SAFETY, THE LOTTERY PUZZLE, AND MISPRINTED LOTTERY RESULTS

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In Section II of his "Safety-Based Epistemology: Whither Now?"[1] Duncan Pritchard addresses a criticism of mine, to the effect that his safety principle is unable to solve the lottery puzzle. To recap, Pritchard's original solution to the lottery puzzle was that (a) you do not have knowledge that your ticket has not won if your true belief that it hasn't was formed solely by consideration of the odds against your ticket winning. This is due to the fact that there are very nearby worlds in which you arrive at your belief in this way, but where your belief is false. In contrast, (b) your true belief that your ticket has not won *is* knowledge if it is arrived at by reading the lottery results in a normally reliable newspaper since, according to Prichard, there are no nearby worlds in which you form this belief by the same method, but where your belief turns out false.[2] In "The Lottery Puzzle and Pritchard's Safety Analysis of Knowledge,"[3] I argued that there are nearby worlds in which, e.g., the lottery results are misprinted, and your belief that your ticket has lost, formed by reading the misprinted (but normally reliable) newspaper is in fact false. If there are such nearby worlds, then forming a belief that one's ticket has lost by means of reading the lottery results in the newspaper turns out to be unsafe, and a fairly intuitive instance of knowledge is misclassified by the safety principle.

Pritchard offers two responses. The first, unsurprisingly, argues that misprint worlds are not nearby, and so the safety principle has it that my belief that my ticket has lost (formed by reading the results in the normally reliable newspaper) is in fact safe, and is thus counted as knowledge by the safety principle, in accordance with our intuitions. The second response is that even if misprint worlds are indeed nearby, they are not *very* nearby, and an amended version of the Safety Principle can handle my objection.

The thrust of Pritchard's second response is that misprint worlds might indeed be nearby, but they are not *very* nearby. Granted this, then since the most recent version of the safety principle requires only that a belief be true in all *very* nearby worlds, and true in (only) *nearly all* nearby worlds, it appears that this new version of the safety principle can handle my objection. However, there are two problems with this response. Firstly, as argued above, the fact is that the actual world contains

easy-to-spot newspaper misprints that a diligent, competent copy editor should spot. Misprinted lottery results, as characterized by Pritchard, are just such errors. Thus, such errors occur at some *very nearby* worlds, and the amended safety principle fails to deal with the objection.

Second, as I argued in my original paper, even if it is granted that the amended safety principle can solve the lottery puzzle by means of dividing nearby worlds into very nearby and merely nearby worlds, *this very feature* of the solution will cause problems elsewhere. In Section IV of my paper, I argued that this move will force Pritchard into making very fine-grained distinctions of modal distance (which he is, rightly, reluctant to do), and that such distinctions are not underwritten by any systematic account of modal distance. Rather than repeat the details here, I refer the interested reader to Section IV of my paper.

Consider the first of these responses. In my original paper, I argued that misprint worlds are nearby since misprints occur regularly, even in normally reliable newspapers. I tried to support this claim by citing several examples of misprints from the (normally reliable) New York Times, all taken from October 2006. Since Pritchard's reply to my objection depends on his claim that lottery misprint worlds are not nearby, he must distinguish between worlds which include the kind of misprints that I cited (which, being from the actual world, are obviously very nearby!) and worlds which include misprints of lottery results. Pritchard takes as his example the misprint about how many times the Dalai Lama had visited Nepal, and urges that misprints of this type do not show that lottery misprint worlds are nearby.

> I don't think such examples demonstrate what they are meant to demonstrate, however, since the type of mistake involved is very different. That a sub-editor might not realize that the Dalai Lama had only visited Nepal once rather than often is a very different sort of mistake from that same sub-editor not noticing that the lottery results have been printed wrongly; the latter error is clearly much easier to spot, and will be spotted if the sub-editors are doing their job properly. (Pritchard 2009, n. 9)

Granted that *some* examples of misprints involve relatively obscure facts, and so might not be spotted, and granted that this is a different kind of error than that involved in misprinting a set of lottery numbers. However, Pritchard's point only counts against *some* kinds of actual-world misprints being of the same kind as lottery result misprints (i.e., those involving relatively obscure facts to which the copy-editors might not be privy). To make his case, he would have to show that *all cases* of actual world misprints are different in kind from lottery misprints. And in fact, as Pritchard characterizes the lottery misprint, his case *cannot* be made. For lottery errors are, as Pritchard has it "clearly much easier to spot [than those involving relatively obscure facts], and will be spotted if the sub-editors are doing their job properly" (Pritchard 2009, n. 9). But easy-to-spot errors, that one would expect to be spotted if sub-editors were doing their jobs properly, occur not infrequently. In fact, I quoted one in a footnote to my original paper, taken from the New York Times of October 3rd, 2006:

> For example, in Las Vegas, which is surrounded by desert, residents can get rebates for using covers on swimming pools to slow evaporation. requires less water. [sic]

No doubt, if you take the time to look, you will find one or two such instances in your normally reliable newspaper this week. I take the presence of misprints like these to show the failure of Pritchard's attempt to distinguish between actual world misprints and lottery result misprints on the grounds that the former involve relatively obscure facts of which a copy editor might be unaware, whereas the latter involve only easy to spot errors that a diligent, competent copy editor should spot. The truth of the matter is that such easy to spot errors do occur in the actual world, and thus in *very* nearby worlds. The claim that lottery misprint worlds are nearby thus seems to me to remain on solid ground.[4]

ENDNOTES

1. Duncan Pritchard, "Safety-Based Epistemology: Whither Now?" *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 34 (2009).

2. Pritchard, *Epistemic Luck* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 163.

3. "The Lottery Puzzle and Pritchard's Safety Analysis of Knowledge," *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 34 (2009).

4. In fairness, Pritchard does offer one consideration that might rule out some nearby misprint worlds—he suggests that copy editors at normally reliable newspapers may be lottery ticket holders themselves, and so would have an extra incentive to check carefully the lottery results prior to going to press. Once more the problem with this response is that it fails to exclude *all* misprint worlds. Surely there are plenty of nearby lottery worlds in which there are copy editors at normally reliable newspapers who do not purchase lottery tickets?