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# WHAT LUCK IS NOT

Jennifer Lackey

In this paper, I critically examine the two dominant views of the concept of luck in the current literature: lack of control accounts and modal accounts. In particular, I argue that the conditions proposed by such views—that is, a lack of control and the absence of counterfactual robustness—are neither necessary nor sufficient for an event's being lucky. Hence, I conclude that the two main accounts in the current literature both fail to capture what is distinctive of, and central to, the concept of luck.

The concept of luck plays a crucial role in many philosophical discussions. For instance, it is nearly received wisdom in epistemology that the possession of knowledge is incompatible with at least certain kinds of luck. Ethicists have long noted that actions that result purely from luck are neither praiseworthy nor properly creditable to the agents who perform them. And fully making sense of the concept of responsibility is something that metaphysicians simply cannot do without a consideration of luck.

Yet despite its philosophical importance, it is rare to find more than a rough characterization of this concept in the literature, and even rarer to find anything resembling a substantive account of luck. Recently, however, this has begun to change, and several detailed proposals of luck have been offered, all of which fall under two general views of this concept: lack of control accounts and modal accounts. In what follows, I shall critically examine these two different approaches to analysing the concept of luck and show that they are both fundamentally flawed. In particular, I shall argue that the conditions proposed by such views—that is, a lack of control and the absence of counterfactual robustness—are neither necessary nor sufficient for an event's being lucky and, hence, that the two main accounts in the current literature both fail to capture what is distinctive of, and central to, the concept of luck.

## I. Against the LCAL

Of the substantive accounts of luck offered in the literature, what we might call the *Lack of Control Account of Luck*—hereafter, the LCAL—is the most widely embraced. Here are some characterizations of the LCAL, offered by

Daniel Statman, John Greco, Michael Zimmerman, and Wayne Riggs, respectively:

Let us start by explaining what we usually mean by the term ‘luck’. Good luck occurs when something good happens to an agent P, its occurrence being beyond P’s control. Similarly, bad luck occurs when something bad happens to an agent P, its occurrence being beyond his control [Statman 1991: 146].

[T]o say that something occurs as a matter of luck is just to say that it is not under my control [Greco 1995: 83].

[S]omething which occurs as a matter of luck with respect to someone P is something which occurs beyond P’s control [Zimmerman 1993: 231].

If an event E is lucky for S, then S was not sufficiently responsible for bringing about E [Riggs forthcoming-a].

The central idea of this view of luck, then, can be formulated as follows:

LCAL: An event is lucky for a given agent, S, if and only the occurrence of such an event is beyond—or at least significantly beyond—S’s control.<sup>1</sup>

The LCAL has a substantial amount of intuitive appeal. Consider a paradigmatically lucky event, such as winning a fair lottery. It is natural to explain the luck of this event in terms of the winner’s lack of control over the outcome of the lottery. For instance, if we discovered that the lottery in question wasn’t in fact fair—say, because the winner had rigged the process or manipulated the results—we would no longer regard such an event as lucky. Similar considerations apply to countless other events: a shot at basketball ceases to be deemed lucky when it clearly resulted from the player’s skill; providing the correct answer at a spelling bee does not seem lucky when the student mastered every possible word beforehand; and finding one’s complicated destination is not a matter of luck when one is an expert in the area in question. In all of these cases, control, or a lack thereof, seems to lie at the heart of our concept of luck.

Nevertheless, despite the intuitive appeal of the LCAL, I shall now argue that a lack of control is neither necessary nor sufficient for an event’s being lucky. Let us begin with the sufficiency component of the LCAL. The first point to notice is that if a lack of control is sufficient for an event’s being lucky, then there will be a counterintuitive proliferation of lucky events. For instance, suppose that I walk into my kitchen, toast a bagel, and eat it with cream cheese. When my husband comes home ten minutes later, my eating a toasted bagel with cream cheese ten minutes earlier is an event that he neither

<sup>1</sup>I am presenting the LCAL as holding a lack of control to be *both* necessary and sufficient for an event’s being lucky since this seems to fit with what most of its proponents say. An exception to this is found in Riggs [forthcoming a; forthcoming b], where he explicitly argues that a lack of control is necessary but not sufficient for luck. In what follows, I shall argue against the necessity claim and the sufficiency claim *separately*, and hence my arguments will apply to both the strong version of the LCAL found in the text and to any weaker version of this view, such as Riggs’s, as well. Other proponents of versions of the LCAL include Nagel [1976] and Card [1990].

had control over (he wasn't home) nor was sufficiently responsible for (he had nothing to do with my eating the bagel in question). But is it lucky for him that I ate a toasted bagel with cream cheese? If so, it is clearly not in any interesting sense of luck.<sup>2</sup> Countless cases of this sort abound: my neighbour's playing a computer game right now, my cat's sleeping this afternoon, a chef's making eggplant parmesan in Florence today, and numerous other ordinary or mundane events are out of my control at this moment. Yet to regard all of these events as lucky, as proponents of the LCAL must do, is surely to miss something important to the concept of luck.

Of course, details may be filled in for each of these scenarios so that the event in question *is* properly regarded as lucky. For instance, suppose that my husband's health requires that he be gluten-free, but he is nonetheless occasionally overcome with powerful cravings for bread and related food items. My eating a toasted bagel with cream cheese, then—which happened to be the last item of food in our house that contained gluten—removed a temptation from his environment that he would not have been able to resist, thereby saving him from a debilitating physical reaction. In such a case, it may be true that my eating a toasted bagel with cream cheese was, in fact, lucky for my husband. But however the luck in this revised version of the original scenario is explained, this does not show that a lack of control is *sufficient* for luck. For in the original case, we can assume that unusual circumstances of this, or any other relevant, kind simply do not hold: my husband is not required to be gluten-free, it is not the last bread-item in the kitchen, terror will not descend upon our house if such a bagel is not eaten, and so on. It is simply a run-of-the-mill bagel, eaten as an ordinary snack, on an average day. Yet my eating this snack is nonetheless an event that lies beyond my husband's control, thereby rendering it lucky according to the LCAL. This clearly seems like the wrong result.

Proponents of the LCAL may respond here by granting that ordinary and mundane events of this kind are in fact lucky—thereby conceding that the proliferation of lucky events in question exists—but then argue that there are practical and/or epistemic reasons to care about the luck of only some of these events. In particular, they may claim that winning a fair lottery can be distinguished on their view from an ordinary toasted bagel being eaten, not in virtue of one being lucky and the other not, but in terms of one having significance or importance for us while the other does not.<sup>3</sup>

This response will not vindicate the LCAL. For there are events that are both clearly outside of an agent's control and of significance and importance to her, but which are nonetheless clearly not lucky. For instance, my picking up my 6-year-old daughter, Isabella, from school while my husband is teaching is an event that is not only outside of his control, it is also one that is deeply significant and important to him. But surely it is not a lucky event that Isabella is picked up from school. I pick her up from school every day

<sup>2</sup>A similar point is made by Duncan Pritchard when he writes, 'the rising of the sun this morning was an event the occurrence of which was out of one's control. But would we really want to say that it was *lucky* that the sun rose this morning?' [2005: 127]. (Pritchard attributes this point to Latus [2000].)

<sup>3</sup>I am grateful to an anonymous referee for this response. Riggs [forthcoming a; forthcoming b] makes a move of this general sort, by adding as a necessary condition to his version of the LCAL that the event in question have relevant significance.

at the same time; I have never forgotten her, nor have I ever arrived to her school late; I am not the sort of person who would neglect my commitments where my children are concerned; and so on. Similar considerations apply to countless other events: for instance, my younger daughter, Catherine, who is 4 years old, is well-fed, clean, and safe on a daily basis. Given her tender age, however, she is not responsible for many of the events that lead to her being properly cared for, nor is she in control of many of these events, despite the fact that they are very significant and important to her. Consider Catherine's being well-fed: she does not prepare her own food and, indeed, couldn't reach or cook most of what she eats even if she wanted to. Nonetheless, that she eats well is something about which she cares a great deal. According to this version of the LCAL, then, it is a matter of luck that Catherine is well-fed every day. But this is clearly the wrong result. If, for instance, she were to say to her father, 'Wow, what luck that there is a plate of tofu and vegetables in front of me', he would rightly say, 'Well, it may *seem* like a matter of luck that your food is on the table, but Dad knows otherwise because he is the one who prepared your meal.'

Of course, there is a sense in which both of the events discussed above *are* lucky: my husband is lucky that he has the sort of wife whom he can depend on to pick up their children, and Catherine is lucky that she has a father who takes proper care of her. But in this sense, there is no end to the events that are deemed lucky: I am lucky to have eyes that enable me to see where I am driving on my way to Isabella's school, Catherine is lucky that she can digest food properly, both of my daughters are lucky to be healthy, we are all lucky to be alive, everyone in the world is lucky to live on a planet with oxygen, and so on. While there may be a sense in which these claims are true, the luck involved here is clearly not what proponents of the LCAL are interested in. For on their view, only *some* events are lucky, a paradigm of which is the winning of a fair lottery. Being unable to explain the sense of luck in which it is *not* true that virtually every event is lucky would clearly be unwelcome to proponents of the LCAL.

The considerations thus far adduced have questioned the *sufficiency* of a lack of control for luck. The next problem with the LCAL, however, challenges its *necessity*. For instance, consider the following:

**DEMOLITION WORKER:** Ramona is a demolition worker, about to press a button that will blow up an old abandoned warehouse, thereby completing a project that she and her co-workers have been working on for several weeks. Unbeknownst to her, however, a mouse had chewed through the relevant wires in the construction office an hour earlier, severing the connection between the button and the explosives. But as Ramona is about to press the button, her co-worker hangs his jacket on a nail in the precise location of the severed wires, which radically deviates from his usual routine of hanging his clothes in the office closet. As it happens, the hanger on which the jacket is hanging is made of metal, and it enables the electrical current to pass through the damaged wires just as Ramona presses the button and demolishes the warehouse.

There are two points to notice about DEMOLITION WORKER. First, that Ramona succeeded in blowing up the warehouse in question is an event that

is clearly riddled with luck. For in order for this event to take place, a number of prior circumstances—some of which are both unlikely and coincidental—had to occur: Ramona’s co-worker had to break his usual routine and hang his jacket in the precise *location* where the wires were severed, on a *metal* hanger, at the exact *time* in which she pressed the button. Second, because Ramona’s pressing of the button—which is an activity that she could have refrained from engaging in—is what is directly responsible for the explosion, the explosion is an event that is sufficiently within her control.

What DEMOLITION WORKER shows, then, is that although an event may be within a given agent’s control, *that the agent has such control can itself be largely a matter of luck*, and hence the event resulting from this control can be lucky as well. For instance, although the explosion of the old abandoned warehouse is within Ramona’s control, it is merely an unlikely coincidence that her co-worker placed a metal hanger at the exact time and place where the relevant wires were severed and, hence, it is largely a matter of luck that she has the control over the explosion that she in fact has. But luck with respect to an event’s being within one’s control can extend to the event itself. By virtue of the fortuitous combination of events leading to Ramona’s control over the explosion, that she succeeded in demolishing the warehouse is also clearly riddled with luck. This is evidenced by the reaction that Ramona would quite likely have upon hearing all of the details of the situation: were she to learn that after a mouse chewed through wires in her construction office, a co-worker just happened to place a metal hanger in the precise location of the severed wires at the exact time she pressed the button, surely she herself would regard the resulting explosion as an event whose occurrence is extraordinarily lucky.

It is of further interest to note that, once it is clear how DEMOLITION WORKER works, numerous other kinds of similar cases can be constructed with considerable ease. To do so, first choose an event over which an agent clearly has sufficient control, such as a professional basketball player making an easy, uninterrupted basket, a driver turning her steering wheel to the left to avoid hitting a squirrel, or a child jumping in a pool to cool off on a hot summer day. Second, construct a case in which such control was almost interrupted by factors unknown to all of the parties involved. Third, ensure that the control is not in fact interrupted through a combination of purely coincidental and unlikely features, so that the fact that the agent has the control in question is riddled with luck, which, in turn, extends to the resulting event. Voilà: you have a counterexample to the LCAL.

For instance, consider Derek, a professional basketball player, alone on the court, shooting an easy, uninterrupted basket. Now imagine that at the moment Derek is about to take his shot, a red-winged blackbird, whose nest he is playing next to, is flying to attack him. Moments prior to reaching its destination, however, a hawk intercepts and turns the red-winged blackbird into lunch. Now, though Derek’s making the basket in question is sufficiently within his control—he is, after all, a professional basketball player inches away from the basket with no one guarding him—that he succeeded in making the basket is nonetheless largely a matter of luck. For had the hawk not intercepted the blackbird at the precise moment when it

did, Derek's ability to make the shot would have been interrupted by the attack. And, as was the case in *DEMOLITION WORKER*, the luck involved in the control Derek has with respect to making the shot in question extends to the making of the shot itself. This, once again, is evidenced by the reaction that a fan would most likely have to seeing the red-winged blackbird's attack thwarted by the hawk.

We have seen, then, that a lack of control is neither necessary nor sufficient for an event's being lucky. Thus, the LCAL fails to provide an adequate account of luck.

## II. Against the MAL

If a lack of control does not lie at the heart of the concept of luck, then what does? By way of answering this question, a natural place to turn to is a recent book by Duncan Pritchard [2005] on the topic of epistemic luck. In this book, Pritchard argues that the three competing characterizations of the general concept of luck found in the current literature—in terms of accidentality, chance, and a lack of control—are not only riddled with vagueness, they are also incorrect. For instance, while it may be a matter of *luck* that one wins the lottery, it need not thereby be an *accident* that one so wins, particularly if one deliberately bought the ticket in question and self-consciously chose the winning number. Similarly, it may be due to *chance* that a landslide happens but, if no one is affected by it, it is not a matter of *luck* that such an occurrence took place. And neither the rising of the sun nor the formation of many perceptual beliefs is the result of anyone's *control*, but surely these events are not a matter of *luck* in any significant sense.

According to Pritchard, what lies at the heart of the concept of luck is not accidentality, chance, or a lack of control but, rather, what we might call *the absence of counterfactual robustness*. Whether an event is counterfactually robust or not is determined by the extent to which it is stable across possible worlds near the actual world in which the event occurs—the more stable an event is across such possible worlds, the more counterfactually robust it is. Because of this purportedly necessary connection between luck and the absence of counterfactual robustness, Pritchard proposes what we might call the *Modal Account of Luck*—hereafter, the MAL—which he claims not only adequately captures the central intuitions in philosophical discussions of this concept, but also avoids the problems afflicting rival views. It consists of the following two severally necessary and jointly sufficient conditions:

MAL: (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.

(L2) If an event is lucky, then it is an event that is significant to the agent concerned (or would be significant, were the agent to be availed of the relevant facts).

[Pritchard 2005: 125, 132]

The MAL, according to Pritchard, captures paradigmatic instances of luck, such as lottery wins and lucky discoveries of buried treasure, since such events are lucky *precisely because* they are both significant to us and occur in the actual world but not in a wide class of relevant nearby possible worlds. Moreover, this account properly excludes events that are intuitively not a matter of luck that rival views have trouble ruling out—for instance, a landslide in which no one is affected by it fails (L2) of the MAL since such an event lacks the appropriate significance, and both the rising of the sun and the formation of perceptual beliefs clearly fail (L1) since such events occur both in the actual world and in a wide class of the relevant nearby possible worlds.

The MAL also avoids the problems afflicting both the sufficiency and the necessity dimensions of the LCAL discussed in the previous section. Mundane events, such as my eating a toasted bagel with cream cheese, not only fail condition (L2) since they do not possess the necessary significance, they will also often fail (L1) by virtue of occurring in the actual world and in a wide class of the nearest relevant possible worlds. And according to the MAL, Ramona's blowing up the warehouse in DEMOLITION WORKER is clearly a lucky event, since it both lacks counterfactual robustness—there are nearby possible worlds in which Ramona's co-worker follows his typical routine and hangs his jacket in the office closet rather than on the nail in question—and possesses significance—the explosion of the warehouse is the culmination of weeks of work on the part of Ramona and her co-workers.

Despite these advantages of Pritchard's MAL, however, I shall now argue that such an account of luck is fundamentally incorrect. To begin, consider the following:

**BURIED TREASURE:** Sophie, knowing that she had very little time left to live, wanted to bury a chest filled with all of her earthly treasures on the island she inhabited. As she walked around trying to determine the best site for proper burial, her central criteria were, first, that a suitable location must be on the northwest corner of the island—where she had spent many of her fondest moments in life—and, second, that it had to be a spot where rose bushes could flourish—since these were her favourite flowers. As it happens, there was only one particular patch of land on the northwest corner of the island where the soil was rich enough for roses to thrive. Sophie, being excellent at detecting such soil, immediately located this patch of land and buried her treasure, along with seeds for future roses to bloom, in the one and only spot that fulfilled her two criteria.

One month later, Vincent, a distant neighbor of Sophie's, was driving in the northwest corner of the island—which was also his most beloved place to visit—and was looking for a place to plant a rose bush in memory of his mother who had died ten years earlier—since these were her favourite flowers. Being excellent at detecting the proper soil for rose bushes to thrive, he immediately located the same patch of land that Sophie had found one month earlier. As he began digging a hole for the bush, he was astonished to discover a buried treasure in the ground.



There are two central points to notice about BURIED TREASURE. First, it is clear that Vincent's discovery of the buried treasure *is a lucky event*, indeed even a paradigmatic instance of one. For not only does he have no reason to think that a treasure has been buried in the particular location in which he was digging, he also has no reason to think that a treasure has been buried *anywhere* on the island. His happening to discover a buried treasure while attempting to plant a rose bush in memory of his deceased mother is, then, an instance of good luck if anything is. Second, even though Vincent's discovery is clearly lucky, *it fails (L1) and is therefore excluded by Pritchard's MAL*. For given that there is only one patch of land on the northwest corner of the island that is suitable for roses to thrive, combined with the fact that only this spot satisfies both Sophie's criteria for proper burial of her treasure and Vincent's requirements for the location of planting his rose bush, the following is true: Vincent's discovering a buried treasure when he did is an event that not only occurs in the actual world, it also occurs in a wide class of the nearest possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions for such an event are the same as in the actual world. Specifically, in all of the relevant nearby possible worlds, Sophie buries her treasure in the particular spot on the island that she does in the actual world, Vincent digs in the very same spot, and the buried treasure is thereby discovered. Thus, in BURIED TREASURE, we have a paradigmatically lucky event that is nonetheless counterfactually robust, thereby showing that (L1) of the MAL is not a necessary condition of luck.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, so as to avoid quibbles about whether such a case does, in fact, fail (L1), we can add further stipulations to BURIED TREASURE to ensure the relevant counterfactual robustness, such as the following: the only type of flower that both Sophie and Vincent's mother are fond of is roses, and hence there are no nearby worlds in which either party chooses a location on the island that is suitable for other kinds of flowers; Sophie has always had the firm conviction that she would bury her earthly valuables upon learning that her illness had become terminal, and thus there are no nearby worlds in which she chooses to not bury the treasure that she does in the actual world; the northwest corner of the island is fairly remote and rarely frequented, so there are no nearby worlds in which someone discovers the buried treasure prior to Vincent; and so on.

It should also be emphasized that it is implausible to attempt to resist the conclusion of BURIED TREASURE by arguing that Vincent's discovery merely *seems* lucky to him, when in fact it is not.<sup>5</sup> To see this, suppose that Noah is the only person to survive an otherwise fatal plane crash because of an elaborate scheme that, unbeknownst to him, was orchestrated by a political group to ensure his survival. Suppose further that because of the factors determining this scheme, Noah's survival is counterfactually robust, i.e., he is the only survivor of the plane crash in question in all of the

<sup>4</sup>Wayne Riggs [forthcoming a] defends a view of luck that endorses (L1) and (L2) of Pritchard's MAL, but adds the necessary condition requiring a lack of control discussed earlier (namely, 'If an event is lucky for S, then S was not sufficiently responsible for bringing about E'). Since Riggs's view is a *conjunction* of the MAL and the LCAL—rather than a *disjunction*—it succumbs to the objections I raise against the necessity of both (L1) and (L3).

<sup>5</sup>I owe this objection to Duncan Pritchard.

relevant nearby possible worlds. Now, even though Noah's survival may *seem* lucky to him because he is not privy to the factors determining it, it nevertheless is *not in fact* a lucky event.<sup>6</sup> As Pritchard says in the context of considering a similar case, 'In order to see this, one need only note that if the agent were to discover that this event had been carefully planned all along, then he would plausibly no longer regard it as a lucky event' [2005: 144, n. 15].<sup>7</sup> But notice: such a response is simply not plausible with respect to BURIED TREASURE. For, unlike in the case of Noah's survival, counterfactual robustness is ensured in BURIED TREASURE through absolutely no deliberate intervention of any sort; instead, circumstances *just happen to fortuitously combine* in such a way so as to make Vincent's discovery appear both in the actual world and in all of the relevant nearby possible worlds. Indeed, it is precisely because of this fortuitous combination of circumstances that the discovery of the buried treasure is so clearly a lucky event. This conclusion is further supported by the fact that, were Vincent to hear all of the details surrounding his discovery, he would quite likely continue to regard it as an extraordinarily lucky event that he found Sophie's buried treasure while planting a rose bush.

Finally, notice that BURIED TREASURE is not at all an isolated case in which an event is clearly lucky yet fails (L1) of Pritchard's MAL. For once it is seen how such an example works, numerous other kinds of similar counterexamples can be constructed with relative ease. To do so, first choose a paradigmatic instance of luck, such as winning a game show through a purely lucky guess, emerging unharmed from an otherwise fatal accident through no special assistance, etc. Second, construct a case in which, though both central aspects of the event are counterfactually robust, there is no deliberate or otherwise relevant connection between them. Third, if there are any residual doubts that such an event fails (L1), add further features to guarantee counterfactual robustness across nearby possible worlds. Voilà: you have a counterexample to the MAL.

For instance, consider winning through a lucky guess a game show that presents contestants with multiple choice options. Now imagine that there is a feature,  $\phi$ , of the final winning answer that is entirely disconnected from its correctness but is such that its presence will invariably lead Penelope to choose that answer. Suppose further that the current producer of the show, Gustaf, has a similar obsession with  $\phi$ , so that he ensures that the final winning answer of the day will possess this feature. Perhaps  $\phi$  is being presented in the colour purple, so that when in doubt Penelope will invariably choose the answer displayed in purple and Gustaf will always present the final winning answer in purple. Moreover, to avoid any suspicion that Penelope is privy to the fact that the final winning answer will

<sup>6</sup>In many respects, this type of case is the flipside of the one discussed earlier involving Ramona in DEMOLITION WORKER: whereas Noah's surviving the plane crash may *prima facie* seem lucky to him when in fact it is not, the explosion may not *prima facie* seem lucky to Ramona when in fact it is. Both of these conclusions are supported by noting that these *prima facie* reactions of the agents in question are very likely to change upon being apprised of all of the relevant details of their respective situations.

<sup>7</sup>Pritchard offers this response when considering the objection, due to Nicholas Rescher, that lucky events can nonetheless be counterfactually robust because of 'deliberate contrivance by others' [Rescher 1995: 35]. As should be clear from the text, I agree with Pritchard that while such events may *seem* lucky, they in fact are not.

be displayed in purple, we can suppose that Gustaf is irregularly chosen as the producer of this game show and hence that no such connection could plausibly have been made between being shown in purple and correctness. If any doubt remains that such a case truly fails (L1), we can simply add a few more details to ensure counterfactual robustness on the sides of both Penelope's choice and Gustaf's presentation of the correct answer—perhaps purple is the *only* colour that both Penelope and Gustaf have any emotional attitude towards, so there are no nearby worlds in which either's obsession is directed at an alternative colour, and so on. Once this is complete, we will again have a paradigmatically lucky event—in this case, winning a game show through a lucky guess—that clearly fails (L1) of Pritchard's account of luck.

Examples like BURIED TREASURE show that the absence of counterfactual robustness found in (L1) of the MAL is not a *necessary* condition of an event's being lucky. There is, however, a class of events that reveal that (L1) and (L2) also fail to be *jointly sufficient* for capturing the concept of luck. To see this, consider what we might call *whimsical events*, that is, events that result from actions that are made, either entirely or largely, on a whim.<sup>8</sup> For instance, suppose that, though it is completely out of character for me, I decide on a whim to take advantage of a low airfare and fly to Paris for the weekend. Given my otherwise cautious character combined with the whimsical nature of my decision, I could have easily chosen to do something entirely different for the weekend, such as join my family at the nearby art museum, or catch up on the pile of grading at work. Accordingly, my going to Paris for the weekend is an event that occurs in the actual world but not in a wide class of the nearest relevant possible worlds. Because such an event can surely be significant to me—say it has been a lifelong dream of mine to see the Eiffel Tower—it clearly satisfies both (L1) and (L2) of the MAL. *But surely whimsical events are not always a matter of luck.* For even if my choosing to go to Paris for the weekend is based on a whim, I am still consciously *choosing* to perform this action and am, therefore, responsible for whatever consequences—either positive or negative—result from it. Similar considerations can be made about countless other decisions that are made on a whim, such as a spontaneous decision to go skydiving, or a whimsical choice to attend a rock concert. Such events, when significant to the agent in question, clearly satisfy both (L1) and (L2) of the MAL. But to regard whimsical events as always being a matter of luck is to confuse what is spontaneous or unpredictable with what is fortuitous or lucky. Hence, (L1) and (L2) are not jointly sufficient for an event's being lucky. The MAL is, therefore, false.

Now, it is important to emphasize, on the one hand, that the lack of counterfactual robustness found with many whimsical events does not follow from the mere fact that such events are sometimes out of character. For instance, we can imagine that my decision to fly to Paris for the weekend wildly deviates from my otherwise cautious character, but that it is neither whimsical nor lacking in counterfactual robustness. Perhaps, for

<sup>8</sup>I am indebted to Baron Reed for bringing this type of problem with the MAL to my attention.

instance, I have recently suffered the tragic loss of a loved one, and a weekend trip to Paris, though uncharacteristic, is a way of dealing with this tragedy that I am quite likely to pursue under the circumstances, thereby being such that it occurs in both the actual world and in a wide class of the nearest relevant possible worlds. On the other hand, some whimsical events can be very consistent with one's character. For instance, it may be in keeping with the characters of some spontaneous or tempestuous people that they frequently act on whims. Perhaps Craig's waking up one day, calling in sick to work, and going parasailing—an activity he has never before thought about attempting—is whimsical, though quite consistent with his spontaneous character. Moreover, some people are prone to acting on a whim, but only in certain contexts. For instance, I typically have a difficult time deciding what to order from menus at new restaurants. As a result, I usually narrow my preferences down to three or four vegetarian options, and then just choose one when the pressure of the server being at the table forces me to do so. Such events may be quite in character, yet nonetheless be both whimsical and not a matter of luck.

It should also be emphasized that whimsical events need not be regarded as entirely arbitrary or random. Craig's going parasailing rather than to work, for instance, may result from a conscious decision that he made, and may therefore not be random, despite being quite unlikely. Moreover, the fact that such an event follows from his decision does not show that it fails to satisfy (L1) of the MAL. For surely some of our decisions, and the events that follow from them, fall at radically different places on the counterfactual robustness spectrum. Craig's decision to feed his cat—which is something that he religiously does—may be extraordinarily counterfactually robust, yet his ditching work in favour of parasailing on Monday—which is a spontaneous act—may occur only in the actual world and in a narrow class of the nearest relevant possible worlds.

Of course, in order to undermine the sufficiency of the MAL, it need not be the case that *all* whimsical events lack counterfactual robustness. Perhaps some spontaneous people act on whims that are stable across relevant nearby possible worlds. For instance, suppose that Craig's particular spontaneity makes it very likely that he will call into work, and a recent documentary on parasailing that he saw renders it probable that he will attempt this activity in the near future. In such a case, Craig's whimsical act may nonetheless be counterfactually robust. Surely, however, at least *some* whimsical events are not like this at all. Waking up one morning and deciding—out of the blue—to fly to Paris, or to ditch work, or to go parasailing, may be extremely unlikely and yet not a matter of luck at all. But notice: in order to truly defend the MAL from the objection under discussion, it must be the case that *all*—not merely some—whimsical events are counterfactually robust. This is surely implausible.

Finally, it is worth noting that the responsibility that an agent has for her whimsical actions will be explained in different ways by libertarians and compatibilists. The point I wish to make here, however, is that from an *intuitive* point of view, many whimsical events are not lucky. In other words, this is a datum, which any adequate theory of responsibility must account

for. This point is worth emphasizing, as one of the leading objections to libertarianism—what has come to be known as the ‘Luck Argument’—is that actions that are performed as a result of indeterministic reasoning processes are lucky.<sup>9</sup> A fortiori, then, whimsical events would be lucky. Whether or not this argument is fatal to libertarianism, it does not affect my argument against the MAL. For, to the extent that one finds the Luck Argument against libertarianism compelling, one will be drawn to an alternative account of responsibility, which should then allow one to explain why whimsical events are not always a matter of luck.

What we have seen, then, is that the account of luck found in the MAL is fundamentally misguided. To see this, notice that it is not available to Pritchard to adequately respond to the above counterexamples by tinkering with the details of such a view so as to produce a slightly modified conception of the MAL. For, as BURIED TREASURE reveals, an event that occurs in the actual world can also occur in all of the relevant nearby possible worlds and yet still be clearly lucky; and, as whimsical events show, an event that is clearly not lucky can be both significant and occur in the actual world but not in the relevant nearby possible worlds. This shows that modal considerations of the sort found in the MAL are neither necessary nor, together with significance, sufficient for an event’s being lucky. Thus, we need to look in an altogether different place than the MAL for an adequate account of luck.

### III. Conclusion

Proponents of the LCAL and the MAL, then, are looking in the wrong places for capturing luck since both views propose conditions that are neither necessary nor sufficient for an event’s being lucky. Hence, we see in the current philosophical literature what luck is *not*—it is *not* a matter of the absence of either control or of counterfactual robustness. We have, unfortunately, yet to see what luck *is*.<sup>10</sup>

*Northwestern University*

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<sup>9</sup>For different versions of the Luck Argument, see Kane [1996; 2005], Haji [1999; 2000; 2005], and Mele [2006]. For a response to this argument on behalf of the libertarian, see Kane [1996; 2005].

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