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## 9

# Knowledge, Credit and Testimony

## 9.1 Lackey's Argument

Jennifer Lackey (2002) (2006) has advanced a strong challenge for any theory that takes knowledge to require the following: that one who knows must deserve *credit* for her true belief. Lackey thus rejects the *credit thesis*:

**CREDIT:** For  $S$ ,  $p$ , if  $s$  knows  $p$ , then it is to  $S$ 's credit that  $S$  believes  $p$  truly.<sup>1</sup>

Lackey rejects CREDIT by arguing that satisfying the CREDIT condition is not necessary for one to have knowledge. In the previous chapter, I've argued that satisfying the credit condition and satisfying the conditions for knowing will be extensionally equivalent; thus, on the view being endorsed here, the satisfaction of the credit condition will be both *necessary* and *sufficient* for knowing. A threat such as Lackey's to the necessity condition is therefore a threat to our theory of knowledge.

So how, specifically, does Lackey attempt to demonstrate that credit theory is false? The argument goes as follows:

1. If CREDIT is necessary for knowledge, then it cannot be the case both that (i) one knows some proposition  $p$ , and (ii) does not deserve credit for holding  $p$  truly.

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<sup>1</sup> A standard way to think about intellectual or cognitive credit is offered by John Greco (*forthcoming*), who takes as a model Joel Feinberg's view of moral credit attributions. Greco gives the following general template for *intellectual credit*—the sort of credit that a variety of virtue epistemologists think must be attributable to an agent who has knowledge:

**Intellectual credit (Greco):**  $S$  deserves intellectual credit for believing the truth regarding  $p$  only if:

- (i) Believing the truth regarding  $p$  has intellectual value
- (ii) Believing the truth regarding  $p$  can be ascribed to  $S$ , and
- (iii) Believing the truth regarding  $p$  reveals  $S$ 's virtuous cognitive character.

2. In a wide variety of cases in which one comes to gain knowledge through testimony, she does not deserve credit for believing truly what her informant has told her.
3. Therefore, the satisfaction of CREDIT is not necessary for knowledge. And *ipso facto*—
4. A 'credit theory' of knowledge is false.

Lackey supports (2) in the argument by offering a case in which one learns where the Sears Tower is by asking an informant. It is a case that has received quite a bit of attention from, among others, Wayne Riggs, John Greco, Ernest Sosa and Duncan Pritchard. Here's the case:

*Lackey's Sears Tower Case:* Having just arrived at the train station in Chicago, Morris wishes to obtain directions to the Sears Tower. He looks around, approaches the first adult passerby that he sees, and asks how to get to his desired destination. The passerby, who happens to be a Chicago resident who knows the city extraordinarily well, provides Morris with impeccable directions to the Sears Tower by telling him that it is located two blocks east of the train station. Morris unhesitatingly forms the corresponding true belief.<sup>2</sup>

Lackey writes: "There is nothing that is particularly unusual about [*sic.* this case], and it is nearly universally accepted that a situation such as Morris's not only can but often does result in testimonial knowledge<sup>3</sup>."

Lackey argues<sup>4</sup> that in circumstances like these, Morris can come to know where the Sears Tower is even though it is false that the true belief Morris receives from the informant is such that he (Morris) deserves credit for having it. As premise (3) suggests, credit-theories of knowledge, of the sort defended by Greco (*forthcoming*)<sup>5</sup> and Sosa (2007)<sup>6</sup> as well as myself, hold that knowledge is a type of cognitive achievement creditable to the agent; by reasoning from her case supporting (2) that credit isn't necessary for knowledge, Lackey infers the conclusion (4) that: "...it is precisely this sort of case that shows CREDIT [credit theories of knowledge] to be false."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Jannifer Lackey (2006), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Pritchard (*forthcoming*).

<sup>5</sup> John Greco (*forthcoming*) A Virtue-Theoretic Approach to Epistemic Evaluation, typescript.

<sup>6</sup> Ernest Sosa (2007), in his essay Epistemic Normativity.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

In order to avoid Lackey's conclusion, we can go one of two ways, both which take aim at (2). The first way is to reject that testimonial cases such as the one she gives are actually cases of knowing, a move that would make it unproblematic for the agent not to deserve credit.

The second way is to grant with her that knowledge can be gained through testimony in these sorts of cases, but to then affirm further what she denies—that the agent deserves credit.

While the second strategy is more popular amongst defenders of credit theory, I think there is a very strong case that can be made for going the first route.

## 9.2 First line of response

Circularity threatens here: any argument I might be able to offer in favor of thinking that the agent isn't a knower in Lackey's example cannot *itself* appeal to credit theory in order to explain why the agent doesn't know. This is because Lackey's argument is one that puts the matter of whether credit theory is true on trial; thus, it would be questionbegging on my part to attempt to reject a premise of her argument that credit theory is false by appealing to a theory that would be apt to demonstrate this only if Lackey's conclusion is false. To avoid begging the question against Lackey, then, any case I might make for thinking her counterexample to credit theory isn't really a case of knowledge must appeal to considerations that would count against her hero (Morris) knowing *regardless* of whether CREDIT is correct.

With this dialectical restriction in the background, I want to start by making explicit an assumption that serves to drive much of the force behind Lackey's case. The assumption is that we are permitted to generalize from what credit theory's verdict is in the Sears Tower case, to what credit theory must say about the wider class of knowledge thought to be gained through testimony.

If we *are* permitted to make this generalized inference, then it's going to be a really bad thing for credit theory if it rules that Morris doesn't know. Duncan Pritchard (*forthcoming*) articulates the worry straightforwardly. Here's Pritchard:

We would naturally describe such a case [as Lackey's] as one in which the informant's knowledge was straightforwardly communicated to our agent; indeed, if we don't allow knowledge in cases like this then it seems that [were the credit theory, which denies knowledge in these

cases, true,] quite a lot of our putative testimony-based knowledge is called into question.<sup>8</sup>

Let's consider even more explicitly the sort of assumptions that generate this worry. Let this set of assumptions be called the *Case-Source Argument*.

### *Case-Source Argument*

1. Testimony is a common method by which we can come to have knowledge.
2. Morris' epistemic situation in the Sears Tower case is at least as good as the epistemic situations we take ourselves to have in most cases whereby knowledge is thought to be acquired through testimony.
3. Therefore, *most of what we take ourselves to know by testimony* can be preserved by credit theory only if credit theory counts the true belief Morris comes to have about the Sears Tower as knowledge.

Everyone should grant that (1) is correct—testimony is certainly a method by which we can come to have knowledge, and even more, we should grant that testimony is a method upon which a *good deal* of our knowledge is acquired. Given that this is so, if (2) in the *case-source* argument is true, then what follows—(3)—would prevent our first strategy for replying to Lackey's argument from ever getting off the ground. This is because (3) implies that the price for denying that Morris is a knower will be more than any theory aiming to preserve testimony as a viable *source* of knowledge could afford.

I have no intention of paying that price. I will in what follows, though, see our first strategy through and argue in a way that doesn't already assume credit theory that Lackey is wrong to think that the Sears Tower Case is one where knowledge is acquired. First though, it will be needed that I defend how, by maintaining this about the case she gives, we do not stand at any tension with the idea that a good deal of what we know is gained through the method of relying on testimony.

### 9.3.1 Testimony and the Epistemic Situation

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<sup>8</sup> D.H. Pritchard (forthcoming) in "Epistemology", ed. A. O'Hear, Cambridge UP, p. 9. Pritchard's quote

Importantly, premises (1) and (2) in the *case-source argument* imply (3) only if a certain theoretical consistency requirement is being assumed, a requirement that functions as an implicit premise in the argument:

**Consistency Requirement:** If a theory fails to count a given case A as a case of knowledge, then it must also fail to count as knowledge the set of all cases relevantly similar to A.

If Morris' epistemic situation is 'relevantly similar' to the wider set of cases that includes most of the knowledge we gain through testimony, then what should this similarity be said to consist in? One answer would be to say that the similarity consists in a shared method. Let's call this the 'method view':

**Method view:** What makes Morris' case relevantly similar to the class of cases that includes our putative testimonial knowledge is a similarity consisting in a shared method (testimony).

If the *consistency requirement* is underpinned by the *method view* about what constitutes the relevant similarity between (i) some case a theory can deny counts as knowledge and (ii) the wider set of cases it must deny count as knowledge, then credit theory is clearly in trouble if fails to count that Morris knows. The consequence would be that it would also have to deny that other cases in which beliefs are formed *via* a relevantly similar method—in this case, the method of believing on the basis of an informant—count as knowledge.

But the *consistency requirement* should not be underpinned by the notion of similarity captured by the *method view*. To see why, consider Goldman's (1979) barn façade case; if the *method view* captures the sort of similarity the consistency requirement should be thought sensitive to, then a theory could fail to count Henry's belief that "there is a barn" as knowledge only if it also fails to count as knowledge the wider class of beliefs we hold *via* perception, including those of the Moorean sort (e.g. "I have a hand.") While the method through which Harry comes to believe there is a barn is relevantly similar to the *method* he would use to ascertain that he has a hand, it would be absurd to think that a theory is committed to skepticism about perceptual knowledge if it fails to count fake barn cases as knowledge.

So the consistency requirement implied in the argument must be thought to appeal to a different notion of similarity. The most obvious choice appeals to the idea that if a theory fails to count some case C as knowledge, it must also fail to count as knowledge the wider class of

cases in which the epistemic situations in those cases are relevantly similar to the epistemic situation in C. The *method view* of similarity should then be distinguished from the *epistemic view*, which tells us this:

***Epistemic view:*** The relevant similarity (that the consistency requirement should be sensitive to) between Morris' case and the wider class that includes putative testimonial knowledge is a similarity that holds in virtue of the *epistemic situations* that make up these cases.

We can then give a more precise articulation of the consistency requirement implicit in the move from (2) to (3):

**Consistency Requirement (Revised):** If a theory fails to count a given case A as a case of knowledge, then it must also fail to count as knowledge the set of all cases similar in virtue of the *epistemic situations* that make up these cases.

The consistency requirement understood this way demands that credit theory give the same verdict in cases that are similar to Morris' in terms of the sort of epistemic situation Morris has; a consequence then is that the wider class of cases credit theory must fail to count as knowledge if it fails to count Morris as knowing is a class of cases that will not be restricted to those in which *testimony* is the method used. After all, the extent to which two cases are similar with respect to the epistemic situations they consist is something we should ascertain by comparing the extent to which the beliefs held in the respective cases are (for example) justified to a similar degree. And so if, by hypothesis, I'm equally justified in believing on the basis of perception that there is a dog in the room as I am in believing that the liquid I'm about to drink is poison on the basis of my mother's testimony, then if both beliefs are true, credit theory can deny I know there's a dog in front of me only if it also denies that I know there is poison in the glass, and vice versa. Given that we're supposing by hypothesis that these beliefs are equally justified, then that a theory can count one as knowledge only if counting the other is quite obvious.

In this respect, what credit theory must deny counts as knowledge if it implies that Morris is not a knower is a class of cases *wider than the class of cases in which beliefs are formed through the method of testimony*. But by the very same token, what credit theory must deny counts as knowledge if it implies that Morris is not a knower is *not as wide* as the set of *all testimonial cases*, a set of cases. After all, within the set including all of our true beliefs reached through the

method of perception, some will be more justified than others, and the same holds true for the beliefs we've arrived at through testimony.

We are in a position now to see the important sense in which it is an open question whether (2) in the argument true--whether Morris' epistemic situation in the Sears Tower case is at least as good as the epistemic situations we take ourselves to have in most cases whereby knowledge is thought to be acquired through testimony. Likewise, we are in a position to be able to determine what sorts of considerations would make (2) true: it is true just in case most of the cases in which we take ourselves to have knowledge by testimony are ones in which the true beliefs at issue are justified to the same (or similar) degree that Morris' true belief is justified.

### 9.3.2 Lackey's case revisited

What has been suggested then is a broader way of conceiving of how the consistency requirement will determine *what else* credit theory would have to give up if it implied that Morris doesn't know. But generally, the idea is that the better Morris' epistemic situation is, the more *any theory* yields to the sceptic by ruling that Morris doesn't know, and conversely, the less satisfactory Morris' epistemic situation is, the less a theory has to give up. And if it turns out that Morris does not know, then what is yielded to the sceptic would be exactly what a correct theory of knowledge *should* yield to the skeptic, a bulk of propositions such that it is doubtful that we know them.<sup>9</sup>

Now that we know what credit theory (or any theory) would *actually* be committed to implicitly if it denies that Morris knows, let's examine first how good Morris' epistemic situation actually is—a matter from which we could then conclude whether credit theory would be in hot water by failing to count it as knowledge.

## 5.1 The structure of knowledge transmission

Without relying on what credit theory itself implies must hold for one to gain knowledge from an informant, I shall investigate the phenomenon of testimonial knowledge by examining different conceptions of it defended in some classic and more recent literature on the epistemology of testimony. I want to start by introducing a rather traditional and widely-shared view, according to which an informant, who knows *p*, can by telling someone else, *transmit* his

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<sup>9</sup> All of these consequences are outputs of the doubting by analogy principle, a principle that will require that what must be called into doubt will depend on how good the epistemic standing is toward the proposition that functions in the antecedent of the principle.

knowledge to her. There are a variety of views about what has to occur for knowledge to transmit. Let's start with a simple view that has been defended by (among others<sup>10</sup>) Jaako Hintikka (1962), Jonathan Adler and Robert Audi (1997)

***Knowledge Transmission (KT):*** If S knows that *p* and S asserts that *p* to H, and H accepts *p* on the basis of S's testimony, then H knows that *p*.<sup>11</sup>

If KT is true, then so long as Morris' informant knows where the Sears Tower is, then so does Morris. But KT is false; transmitting knowledge just can't be this easy.

To see why this is so, simply suppose that S knows *p*, and asserts *p* to H, and H accepts *p* on the basis of S's testimony, but should not have. H, suppose, has good reasons for thinking that it is in S's interest to lie to H about whether or not *p*, but H's 'wishful thinking' that S would 'not dare lie to *him*' makes him insensitive to his good reasons for doubting *p* on the basis of S's testimony that *p*. KT rules that H knows *p* just because S knew it, asserted it to H, and H believed it on the basis of S asserting it; but clearly, H does not know *p*. After all, H is not even justified in believing *p* on the basis of S's testimony, given that he has good reasons for thinking S would say *p* when  $\sim p$ . And even more problematically, given H's good reasons to think that S would lie to him about whether or not *p*, S's testimony that *p* constitutes a good reason for H to believe *not p*. KT, then, mistakenly allows that you can know some proposition that you're justified in believing to be false.

That KT is mistaken does not undermine the idea that knowledge transmission occurs, or that testimonial knowledge requires knowledge transmission. What we should include, rather is that a view about the conditions under which knowledge transmits had better not allow that you can know *p* in the absence of any good reason<sup>12</sup> to believe *p*, or alternatively, when the reason you have for believing *p* is a bad one. To stress, in the presence of positive reasons to believe S would lie to us, for example, there simply isn't any *good reason* to accept *p* on the basis that S said *p*.

Testimonial knowledge, thus, is not a phenomenon in which knowledge is transmitted *just on the basis* of our believing a knower's

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<sup>10</sup> Proponents of KT include Hintikka (1962), Welbourne (1979), (1981), (1993), Evans 1982, Ross 1986, Adler 1996, Audi 1997,<sup>10</sup> see Adler (2006).

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Adler (2006) "Epistemological Problems of Testimony," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, sec. 4, "Knowledge Transmission."

<sup>12</sup> Failing to require that an agent have a reason to believe what he knows is an common objection to, more broadly, any view that allows that one can know just by satisfying some externalist condition which itself does not require any evidence on behalf of the knower.

testimony. If knowledge were transmitted so easily, then in a world in which, unbeknownst to us, everyone is an omniscient truth teller, the best way to gain knowledge would be to be maximally naïve, and to believe everything everyone tells you just because they said it. After all, we're defending knowledge as the sort of thing one has when her true belief arises from intellectual virtue<sup>13</sup> and there's nothing intellectually virtuous about naivety. Testimonial knowledge, quite obviously, is not gained *just because* a truth-telling knower tells us something which we thereby believe.

## 5.2. Testimony and the structure of reasons

The problem with KT, then, was that it overlooks the fact that you can't gain knowledge from an informant unless certain background conditions are in place. After all, whether some knower A's telling S *p* counts as a reason for S to believe *p* depends entirely at least in part on what background, non-testimonial evidence S has for thinking that A would tell S *p* only if *p*, and  $\sim p$  only if  $\sim p$ .

Crispin Wright<sup>14</sup> (*forthcoming*) has gone to some lengths to establish just what these sort of background conditions would have to consist in. Wright characterizes this point as follows: for propositions *a*, *b*, whether we are justified, or 'warranted'<sup>15</sup>, in believing *a* on the

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<sup>13</sup> It might be said here that our naïve epistemic agent who, in the world of omniscient truth-tellers, gains knowledge maximally, would thereby be intellectually virtuous because, in such a world, naivety is a reliable belief forming process, and thus, an intellectual virtue. However, the absurdity of ruling the maximally naïve intellectually virtuous stands as evidence for denying that intellectual virtue is solely a function of reliable truth-conduciveness and nothing else.

<sup>14</sup> Crispin Wright (*forthcoming*) "The Perils of Dogmatism," To appear in *Themes from G. E. Moore: New Essays in Epistemology and Ethics*, edited by Susana Nuccetelli and Gary Seay, Oxford, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Of warrant, Wright says: "Let a warrant for a belief be, roughly, an all-things-considered mandate for it: to possess a warrant for P is to be in a state wherein it is, all things considered, epistemically appropriate to believe P" (p. 6). Although Wright says later that he does not intend his account of warrant to be committed to either internalism or externalism, his discussion of warrant—at least in this debate—suggests strongly that warrant is not divorceable from some form of justification internalistically construed. This is because he has suggested (in discussion) that warrant—at least as the dogmatist supposes she could have it—is something that could be earned in principle by have no reasons to doubt the relevant authenticity condition, where reasons are discussed by him to include the evidence we have. Even though he rejects dogmatism, his not objecting to the idea that warrant could be (at least in principle) a product of evidence possession (see his number 1 in the justificational triad) suggests strongly that warrant is more akin to internalist rather than externalist accounts of justification. Further, Wright requires that, to know *p*, you must be in a position to claim warrant for *p*, and one would not be in such a position were it that knowing requires merely satisfying conditions that are, themselves, such that we can satisfy them without it being reflectively accessible that we have done so. In sum, so long as warrant is at least in part determined by reasons that are themselves a constituted by a subject's evidence, neither warrant nor claimable warrant (knowledge) would be understood as purely external notions.

basis of an informant telling us *b* is not a matter that would be settled independent of what our epistemic standing to some further *c* would be, where *c* is some proposition that if true would legitimize us in taking *b* to count as evidence for *a*, and if false, would fail to do so. Here's Wright:

Whenever the belief that P is formed for reasons, we will characteristically be able to find a number of *justificational triads*, each of the following form

- 1 A kind of evidence that P that constitutes the reasons for believing it
- 2 The proposition that P itself
- 3 An *authenticity-condition*<sup>16</sup>

Wright offers this view of the structure of reasons to apply straightforwardly to cases of testimony; in such cases, he says (1) would be the evidence consisting the informant's telling *p* to the receiver; (2) would be the proposition the informant comes to believe (i.e. that the Sears Tower is located in a certain place). And (3), the *authenticity condition* is a condition that, were it not to hold, the *evidence would not indicate the truth of the proposition believed*.<sup>17</sup> Of this condition, Wright says: "... the third element of the triad—the authenticity-condition—is related to the first two like this: a thinker who doubted 3 could not rationally believe 2 just on the basis of evidence 1."<sup>18</sup> Wright's makes a fair point here: if you *doubted* your informant was either honest or sincere (what he takes to be the salient authenticity condition in cases in which beliefs are held on the basis of an informant's testimony), then it wouldn't be rational for you to believe what your informant tells you just on the basis that he said it.

Because you obviously can't know some claim *p* on the basis of reasons from which you can't rationally infer *p*, you can't gain knowledge on the basis of testimony *T* if you doubt whether the conditions hold under which the *T* would indicate the truth of the proposition your informant would have you believe on the basis of it.

That said, let us bring into focus the authenticity conditions at play in the case of Morris. Following in Wright's footsteps, I offer that the following conditions could not be doubted to hold if Morris'

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> This is the way Wright presents it in the case he calls 'The Stranger' case, one which, for all he says, could just *be* Lackey's Sears Tower Case insofar as there is no fact relevant to the receivers respective epistemic standing that applies to one case but not the other.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

informant warrants him in believing that the Sears Tower is where he says it is.

(3): Morris' informant is neither untruthful nor likely to be mistaken (*Authenticity Condition*)

Given that Morris' evidence and belief then are:

(1) The informant's telling Morris that the Sears Tower is at location *L*.

(2) Morris' belief that the Sears tower is at *L*.

Morris would lack any good reason, and indeed as Wright suggests be irrational, if he believed (2) on the basis of (1) while nonetheless doubting (3): that the informant is a truth-teller and/or not likely to be mistaken. And so we have established one way in which Morris' knowledge in the Sears Tower case might be defeated. Let's call this, then, the *defeat scenario*:

*Defeat scenario*: Morris doubts that the informant is truthful and/or unlikely to be mistaken.

Nothing about the case as Lackey presents it, though, would entitle us to think that Morris is in the *defeat scenario*, for the scenario supposes that Morris actually doubts the honesty of competence of the informant; but Morris by stipulation doubts neither of these.

Lackey's case could do work it's meant to do if Morris should be thought to not only *not* be in the defeat scenario, but also in a scenario in which he clearly knows. Doubting the authenticity condition is sufficient for undermining Morris' knowledge. But the relevant question becomes: what must Morris' standing be with respect to the authenticity condition in order for him to come to know on the basis of his informant's testimony?

One response to this question would be to take the line taken by James Pryor and Martin Davies, which I'll call the *dogmatist* response.

*Dogmatist's response*: A thinker's having the evidence (2) suffices to give her warrant for (3) provided she *has no reason to doubt* (1) (i.e. the authenticity condition).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

If the dogmatist's response is correct, then so long as Morris doesn't have a reason to doubt the honesty and competence of the informant, he is warranted in believing where the Sears tower is on the basis of the informant's telling him.

Upon further examination, the prospects are not promising that we could vindicate Morris as a clear knower by supposing that all he has is a true belief coupled with dogmatist's warrant. This is because one could have no reason to doubt that the informant is honest and competent, and nonetheless quite clearly *not* know the belief he forms.

We can easily construct such a case by imagining a type of testimonial 'fake barn' scenario<sup>20</sup>, in which A has no reason to doubt what B tells him, but B happens to be the lone truth-teller in a crowd of liars. To be clear, it's not being suggested here that we build in to Morris' case that his informant happens to be standing amongst a crowd of liars. We're taking Lackey's case to be as straightforward as she wants it to be. The relevance of the testimonial fake barn case is that it shows us that *whatever conditions Morris has to satisfy* in order for his epistemic situation to be as good as those ruled as knowledge, they must require more than what that *dogmatist's* warrant-conditions require.

If Morris would have to meet more stringent conditions in order to know than simply *having no reason to doubt*, then this would count against a prominent view in the epistemology of testimony that Lackey herself rejects as too weak. The view is called *non-reductionism*:

***Non-reductionism:*** testimonial knowledge can be acquired merely on the basis of a speaker's testimony—so long as the hearer does not have any relevant defeaters.<sup>21</sup>

Lackey, by rejecting non-reductionism, is committed to the very idea our own reasoning has led to, which is that simply believing truly on the basis of the informant's testimony and having no relevant

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<sup>20</sup> One might object here for the reason that I am 'building in' to the Morris case what was not originally there. It is true that I am here, however, this is orthogonal to the point being made, which is that Lackey cannot explain Morris' knowledge within the assumption that the *dogmatist's* principle accurately captures the requirements one must meet in order to know. The dogmatist's principle, if correct, would be meant to work for *any* case. The fact that it doesn't (i.e. by making knowledge too 'easy' to achieve) disqualifies it as an acceptable explanation that can be given to explain Morris' presumed knowledge; the result of course is just that for Morris to know in the *original* case, it will be needed that he has a stronger standing to the authenticity principle than merely failing to doubt it, the requirement of the dogmatist.

<sup>21</sup> J. Lackey (2006) p. 11.

defeaters isn't enough to make Morris a knower. And so Lackey must think that Morris has satisfied some condition over and above what non-reductionism requires for knowledge. What Lackey herself rejects non-reductionism in favor of is a stronger position known as *reductionism*:<sup>22</sup>

***Reductionism***: The hearer [in order to gain testimonial knowledge] must always have some appropriate non-testimonial positive reasons for accepting a speaker's report.<sup>23</sup>

If *reductionism* is true then, as Lackey says, "testimonial knowledge can be acquired only when the hearer has relevant background information for accepting the report in question."<sup>24</sup> And so, reductionism implies that you don't get testimonial knowledge cheaply, *simply* on the basis of someone telling you something, and in the absence of positive independent reasons for accepting what the informant says.

*Reductionism* is, in all relevant respects, a specific view about testimony in alignment with what Crispin Wright calls *conservatism*, which requires for warrant a stronger standing with respect to authenticity conditions than merely having no reason to doubt them. With regard to warrant we might have for believing a proposition on the basis of some evidence, Wright says that *conservatism* "represents these warrants as hostage to the possession of collateral information about authenticity-conditions<sup>25</sup>," collateral information that the dogmatist doesn't ask us for, and that the non-reductionist denies that testimonial knowledge requires.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> J. Lackey (2003) "A Minimal Expression of Non-Reductionism in the Epistemology of Testimony." *Noûs* 37: 706-23.

<sup>23</sup> J. Lackey (2006) p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> C. Wright (*forthcoming*) p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> We might think of reductionism as a sort of 'testimonial extension' of Wright's conservatism because Wright's conservatism *implies* reductionism. That is, Wright's conservatism implies that you are not warranted or justified in believing some proposition p on the basis of evidence consisting in testimony T unless you have positive independent reasons for (and not just an absence of reason to doubt) the authenticity condition, which in testimonial cases, will be that the informant is neither mistaken nor insincere.

Therefore, in the absence of the sort of positive reasons reductionism takes to be necessary for testimonial knowledge, Wright denies that you will possess warrant. Because on Wright's view warrant is not factive, knowledge is something that is going to be stronger than what Wright takes warrant to be. And thus, if a lack of 'collateral information' robs a testimonial recipient of warrant, it's going to by implication also rob us of knowledge.

That said, let's consider the reductionist's claim more carefully:

***Reductionism:*** The hearer [in order to gain testimonial knowledge] must always have some appropriate non-testimonial positive reasons for accepting a speaker's report.<sup>1</sup>

What would make the relevant sort of non-testimonial positive reasons 'appropriate' ones for the purpose of making the hearer, by having them, a knower?<sup>27</sup> Lackey gives us a hint. In a forthcoming paper,

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<sup>27</sup> Clearly, any positive, non-testimonial reasons one has for believing a speaker's report would not be appropriate 'enough' if she has defeaters for these reasons. And a hearer's reasons for accepting a speaker's report will be defeated if doubted either (i) that the speaker is sincere; (ii) that the speaker is not mistaken.

Recall that Non-reductionism allows the hearer to know so long as the hearer has no reason to doubt the speaker's report; having no reason to doubt the speaker's report requires that the hearer at least doesn't *doubt* that the speaker is sincere and not mistaken, although non-reductionism doesn't require any positive reasons for actually believing that the speaker is sincere and not mistaken.

Lackey wants to require more this. By her own admission she "would deny that testimonial knowledge has been acquired" if Morris fails to have "relevant beliefs about humans' general testifying habits, or about the reliability of humans when offering directions." Beliefs about an informant's testifying habits would count in favor of what she says only if the hearer doesn't already believe that the informant is insincere, and by the same token, beliefs about an informant's reliability become relevant to accepting testimony only if you first don't already believe the informant is mistaken. And so only if you already take it that that the informant is sincere and not mistaken will other beliefs about the informant's testimonial habits and reliability be relevant to whether you accept her testimony.

This is significant because even though Wright's conservativist view according to which positive reasons for accepting authenticity conditions are required for warrant (justification) isn't itself entailed by (though it entails) reductionism, Lackey's own reductionist view of testimonial knowledge is one that requires not just that one *not doubt* the authenticity conditions, but that one positively accept them. To be clear, by explicitly denying that Morris knows in the absence of relevant beliefs about an informant's testimonial habits and reliability, Lackey is implicitly committed to requiring of a knower that he also have those beliefs that he must already have for other, more general beliefs about the informant's testimonial habits and reliability to constitute reasons for accepting the speaker's report. And these are the beliefs that the informant is sincere and not mistaken.

We are now in a position to ask: Does testimonial knowledge require that we actually *know* that our informant is sincere and not mistaken, or does it suffice to merely rationally accept this to be the case? This much hasn't yet been adequately discussed.

Lackey (*forthcoming*), with the intention of addressing some concerns brought up by Wayne Riggs, John Greco and Ernest Sosa, tries to get clearer about what we should assume to be ‘built in’ to the her Sears Tower case—facts about what we are entitled to conclude about Morris’ background beliefs about his informant. These facts weren’t originally made explicit, but (I think) they could have been reasonably inferred. Here’s Lackey:

I certainly never presented CHICAGO VISITOR as involving a hearer who is “simply opening his brain and putting into it whatever some random stranger has to say,” much like a robot would. On my view, testimonial knowledge requires that Morris exercise the capacity to be appropriately sensitive to defeaters—if, for instance, he would accept the passerby’s testimony even if he appeared highly intoxicated or told him that the Sears Tower was in France, then he would clearly not acquire the knowledge in question. In addition, I require the presence of minimal positive reasons for rational acceptance of testimony—if Morris had no relevant beliefs about humans’ general testifying habits, or about the reliability of humans when offering directions, or about Chicago, and so on, then, once again, I would deny that testimonial knowledge has been acquired.<sup>28</sup>

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It will be helpful then to consider that Wright (*forthcoming*) defines *conservatism* twice over<sup>27</sup>. His first definition implies a stronger epistemic standing to the authenticity condition than his second. Call the first *strong conservatism*:

***Strong conservatism:*** *S* is warranted in *p* only if *S* ‘has information about’ (i.e. knows) the authenticity condition *A*, where *A* is a condition that must hold for *S*’s evidence *E* to count in favor of *p*.

Wright seems to endorse this strong version when he describes our “warrants as hostage to the possession of collateral information about authenticity-conditions<sup>27</sup>.” The factive requirement of ‘information’ could plausibly be interpreted as requiring of us ‘collateral knowledge’ of the authenticity condition.

But elsewhere, Wright’s discussion of *conservatism* seems to require less. In the context of discussing conservatism, Wright says that the authenticity condition is “something which a thinker requires some kind of prior reason to accept before he may rationally regard his experience as carrying such evidential force [for some *p* he believes on the basis of the evidence].”

Let this weaker requirement be called *weak conservatism*:

***Weak conservatism:*** *S* is warranted in *p* only if *S* has a reason to accept the authenticity condition *A*, where *A* is a condition that must hold for *S*’s evidence *E* to count in favor of *p*.

Setting aside the fact that weak conservatism seems much more plausible than the stronger version, the fact that Lackey says only that Morris must rationally hold the relevant ‘beliefs’ about his informant’s testimonial habits and reliability suggests that her brand of reductionism would be committed only to *weak conservatism*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 5-6.

If Lackey is right that Morris clearly knows, then the background beliefs about human's general testifying habits and the reliability of humans when offering directions, which are made explicit here by Lackey, need to be good enough to give Morris positive reason to believe that his informant is neither mistaken or insincere in what he's saying. As we've said, if he doesn't have a reason to think that his informant is neither mistaken or insincere, then Morris has no positive, non-testimonial reason to accept what his informant says on the basis of his testimony—and by the reductionist view that Lackey herself takes, Morris could not be said to know.<sup>29</sup>

### 9.3.4 Probabilistic inference

To be clear: Lackey *must* be assuming that Morris actually does have good enough positive, non-testimonial reasons for accepting what his informer says, to make it that the testimony he receives from the informant gives him knowledge. These non-testimonial reasons consist in Morris' "beliefs about humans' general testifying habits...[and] about the reliability of humans when offering directions."<sup>30</sup> Now beliefs about (presumed sincerity that marks people's) testimonial habits and about the reliability of people in general are ones Morris can take to count in favor of his *own* informant being neither insincere or mistaken only if he relies on a probabilistic inference—that is, an inference from what people are usually like to the conclusion that his informant will be similar.

In the absence of making this probabilistic inference—and perhaps some other probabilistic inferences from how truthful most people who (for example) look, talk, etc. like his informant looks, talks, etc., to how truthful the informant himself will be—Morris would lack any positive reason for thinking his informant is neither insincere or mistaken in what he is telling him.

Are Morris' reasons for believing what his informant tells him good enough to count him as knowing that what the informant says is true?

No. To make the case for doubt here, I shall appeal to two thought experiments—in each case, it should be clear that the agent in question lacks knowledge, and both of these cases will be ones in which the support structure will be the same as it is in Morris' case,

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<sup>29</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 5-6.

that is: (i) some proposition is believed truly; (ii) held on the basis of reason(s) R; and (iii) that S accepts reason R owes wholly to an inference from a generalization making R probable; and (iv) in the absence of this probabilistic inference, there would be no other independent reason for holding the belief R supports. Consider first, MYSTERY.

**MYSTERY:** Mark likes to watch movies, and has seen thousands in his lifetime. He rents a film entitled *Mystery*, which he has never seen before nor heard of. Toward the end of the film, the ‘good guy’ and the ‘bad guy’ engage in a swordfight to the death, a final showdown. Just as the fight is about to start, Mark turns off the film. “I already know that the good guy is not going to be killed.” He adds, confidently, that in the 1000 movies he has seen with final swordfight showdowns between good and evil, the good guy has never been killed by the bad guy. Mark’s evidence, then, for thinking that the good guy in *Mystery* will not be killed in the swordfight on the basis of the swordfight’s being a final showdown against the ‘bad guy’ is extremely good. But is it correct to say that he can know the outcome of the fight without even watching it?<sup>31</sup>

In MYSTERY, Mark’s reason for believing the good guy will win owes to an inference from a belief about how movies with such showdowns usually end to the belief that this particular movie will end similarly. Consider now a second case.

**SICK AND BLIND SHEEP: Case 1:** Raymond is visiting his friend on a ranch and approaches a barn inside which are 300 sheep; each for Raymond is visually indistinguishable from the rest. “I’ve never seen such identical looking sheep,” says Raymond. His friend replies, “They’re not as identical as it seems. Five of these sheep have a blood disease, and 10 of the sheep are blind, but you wouldn’t be able to tell just by looking.” The farmer adds, “The sheep that are either blind or sick are worth \$100 each, and the non-sick, non-blind sheep are worth \$500 each.” Raymond asks, “How do you know which ones are worth \$500?” The farmer replies, “I have to conduct tests on the sheep to tell, as you can’t tell just by looking.” Raymond, to the surprise of the farmer, picks a sheep at random and says, “This sheep is worth \$500.” The farmer investigates the sheep and says, “Correct! How did

you know?" Raymond shrugs and replies, "The odds are in my favor."

Surely, Raymond cannot know by glancing what the more experienced farmer would himself have to test to find out; similarly, Mark cannot know how the movie will end before watching it. And their reasons for believing what they do are no better or worse than the reasons Morris has for believing the Sears tower is where the informant says it is.

In the absence of what Mark believes holds true for most movies with final swordfights, Mark has no positive reason to believe that MYSTERY will have the ending he thinks it does. In the absence of what Raymond believes about most of the sheep in the barn, he has no positive reason for believing that the given one he points to is worth \$500. And similarly, in the absence of what Morris believes about humans who give testimony, he has no positive reason to believe what his informant says. Aside from what he infers from what he takes to hold true about people relevantly similar to his informant, his reasons for believing that what *this* informant says is true are no better than Mark's reasons for thinking MYSTERY would end a certain way had Mark not watched the other movies he infers the MYSTERY will resemble, or Raymond's reasons for thinking the sheep is worth \$500 had he not taken certain things to hold true about other sheep in the barn that he infers that *that* sheep will resemble.

Mark and Raymond seem to be in an *epistemic position* not unlike Morris'—Morris' reasons are certainly no better than Mark's or Raymond's. Mark and Raymond obviously don't have knowledge. And so by the *consistency* requirement—if we're going to deny that Mark and Raymond are knowers, we must also deny that Morris is a knower.

It's worth pointing out that the Mark, Raymond and Morris cases are not without an epistemological cousin in the literature on knowledge and lotteries.

In the lottery case, in the absence of the belief that most tickets are losers, there would be no positive reason for believing of any *given* ticket will lose. This very same phenomenon appears in the MYSTERY, SICK SHEEP and the Morris case. Each case is such that, in the absence of a generalized belief about things of a certain type are, there would be no positive reason for believing that the given token instance of that type is the way it is believed to be.

For considerations that stand independent to whether credit theory is true, I've tried to give a compelling case for thinking that the counterexample relied upon to undermine credit theory is not an example of knowledge; in arguing for this, I've drawn attention to some overlooked though epistemically significant features of Lackey's

case that should compel us to find it no better a candidate for knowledge than cases that by a wide consensus would be denied as having knowledge.

## 9.4 The second line of defense

So I've made a case for thinking that Morris doesn't know. So then what? There is a question from Section 1 that has yet to be addressed: is a theory that denies that Morris knows also committed to denying knowledge in the wider class of testimonial cases? We've said that it would *only if* Morris' epistemic situation is relevantly similar to the epistemic situations at issue in the class of putative testimonial cases.

Again, without arguing the point by appealing directly to credit theory, I offer that the Morris case is not relevantly similar. Most of our testimonial knowledge lacks the feature of Morris' case by which it was argued that he fails to know. That is, in typical cases in which we take ourselves to gain knowledge by testimony, it's false that, in the absence of a generalized belief from which we draw a probabilistic inference about our own informant, we have no *other* reason for believing what our informant tells us. After all, in most cases in which we take ourselves to gain knowledge by testimony, our informant is someone who—in the absence of our beliefs about the testimonial habits of humans in general and the general reliability of humans—we would *still* have some positive, non-testimonial reason to believe. (Whereas Morris, in the absence of such beliefs, would have not). For example, regardless of what I believe about humans in general, I can come to know something about France that my history teacher tells me because I have positive reasons for thinking *she* is both knowledgeable about France and has never deceived me in the past. Likewise, I can come to know that my father is mad at on the basis of what my mother tells me, and my reasons for believing her include, among other things, that she cares about my well-being—a reason I hold not because I've inferred that, given that most mothers care about their children's well-being, it's probable that mine does too. The positive, non-testimonial reasons we have for believing what our informants tell us in the wide class of cases a theory actually should count as knowledge are thus quite a bit better than the sort of reasons taken to ground knowledge in Lackey's counterexample to credit theory. And this is true *even though* Morris employ the same method (belief on testimony) that is employed in cases of genuine testimonial knowledge.

In sum, a theory that rules that Morris doesn't know isn't committed to also ruling that a wide variety of testimonial cases also aren't knowledge. The only testimonial cases called into doubt are

those in which we believe testimony from a complete stranger, like Morris did. If I'm right, then, a theory had certainly better count these, and other cases that are similar—such as the MYSTERY and SICK SHEEP—not as ones where knowledge is present, but positively as ones in which knowledge is *not*.

## 9.6 Recasting the Objection

Although Lackey has stood adamantly by CHICAGO VISITOR as being “precisely this sort of case that shows CREDIT [credit theories of knowledge] to be false<sup>32</sup>,” it is worthwhile to consider whether credit theory would be in trouble if the testimonial case used is a better one—i.e. one in which the positive, non-testimonial reasons we have for believing our informant don't owe entirely to probabilistic inference. Let's take then the example mentioned of the trusted History teacher and run Lackey's line using this instead. Her argument this time begins with a claim we can accept—that someone (say Bill)—comes to know what his history teacher tells him about France, and further, that he has a true belief isn't something he deserves credit for.

Since in this case, the knowledge at issue really is something we could challenge only if calling into question most any other piece of putative testimonial knowledge, it becomes the burden of credit theory to show how Bill *does* deserve credit of the relevant kind for his true belief.

Lackey will have the same story to tell about why Bill doesn't deserve credit as the one she gives for why Morris didn't deserve credit—an explanation that serves as her support for Premise (2) of the original argument (as opposed to the *case source* argument) I've attributed to her. The explanation, meant to hold for all those who gain knowledge by testimony, will be—to put the point bluntly—that they haven't done enough to deserve the sort of credit theory wants to attribute to them. Her idea is that in a given case in which knowledge is transmitted from informant to recipient, it is the informant—not the recipient—who should actually get the credit. In our case, then, Bill's true belief about France isn't something for which we credit *him*—after all, all Bill presumably did was take his professor for his word—and it was the professor who actually did the epistemic leg work; Bill, on this picture, owes to the professor's intellectual work and not his own for the fact that he believes truly what he does about France.

Consider that the same thing can be said about *any* piece of testimonial knowledge, even those that we take to be the clearest

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

examples of it. The idea is that the *method* used—the method of accepting someone’s testimony—is not a method by which the cognitive successes gained through the method constitute any cognitive achievement on the part of the receiving agent, and credit is—as was suggested in Section 1—something an agent gets only if the cognitive success is attributable *to her*. So if knowledge is something we get credit for, and credit is something an agent gets only if her cognitive success is something attributable to her own intellectual efforts—then if true beliefs acquired by testimony are not something we can attribute to the intellectual efforts of the individual who acquires them by testimony, then credit is not *necessary* for knowledge, and Lackey’s original conclusion stands.

Against this challenge, there are two separate lines of argument that can be made. The first line rejects a certain assumption about credit attributions that loads the argument in favor of the conclusion Lackey reaches. The second line I’ll advance builds upon the first, and shows why it is a mistake to appeal to facts about the informant’s intellectual efforts in concluding whether a testimonial recipient deserves credit for believing truly what she is told.

### 9.5 Against the disjunctive picture of testimonial credit attributions

The assumption that I think loads the deck in Lackey’s favor, and leave credit theory with literally *no* good defense for why a knowing recipient deserves credit, is captured by what I’ll call here the *disjunctive view* of testimonial credit attributions.

*Disjunctive view:* If recipient R comes to know p on the basis of informant I’s testimony, then the fact that R believes p truly is attributable either to R’s intellectual abilities or to I’s intellectual abilities.

It should be obvious why the disjunctive view stacks the deck in Lackey’s favor. Because we take it that the informant expended more intellectual effort than the recipient, the disjunctive view implies that it will be the informant, and not the recipient, who will always be the one deserving of the credit.

The disjunctive view, however, overlooks something important about what it is for which credit is being awarded. It’s not just a single item consisting in a true belief, even though it’s the *same thing* believed by informant and recipient. Credit, after all, doesn’t attach to beliefs themselves, but to agents, and *each* agent—informant and recipient—has come to hold the true belief in a certain way. Whether the informant deserves credit for how she came to hold the belief truly

is one matter, and whether the recipient deserves credit for how she came to hold her belief is another. Just because the informant deserves credit for how he came to hold the true belief doesn't mean, as the disjunctive view implies, that the recipient thereby does not. The disjunctive view, therefore, should be resisted for the reason that it mistakenly supposes that there is only one 'credit award' to go around.

By rejecting the disjunctive view, we thus take a lot of the force behind Lackey's argument; in particular, we've undercut entirely any reason to think that the recipient doesn't deserve credit for her true belief that appeals to facts about the informant having been comparatively *more* creditworthy.

In Bill's case, then, no matter how much we want to shower with credit Bill's professor for knowing what he did about France, it's going to be an open question whether Bill himself deserves credit for the true belief he acquired by believing him.

## 9.6 Agency, credit and luck: the second line of defense

I've argued that the second line I take builds off the first line, which itself targeted the disjunctive assumption responsible for thinking that a receiver couldn't *in principle* deserve credit, so long as the informant does. Now I want to argue that in cases such as Bill's, he not only in principle doesn't deserve credit for his true belief, but quite more, he actually does. The argument I want to make here takes as a starting point what our first line established, which is that in determining whether the receiver deserves credit, it's a mistake to appeal to a comparison between the recipient's efforts and the informant's efforts. The informant's efforts, we've said, are irrelevant. What we should be comparing the recipient's efforts to instead of the informant's efforts is just plain luck. Literally. The recipient's true belief will be creditable to her cognitive abilities or efforts just so long as her coming to have a true belief depends on her abilities *moreso* than luck. This was the idea defended at length in the previous chapter. Without going into all of the details of the view developed over the last chapter, it will suffice for present to emphasize that what an agent's true belief should be said to depend on in order for her to get the kind of credit required to know, is not her abilities *rather than* luck, but rather, on her abilities *moreso* than luck. While Bill's cognitive efforts weren't particularly strenuous in giving rise to his true belief about France, the fact that he has a true belief owes *moreso* to the fact that he had the sense to trust his professor than to luck—that is, to the actual world being unlike most nearby worlds in which Bill forms his belief on the basis of testimony from his professor. Because most nearby worlds are ones in which his professor is reporting

accurately about France, Bill's true belief depends on his own good sense to trust the professor more so than it does on it being lucky that the testimony he accepted from his professor was true.

## 9.7 Conclusion

I've offered here what I think should be a quite compelling case for thinking that Lackey-style counterexamples against credit theories of knowledge do not have the sort of devastating consequences for credit theory they've been thought to have. The CHICAGO VISITOR case she takes to be sufficient for undermining credit theory is one in which she supposes that an agent gains knowledge through testimony while at the same time is not deserving of the sort of epistemic credit credit theory takes to be essential to knowing. I've argued that there is clear reason to think that the CHICAGO VISITOR case is no more a case of knowledge than structurally similar cases that are clearly not cases of knowledge. Thus, credit theory should not be held to account for why the protagonist in her purported counterexample deserves credit.

Further, I considered whether the line she takes against credit theory would go through if the testimonial case at issue is one in which the agent clearly does have knowledge. I've shown how credit theory will have problems accounting for the knowledgeable recipient being a deserver of epistemic credit if we are assuming the *disjunctive view* of testimonial credit attribution; by showing why the disjunctive view is mistaken, it becomes clear that whether the recipient deserves credit is a matter we should settle by appealing not by appealing to the comparative creditworthiness of the recipient and informant, but rather, to the extent to which the recipient's true belief depends on her own intellectual efforts more so than on luck. In putative testimonial cases of knowledge, a recipient's true belief will owe more to the fact that the recipient trusted the informant testimony than to the world not being different from what the informant claims.

While Lackey's objection is directed at the idea that credit is necessary for knowledge, Pritchard (2007) has recently appealed to what he takes to be the compatibility of achievement and environmental luck as evidence that credit is not *sufficient* for knowledge. While this worry is apposite to theories upon which credit worthiness does not imply safety, the view of credit-worthiness I've defended in the previous chapter is one according to which credit for having a true belief is something an agent will have only if it isn't the case that the truth of her belief depends on luck more so than ability—the very idea I've appealed to in a defense for why recipients in putative testimonial cases are creditable for their true beliefs. In cases in which environmental luck functions as prominently as it does in

**Pritchard's example (of the archer and the forcefield), it will simply be false on the view I've defended that the truth of the agent's belief in such a case depends moreso on her ability than on luck. Any credit theory of knowledge that preserves that credit for a true belief is something you will get only when environmental luck doesn't play prominently in the picture will thus be equipped to stand up to objections to the sufficiency thesis that aim at exploiting the supposed compatibility between cognitive achievements and environmental luck.**

**At the end of the day, then, the credit thesis simply doesn't have the sort of implications it has been thought to have, and so given all the other things that stand in favor of credit theory, by my lights it stands to look pretty good.**