

EVIDENCE AND TRANSMISSION FAILURE

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ABSTRACT: Some philosophers (can be taken to) claim that there are no genuine instances of transmission failure provided we operate with the right account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning. My aim in this paper is to (begin to) clear the way for instances of transmission failure regardless of the account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning with which one operates. My aim is not to claim there are in fact genuine instances of transmission failure; merely to render it possible, on all – or most – plausible accounts of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning.

KEYWORDS: evidence, transmission failure, epistemic circularity

0.1 Consider the following argument:

- (MOORE) (1) I have hands.
- (2) If I have hands an external world exists.
- (3) An external world exists.

Our focus in this paper is on (MOORE), but points will generalise to (reasoning by means of) arguments with a similar structure. (MOORE) is clearly valid and its premises are true. Yet, to many, reasoning by means of this argument – call it (MOORE)-reasoning – seems defective. On one view, it is an example of transmission failure. In section 2 we'll come to precisify this concept. For now let's make do with a very rough, first pass at transmission failure. Philosophers locating the defectiveness of (MOORE)-reasoning in transmission failure, typically take (MOORE)-reasoning to suffer from a form of epistemic circularity: it's only if one already has warrant for (3), that one can have a warrant for (1). If (MOORE)-reasoning suffers from transmission failure in this way, we can say that propounding the argument cannot offer one a new route to a warranted belief in its conclusion.

0.2 What's one's warrant to believe (1)? Put differently: what's one's evidence for (1)? (Suppose the conditional premise (2) is knowable a priori.) These questions are badly formed. There are various different warrants one might have for (1). Lots of things could be one's evidence for (1). Suppose I'm sitting blindfolded,

unable to see my hands, and Edna whispers gently in my ear: “You have hands.” Edna’s utterance – on one plausible view – counts as good testimonial evidence for me that I have hands. That’s one form of evidence I might have for (1). And there are many others. But let’s focus on visual-perceptual evidence that I have hands, and specifically the *mere having* of a visual experience *as of* having hands – the having of which is compatible with my failing to have hands.¹ (Indeed, unless we focus on a particular form of evidence it will be indeterminate whether transmission failure occurs.) With this assumption about the nature of my evidence for (1), the idea that (MOORE)-reasoning involves epistemic circularity has some initial plausibility. For, it might be said, it’s only if I antecedently and independently have a warrant for (3) that an experience as of having hands constitutes a warrant for (1). If, by contrast, I had good reason to think that (3) was false and that I was a handless brain-in-a-vat with experiences that were being generated by an evil scientist, then merely having a visual experience as of having hands would not be such good evidence for (1).

If (MOORE)-reasoning does involve epistemic circularity, then following through the reasoning could not provide a new route to a warranted belief in (3). Even if one were to allow that it would provide a *new*, gratuitously circuitous, *route*, still it would not be a way of arriving, *for the first time*, at a position in which one had a warrant to believe (3).

0.3 Some philosophers – viz. Timothy Williamson,² John Hawthorne,³ and Nicholas Silins⁴ – (can be taken to) claim that there are *no* genuine instances of transmission failure, provided we operate with the right *account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence*⁵ for future reasoning.⁶ As to sources of warrant-or-evidence,

¹ An experience *as of* x is an experience representing x, the having of which is compatible with \sim x (and, indeed, compatible with x). This may need to be finessed, depending on one’s view on object-dependent experience, to the following: An experience *as of* x is an experience representing x, and *the having of an experience with the same conscious character* is compatible with \sim x (and, indeed, compatible with x).

² Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch.9.

³ John Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 34 n.86: “I find most alleged examples of [transmission failure] unconvincing.”

⁴ Nicholas Silins, “Transmission Failure Failure,” *Philosophical Studies* 126 (2005): 71-102. But see Nicholas Silins, “Basic Justification and the Moorean Response to the Skeptic,” in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology: Vol. 2*, eds. Tamar Gendler and John Hawthorne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 108-140, for an evolution in his views (128 n.27).

⁵ Cf. Peter Klein’s notion of “sources of justification” (Peter Klein, “Skepticism and Closure: Why the Evil Genius Argument Fails,” *Philosophical Topics* 23 (1995): 213-36.)

⁶ We can certainly grant to these epistemologists that there is *an* exceptionless notion of what we might call warrant transmission. We would then say that when *other epistemologists* talk

pre-theoretically, or before commitment to any particular theory, warrant or evidence can come in myriad forms: blood and DNA-samples, hearsay, facts, states of affairs, objects etc. Our principal focus, though, will be on two particular possible sources of warrant-or-evidence: an experience and a premise (i.e. a proposition).⁷ As to future reasoning, we may take inference to be our paradigm case thereof (as contrasted, for example, with coming to know that from which one infers).⁸ My aim in this paper is to (begin to) clear the way for instances of transmission failure *regardless of* the account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning with which one operates. My aim is not to claim there *are in fact* genuine instances of transmission failure; merely to render it *possible* on *all* – or most – plausible accounts of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning.⁹

0.4 Silins claims instances of transmission failure only arise on a particular – putatively flawed – *account* of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning.¹⁰ Call this *Silins's claim*. Here's a key commitment of this account. (Silins is going to reject the commitment and the account of which it is a commitment. It may help to keep (MOORE) in mind when reading this passage.):

[Y]ou might know a certain premise, or indeed be absolutely certain that the premise is true, yet still not possess the premise as a warrant for a conclusion you have competently deduced from the premise. On this view, if your inference provides you with any warrant for believing¹¹ the conclusion at all, the warrant

about there being instances of transmission failure, this suggests that they are using a more demanding notion of warrant transmission than the exceptionless notion. And one possible more demanding requirement – our focus – would be to exclude epistemic circularity.

⁷ Some readers may find it hard to think of a premise in an argument as *warrant-or-evidence*. My parenthetical reference to a proposition may make it less hard. Regardless, I ask for patience on the part of the reader, and trust the idea will be clearer by the paper's end.

⁸ And so “future” is not the temporal notion where the contrast is with “past” and “present” reasoning. Instead, in our paradigm case, we suppose a reasoner knows a proposition and ask what sources of warrant-or-evidence such a reasoner has at his disposal should he go on (*in the future; subsequently*) to perform an inference. Finally, our focus in this paper is on future *deductive* reasoning.

⁹ And, indeed, on *all* – or most – plausible *conceptions of evidential warrant* (a term explained in 1.1 *infra*).

¹⁰ Silins, “Transmission Failure,” 84-89. I call the account *fallibilism-* (explained in 1.2 *infra*). Strictly it is an account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning *and a conception of evidential warrant*. Silins's claim receives a sharpening later (see n.47 *infra*), but this version will do in the meantime. Finally, I take it this claim can be fairly ascribed to Silins. Nonetheless, should he resist it, the claim itself is worth independent exploration.

¹¹ My note: For Silins, “when [he] say[s] that someone's warrant *for believing* that p is that w... [he] means that the person believes that p, and that the person believes that p on the basis of

provided is the prior warrant for which you believe the premise. Thus even if you know that *p*, or are absolutely certain that *p*, it is still not the case that your warrant for believing the conclusion is that *p*.¹²

Sticking with (MOORE), suppose, as before, my warrant to believe (1) is my having an experience *as of* having hands. Nonetheless, suppose I can come to know, on the basis of this warrant, that I have hands. Suppose also, if I know (1), I am certain that (1) is true. Finally suppose I competently deduce – using the conditional, (2) – (3) from (1). Silins now cuts in that, on this (to-be-rejected) account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning, if my inference provides me with any warrant to believe (3) at all, the warrant provided is my experience as of having hands. Crucially, Silins points out, on this account, even though I know that I have hands, and am certain that I have hands, it's not the case that I can use the fact that I have hands as a source of warrant-or-evidence *for future reasoning*. Specifically, I can't use *the premise* that I have hands – a premise, note, whose truth is *incompatible with* my being in an idealistic world – as a source of warrant-or-evidence to believe there to be an external world. Rather, on this account, all I can use is *my experience* as of having hands, combined with inference – an experience, note, the having of which is *not incompatible with* my being in an idealistic world.¹³

Silins's claim that instances of transmission failure arise only on one (to-be-rejected) account is resisted in this paper. One cannot confine the possibility of transmission failure to this one account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning. So, at least, I shall argue.

the relevant [warrant, w].” (Silins, “Transmission Failure,” 74.) I do not take this to be orthodox usage, but we can grant it for present purposes without harm.

¹² Silins, “Transmission Failure,” 88.

¹³ It might be worth quickly pointing out what else a philosopher operating with this account *can* do (all assuming he meets the epistemic standards for knowing (1)). First, he can competently deduce (3) and come to believe (3) on that basis: he can allow that, in the exceptionless sense of what we might call warrant transmission (cf. n.6 *supra*), the experiential warrant for (1) is transmitted to (3). Second, if such a philosopher is a *dogmatist* (see James Pryor, “The Skeptic and the Dogmatist,” *Nous* 34 (2000): 517-49), he can allow that, even in a more demanding sense of warrant transmission that excludes epistemic circularity, the experiential warrant for (1) is transmitted to (3). Finally – whether dogmatist or not –, he can allow that, if asked why he believes (3), he can legitimately reply: Well, I have hands – I know that much – and (3) follows from what I know.

1. Conceptions of Evidential Warrant and Accounts of Sources of Warrant-or-Evidence for Future Reasoning

1.1 Consider (where, throughout, ‘*S*’ is a placeholder for a subject and ‘*p*’ for a proposition):

Fallibilism: *S* can know *p* when *S*’s evidence for *p* is compatible with $\sim p$.

Infallibilism: *S* cannot know *p*, when *S*’s evidence for *p* is compatible with $\sim p$.

Focusing on (MOORE), fallibilists can suppose my *having an experience as of having hands* is – or can be – my way of coming to know that I have hands.¹⁴ Infallibilists, by contrast, typically suppose my *seeing that I have hands* is my way of coming to know that I have hands, where my seeing that I have hands is incompatible with my not having hands.¹⁵ Think of fallibilism and infallibilism as particular *conceptions of evidential warrant*: they’re particular views of what it takes for a piece of evidence to warrant a belief in a proposition for a subject such that that subject can acquire knowledge. A philosopher’s conception of evidential warrant is typically associated with a particular account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning. A fallibilist typically takes an *experience* as of having hands as his source of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning (and indeed sometimes, perhaps often, for (1) itself). An infallibilist typically takes (knowledge of) *(1) itself* – a *premise* – as his source of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning (and indeed sometimes, perhaps often, for (1) itself).

1.2 Philosophers who’ve explored the *possibility* of transmission failure in (MOORE)-reasoning (and in like arguments) – viz. Martin Davies, James Pryor, and Crispin Wright¹⁶ – operate with a fallibilist conception of evidential warrant. Let’s – exhaustively and exclusively – partition fallibilism as follows:

¹⁴ Such fallibilists will be dogmatists. All dogmatists are fallibilists; but not all fallibilists are dogmatists.

¹⁵ Cf. John McDowell, a *fact disjunctivist* (John McDowell, “Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68 (1982): 455-79, and “Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space,” in *Subject, Thought and Context*, eds. Philip Pettit and John McDowell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 137-68), and Williamson (*Knowledge and Its Limits*, ch.1) for whom seeing that *p* entails knowing that *p*. Note that a fallibilist *may also*, for example, allow that sometimes, perhaps often, we see that *p* – that is, we *enjoy* evidence incompatible with $\sim p$.

¹⁶ See Martin Davies, “Epistemic Entitlement, Warrant Transmission and Easy Knowledge,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume* 78 (2004): 213-45, and “Two Purposes of Arguing and Two Epistemic Projects,” in *Mind, Ethics, and Conditionals: Themes from the Philosophy of Frank Jackson*, ed. Ian Ravenscroft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 337-83, James Pryor, “What’s Wrong with Moore’s Argument,” *Philosophical Issues* 14

Fallibilism-: S can know p , when S 's evidence for p is compatible with $\sim p$, and when S knows p , p itself is not part of S 's evidence-base for future reasoning.¹⁷

Fallibilism+: S can know p when S 's evidence for p is compatible with $\sim p$, and when S knows p , p itself is part of S 's evidence-base for future reasoning.

These theses are constructed by combining a conception of evidential warrant (first conjunct: fallibilism) with an account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning (second conjunct: "evidence-base for future reasoning").¹⁸ Precisely what the second conjunct of fallibilism- forbids is a subtle matter (cf. n.13 supra). I take it, somewhat suggestively, to be the following: The fallibilist-denies that a known premise, p , can itself be used in future reasoning, but this leaves open that future reasoning from a known premise, p , can lead to, for example, further knowledge.¹⁹ Fallibilists are typically fallibilists-.²⁰ But nothing in fallibilism rules out being a fallibilist+.

1.3 Now consider:

Infallibilism-: S cannot know p when S 's evidence for p is compatible with $\sim p$, and when S knows p , p itself is part of S 's evidence-base for future reasoning.²¹

(2004): 349-78, and Crispin Wright, "Facts and Certainty," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 71 (1985): 429-72, and "(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: Moore and McDowell," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (2002): 330-48.

¹⁷ Note that this leaves open that, though p itself is *not* part of S 's evidence-base for future reasoning, it *is* part of S 's evidence-base for knowing p .

¹⁸ A note about the *exhaustivity* of these two theses: I take it that p either *necessarily is* or *necessarily is not* part of S 's evidence-base for future reasoning. Consistently with this, contingent matters could be in play rendering p , though part of S 's evidence-base for future reasoning, *not exploitable* (e.g. on account of epistemic circularity). (Alternatively, one might recast the second conjunct of fallibilism- as " p itself *necessarily is not* part of S 's evidence-base for future reasoning" and the second conjunct of fallibilism+ as " p itself *is or can be* part of S 's evidence-base for future reasoning.")

¹⁹ Where "future reasoning *from* a known premise" is, perhaps, elliptical for "future reasoning *from warrant for* a known premise." Finally, such a fallibilist can allow that, if the believed premise, p , is not known, perhaps because it is not true, then reasoning from p to a conclusion may be above reproach and yet will not normally lead to knowledge.

²⁰ E.g. Fred Dretske, notwithstanding he's classifiable as an infallibilist on a different way – present in the literature – of carving things up. Finally, I take it dogmatists can be either fallibilists- or fallibilists+.

²¹ There is close to being merely *logical space* for *infallibilism-* (*modulo* "evidence-base" being used in the way I describe). At any rate, it's difficult to discern the motivation for such a thesis. Given this, in the main text I quickly revert to simply talking of infallibilists.

As with our previous two theses, this thesis is constructed by combining a conception of evidential warrant (first conjunct: infallibilism) with an account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning (second conjunct: “evidence-base for future reasoning”). To conclude: How do the fallibilist+ and infallibilist+ differ? Each, after all, allows *p* itself into one’s evidence-base for future reasoning. Two features distinguish them. First, most obviously, they operate with different conceptions of evidential warrant: for the former – but not the latter – one can know *p* when one’s evidence for *p* is compatible with $\sim p$. Second, and less obviously, the latter’s allowance of *p* itself into one’s evidence-base *may well not be confined* to future reasoning (*p* itself, on versions of this view, is part of one’s evidence-base *for knowing p*), while the former’s allowance *may well be* so confined (on versions of this view).²² In part because our chief focus in this paper is on *future* reasoning, and in part because we only seek to secure the *possibility* – rather than genuine instances – of transmission failure, neither difference, though important, turns out to be *fundamental* for our purposes.²³

We’ve got a (novel) taxonomy of conceptions of evidential warrant and accounts of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning to hand. Now let’s try to precisify the concept of transmission failure, and locate it within this taxonomy.

2. Transmission Failure and (In)fallibilism

2.1 Consider this (sufficient) condition for non-transmission:

(NT) Non-transmission of warrant

Epistemic warrant is not transmitted from the premises of a valid argument to its conclusion if the putative support offered for one of the premises is conditional on its being antecedently and independently reasonable to accept the conclusion.²⁴

²² Cf. nn.15 and 17 supra.

²³ Many issues I’ve opened up in this section require more detailed treatment. For example: What does it take – knowledge? warrant(ed belief)? truth? – for a proposition to be included in one’s evidence? Is (possession of) propositional evidence for *p* compatible with $\sim p$? On some views your evidence will include the proposition that *p* when you know *p*, but you could have had that evidence even if you warrantably, yet falsely, believed that *p*. Moreover, my discussion of the presented theses has proceeded in hedged terms with, for example, “often,” “typically,” and “may well” in place of “necessarily” at many junctures (here and in what follows). I don’t see that this is avoidable, however.

²⁴ Davies, “Epistemic Entitlement,” 221.

Let's spell out *one* view of how (MOORE)-reasoning *might* suffer from transmission failure.²⁵ Let's take the fallibilist-. Suppose the fallibilist- claims²⁶ that:

(*AW*) In order for one's visual experience as of having hands to act as warrant for

(1) one must, antecedently, have warrant for (3).²⁷

If (*AW*) is true, one's warrant for (1) will depend on an antecedent warrant for (3). So (MOORE)-reasoning will suffer from epistemic circularity and (*NT*) will be triggered. Suppose that one *in fact has* antecedent warrant for (3), so that one's visual experience does count as warrant for (1). Then, according to (*NT*), the warrant for (1) that is constituted by one's experience as of having hands is not transmitted across the conditional – (2) – to serve as warrant for (3).²⁸

2.2 What about our fallibilist+?²⁹ Consider him debating with our fallibilist-: If you're allowing – as a good fallibilist should – that I can come to know *p* notwithstanding my evidence for *p* is compatible with $\sim p$, and allowing that I do indeed come to know (1) on the basis of such *non-entailing* evidence, why are you hamstringing me from using (1) *itself* as evidence in my future reasoning? If you were a sceptic about our knowledge of quotidian propositions, I'd vehemently disagree with you – being a good fallibilist myself –, but I could at least make sense of your prohibition on my use of (1) as evidence in future reasoning: I couldn't so use (1) as I wouldn't – ex hypothesi – know (1). But given – as we can happily

²⁵ Cf. Davies, "Two Purposes," for another (complementary) way.

²⁶ Cf. Wright, "Facts and Certainty," "(Anti-)Sceptics," and "Warrant for Nothing (And Foundations for Free?)," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume 78* (2004): 167-212.

²⁷ Rejection of (*AW*) is a defining feature of dogmatism. In this section we focus on fallibilists not flatly rejecting (*AW*) – that is, fallibilists allowing that (MOORE)-reasoning might involve epistemic circularity, and so might suffer from transmission failure. Indeed given the paper's overall focus is not to claim there *are in fact* genuine instances of transmission failure, but merely to render it *possible* on *all* – or most – plausible accounts of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning, we do not definitively adjudicate on (*AW*) (or its cognate, (*AW**) – see 3.2 *infra*) at all in this paper.

²⁸ This failure of transmission is, trivially, not a failure of transmission in the exceptionless sense (cf. n.6 *supra*). It is failure of transmission in the more demanding sense that requires that there not be epistemic circularity. And it seems that this remains the situation even if we regard the warrant for (1) as being *constituted* by *both* the experience as of having hands *and* the antecedent warrant for (3).

²⁹ Cf. Silins, "Transmission Failure."

agree as fallibilists – I know (1), your exclusion of *it – that premise* – from my evidence-base for future reasoning is unmotivated.³⁰

Our fallibilist+ makes a good case. So let's grant him – *pro tem* – victory over his fallibilist- foe. Our fallibilist+ may have won this particular battle, but not yet the war. Fallibilist- is a dogged soul. Suppose he – accepting defeat over the inclusion of (1) *itself* in one's evidence-base for future reasoning – marshals (*AW*) and claims that fallibilist+'s (MOORE)-reasoning thereby suffers transmission failure.

If, however, fallibilism+ is true, it's no longer clear (*AW*) leads to (MOORE)-reasoning suffering (complete)³¹ transmission failure. Why not? After all, isn't it still the case – thanks to (*AW*) – that (*NT*) is triggered? The wrinkle is that it's no longer clear that (*NT*) is *applicable, given the truth of fallibilism+*. And that's because of (*NT*)'s mere talk of “*support...for one of the premises,*” and not, additionally, talk of *premises themselves*.³² (*NT*) seems to, *pace* fallibilism+, preclude (1) *itself* from counting amongst one's evidence-base for future reasoning. In other words, (*NT*) doesn't seem to capture adequately the account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning with which a fallibilist+ operates. Take this to be what I'm driving at in suggesting (*NT*) isn't *applicable* to fallibilism+ (and, *mutatis mutandis*, in subsequent uses of “applicable”). Put differently: the non-transmission of one's *warrant for* (1) – which, by (*NT*), is one's *support for* (1) – leaves open that (1) *itself* (which one ex hypothesi knows) transmits across the conditional ((2)) to provide warrant for (3). In sum, I think, for all we've said, our fallibilist+ has won another (interim) battle.

2.3 Before responding to our fallibilist+, let's tie together the fallibilist+ and the infallibilist (i.e. the infallibilist+ – cf.n.21 *supra*). To be sure each philosopher – the fallibilist+ and the infallibilist – operates with a different conception of evidential

³⁰ Both of these fallibilists should agree that, provided that one knows (1), one will do well to believe (3), since it follows from (1) by a palpably valid inference. (Of course, if one gets good evidence against (3) then the palpably valid inference may have to be run in the opposite direction.) But, because of possible epistemic circularity, there is more to be said about why one does well to believe (3). The argument via (1) and (2) appears to involve a detour and, in order to understand one's warrant to believe (3) after the inference, one needs to articulate the nature of the antecedent warrant – that is, one's warrant to believe (3) even before the inference.

³¹ As will become clear, here (and in what follows), when I talk of “complete” transmission failure I am bracketing any exceptionless notion of warrant transmission (cf. n.6 *supra*) and focusing on a more demanding notion. If there is, in this sense, “complete” transmission failure, it means *all*, and not just *some*, of one's sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning fail to transmit. Germanely to this, I explicitly expand what I call the *standard* account of *warrant* in 3.2 *infra*.

³² This is evidence philosophers operating with (*NT*) are (closet) fallibilists-.

warrant. But, for the purposes of *this* transmission failure debate, this difference is less important than one's account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning.³³ Of *more* importance, then, is whether or not, when a subject comes to know (1) (or a like proposition), (1) *itself* becomes part of that subject's evidence-base for future reasoning. And on this the fallibilist+ and the infallibilist are united: it does. We thus must alter standard taxonomies. Typically, in debates pertaining to evidence, fallibilists and infallibilists are taken to be the two camps ripe for comparison.³⁴ But, in this transmission failure debate it's best to group fallibilists- in one corner (by dint of their *refusal to allow* (1)-type propositions into one's evidence-base for future reasoning), and fallibilists+ and infallibilists together in the other corner (by dint of their *allowing* (1)-type propositions into one's evidence-base for future reasoning). We thus might hope that a good response – in the case at hand – to the fallibilist+ will also count as a good response to the infallibilist.

3. Modifying (NT) (and other germane theses)

3.1 The challenge is to see if we can construct a motivated (sufficient) condition for non-transmission of warrant which – unlike (NT) – is applicable to fallibilism+ and infallibilism, and which, if the condition is satisfied, precludes (1) itself from transmitting across the conditional ((2)) to provide warrant for (3).³⁵ A natural first response to putting the challenge this way would be to ask: What does it mean for (1) *itself* to fail to transmit across the conditional ((2)) to provide warrant for (3)? After all (MOORE) is an instance of *modus ponens*. And let's assume a plausible knowledge-closure principle, say: If S knows P and S knows P entails Q, then S knows (or at least is in a position to know) Q. Given this (and given (2) is knowable a priori), if I know (1), I know (or am in a position to know) (3). What room is there for a motivated principle – a modification of (NT) – granting this,

³³ Our excursus into conceptions of evidential warrant was still useful. First, standard taxonomies foreground conceptions of evidential warrant: so this excursus helps locate our taxonomy in relation to standard ones. Second, while there are no entailments in play from one's conception of evidential warrant to one's account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning (or conversely), we might think that the former *helps explain* the latter.

³⁴ Or a divide is effected between forms of *internalism* (typically associated with fallibilism) and *externalism* (typically associated with infallibilism). Effecting such a divide will not serve present purposes.

³⁵ Ideally this condition would also be applicable to *fallibilists-*. But this seems unrealistic. Nonetheless, a desideratum of parsimony – viz. *ceteris paribus*, construct as few theses as possible – operates in what follows.

yet allowing that (1) itself can fail to transmit across the conditional ((2)) to provide warrant for (3)?

3.2 First, let's distinguish between a closure question and a transmission question.³⁶ The germane closure question asks: Is it possible to know (1), know that (1) entails (3), yet not be in a position to know (3)? The germane transmission question asks: Is it possible to know (1), know that (1) entails (3), yet not *thereby* – that is, in virtue of recognising the entailment from (1) to (3) – be in a position to know (3)? Or, differently: Is it possible to know (1), know that (1) entails (3), yet not be in a *first time* position to know (3)? Let's answer the closure question: "No," yet remain agnostic about the transmission question.³⁷ I take it that, even answering the closure question: "No," conceptual room is left open to deny that (1) itself transmits.

Second, let's expand what I'll call the *standard* account of *warrant*. Standardly, one's warrant is one's warrant *for this or that proposition*, and does not include *the proposition itself*. But we're not bound by standard usage. Indeed we're currently granting the fallibilist+ and infallibilist their claims that premise (1) becomes part of one's evidence-base for future reasoning, once one knows (1). So we might modify (*NT*) by making explicit that warrant includes any known premises.³⁸ Here's a first pass:

(*NT) Non-transmission of warrant**

Epistemic warrant – where warrant includes any known premises – is not transmitted from the premises of a valid argument to its conclusion if the putative support offered for one of the premises – or knowledge of any of the premises themselves – is conditional on its being antecedently and independently reasonable to accept the conclusion.³⁹

³⁶ Cf. Davies, "Two Purposes."

³⁷ For philosophers answering the closure question: "Yes," cf. Fred Dretske ("Epistemic Operators," *Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970): 1007-23, "Conclusive Reasons," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 49 (1971): 1-22, and "The Case Against Closure," and "Reply to Hawthorne," in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, eds. Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 13-25, 43-6), Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*. (Cambridge: Belknap, 1981), and Mark Heller, "Relevant Alternatives and Closure," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1999): 196-208. For remarks on how one's operative account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning affects one's answer to the closure question, see Klein, "Skepticism and Closure."

³⁸ "Warrant" is hereinafter used in this broad sense unless stated, or indicated, otherwise.

³⁹ Objection: If knowledge of a premise is conditional on antecedent warrant for the conclusion then this will be because epistemic warrant for the premise is conditional on antecedent warrant for the conclusion. So it is unclear why we need to introduce (*NT**). Reply: Insofar as

Recall that, to show (MOORE)-reasoning suffers transmission failure by (*NT*), our fallibilist- marshalled thesis (*AW*). And we can construct a thesis paralleling (*AW*) – call it (*AW**) – which makes room for (complete) transmission failure in (MOORE)-reasoning by (*NT**):

(*AW**) In order for one’s warrant for (1) – where warrant includes any known premises – to so act as warrant, one must, antecedently, have warrant for (3).

If (*AW**) is true, and (as a central case) if one *in fact has* antecedent warrant for (3), (MOORE)-reasoning suffers transmission failure by (*NT**). Is, then, this pair of theses – (*NT**) and (*AW**) – motivated?⁴⁰

4. Motivating our Modifications

4.1 Let’s start with (*AW**). As with (*AW*), I don’t want to marshal arguments purporting to secure (*AW**)’s truth. Instead, here, I simply want to present a way of formulating or expressing a defense of these (modified) theses. Recall, our overall strategy is not to secure *genuine instances* of transmission failure; it’s merely to render it *possible*, on *all* – or most – plausible accounts of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning. So, how might one go about expressing a defense of (*AW**)? Let’s approach this question indirectly. We’ll first consider how one might express a defense (*AW*) and see if that helps us in discerning a way to express a defense of (*AW**). Recall (*AW*):

(*AW*) In order for one’s visual experience as of having hands to act as warrant for (1) one must, antecedently, have warrant for (3).

One (likely) way of formulating or expressing a defense of this thesis would be by making use of notions contained within an account of a relation of *epistemic antecedence* (or *priority*):

(*EA*) One’s warrant for accepting *p* is antecedent to one’s warrant for accepting *q* iff one’s reasons for accepting *p* do not *presuppose or rest on* one’s reasons for accepting *q*.⁴¹

this objector is adopting my expanded account of warrant, I agree with the premise but not the conclusion. Only (*NT**) allows us to make explicit the pivotal relation of epistemic antecedence between a (*known*) *premise* and a *standard warrant* (see sections 4 and 5 *infra*).

⁴⁰ So my focus in this section (and those to come) is on *known* premises. What happens when, say, the premise is false but warrantably believed (cf. n.23 *supra*)? I bracket this question, but see, *inter alia*, Peter Klein, “Useful False Beliefs,” in *Epistemology: New Essays*, ed. Quentin Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 25-61.

Someone defending (*AW*) would likely claim that one's visual experience acting as warrant for (1) presupposes or rests on one's reasons for accepting an external world exists. We don't need to *agree* with that bald statement offered in defense of (*AW*).⁴² Indeed we here offer no reasons for (*AW*)'s (or (*AW**)'s) truth. We just need to understand the claim so formulated or expressed.

4.2 That's (*AW*). Now what about (*AW**)? We might formulate or express a defense of (*AW**) by making use of notions contained within an account of the following relation of epistemic antecedence:

(*EA**) One's warrant for accepting *p* is antecedent to one's warrant for accepting *q* – where warrant includes any known premises – iff one's reasons for accepting *p* do not *presuppose or rest on* one's reasons for accepting *q* – where one's reasons include any known premises.

We're supposing, recall, that (1) *itself* – which we ex hypothesi know – is part of our evidence-base for future reasoning. In assessing (MOORE)-reasoning armed with notions from (*EA**), we're (in part) asking: Does my knowing that (1) presuppose or rest on my reasons for accepting (3)?

Let's make an assumption – an assumption favourable to fallibilists+ in particular. To understand why we're making this assumption we need to understand a claim some (prominent) infallibilists make. Some infallibilists claim that *all and only* what one knows is one's evidence.⁴³ So for this type of infallibilist our supposition that (1) itself is *part of* one's evidence-base for future reasoning, and that one's evidence-base for future reasoning *includes* (1) itself, is a slightly misleading supposition: for them, (knowledge of) (1) itself *exhaustively constitutes* one's evidence-base for future reasoning (prior to an act of inferring (3)).⁴⁴ Any

⁴¹ Cf. Pryor, "The Skeptic and the Dogmatist," 525. Should the left-hand-side of (*EA*) strictly be: It's not the case that one's warrant for accepting *q* is epistemically antecedent (or prior) to one's warrant for accepting *p*? Couldn't the right-hand-side be satisfied and one's warrant for *p* be epistemically *neither-prior-to-nor-posterior-to* one's warrant for *q*? Finally, note that we can also, I take it, say: One's warrant for *p*₁ is antecedent to one's warrant for *p*₂ iff one's warrant for *p*₂ is *dependent* on one's warrant for *p*₁ and one's warrant for *p*₁ is *not dependent* on one's warrant for *p*₂.

⁴² Nor do we need to find this notion of one reason presupposing or resting on another perfectly perspicuous; it's left intuitive.

⁴³ See Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits*, ch.9.

⁴⁴ An infallibilist *might* claim that one's evidence for (1) consists of knowledge of (1) *and knowledge* of one's having an experience as of having hands. If he does so, the points I make in relation to the fallibilist+ here can be marshalled, *mutatis mutandis*, with respect to this infallibilist. But this is – for good reason – currently an unpopular way to be an infallibilist, so I'll ignore it in what follows. An infallibilist will typically only claim that one's evidence for

pragmatic implication that there must or may be more to one's evidence-base for future reasoning than (1) itself should be cancelled. So I hereby cancel any such implication by explicitly noting that "part" does not mean "proper part," and "includes" does not mean there need be any more evidence. For our fallibilist+, meanwhile, *all* that one knows is in one's evidence-base for future reasoning, but not *only* what one knows: one still, in addition to (knowledge of) (1) itself, has one's visual experience as of having hands as part of one's evidence-base for future reasoning. This, at least, is one plausible way of carving up evidence for a fallibilist+.⁴⁵

What's the purpose of this detour? Recall, the strategy is to explore using notions from (*EA**) to formulate or express a defense of (*AW**), and to claim (*AW**) opens up the possibility of transmission failure for fallibilists+ and infallibilists by (*NT**). Given this, we don't want the fallibilist+⁴⁶ to be inexorably lumbered with (complete) transmission failure in (MOORE)-reasoning because *part of his warrant for (1)* – the part he shares with the fallibilist-, viz. a visual experience as of having hands – fails to transmit to (3).⁴⁷ To allow for this would be to slur over the important difference between the fallibilist- and the fallibilist+. To preclude this from happening, we make our assumption, viz. *some* of one's warrant can fail to transmit in an argument without *all* of one's warrant failing to transmit.⁴⁸ Maybe this assumption seems too obvious to need stating. But note that, without this assumption, if we suppose that (*AW**)'s truth can be secured (perhaps with use of notions from (*EA**)), this inevitably leads to a fallibilist+ being committed to (MOORE)-reasoning suffering transmission failure by (*NT**). And that's because

(1) consists of knowledge of one's having an experience as of having hands in the *bad case* – that is, when $\sim(1)$. But our principal focus in this paper is not on bad cases.

⁴⁵ There's logical space for a fallibilist+ to claim that his knowledge that (1) *trumps* or *wipes out* any non-entailing evidence he has for (1). But I find this a peculiar way of carving things up. To complete the picture, for our fallibilist- neither all that one knows, nor only what one knows, is in one's evidence-base for future reasoning.

⁴⁶ Or the infallibilist (cf. n.44 *supra*); but the fallibilist+ is the philosopher driving our present concern.

⁴⁷ Recall that the fallibilists+ allows that when *S* knows *p*, *p* itself is part of *S*'s evidence-base for future reasoning. It is thus not a flawed account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning by the lights of Silins's claim (cf. 0.4 *supra*). But it should be clear that we would not have answered Silins's claim by showing that the warrant the fallibilist+ can share with the fallibilist- may fail to transmit. To make the dialectic clearer we may wish to sharpen Silins's claim thus: instances of *complete* transmission failure only arise on a particular – putatively flawed – account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning (cf. n.31 *supra*).

⁴⁸ *Mutatis mutandis* for *reasons*: some of one's reasons for (1) may presuppose or rest on one's reasons for (3) without other of one's reasons for (1) presupposing or resting on one's reasons for (3).

our trio of theses – (EA^*) , (AW^*) , and (NT^*) – don't themselves discriminate between different warrants one might have for (1) (and for (3)). Given the two types of warrant on which we're focusing – viz. an experience and a premise – are lumped together, if one type fails to transmit in (MOORE)-reasoning – viz. the experience –, (NT^*) is sufficiently coarse-grained (a bad thing) that it delivers the result that (MOORE)-reasoning suffers from transmission failure, period. This is an unwelcome result: our modified (transmission failure) theses – (EA^*) , (AW^*) , and (NT^*) – should be able to discriminate the salient differences between the fallibilist- and the fallibilist+. We need theses which *leave room* – in line with our assumption – for one type of warrant to *fail to transmit* in (MOORE)-reasoning (e.g. here, the experience), and another type of warrant *to transmit* (e.g. here, the premise). Rather than further refining, and complicating, our modified theses *themselves*, I leave the task of avoiding the foregoing unwelcome result to *sensitive application* of the modified theses.

4.3 Let's take stock. We might reconstruct the foregoing dialectic thus. We set out fallibilism-. We then set up three theses – (EA) , (AW) , and (NT) – which seemed motivated, and captured adequately the fallibilist-'s account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence (for future reasoning). We used notions from (EA) to describe one way to express a defense of (AW) . We then noted that, assuming (AW) and fallibilism-, we had transmission failure in (MOORE)-reasoning by (NT) . Fine. We then noted that it wasn't clear the account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence (for future reasoning) presupposed by these three theses was the same account with which fallibilists+ and infallibilists operate. Next we set up three modified theses – (EA^*) , (AW^*) , and (NT^*) – to see if we could construct a motivated transmission failure thesis which operated with an account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning friendly to fallibilists+ and infallibilists. But while our three modified theses operated with a (disjunctive) account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence (for future reasoning) not unacceptable to fallibilists+ and infallibilists, they were vulnerable to two objections from the two camps: a *pragmatic implication* objection (from infallibilists, which we cancelled) and a *coarse-grained* objection (from fallibilists+, which we deflected).

In sum, our original three theses – (EA) , (AW) , and (NT) – are serviceable for analysis of fallibilism- (but not fallibilism+ and infallibilism). Our three modified theses – (EA^*) , (AW^*) , and (NT^*) – are serviceable for analysis of fallibilism+ and infallibilism (but not fallibilism-). So we have two sets of three theses, which sets jointly cover all – or most – plausible accounts of the sources of warrant-or-evidence (for future reasoning).

5. Might Introducing (EA*) be More Difficult than Introducing (EA)?

5.1 There may be especial problems involved with introducing our *modified* theses. Let's focus on a putative problem arising over introducing (EA*) (which doesn't arise when introducing (EA)). How exactly can a *premise* – a source of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning, by fallibilism+ and infallibilism – fail to transmit? I accept this explanatory challenge. Consider a fallibilist+ or infallibilist debating with a proponent of our modified theses, and reasoning thus: I can sort of make sense of *support for* a premise – say, an experience – failing to transmit across entailments or inferences. I've heard talk of an *abstract space of warrants* and I can see that some warrants might be *epistemically antecedent* to others in that abstract space of warrants. So if I'm trying to non-question-beggingly engage the external world sceptic, I can see that my warrant for (1) could fail to be epistemically antecedent to my warrant for (3). But I can't make sense of relations of epistemic antecedence between a *premise* ((1)) and a *warrant* for a premise ((3)). The former is a proposition I, ex hypothesi, know; the latter is warrant for a proposition I fail – prior to inference – to know. To talk of a relation of epistemic antecedence between a premise and warrant for a premise is close to a category error: it's introducing an epistemic relation between two radically different things. And while, for example, knowledge is an epistemic relation between a (knowing) *subject* and a *proposition* (at a time) – two very different relata if ever there were –, there's something distinctively problematic about introducing a relation of *epistemic antecedence* between two relata of radically different kinds. To introduce a relation of epistemic antecedence, don't the relata have to be of the same kind?⁴⁹ This, I take it, is a forceful objection which could be made by a fallibilist+ or infallibilist to (EA*), and any resultant use of (NT*) via (AW*).⁵⁰

5.2 We must distinguish between a *premise* and *knowledge of* a premise. Once we do so the objection dissolves. So far I've played fast and loose with what form evidence for future reasoning takes – better: how we should describe such evidence – for a fallibilist+ or infallibilist. I've switched between (1) *itself* and *knowledge of* (1). I take it these are, for our purposes – we suppose I *know* (1) –,

⁴⁹ Cross-categorial relations are routinely posited in philosophy. An example from metaphysics: the truthmaker relation has been posited between a (non-propositional) truthmaker and a (true) proposition (see David Armstrong, *Truth and Truthmakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)). So the objection in the main text is a specific objection focused on the relation of epistemic antecedence.

⁵⁰A trio of theses such as these is a (prominent) way to argue for transmission failure – it may not be the *only* such way (cf. 2.1 *supra*).

two different descriptions of the same piece of evidence. And we can note that epistemologists who operate with the former description typically take (1) itself to be in one's evidence-base for future reasoning *because* one (ex hypothesi) knows (1). I propose we describe (part of) the fallibilist+'s and the infallibilist's evidence-base for future reasoning as *knowledge of (1)* (rather than as *(1) itself*).⁵¹ Once this is done there's no especial problem about seeing how a relation of epistemic antecedence might hold. We simply ask: Does my knowing (1) presuppose or rest on my warrant for (3)?⁵² To be sure, different epistemologists will give different answers to this question. But that's no slur on the intelligibility of the question – indeed it counts in its favour.⁵³

A caveat: To require that the fallibilist+ and infallibilist describe this evidence in this way in this transmission failure debate, isn't to require that he *always* so describe his warrant. Nor, relatedly, is it to say that the alternative description of the evidence is deficient.

In sum, one might have difficulty with the intelligibility of the notion of epistemic antecedence, period. But I've shown there's no especial problem of applying the notion of epistemic antecedence to a fallibilist+'s and an infallibilist's account of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning. Put differently: if one hasn't a problem with (*EA*), then one shouldn't have a problem with (*EA**)

6. Conclusion

6.1 I take myself to have shown that motivated transmission failure conditions can be constructed which are applicable to – capture adequately – all – or most – plausible accounts of the sources of warrant-or-evidence for future reasoning. I haven't shown that there are in fact genuine cases of transmission failure. I have,

⁵¹ Why, then, did I play fast and loose with my description of the evidence? First, I want to leave open (cf. n.23 *supra*) that something short of knowledge of a proposition can suffice for a proposition to be in one's evidence-base for future reasoning. Second, I want to keep vivid, with Silins, the thought that, upon competent inference from a known premise, *the premise itself* can become one's warrant to believe the conclusion.

⁵² Pryor does "extend th[e] notion of epistemic priority to knowledge as follows: you count as *knowing p1* antecedently to knowing *p2* just in case you know *p1* and *p2*, and *the justification* on which you base your belief in *p1* is antecedent to the justification on which you base your belief in *p2*" ("The Skeptic and the Dogmatist," 525). But insofar as we are here interested in (at one level of abstraction – cf. n. 38 *supra*) a *cross-categorical* relation this notion will not serve our purposes (cf. n. 39 *supra*).

⁵³ Indeed, even the following extreme response, I take to count in its favour: Once I know (1), never mind how, I'll be able to *exploit* (1) as evidence for (3).

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though, demonstrated that the fallibilist+ and infallibilist cannot evade questions of transmission failure as easily as they might have hoped. Williamson's, Hawthorne's, and Silins's hard-line against genuine instances of transmission failure is not warranted.^{54,55}

⁵⁴ It is a further task – one not attempted in this paper – to show why, for example, an infallibilist might plausibly take (MOORE)-reasoning to *suffer* from some kind of epistemic circularity.

⁵⁵ Thanks to Martin Davies and Nico Silins for stimulating discussion.