agents in believing they will reach a goal is evidence *that they can reach it competently*. Of course, what exactly that means is what we are trying to figure out. Nevertheless, we can already see the fundamental problem with epistemic accounts of the anti-luck condition: these accounts get things backwards. While it is correct that Rudy has a JTB that he will successfully drive from A to B, this does not explain why he acts competently when he does. Rather, that he can competently drive from A to B explains why his belief is justified. Similarly, Karl's competence in obtaining a PhD is not constituted by the fact that 'were he to form an optimistic belief, it would be justified'. Rather, such a belief would be justified, because he is competently pursuing his PhD.

Having a JTB that one will succeed is a somewhat reliable proxy for being competent because, ordinarily, being competent justifies such a belief. That is why Hurka's account delivers the right verdict in many cases (such as Rudy's and Ben's). It

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8 Karl might have had misleading evidence about his talents. And his pessimistic outlook might be reliable in that it produces true beliefs more often than not.

fails to deliver the correct results when being competent does not lead the agent to form an optimistic belief (as in the cases of Karl and Carla), or where an agent has a justified belief despite being lucky in reaching the goal (as in practical Gettier cases). But even when the account gets the right result, it does so for the wrong reasons. It treats what is a somewhat reliable proxy for competence as a constitutive account of competence. I conclude that the anti-luck condition for achievements should not be spelled out in terms of JTBs or knowledge.

### **3. Ability-Based Accounts**

I opened my discussion of epistemic accounts with *Bradford's Slogan*: someone's causing of an event can be an achievement only if this person *knows what they are doing*. Since epistemic accounts of competence fail, it seems that Bradford's slogan must be false. As Bradford recognizes, however, there is another possibility: maybe we should understand the slogan as a statement about *knowing how* rather than propositional knowledge (Bradford, 2015, 80-1).

The locus classicus for the distinction between propositional knowledge and knowing how is Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*. According to Ryle knowing how is "the ability ... to do certain sorts of things." He describes an ability as "a disposition, or complex of dispositions."<sup>9</sup> This contrasts with propositional knowledge which is "a relation between a thinker and a true proposition." (Stanley and Williamson 2001, 411) Ryle's claim that knowing how cannot be reduced to or defined in terms of propositional knowledge has been challenged by Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson (Ryle 1971;

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9 Ryle (1949), 33. In the quoted passage, Ryle speaks of skills rather than abilities but he uses the terms interchangeably.

Stanley and Williamson 2001). However, the ongoing debate sparked by their influential paper is immaterial for current purposes (Noë 2005 provides a powerful critique of many of Stanley/Williamson's main claims. Further discussions include Koethe 2002; Snowdon 2004; Hetherington 2006; Bengson and Moffett 2007; Adams 2009). What is at stake in that debate is whether ascriptions of knowing how are linked with propositional knowledge or with abilities. Very roughly, Ryle and his followers think that to say that someone knows how to X is to say that this person has the ability to X, while those in the Stanley/Williamson camp claim that it is to say that this person knows that '*this* is the correct way to X'. What neither side denies, however, is that there is a difference between propositional knowledge and abilities. And there is at least an initial plausibility to the claim that knowing how is a matter of abilities. Thus, an account of the anti-luck condition for achievements in terms of abilities would explain the intuitive attractiveness of *Bradford's Slogan*.

### ***3.1 Achievement in the Epistemology Literature***

The notion of that a success is an achievement only if it is properly attributable to the agent's abilities has been developed in the context of an epistemological research program that attempts to conceptualize knowledge as a form of achievement. This program has been variously termed 'robust virtue epistemology', 'performance epistemology', or simply 'AA' (for "achievement account of knowledge"), and the seminal figure in this context is Ernest Sosa. Sosa laid out the basic model of the knowledge as achievement program in his 2007 monograph. In the ensuing decade, him and many others have proposed more or less friendly amendments, but the general model remains the same (see e.g. Turri 2011, McKinnon 2013, Littlejohn 2014, McKinnon 2014, Carter et al 2015, Sosa 2015, Turri 2016). According to Sosa, achievements have what he calls a "AAA

structure”. For a performance to constitute an achievement it must be *accurate* (i.e. achieve its goal), *adroit* (i.e. carried out competently), and *apt* (i.e. the success must be properly attributable to the fact that the performance was carried out competently) (Sosa 2007, 22). Sosa understands full competence (or adroitness), in turn, as having a “SSS structure” consisting of seat, shape, and situation. Thus, a performance is competent (or adroit), if the agent is generally constituted in such a way as to be disposed to succeed if they try under the right circumstances (seat), the agent is in the proper condition to perform, i.e. sober, awake etc. (shape), and the circumstances in which the agent attempts to exercise their ability are generally favourable (situation) (Sosa 2015, 95-6).

Among the many refinements proposed of this general view, John Greco’s work contains one of the most developed accounts (Greco 2010) as well as extensive criticism of many others (Greco 2012). I will focus my discussion on Greco here partly because of that, and partly because his exposition lacks two features of Sosa’s most recent contribution that are potentially confusing in the current context.<sup>10</sup> First, like many virtue-epistemologists (most prominently Turri 2011), Sosa has taken to making extensive use of the notion of *manifestation* as a primitive (i.e. unanalyzed) metaphysical concept (e.g. Sosa 2010, 466). To unfriendly observers, this may appear as a case of renaming the problem posed by certain types of Gettier cases instead of solving it. The original problem is that competent performance and success need to be related “in the right way”, where it

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<sup>10</sup> In addition, I hope that ethicists will resist the temptation to incorporate Sosa’s terminology which appears to favour catchy acronyms over using English words in their standard sense. It is tempting to think that Turri is mocking Sosa on this account, when he adds to the AAA account by labeling further proposed conditions with terms starting with A that are even less apt (in the ordinary sense) than Sosa’s ‘accurate’, ‘adroit’, and ‘apt’.

turns out to be difficult to define what that comes to. Since “manifestation” is unanalyzed, the manifestation solution appears to simply replace the mysterious “related in the right way” with the equally mysterious “manifests competence”. While I have no doubt that friends of manifestation have answers to this worry, I find it preferable to avoid the issue by focussing on Greco’s account that does not use the notion of manifestation. Second, when Sosa offers a theory of competence in chapter 4 of his most recent book, he is concerned with something slightly different from my current interest. Sosa’s theory of competence is a theory about what it takes for someone to be competent at X (e.g. be a competent tennis player). By contrast, my interest is only in whether a particular performance has been competent in the sense that it could potentially count as an achievement. These two evaluations (of an agent, and of an action) are likely to be related, but they are not identical. Thus, Sosa’s “Theory of Competence” (Sosa 2015, 95-106) is not a direct competitor to my own account of succeeding competently. Focusing on Greco’s account will thus avoid terminological confusion.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> While on the topic, I should note another potential source of terminological confusion.

Throughout this article, I use the language of an ‘anti-luck condition’ for achievement in a somewhat broader sense than it is often used in the epistemology literature. In particular, according to Duncan Pritchard’s “anti-luck virtue epistemology” knowledge has to be both an achievement and fulfill an anti-luck clause (Pritchard 2012). Thus, according to this view, achievements do not automatically pass the anti-luck clause for knowledge (which Pritchard spells out in terms of safety). As I am not trying to give an account of knowledge here, this question is immaterial for my purposes. When I speak of an anti-luck condition here, I simply mean that we need a way to distinguish achievements from lucky successes. And, in that sense, Pritchard agrees with the virtue-epistemologists that the way to exclude luck from achievement is to think of the latter as success from ability.

### 3.2 Greco's 'Success because of Ability'

For Greco, what distinguishes achievements from lucky successes is that an achievement is a *success because of ability*.<sup>12</sup> This requires some explanation. We need to know, first, what Greco means by 'ability' and, second, what he means by 'because of'.

Take the second point first. When he says that achievements are successes *because of ability*, Greco says that “[t]he term “because” is here intended to mark a causal explanation.” (Greco 2010, 71) In other words, a success is an achievement, if and only if, the agent having an ability explains why she was successful (Greco 2010, 74). This seems to handle cases like *Able Pessimist* and *Competent Driver*. Karl's philosophical abilities explain his success in pursuing a PhD, and Rudy's ability to drive explains why he reaches B safely, and so both are correctly classified as achievements. The account also looks promising when considering lottery winners, as their abilities are not what explains their success. Of course, these assessments are preliminary until we know more about abilities. In addition, however, we need to know what counts as an explanation.

Greco says that an account of (good) causal explanations would provide criteria for singling out one of the partial causes leading to an event as salient. While not providing a full account of explanatory salience, he considers two elements of any such account uncontroversial: salience is sensitive to (a) our purposes and interests and (b) what is normal or usual (Greco 2010, 74-5). However, while this kind of context-sensitivity is probably part of the best account of causal explanations, we should be wary of introducing it into an account of achievements. Greco's resulting account of knowledge

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<sup>12</sup> I am skeptical about the overall project of explicating knowledge in terms of achievement; for some strong objections to see Lackey (2007). But Greco's account of achievements could be accepted independently of the virtue epistemological program.

(as cognitive achievement) is a version of attributor contextualism, i.e. the view that whether a knowledge ascription is true depends partly on the circumstances of the person who makes it (Pritchard 2002). For example, I might be asserting truly that Charlemagne knew such and such, while a historian making the same assertion at a conference would be speaking falsely.

Whatever the merits of attributor contextualism as a theory about the propriety of knowledge ascriptions, this kind of context-sensitivity has no place in an account of what achievements *are*. Whether Charlemagne's conquest of Saxony was an achievement, for example, does not depend on the context in which we talk about the question. This should be particularly clear, if we think (as Greco does) that achievements have intrinsic value (or, as he would put it, 'final value' see footnote 2). Since events can be discussed in different contexts, but an event cannot both have and lack intrinsic value, whether an event is intrinsically valuable cannot depend on the context in which it is discussed.<sup>13</sup> Thus, if Greco is right that causal explanations are context-sensitive, we do best not to wed our account of achievements to them.<sup>14</sup>

Maybe the spirit of Greco's account could be retained by focusing on how much of a causal role the agent's ability played in bringing about her success (rather than on

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<sup>13</sup> Many would even say that whatever is intrinsically valuable is necessarily so. But others disagree. See Korsgaard (1983), Hurka (1998), Kagan (1998), Dancy (2004).

<sup>14</sup> More recently Greco has moved away from thinking about achievement as success because of ability where 'because of' signifies a causal explanation. He now thinks that achievements are successes from ability, where 'from' signifies that the ability contributes to the success in the right way. The latter locution, in turn, is understood as 'in a way that would regularly serve the relevant purposes' (Greco 2012, 14). For criticism of this move see Carter et al (2015), 1609-12.



whether that role ensured explanatory salience). But now we encounter a second problem with Greco's account: it is doubtful whether what he calls abilities have any causal power. Greco understands abilities to be a dispositional property.<sup>15</sup> He thinks that someone has an ability to do X, if and only if were this person to try to do X, they would be likely to succeed.<sup>16</sup> By that Greco means that having the ability to do X means succeeding when trying to do X in many or most of a set of a relevantly close possible worlds (Greco 2010, 77).

In deciding which possible worlds are relevantly close, Greco employs a two-pronged strategy. First, he relies on an intuitive notion of closeness. Second, the nature of an ability helps to fix the set of relevant possible worlds. Greco argues that abilities are always tied to some set of environments and conditions (this closely mirrors Sosa's discussion of competence in terms of the SSS account). When we say that Derek Jeter had the ability to hit fastballs, for example, we understand that this ability was tied to a set of favourable environments and conditions. We do not mean that he could hit fastballs with sand in his eyes, or in an active war zone (Greco 2010, 76-7). No matter how close these possible worlds might be, they are not part of the relevant set, because the ability is implicitly indexed to exclude such worlds. Greco concludes that abilities have the following structure.

*Ability:* S has the ability to X (where X is indexed to conditions C and environments E), iff S has a high success rate in doing X over the set of relevantly close possible

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15 This is similar to Ryle's view. See Ryle (1949), 33. Cf Sosa (2005), 95.

16 Abilities, on this picture, imply more than the mere possibility of success. We could say that someone has the ability to do X, iff it is possible for them to do X. But this sense of 'ability' would be trivially fulfilled by all events that are in the market for achievement.

worlds (where that set includes only worlds in which S is in C and E). (see Greco 2010, 77)

But how could abilities, thus understood, cause (or causally explain) anything? Without getting into questions about the nature of causation, let us assume that causing an event is either constituted or closely accompanied by making that event likely. Clearly, that I *am* likely to succeed cannot be what *makes* me likely to succeed. But this is what saying that my ability (in Greco's sense) causes my success would come to.

What seems right is that, for my success to be an achievement, I need to *do* things that make it likely that I will succeed. This contrasts with Greco's picture on which I have to *be* such that I am likely to succeed. This leads to another point. To say that I have an ability (in Greco's sense) is akin to saying that I am likely to act in ways that make my success likely. To have an ability, then, is to have a somewhat stable disposition to be successful (cf. McKinnon 2013). But why should it be part of the anti-luck condition for achievement that I have such a stable disposition? Consider

*Clutch Strikeout*: Ricky is pitching in a clutch situation. The bases are loaded with nobody out, so he cannot afford to walk the batter or let him put the ball in play. Throughout his career, Ricky has had trouble with his command and has often failed in high pressure situations. His past numbers against the opposing batter are dreadful. Everyone is surprised that the manager leaves him in the game. Failure is overwhelmingly likely. On this occasion, however, Ricky throws three curveballs down and away in the zone to strike out the batter.

Ricky's success is an achievement.<sup>17</sup> But he does not succeed in most nearby possible worlds. In most of them, he cannot find the strike zone, serves up a base hit, or uncorks a

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<sup>17</sup> For a parallel objection to dispositional accounts of virtue see Hurka (2006b), 71-2.

wild pitch. Thus, (according to Greco's notion) he could not have succeeded from ability.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4. Toward a New Conception**

##### ***4.1 Making Success Likely***

While Greco's model of achievement as 'success because of ability' is flawed, he is right that the anti-luck condition for achievements has to do with the relationship between the agent and the likelihood of success.<sup>19</sup> He goes wrong when he locates the required source of likelihood in the agent's dispositional makeup. The agent does not need to *be* such that success is likely, she has to *act* such that success is likely. Thus, a complete conception

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<sup>18</sup> Turri considers cases, similar to Ricky's, in which agents are successful despite lacking a reliable disposition to succeed. Since he is committed to using the term 'achievement' only for successes that manifest reliable abilities, he introduces the term 'mere attainment' for successes that manifest an unreliable ability (which Ricky presumably has). See Turri 2016, 131. Turri does not discuss the notion of mere attainment in much detail, but there appears to be a dilemma. Either mere attainments are less valuable than achievements, or they are equally valuable. In the former case, we would have to know why a success springing from a reliable disposition is supposed to be superior to one springing from an unreliable one (if, as the notion of attainment implies, neither counts as lucky). See Hurka 2006b for related questions about virtuous acts. In the latter case, the notion of a reliable ability ceases to do any work, which would increase the pressure to open the black box that is 'manifestation' and explain the difference between a mere attainment (manifesting an unreliable ability) and beginners luck (not manifesting an existing unreliable ability) other than by fiat.

<sup>19</sup> Following John Pollock, I use talk about (nomic) possible worlds and talk about objective probability interchangeably. Pollock (1990), 72-3.

of the anti-luck condition requires a theory of action. As defending such a theory cannot be done here, I will help myself to the notion of action and describe the role to be played by it.

Consider Pritchard's necessary condition for an event to count as lucky.

(L1) If an event is lucky, then it is an event that occurs in the actual world but which does not occur in a wide class of the nearest possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions for that event are the same as in the actual world. (Pritchard 2005, 128)

Combined with the claim that achievement excludes luck, (L1) correctly classifies many cases as non-achievements. Consider, for example, young Jerry's win of the track-race in the Seinfeld episode *The Race*. Jerry wins, because nobody (but George) realizes when he accidentally starts 2 seconds early. In most nearby possible worlds somebody would have noticed Jerry's early start. Thus, his winning the race is a lucky event according to (L1).

Pritchard argues that the vagueness of the locution 'relevant initial conditions' in (L1) is unproblematic. This is partly, because he thinks that we have a good enough intuitive grasp of what the relevant initial conditions are (Pritchard 2005, 131-2). Moreover, he thinks that the vagueness captures a corresponding vagueness in our everyday concept of luck (Pritchard 2005, 143 n.12). In the current context, however, we should at least specify the following: the relevant initial conditions include the actions taken by the agent. Here, then, is a first pass at an anti-luck condition.

*Anti-Luck 1*: An agent pursues a goal competently, iff the goal obtains in most nearby possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions, including her actions, are the same as in the actual world.

*Anti-Luck 1* will not do, for I could make one of my goals likely through actions that I am performing for unrelated reasons. Consider

*Fresh Money*: Kyle has recently taken over his dad's troubled business. To stay afloat he needs cash but the bank has turned him away. His friend Tony, an event manager, has a way of getting bankers to look at loan applications favourably, and Kyle asks him for help. Tony is happy to help but is busy tonight; he has to place an order for ten thousand liters of beer with a local brewery. Unbeknownst to him, that brewery is Kyle's business. When he calls Kyle the next day, he is happy to discover that his friend's liquidity problem has been solved.

*Anti-Luck 1* implausibly implies that Tony achieved his goal of keeping Kyle's business solvent. We need some restriction on which of an agent's actions count as part of the relevant initial conditions. The natural thing to say is that one can pursue a goal competently, only if one pursues it at all.<sup>20</sup> And while Tony *has* the goal of keeping Kyle's business afloat, he is not pursuing that goal when placing his order. However, we should not use too strong a notion of pursuit here. Consider, for example, the suggestion that only those actions count that are performed with the primary purpose of reaching the goal. This would be too strong. Suppose I want to lose some weight; but I also often oversleep and – having recently moved further from my office – find myself having to either run to work or take a cab to avoid being late. I choose to run, realizing that running would also help with my goal of weight loss. If I lose weight as a result, it seems that I have achieved my goal. But my primary goal in running was to arrive in time. It is not necessary, then, that my actions are performed primarily in order to reach the goal. What is necessary (and

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<sup>20</sup> See Navarro (2015), 3345-6.

what distinguishes this case from *Fresh Money*) is that I have to be aware that my actions are making my goal more likely.<sup>21</sup> This leads to

*Anti-Luck 2*: An agent pursues a goal competently, iff the goal obtains in most nearby possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions are the same as in the actual world. The relevant initial conditions include those of her actions that she (a) performs explicitly in order to reach the goal or (b) performs while being aware that they make the goal more likely.

#### **4.2 Practical Gettier Cases**

Even if *Anti-Luck 2* passes muster as an account of competent pursuit, it is not enough that an agent competently pursues *and* reaches her goal. She must reach it *through* her competent pursuit. The former does not guarantee the latter. Cases that lack the right connection between competent pursuit and success are the practical analogue of Gettier cases. Here is one.

*Young Millionaire*: Oliver's goal is to become a millionaire by age 24. Thorough market research and probing of his talents have lead him to the justified belief that he can best reach this goal by founding a porn company. At 21 Oliver is on pace to reach his goal. However, on his 22nd birthday a new government is elected (in a major upset) promptly banning all porn-related business. Oliver's rich uncle Tobi learns about Oliver being in the porn business and is so outraged that he suffers a heart-attack and dies. Oliver is

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<sup>21</sup> This is not to say that I have to consciously think about the goal. It is enough that I would realize, if asked, that I was making my goal more likely.

Tobi's closest living relative, inherits most of Tobi's money,  
and has reached his goal.<sup>22</sup>

In *Young Millionaire* Oliver competently pursues his goal (as correctly diagnosed by *Anti-Luck 2*) and reaches it, but he does not reach it through his competent pursuit. There is a deviant causal chain from his actions to his success.<sup>23</sup> At this point, we might be tempted to return to an epistemic view like Bradford's requiring that an agent needs to know (most of) the causal chain leading from her actions to success. This could handle *Young Millionaire*, as Oliver's beliefs about how his actions are going to lead to his goal are false. But, as we have seen, Bradford's view excludes too much. People can achieve their goals without much knowledge about the causal chains leading from their actions to success.

Alternatively, we can try to fine-tune the modal modelling to exclude deviant causal chains. Consider

*Anti-Luck 3*: An agent competently pursues and thereby reaches a goal, iff both

(1) the goal obtains in the actual as well as in most nearby possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions are the same as in the actual world. The relevant initial conditions include those of her actions that she (a) performs explicitly in order to reach the goal or (b) performs while being aware that they make the goal more likely. And

(2) this remains true throughout the event that is the achievement.

This also handles *Young Millionaire*. While Oliver's success is likely at the outset, it becomes unlikely once his business is being outlawed. One might worry that *Anti-Luck 3*

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22 Cf. Portmore (2007), 3.

23 There is a similar analysis of Gettier cases in Goldman (1967). But my purpose here is not to develop an anti-luck condition that would also work for knowledge.

is too restrictive. In many cases, some time passes between someone's competent action and the resulting success. What if, during that interval, it became very likely (even though it was not so at the time of the action) that something interfered with the normal causal chain but then (luckily) this danger passes? In such cases of 'bad-luck-almost' we should still want to ascribe achievement. This problem is merely apparent, however, for the 'relevant initial conditions' clause takes care of such cases. There is nothing in this clause (or the motivation for it) that requires us to interpret 'initial' exclusively temporally. So, if, between action and success, nuclear holocaust becomes overwhelmingly likely but is then narrowly avoided, we might say that success remained likely throughout, because it obtained in most possible worlds with the same relevant initial conditions, the last clause excluding all worlds featuring nuclear holocaust.

But *Anti-Luck 3* is still too permissive. In *Young Millionaire*, we could stipulate that, when the new government is elected, this has two simultaneous effects: it makes the success of his business unlikely *and* it makes the sudden death of his uncle very likely. In this case, *Anti-Luck 3* would be satisfied, but Oliver's success would not plausibly be an achievement. It is tempting to think that *Anti-Luck 3* is in trouble whenever there is an event that reduces the likelihood of the most likely causal chain, while simultaneously increasing the likelihood of a different causal chain leading to success. But this generalization is too quick, as the case of Lloyd shows.

*Correlation Trade:* Lloyd has figured out an almost risk-free way to make money in the mortgage derivatives market. He looks for a collateralized mortgage obligation (CMO) that is on the brink of being hit by massive defaults. Then he shorts the senior tranches (making a bet that the CMO is going to fail), while buying the high-yield equity tranches. If, as is overwhelmingly likely, the CMO fails he will win his original bet and this will more than offset his costs for buying the



equity tranches. If, however, the CMO pulls through, the equity tranches will yield more than enough to cover his costs for shorting the seniors. Via some sort of deviant causal chain (and to Lloyd's surprise) the CMO does not fail and he makes a handy profit on the equity tranches.<sup>24</sup>

Both Lloyd and Oliver reach their goals as the result of a causal chain that was not likely to occur at the outset. But Lloyd's profits are an achievement whereas Oliver's riches are not. Thus, Oliver's claim to achievement cannot be undermined simply by the prior unlikelihood of the actual causal chain. Instead, it seems the problem is that the actual causal chain was not accounted for in Oliver's plans. To see this more clearly consider

*Young Millionaire 2*: Felix's goal is to become a millionaire by age 24. He has a justified belief that the best way to reach this goal is to start an online-dating site. Felix is well on his way to his goal, when on his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, the military stages a coup and shuts down the internet for half a year. While this was a very likely event (the coup had been planned for years), this was well-hidden from the public. After solidifying their grip on power, the generals compensate online merchants with a generous lump-sum, if they can show that they ran a successful business before the coup (this too was very likely to happen, as it was the generals' plan all along). Felix qualifies and is awarded enough to be a millionaire.

Felix's actions made success likely, success remained likely, and it was likely to come about via the actual causal chain right from the start, even though Felix had a different causal chain in mind. If we do not want to credit Felix with an achievement, we need to

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<sup>24</sup> This kind of 'Dutch-booking' is possible only if the market is blatantly failing to price assets efficiently.

revise *Anti-Luck 3*. But since we do not want to exclude cases like *Correlation Trade* it is not obvious how to do this.

### *Goals and Processes*

I can see three ways of responding to cases like Felix's. The first is to deny that Felix actually reached his goal. We might say that his goal is under-described and that what he really aims at is not just to be a millionaire by age 24 but to *make* himself into one. This does not address the problem head on and does not ultimately solve it. But the proposal has considerable merit and is worth dwelling on for a moment.

When describing a goal, we will necessarily describe a less than fully determinate event. Less than fully determinate events obtain in virtue of more determinate events (which in turn obtain in virtue of even more determinate events, and so on until a fully determinate event is reached). For example, [John, raising a hand, t] may obtain in virtue of [John, raising his right hand, t].<sup>25</sup> A more determinate event in virtue of which a less determinate event obtains is sometimes called the latter's *ontological ancestor* (Zimmerman 2001, 56-7). The description of a less than determinate event leaves it open, exactly which events are its ontological ancestors – in the example above, [John, raising his left hand, t] would have been an equally good candidate. Consequently, if we describe a goal, there are many (probably infinitely many) fully determinate events that have ontological descendants that fit the description. This is as it should be, for when I set myself a goal, I will often not care in virtue of which determinate event it obtains (I can

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25 I follow Jaegwon Kim's property exemplification account of events. Events are denoted as [x, P, t] where x, P, and t are the event's constitutive individual (or individuals in the case of non-monadic properties), property, and time interval respectively. Kim (1976).

reach my goal of beating you at Ping Pong either by beating you 11-5 or 11-8...). But it is equally clear that we will not accept every event with an ontological descendant that looks like our goal as fulfilling it. If my goal was for John to raise a hand, I would not be satisfied, if John cut off my hand and raised *it*. Thus, the description of the satisfaction conditions of a goal will always be imprecise (since we cannot specify an infinite list of fully determinate events).

This lack of precision might be partly a feature of the goal itself. There could be some fully determinate events of which it is not clear whether they fulfil the goal. That said, goals are typically a lot more precise than our explicit descriptions of them. My description of my goal as beating you at Ping Pong does not exclude many events that nevertheless do not fulfil my goal. For example, if I beat you after you lost your strong hand in a car accident, I will probably not agree that my original goal has been reached. Generally, there will be a fact of the matter as to whether an agent who has a goal would recognize a particular determinate event as fulfilling that goal. And this counterfactual recognition condition delineates the set of events that count as the agent reaching the goal.

As Jesús Navarro puts it

Take any description of the agent's performance you may consider as his success: the question as to whether it is a genuine achievement or not cannot be answered unless we consider the way that result is related to what the agent intended to do, the scenario he was recognizing for his own performance, and the task he considered he was undertaking. (Navarro, 2015, 3360-1)

Suppose, as Felix sets out with his business, you probe what his actual goal is by asking him to imagine some scenarios in which he is a young millionaire and tell you whether, in these scenarios, he would have reached his goal. Some scenarios are obviously in (his business being a big success) and some are obviously out (involving hyperinflation meaning that a million dollars will not cover rent for a month). If you ask him about the scenario described in *Young Millionaire 2*, Felix might very well tell you that it would

not constitute reaching his goal. He might say that his goal was not just to have a million dollars, but to make himself into a millionaire. While there is a distinction between a goal and the process of reaching it, this distinction is often blurred because people include parts of the process in their goals. A mountaineer, for example, does not just want to stand on top of a summit, but to reach it in a certain way. Similarly, Felix and Oliver might have goals that exclude the ways of reaching their millions described in the *Young Millionaire* scenarios. If so, their cases cease to be problematic; for we knew all along that there is no achievement without success.

### *Biting the Bullet*

I suspect that many cases, which at first glance look like practical Gettier cases, can be handled by pointing out that the agents did not really reach their goal. But this response is not always going to cut it, because Felix, or someone like him, may well think of himself as having reached his goal in *Young Millionaire 2*. An agent's goal need not implicitly exclude all the ways of reaching it we would intuitively classify as lucky. This leads to a second way of responding to cases like the *Young Millionaire* scenarios, which is to bite the bullet, accept *Anti-Luck 2*, and admit that these are cases of achievement. This might seem like a desperate move, but it is not completely implausible. If you were to tell Oliver and Felix that theirs were lucky successes rather than achievements, they might rightly point out that they would not have succeeded, if not for their hard work and good plans. If Oliver had not been a rising star in the porn industry, Tobi would not have heard about him, and if Felix had not run a strong business, he would not have qualified for the handout. Thus, both of them can claim that their success is due to their competent pursuit of their goals. Biting the bullet, then, might be more plausible than meets the eye.

It will be objected that Felix and Oliver did not reach their goals in the way they intended. But it is not clear whether that complaint withstands scrutiny. A lot hangs on how we understand the locution 'the way they intended'. After all, under one description they reached their goals precisely as intended: they started successful companies and this made them rich! We are uncomfortable accepting this, because Oliver and Felix had false beliefs about the causal chain leading from their actions to their successes. And so, we might be tempted to understand 'the intended way' more demandingly as involving knowledge of this causal chain. And so, again, we reach a point where a view like Bradford's seems well motivated. If we do not want to bite the bullet, then, we might need to revisit epistemic conditions.

#### ***4.3 An Epistemic Enabling Condition***

A third response to the *Young Millionaire* scenarios is to take another look at epistemic anti-luck conditions. While such proposals by themselves are inadequate, they might prove useful when combined with a condition based around modal safety. In section 2.1, I argued (1) that no set of JTBs about the causal chain from action to success suffices to rule out luck, and (2) that some JTBs do not contribute to the elimination of luck. The lack of sufficiency is unproblematic in the current context as we are not looking for an epistemic condition that rules out luck by itself. But the second point is still pertinent. The epistemic part of the anti-luck condition must not assign significance to (the absence of) irrelevant JTBs. Recall *Competent Driver*. Rudy's false beliefs about how cars work, do not undermine his driving competence. Thus, we must be careful to formulate our epistemic condition such that Rudy is not subject to the same criticism as Oliver and Felix: that, even though his actions made success likely, he did not bring about success in the way he intended.

I submit that the crucial difference between Rudy on the one hand, and Felix and Oliver on the other is that correcting Rudy's beliefs would not provide him with a reason to change his plans, but the same cannot be said of Felix and Oliver. In *Young Millionaire*, there is an event that Oliver does not foresee (the prohibition of porn), and had he foreseen it, he should not have acted as he did. Similarly, had Felix foreseen the military coup, he should have changed plans. Of course, had he foreseen both the military coup *and* the later government handout, he might have acted as he did; but in that case, his situation would be akin to *Correlation Trade* and we should have no qualms calling his success an achievement (the same goes for Oliver foreseeing Tobi's death). The problem with Bradford's proposal is that it does not discriminate between (the absence of) JTBs that make a difference to the way the agent should act in pursuing his goal and those that do not. But only the former can plausibly play a role in an anti-luck condition for achievements. I propose

*Anti-Luck 4*: An agent competently pursues and thereby reaches a goal, iff both

(1) the goal obtains in the actual as well as in most nearby possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions are the same as in the actual world. The relevant initial conditions include those of her actions that she (a) performs explicitly in order to reach the goal or (b) performs while being aware that they make the goal more likely. And

(2) the agent justifiably regards her plan a good one (her actions as making success likely) and there is no event of which it is true that (a) it obtains in the actual world, (b) the agent does not foresee this, (c) had the agent foreseen it, she would not have been justified in regarding her plan a good one, and (d) there is no other event that also obtains in the

actual world and knowing this would have restored justification.<sup>26</sup>

*Anti-Luck 4* combines a modal safety condition with an epistemic enabling condition that assigns significance only to false beliefs whose correction would make a difference to the quality of the agent's plans.<sup>27</sup>

*Anti-Luck 4* has been developed in response to rather convoluted scenarios, but it is not just a gerrymandered proposal designed to handle these cases. Instead, it expresses two simple and compelling ideas about how to distinguish achievement from lucky success. First, the actions taken must make success likely (clause 1); second, *that* (clause (1)) is why the agents performs these actions (clause 2).

## 5. Defying the Odds

There may seem to be easy counterexamples to the claim that *Anti-Luck 4* is a necessary condition for achievement. Consider events that appear to be achievements even though success was unlikely, even given the actions taken by the agent. Take, for example, getting into a competitive academic program where there are so many excellent applicants that the last stage of the admissions process becomes more or less random. Even doing

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26 Clause (d) deals with cases in which the agent is unaware of defeated defeaters of their plans. Imagine that in *Young Millionaire* the prohibition is immediately struck down by the courts. Oliver need not foresee either of these events for his business success to be competently reached.

27 Note that if clause (2) of *Anti-Luck 4* was proposed as a freestanding anti-luck condition, it could be charged (as against Hurka's view) that it is not the justified belief that the plan is good that constitutes competence, but rather it is the fact that the plan is good which, both, constitutes competence and justifies the belief.

everything they could to distinguish themselves, will give outstanding applicants only so much of a chance. Or take a pitcher on a baseball team with an anemic offence trying to get a win against a team with great pitching. Even pitching seven or eight shutout innings will give him only so much of chance.

This problem is not unique to my suggested anti-luck condition. The agents in these situations would not have a justified belief that they will succeed, as Hurka requires. Nor would they succeed in most nearby possible worlds, thus running afoul of Greco's condition. It is unclear how Bradford would deal with such cases, as it is possible that these agents would know a lot about the causal chain from action to success, but this might also be true of lottery winners. To exclude the latter, Bradford would likely claim that buying a ticket and understanding how the lottery works counts as competent in some sense, it falls short of competent *causation* – because the causal link between action and success is too weak. This, in turn, is likely to exclude the cases we are currently considering as well. While a full consideration of the issue is beyond the scope of this article, I will briefly sketch three promising ways of dealing with the issue in ascending order of plausibility.

The most straightforward solution is to claim that, in cases of defying the odds, the agents achieve something other than what they were aiming at. In the case considered above, for example, we might say that it was an achievement for an applicant to reach the last stage of the admissions process, but a lucky success that they were actually admitted. The drawback of this solution is that it opens a gap between our account and the ordinary notion of achievements. Consider a race between four roughly equally good runners. Intuitively, winning the race would be an achievement under normal circumstances. According to the current suggestion, however, winning the race would be a lucky success, while the related achievement would be finishing the race in a certain time.



A second option would be to say that what counts as ‘most nearby possible worlds’ in clause (1) of *Anti-Luck 4* differs depending on the goal in question. The required threshold would be lower if the goal was generally very difficult to reach. Given, for example, that people tend to fail rather frequently at getting hits in baseball, actions that result in a base-hit in about a third of nearby possible worlds might be sufficient for establishing competence. By contrast, if the goal is just to show up at the ballpark in time for the game, competence would require actions that result in success in, say, 99.5% of nearby possible worlds. This solution has the advantage of respecting the intuitive verdict about what is actually achieved. This is also the received view in the epistemology literature (see e.g. Sosa 2015; cf Bradford 2014; Carter et al 2015).<sup>28</sup>

While I do not see decisive reason to reject the moving-threshold proposal, I prefer a third option, namely to adopt a scalar model of competence. Instead of determining *whether or not* an agent reached a goal competently, we might simply ask *to what degree* they did so (see McKinnon 2013 for the related view that instead of credit for a success being due to an agent above a certain (perhaps moving) threshold of competence, such credit itself comes in degrees). The reason I find this preferable is extraneous to the concerns of the debate in epistemology (hence it is unsurprising that epistemologists are by and large content with the moving-threshold proposal). Ethicists concerned with achievements have argued that one important dimension determining the value of any particular achievement is the amount of difficulty involved: the more difficult an

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<sup>28</sup> This solution comes at some cost to theoretical neatness. Specifying what counts as ‘most’ nearby possible worlds is difficult enough (and, as far as I can tell, never actually attempted) when we talk about just one consistent threshold. With a moving threshold, this task becomes both more difficult and less comfortably ignored.

achievement was to secure for the agent, the more value it has (see e.g. Bradford 2013; von Kriegstein 2017b). According to the moving-threshold proposal, however, the difficulty of a goal would already be accounted for by the role it plays in lowering the threshold for competence. This would amount to double counting if, as I think is plausible, how competently a goal is reached is also plausibly a measure of how valuable an achievement is (see Bradford 2015). Thus, at least in the context of ethics, I would suggest that we should think of competence as a partial measure of, instead of a necessary condition for achievement. Instead of saying ‘hitting a homerun is an achievement, only if done competently’, we should say ‘hitting a homerun is an achievement to the degree that it was done competently’. This would lead to the conclusion that cases of defying the odds would be less of an achievement on this measure than doing things where success is more certain. Since competence would only be a partial measure of achievement, however, this is unproblematic: such cases are likely to score high on other plausible measures of achievement (such as difficulty). *Anti-Luck 4*, as well as many other suggested anti-luck conditions, could easily be amended to capture that thought.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this paper, I aimed to achieve three things. First, to critique the existing accounts of the anti-luck condition in the ethics literature on achievements. Second, to invite ethicists interested in the notion of achievement to avail themselves of the resources that related debates in epistemology have produced. Third, to develop a new anti-luck condition for achievements. My account consists of two simple and compelling ideas about how to distinguish achievements from lucky successes. First, the actions taken must increase the likelihood of success; second, the agent performs these actions for that reason.

Biographical Note: Hasko von Kriegstein is assistant professor in the Law and Business Department at Ryerson University's Ted Rogers School of Management. His main interests are in normative ethical theory and business ethics.

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