

Handout: Julia Driver – "Luck and Fortune in Moral Evaluation"

Framing the Problem and the Proposed Solution

The Problem: The Paradox of Moral Luck

- Philosophical *puzzle*: Moral evaluations (especially blame and praise) appear to hinge on **factors beyond agents' control**, contradicting the "control condition"—the idea that we're only morally responsible for what we control.
- **Example**: Two truck drivers drive equally recklessly. One kills a child (bad luck), the other doesn't (good luck). The former is blamed more harshly. But *why*, if both had identical intentions and behavior?
- This tension leads some to **internalism**, where moral evaluation is based solely on internal features—intentions, motives, reasoning.
- But this leaves out something many find intuitively crucial: *actual consequences*.

Driver's Solution: A Contrastivist, Objective Consequentialist Account

- **Main goal**: Defend an *externalist* account of moral evaluation that includes *consequences*, while preserving the intuition that **agents shouldn't be blamed for luck**.
 - **Key thesis**: Our *luck attributions*—and our moral evaluations—are inherently **contrastive**. That is, no one is "just lucky"; they are *lucky that X happened rather than Y*.
 - This approach preserves outcome-sensitivity *without collapsing into moral absurdity or injustice*.
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I. Moral Luck and the Challenge to Externalism

Types of Moral Luck:

1. **Resultant luck** – luck in the outcomes of actions.
2. **Circumstantial luck** – luck in the situations one faces.
3. **Constitutive luck** – luck in the kind of person one is (e.g., temperament, moral character).
4. **Causal luck** – luck in how one's actions come about.

Dominant Theories' Response:

- **Kantian internalism**: Only intentions matter. Insulates moral worth from luck.
 - **Subjective consequentialism**: Focuses on expected utility, based on agent's reasonable expectations—not actual outcomes.
 - But both views *ignore* the apparent *moral relevance of outcomes* to action assessment and blame.
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II. Mixed Views and Their Shortcomings

- Many intuitively hold a “*mixed view*”: evaluate both internal states *and* actual consequences.
 - This seems reasonable, but Driver argues it doesn't withstand theoretical scrutiny:
 - The view can't explain *why* we should count both intention and outcome as *intrinsically* morally relevant.
 - Risks **moral solipsism**: discounting agents' actual impact on the world.
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III. Driver's Contrastivist Approach to Luck

Core Insight:

No one is simply “lucky” or “unlucky” tout court. Evaluations of luck are always made *in contrast* to some alternative possibility.

- **Example:** Sandra contracts a rare, fatal flu—but recovers, and the illness cures her arthritis. She's lucky *to have had the flu rather than remained arthritic*, but unlucky *to have caught the flu rather than avoided it*.

Contrastivist Claim:

- Evaluations of luck must always specify:
 1. *Agent* (S)
 2. *Actual outcome* (p)
 3. *Contrast outcome* (q)
 4. *Interest-relative perspective*

Formalization:

“S is lucky that *p* rather than *q*, relative to interests and epistemic context.”

- This explains cases of **ambiguous luck** (e.g., lottery winners, missed trains, mistaken killings).
 - It also respects our **normative interests**: praise/blame, moral luck attributions depend on what the agent *should care about*.
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IV. Alternative Accounts of Luck

1. Epistemic Reductionism

- Luck is merely a projection of *our ignorance*.
- Inspired by **Laplace**: a God-like knower sees no luck, only causality.
- Weaknesses:
 - Fails to explain *non-epistemic surprise* (e.g., buried treasure found accidentally, missed trains leading to romance).
 - Can't distinguish **good fortune** from **luck** proper.

2. Modal Account (Duncan Pritchard)

- **L1**: An event is lucky if it occurs in the actual world, but *not* in nearby possible worlds with the same initial conditions.
 - **L2**: The event must be significant to the agent's interests.
 - **Limitation**: Doesn't fully capture *contrastive structure* (e.g., "lucky to win lottery" vs. "unlucky to win and lose inheritance").
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V. Driver's Hybrid Modal-Contrastive Account

Driver synthesizes the modal and contrastive insights into a unified theory:

- **CL1**: S is lucky that *p* rather than *q* iff:
 - *p* occurs in the actual world, but not in many nearby worlds.
 - *q* occurs in those nearby worlds, but not in the actual one.

- **CL2:** The luck judgment is evaluated *relative to interests*—not necessarily those the agent actually has, but those the agent *ought to have*.

Moral Application:

- **Morally unlucky:** The reckless truck driver who *happens* to kill someone. In most nearby worlds, he wouldn't. He's unlucky, *but still blameworthy* for his reckless intention.
- **Morally lucky:** The attempted murderer who misses. He's *not as blameworthy* as the successful murderer, but his *intentions still reflect bad character*.

Key Insight:

Moral luck *does not undermine* blame or praise. It reveals the complexity of attributing *degrees* of responsibility, depending on the agent's relation to actual and possible outcomes.

VI. Conclusion: Luck, Fortune, and Moral Evaluation

- **Driver's Position:** Consequences matter to rightness/wrongness, but *blame* and *praise* depend on deeper factors—agent intentions, foreseeability, and contrasts between actual and possible outcomes.
 - **Fortune vs. Luck:**
 - *Luck* involves **flukes, chance, improbability**.
 - *Fortune* may involve **systematic but undeserved outcomes**—like character traits or upbringing. Not necessarily "lucky," but still morally significant.
 - Her approach enables a *nuanced externalism* that captures both our *intuitive moral judgments* and the **systematic role of outcome and contrast**.
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