Authority without privilege: How to be a Dretskean conciliatory skeptic on self-knowledge

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ABSTRACT: Dretske is a "conciliatory skeptic" on self-knowledge. Take some subject S such that (i) S thinks that P and (ii) S knows that she has thoughts. Dretske's theory can be put as follows: S has a privileged way of knowing what she thinks, but she has no privileged way of knowing that she thinks it. There is much to be said on behalf of conciliatory skepticism ("CS" for short) and Dretske's defense of it. We aim to show, however, that Dretske's defense fails, in that (in part) if his defense of CS's skeptical half succeeds, then his defense of CS's conciliatory half fails. We then suggest a potential way forward. We suggest in particular that the correct way of being a Dretskean conciliatory skeptic is to deny that S has a privileged way of knowing about her thoughts, but to grant that she is nonetheless an authority on her thoughts.

1   Introduction

Dretske (2003a, 2003c, 2006b, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c) is a "conciliatory skeptic" on self-knowledge.[1] Take some subject S such that (i) S thinks that P and (ii) S knows that she has thoughts. Dretske's theory can be put as follows:

> Conciliatory Skepticism (CS): S has a privileged way of knowing what she thinks, but she has no privileged way of knowing that she thinks it.

This should be understood as restricted to occurrent conscious thoughts, where thoughts are non-factive propositional attitudes (hence S can think that P even if in fact P is false)

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[1] Our focus here is on Dretske's later writings on self-knowledge. For discussion of his earlier writings (Dretske 1994, 1995, Ch. 2, 1999), see, e.g., Aydede (2003), Kemmerling (1999), and Lycan (1999).

and essentially involve acceptance (hence S thinks that P only if she accepts that P).[2] Further, CS should be understood so that S has a *privileged* way of knowing a given fact only if she has a way of knowing it that is both (a) unavailable to others and (b) epistemically superior to others' ways of knowing it.[3]

CS is a middle position: it is conciliatory on whether S has a privileged way of knowing what she thinks, but it is skeptical on whether S has a privileged way of knowing that she thinks it. It stands in contrast to a *fully conciliatory* theory according to which S has a privileged way of knowing both what she thinks and that she thinks it. It also stands in contrast to a *fully skeptical* theory according to which S has no privileged way of knowing either what she thinks or that she thinks it.

Crucial to understanding CS is to bear in mind that Dretske is a contrastivist on knowledge. He holds that knowledge is a *ternary* (as opposed to binary) relation K(S, P, A) between a subject S, a proposition P, and a set of relevant alternatives A such that (i) P is a member of A and (ii) exactly one member of A is true.[4] CS's conciliatory side should thus be understood as:

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[2] Dretske believes that his defense of CS can be generalized to mental states and events other than occurrent conscious thoughts (so understood), e.g., perceptual experiences (see Dretske 2003b for relevant discussion). He restricts CS to occurrent conscious thoughts because his "plate is already too full" (Dretske 2012b, p. 2, n. 1). For discussion of other theories of self-knowledge, and for references, see Gertler (2017).

[3] How exactly (a) and (b) are to be unpacked is not entirely clear. But Dretske certainly holds that a given way of knowing can be privileged even if it is not infallible (see Dretske 2012a, p. 52). See Byrne (2018, Ch. 1) on "privileged access" and "peculiar access" for relevant discussion. See also Fernández (2013, Ch. 1) on "special access" and "strong access".

[4] This is perhaps most explicit in Dretske (1981b). But see also Dretske (1970, 1971, 1981a, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a). Sawyer (2015) has a different reading. She reads Dretske's theory of knowledge as a non-contrastivist theory on which knowledge is a binary relation—between a subject and a proposition—holding against a set of alternatives. This is okay for our purposes, however, since our main points about CS and Dretske's defense thereof would hold even if Sawyer's reading were assumed. For further discussion of contrastivist epistemologies, see, e.g., Blauuw (2008), Johnsen (2001), Rieber (1998), Schaffer (2005), and Sinnott-Armstrong (2004).

CS$_{CO}$: S has a privileged way of coming to stand in the knowledge relation K(S, S thinks that P, {S thinks that P, S thinks that Q, S thinks that R, …}).

CS's skeptical side, in turn, should thus be understood as:

CS$_{SK}$: S has no privileged way of coming to stand in the knowledge relation K(S, S thinks that P, {S thinks that P, S hopes that P, S fears that P, …}).

The knowledge relations at issue in CS$_{CO}$ and CS$_{SK}$ are alike in their first and second terms. But they differ in their third terms.

It will help in terms of presentation to reformulate CS$_{CO}$ and CS$_{SK}$ in terms of *contrastive focus* (indicated by underlining):

CS$_{CO}$: S has a privileged way of knowing that she thinks <u>that P</u>.

CS$_{SK}$: S has no privileged way of knowing that she <u>thinks</u> that P.

The contrastive focus in CS$_{CO}$ serves to indicate that the relevant alternatives at issue differ in terms of *the content* of S's thought. The contrastive focus in CS$_{SK}$ serves to indicate that the relevant alternatives at issue differ in terms of *the attitude* that S bears towards P.

Dretske's theory is easily misunderstood. CS$_{CO}$ claims that S has a privileged way of knowing a certain proposition. Which proposition? The non-contrastive proposition: S thinks that P. CS$_{SK}$ denies that S has a privileged way of knowing a certain proposition. Which proposition? The *very same* one: S thinks that P. They don't differ, then, in terms of the proposition that S is said to have or not have a privileged way of knowing. They differ, rather, in terms of their sets of relevant alternatives.[5]

Because the knowledge relations at issue in CS$_{CO}$ and CS$_{SK}$ involve the same proposition (S thinks that P), CS might appear to violate the following closure principle:

Closure: If (i) S knows that P, (ii) S knows that P entails Q, and (iii) S comes to believe that Q on the basis of this knowledge, then S knows that Q.[6]

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[5] We defend the reading of CS just presented in Roche and Roche (2017); see it for further details. We there appeal to some of Dretske's early work on contrastive focus (e.g., 1972, 1975, 1977) in order to make sense of his theory.

[6] See Baumann (2006), Dretske (2005a, 2005b, 2006a), Hawthorne (2005), Jäger (2004), Okasha (1999), Roche and Roche (2017), and Shackel (2006) for relevant discussion.

It is well known that Dretske rejects *Closure*. Importantly, though, so that *Closure* is not an issue, Dretske grants for the sake of argument that if S knows that she thinks <u>that P</u>, then she also knows that she <u>thinks</u> that P. This concession is compatible with CS, for CS concerns a *way* of knowing. Friends of *Closure* can thus also be friends of CS.

CS is admittedly quite odd. Setting aside the prominence of its author, is there any reason to care about it? We think there is, for it promises to solve two particularly challenging puzzles concerning self-knowledge. The first, which can be extracted from Dretske (2012a), is that while each of the following theses has some prima facie plausibility in isolation, they seem inconsistent as a set:

> *Privileged Self-Knowledge*: There is a subject S and proposition P about her thoughts (e.g., the proposition that she thinks that Q) such that S has a privileged way of knowing that P.

> *Knowledge Requires Evidence*: There is no subject S and proposition P such that S knows that P but has no adequate evidence for P.

> *No Inner Awarenesses*: There is no subject S and mental state/event M such that S is perceptually or quasi-perceptually aware of M.[7]

It turns out, however, that if Dretske's defense of CS succeeds, then they are *not* inconsistent as a set. CS_{CO} entails *Privileged Self-Knowledge*, and Dretske's defense of CS_{SK} is based in part on *Knowledge Requires Evidence* and *No Inner Awarenesses*.[8]

How does *Knowledge Requires Evidence* fit into Dretske's general epistemology? The answer, in short, is that the latter should be understood so that K(S, P, A) holds only if S's evidence indicates that P by ruling out, or enabling her to rule out, every member of A—the set of relevant alternatives at issue—except P.[9]

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[7] Although this puzzle is similar in some respects to the paradox introduced in Boghossian (1989), there are nonetheless important difference that in our opinion make the former more challenging than the latter. See Roche and Roche (2016) for further discussion of the former.

[8] Even if one finds one or more of the above theses implausible, Dretske's defense of CS is still interesting in that if it succeeds, the three theses are *not* inconsistent as a set.

[9] Dretske sometimes presents himself as a reliabilist on knowledge. But he stresses that he is not a *process* reliabilist, and that he accepts *Knowledge Requires Evidence*. See Dretske (2003b, pp. 11-12, n. 15, 2012a, p. 51, n. 3).

The second puzzle that Dretske's theory promises to solve is McKinsey's paradox (McKinsey 1991). Here, first, Dretske explains the paradox (as he understands it):

> Externalism about the mind—the metaphysical doctrine that thought and maybe even experience are constituted by extrinsic, relational facts about a person—is held to pose problems for how we can know, in the special authoritative way that we do, what is happening in our mind. … Thought and experience cannot be relational, because if they were, people couldn't know, in the privileged way that they do, what they are thinking and experiencing. But people do know. So thought and experience are not relational. (Dretske 2003a, p. 131)

Here, next, he explains his proffered solution:

> Enough about instruments. What does all this have to do with the mind? Well, the general drift should be obvious. If, like me, you think of the mind as the representational face of the brain and if, like me, you also understand representation in terms of informational functions, the conclusion will be evident enough: although we do not have information that we are representing the world—that we are thinking and experiencing—nonetheless, if we are representing it, if we are thinking and experiencing, we always have information about just how we are doing it, about the content of these mental states. If we think, we can know—in a privileged and authoritative way—what we think. What we can't know, at least not in the same authoritative way, is that we are thinking it. (Dretske 2003a, p. 136)

The rough idea here is straightforward. Dretske's externalism about the mind is consistent with CS. Given this, and given that CS implies *Privileged Self-Knowledge*, it follows that his externalism about the mind is consistent with *Privileged Self-Knowledge*.[10,11]

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[10] In addition to his 2003a, see also his 2003c and 2006b. There are important respects in which Dretske's understanding of McKinsey's paradox is idiosyncratic. But whether or not CS solves McKinsey's paradox, Dretske's claim that his externalism is consistent with CS and therefore also with *Privileged Self-Knowledge* is of interest. See Sawyer (2015) for an alternative contrastivist answer to McKinsey's paradox. For general discussion of McKinsey's paradox, and for references, see Parent (2017).

[11] CS is relevant to yet another puzzle concerning self-knowledge. Consider:

> … some writers have worried that if one can know what one thinks, then one can know *that* one thinks. If so, then the ability to armchair know one's own thoughts would too easily refute eliminativism about the mental …. (Parent 2017, sec. 4,

CS, if true, would thus be of great philosophical significance. Unfortunately, as we shall argue, Dretske's defense of CS fails. In Section 2, we explain Dretske's defense of CS (or certain key parts thereof). In Section 3, we argue (among other things) that if his defense of CS_{SK} succeeds, then his defense of CS_{CO} fails. In Section 4 and Section 5, we suggest a potential way forward. We suggest in particular that the correct way of being a Dretskean conciliatory skeptic is to deny that S has a privileged way of knowing about her thoughts, but to grant that she is nonetheless an authority on her thoughts. We also return briefly, in Section 5, to the two aforementioned puzzles (discussed in the main text).

2 Dretske's defense of CS

Dretske's defense of CS has two main parts: his defense of CS_{CO} and his defense of CS_{SK}. We explain the former in Section 2.1 and the latter in Section 2.2.

2.1 Dretske's defense of CS_{CO}

Dretske distinguishes between "object-awareness" (hereafter "o-awareness") and "fact-awareness" (hereafter "f-awareness"). Here he explains both:

> O-awareness … is epistemically neutral. You can be o-aware of my cousin and not know he is my cousin. You can be aware of a kumquat and not know it is a kumquat. You can watch (see, be visually aware of) a robbery in progress and not know it is a robbery. You might think it is a perfectly routine transfer of money by bank officials. (Dretske 2012b, p. 4)

> F-awareness, awareness of facts, is just another way of describing what someone knows. To be aware that I'm late is to know I'm late. To be aware that she is an expert is to know she is an expert. (Dretske 2012b, p. 4)

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emphasis original)

CS says in part that S has no privileged, or "armchair", way of knowing the *specific* claim that she <u>thinks</u> that P. It does not follow from this that S has no privileged way of knowing the *general* claim that, contra eliminativism, she has thoughts. But that is part of Dretske's overall view. He would deny that if S has a privileged way of knowing what she thinks, then she thereby has a privileged way of knowing that eliminativism is false.

So f-awareness is knowledge (propositional knowledge) whereas o-awareness is not.[12]

The first passage makes clear that Dretske holds that there can be o-awarenesses of *concrete* objects. In fact, he holds that there can be o-awarenesses of *abstract* objects too. Consider:

> We are not only o-aware of ordinary physical objects, events, and properties, but also of such abstract "objects" as (what philosophers call) propositions. They report on the TV news that it is snowing in Miami. I don't know they reported this on the news. You now tell me that it is snowing in Miami. As a result of your communication, I am now o-aware of what they reported on the news—that it is snowing in Miami—without knowing it was reported on the TV news. This is o-awareness of a proposition, not f-awareness of a fact (the fact that it is snowing in Miami) because, as it turns out, there is no such fact. It isn't snowing in Miami. The TV news (and my informant) got it wrong. (Dretske 2012b, p. 7)

O-awareness of a proposition is important because Dretske holds that every thought (at least every occurrent conscious thought) involves an o-awareness of the proposition that is thought. S's thought that P, for instance, involves an o-awareness of the proposition that P.[13]

This is central to Dretske's defense of CS_{CO}. He claims that S's o-awareness of the proposition that P gives her a privileged way of knowing that she thinks that P; S's o-awareness of P is the *source* of her privileged access. If he is correct, then, as per CS_{CO}, S has a privileged way of knowing that she thinks that P.

Dretske says little, if anything, directly in support of the claim that S's o-awareness of the proposition that P gives her a privileged way of knowing that she thinks that P. But consider this:

> The *Philosophical Gazette* vows to publish all (and only) what I write. A truly dedicated vanity press! They tell me of their intentions. I believe them. I then write P. Given what they told me (they are completely trustworthy) I know they are going to publish P. How do I know that they are going to publish P? They told me. How do I

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[12] Dretske sometimes writes in terms of "acquaintance" instead of "o-awareness". See Dretske (2011, p. 429, 2012a, p. 56, 2012c, p. 157).

[13] How exactly an o-awareness of a proposition should be understood is unclear. But we are happy to bracket this issue and go along with Dretske's claim that we are often o-aware of propositions.

know what they are going to publish? By looking at what I write. Even if I cannot know what they will publish without knowing that they will publish it, my way of knowing the one is clearly different from my way of knowing the other. Observing myself write P is not my way of knowing that they will publish P. It is my way of finding out what they will publish. (Dretske 2012b, p. 2)

His claim here, in part, is that his o-awareness (in the form of a visual experience) of his writing that P gives him a way of knowing—and is his way of knowing—that the *Philosophical Gazette* is going to publish <u>that P</u>, even if it does not give him a way of knowing that the *Philosophical Gazette* is going to <u>publish</u> that P. Perhaps he thinks that if this is right, then, by analogy, S's o-awareness of the proposition that P gives her a way of knowing that she thinks <u>that P</u>, even if it does not give her a way of knowing that she <u>thinks</u> that P.

Some readers might regard as obvious that S's o-awareness of the proposition that P gives her a privileged way of knowing that she thinks <u>that P</u>. After all, the contrastive focus indicates that the relevant alternatives at issue concern the content of S's thought, and P is *that* content. Keep in mind, though, that whether S's o-awareness does this depends on whether it gives her a way of ruling out each but the first member of the set: {S thinks that P, S thinks that Q, S thinks that R, …}.

We shall return to this issue in Section 3. First, though, we shall explain Dretske's defense of CS$_{SK}$.

2.2 Dretske's defense of CS$_{SK}$

A key part of Dretske's defense of CS$_{SK}$ is the following argument:

(1)   S's o-awareness of the proposition that P gives her a privileged way of knowing that she <u>thinks</u> that P only if the proposition that P indicates that she <u>thinks</u> that P.

(2)   The proposition that P does not indicate that S <u>thinks</u> that P.

Thus

(3)   S's o-awareness of the proposition that P does not give her a privileged way of knowing that she <u>thinks</u> that P.

This argument is obviously valid. But are (1) and (2) true?

Dretske distinguishes between the ability to tell βs from one another and the ability to tell that they are βs. He explains this distinction by appeal to some examples:

> I can easily distinguish my cousins from one another—they look much different—but as far as I can tell there is nothing about them that indicates they are my cousins. I can also tell Baptists from one another. This one is an old man, the other one a young woman; this one has freckles, the other a milky complexion. Once again, though, there is nothing about any of them (at least nothing I can see) that tells me they are Baptists. (Dretske 2012b, p. 9)

There is no explicit mention here of o-awarenesses. But the key point is that there can be cases where S is o-aware of (for example, sees) some βs, her o-awareness of the βs in question enables her to distinguish between them, and yet, because the βs have no β-indicating properties of which she is o-aware, her o-awareness of them does not enable her to tell—it does not give her a way of knowing—that they are βs.

This point leads straightforwardly to (1). Yes, S is o-aware of the proposition that P, and yes, this proposition (the proposition that P) is a proposition that she thinks. But this is not enough to give her a way of knowing—let alone a privileged way of knowing—that she <u>thinks</u> that P. It needs to be the case that the proposition that P indicates that she <u>thinks</u> that P. Hence, as per (1), S's o-awareness of the proposition that P gives her a privileged way of knowing that she <u>thinks</u> that P only if the proposition that P indicates that she <u>thinks</u> that P.

We noted in Section 1 that Dretske's defense of CS_{SK} is based in part on *Knowledge Requires Evidence*. We had in mind there, among other things, (1) and his defense of it. His thought here is that if the proposition that P does not indicate that S <u>thinks</u> that P, then S's o-awareness of the proposition that P is not (and does not give her) adequate evidence for the proposition that she <u>thinks</u> that P, and thus does not give her a way of knowing that she <u>thinks</u> that P.

Why believe, as per (2), that the proposition that P does not indicate that S <u>thinks</u> that P? Consider the following:

> It is important to understand that if what one thinks (the content of the thought) is regarded as a property of the thought, it is not an indicator property. Propositions—what is reported, published, written, said, and thought—do not indicate anything at all. They are evidentially worthless. There is nothing about what they report on the TV news—that it is snowing in Miami—that indicates it was reported on the TV news. There is nothing about what the *Philosophical Gazette* publishes that indicates they publish it. There is nothing about what a person says that indicates he said it.

> There is, finally, nothing about what you think that indicates you think it. What you think or say indicates nothing because (unlike a fact) what you think or say needn't be true. If it was a fact that it is snowing in Miami, that might indicate that the snowfall was reported on the TV news. The TV news is, after all, a reliable source of information about unusual events. So if it was snowing in Miami you can bet money they reported it. But the proposition (indeterminate truth value) that it is snowing in Miami does not indicate anything. That is why awareness of it—awareness, simply, of what they reported on the news—is of absolutely no help in finding out whether it was reported on the news. (Dretske 2012b, p. 10)

The idea here is that because a proposition need not be true, it indicates nothing. Thus, what you think—a proposition—does not indicate that you think it. It follows then that, as per (2), the proposition that P does not indicate that S <u>thinks</u> that P.

There is more to Dretske's defense of CS_{SK} than his argment for (3). We shall return to some of this, but, for now, the foregoing will suffice for our purposes.

3   Our critique

There appears to be a tension between Dretske's defense of CS_{CO} and his defense of CS_{SK}. The former claims that S's o-awareness of P gives her a privileged way of knowing that she thinks <u>that P</u>. The latter claims that propositions indicate nothing. But if propositions are evidentially worthless in this way, how can S's o-awareness of P give her a way of knowing—let alone a privileged way of knowing—that she thinks <u>that P</u>? Indeed, how can it give her a way of knowing *anything*?

Perhaps Dretske is guilty of engaging in hyperbole in the previous quotation. Perhaps propositions indicate very little, but *not* nothing. The following remark from Dretske seems to support this possibility:

> It would … be a mistake to view introspection as a form of inner sense, as a perception-like awareness of one's own thoughts. [S] is aware of her own thoughts, yes, but unlike the (often) revealing aspects of ordinary objects (trees, people, automobiles, houses), the aspect of her thought she is aware of, its content, does not disclose, indicate, or reveal that it is the content of a thought. It does not indicate or reveal anything at all *except (see footnote 11) what it is she is thinking*. (Dretske 2012a, p. 59, emphasis added)

The italicized part of this passage seems to allow that P—"the aspect of [S's] thought she is aware of"—indicates at least one thing, viz., that she thinks <u>that P</u>. This is the only

passage in Dretske's writings (as far as we are aware) where he explicitly qualifies his claim that propositions are evidentially worthless. Even so, is there something to it?

No. To see why, suppose (as is perfectly reasonable) that you, like S, know that S is thinking,[14] and that you, like S, are o-aware of the proposition that P, because you, like S, are thinking that P. If the qualification in question were true, then *your* o-awareness of the proposition that P would give *you* a way of knowing that *S* thinks <u>that P</u>. Clearly, though, this is not the case. For, your o-awareness does not enable you to rule out the alternative that S thinks that Q, or any other alternative to the proposition that S thinks that P.

Our argument does not assume that if S and you are both o-aware of a certain object, then S's o-awareness enables her to come to know a particular proposition only if your o-awareness enables you to come to know that very same proposition. Such an assumption is doubtful, for you and S might be sufficiently different from each other in terms of relevant background knowledge. If so, then S's o-awareness might enable her to come to know the proposition in question whereas your o-awareness does not. For this reason, our argument assumes that you and S are the same in the relevant piece of background knowledge: S knows that she is thinking, and you know that S is thinking. Hence, S's o-awareness enables her to rule out each of the relevant alternatives only if your o-awareness enables you to rule out each of those alternatives. Because your o-awareness does not enable you to do this, neither does hers. This is our point.

Perhaps returning to the case of the *Philosophical Gazette* will be helpful here. Recall that Dretske's o-awareness of what he writes gives him knowledge that the *Philosophical Gazette* will publish <u>that P</u>. We noted in Section 2.1 that perhaps he thinks that if he is right about this, then, by analogy, he is right that S's o-awareness of the proposition that P gives her a way of knowing that she thinks <u>that P</u>. There is a crucial disanalogy between these cases, however. In the case of Dretske and the *Philosophical Gazette*, Dretske's o-awareness is an o-awareness of an *event* (his writing that P), not a proposition (such as the proposition that he is writing that P). In the case of S and her thought that P, by contrast, S's o-awareness is an o-awareness of a *proposition* (the proposition that P), not an event (such as the event of her becoming o-aware of the proposition that P).

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[14] Recall that for the purpose of setting aside issues of closure, Dretske concedes that S knows that she thinks <u>that P</u> only if she knows that she <u>thinks</u> that P. We suspect that for the same reason, he would concede that you know that S thinks <u>that P</u> only if you know that she <u>thinks</u> that P. This is why we are supposing that you know she is thinking.

The situation would perhaps be importantly different if S were o-aware of her o-awareness of the proposition that P. If she were, then perhaps this would enable her to come to know that she thinks that P.[15] But recall Dretske's adherence to *No Inner Awarenesses* (the thesis that there is no subject S and mental state/event M such that S is perceptually or quasi-perceptually aware of M). If he is right here, then there are no o-awarenesses of o-awarenesses, and thus S is not o-aware of her o-awareness of the proposition that P.[16]

The lesson in all this is that Dretske's defense of CS is hopelessly problematic. His defense of CS_{SK} relies on the claim that propositions are evidentially worthless in that they indicate nothing, and so S's o-awareness of the proposition that P fails to give her a way of knowing that she thinks that P. But then his defense of CS_{CO} fails, for S's o-awareness of the proposition that P also fails to give her a way of knowing that she thinks that P. Hence if Dretske's defense of CS_{SK} succeeds, then his defense of CS_{CO} fails.

It does not follow, however, that if Dretske's defense of CS_{SK} succeeds, then CS_{CO} (*a thesis*) is false. It is highly plausible, though, that in fact this is the case. In Section 2.2, we noted that there is more to Dretske's defense of CS_{SK} than his argument for (3). We had in mind in part his argument for the following:

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[15] Imagine, e.g., that S can be o-aware of at most one proposition at a time (and that S knows this). Then, if S knows she is thinking, she can deduce that she is thinking that P.

[16] Dretske references a footnote in the passage displayed at the beginning of this section where he qualfies his claim about the evidential worth of propositions. It reads in part:

> You do not have to know (be aware that) *p* and *q* are propositions to be aware of, and thereby distinguish, *p* from *q* anymore than you have to be aware (know) that X and Y are counterfeit to be visually aware of, and thereby distinguish, X (the $100 counterfeit bill) from Y (the $50 counterfeit bill). (Dretske 2012a, p. 57, fn. 11)

We fail to see how this supports CS_{CO}. S's being able to distinguish between the proposition that P and the proposition that Q is one thing. S's being able to rule out the proposition that she thinks that Q is another thing entirely. (Recall Dretske's point about being able to distinguish between Baptists even though nothing about them indicates that they are Baptists.) You too can distinguish between the proposition that P and the proposition that Q, but you are not thereby in a position to rule out the proposition that S thinks that Q.

(4)   S has a privileged way of knowing that she <u>thinks</u> that P only if she is o-aware of things of which others cannot[17] be o-aware.

We also had in mind *No Inner Awarenesses*. If, as it seems, *No Inner Awarenesses* implies that S is not o-aware of things of which others cannot be o-aware, then by (4) it follows that S has no privileged way of knowing that she <u>thinks</u> that P.

Now consider the following variant of (4):

(4*)   S has a privileged way of knowing that she thinks <u>that P</u> only if she is o-aware of things of which others cannot be o-aware.

Dretske's argument for (4) carries over to (4*). Hence, if his argument for (4) succeeds, and if *No Inner Awarenesses* implies that S is not o-aware of things of which others cannot be o-aware, then by (4*) it follows that, contra CS_{CO}, S has no privileged way of knowing that she thinks <u>that P</u>.

A second lesson thus emerges. Given Dretske's commitment to *No Inner Awarenesses*, and given his understanding of privileged knowledge (along with his understanding of the relation between evidence and knowledge more generally), it follows that CS_{CO} itself is false.

In sum, we have argued that Dretske's defense of CS_{SK} undermines *both* his defense of CS_{CO} and CS_{CO} itself. The conciliatory side of CS is thus doubly problematic; its failure is overdetermined. This is not the end of the line for Dretskean conciliatory skeptics, however. We turn now to a potential way forward.

4   Authority without privilege

There are serious problems with the conciliatory side of CS. But might Dretskeans have available to them a weaker surrogate to privileged knowledge? It seems so. Dretske (2012c) introduces a sense of *authority* that is independent of privileged knowledge.

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[17] The kind of modality that Dretske has in mind here is unclear. Is it logical, technological, or something in between? Notice that a similar question arises with respect to CS. Recall that, for Dretske, S has a privileged way of knowing a given fact only if she has a way of knowing it that is *unavailable* to others. We assume that whatever kind of modality he has in mind for the latter, he has in mind for the former.

He gives a case involving a young child named Sarah who lacks the concept of thought and so has no knowledge of, let alone privileged knowledge of, her thoughts. He claims that she is nonetheless an authority on what she thinks. He writes:

> She is an authority on what she thinks in the sense that *if we want to find out what Sarah thinks, we have to "consult" her*. We cannot, of course, do so by asking Sarah what she thinks. She will not (we are assuming) understand what we are talking about. But there are other ways of getting this information. Given a cooperative child, we can ask Sarah whether her father is home. Or why she is rushing to open the door. The answers will *reveal, reliably enough for us to know what she is thinking, what she thinks*. If Sarah was not aware of what she thinks as she rushes to the door, how could she (not her mother or anyone else) be the authority on why she is running to the door? (Dretske 2012c, pp. 159-160, emphasis added)

The rough idea here is clear enough. If you ask Sarah whether her father is home, and she answers in the affirmative, then her answer indicates that—it reveals the fact that—she thinks that her father is home. (We qualify this point about indication shortly.) If, instead, you put the question to her mother, and her mother answers in the affirmative, then her mother's answer does *not* indicate that—it does *not* reveal the fact that—Sarah thinks that her father is home.[18] Sarah is thus an authority on whether she thinks that her father is home in that, though she lacks the concept of thought and so has no knowledge of her thoughts, she is *the* person to consult to find out whether she thinks that her father is home.

It might seem strange to speak of Sarah as an authority on whether she thinks that her father is home, and on what she thinks more generally, given that she lacks the concept of thought and so has no knowledge of her thoughts. Consider, though, by way of analogy, the question of what to consult to find out whether your car's gas tank is full. The answer, clearly, is that you should consult your car's gas gauge (assuming that you cannot directly examine the tank). This is not because of the gauge's knowledge of the amount of gas in the tank; the gauge, of course, has no such knowledge. The gauge is the thing to consult, and thus is an "authority" in the sense in question, because it (and, suppose, it alone) is connected to the tank in such a way that if it reads "Full", then this indicates that in fact the tank is full.

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[18] Notice that Sarah's mother's affirmative answer to the question "does Sarah think that her father is home?" also fails to indicate that Sarah thinks that her father is home. Sarah's behavior could be misleading, after all.

Dretske's points about Sarah are meant to generalize to subjects who, unlike Sarah, have the concept of thought. Return to S and her thought that P, and take some subject S* distinct from S. If S is asked whether P, and she answers in the affirmative, then her answer indicates that she thinks <u>that P</u>. If, in contrast, S* is asked whether P, and he answers in the affirmative, then his answer does not indicate that S thinks <u>that P</u>. Hence S is the person to consult to find out whether she thinks <u>that P</u>, and is in this sense an authority—the authority—on whether she thinks <u>that P</u>.[19]

Are these claims meant to hold in all cases? The answer, we take it, is negative. Dretske has in mind typical, or realistic, cases. These are cases where:

(5)   S and S*'s affirmative answers to the question of whether P are sincere, based on an adequate understanding of the question, and so on.

(6)   S*'s thinking <u>that P</u> does not indicate that S thinks <u>that P</u>.[20]

When (5) holds, S's affirmative answer to the question of whether P *expresses* her underlying thought. And when this happens, her answer thereby indicates that she thinks <u>that P</u>. If, say, she had thought that not-P rather than thought that P, then, given (5), she would not have answered in the affirmative. Similarly, when (5) holds, S*'s affirmative answer to the question of whether P *expresses* his underlying thought. And when this happens, his answer thereby indicates that he thinks <u>that P</u>. However, as per (6), it is not the case that his answer indicates that S thinks <u>that P</u>, since, in part, it is not the case that

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[19] These points are related to a well-known passage from Evans (1982):

> I get myself in a position to answer the question whether I believe that *p* by putting into operation whatever procedure I have for answering the question whether *p*. … If a judging subject applies this procedure, then necessarily he will gain knowledge of one of his own mental states: even the most determined sceptic cannot find here a gap in which to insert his knife. (Evans 1982, p. 225)

The idea that Evans's procedure is knowledge-yielding arguably runs counter to *Knowledge Requires Evidence*. If so, and if that thesis is true, then there *is* a gap in which a skeptic can insert his knife! But, regardless, Evans's procedure is reliable. Evans-style approaches to the epistemology of belief are defended by, among others, Byrne (2018, Ch. 5), Fernandez (2013, Ch. 2), and Roche (2016).

[20] Cases can be described where S*'s thinking <u>that P</u> *does* indicate that S thinks <u>that P</u> (imagine, e.g., that S and S* have minds that are for whatever reason perfectly in sync with one another). When (6) holds—as it typically will—such cases are ruled out.

his answer expresses *her* underlying thought. The aforementioned indication asymmetry is thus grounded in an asymmetry concerning expression.

You will of course most often (if not always) be unsure whether (5) holds. Does such uncertainty undermine the sense in which S is an authority concerning whether she thinks that P? Not if certain rather natural conditions hold. Let A, B, C, and D be understood as follows:

A: S thinks that P.

B: You ask S whether P, and she answers in the affirmative.

C: S* thinks that P.

D: You ask S* whether P, and he answers in the affirmative.

Suppose that your credence in A given B should be the same as your credence in C given D, and that, because you are not sure that (5) is true, neither of these credences should be equal to one:

(7) $1 > \Pr(A \mid B) = \Pr(C \mid D)$.

Suppose, next, that your credence in A given B should be greater than your credence in A given C, and that your credence in A given C, in turn, should be greater than your credence in A:

(8) $\Pr(A \mid B) > \Pr(A \mid C) > \Pr(A)$.

Suppose, finally, that D should have no impact on your credence in A given C or on your credence in A given ~C:

(9) $\Pr(A \mid C \, \& \, D) = \Pr(A \mid C)$ and $\Pr(A \mid {\sim}C \, \& \, D) = \Pr(A \mid {\sim}C)$.[21]

It turns out, as shown in the appendix, that (7), (8), and (9) together entail that your credence in A given B should be greater than your credence in A given D:

(10) $\Pr(A \mid B) > \Pr(A \mid D)$.

This is true even if $\Pr(A \mid B)$, and thus also $\Pr(C \mid D)$, is less than 0.5. Here too, then, even though S's answer to the question of whether P would not enable you to come to know

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[21] This is a "screening-off" condition to the effect that each member of partition $\Gamma = \{C, {\sim}C\}$ renders D probabilistically irrelevant to A. For recent discussion of screening-off, and for references, see, e.g., Roche (2017) and Shogenji (2017).

whether she thinks that P (at least not on Dretske's epistemology), there is a clear sense in which S is an authority on whether she thinks that P.[22]

The foregoing suggests that S *is* an authority on whether she thinks that P. Does her authority extend even further, though? Specifically, when authority is a matter of the person to consult (as spelled out in this section), is S an authority on whether she thinks that P?

It seems so. Take (5) and the following variant of (6):

(6*)   S*'s thinking that P does not indicate that S thinks that P.

When (5) holds, S's affirmative answer to the question of whether P expresses her underlying thought. And when this happens, her answer thereby indicates that she thinks that P. If, say, she had suspended judgment on whether P rather than thought that P, then she would not have answered in the affirmative. Similarly, when (5) holds, S*'s affirmative answer to the question of whether P expresses his underlying thought. And when this happens, his answer thereby indicates that he thinks that P. But, given (6*) in part, his answer does not indicate that S thinks that P.

There is more. The point above that (7), (8), and (9) together entail (10) holds regardless of whether the issue is whether S thinks that P or is instead the issue of whether S thinks that P.

In sum, S is an authority (in the way spelled out in this section) both on whether she thinks that P *and* on whether she thinks that P. The foregoing thus makes the case for a *fully conciliatory* theory concerning authority of one's thoughts. Moreover, notice that the case for this requires no assumption that S has a privileged way of knowing her thoughts. Even if S has no privileged way of knowing about her thoughts, and even if she

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[22] The literature on confabulation suggests one way in which $Pr(A \mid B)$ might be less than 0.5. Perhaps S will sometimes sincerely assert that P, not because she thinks that P, but rather because she confabulates. (Although confabulation is typically taken to involve a self-ascription of a mental state, asserting that P is true is closely related to asserting that one thinks that P (Evans 1982)). Suppose, for example, that S is motivated to believe that she thinks that P (and thus to assert that P). Take the "and so on" in (5) to include the condition that S is not confabulating in this way. The current point is that even if you are unsure whether (5) holds, S is still the authority on whether she thinks that P in that $Pr(A \mid B) > Pr(A \mid D)$. For discussion of confabulation studies, and for references, see Schwitzgebel (2016, sec. 4). We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the relevance of confabulation to our project.

has no knowledge whatsoever of her thoughts, she is *still* the person to consult to find out about her thoughts. Think, again, of Sarah and her thought that Daddy is home.[23]

5   How to be a Dretskean conciliatory skeptic

We suggest, then, that Dretskean conciliatory skeptics adopt a fully conciliatory theory concerning authority: they should hold not just that S is an authority on whether she thinks <u>that P</u>, but also that S is an authority on whether she <u>thinks</u> that P.[24] We also suggest that they adopt a fully skeptical theory concerning privileged knowledge: they should hold not just that S has no privileged way of knowing that she <u>thinks</u> that P, but also that she has no privileged way of knowing that she thinks <u>that P</u>. The overall view—a conjunction of both a fully conciliatory theory concerning authority and a fully skeptical theory concerning privileged knowledge—would still have both a conciliatory side and a skeptical side, and it would still be grounded in Dretske's general epistemological and metaphysical commitments (his contrastivist epistemology, *No Inner Awarenesses*, etc.). Further, and crucially, it might well be true. Let "CS*" refer to this new view.

We return now briefly to the two puzzles described in the main text of Section 1. CS promised to solve these puzzles. How does CS* fare? Consider, first, the puzzle consisting of *Privileged Self-Knowledge*, *Knowledge Requires Evidence*, and *No Inner Awarenesses*. Given that CS* is fully skeptical concerning privileged knowledge, Dretskeans can simply reject *Privileged Self-Knowledge* while keeping *Knowledge Requires Evidence* and *No Inner Awarenesses*. And given that CS* is fully conciliatory

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[23] We claimed above that when (5) holds, S's affirmative answer to the question of whether P *expresses* her underlying thought that P. This is central to the foregoing account of authority. The account has this in common with "neo-expressivist" accounts of first-person authority (Bar-On 2004 and Finkelstein 2003). There is also a difference, however. Neo-expressivists focus on avowals, i.e., utterances such as "I think that P". Our account, by contrast, focuses on utterances such as "Yes, P", which make no mention of thought or even a thinking subject. The former semantically express propositions that ascribe mental states; the latter do not.

[24] They can even add in a second conciliatory thesis to the effect that S has both a non-privileged way of knowing that she thinks <u>that P</u>, and a non-privileged way of knowing that she <u>thinks</u> that P.

concerning authority, Dretskeans can stress that such authority, though not as ambitious as *Privileged Self-Knowledge*, is a worthy (and not false!) fall back position.

What about McKinsey's paradox? Dretskeans can trade in Dretske's point that his externalism about the mind is consistent with CS and thus with *Privileged Self-Knowledge* for the point that his externalism about the mind is consistent with CS*'s fully conciliatory stance on authority. Dretskeans could then argue that this is enough to answer McKinsey's paradox.

We are not claiming, of course, that the suggested replacement theory— CS*—will prove to be a satisfactory theory in the end. But, we suggest, it at least merits careful consideration. We *are* claiming, however, that the correct way of being a Dretskean conciliatory skeptic is to move from CS to CS*.[25]

Appendix

Suppose that:

(7) $1 > \Pr(A \mid B) = \Pr(C \mid D)$.

(8) $\Pr(A \mid B) > \Pr(A \mid C) > \Pr(A) > 0$.

(9) $\Pr(A \mid C \ \& \ D) = \Pr(A \mid C)$ and $\Pr(A \mid \sim C \ \& \ D) = \Pr(A \mid \sim C)$.

The aim is to show that:

(10) $\Pr(A \mid B) > \Pr(A \mid D)$.

It follows from the law of total probability that:

(11) $\Pr(A \mid D) = \Pr(C \mid D)\Pr(A \mid C \ \& \ D) + \Pr(\sim C \mid D)\Pr(A \mid \sim C \ \& \ D)$.

Given this, and given (7) and (9), it follows that:

(12) $\Pr(A \mid D) = \Pr(A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid C \ \& \ D) + \Pr(\sim A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid \sim C \ \& \ D)$

        $= \Pr(A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid C) + \Pr(\sim A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid \sim C)$

        $= \Pr(A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid C) + \Pr(A \mid \sim C) - \Pr(A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid \sim C)$.

It follows from this and (8) that:

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(13) $\Pr(A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid B) + \Pr(A \mid \sim C) - \Pr(A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid \sim C) >$

    $\Pr(A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid C) + \Pr(A \mid \sim C) - \Pr(A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid \sim C) =$

    $\Pr(A \mid D).$

The following holds without exception:

(14) $\Pr(A \mid B) > \Pr(A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid B) + \Pr(A \mid \sim C) - \Pr(A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid \sim C)$ iff

    $\Pr(A \mid B) - \Pr(A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid B) > \Pr(A \mid \sim C) - \Pr(A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid \sim C)$ iff

    $\Pr(A \mid B)[1 - \Pr(A \mid B)] > \Pr(A \mid \sim C)[1 - \Pr(A \mid B)]$ iff

    $\Pr(A \mid B) > \Pr(A \mid \sim C).$

Given this, and given that (8) entails that $\Pr(A \mid B) > \Pr(A \mid \sim C)$, it follows that:

(15) $\Pr(A \mid B) > \Pr(A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid B) + \Pr(A \mid \sim C) - \Pr(A \mid B)\Pr(A \mid \sim C).$

By (13) and (15) it follows that (10) holds. QED

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