

The issue of moral luck is, according to Driver, an issue about how much/little control we have over our actions. It is uncontroversial that we do not fully control how our intended actions actualize. If the actualizing of our intentions is, at least in part, a matter of luck, then moral responsibility begins to dissolve. After all, you don't praise someone for how hard they worked when they win the lottery. Praise and blame are tied to effort and action, but if luck is present in many / most / all of our actions, then it seems like we cannot justifiably praise or blame them (i.e. we become much less responsible for our actions).

Driver is careful to distinguish the ethical theories for which luck is, in her estimation, an actual problem, and which are not. Kant, for example, faces no moral luck problem (as Driver has framed it anyway). Remember, Kant cares not one bit about how intentions and actions align. All that matters for moral appraisal is whether or not your will was motivated by duty. Consequences and actions do not matter.

It is important to note that some ethicists think that it is the consequences of our actions *alone* which are morally valuable. This position resembles Utilitarianism, but the two positions are not identical. Call such a position *consequentialism*. There are a variety of ways to flesh out such a position. Some consequentialists argue that our actions are all that matters morally, while other consequentialists emphasize the importance of intentions for various reasons. Moral luck's presence in our actions, then, radically changes how much praise or blame can be properly assigned depending on which theory you adopt.

Objective Consequentialism	Subjective Consequentialism	Kantianism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actions are the target of moral appraisal.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intentions are at least in part the target of moral appraisal.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The will is the sole target of moral appraisal.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Luck, which is at least a partial factor in all of our actions, undercuts moral responsibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Luck may interfere in our success to bring about the actions that we intended, but insofar as our intentions are good / bad, then we are still morally responsible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Luck is irrelevant since the target of moral appraisal is only our will.</li> </ul>

Moral luck poses a problem, according to Driver, for *objective consequentialists*. These theories hold is that your actions *alone* are the target of moral appraisal. Hence, if luck is a factor in a large number of our actions, then we are not as blameworthy or praiseworthy as we may think. This, however, is unintuitive (i.e. a reason to reject the theory) because a great many people

think that your intentions matter at least to some degree. Driver intends to avoid this conclusion by showing that luck isn't a serious problem for objective consequentialists.

But first, what is luck anyway? Driver wants to get straight on what she thinks is the best account of luck. There are, in fact, two options.

- **Subjective Luck / Epistemic Reductionism:** Subjective luck is, at its core, a claim that all attributions of luck (i.e. whenever we say someone was lucky / unlucky) is merely a result of our being ignorant of all the relevant details involved in a given circumstance. For example, when we consider someone lucky when they win the lottery because the odds are against their winning, we are *not* correctly attributing this as a case of luck. Why not? Well, the odds of losing are dependent on our ignorance of all of the relevant details. If we, for instance, knew every detail about the motion and location of each particle<sup>1</sup>, then we could have known which numbers were going to come up in the lottery. This is not actual luck but ignorance. If we knew enough / all of the relevant details of any supposed case of subjective luck, then we could predict with absolute certainty what the outcome would be. When you can accurately predict an outcome, then the outcome is not a result of luck. Hence, if you view luck based on probabilities, then Driver argues that you are not actually understanding the nature of luck properly.

The argument that Driver offers against the subjective understanding of luck is, well, not very convincing. Her stated reason is captured in a thought experiment:

John rushes to the train station but, unfortunately, the train happens to be a bit early that day and he misses it. However, while waiting for the next train he happens to meet Lucy. Eventually, John and Lucy get married and live happily ever after. John, however, has forgotten by that time that he met Lucy as a result of missing the train. No one else is aware of that fact. (pg 17)

Driver claims that, "the epistemic reductionist is in a bit of a bind with cases like this. To avoid the rather counterintuitive result that John, in fact, has not been lucky, the epistemic reductionist needs to idealize a bit. But if she idealizes too far, then there is no such thing as luck at all." For Driver, not counting John as lucky is too far.

I said it might not be a satisfying argument. So, what is the account of luck that she thinks properly captures what luck is?

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<sup>1</sup> Schrödinger be damned.

- **Objective Luck:** Luck is objective in the sense that, according to Driver, events that are lucky / unlucky are a matter of the proportion of possible worlds where the circumstance occurs weighed against the worlds where the circumstance does not occur. So, when we say someone is lucky for winning the lottery, what this amounts to involves the following:
  - First, we hold fixed what happened in the actual world (you bought a lottery ticket)
  - Second, we look at worlds just like ours but where you lose the lottery vs. the worlds just like ours where you win the lottery.
  - Then, we find out that the number of worlds where you lose the lottery are in fact enormous, and the worlds where you win the lottery are actually just a single world (since there is only one string of numbers that would mean that you won)
  - Finally, since the worlds where we win the lottery are so small, and the worlds where we win are so numerous, we consider ourselves lucky when we win the lottery.

That being said, she goes on to explain how the objective account of luck allows the objective consequentialist to retain moral responsibility considering the case of the *evil klutz*. The evil klutz is someone:

“who tries to harm people but instead ends up helping them. Let’s assume this is part of his make-up, and in a wide class of the nearest possible worlds he is still an evil klutz, intending to harm but helping instead. Although the bad intentions, systematically across agents, produce bad outcomes, in his particular case they regularly do not. This evil klutz is not blamed to the extent that the competent evil person is. This is moral good fortune for the evil klutz. He has a bad character, of the sort that systematically produces bad outcomes in this world. He is deserving of blame for this, but not deserving of the same blame as the competent evil person who is actually harming others, and thus actually doing something wrong.” (pg 25)

The evil klutz is, according to Driver, morally lucky in the objective sense.<sup>2</sup> That is, in most worlds close to ours, when the klutz intends to harm, he succeeds. Certain intentions produce certain actions unless luck interferes, and Driver explains this using possible worlds. That is why the klutz is lucky: the worlds where the klutz’s intentions don’t actualize are few. But, you may be thinking, since the klutz didn’t *do* anything wrong, and the objective consequentialist is focused on appraising *actions*, then we cannot blame the klutz for wanting to harm since he didn’t actually harm, and that just was the moral luck problem Driver was supposed to avoid.

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<sup>2</sup> To be clear, she calls him fortunate. There is a small distinction here, but it is irrelevant to our purposes and so we can ignore this modification without loss of clarity in her answer to the problem of moral luck.

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Driver's move is to claim that since those intentions do result in harmful actions in a large proportion of possible worlds close to ours, the klutz is blameworthy. Thus, the klutz is blameworthy because of the possible harm he almost produced. If the klutz wasn't a klutz, and his intentions did result in bad actions, then we would be able to blame him *both* for his intentions and for his actions. But, even though he was lucky, we can still blame him.