On Deliberation and Epistemic Luck
Commentary on Barba Magdalena, "Deliberation and Collective Epistemic Luck"

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Moisés Barba Magdalena has argued for three theses. First, that the lack of control explanation of luck handles intuitive cases of collective epistemic luck better than modal explanations. Modally robust coincidences are exemplary. Gettierized hikers with the modally robust riders that Hiker 1 will mistake trails A and B and will also get his times wrong because of his sister's interference is Magdalena's primary case. Second, that the lack of control account identifies particular instances of exposure to collective epistemic luck in deliberative contexts – namely, that of hidden profiles and group polarization. Third, and finally, Magdalena makes a comparative case that because deliberative methods of collective belief management have these particular liabilities, and anonymized voting and leadership models do not, there is a reason to hold the non-deliberative options will have higher quality epistemic output than deliberation.

It is on this final thesis I will focus. It is important to state it exactly, so I will quote Magdalena:

> "It is argued that deliberating groups are more exposed to epistemic luck than groups that form their beliefs through other methods" (p. 17).

> "[D]eliberation exposes groups to higher levels of epistemic luck than other methods of belief formation, in as much as it tends to give rise to effects that impede the proper satisfaction of the filtering and distribution standards, thus depriving groups, to some extent, of control over their beliefs" (p. 20)

Notice that we have a shift in categories of evaluation – *lucky* beliefs on the one hand, and beliefs *exposed to luck* on the other. This distinction is important, since, at least by my lights, *exposure to luck* is not identical to *being lucky*, at least in the relevant sense of destroying credit-related terms like 'knowledge'. Magdalena's argument runs that because a

collective belief that's true but formed by belief polarization is *lucky* (and so not knowledge), then because deliberative methods can be skewed by polarization, beliefs formed by deliberation are *exposed to luck.* And so, their epistemic quality is dropped (whether to *not knowledge* is not clear).

My reply is simply that: *Exposure to luck is a feature of accepting fallibilism*. For example, a true belief formed on the basis of a lie is lucky, so testimony generally has exposure to luck; a true belief formed on the basis of an illusory visual impression is lucky, so visual perception has luck exposure. Assuming falliblism is true, *exposure to luck* is not knowledge-destroying; only *luck* is. The only way I see Magdalena's thesis working is to say that exposure to luck is *second order luck* – that you're lucky that your true beliefs, in this case, aren't true just by luck. So with veridical testimony and perception, we are *lucky* that we didn't get lied to or be on the receiving end of an illusion. In some cases, we might say: *You're lucky you weren't Gettiered*.

I think we can, especially on the no-control model for luck, make sense of that thought. It is not up to me whether I am Gettiered or not. However, I don't see this second-order luck as knowledge-destroying. This is because *not all cases of epistemic luck are knowledge-destroying*. There are instances of *evidential luck* that are perfectly consistent with knowledge. For example, I am reading one day and I chance to look up out my window at exactly the moment a hawk snatches up a squirrel in the quad outside. Amazing! I count myself *lucky* to have seen it, but this luck of having the evidence is not knowledge-destroying. The same goes for *constitutive luck*, too – that someone is lucky enough to have excellent eyesight, a good memory, or is quick on the uptake with inference does not yield destruction of knowledge. The only kinds of luck that are knowledge-destroying, by my lights, are those that are first-order cases of luck that affect the truth of the target proposition – that the belief, by luck, was true. This is sometimes called *alethic or veritic luck.* (See, for this distinction, Mylan Engel's 1992).

The same, as I see it, goes for group deliberations – insofar as the group shares information synergistically and does not polarize, then its results will be of high epistemic quality. That they do not polarize or have hidden profiles may be a matter of luck, in a certain sense, but that does not destroy whether their results are knowledge, assuming them true. Note that many institutions try to eliminate this second-order luck, too, by having institutional norms designed to ensure those procedural ends. And, again, whether a group does so successfully may be a matter of luck. Imagine my surprise, for example, that the committee I am serving on is a properly functioning deliberative body. I'd count myself *lucky*, and perhaps the committee is *lucky* for having been able to maintain those institutional norms. In such a case, this

second order luck does not yield the *first-order* alethic epistemic luck that destroys knowledge.

I will close by noting that whether deliberative bodies manage their exposure to luck is something groups can control. Groups can encourage norms of informative exchange, encourage members to play devil's advocate, and work to depolarize by including a wide variety of voices in the critical conversation. The objection, of course, is not only to reduce luck exposure, but reduce first-order alethic luck.

REFERENCES

Engel Jr., M. (1992) "Is Epistemic Luck Compatible with Knowledge?" *Southern Journal of Philosophy,* 30(1), 59-75.