

# REPLY TO ADAMS AND CLARKE

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ABSTRACT: Here I defend two counterexamples to Nozick's truth-tracking theory of knowledge from an attack on them by Adams and Clarke. With respect to the first counterexample, Adams and Clarke make the error of judging that my belief counts as knowledge. More demonstrably, with respect to the second counterexample they make the error of thinking that, on Nozick's method-relativized theory, the method *M* in question in any given case must be generally reliable.

KEYWORDS: knowledge, truth-tracking, counterexamples

In a recent paper<sup>1</sup> I put forward two counterexamples to Nozick's truth-tracking theory of knowledge. I claimed that these work against Nozick's simple truth-tracking account, the method-relativized version of his truth-tracking account, and a recent modification of the account due to Briggs and Nolan,<sup>2</sup> on which counterfactuals are replaced with dispositional claims. In a discussion note in this journal,<sup>3</sup> Adams and Clarke have argued that both of my counterexamples fail.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tristan Haze, "Two New Counterexamples to the Truth-Tracking Theory of Knowledge," *Logos & Episteme* VI, 3 (2015): 309-311.

<sup>2</sup> Rachael Briggs and Daniel Nolan, "Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know," *Analysis* 72, 2 (2012): 314-316.

<sup>3</sup> Fred Adams and Murray Clarke, "Two Non-Counterexamples to Truth-Tracking Theories of Knowledge," *Logos & Episteme* VII, 1 (2016): 67-73.

<sup>4</sup> An incidental clarification about scope: potentially misleadingly, Adams and Clarke claim that my counterexamples are aimed 'at tracking theories generally' (Adams and Clarke, "Two Non-Counterexamples," 67). In keeping with this, they consider, as an afterthought, my counterexamples with respect to an account due to Dretske. To be clear: in my title and my first sentence, I use the phrase 'the truth-tracking theory of knowledge' to designate my target. In my last sentence, I use the phrase 'this tired old theory' to designate the same. The idea here, adopted for expository convenience in the title and opening and closing sentences, was that there is a theory, Nozick's theory, which comes in two or perhaps three versions: Nozick's simple version, his method-relativized version, and perhaps the modified dispositional account of Briggs and Nolan. In the body of the paper, I am more specific: I claim, of each of these three versions, that my counterexamples work against them, and I make no other comparable claims about other versions or accounts. So I should not be read as claiming that my counterexamples work against any account other than these three.

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I believe that Adams and Clarke have made two important errors. With respect to my first counterexample, they make the error of judging that my belief does indeed count as knowledge. With respect to my second counterexample (and this also appears in their discussion of my first counterexample) they make the error of holding that, on Nozick's method-relativized theory, the method *M* in question in any given case must be generally reliable. They have in effect adopted a different theory of knowledge, one which I make no claim to be able to refute, and proceeded as if this is Nozick's method-relativized theory.

### **The First Error**

Here is my first counterexample:

I have a deep-seated, counterfactually robust delusional belief that my neighbour 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, being very distrustful of lawyers.<sup>5</sup>

Regarding this, Adams and Clarke write:

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.<sup>6</sup>

Firstly, the assumption that they make is right: in the example as I intended it, the main delusion I have is that my neighbour is not a lawyer but a divine oracle. I was not imagining myself to have delusions concerning the issue of what my neighbour has and has not said to me.

So, Adams and Clark seem to understand my example correctly here, but maintain that in it, I do know that *p*. I think this is the wrong verdict. After all, if my delusion were removed, I would lose my belief that *p*.

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<sup>5</sup> Haze, "Two New Counterexamples," 310.

<sup>6</sup> Adams and Clarke, "Two Non-Counterexamples," 68.

It occurs to me that perhaps this counterexample should have been more fully specified. If we imagine the origin of my belief to have been forgotten by me, so that it becomes mere history, then *perhaps* I could be said to know that  $p$ . But as I am imagining it, the stuff about my neighbour being a divine oracle is fresh in my mind and I think of it with wonder every time I think of  $p$ .

I do not know what more to say in support of my view here, so I will leave it at that and just hope that you agree with me about this.

### The Second Error

Here there is more to say. I think I can argue conclusively that this second error is an error. For easy reference, here is the core part of Nozick's method-relativized theory of knowledge – his account of knowing-via-a-method:<sup>7</sup>

S knows, via method (or way of believing) M, that  $p$  iff

1.  $p$  is true
2. S believes, via method or way of coming to believe 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)  $p$ , then S would believe, via M, that  $p$ .

And here is my second counterexample:

My neighbour is a tax lawyer. Here, unlike in the previous counterexample, I have no delusional belief. It is my neighbour 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 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.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This time I use the exact wording of Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 179. Adams and Clarke point out that, in my original article, I departed slightly from Nozick's formulation. The differences were as follows: I had 'knowing' in place of the occurrence of 'believing' before the 'iff', did not include 'or way of coming to believe' in condition (2), and did not include 'then' in condition (4). None of these differences were introduced for any philosophical reason, and none of them would have made my counterexamples seem more plausible than they are.

<sup>8</sup> Haze, "Two New Counterexamples," 310.

First of all, I want to clear up a potentially distracting mistake on the part of Adams and Clarke as to what caused me to think this is a counterexample. They write:

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. (...) Nozick is very clear that methods are the belief-forming methods of the cognizer. (...) Haze's method  $M$  in the example is to trust what the neighbor says.<sup>9</sup>

Adams and Clarke have made a wrong conjecture here. I agree that the method  $M$  in the example is to trust what the neighbour says – that is exactly how I thought of it when I came up with the counterexample. I do think the tracking conditions are satisfied, but not because I have some idea of what the method  $M$  is which differs from Adams and Clarke's idea of what the method  $M$  is.

Now, this leads us into Adams and Clarke's argument that this counterexample fails. Immediately after the above quoted passage, they continue:

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.<sup>10</sup>

The first thing to note about this argument is that it does not refer explicitly to any of Nozick's four conditions for knowledge-via-a-method. Nowhere do Adams and Clarke specify, by engaging explicitly with Nozick's theory as formulated in four conditions, why this example, according to them, fails to count as knowledge on that theory.

The second thing to note is that Nozick's account nowhere requires that the method  $M$  in question in a given case track the truth, where tracking the truth is something like general reliability.<sup>11</sup> I agree that, in this example, the method in

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<sup>9</sup> Adams and Clarke, "Two Non-Counterexamples," 69.

<sup>10</sup> Adams and Clarke, "Two Non-Counterexamples," 69.

<sup>11</sup> The heuristic talk of 'tracking the truth', which does not appear at all in Nozick's official account, is correctly applied as follows: Nozick's account of when a subject  $S$  knows a proposition  $p$  via method  $M$  requires  $S$ 's *belief* that  $p$  to track the truth. Perhaps this is also OK: the account requires that the method  $M$ , when used by  $S$ , tracks the truth with respect to  $p$ . On the other hand, we cannot properly say: the account requires that the method  $M$  tracks the truth in general. That is a mischaracterization of Nozick's theory.

question – trusting what my neighbour says – is not generally reliable. But that doesn't stop Nozick's conditions from being fulfilled, for the conditions do not require general reliability of method.

Regarding conditions (1) and (2), there is no disagreement here between me and Adams and Clarke. In my example,  $p$  is true, and I believe it via the method of trusting what my neighbour says. Condition (3) is satisfied: if  $p$  weren't true, and I were to use the method of trusting what my neighbour says to arrive at a belief as to whether (or not)  $p$ , I would not believe, via the method of trusting what my neighbour says, that  $p$ . As I stipulated in describing the counterexample, my neighbour's desire to have me believe the truth about  $p$  is very counterfactually robust. For the same reason, (4) is satisfied as well.

It is as though Adams and Clarke are misreading conditions (3) and (4), such that they are taking occurrences of ' $p$ ' in them as occurrences of a separate variable from that which the occurrences of ' $p$ ' on the left hand side of the analysis, and in (1) and (2), are occurrences of. That is, it is as though they are reading conditions (3) and (4) as together saying that, for a subject  $S$  to know a proposition  $p$  via method  $M$ , method  $M$  must be such that, for all propositions  $q$ , the subject  $S$  whose knowledge of  $p$  is in question would, if they used  $M$  to arrive at a belief whether (or not)  $q$ , believe  $q$  via  $M$  iff  $q$  were true. In other words, that the method  $M$  be generally reliable (for the subject  $S$  in question).

This is plainly not what conditions (3) and (4) mean. The occurrences of ' $p$ ' in (3) and (4) and the occurrences elsewhere are occurrences of *the same variable*. Given a subject  $S$  and a proposition  $p$ , what conditions (3) and (4) require in order for  $S$  to know  $p$  may be summed up as follows: the method in question  $M$ , as used by  $S$ , must be reliable with respect to  $p$ .

Adams and Clarke are free to advance a theory according to which, for a subject  $S$  to know  $p$  via method  $M$ , method  $M$  must be generally reliable. But Nozick's theory simply does not require this. Neither does the modified version of it due to Briggs and Nolan. My second counterexample stands.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Thanks to Peter Baumann and Neil Sinhababu for helpful correspondence.