

## **Warrant Entails Truth\***

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### **I**

Warrant is “that, whatever precisely it is, which makes the difference between knowledge and mere true belief.”<sup>1</sup> S knows that p, therefore, if and only if S’s belief that p is warranted and p is true.<sup>2</sup> This is a purely formal characterization of warrant. Warrant may, no doubt, be a messy item: a substantive analysis might be full of disjuncts and conjuncts and conditionals and caveats. But if there are true beliefs that are not knowledge, then there is something that all beliefs that are knowledge share, and all merely true beliefs lack. This is warrant. I want to argue that warrant, whatever it is that makes the difference between mere true belief and knowledge, entails truth.

Pollock, Lehrer, Nozick, Dretske, Goldman, and Tomberlin, among others, provide accounts of warrant that entail truth.<sup>3</sup> So in one sense the claim that warrant entails truth is already widely, and ably, defended. It is defended along the following lines: warrant is to be understood in such and such a manner (e.g., undefeated justification); warrant thus understood entails truth; therefore, warrant entails truth. Obviously, in this sort of argument the conclusion that warrant entails truth gets all of its support from the particular account of warrant from which it follows. I will try to establish that warrant entails truth, however, without assuming any particular analysis of warrant at all. If the argument of this paper is successful, that warrant entails truth is not so much a conclusion we should draw on the basis of one or another substantive analysis of warrant, as it is a condition of adequacy for any analysis whatsoever.

My argument will rely only on the fact that warrant is the “gap filler” between true belief and knowledge, and not on any particular account of what that gap filler might be like. I will show that the assumption that warrant does not entail truth—that is, the assumption that it is

logically possible that a warranted belief be false—leads to one of two untenable conclusions. The denial that warrant entails truth leads either to contradiction (which is surely undesirable), or to a set of claims that is far less plausible than the claim that a belief's being warranted entails that it is true. We should conclude, therefore, that it is not logically possible that a warranted belief be false. This is, of course, equivalent to the claim that warrant entails truth.

I will use the word 'fallibilism' to refer to the doctrine that warrant does not entail truth.<sup>4</sup> Before presenting my first argument, let me provide an example to illustrate the general shape of the problem facing fallibilism. Suppose that S has a warranted belief that p, and p is false; S then infers, from p, that p or Brown is in Barcelona. That S's belief that p is warranted seems to imply that S's belief that p or Brown is in Barcelona is warranted. Further, suppose that, by sheer coincidence, Brown is in Barcelona. Then S's belief that p or Brown is in Barcelona is, not only warranted, but true. Since warrant is what makes true belief knowledge, S knows that p or Brown is in Barcelona. But surely S doesn't know this. The supposition that S's belief that p is both warranted and false seems initially to lead to a contradiction.<sup>5</sup>

A prominent feature of the above example, which will play an important role in the discussion to follow, is that S's belief that p or Brown is in Barcelona is accidentally true. A belief is accidentally true for one, to a first approximation, if its being true has no relevant connection to the reasons for, or processes involved in, one's holding the belief.<sup>6</sup> (A belief is never, strictly speaking, simply accidentally true. Rather, it is accidentally true for one who holds it.) No doubt a more detailed analysis of accidental truth, which included an account of the all-important relevant connection, would be helpful. I have no such analysis, but, fortunately, the concept is still extremely useful in this context. For instance, even in the absence of an analysis of accidental truth, I think we can agree that a sufficient reason for S's not knowing p or Brown is in Barcelona is that that belief is accidentally true (for S).<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it seems that whenever a belief is accidentally true, it is not known.<sup>8</sup> I think that even with no more than a first approximation of an account of accidental truth, and an example in which accidental truth clearly precludes knowledge (more examples will follow), we can safely assume that an

accidentally true belief cannot be known.<sup>9</sup>

With these comments in mind, we can take the central features of the above example and construct our first argument against fallibilism:

(Argument One)

- (1) Possibly, the belief that p is warranted and p is false. [assume for reductio]
- (2) Necessarily, if the belief that p is warranted and p is false, then it is possible to transfer the belief that p's status of being warranted to some accidentally true belief that q. [premise]
- (3) Necessarily, no belief that is accidentally true is known. [premise]
- (4) Possibly, there is a true belief that q that is warranted but not known. [(1), (2), (3)]
- (5) Necessarily, a warranted true belief is known. [definition of warranted belief]
- (6) It is not possible that the belief that p is warranted and false. [RAA, (4), (5)]

The conclusion of this argument, (6), is the claim that a belief's being warranted entails that it is true. (Argument One) is valid. The argument's premises are (2) and (3). Someone might conceivably deny (3), but this denial is not part of fallibilism, and to saddle fallibilism with it would make fallibilism much less plausible than it initially seems to be. The fallibilist, therefore, should deny that (2) is true.<sup>10</sup> But my example of the belief that p transferring its warrant to the belief that p or Brown is in Barcelona seems possible—so (2) certainly seems true (for any arbitrary p).

Of course, the fallibilist might claim that my example isn't possible, because, so she might claim, being warranted is not closed under disjunction introduction—i.e., she might claim that it is possible for the belief that p to be warranted for S, while the belief that p or q is not. But even if this claim were plausible, embracing it would fall far short of rescuing the fallibilist, since there are other examples which support (2) that do not rely on disjunction introduction or merely logical transformations of any sort. Suppose I know that whoever owns an Escort owns a car, and I have the false, but warranted, belief that Jones owns an Escort. I recognize the bearing the first belief has on the second, and conclude that Jones owns a car. My belief that Jones owns

a car, so it seems, is warranted. But suppose that Jones does own a car. (A Honda has just been left to him by a very recently deceased aunt; I am not aware of this fact, nor is Jones or any of my acquaintances.) My belief that Jones owns a car, then, is not only warranted, but is (accidentally) true. I don't, however, know that Jones owns a car. The assumption that I could have a warranted false belief about Jones owning an Escort leads to contradiction: I have a warranted true belief that is not knowledge. This contradiction was reached, not by way of a merely logical transformation on a false warranted belief, but rather by way of a sort of inference from belief to belief that commonly occurs.

## II

How must the fallibilist respond?

We know valid inferences preserve truth. But, the fallibilist might insist, we don't know which inferences preserve warrant<sup>11</sup>—we don't know under which operations warrant is closed.<sup>12</sup> The moral to be drawn from examples like the ones presented above, she might continue, is not that fallibilism is untenable, but rather that the inferences employed in those examples do not preserve warrant. This gives the fallibilist a general formula for how to defend herself against (Argument One): whenever it seems she is committed to the possibility of inferring a warranted, accidentally true belief, question the warrant-preserving nature of the inference involved.

Have we reached an impasse? I don't think so. No doubt there are questionable cases where we puzzle over whether warrant is preserved. On the other hand, there are many cases of warrant preservation that are not questionable. One guideline is that whenever an inference is obviously of the right sort to preserve knowledge, we can safely conclude that it is of the right sort to preserve warrant. For example, if I know both that Jones owns an Escort and that whoever owns an Escort owns a car, and, furthermore, I know the bearing the second belief has on the first, then surely I can thereby know that Jones owns a car. Since such an inference preserves knowledge (i.e., warrant and truth), it must preserve warrant. Or, if I know that it is raining outside, and I know that generally, if p then p or q, then I suppose that just in virtue of

these two beliefs I could know that it is raining or snowing. Again, since such an inference preserves knowledge, it must preserve warrant. Although (2) would clearly be vindicated if every known valid inference is warrant preserving, the plausibility of (2) does not depend on such a close connection between what is valid and what preserves warrant. Rather, (2) is true just so long as for any false belief that *p*, there is some inference or other that could pass the belief that *p*'s warrant to an accidentally true belief. In searching for such inferences we can avail ourselves of the ready supply of widely accepted knowledge preserving inferences.

So it doesn't seem that the fallibilist can plausibly respond to (Argument One) by claiming that there are absolutely no warrant preserving inferences of the sort the argument relies on. The fallibilist, however, need not reject any of the inferences we ordinarily think of as warrant preserving. She can, instead, defend herself by making the following two claims: warrant preserving inferences result in a slight decrease of warrant from one belief to the next; and, necessarily, a warranted false belief is barely warranted—i.e., has the minimal amount of warrant necessary to be warranted.<sup>13</sup> Let's call this pair of claims restricted fallibilism I. Since, according to restricted fallibilism I, inferring one belief from another results in a slight decrease of warrant at each step, no warranted belief (and therefore no warranted accidentally true belief)<sup>14</sup> can be inferred from a false belief.<sup>15</sup>

### III

The strategy of restricted fallibilism I is to block the sort of inference that would pass a false belief's being warranted to another, accidentally true, belief. But this strategy is, in the long run, unable to free the fallibilist from contradiction. Suppose that I have the warranted false belief that Jones owns a Ford Escort. Imagine that seconds after I acquire this belief, Jones's aunt dies, and leaves him a Ford Escort.<sup>16</sup> My belief is now true. The belief that Jones owns a Ford Escort, then, is true and warranted, but, because it is accidentally true, it is not known. The assumption that a belief is false and warranted leads to a contradiction—and this without the belief transferring its warrant via any inference at all.

That a warranted false belief's becoming accidentally true leads to contradiction could be

seen as a version of (Argument One) according to which p and q are simply the same proposition. Restricted fallibilism I cannot plausibly be supposed to block this version of the argument, since surely there is no problem with a belief “transferring” all of its warrant to itself.<sup>17</sup> The reason that such “transfer” is not plausibly threatened by restricted fallibilism I, however, is that it is really no transfer at all. And this fact, although it allows this version of the argument to avoid one move the fallibilist might make, opens it up to a different sort of criticism.

The argument that led to restricted fallibilism I, the argument involving genuine instances of warrant transfer, was undergirded by intuitive judgments about which inferences preserve knowledge (if the inference in question is knowledge preserving, we can conclude it is warrant preserving). But, the fallibilist might point out, we cannot defend the claim that warrant is preserved when a false belief becomes accidentally true by calling on our intuitions about knowledge preserving inferences.<sup>18</sup> And, the fallibilist might continue, the stipulation that warrant is whatever it is that makes true belief knowledge opens up the possibility that warrant may have some odd properties; we therefore have no right to make intuitive judgments about particular cases of warrant divorced from knowledge; and so, the fallibilist could conclude, for all we know the false warranted belief that Jones owns an Escort ceases to be warranted just by becoming accidentally true.

I will take up this objection in the next section where I argue, not just that warranted false beliefs that could possibly become accidentally true lead to contradiction, but that warranted false beliefs that could possibly be accidentally true lead to contradiction. If this objection is overcome and it is established that there can be no warranted false belief that is true in some possible world, it of course follows that there can be no warranted false belief that becomes true in some possible world (since a belief cannot become true if it cannot possibly be true).

#### IV

Suppose that it is possible that I have the false warranted belief that Jones owns an Escort. In other words, I have this false warranted belief in some possible world W. There is, of course, another possible world W\* which differs from W only in the fact that seconds before I

formed my belief that Jones owns an Escort, Jones's aunt died (in obscurity thousands of miles from Jones and me) and left him an Escort. More precisely,  $W^*$  differs from  $W$  in the way just noted, and in all that this difference entails.<sup>19</sup> In  $W^*$ , is my belief that Jones owns an Escort warranted? It certainly seems so. For how could the far away and unknown death of Jones's aunt make my (otherwise warranted) belief unwarranted? Again, how could the far away and unknown death of Jones's aunt entail that my (otherwise warranted) belief is unwarranted? Of course, this would mean that in  $W^*$  I have a warranted belief that is accidentally true.

The point illustrated by this example is general. The salient, defining feature of accidental truth is that the truth of the belief has no relevant connection to the reasons for, or processes involved in, one's holding the belief. If in a possible world  $W$  I warrantably believe that  $p$ , and  $p$  is false, then the reasons for, or processes involved in, my believing that  $p$  have no relevant connection to  $p$ 's truth (since  $p$  is not true). Just so long as it is possible that  $p$  be accidentally true, there is some other world,  $W^*$ , which differs from  $W$  only in the fact that  $p$  is accidentally true (and all  $p$ 's accidental truth entails). In  $W^*$   $p$ 's truth has no relevant connection to the reasons for, or processes involved in, my believing that  $p$  (since  $p$  is accidentally true). Since in both worlds  $p$ 's truth is unrelated to my reasons for, or the processes involved in, my believing that  $p$ , and the worlds differ only with respect to  $p$ 's truth, there is, presumably, no difference between  $W$  and  $W^*$  with respect to how, or why, I believe that  $p$ . Given this fact, how can these worlds differ with respect to the warrant enjoyed by my belief that  $p$ ?<sup>20</sup>

This makes clear—in response to the objection of the last section—that there is no need to rely on intuitive judgments about when particular accidentally true beliefs are warranted in order to show that a possibly false warranted belief (which could possibly be true) leads to contradiction. It is sufficient to assume that, in general,  $S$ 's belief that  $p$ 's being warranted is determined by the causes of, or the reasons for,  $S$ 's believing that  $p$ .<sup>21</sup> This assumption is extremely plausible, since presumably any account of what makes a belief warranted will be in terms of the reasons for, or the processes which result in, belief. It is also consistent with the aim of providing an argument that warrant entails truth which is independent of any substantive

account of warrant, since it leaves completely open what those warranting reasons or causes might be.<sup>22</sup>

The upshot of all this is that the fallibilist must accept:

(7) If the belief that p is warranted, false, and possibly accidentally true, then it is possible that the belief that p is warranted and accidentally true.

But the fallibilist also recognizes that the consequent of (7), which entails that it is possible that a belief be true, warranted and not known, is necessarily false. How can she reconcile these positions? Her only hope is to claim that (7) has a necessarily false antecedent.<sup>23</sup> The fallibilist could claim that it is possible that a warranted belief be false (thus preserving her fallibilism), but add that the only possibly warranted false beliefs are those which cannot possibly be accidentally true—therefore, it is not possible that there be some belief that p that is warranted, false and possibly accidentally true. Let's call this doctrine restricted fallibilism II. Which false beliefs cannot be accidentally true? The only candidates, it seems, are necessary falsehoods.<sup>24</sup>

So the fallibilist must embrace restricted fallibilism II. Restricted fallibilism II, however, results in contradiction. Suppose I have the warranted and (necessarily) false belief that three plus two equals thirty-two and Jones owns an Escort. Suppose I then infer from this (the false belief) that Jones owns an Escort. This belief could be accidentally true. If it is warranted, then (because of (7)) fallibilism leads to the unacceptable conclusion that there are possibly warranted accidentally true beliefs. The fallibilist must therefore claim that having the warranted (false) belief that p and q (and seeing that p and q entails p) is not sufficient for the belief that p to be warranted. This is just the most troubling upshot of the fact that those beliefs that are possibly warranted and false cannot pass their warrant on to any belief that could possibly be accidentally true. Another example: I can have the warranted belief that p, where p is not possibly accidentally true; but if fallibilism is to avoid contradiction, then I cannot infer from p the warranted false belief that p or q (if q is possibly accidentally true). The restricted fallibilist of the second variety faces the original version of the problem embodied by (Argument One).

## V

The only way the fallibilist can avoid all contradiction is to endorse both restricted fallibilism I and II. She must endorse, first of all, the following de dicto necessity: necessarily, any false warranted belief is barely warranted (and, because warrant decreases at each inference, it cannot pass on its status of being warranted to any other belief). This is not to say of a proposition that is false and warrantably believed that there is no world where that proposition is more than barely warrantably believed. It is only to say that there is no world where it is both more than barely warranted and false.

The fallibilist must also endorse a claim of de re necessity about the propositions that are possibly warrantably believed and false. Any proposition that is possibly the content of a warranted and false belief is necessarily false.

I claim that any account of warrant must have a certain feature: it must entail truth. The fallibilist denies this. But for this denial to avoid contradiction, the fallibilist must assert that any account of warrant has certain other features. If we embrace fallibilism, any possible account of warrant must be such that:

(A) Necessarily, every warranted false belief is barely warranted. This commits one to two things: first, being warranted comes in degrees. And secondly, necessarily, every warranted false belief is warranted to virtually the same degree (any more warrant, and it is not barely warranted; any less, and it is not warranted at all.)<sup>25</sup>

(B) Necessarily, there is a decrease in warrant with every inference from a warranted belief to some other belief. (Again, this commits one to the claim that warrant comes in degrees.)  
Question: Why should we think that, necessarily, if p is inferred from my warranted belief that p & q, then p has less warrant than my belief that p & q? Why should we think that, necessarily, my belief that Jones owns a car has less warrant than the belief that he owns an Escort simply because I concluded the former on the basis of the latter?

And finally,

(C) Contingently false beliefs, beliefs that could possibly be true, cannot be warranted,

but (at least some) necessarily false beliefs can be warranted. There is no problem, the fallibilist says, with my having a warranted belief like two plus five equals ten, but I can never have a warranted false belief like Jones owns a Ford, there is a dog nearby, or it is twelve noon.

Question: What reasonable account of warrant would be so stingy in awarding warrant to extremely plausible, contingently false, beliefs, yet so liberal in awarding it to necessarily false beliefs? Would the motivation one might have initially for being a fallibilist be satisfied by a fallibilism so restricted as to allow only necessary falsehoods to be fallibly warranted? Or, would seeing that fallibilism must be so restricted be tantamount, at least for some, to completely discrediting it?

At least one important point has been proven: any possible account of warrant is either such that warrant entails truth, or such that (A), (B), and (C) are true of it. Because the claim that warrant entails truth is much more plausible than the combined (A), (B), and (C),<sup>26</sup> we can draw a second conclusion: warrant, whatever it is that makes true belief knowledge, entails truth. Being warranted, therefore, is (necessary and) sufficient for belief of any sort to be knowledge—a truth condition is superfluous. Furthermore, any proposed account of warrant that does not entail truth, can, for that reason, be rejected as not possibly correct.<sup>27</sup>

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### Notes

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<sup>1</sup>This is an amended version of the opening line of Alvin Plantinga's Warrant: The Current Debate (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1993), 3. The original contains a misprint.

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<sup>2</sup>Plantinga thinks that warrant comes in degree—some beliefs have more by way of warrant than others. He also thinks that it is not only the total amount of warrant that determines whether a true belief is knowledge, but also factors like the context and content of the belief. A warranted belief, for our purposes, is one that, given its content and context, has enough by way of warrant to be knowledge. By our definition, if a warranted belief is not known, it is because it is false, not because it lacks some amount of warrant. Plantinga’s claims about degrees of warrant can be found in Warrant: The Current Debate (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1993), 4.

<sup>3</sup>These philosophers, of course, might not use the word ‘warrant’ for that which makes true belief knowledge, and some are not explicit about (or perhaps are unaware of) the fact that their account of warrant entails truth. Nozick, for instance, doesn’t mention that his account entails truth, and his analysis of knowledge contains a truth condition (which, if warrant entails truth, is superfluous).

John Pollock calls warrant ‘objective justification’. A belief is objectively justified only if it is “ultimately undefeated”, and it is not possible for a belief to be ultimately undefeated and false. See his Contemporary Theories of Knowledge (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1986), 183-190.

Keith Lehrer says warrant entails truth (he calls warrant ‘undefeated justified acceptance’). The infallibility of undefeated justified acceptance is testified to by Lehrer’s analysis of knowledge, which contains no independent truth condition: “Knowledge is undefeated justified acceptance”. See his “Knowledge Reconsidered” M. Clay and K. Lehrer (eds.) Knowledge and Skepticism (Boulder: Westview, 1989), 152.

Alvin Goldman says that “Roughly, a cognitive mechanism is reliable [and therefore produces beliefs that count as knowledge] if it not only produces true beliefs in actual situations, but would produce true beliefs, or at least inhibit false beliefs, in relevant counterfactual situations.” “Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge” Journal of Philosophy 73 (1976): 771. I cannot have a false belief produced by a mechanism that would either produce true beliefs or

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inhibit false beliefs. Nozick and Dretske, who are discussed below, have accounts of warrant that entail truth for similar reasons.

James Tomberlin argues that a justified true belief analysis of knowledge must be such that justification entails truth. He thinks of justification in terms of propositional evidence, and of warrant as justification. The fact that Tomberlin thinks of justification as infallible, and warrant as justification, obviously makes him an infallibilist with respect to warrant. This allows him to provide an analysis of knowledge with no truth condition: “S knows that P if and only if S believes that P on the basis of completely adequate evidence” “Critical Review of Carl Ginet’s Knowledge, Perception, and Memory” Nous 14 (1980): 248.

<sup>4</sup>There are, of course, other ways in which the term ‘fallibilism’ might be used. Probably the central use of the term has to do with the claim that a justified belief can be false (where justification is spelled out either deontologically, or in terms of having adequate evidence for a belief). This is not the sort of fallibilism I am arguing against; I am not claiming that justified false belief leads to contradiction.

It should be mentioned, however, that some have thought that a fallibilistic account of justification encounters certain problems. As noted above, Tomberlin denies that justification is fallible. Lehrer recognizes the fact that infallible accounts of justification avoid Gettier’s problem, and says that Gettier’s problem is “in my opinion, the problem of showing that a fallibilistic theory of epistemic justification is possible”. But, in the same article, Lehrer affirms fallibilistic justification, and tries to handle the Gettier problem by introducing a further condition for knowledge beyond justification and truth. Keith Lehrer “The Gettier Problem and the Analysis of Knowledge” in George Pappas (ed.) Justification and Knowledge (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979), 65. (The locus classicus of the Gettier problem is Edmund Gettier’s “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” Analysis 23 (1963): 121-123.) In a later work, Lehrer points out problems, other than those inspired by Gettier, that arise with a fallibilistic account of justification. He also notes that providing an analysis of fallibility for justification is not trivial.

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See Keith Lehrer and Kihyeon Kim “The Fallibility Paradox” Philosophy and Phenomenological Research Vol. 50, Supp (1990): 99-107.

<sup>5</sup>Gettier’s objections to justified true belief accounts of knowledge are often handled by hypothesizing some further condition, other than truth and justification, that is necessary for knowledge. Obviously, it would be confused to respond to the problem illustrated by this example by claiming that a “warranted true belief” account of knowledge is mistaken, and that there must be some further condition, in addition to truth and warrant, that one must add to make belief knowledge. Warrant just is whatever it takes to make true belief knowledge.

<sup>6</sup>Usually, if one’s belief that p is accidentally true, then one would have believed p even if it were false. This is not always the case, however. Suppose an orphan with no knowledge of who her parents were forms the belief, by reading tea leaves (which, let us stipulate, fails at least in this case to provide non-accidental truth), that a man, S, met a woman, S\*. Now imagine this is accidentally true. But add the fact that S and S\* are the orphan’s parents. The belief, which is accidentally true, is not something she would have believed were it false, because, were it false, presumably the orphan would not have been born, and thus would not have had any beliefs.

<sup>7</sup>Consider how the claim that accidental truth precludes knowledge captures, for instance, the intuition that underlies Gettier-style counterexamples to proposed analyses of knowledge in terms of justified true belief (JTB). The very fact that the JTB account seems to commit one to knowing certain accidentally true propositions is sufficient to show the JTB account is flawed.

Some go so far as to identify warrant with non-accidental truth. The claim that accidental truth precludes knowledge would of course follow from this identification. See, for instance, Peter Unger’s “An Analysis of Factual Knowledge” Journal of Philosophy 65(1968): 157-70. Unger says, however, that “To provide an analysis of when something is an accident, or somewhat accidental, is more than I am (now) capable of doing... Thus, I will rely on a shared intuitive understanding of these notions” (p. 159). (From Unger’s examples, it is clear that he has the same intuitive notion of accidental truth that is made use of in this paper.)

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<sup>8</sup>There may be some difficulty in seeing how the truth of  $2+1=3$  bears the relevant connection to the processes involved in, or reasons for, my believing that  $2+1=3$  (the same point can be made for any obvious necessary truth). Perhaps my reason for believing that  $2+1=3$  is that I simply see that it must be so; and perhaps I wouldn't simply see this, if it weren't so. That is, perhaps the truth of  $2+1=3$  is directly responsible for the reason that I believe it. But this is not completely satisfying. It may be that with respect to obvious necessary truths, we need a different understanding of non-accidental truth than the one employed with respect to contingent truths. Happily, this need not concern us. None of the problems I raise for fallibilism involve accidentally true necessary truths. And, furthermore, the connection between necessary truths, such as  $2+1=3$ , and our knowledge of them is one that bedevils epistemology generally; we shouldn't be surprised to see these familiar problems surfacing in the present context.

<sup>9</sup>That an accidentally true belief cannot be known is, I think, even less controversial than might at first be supposed. It is, for instance, consistent with the view that certain kinds of epistemic luck are compatible with knowledge. See Mylan Engel, Jr. "Is Epistemic Luck Compatible with Knowledge?" *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 30 (1992): 59-75 and Alvin Goldman "Strong and Weak Justification" in Tomberlin (ed.) *Philosophical Perspectives, 2, Epistemology* (Atascadero, California: Ridgeview Press, 1988): 51-69.

<sup>10</sup>(2) will be accepted by anyone who thinks that warrant entails truth, because if warrant does entail truth, the conditional in (2) has a (necessarily) false antecedent.

<sup>11</sup>She should not try to avoid the argument by claiming that, necessarily, the property of being warranted can never be passed on, or transferred, from one belief to another. This would mean, for instance, we cannot know the conclusion of a mathematical proof, on the basis of that proof, even if we know the axioms and see that all the steps preserve truth.

<sup>12</sup>There are philosophers, such as Robert Nozick, who say: "Knowledge is not closed under known logical implication." *Philosophical Explanations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 227. Of course, Nozick thinks truth is closed under logical implication, so if knowledge isn't, but truth

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is, then we can safely conclude that it is warrant that Nozick claims is not closed under logical implication. How does this bear on the present discussion? First of all, even if we grant Nozick his position, it does not follow that (Argument One) is unsound. Nozick doesn't deny that warrant can, in many cases, be transferred from one belief to another. He says, for instance, "I am now writing with a blue pen. I know the pen is blue. I realize this entails that something now is blue, and I know that something now is blue, even solely on the basis of this inference" (p. 230). He objects only to the claim that, in all possible cases, knowledge is preserved by known logical implication. And (Argument One), as we shall see, does not require that this most general claim be true.

Secondly, Nozick's contention that warrant is not closed under known logical implication is, at least initially, implausible. Consider one example of such nonclosure that Nozick mentions: "I know that I am in Emerson Hall now, yet I do not know that: it is not the case that (I am in the tank on Alpha Centauri and not in Emerson Hall)" (p. 228). There must be good reasons to endorse such a counterintuitive position. Nozick's reasons are found in his account of warrant. The fallibilist, however, cannot look to Nozick for help in these matters, since Nozick's account of warrant involves the condition that: if p weren't true, S wouldn't believe that p. (p. 172). (He goes on to make this condition more complicated, but the complication doesn't affect the point here.) Nozick's position then, does not allow for the possibility of a false warranted belief. Therefore, although Nozick's conclusion about the nonclosure of warrant is one the fallibilist might find helpful in answering (Argument One), the fact that Nozick's route to defending that conclusion is closed to the fallibilist shows that she must look elsewhere for an ally.

Fred Dretske also denies that knowledge is closed under known logical implication in "Epistemic Consequences" *The Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970): 1007-1023. Nothing in Dretske's article, however, indicates he would object to all putative transfers of warrant, or, in particular, to any of the cases that I rely on in support of (2). (Like Nozick, Dretske seems concerned with blocking arguments for skepticism that rely on the general closure of warrant

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under known implication.) Furthermore, Dretske is an infallibilist. And as with Nozick, the fallibilist would be misguided to look to Dretske for reasons to reject (2), since Dretske's infallibilism is at least part of his motivation for denying that knowledge is closed under known implication. See Dretske's "Conclusive Reasons" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 49 (1971): 1-22 and the fourth chapter of his *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1981).

<sup>13</sup>Instead of restricting the degree to which false beliefs can be warranted, one might try to avoid (Argument One) by restricting the content of those beliefs that could possibly be both warranted and false. Only certain propositions, one might claim, can possibly be warrantably believed and false, and those propositions (unlike the proposition that Jones owns an Escort) fail to admit of the sort of inferences that lead to absurdity. I can't think of a single example of such a proposition. If being warranted really is closed under known logical operations like disjunction introduction, then there are no such propositions. Because of the extreme implausibility of this move, and the fact that (as we shall see) it would be of no use to the fallibilist in responding to problems raised in the following section, I will not consider this a live option for the fallibilist.

<sup>14</sup> The objection raised at this point in the paper, however, could be blocked by replacing restricted fallibilism I with the weaker: the belief that p, if inferred from a warranted false belief, cannot be warranted if p is accidentally true. But this latter claim is plausible only if one accepts restricted fallibilism I. Why? Recall that what is at issue is the transfer of one belief's warrant to another via certain inferences. Whether or not an inferred belief is warranted, then, would seem to be a factor of only the status of the original belief(s) from which it is inferred, and the inferences involved. I don't think it is plausible to claim that the warrant of that belief is also a function of whether it is accidentally true.

This point is not crucial to the argument. In what follows, one could replace restricted fallibilism I with the weaker claim mentioned above. The conclusion of this paper would then be slightly different (specifically, the claims made in (A) and (B) below), but the general thrust of

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the paper would be the same—fallibilism would still entail a collection of claims which are jointly extremely implausible.

<sup>15</sup>According to restricted fallibilism I, truth and warrant aren't really logically independent. It is possible to have a warranted false belief, but not possible for a false belief to be warranted in the robust manner that (at least many) true beliefs are. Only true beliefs can have enough warrant to make their logical consequences warranted. (The “minimal amount” of warrant enjoyed by a warranted false belief might be any amount of warrant within a certain interval. Restricted fallibilism I requires that the interval be no larger than the amount of warrant that is lost at each inference.)

<sup>16</sup>This suggests a different sort of puzzle. Suppose Jones's aunt has bequeathed him an Escort, and dies seconds before I form the warranted belief that Jones owns an Escort. In that case, we have a (supposedly) warranted and accidentally true belief that is not knowledge. This has the makings of an argument for the conclusion that warrant entails non-accidental truth. In fact, a very simple argument for the conclusion that warrant entails non-accidental truth is available once we establish that warrant entails truth: if warrant entails truth, necessarily, all warranted beliefs are known; necessarily, no accidentally true beliefs are known; therefore, necessarily, no accidentally true beliefs are warranted. From this we can conclude (since warrant entails truth) that necessarily all warranted beliefs are non-accidentally true.

<sup>17</sup>Note that the fallibilist cannot say that the standards for being warranted are higher for a true belief than for a false, and thus once p becomes true, although it may have met the conditions for being warranted while false, it no longer meets them. Being warranted is one of the two ingredients of knowledge. If you add truth to a warranted belief then you get knowledge.

<sup>18</sup>The closest we have to a parallel “knowledge preserving inference” is that if I know that p at a certain time, and continue to believe it, it is usually the case that ceteris paribus I continue to know that p; but this does not seem to speak in any decisive way on whether my false belief that

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p continues to be warranted—even if it becomes accidentally true—just so long as I continue to believe that p.

<sup>19</sup>One example of what the accidental truth of Jones owns an Escort entails: if God exists in both worlds, in W\* God believes that Jones owns an Escort, but does not believe this in W.

<sup>20</sup>A particular strategy is employed to show that the possibility of false warranted beliefs seems to imply the possibility of accidentally true warranted beliefs. It is instructive to note why this strategy cannot be used to show that the possibility of non-accidentally true warranted beliefs seems to imply the possibility of accidentally true warranted beliefs. If in W I have the warranted non-accidentally true belief that p, then any world W\* in which I believe that p and p is accidentally true differs from W with respect to the reasons for, the processes involved in, or the relation of p's truth to those reasons for or processes involved in, my believing that p. In W p's truth played a role in my believing that p (for my belief in W is not accidentally true), not so in W\* (for my belief in W\* is accidentally true). Given this difference, it is reasonable to suppose a difference in warrant.

<sup>21</sup>We might need to add that S's belief that p's being warranted is a function not only of S's reasons for, or the causes of, S's believing that p, but also of some relevant relation that, if p is true, those reasons for, and causes of, belief stand in to the fact that p. In the example in the text, the relevant relation of S's belief that p to the truth of p is unchanged from W to W\*, since S's belief that p bears no relevant relation to the truth of p in either W or W\*. We need this further condition if the following possibility is to be countenanced: Suppose S is a good tea leaf reader in W because in that world a benevolent spirit consistently makes the world correspond to S's readings. So in W S believes that p on the basis of his readings and, let us suppose, p is true. Suppose however that in some other world W\* the benevolent spirit does not exist, and S believes the true proposition that p for the very same reasons and as a result of the same processes, i.e., reading tea leaves, as he does in W. A reliabilist of a certain stripe might say that in W S is warranted that p, but not so in W\* —even though S's belief is a result of the same sorts

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of causes and reasons in both worlds. Adding the clause that warrant is also a function of the relation that the belief in question bears to the truth allows us handle this case (in *W* there is a counterfactual relation between *S*'s belief that *p* and *p* that is not present in *W\**).

<sup>22</sup>Pollock thinks that *S*'s belief that *p* is warranted only if *S* would still believe *p* (and for the same reasons) no matter what other truths *S* came to believe. One might object that on such an account warrant is a function of something other than the actual causes of, or reasons for, belief. Suppose, for the sake of argument, we grant to the objector that Pollock's claim is not one about a feature of the actual causes of, or reasons for, belief (i.e., we grant that his claim is not that the causes of, or reasons for, *S*'s warranted belief that *p* are such that they insure that no matter what truths *S* came to believe, *S* would still believe that *p*). Even granting this, Pollock, and anyone who endorses a similar position, is of no help here to the fallibilist. Building into warrant these sorts of claims about what one would believe, were one to believe any set of truths, ensures that warrant entails truth. What one would need in order to save the fallibilist at this point is an account of warrant such that warrant is both a function of something other than, or in addition to, reasons or causes of belief and is such that it does not entail truth. I think the prospects for such an account are extremely dim. See Pollock's Contemporary Theories of Knowledge (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1986), 185.

Similar comments apply to the claim that Dretske's, Nozick's, and Goldman's accounts of warrant are such that warrant is not a feature of the actual causes of, or reasons for, belief.

<sup>23</sup>In this the fallibilist and the infallibilist would be in agreement. For the infallibilist thinks that (7) has a necessarily false antecedent, and therefore thinks the entire conditional is true.

<sup>24</sup>Any candidate must meet two criteria: not only must it be not possibly accidentally true, but it must be possibly both believed and false. Perhaps beliefs like I believe I am appeared to red-ly or I exist are not possibly accidentally true. But such beliefs are of no use to the fallibilist in the present context since, presumably, they cannot be believed if false.

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One class of beliefs, in addition to necessary falsehoods, that might meet both criteria are those beliefs which contain claims about their own non-accidental truth, such as: this belief is not accidentally true. It might seem that such a belief is not a necessary falsehood, and that such a belief could not possibly be accidentally true. But it isn't clear that 'this belief is not accidentally true' expresses a proposition, and consequently it is unclear that this belief is not accidentally true could be the content of a belief. Compare: this belief is true and this belief is false. Which of the preceding is true? Because of the anomalous nature of such propositions, if propositions they be, I will not include them among the possible contents of a false warranted belief.

<sup>25</sup>False warranted beliefs are warranted to "virtually" (and not "exactly") the same degree because it might be that there is a some small interval within which restricted fallibilism I can allow false beliefs to be warranted. Suppose that a belief must have at least five degrees of warrant to be warranted. If we also add that each inference from one belief to another results in a decrease of two degrees of warrant, restricted fallibilism I will sanction false beliefs warranted to either five or six degrees.

<sup>26</sup>In defense of the claim that warrant entails truth is more plausible than (A) through (C), recall that there are numerous actual accounts of whatever it takes to get from true belief to knowledge according to which warrant entails truth; there is, however, no one who explicitly endorses (A) through (C).

<sup>27</sup>This will raise a challenge to accounts of warrant on both sides of the (hard to define) internalist/externalist divide. For instance, it certainly seems possible that a completely coherent system of beliefs contains a false belief. The coherentist (who is presumably an internalist) who wants to explain warrant wholly in terms of coherence will have to come up with an account of how coherence could be infallible. Also, any account of warrant purely in terms of reliability (an externalist account) will have to insist that the belief producing mechanism be not merely reliable, but infallible. (Ernest Sosa argues that a (fallibilist) reliabilism gets into the kinds of problems I have argued fallibilism in general faces. See his Knowledge in Perspective

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991), 238-239. Sosa was right to see that a fallibilist account of reliabilism faces these problems, but we can now see that the problem is not with fallibilist reliabilism in particular, but with any fallibilist account of warrant.)

Of course, coherence and reliability accounts can be extremely subtle, and may well contain extra conditions to secure the infallibility needed. The point is that the fact that warrant entails truth has ramifications for both externalist and internalist theories of warrant.

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