TWO NON-COUNTEREXAMPLES TO TRUTH-TRACKING THEORIES OF KNOWLEDGE

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ABSTRACT: In a recent paper, Tristan Haze offers two examples that, he claims, are counterexamples to Nozick's Theory of Knowledge. Haze claims his examples work against Nozick's theory understood as relativized to belief forming methods *M*. We believe that they fail to be counterexamples to Nozick's theory. Since he aims the examples at tracking theories generally, we will also explain why they are not counterexamples to Dretske's Conclusive Reasons Theory of Knowledge.

KEYWORDS: Robert Nozick, tracking theories, Fred Dretske, conclusive reasons

In a recent paper, Tristan Haze[1] offers two examples that, he claims, are counterexamples to Nozick's Theory of Knowledge.[2] Haze claims his examples work against Nozick's theory understood as relativized to belief forming methods *M*. We believe that they fail to be counterexamples to Nozick's theory. Since he aims the examples at tracking theories generally, we will also explain why they are not counterexamples to Dretske's Conclusive Reasons Theory of Knowledge.[3]

As Haze rightly points out, we maintain that to fully understand Nozick's Tracking Theory one must know that Nozick relativizes tracking to the knower's belief-forming method *M*.[4] Nozick explains that a subject might know something by one method, but not by another because one method enables one to track the truth and the other doesn't.

We will use Haze's own formulation of Nozick's tracking conditions (though this is not exactly Nozick's wording of his conditions). We will explain below why this matters.

S knows, via method (or way of knowing) *M*, that *p* iff

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[1] Tristan Haze, "Two New Counterexamples to the Truth-Tracking Theory of Knowledge," *Logos and Episteme* VI, 3 (2015): 309-311.

[2] Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

[3] Fred Dretske, "Conclusive Reasons," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 49 (1971): 1-22.

[4] Fred Adams and Murray Clarke, "Resurrecting the Tracking Theories," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83, 2 (2005): 207-221.

1. p is true

2. S believes, via method M, that p

3. If p weren't true, and S were to use M to arrive at a belief whether (or not) p, then S wouldn't believe, via M, that p

4. If p were true, and S were to use M to arrive at a belief whether (or not) p, S would believe, via M, that p.[5]

Here is Haze's first example:

> I have a deep-seated, counterfactually robust, delusional belief that my neighbor is a divine oracle. He is actually a very reliable and truthful tax-lawyer. There is a point about tax law he has always wanted to tell me, p. One day, he tells me that p, and I believe him, because I believe he is a divine oracle. I would never believe him if I knew he was a lawyer, because I am very distrustful of lawyers.

Haze claims that he does not know that p because his belief rests upon a delusion (though counterfactually robust). We take it that Haze thinks the reason he doesn't know that p is that part of the explanation of his trusting the lawyer is that he delusionally believes his neighbor is a divine oracle and not a lawyer. If he thought the neighbor was a lawyer, he would not believe anything he tells him.

But what is his belief-forming method M? Suppose that his delusion infects his belief-forming methods. If so, we don't see why this would be a counterexample to Nozick. After all, delusional belief forming methods fail to track the truth. That is partly what makes them delusions. A deluded person may fail to satisfy either condition 3 or 4, and thus not know that p. Deluded people may believe false things or fail to believe true ones (actually and counterfactually). If this is why Haze claims that he fails to know that p in this example, then he is mistaken to think this is a counterexample to Nozick's account. Nozick's theory would give the same result.

Of course, if the delusion is only about whether or not the neighbor is a lawyer, and not about anything the neighbor says to Haze about tax law, then the delusion does not infect Haze's belief-forming methods about propositions uttered by the neighbor. In that case, given the reliable testimony of the neighbor and the reliability of Haze's hearing and understanding what the neighbor says and his belief forming method of trusting what the neighbor says about tax law, we fail to see why Haze would not know that p. His belief forming methods about what the neighbor says about tax law are delusion-free. So his beliefs about tax law track the truth and Nozick's theory yields the result that Haze knows that p. We see this as the right result and not a counterexample to Nozick. So we think Haze draws

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[5] Haze, "Two New Counterexamples," 310.

the wrong conclusion in this example and he is mistaken to claim he doesn't know. Hence, in example one, either his delusion does spread and infects his belief-forming methods or not. But in neither case is it a counterexample to Nozick's theory.

Here is Haze's second example:

> My neighbor is a tax lawyer. Here, unlike in the previous counterexample, I have no delusional belief. It is my neighbor who is the strange one: for years, he has intently nurtured an eccentric plan to get me to believe the truth about whether p, where p is a true proposition of tax law, along with five false propositions about tax law. His intention to do this is very counterfactually robust. He moves in next door to me and slowly wins my trust. One day, he begins to regale me with points of tax law. He asserts six propositions: p and five false ones. I believe them all.

Haze claims that he does not know the true proposition of tax law p, but that Nozick's theory would claim that he does know that p. This is not the case. Nozick's theory implies no such thing. Nozick's theory implies the opposite. We think the reason Haze believes this is a counterexample is because he relativizes the method M to the neighbor and the neighbor's dispensing of information and not to Haze's own belief-forming methods. Haze seems to think the method here is that with respect to the true proposition p, the neighbor would not say "p" unless p. This causes Haze to think Nozick's tracking conditions are satisfied and that Nozick's theory implies that Haze knows that p. However, this is not the case. And it is not the case even if, with respect to p only, the neighbor wouldn't say "p" unless p.

Nozick is very clear that methods are the belief-forming methods of the cognizer. In this case, the relevant method M has to be something Haze uses or has some control over. He has no direct control over what the neighbor chooses to tell him, so the neighbor's method of dispensing information is not Haze's method of consuming information. Haze's method M in the example is to trust what the neighbor says. And this method clearly does not track the truth because it is not restricted to "p" alone, but freely ranges over the other five falsehoods the neighbor utters and Haze believes. So this too, when properly understood, does not constitute a counterexample to Nozick's tracking theory. Contrary to Haze's claim that these two examples are different than the kind of examples we discussed,[6] they in fact are importantly the same in so far as they fail to be counterexamples to Nozick's theory.

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[6] In Adams and Clarke, "Resurrecting the Tracking Theories."

Furthermore, they are not counterexamples to Dretske's Conclusive Reasons Theory either.[7] In example 1, the reason R that Haze believes that p is that the neighbor said "p." And the neighbor, being a very reliable and truthful tax lawyer, would not have said "p" unless p. So, on Dretske's theory, Haze would know that p, via conclusive reason R. Of course, if the delusion were affecting Haze's formation of beliefs about things the tax lawyer says, then Haze would not believe p solely based on R (what the lawyer said). And so if his delusion spread, he would not know according to Dretske's Conclusive Reasons Theory of Knowledge.

And in example 2, Haze would not know that p on the basis of R, where R is 'believing that p because the lawyer said "p."' It is false that the lawyer would not have said something about tax law unless it were true. This counterfactual is false because the lawyer utters five other false propositions, which Haze believes. Of the six things the neighbor tells Haze, Haze has no way of discriminating which are true and which are false. When Haze believes that p and the neighbor says "p," saying "p" sounds to Haze indiscriminately the same in truth value to the neighbor's saying "q," "r," "s," "t," and "v." However, Haze cannot tell which are true and which are false just by the neighbor's utterances. So while he believes the truth with respect to p, he does not know that p is true because R (the neighbor said it) is not a conclusive reason for p.

What both of these purported counterexamples have in common is that a particular belief with a strange epistemic pedigree is advanced. In the first case, the method M involved, according to the cognizer, is 'believe the oracle.' However, the 'oracle' is just a very reliable and truthful tax lawyer and so the method is, in fact, reliable and the cognizer knows that p. In the second case, the method M, 'believe my neighbor,' is unreliable most of the time and so the cognizer fails to know that p. Haze thinks the cognizer fails to know in both cases because he focuses only on the specific belief and fails to consider whether the method is reliable or not. We think he knows in the first case, but not the second, because the method is reliable in case one, but not case two. But notice that Haze treats these examples as if they were single-case problems. The problem is that they are not single-case methods at all. That is, they mimic the single-case horn of the Generality Problem that Goldman faced concerning the reliable-process theory of epistemic justification.[8] The Generality Problem concerns the issue of how to individuate the width of process types in a principled, or non-question-

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[7] Fred Dretske, "Conclusive Reasons," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 49 (1971): 1-22.

[8] Alvin Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?" in *Justification and Knowledge*, ed. George Pappas (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979): 1-23.

begging, way.[9] The issue can be posed as a dilemma. If we individuate process types too narrowly then a reliable process might have just one instance. But process types cannot be tokens or all true beliefs would be reliably produced and all false beliefs would be unreliably produced. This is the 'single-case' horn of the dilemma. On the other hand if we construe process types too widely then the 'no distinction' problem awaits us. For instance, visual perception might count as a process type such that all beliefs formed on that basis are equally justified. But beliefs about mountain goats where the percipient is 300 yards away from the goat are clearly not as reliable a belief-forming method as the same belief arrived at from viewing the goat at 30 feet. The problem is that Goldman's reliable process account of epistemic justification and knowledge has no way to draw this distinction in a principled way. This is the 'no distinction' horn of the generality problem. The solution to the Generality Problem consists in providing a principled, i.e., non *Ad Hoc,* account of process types that is neither too narrow nor too wide. The Generality Problem remains an important, but unresolved, issue for the reliable process account of justification.[10]

One way to think about the difference between Dretske's and Nozick's tracking theories of knowledge (DTK and NTK) and a Goldman-style reliability theory of knowledge (GTK), is that the latter is simply offering a weaker tracking account. Where GTK requires that the process type be .9 reliable (or thereabouts) in near possible worlds for a reliable true belief to count as knowledge, DTK and NTK require complete reliability.[11] But for all of these accounts, the process type or method M must be generally reliable. In other words, the process type or method M must be a type, not a token. Process types cannot be individuated too narrowly or the single-case horn of the generality problem will be in play. We think that this is exactly where Haze goes wrong since both of his examples are treated as if they were single-cases where the process type is a token, not a type. If the lawyer in case one is reliable and truthful as Haze asserts such that he would not have said "p" unless p, then the method of 'believing the Oracle' will produce knowledge that p and would produce knowledge in every near possible world, not just in this case. The method M is reliable, so this is not a single-case. In case two, the method M is not reliable concerning five of the six beliefs. Hence, the method

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[9] Murray Clarke, *Reconstructing Reason and Representation* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 85.

[10] Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, "The Generality Problem for Reliabilism," *Philosophical Studies* 89 (1998): 1-29.

[11] In Goldman's "What is Justified Belief," he says a reliable process is one that generates more true beliefs than false. Here we say a process is reliable if it generates true beliefs approximately 90 percent of the time because Goldman said this in conversation with Clarke.

M is unreliable and the cognizer does not know that *p* even when *p* is true. Again, the method *M* is not a single-case. Haze could only make his case if the method *M* in these examples was a single-case, but it isn't. In both cases, the method *M* is a type, in the first case that type of method is reliable and in the second, it is not reliable. Haze neglects the fact that reliability accounts of knowledge require that the method *M* must be nomically reliable, it must be a reliable process type that the cognizer employs. In Nozick's case, those process types (methods *M*) are individuated from the standpoint of the cognizer. For Dretske, this work is done in the Conclusive Reasons Theory of Knowledge where, holding certain conditions *C* fixed, the cognizer's reason *R* is his reason for believing that *p*. The result is that the following condition must be satisfied in order to know that *p*: Given your reason or evidence *R* and fixed circumstances *C*, it must be the case that it is not physically or circumstantially possible that not-*p*. If it is physically or circumstantially possible that not-*p*, then one cannot know that *p* in those circumstances.

So, for instance, in Dretske's famous thermometer example, *that* the thermometer is working properly must be held fixed when considering counterfactuals concerning a child's temperature in near possible worlds.[12] Hence, the thought that the thermometer might be broken cannot be used as the basis of an objection to his account since, as Dretske says: 'if it is *that* kind of thermometer' then, of course, one cannot know the child's temperature is *p*.[13] Ultimately, what is held fixed and what is allowed to vary depends on the laws of nature (or other law-like circumstantial conditions) operating at the time and the "conclusiveness" of the reason *R*. If one is using a defective thermometer then one cannot know that the child's temperature is normal even if it is normal. Dretske's point is that the thermometer must be such that in the circumstances *C* it would not read "*p*" unless *p*, in order to have conclusive empirical reasons for believing that *p*.

The upshot of all of this for Haze is that his purported counterexamples ignore the role that 'holding the method *M* fixed' plays in Nozick's account of knowledge and its equivalent, in Dretske's account of knowledge. That role requires that the method *M* must be reliable in the sense that the process type employed must be generally reliable – it must be a genuine 'type,' not a 'token,' in order to avoid the single-case problem. In the case of reliable indicator accounts of knowledge such as Dretske and Nozick defend, the effect of imposing counterfactual requirements has the same effect: the reasons *R*, or method *M*, must be reliable in counterfactual situations or near possible worlds. All reliability

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[13] Dretske, "Conclusive Reasons," 2.

theorists share this conviction. But the method M in both of his examples actually is a type (pace Haze), not a token, and so the tracking theories would get the correct result in these cases. For this reason, these examples are failed single-case objections to tracking theories.[14]