A Critical Analysis of Epistemic Luck

Process Reliabilism and The Truth Tracking Theory

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As of December 2017 no proposed theories of knowledge have managed to specifiy knowledge conditions that are immune to the problem of epistemic luck. The most common approach of specifiying conditions for someones knowing a proposition, is to provide an account of knowledge that is a modification of the **Classical Analysis of Knowledge**:

> S knows that P if and only if
> (i) P is true.
> (ii) S beleives that P, and
> (iii) S is justified in beleiving that P.

so that each condition is necessary for knowledge, and jointly sufficent for knowledge. Among these attempts include **Robert Nozick's Truth Tracking Theory**:

> *S knows that P* if and only if
>
> (i) P is true.
> (ii) S beleives that P.
> (iii) If P were false, S would not beleive that P.
> (iv) If P were true, S would beleive that P.

and **Process Reliabilism** which asserts that:

> *S knows that P* if and only if
>
> (i) P is true.
> (ii) S beleives that P.
> (iii) S is justified in beleiving that P.
> (iv) S is only justified in beleiving that P, if that beleif was formed using a reliable beleif forming process.

The focus of this paper is to compare and contrast the strengths of the process reliabist and truth tracking theories of knowledge when it comes to solving the problem of epistemic luck. I will argue that the Truth Tracking theory should be

preffered over the Truth Tracking Theory as a general solution to epistemic luck by frist describing Epistemic Luck, then providing a characterization of what it could mean to prefer one theory over another as a genral solution to Epistemic Luck, and showing that Truth Tracking Theory satisfies this characterization.

Epistemic Luck is a generic term ascribed to instances of knowledge where a belief in a proposition P is true merely by luck. In other words, epistemic luck can be used to describe any number of ways in which it can be accidental, coincidental, or fortuitous that a person has a true belief. To understand why epistemic luck has proved to be a hard problem in epistemology, consider the following example of knowledge claims that suffer from epistemic luck:

> **Example 1.** Suppose that Smith has strong evidence that Jones owns a Ford, and Smith has another friend, Brown, that he is ignoarant of his whereabouts. Smith claims that either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Barcelona. Now assume that jones does not actually own a Ford, and Brown is indeed in Barcelona by luck. In this case, Smith has a belief that is true and justified. However, it is not reasonable to conclude that Smith knows that Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Barcelona because Brown was in Barcelona merely by luck.

Now that we have well defined the problem of epistemic Luck, I will give a provisional defintion of what it could mean to prefer the Truth Tracking Theory over Process Reliabilism as a general solution to epistemic luck. For two theories of knowldge T_1 and T_2, consider the following formulation preferedness:

> **Defintion 1.** As a general solution to Epistemic Luck, T_1 *should be prefferred over* T_2 *as a general solution to epistemic luck* if and only if at least two of the following conditions are met:
>
> (i) T_1 is a more tenable account of knowledge than T_2.
>
> (ii) T_1 resolves a larger number of epistemic luck knowledge claims than T_2.
>
> (iii) T_1 offers the favorable basis for further investigation of epistemic luck.

There may be other combinations of conditions that could accurrately capture what it means to prefer Truth Tracking over Process Reliabilism as a general solution to epistemic luck. In fact, I am not claiming that the conditions specified give the most accurate definition preferedness. However, I do think this defintion suffices as a basis for comparing these two theories because the most important aspects of these theories are being accounted for and weighted equally.

One of the biggest criticsms of the Truth-Tracking theory is that it requires the rejection of the highly intuitive closure principle. That is, according to the truth tracking theory if S knows P and S knows that P $\Rightarrow$ Q, then S does not necessarily know that Q. Nozick, however, claims that rejecting the closure princple is actually a feature of the theory as a response to this criticsm. He

maintains that the fact the truth tracking theory illumaniting a certain property of knowledge. Indeed, there is no substantial evidence that would prove other wise. Even after considering that, it is still more plausible to prefer a theory that coheres with our logical beleif system. Abonding the closure princple hurts the Truth Tracking's theory's tenablity. Another criticsm of the Truth-Tracking theory is that it is vague. For instance, how are we supposed to interpret the subjunctive conditional? In particular, how exactly do we know in scenerios where it were the case that P? One proposed semantics, is the one proposed by Stalnaker and Lewis:

> **Possible Worlds Based Semantics.** If ϕ were true, then ψ is true if and only if:
>
> (i) ψ is true at some ϕ-world w (where a ψ-world is just one in which ψ is true); and
>
> (ii) w is closer to actuality than is any ϕ and $\neg\psi$ world w'.

This semantics is not without it's own issues. An objection against how to discriminate between the various close worlds where p is true. In particular, how does one select the closest world to the actual world where p is true. However, if one is not moved by any such discrimination requirement, one will not be moved by this objection. Of course, Process Relibilism has asepcts That are vague as well. Process Relibilism, although with it's own problems does not require the abondonment of the closure principle and offers conditions that are more intuitive. Therefore Process Reliabilism is the more tenable account of knowledge.

Suppose E is the set of all knowedge-claims that are true merely by luck. It is conceivable to partition this set into different classes, or types of epistemically lucky knowldge claims. That is $E = C_1 \cup C_2 \cup C_3 ... \cup C_i$ where each $C_j, \forall j <= i$ represents a class of epistemic knowledge claims. It is important to note that it is perferctly possible for an epistemically lucky knowledge claim to be of more than one type. Furthermore, partioning epistemically lucky knowledge claims is a somewhat of an aggergious task. The manner in which I have partitioned these

$$C_1 = \{k_c \in E \textit{ such that } k_c \textit{ has } false \textit{ grounds}\}$$
$$C_2 = \{k_c \in E \textit{ such that } k_c \textit{ is an original counterexample}\}$$
$$C_3 = \{k_c \in E \textit{ such that } k_c \textit{ has } false \textit{ grounds}\}$$
$$C_4 = \{k_c \in E \textit{ such that } k_c \textit{ is not in } C_1,\ C_2,\ \textit{or } C_3\}$$

An advantage of Process Reliabilism is that it is a theory of both justification and knowledge. If correct, Process Reliabilism would allow us to understand how knowledge is contstructed and would offer a basis for analyzing epistemic luck itself. However, it is still debated whether knowledge actually requires justification. If it were the case that knowledge did require justification, Process

Reliabilism would be valuable. However, if knowledge doesn't require justification Process Reliabilism doesn't offer much value for further investigation since it is fundamentally flawed in assuming knowledge require justification. A response to this could reject the Process Relibilist theory of justification In Goldmans What is JTB, we learn that a reliable beleif forming Process is neither sufficient nor necessary for knowledge.