FROM VIRTUE TO SAFETY – NOT THIS WAY!

Recently some proponents of robust virtue epistemology have argued that in virtue of satisfying the virtue-theoretic condition one will satisfy the safety condition. Call this idea the *entailment thesis*. The reason why advocates of robust virtue epistemology have argued for the entailment thesis is simple: If the entailment thesis were true, then one would not satisfy the virtue-theoretic condition in cases featuring environmental luck, since the safety condition is not satisfied in cases of environmental epistemic luck. Given that cases featuring environmental epistemic luck pose perhaps the most pressing challenge against robust virtue epistemology, the motivation to argue for the entailment thesis is clear.

While I agree with proponents of the entailment thesis that robust virtue epistemology would be an extremely simple and elegant theory of knowledge if the entailment thesis were true (at least compared to a theory that simply added a safety clause to the virtue-theoretic condition as is done in Pritchard (2012)), I do not find the arguments for the entailment thesis convincing. The principal aim of this paper is to argue that the entailment thesis is false. The kind of safety condition that might be entailed by the satisfaction of the virtue-theoretic condition is not the one that we have in mind when we require that a belief has to be safe from error in order to be knowledge.

Five recent arguments for the entailment thesis are examined. Carter (2014) argues for the entailment thesis by claiming that the attribution of a cognitive success to ability is compatible with the attribution of that cognitive success to luck just in case the success is more due to ability than luck. He argues that if that is the case, then the safety of the subject's belief is ensured. Gaultier (2014) and Littlejohn (2014) argue for the entailment thesis by noting that in cases of environmental luck the agent has not been afforded with an opportunity to exhibit her cognitive abilities, and that therefore there is no *cognitive* success in such cases. Greco has offered two arguments for the entailment thesis. In his (2010) he claims that in order for a subject to satisfy the virtue-theoretic condition, the subject's cognitive abilities have to be the best explanation as to why the subject gained a true belief. Greco thinks that good epistemic luck undermines the explanatory salience of the subject's cognitive abilities, and that the virtue-theoretic condition therefore entails the safety condition. In his more recent work, Greco has argued that the satisfaction of the conditions that Sosa has proposed for knowledge both entails the satisfaction of the right kind of safety condition and explains in what sense one must be safe from error in order to have knowledge.

I will argue that these arguments entail a wrong kind of safety condition, one that we do not have in mind when we require a belief to be safe from error. Carter's solution is unable to deal with Gettier-style cases that feature inductive reasoning, while Gaultier's and Littlejohn's observations do not enable the proponent of robust virtue epistemology to deal with a slightly altered version of the barn façade case. Greco's first solution fails, since in addition to entailing a safety clause, it entails too strong conditions for when a belief is properly attributable to one's cognitive abilities. Greco's second proposal fails as well, because the resulting safety condition is too weak. A subject who believes that her lottery ticket is a loser will satisfy the safety condition that is entailed by Sosa's virtue epistemology, even though intuitively one is not safe from error if one believes that one's lottery ticket is a loser. In conclusion, none of the arguments that have been offered for the entailment thesis entail the right kind of safety condition.

This shortfall propels us to search for the right kind of safety condition; one that the proponents of robust virtue epistemology should claim is entailed by satisfying the ability condition. Such a reformulation of the safety principle is offered.

References:

Carter, A., J. (2014). Robust virtue epistemology as anti-luck epistemology: A new solution. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 1-16, doi:DOI: 10.1111/papq.12040.
Gaultier, B. (2014). Achievements, Safety and Environmental Epistemic Luck. *Dialectica, 68*(4), 477-497, doi:10.1111/1746-8361.12081.
Greco, J. (2010). *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Greco, J. (2016) Knowledge, Virtue, and Safety. In M. A. Fernández (Ed.), *Performance Epistemology - Foundations and Applications* (pp. 51-61). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Littlejohn, C. (2014). Fake Barns and False Dilemmas. *Episteme-a Journal of Individual and Social Epistemology, 11*(4), 369-389, doi:10.1017/epi.2014.24.
Pritchard, D. (2012). Anti-Luck Virtue Epistemology. *Journal of Philosophy, 109*(3), 247-279.