

INFALLIBILISM AND GETTIER'S LEGACY

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Abstract. Infallibilism is the view that a belief cannot be at once warranted and false. In this essay we assess three nonpartisan arguments for infallibilism, arguments that do not depend on a prior commitment to some substantive theory of warrant. Three premises, one from each argument, are most significant: (1) if a belief can be at once warranted and false, then the Gettier Problem cannot be solved; (2) if a belief can be at once warranted and false, then its warrant can be transferred to an accidentally true belief; (3) if a belief can be at once warranted and false, then it can be warranted and accidentally true. We argue that each of these is either false or no more plausible than its denial. Along the way, we offer a solution to the Gettier Problem that is compatible with fallibilism.

Mere true belief is not knowledge. Warrant is that, whatever precisely it is, (enough of which) makes the difference between knowledge and mere true belief.¹ We will call the view that a belief cannot be at once warranted and false 'infallibilism' and we will call the view that a belief can be at once warranted and false 'fallibilism'.² One might argue for infallibilism in the following way: the property of *being warranted* is identical with a certain property described and defended by a particular substantive theory of warrant; a belief cannot have that property unless it is true; so a belief cannot be at once warranted and false—warrant entails truth. This sort of argument for infallibilism requires one to buy into whatever particular substantive theory of warrant is put forward in the first premise. Infallibilists would be better advised to argue for infallibilism in a way that did not require one to affirm some substantive theory of warrant, in a way that was compelling independently of any commitment to a substantive theory—a *nonpartisan argument for infallibilism* if you will.

Infallibilists have done this. We have identified three nonpartisan arguments for infallibilism in the recent literature. Here are their first premises, respectively:

- If a belief can be at once warranted and false, then the Gettier Problem cannot be solved.
- If a belief can be at once warranted and false, then its warrant can be transferred to an accidentally true belief.
- If a belief can be at once warranted and false, then it can be warranted and accidentally true.

Add to each the denial of the consequent, and infallibilism follows. We accept the second premise of each argument; however, each of the three first premises is either false or no more plausible than its denial. If we are right, then infallibilists laudably imbued with the spirit of nonpartisanship must look elsewhere to meet their nonpartisan aims.

1. The First Nonpartisan Argument: the Gettier Problem and Infallibilism

The first nonpartisan argument goes like this:

¹ Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3. We'll let the parenthetical qualification remain implicit throughout.

² These words have other uses, but there are no more apt terms and there is some precedence for our use. See Trenton Merricks, "Warrant Entails Truth," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55 (1995), and "More on Warrant's Entailing Truth," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 (1997).

1. If a belief can be at once warranted and false, then the Gettier Problem cannot be solved.
2. The Gettier Problem can be solved.
3. So, a belief cannot be at once warranted and false.

(2) is true, or so we shall argue in section 1.2. But is (1) true? Is it true that the Gettier Problem can be solved only if a belief cannot be at once warranted and false?

1.1 The standard—infalibilist—answer

Linda Zagzebski thinks so. She claims that "no account of knowledge as true belief plus something else can withstand Gettier objections as long as there is a small degree of independence between truth and the other conditions of knowledge".³ She infers that "The definition of knowledge must make truth implied by the other component(s) of knowledge" and that "the sense in which knowledge is believing in a good way must entail truth".⁴ She appropriates her advice in her virtue epistemology by insisting that a belief is warranted only if it "arises out of" "acts of intellectual virtue," stipulating that a belief that so arises cannot have thus arisen while false.⁵

Zagzebski is not alone. Scott Sturgeon—purporting to express "the standard post-Gettier model of propositional knowledge"—recently wrote that the Gettier Problem can be avoided only by saying that S knows that p if and only if S believes p and S's belief is fully justified, where S's belief is *fully* justified only if it is true.⁶ Early on, defeasibility theorists decided that if their accounts did not have the consequence that warrant entails truth, they would be subject to Gettier cases, and so they fortified them accordingly.⁷ Causal theorists are likewise motivated by Gettier to endorse infalibilism. Recall the first words of the locus classicus of the genus: "Since Edmund L. Gettier reminded us recently of a certain important inadequacy of the traditional analysis of 'S knows that p,' several attempts have been made to correct that analysis. In this paper I [Alvin Goldman] shall offer still another analysis..., *one which will avert Gettier's problem*". Reflecting on certain cases, Goldman concluded that one is warranted in believing p only if the fact that p is causally connected in an appropriate way with one's believing p. Of course, the fact that p cannot be thus connected to one's believing p unless it is a fact that p, and so p is true; so his causal theory implies that warrant entails truth, a consequence endorsed in

³ Linda Zagzebski, "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems," *Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (1994), 72.

⁴ *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 293; "What is Knowledge?," in John Greco and Ernest Sosa, eds., *Blackwell's Guide to Epistemology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1999), 102.

⁵ *Virtues*, 298.

⁶ "The Gettier Problem," *ANALYSIS* 53 (1993), 160.

⁷ See, e.g., Keith Lehrer and Thomas D. Paxson, Jr., "Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief," in George Pappas and Marshall Swain, eds., *Essays on Knowledge and Justification* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978), 148; Lehrer, "The Gettier Problem and the Analysis of Knowledge," in George Pappas, ed., *Justification and Knowledge* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979), 65; Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990), 147-150; Marshall Swain, "Epistemic Defeasibility," in Pappas and Swain, 164-67; Swain, *Reasons and Knowledge* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), 141-195; John Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1986), 180-193; Paul Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 232-55; Moser, "The Gettier Problem," in Jonathan Dancy and Ernest Sosa, eds., *A Companion to Epistemology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1992), 157-59; Matthias Steup, *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Upper Saddle River, New York: Prentice Hall, 1996), 16-18; Robert Shope, *The Analysis of Knowing* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), 45-74.

order to "circumvent Gettier's counterexamples".⁸ As a process reliabilist, Goldman conceives of the reliability of a process in terms of how it operates in actual and relevant alternative situations. Those alternatives which are relevant are conceived in such a way that warrant entails truth. Why? To avoid Gettier cases, he says.⁹ Robert Nozick added condition (iii) to his 'truth-tracking' theory—S knows that p only if S wouldn't believe that p if p weren't true—precisely because he wished "to exclude cases of the sort first described by Edmund Gettier".¹⁰ Fred Dretske argued that one has a warranted belief that p only if one has a 'conclusive reason' for p, a reason that 'eliminates' the conjunction of that reason and the denial of p as a possible state of affairs. What motivated him to lay down this condition? "[T]he conviction (*supported by Gettier-like examples*) that knowledge, if it embodies an evidential relation at all, must embody a strong enough one to eliminate the possibility of mistake".¹¹ Even Roderick Chisholm—who explicitly wished to avoid infallibilism in his response to the Gettier Problem—in the end conceded that "what is known must be evident but not defectively evident," where a proposition is not defectively evident only if the propositions on which it is based do *not* make evident a proposition that is *false*.¹² More recently Alvin Plantinga was compelled by his critics to add an epicycle to his account of warrant in *Warrant and Proper Function*—namely, 'the Resolution Condition'—"that guarantees that no false belief has a degree of warrant sufficient for knowledge".¹³ Why? To placate Gettier.

So epistemologists whose substantive theories of warrant differ dramatically seem to believe that the Gettier Problem can be solved only if a belief cannot be at once warranted and false, which is premise (1). Such is the standard view.

We believe the standard view is false. The Gettier Problem can be solved *even if* a belief can be at once warranted and false. Let's look into the matter more closely.

1.2 Two candidate solutions compatible with fallibilism

Here is a typical Gettier-style counterexample: Smith has excellent reasons and so is justified in believing that Jones will get the job. He validly infers, and so justifiably believes, that either Jones will get the job or Brown is in Barcelona. As it turns out, Jones will not get the job. Still, as luck would have it, Brown is now in Barcelona, unbeknownst to Smith. So, Smith's belief in the disjunction is justified and true—clearly, however, it is not warranted since it is not a case of knowledge.¹⁴ This case involves an inference based on a false belief. It won't do, however, to suggest that the moral of the Gettier Problem is that we cannot have warranted beliefs based on inferences from false beliefs since cases that lack this feature are a dime a dozen. For example, suppose that Smith sees what for all the world looks like a sheep in the field, and this non-inferentially triggers a belief in the existential generalization that there is a sheep in the field. But,

⁸ "A Causal Theory of Knowing," in Pappas and Swain, 67, 82, 83 (our emphasis).

⁹ *Epistemology and Cognition* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1986), 46-55.

¹⁰ *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 173 (our emphasis).

¹¹ "Conclusive Reasons," in Pappas and Swain, 42, 57n11 (our emphasis).

¹² "Knowledge as Justified True Belief," in *The Foundations of Knowing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 45-47.

¹³ *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); "Respondeo," in Jonathan Kvanvig, ed., *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 308-329, esp. 328; "Warrant and accidentally true belief," *ANALYSIS* 57 (1997), 140-45, esp. 144.

¹⁴ See Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?," *ANALYSIS* 23 (1963), 121-23.

unbeknownst to him, what appears to be a sheep is really a hologram. As luck would have it, however, over a hill and out of Smith's view there is a sheep in the field. Smith, then, has a justified true belief that there is a sheep in the field, but his belief is obviously unwarranted. Or suppose that Smith is driving through the Wisconsin countryside where the farmers have erected three barn facades for every genuine barn in order to deceive tourists into thinking they're flourishing more than they really are. Upon seeing what for all the world looks like a fine barn, Smith naturally believes that there's a fine barn, without inferring it from any belief at all. As it turns out, he's right. It is a real barn, and a fine specimen at that; and he has no reason to think otherwise. His true belief is not warranted, however, even if it is justified.

Note that the distinctive feature of standard Gettier cases like these is that the reasons Smith believes *p* or the processes involved in his believing *p* are not properly related to those facts that render *p* true. It's a matter of sheer serendipity that his belief that *p* is true given his reasons for believing *p* or the processes involved in his believing *p*. Smith's reasons for believing that either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona *have nothing to do* with Brown's being in Barcelona. The operation of those cognitive processes involved in Smith's coming to believe that there are sheep in the field is *completely unconnected* to the sheep—over the hill and out of Smith's view—which make his belief true. Although, in the barn case, a real barn is causally connected to Smith's belief that that's a fine barn, given the preponderance of barn facades in the area, it's mere luck that on this occasion he's looking at a real barn; in an important sense, the *right sort* of connection, the *proper* relation, is missing.¹⁵

One might think, then, that the Gettier Problem can be solved like this:

- S's belief that *p* is warranted only if S's belief that *p* is not accidentally true for S,

where "accidentally true for S" abbreviates "such that what makes *p* true is not properly related to the reasons for, or processes involved in, S's believing *p*". Note two things about this condition. First, no belief that satisfies it can be at once warranted and accidentally true. So it eliminates Gettier cases. Second, there are two ways to fail to be accidentally true: being false and being nonaccidentally true. So a false belief trivially satisfies this condition, that is, satisfies it just in virtue of being false. We have here then, a fallibilist condition on warrant that eliminates Gettier cases, "fallibilist" in the sense that it doesn't rule out fallibilism, not in the sense that it entails fallibilism. But is it an *adequate* solution?

It seems not. First, we expect a solution to the Gettier Problem to lay down a true condition on warrant that *informs* us at least somewhat about the nature of warrant. Our first candidate fails on this score. The condition it lays down is equivalent to the following disjunctive condition:

- S's belief that *p* is warranted only if S's belief that *p* is false *or* nonaccidentally true for S.

It divides the cases into true and false beliefs. What it says about warranted true beliefs is helpful in understanding the nature of warrant: they must be *nonaccidentally* true. But

¹⁵ We are aware of the fact that what counts as a "Gettier case" is controversial. In particular, we are aware that we draw the boundaries more narrowly and differently than Shope does with (G) on page 4 and (G)'s successor on pages 221-22 in *The Analysis of Knowing*. We think we are justified in doing so and we are encouraged by the fact that our characterization has an impressive pedigree in the early post-Gettier literature that continues thirty years later in the discussion of "anti-luck" conditions on warrant.

what it says about false beliefs is completely unhelpful. Any old completely unjustified and unreliably formed belief could meet this condition on warrant, so long as it was false. So this condition tells us nothing about the nature of warrant in the case of false belief. Since it is preferable for a fallibilist solution to the Gettier Problem to help us at least somewhat understand how a *false* belief can be warranted, we should look elsewhere.

One might argue that there is a second reason to think this condition is inadequate. We expect an adequate solution to the Gettier Problem not to bring along with it avoidable implausibilities; or, at least, all else being equal, a solution is *more* adequate than another if the first avoids implausibilities the second implies. The solution under discussion arguably implies that being false is a step in the right direction toward warrant. But being false is no epistemic improvement, so neither is being either false or nonaccidentally true.¹⁶

A preferable fallibilist candidate is lurking nearby, namely our solution:

- S's belief that p is warranted only if S's belief that p would not be accidentally true for S, if it were true,

that is, S's belief that p is warranted only if the following subjunctive conditional is true: if S's belief that p were true, then it would also be true that what makes p true is properly related to the reasons for, or processes involved in, S believing p. Like its predecessor, no belief that satisfies the condition our solution lays down can be at once warranted and accidentally true, and so it avoids Gettier cases; moreover, a belief can be false but such that if it were true, it would be nonaccidentally true. (We develop both of these points shortly.) So the condition our solution lays down avoids Gettier cases and does not rule out fallibilism.

It is important to see that our solution avoids our two worries about the first. It tells us something significant about the nature of warrant (even a warranted *false* belief, if such there be), and it does not imply that being false is a step in the right direction toward warrant. A belief that is false but such that it would not be accidentally true if it were true, has a feature that constitutes a significant step in the right direction toward warrant—indeed, a giant leap! (We will develop this point in section 3.3 below.) So, all else being equal, our solution is preferable to the first.¹⁷

Is it an *adequate* solution to the Gettier Problem? There are several things to consider in answering that question. We begin by returning to the two points briefly stated in the paragraph before last.

First, any belief that meets the condition laid down by our solution is impervious to Gettier cases. That's because the target of a Gettier case is a true belief, but any true belief that meets our condition is *nonaccidentally* true, and a nonaccidentally true belief cannot be the target of a Gettier case. Consequently, the primary desideratum for a solution to the Gettier Problem is satisfied.

Second, a false belief can be such that if it were true, it would not be accidentally true. Consider the following illustration of the point. We visit the zoo one Saturday morning and rush to our favorite display: the zebra. In the display labeled '*Equus burchelli*' we see what looks like a zebra. Naturally enough, we believe that *there's a zebra*. However, suppose that last night the zookeeper, Fred, inadvertently poisoned the zoo's only zebra,

¹⁶ Merricks, "More on Warrant's Entailing Truth," 629n7.

¹⁷ Our opting for a subjunctive puts us at odds with Sharon Ryan, who uses the indicative and exploits that fact in criticizing Merricks. See "Does Warrant Entail Truth?," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 56 (1996), 183-92, esp. 184.

Zak, and in order to keep zoo-goers from being disappointed, painted his mule, Moses, to look exactly like Zak. Nevertheless, it is plausible to suppose that our belief would not be accidentally true if it were true. For although in fact there is no zebra before us, the closest worlds at which there is are worlds in which, for example, Fred doesn't poison Zak, or he finds an actual zebra to replace poor Zak instead of Moses the mule. In these worlds, we form the belief that *there's a zebra* in epistemically propitious circumstances, circumstances in which it is true and not accidentally true. So although our belief is actually false, if it were true, it would not be accidentally true.

Third, although our condition is not sufficient for warrant,¹⁸ so long as a false belief can meet the other conditions for warrant while meeting ours, there could be a warranted false belief. We see no reason to suppose that a false belief cannot meet the other conditions while meeting ours.

One might object that even if our solution avoids Gettier cases and avoids the two worries for the first fallibilist candidate, there's more to being an *adequate* solution to the Gettier Problem than that. What should we say in reply? We have no list of desiderata for an adequate solution that we are willing to pronounce complete, but we insist that avoiding Gettier cases, shedding some light on the nature of warrant, and not implying any implausibilities constitutes pretty good evidence that our solution is adequate. What other desiderata are there?

Sturgeon asserts that the Gettier Problem consists in the difficulty of finding *the minimal link* between warrant and truth that precludes Gettier cases.¹⁹ Perhaps he's right. Unfortunately, it's hard to tell since he leaves the crucial notion of minimality undefined, but here's one way to understand it:

- The connection between warrant and truth which precludes Gettier cases postulated by one solution is more minimal than that postulated by a competitor if and only if the former implies *fewer substantive theses* than the latter.

And this makes sense. Suppose you pose two first-graders the following problem: what is the sum of 2+2? William says, "Four"; Peter says, "Four, and the square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle is the sum of the squares of its two sides". William's answer is clearly better than Peter's since it is more minimal in the sense just sketched.

If minimality of this sort is a constraint on the adequacy of a solution to the Gettier Problem, our solution fares well since it is more minimal than the standard infallibilist solution, which is this:

- S's belief that p is warranted only if p is nonaccidentally true for S, that is, S's belief that p is warranted only if *p is true* and what makes p true is properly related to the reasons for, or processes involved in, S's believing p. Clearly enough, no false belief can satisfy this condition, and it avoids Gettier cases. But like Peter's answer, it adds a fair bit too—infallibilism. Our solution, on the other hand, does not imply

¹⁸ As our friend David Vander Laan said, consider the proposition that *all your beliefs are nonaccidentally true for you*. Suppose you believe it. At the closest worlds at which it's true, your belief is nonaccidentally true for you, but you are surely not now warranted in believing that all your beliefs are nonaccidentally true for you.

¹⁹ "The Gettier Problem," 157.

infallibilism, and it has no other comparable commitments; thus, on the minimality constraint, our solution is preferable.²⁰

But perhaps this isn't the correct understanding of minimality. Perhaps this is better:

- The connection between warrant and truth which precludes Gettier cases postulated by one solution is more minimal than that postulated by a competitor if and only if *the former is weaker than the latter*, where one is weaker than another just in case the second entails the first but not vice-versa.

If this is the sense of 'minimality' in question, our solution is arguably more minimal than the infallibilist's. The condition laid down by the infallibilist entails the condition laid down by our solution, but not vice-versa. To see why, suppose, for conditional proof, that S's belief that p cannot be at once warranted and false (i.e. infallibilism). Then, necessarily, if S's belief that p is warranted, it's true. Since it is impossible for a warranted belief to be accidentally true, it follows that the only possible way for S's belief that p to be warranted is if it is not accidentally true, which is to say that, necessarily, if S's belief that p is warranted, then it is not accidentally true for S. So, necessarily, if S's belief that p is warranted, then p is true and S's belief that p is not accidentally true for S. A consequence of the standard semantics for subjunctive conditionals is that, necessarily, for any proposition q and r, if q is true and r is true, then, if q were true, r would be true. (No world is as close as the actual world.) Then it follows that, necessarily, if S's belief that p is warranted, S's belief that p would not be accidentally true for S if S's belief were true. Therefore, by conditional proof, if S's belief that p cannot be at once warranted and false (i.e. infallibilism), then S's belief that p is warranted only if S's belief that p would not be accidentally true for S if S's belief were true. On a moment's reflection, one can see that the entailment does not go in the other direction—our condition can be satisfied by a false belief (as we've seen), the infallibilist's cannot. So on this second understanding of 'minimality', our solution is more minimal than the infallibilist's solution. Unless there is some plausible way to understand 'minimality' that gives the opposite result, it seems that our solution fares better than the infallibilist's on Sturgeon's sensible minimality constraint.²¹

Another objection to our solution states that it is too uninformative to be an adequate solution to the Gettier Problem. All it says is that a belief is nonaccidentally true for someone just in case the reasons or processes involved in her having the belief are

²⁰ One might object that our solution has its own corresponding implication—fallibilism. This objection is mistaken, however. Our solution lays down a *necessary* condition on warrant, not a sufficient condition. As such, it rules out neither fallibilism nor infallibilism—it leaves it an open question whether there are other conditions that imply infallibilism.

²¹ Things are not quite so simple as we let on here. We've relied on the premise that

- Necessarily, for any proposition q and r, if q is true and r is true, then, if q were true, r would be true.

This is a consequence of the standard logic of counterfactuals presented by Lewis and Stalnaker. This consequence is arguably false, however. As Plantinga writes:

Consider quantum effects: perhaps in fact the photon went through the right slit rather than the left; that is not enough to entail that if it had gone through either slit, it would have gone through the right. I toss the die; it comes up 5. That is not sufficient to entail that if I had tossed the die, it would have come up 5. The truth of a counterfactual requires not just that *p and -q* be false in fact; it is also necessary that even if things had been moderately different, it still wouldn't have been the case that *p and -q*. To put it in familiar semantical terms, the counterfactual is true only if there is no *sufficiently close* possible world in which *p* is true and *q* is not. ("Respondeo," 328-29)

‘properly related’ (have the ‘right sort of connection’) to the fact that makes the belief true. But what is that *proper* relation? What is the *right sort* of connection? Our solution is silent on this important question.

By way of reply, notice first that our main competitor—the standard, infallibilist solution—is similarly silent. So we haven’t here an advantage for the standard view. More importantly, however, we need to draw an important distinction. On the one hand, there are constraints that every competing substantive theory of knowledge must meet if it is to have a chance at being in the theoretical ballgame, constraints that will be expressed in very general terms. Thus, for example, the traditional model said that S knows that p if and only if (i) S believes p, (ii) p is true, and (iii) S’s belief is justified. Any substantive theory of knowledge, on this view, must have these three consequences. If a theory implies that you can know something that is, say, false, then it isn’t even a theoretical option. It has failed to meet a condition on the adequacy of any substantive theory of knowledge. On the other hand, there are the more specific conditions that a particular epistemologist will lay down in articulating his or her own substantive theory of knowledge. Typically, substantive accounts focus only on the justification condition or, more precisely, the warrant condition. Gettier cases help us to see what constraints every competing substantive theory of warrant must meet if it is to have a chance at being in the theoretical ballgame. That’s their function. But it is not their function to help us see the sort of specific condition that a particular epistemologist might lay down in articulating his or her substantive theory of warrant. After all, think of how many very different substantive accounts of warrant there are all of which avoid Gettier cases. Gettier underdetermines substantive theorizing.

Here’s another way to see the point we are making. We are all familiar with the sorts of stories we tell in an introductory epistemology class to get our students to see that you know something only if you think it’s so and what you think is true. Knowledge entails true belief, we say. We are also familiar with the sorts of stories we tell to get our students to see that knowledge is not *mere* true belief, that there’s something extra. Gettier cases are like these stories. They help us to see something about warrant (the “extra”), that it’s a matter of having something that rules out being right by luck. We should not expect a solution to the Gettier Problem to give us any more detail about warrant or nonaccidentality than that, just as we should not expect the just-mentioned stories to give us any more detail about truth, or belief, or the objects of belief—which is to say that we shouldn’t expect much in the way of details at all. That’s a matter for substantive theorizing. Consequently, the fact that our solution lacks a detailed, informative analysis of accidentality constitutes no strike against it.

Let’s take stock: our solution is the minimal link between warrant and truth that precludes Gettier cases; moreover, it does not bring along with it any implausible philosophical theses. Whether that’s adequate, we aren’t sure, but it’s at least as much as the infallibilist solution can lay claim to. The most important point to see in the present context, however, is that if our solution is adequate, or at least as adequate as the infallibilist solution, then premise (1) of the first nonpartisan argument is either false or no more plausible than its denial.

1.3 Zagzebski’s objections to our solution

As we saw earlier, Zagzebski claimed that premise (1) is true, that if a belief can be at once warranted and false, then the Gettier Problem cannot be solved. In her most recent

work on the topic, however, she says that our fallibilist condition successfully precludes Gettier cases:

...it has been shown by the Howard-Snyders that the component of knowledge in addition to true belief [i.e., warrant] can be defined in a way that uses the concept of nonaccidentality but does not entail truth. Their definition is this: Knowledge is *true belief which is such that if it were true it would be nonaccidentally true*.²²

She rejects our condition, however; it “combines the defects” of two other “definitions”:

Like the definition *nonaccidentally true belief* it is vague, negative, lacks practical import, and has little to recommend it theoretically. Like the definition *justified true belief that is not a Gettier case* it is ad hoc.²³

So, according to Zagzebski, although our solution eliminates the Gettier Problem, it is to be rejected since it is vague, negative, lacks practical import, has little to recommend it theoretically, and is ad hoc.²⁴ What should we make of this list of alleged defects?

Before we answer that question, let us be clear. Our position is this:

- S’s belief that p is warranted only if it would not be accidentally true for S, if it were true.

So, contrary to what Zagzebski indicates, we have not given a definition of *knowledge*; our topic, in the first instance, is *warrant*. More importantly, we have not given a *definition* of warrant. To do that involves giving necessary and sufficient conditions for warrant; we have only offered a *necessary condition*. Furthermore, as we indicated in section 1.2, it is better to think of our condition as a *general constraint* on every substantive theory of warrant, although we refer to it as a *condition* on warrant. With these clarifications in mind, let’s consider each of Zagzebski’s objections.

It’s vague. We agree that our condition is vague in the sense that it is not very informative. But it is informative enough to meet our aims. It precludes Gettier cases and provides a general constraint on the adequacy of any substantive theory of warrant.²⁵

We’re not sure who’s right on this point. If Plantinga is, our argument in the text fails, and we can’t say that our solution fares better than the infallibilist’s on the second interpretation of Sturgeon’s minimality constraint. We can say, however, that it fares no worse.

²² Zagzebski, “What is Knowledge?,” 103. She refers to a presentation at the Central Division Meetings of the American Philosophical Association, 1996.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “In addition,” she writes, “it has the problems that come with interpreting the truth conditions of the subjunctive conditional” (ibid.). We can’t take this objection seriously. Zagzebski’s own definition of warrant deploys a subjunctive conditional since it relies on the concept of “an act of virtue” (*Virtues*, 248); moreover, subjunctive conditionals of the sort in our condition generally *have* truth-conditions even if it is difficult to *tell* what they are and when they are satisfied.

²⁵ Other features of the notion of accidentality deployed here that make it less vague than it might otherwise be include these. (1) The phrase “accidentally true” and its cognates can be misleading since it might be taken to refer to a certain modality of truth, say contingency. But that’s not right at all. Rather, it refers to the failure of a certain sort of relation to obtain, a relation between the reasons or processes involved in a person’s having a belief and what makes her belief true. (2) That one believes may well be accidental even though it is not accidental at all that one’s belief is true. It might be a sheer accident that the coin landed heads or that the photon went through the right slit, but not accidental at all that you believe that it did since you saw it in broad daylight, etc. (3) One’s existence may be accidental even though it is not accidental that one’s belief is true. Naturalism does not entail accidentality in the relevant sense. (4) The way in which one comes to believe a proposition can be in some sense accidental even though one’s belief is not accidentally true for one. For example, suppose you flipped a coin to decide whether to take the left path or the right and, as a result, you came to believe there are red-breasted robins in the area because you saw one. In that case, although in one sense of the word your beliefs about robins are “accidental”, they

It's negative. Suppose our condition is negative in the sense that it says what something isn't instead of what it is.²⁶ Although a *completely* negative definition is objectionable, a partially negative one need not be (e.g. the definition of 'bachelor'); nothing we've said rules out further positive conditions for warrant. More importantly, on any reasonable standard of 'saying what something is,' our condition says what warrant, in part, is. It says that a warranted belief is such that, if it were true, a certain sort of relation would obtain between what makes it true and the reasons for, or processes involved in, having it. If that isn't "positive" we don't know what is.

It lacks practical import. We agree that our condition is not "practically useful in guiding our search for knowledge".²⁷ But, that is no strike against it. Like a theory of knowledge (think of the truth-condition), not every condition in a theory of warrant needs to be a useful guide in the acquisition of warranted belief. Moreover, general constraints are intentionally general and so should not be called on to provide guidance.

It's theoretically unilluminating. We do not agree that our condition "should make sense of as much data as possible and put to rest as many unanswered questions as possible".²⁸ While that may be a desideratum for a *complete* definition of either knowledge or warrant, we have only stated a necessary condition on warrant. Our condition does, however, provide a condition on the adequacy of any theory of warrant whatsoever, one that precludes Gettier cases without bringing along other difficulties or philosophical "extras," like infallibilism. And it shows that Zagzebski and others are wrong when they say things like "Gettier problems arise for any definition in which knowledge is true belief plus something else that is closely connected with truth but doesn't entail it".²⁹ That strikes us as sufficiently theoretically illuminating.

It's ad hoc. We disagree that our condition is like "justified true belief *that avoids Gettier cases*". Our condition does not express a string of unrelated features with a proper name in it; ours leads to some understanding. More plausibly, perhaps Zagzebski's point is that *no* condition on warrant should be such that its "sole advantage is to answer counterexamples"; it must be "plausible even if no one had ever thought of Gettier cases".³⁰ But, is adhocery of this sort really a defect? Even if it is, it's not clear that our condition is ad hoc. Why suppose that if no one had thought of Gettier cases, no one would have thought our condition was plausible?

Zagzebski's objections to our condition on warrant are, at best, indecisive. Moreover, since there is no good reason to think that our solution fares worse than the infallibilist's solution, the Gettier Problem is solvable even if warrant does not entail truth—and so the first premise of the first nonpartisan argument is false.

We turn now to the second nonpartisan argument for infallibilism.

2. The Second Nonpartisan Argument: Warrant Transfer and Infallibilism

The second nonpartisan argument for infallibilism goes like this:

1. Necessarily, if a belief can be at once warranted and false, then its warrant can be transferred to an accidentally true belief.

need not be "accidental" in the sense relevant to warrant. These points are developed in Peter Unger, "An Analysis of Factual Knowledge," *Journal of Philosophy* (1968).

²⁶ Her definition of "negative". See "What is Knowledge?," 98.

²⁷ Her definition of "practical import". See *Virtues*, 267-68.

²⁸ Her definition of "theoretically illuminating". See *Virtues*, 264.

²⁹ "What is Knowledge?," 101.

³⁰ Her definition of "ad hoc". *Virtues*, 65.

2. Necessarily, warrant cannot be transferred to an accidentally true belief.
3. So, necessarily, a belief cannot be at once warranted and false.

Naturally, we commend (2) since it is a consequence of our counterfactual condition on warrant. But what about (1)?

Trenton Merricks, the source of this argument, appeals to examples where it ‘seems possible’ that warrant is transferred by known *logical* entailment from a false belief to an accidentally true belief.³¹ Suppose that Smith could have a warranted, false belief that Jones will get the job. Smith recognizes that this entails that either Jones will get the job or Brown is in Barcelona, and comes to believe this disjunction on the basis of that recognition. This “seems to imply,” says Merricks, that Smith’s disjunctive belief is warranted. But, suppose that, as luck would have it, Brown is in Barcelona. Then Smith’s disjunctive belief is warranted and accidentally true. So if Smith can have a warranted false belief, then its warrant can be transferred to an accidentally true belief. The first premise is a generalization of this claim. Merricks adds an example where it seems possible that warrant is transferred from a false belief to an accidentally true belief by known entailment that does *not* involve mere “logical transformations of any sort”.³²

What should we make of this argument for (1)? We suggest that even if the sorts of cases Merricks brings to our attention do seem to be cases in which warrant is transferred to an accidentally true belief, it is quite weak evidence for (1). That’s because there are cases in which it seems possible that there can be warranted false beliefs. Indeed, every case that Merricks gives in support of (1) begins with a case in which it seems possible that a belief is warranted and false. Moreover, it seems no more possible that warrant can transfer to accidentally true beliefs than that there can be warranted false beliefs. So, if sheer reflection on the seeming possibility of cases is all we’ve got to go on here, then the fact that it seems possible for warrant to transfer to an accidentally true belief in some cases is counterbalanced by the fact that it seems possible for a false belief to be warranted in some cases. Merricks’ first bit of evidence in favor of (1) is counterbalanced.

What else might be said on behalf of (1)? Merricks suggests the following line of thought:

- 1a. Necessarily, for *any* candidate for a warranted false belief, there is *some* inference or other that *could* transfer the warrant of that belief to an accidentally true belief.³³
- 1b. Necessarily, if for any candidate for a warranted false belief, there is some sort of inference that could transfer the warrant of that belief to an accidentally true belief, then, if a belief can be at once warranted and false, its warrant can be transferred to an accidentally true belief.
1. So, necessarily, if a belief can be at once warranted and false, then its warrant can be transferred to an accidentally true belief.

The argument is valid, and (1b) is self-evident. But why believe (1a)? Why suppose that, necessarily, there is some inference that could pass the warrant of a false belief to an accidentally true belief?

³¹ “Warrant Entails Truth,” 843.

³² *Ibid.*, 845.

³³ *Ibid.*, 847.

Merricks gives us the following hint: “In searching for such inferences we can avail ourselves of the ready supply of widely accepted knowledge preserving inferences,” for after all, “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”.³⁴ This line of thought can be readily connected with (1a):

- 1a1. Necessarily, whenever an inference is of the right sort to preserve knowledge, it is of the right sort to preserve warrant.
- 1a2. Necessarily, whenever an inference is of the right sort to preserve warrant, it is of a sort that could pass the warrant of a false belief to an accidentally true belief.
- 1a3. So, necessarily, whenever an inference is of the right sort to preserve knowledge, it is of a sort that could pass the warrant of a false belief to an accidentally true belief.
- 1a4. Necessarily, there is some inference of the right sort to preserve knowledge.
- 1a. So, necessarily, for *any* candidate for a warranted false belief, there is *some* inference that *could* pass the warrant of that belief to an accidentally true belief

Unfortunately, it isn’t at all clear that (1a1) is true. An inference type I is of the right sort to preserve knowledge if and only if for any subject S, *if* S knows the premise of some I-token and she infers the conclusion of that I-token, *then* (given the usual qualifications) S knows the conclusion. Disjunction introduction, existential generalization, and their ilk meet this condition. But that tells us nothing about the cases in which the premise is *false*. The condition is silent on that score. Even if disjunction introduction and the like are of the right sort to preserve knowledge, we cannot “safely conclude that they are of the right sort to preserve warrant” in cases in which the premise is false. And hence we cannot tell merely from the fact that disjunction introduction, *et al* are knowledge preserving whether they are warrant preserving. So for all we can tell, (1a1) is false even if disjunction introduction, *et al* are “obviously of the right sort to preserve knowledge”.³⁵

Perhaps there is a more direct route to seeing the truth of (1a1). Perhaps we can just go with our ‘intuitions’ here. Disjunction introduction, *et al* preserve knowledge: we can just see that much. Can’t we *also* see that they preserve warrant? And seeing that, can’t we just see that they could be used to pass the warrant of a false belief to an accidentally true belief, for any false belief you please?

This bald appeal to our ‘intuitions’ is not entirely lacking in merit. There is a strong pull toward the idea that disjunction introduction (given the usual qualifications) is warrant preserving. The only difficulty is that there is an equally strong pull toward the idea that a belief can be at once warranted and false. Both pulls have the same source: our intuitions about *justification*. Intuitively, disjunction introduction, *et al* are justification preserving. Intuitively, there can be justified false beliefs. But these two intuitions cannot be reliable guides for our thinking about *warrant* since we know that the conjunction of their analogues for warrant entails a contradiction. Something must give here, but a bald appeal to intuitions cannot help us decide. We need independent reason to affirm one over the other, reason independent of our intuitions about cases.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ It may even be that knowledge is not closed under known entailment, as the lottery paradox, the paradox of the preface, and other such cases suggest—although nothing we say here hangs on this.

3. The Third Nonpartisan Argument: Supervenience and Infallibilism

The third nonpartisan argument is this:

1. If a belief can be at once warranted and false, then it can be warranted and accidentally true.
2. A belief cannot be warranted and accidentally true.
3. So, a belief cannot be at once warranted and false.

Note that, as Merricks points out, (1) is false, so long as we can have warranted *necessarily* false beliefs. We will assume that (1) is restricted to beliefs that are possibly true. With that in mind, why should we believe it?

3.1 Possible accidentality

Merricks offers the following line of thought:

Suppose that it is possible that Smith has the false warranted belief that Jones owns an Escort. In other words, Smith has 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 Smith formed his belief that Jones owns an Escort, Jones's aunt died (in obscurity thousands of miles from Jones and Smith) and left him an Escort. More precisely, W^* differs from W in the way just noted, and in all that this difference entails. In W^* , is Smith's 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 Smith's (otherwise warranted) belief unwarranted? Again, how could the far away and unknown death of Jones's aunt entail that Smith's (otherwise warranted) belief is unwarranted? Of course, this would mean that in W^* Smith has a warranted belief that is accidentally true.³⁶

We might formalize Merricks's argument for (1) here like this:

- 1a. Suppose, for conditional proof, that Smith, in W , has the warranted false belief that Jones owns an Escort.
- 1b. There is another possible world, W^* , which differs from W only in the fact that Smith's belief that Jones owns an Escort is accidentally true for Smith (and in all that this fact entails).
- 1c. So Smith, in W^* , has the accidentally true belief that Jones owns an Escort. (from 1b)
- 1d. The far away and unknown death of Jones's aunt in W^* could not make Smith's (otherwise warranted) belief unwarranted.
- 1e. So Smith, in W^* , has the warranted belief that Jones owns an Escort. (from 1a and 1d)
- 1f. So Smith, in W^* , has the warranted, accidentally true belief that Jones owns an Escort. (from 1c and 1e)
- 1g. So, if Smith, in W , has the warranted false belief that Jones owns an Escort, then Smith, in some other possible world W^* , has the warranted, accidentally true belief that Jones owns an Escort. (from 1a-1f)

Premise (1) is a universal generalization from Smith's case. What should we make of this proof?

³⁶ Ibid., 849-50, lightly edited.

The worrisome premise is (1d). Doesn't the far away and unknown death of Jones's aunt in W^* make a big difference between the two cases? After all, Smith's false belief in W is such that if it were true, it would be nonaccidentally true—that's a consequence of its being a candidate for a *warranted* false belief. But his belief in W^* is such that it is not the case that if it were true, it would be nonaccidentally true, and so in W^* his belief is *unwarranted*. That's the effect of the death of Jones's aunt on Smith's belief in W^* . So isn't (1d) false?

Merricks cannot accept this description of the case. In fact, in his published reply to this objection of ours, he denies that Smith's false belief in W is such that if it were true, it would be nonaccidentally true. He writes: " W^* is the closest world to W in which [Smith's] belief is true; thus the conditional is false in W ".³⁷ What should we make of this response?

Note that Merricks *assumes* that W^* is one of the closest worlds to W in which Smith's belief is true. But why should we assume *that*? Why not assume that there is a world closer to W than W^* —say, W' —in which Smith's belief is warranted and nonaccidentally true for him? Of course, Merricks will note that our description of the case *assumes* that W' is closer than W^* . "Why should we assume *that*?" he might retort. We might reply that we assume that because the initial description of the case has it that Smith's belief is warranted, which entails that if it were true, it would be nonaccidentally true (and hence that W' is closer to W than is W^*). But suppose we have no good reason to make our assumption. Unfortunately, Merricks's has no good reason to make *his* assumption either—which means we have no good independent reason to believe (1d). Are we at an impasse? Maybe not.

Suppose we are wrong. Suppose we have some good independent reason to think that " W^* is the closest world to W in which [Smith's] belief is true; thus the conditional is false in W ". Does that settle the matter in Merricks's favor? Unfortunately, not. He must *generalize* from Smith's case to *every* candidate for a warranted, false belief—otherwise (1) doesn't follow from the conditional proof. This means he must assume that for *every* possible candidate for a warranted, false belief, the closest worlds in which it is true include worlds in which it is accidentally true. How plausible is this assumption? Even if Merricks's is right about Smith's belief and countless others like it, it is at least as plausible to assume that for *some* possible candidates for warranted false beliefs, the closest worlds in which they are true *do not* include worlds in which they are accidentally true. So Merricks's argument for (1) rests on an assumption that, at the very best, is no more plausible than its denial.

3.2 Warrant supervenes on reasons and causes alone

But perhaps there is another way to defend (1d), one that manifests the plausibility of (1). Merricks alludes to such a defense in the following passage:

... 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 p. This assumption is extremely plausible, since presumably any account of what makes a belief

³⁷ See "More on Warrant's Entailing Truth," 629n7.

warranted will be in terms of the reasons for, or the processes which result in, belief.³⁸

The assumption here seems to be that warrant supervenes on “the causes of, or the reasons for” one’s belief *alone*. This thought might be used to defend (1d): since the far away and unknown death of Jones’s aunt in W* has no bearing on the reasons for or causes of Smith’s belief in W*, the same reasons or processes operative in Smith’s believing that Jones owns an Escort in W are operative in W*, in which case it follows from Merricks’s assumption, that if Smith’s belief in W is warranted, then it is warranted in W*—which is just premise (1d). And since this point about Smith is rooted in a general claim about the nature of warrant, we can use it to say the same thing about every candidate for a warranted false belief: for any candidate for a warranted false belief, its warrant will supervene on certain reasons or processes, and those reasons and processes will be operative in the closest worlds at which the belief is accidentally true, resulting in the absurdity of a warranted, accidentally true belief.

By way of reply, note that warrant does not supervene on “the causes of, or the reasons for” a belief *alone*. Defeaters, to take one example, are relevant to whether a belief is warranted; and this is the case even if they are causally isolated from the processes whereby one forms (or maintains) that belief, and even if they fail to affect the reasons for which one believes. The fake barns in Wisconsin, for example, are relevant to the warrant your true barn beliefs enjoy even if they are causally isolated from the processes whereby you form and maintain your true barn beliefs and even if they fail to affect the reasons for which you believe. The presence of a defeater might make a difference to *facts about* the reasons for or causes of S’s belief, however. But if we understand Merricks’s assumption in this way—as the claim that warrant is determined by *facts about* the causes of, or reasons for belief, and not *the causes* or *the reasons* alone—then although defeaters are not counterexamples, there is a fact about the reasons for or causes of Smith’s belief in W that does *not* obtain in W*, a fact that certainly seems relevant: the fact that *if S’s belief were true, it would not be accidentally true*. Of course, the claim that there *is* such a fact will be denied by Merricks. This is just the impasse we encountered two paragraphs before last. Can it be broken? Maybe.

3.3 Warrant supervenes on “the overall epistemic situation”

Merricks’s insight that warrant *is* supervenient can be detached from the falsehood that warrant supervenes on *only* reasons and causes of belief and attached to the truth that it supervenes on much more. Indeed, in a published response to an unpublished version of the argument of the last paragraph, he suggests just this possibility:

... whether a belief is warranted or not *is not a brute fact*. A belief’s being warranted will supervene on other facts. [Footnote: I will not assume, as I did in “Warrant Entails Truth”, that warrant supervenes on *only* reasons for and causes of belief.”] So if I have a warranted belief that p in one world but not in another, then the first world contains some other difference on which the difference in warrant supervenes.³⁹

What sorts of things does warrant supervene on in addition to reasons for and causes of belief? Probably “things like one’s environment, ... the reliability of one’s faculties, the

³⁸ “Warrant Entails Truth,” 850-51.

³⁹ “More on Warrant’s Entailing Truth,” 627.

defeaters present, and so on,” says Merricks.⁴⁰ Whatever else might properly be on the list here, let’s call their totality one’s “overall epistemic situation”. So warrant supervenes on one’s overall epistemic situation. To this thesis Merricks adds a second: if you have a warranted belief that p in one world but not in another, then the first world contains not just a difference but an *improvement* in your overall epistemic situation. The warrant of your belief that p in the first world cannot be grounded in, say, your faculties being *less* reliable with respect to your belief that p or your possessing a defeater. The difference “must involve *some improvement* in the ‘overall epistemic situation’ with respect to [your] belief that p”.⁴¹

Merricks takes these two insights as decisive evidence for (1d) and, by extension, (1). Here’s how he applies them to (1d):

W and W* are alike in the environment—for thousands of miles around—in which [Smith] formed the belief that Jones owns an Escort, in the reasons for and causes of [his] belief, in all [his] psychological states, and so on. There is no defeater for [his] belief in W* that is not also a defeater for that belief in W.... So the only difference between W and W* is that a woman thousands of miles away from [Smith] dies a few seconds later in one than in the other. I submit that there is no difference between the worlds that would constitute a plausible difference in the supervenience base for [Smith’s] belief’s warrant. So if warrant is supervenient, then [Smith] is warranted in one world if and only if [he] is warranted in the other.⁴²

Add that falsity is not an improvement in the supervenience base of S’s belief in W (either because falsity is not in the supervenience base or because, even if it is, it is not an improvement); then, if Smith’s false belief in W is warranted, his accidentally true belief in W* is too—which is just (1d). The argument is readily generalizable to (1).

What should we make of this new defense of (1d)? From our perspective, as Merricks rightly notes, the important question is whether “in W, unlike W*, the following *subjunctive* conditional is true: if [Smith’s] belief were true, it would not be accidentally true”.⁴³ If it is a difference, a difference grounded in Smith’s overall epistemic situation in W, then (1d) is false. So what does Merricks have to say about this important question? He writes:

Response: this subjunctive conditional must be grounded in the overall epistemic situation; so it is not itself (an independent) part of the situation. Therefore one cannot rely on this conditional to constitute an improvement in the overall epistemic situation in the absence of any other improvement that grounds it.⁴⁴

But why suppose that there is no such additional improvement? Merricks’s answer seems to be that Jones’s aunt does not die near enough to Smith. She dies far away, not in his Charlottesville living room. Yet if Jones’s aunt died in obscurity bequeathing him an Escort, wouldn’t Smith’s belief in W* be accidentally true? Yes. Question: Is the property of *rendering a belief accidentally true* a property of a fact that renders it relevant to one’s “overall epistemic situation”? Well of course it is! How could it be otherwise? Contrary to what Merricks seems to suggest, it does not matter *where* Jones’s

⁴⁰ Ibid., 628

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 629.

⁴³ Ibid., 629n7.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

aunt dies in W^* . Provided she has bequeathed him her Escort, her death—wherever it occurs, Antarctica, Pluto, or Smith’s Charlottesville living room—renders his belief accidentally true. The fact that she exists in W^* , bequeaths him an Escort, and dies *is* a difference between W and W^* that constitutes a difference *in the overall epistemic situation* of his belief in W^* , a difference that makes the conditional false in W^* but not in W , and so a difference that grounds a difference in the epistemic status of Smith’s belief in the two worlds.

But what if we suppose that Jones’s aunt exists in W as well? What if we also suppose that in W she bequeaths him an Escort and dies just a few seconds *after* Smith forms the belief that Jones owns an Escort (though it is still false at the time he forms it)? In that case, the *only* difference between the worlds is a few seconds in the time of a woman’s death. Certainly *that* fact cannot ground an improvement in Smith’s overall epistemic situation in W as compared with W^* . If we revise the case accordingly, (1d) seems vindicated.⁴⁵

What should we make of this added wrinkle? Well, consider the two options. Either

Case 1. Jones has an aunt in W who has made a will bequeathing Jones an Escort and who is about to die just after Smith forms the belief in question

or

Case 2. Jones has *no* aunt in W who has made a will bequeathing Jones an Escort and who is about to die just after Smith forms the belief in question.

First, consider Case 1. If Jones does have an aunt as described in W , then Smith’s belief in W is not warranted since his belief in W would be accidentally true if it were true. In that case—that is, in Case 1—the far away and unknown death of Jones’s aunt in W^* could not make Smith’s (otherwise warranted) belief unwarranted *because Smith doesn’t have an otherwise warranted belief*, i.e. a warranted belief in W . That’s just to say that premise 1d is true. So, in Case 1, premise 1d is true—the far away and unknown death of Jones’s aunt in W^* does *not* ground a difference in the overall epistemic situation of Smith’s belief.

But what about Case 2? Suppose Jones does *not* have an aunt in W , or if he does, that she has *not* bequeathed him an Escort in a will or any such thing. Indeed, suppose that, in W , *there is no accident waiting to happen at all*; that is, suppose that there is nothing in W that would make Smith’s belief accidentally true if it were true. In that case—that is, in Case 2—if Smith’s belief in W *were* true, it would not be accidentally true. But if there is an aunt in W^* who bequeaths Jones an Escort and dies just seconds before Smith forms that belief, and there is no such person in W (and there is no other accident waiting to happen), that difference constitutes a *monumental* difference in Smith’s overall epistemic situation in the two worlds. For, in that case, it is false in W^* that if Smith’s belief were true, it would not be accidentally true. Therefore, in Case 2, the far away and unknown death of Jones’s aunt in W^* —along with her existence in W^* , her will, etc.—could make Jones’s (otherwise warranted) belief unwarranted. That is to say 1d is false. So in Case 2,

⁴⁵ Indeed, Merricks suggests just that: “If it will help, we can add that Jones’ aunt dies and bequeaths in W as well, a few seconds after [Smith] formed the belief...” (Ibid., 629). We left this addition out of our initial presentation of his argument in order not to confuse the two cases and to highlight the difference in what follows.

premise 1d is false—the far away and unknown death of Jones’s aunt in W^* *does* ground a difference in the overall epistemic situation of Smith’s belief.

Merricks wants us to focus exclusively on Case 1. And, if we do, we will think that premise 1d is true. Of course, Merricks gets to pick his cases as he pleases—after all, it’s his argument. *But* if Case 2 describes *a possibility*, then there is a case in which premise 1d is false, and so we cannot universally generalize to premise 1 of the third nonpartisan argument for infallibilism. That is, if Case 2 describes a possibility, then we cannot say that *every* possible case is like Case 1—i.e., we cannot say that for *every* candidate for a warranted false belief there’s an accident waiting to happen—and so we cannot say that, in every possible case, if a belief can be at once warranted and false, then it can be warranted and accidentally true. So Merricks must say that

- Necessarily, for any possible world W_n and for any candidate for a warranted false belief that p , in W_n , there is an accident waiting to happen in W_n that would occur (making the belief that p accidentally true) if it were true.

But why believe this is true? Why suppose that, as a matter of necessity, there is an accident waiting to happen for any possible candidate for a warranted false belief? Nonpartisan reasons aside, isn’t it *at least* as plausible to suppose that some possible candidates for warranted false beliefs occur in situations where there is no such accident waiting to happen?

3.4 What about existential generalization?

Merricks treats the Smith case as a basis for a *universal* generalization to (1) via the argument at the beginning of section 3.1. This requires him to make the assumption indented in the last paragraph. We objected that it is at least as plausible to suppose that that assumption is false; more exactly, we objected that there is no nonpartisan reason to endorse it over its denial.

But perhaps Merricks can dispense with the assumption. Perhaps an *existential* generalization from Smith’s case will do. The third nonpartisan argument from possible accidentality would then look like this:

- 1*. If there exist some beliefs that can be at once warranted and false, then some of them can be warranted and accidentally true.
2. A belief cannot be warranted and accidentally true.
3. So, a belief cannot be at once warranted and false.

Our objection does not touch inferring premise 1* from the Smith case.⁴⁶ What should we say?

Briefly, two things. First, at most, the Smith case shows that there is a candidate for warranted false belief which has this property: *if it were warranted and false, then it would be possible that it is warranted and accidentally true*. But in that case, Smith’s belief is *not* in fact warranted. Nothing we have said implies that *some* candidates for warranted false belief will in fact not be at once warranted and false. If Smith’s belief is such a candidate, so be it. Second, premise 1* does not follow from what the Smith case shows. The lesson of the Smith case does not rule out two further claims: (a) Every other possible candidate for a warranted false belief which *is* such that if it were warranted and false, then it would be possible that it is warranted and accidentally true is in fact *not* warranted, and (b) each of the rest of the possible candidates for warranted false belief which is *not* such that if it were warranted and false, then it would be possible that it is

⁴⁶ An anonymous referee brought this line of thought to our attention.

warranted and accidentally true *is* in fact warranted. In that case, there will be some warranted false beliefs but it will be impossible for there to be a warranted accidentally true belief. So the Smith case does not support the existential generalization gambit.

4. Conclusion

We have examined three nonpartisan arguments for infallibilism, the thesis that a belief cannot be at once warranted and false. On several occasions when we have presented our ideas we have been interpreted as arguing that a belief can be at once warranted and false; we have been interpreted as arguing for fallibilism. In conclusion, we wish to be absolutely clear: we do *not* endorse fallibilism, our thesis is *not* that warrant does not entail truth. For all we have argued, fallibilism is false. We hope, however, to have shown that a reasonable rejection of fallibilism cannot be grounded in the three recent nonpartisan arguments we have assessed here. More importantly, perhaps, we hope to have shown that surmounting the Gettier Problem does not entail infallibilism. Infallibilism is no part of Gettier's legacy.⁴⁷

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