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*Glamorous self-knowledge*  
– *what's it good for?*

[*Abstract:* It is often assumed that we have epistemologically glamorous (*a priori*, 'direct', 'infallible', 'self-evident', etc.) self-knowledge. I shall focus on the case of alleged knowledge of our own current conscious thoughts. The best reason for assuming that we have glamorous knowledge of them seems to be this: it is needed to explain our ability to say with absolute authoritativeness what we are currently thinking (at least whenever the thoughts we have are 'sayables'). But this sort of authoritativeness can be explained without assuming that we have knowledge of what we are consciously thinking.]

We have self-knowledge of various sorts: knowledge of things we have done or suffered, for example, and some knowledge of who we are: of our character-traits, our temper, our inclinations, weaknesses, feelings, addictions, worries, lusts and so on. Most of this knowledge is human knowledge of the regular kind, nothing exciting about it, epistemologically speaking.

But many philosophers assume that some of our self-knowledge is of a very special kind: it is such that we cannot be mistaken about it. It is *infallible* self-knowledge in the following sense: If it seems to a subject,  $S$ , that he so-and-sos (or if he believes that he so-and-sos), then it is somehow guaranteed that he actually so-and-sos. Our current conscious thoughts are one striking example. If it seems to a human subject  $S$ , at time  $t$ , that he is entertaining a particular thought (e.g., the thought he would express by the words "Harvey is stupid"), then, in this exact moment, he incontestably entertains this thought. Another example, maybe a bit more controversial, would be one's current beliefs: If it seems to  $S$  (or if he believes) that he holds the belief which he would express by assenting to "Harvey is stupid", then, incontestably, he does hold this belief, in the exact moment in which it seems so to him. I shall focus, today, on the case of current thoughts, and leave the issue of our self-knowledge concerning our beliefs for another occasion.

Let me warn you about the way in which I shall use the phrase “to think that ...”, namely in a slightly technical sense. In saying that  $S$  is thinking that such-and-such, I do not mean to suggest that  $S$  judges, or is at least inclined to judge, that such-and-such. What I have in mind is some broader (and, possibly, an artificial) sense of *thinking that*, namely: entertaining, in whatever mode, the thought in question. (Modes of entertaining a thought are, for example: judging, doubting, possibly merely “perceiving” it in Descartes’s sense, or “grasping” it in Frege’s sense; but there are many more modes, and I shall briefly return to this point later on). One more technicality. When I say that  $S$  thinks that such-and-such, the correctness of what is inserted for the place-holder phrase “such-and-such” is determined by the way in which  $S$  himself would express the thought he is entertaining, if he were a normal competent speaker of English who expresses his thought in English. The reason for this is to avoid side-issues which otherwise would have to be considered very carefully (for example issues which are discussed in the debate about the compatibility of anti-individualism and infallible self-knowledge). – In brief, for the purposes of this paper, whenever I say something like “ $S$  (at time  $t$ ) thinks that Harvey is stupid”, please understand this as an abbreviation for:

At  $t$ ,  $S$  entertains, in whatever mode, a thought which he would express at  $t$ , if he were to express it, at  $t$ , in English as a normal competent speaker of this language, by using the very words “Harvey is stupid”.<sup>1</sup>

Many philosophers have assumed that we have knowledge about what we think (in the sense of “think” I’ve just explained), and this kind of alleged self-knowledge has been showered with highly honorific epithets like, e.g., *direct*, *a priori*, *infallible*, *self-evident*, *privileged*, and it is widely assumed that in voicing one’s current thoughts, one has a special sort of so-called *First-*

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<sup>1</sup> As a consequence of this, if  $S$  is an entity of which it doesn't make much sense to assume that it could express itself competently in English, then, to the extent in which this doesn't make sense, it is left open what is said, if anything, in saying that  $S$  thinks that Harvey is stupid.

*Person-Authority*.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is, at least it seems to be, *substantial* self-knowledge: its truth is not guaranteed solely by its content in combination with the fact that the subject in question exists (like the knowledge of one's being self-identical, or the knowledge that one exists). If somebody knows that he is thinking that Harvey is stupid, then he knows about a substantial, contingent fact; for he might as well have had another thought instead at this particular moment. - Self-knowledge, which deserves these characterizations (or at least sufficiently many of them), I shall call (*epistemologically*) *glamorous*, as opposed to the more standard sorts of knowledge which we may have about ourselves.

I have certain misgivings about the applicability of some of the attributes I've just mentioned, and about the appropriateness of speaking, in this context, of knowledge at all. After all, to say such a thing as "Birgit knows that she is thinking that Harvey is stupid" sounds somewhat strange. To exercise a certain amount of conceptual caution here, is, as far as I can tell, not just a silly quirk. You don't have to have been under the influence of philosophers like Wittgenstein, Austin or Ryle, to feel that something may be conceptually amiss with such ways of talking. Even Descartes, assumed by many to have been a grand champion of self-knowledge about our current thoughts, would not have put it this way; he would have preferred to say that Birgit is conscious of her thought/thinking or that she 'experiences' that she thinks. (What you find in Descartes' writings is not: *scio me cogitare*, but instead phrases like: *meae cogitationis conscius sum*, *experior me cogitare* and, for the rare case in which the thinker were to waste a special thought about what she is anyway conscious of: *adverto me istud prius advertisse*.<sup>3</sup>) Kant clearly denies at least the glamour of such knowledge. And, to return to the current discussion, Fred Dretske argues

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<sup>2</sup> Here come two examples, more or less randomly selected. According to Tyler Burge, what he calls basic self-knowledge is direct, authoritative, non-empirical and self-verifying („Individualism and Self-Knowledge“, *Journal of Philosophy* 85 (1988), 649 – 663), and in his paper „Our Entitlement to Self-Knowledge“ (*Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 96, 1996, 91 – 116) he says that *cogito*-like thoughts are direct, self-verifying, infallible and self-evident. Ted Warfield says that knowledge of the contents of our own thoughts is *a priori* and privileged („Privileged Self-Knowledge and Externalism Are Compatible“, *Analysis* 52, 232).

<sup>3</sup> Cf., for example, his *Fourth* and *Fifth Responses*, in: Charles Adam/Paul Tannery (eds.), *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Paris 1897-1910, vol. VII, pp. 246, 358 and 359.

that there is no knowledge, and certainly no glamorous knowledge, about the fact *that* one is thinking, even if it were taken for granted that one knows *what* one thinks.<sup>4</sup> The reasons Dretske puts forward for his, as he labels it, “skepticism” about self-knowledge are clearly different from those which one may hope to find in Descartes, Kant or Wittgenstein. So conceptual caution as to the appropriateness of speaking of knowledge at all, with regard to our epistemic relation to our own present thinking, should not be simply shrugged off. It’s not something which betrays undue fondness of being linguistically persnickety. First rate thinkers, past and present, with quite different outlooks on to philosophy and the human mind, have given us reason to take this issue seriously.

So I shall not take it for granted that we have glamorous knowledge, or even only regular knowledge, of our current thinking. Rather I shall assume a conditional:

If there is glamorous self-knowledge, then some of our current thoughts are items concerning which we can have it.

Which of our current thoughts? Well, at least those which I shall label as *sayables*, *i.e.*, thoughts which the subject may formulate in words, completely and exactly as he has them. I assume that some of our thoughts are sayables. And I intend this to be a modest claim. I am not making any grand or general thesis here about the nature of thinking. I am not claiming, like Kant, that “thinking is talking with oneself ... and therefore it is also hearing oneself inwardly” (*Anthropologie*, Teil I, § 36). Neither do I want to claim that we, at least sometimes, ‘think in language’.

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<sup>4</sup> In a series of recent papers, and some unpublished material he was kind enough to make available to me. As to the published papers, *cf.* “How do you know you are not a zombie”, in: *Privileged Access and First Person Authority*, Brie Gertler (ed.), Burlington: Ashgate 2003, 1 – 13; “Externalism and self knowledge”, in: *New Essays on Semantic Externalism and Self-Knowledge*, Susanna Nuccetelli (ed.), Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 2003, 131 – 142; “Knowing what you think *vs* knowing that you think it”, in: *The Externalist Challenge*, vol 2, Richard Schantz (ed.), Berlin/New York: de Gruyter 2004, 389 – 399.

Let me add that having a sayable thought is not the same as merely having a fully meaningful linguistic item going through one's mind - even if one fully understands the item. Recently, I couldn't get rid of a certain line from a song by an English pop group; sadly enough, the words "Reason is treason" lingered in my mind for weeks. But it happened only very rarely during this period that I ever *thought*, if only in the sense explained, that reason is treason. – I have no theory to offer about sayable thoughts, but I shall assume that they exist and that we can have glamorous self-knowledge about some of them, if we can have such knowledge at all.

### 1. Absolute authoritativeness in saying what one thinks

Now let's turn to our ability to *say* what we think.<sup>5</sup> The sense in which we can say what we currently think has some epistemological splendour too. At least if the thought in question is a sayable one. For if in such a case we say what we think, then (a) we ourselves, given that we speak honestly, cannot rationally doubt what we say, when we say that we are thinking such-an-such, (b) nobody else, except those who have reservations about our honesty, can rationally doubt what

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<sup>5</sup> The phrase „(being able) to say what one thinks“ has a reading in which the subordinate *wh*-clause is an indirect interrogative and one in which it is a relative clause. There are languages, like English or German, which blur this difference by not marking it syntactically. But there are also languages, like Latin, in which the difference is marked syntactically. In Latin, the indirect-interrogative reading of the *wh*-clause of „Harvey says what he thinks“ is given by a „quid“-clause in the subjunctive mood („Herveus dicit *quid* se ipse cogitet“), the relative-clause reading by a „quod“-clause in the indicative mood („Herveus dicit *quod* se ipse cogitat“). For the sake of brevity, I shall refer to the two readings as the *quid*-reading and the *quod*-reading, respectively.

The difference between these readings is quite manifest in sentences like „Harvey knows what he thinks“. It is only in the *quod*-reading that in combination with „What Harvey thinks is that it's raining“ it follows: „Harvey knows that it's raining“. (Interestingly, „to believe what one thinks“ seems to have no *quid*-reading.) - The ambiguity may be less perspicuous in „being able to say what one thinks“. But it is there nevertheless. In ascribing to *S* the ability to say what he thinks, we may commit ourselves either to the claim:

(Quod) Given that --- is what *S* thinks, he is able *to say* ---;

or instead, more naturally, to the claim

(Quid) Given that --- is what *S* thinks, he is able *to say that (or whether) --- is what he thinks*.

In this paper, I shall be primarily concerned with the *quid*-sense of our ability to say what we think. But I shall argue that, very roughly speaking, the ability mentioned in (Quod) is explanatory of the ability (Quid) is about.

we say, and (c) nobody else, but the subject in question, could say, in such a doubt-excluding way, what *he* thinks. Let's say that

$S$ , in a certain context  $c$ , says that  $p$  **with absolute authoritativeness**, if the following holds: Whoever assumes that  $S$  is honest in his saying that  $p$  (in  $c$ ), cannot rationally doubt that  $p$ ; but if somebody other than  $S$  were to honestly say the same,<sup>6</sup> it could be coherently doubted that  $p$ .

This sort of authoritativeness is marked by a distinctive exclusiveness: what one person can say with absolute authoritativeness, only he or she can say in this way. Put differently: It is marked by a distinctive asymmetry, regarding the relation between honesty and dubitability, between him who says something with this sort of authoritativeness and everybody else. His honesty is sufficient for the indubitability of what he says; if anybody else says the same, their honesty is not sufficient.

Things which can be said with absolute authoritativeness are things of which we have glamorous self-knowledge, if there is such knowledge. And, specifically, anything we can say by using a sentence of the type "I am thinking that  $p$ " (where both this complex sentence and the " $p$ " embedded in it express sayables), is something that can be said with this special authoritativeness. Given that the thought that someone would express by saying "I am thinking right now that Harvey is stupid" is one of her sayable thoughts, then, it seems, that what she would say in using these words is something she would say with absolute authoritativeness.

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<sup>6</sup> I am assuming here that there is a good sense in which, e.g., Birgit who says (at  $t$ ) "I am thinking that Harvey is stupid" *says the same* as Albert when he says "Birgit (at  $t$ ) thinks that Harvey is stupid". – If you have misgivings about the appropriateness of speaking of same-saying here, you are welcome to replace the phrase, "to say the same", by a more convoluted phrase you take to be apter (e.g., "to say something the truth condition of which is the same as the one of Birgit's saying that she thinks that Harvey is stupid").

My central concern in this talk will be the question: How is this authoritativeness to be explained? Or, more specifically: What could plausibly be offered as an explanation, if we abstain from the usual one ("We have this ability because we have self-knowledge")?

Now here are some of the reasons why I take this question to be of some interest. First, I am not sure if we have such glamorous self-knowledge (*GSK*, for short) at all; but I have no doubts about our ability to say, sometimes with absolute authoritativeness, what we think.

Second, at least in the case of adult, normal, competent speakers of a natural language, the possession of *GSK* about our current sayable thoughts are intimately connected to the ability to authoritatively say what one thinks. In fact, I assume that the statements (1) and (2) are conceptual truths:

Let  $S$  be a normal speaker of a natural language, let  $\theta$  be a sayable thought that  $p$  which  $S$  has at time  $t$  (in whatever mode  $\Psi$  [like, e.g., judging that  $p$ , asking oneself whether  $p$ , wondering about  $p$ , reflecting on  $p$ , it's coming back to him that  $p$ , etc.]).

- (1) If  $S$  at  $t$  has *GSK* about (his having)  $\theta$ , then, *ceteris paribus*,  $S$  at  $t$  has the ability to authoritatively say that he, at this moment,  $\Psi p$ .
- (2) If  $S$  at  $t$  has the ability to authoritatively answer the question whether he, at this moment,  $\Psi p$ , then: If there is *GSK* at all, then, *ceteris paribus*,  $S$  at  $t$  has *GSK* about (his having)  $\theta$ .

In the light of (1) and (2), *GSK* of normal speakers, about their current thoughts, is closely connected to their ability to say what they think. So an explanation of authoritativeness should be of interest to anybody who believes in *GSK*.

Third, I think it's a good idea anyway to restrict ourselves to normal speakers of natural languages,<sup>7</sup> sayable thoughts and overall normal circumstances, because it is primarily within these limits that we should have some confidence in our judgments concerning such issues.

Fourth, I believe that the best reason people have to assume *GSK* is that it makes it easy to explain whence our special authority in saying what some of our current mental states are. Pointing to a different explanation –one in which no *GSK*, in fact no knowledge at all, is involved— may help to weaken the belief in *GSK*.

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What I am going to argue for, then, is this. In order to explain our ability to say, authoritatively, what we presently think, we don't have to assume that we have *GSK* about our current thinking. I presume that this point has some bite, because the undeniable authoritativeness (with which we are able to say what we think) is, at least *prima facie*, a good reason to assume that we have *GSK*. The friend of *GSK* may argue that the existence of such knowledge is suggested by an inference to the best (in fact, the only available) explanation. "You don't deny first person authority, but how in all the world could this special authority be explained - except by the fact that we have it in virtue of our *GSK* about our current thoughts?" – This is a fair question which I shall try to answer. As may be clear by now, a mainspring of my following considerations is this: If it can be shown that no recourse to *GSK* is needed to account for what seems to be the best evidence in its favour (viz., linguistic performances in which we parade our ability to authoritatively say what

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<sup>7</sup> A *normal speaker of L*, roughly, is an adult 'fluent' in *L*. The crucial thing is that he has a high degree of mastery of *L*: speakers of *L* who use *L* as their common language would consider him as of equal linguistic competence. – So, being a normal speaker of *L* turns on what kind of linguistic *ability* a person has. (It is not required that he is an actual member of an *L*-speaking community. Nor is it required that he is a normal person; being linguistically competent to the relevant degree is compatible with having foibles, quirks and abnormalities.)

our current conscious sayable thoughts are), then there is one reason less to assume that we have *GSK*.

For this purpose, I shall introduce an ability we all have, describe some of its characteristic peculiarities, and try to show that it opens a way to account for the authoritativeness with which we can say what our current sayable thoughts are. What makes this sort of explanation interesting is that it does not presuppose self-knowledge, be it glamorous or not. An extra-gain of this explanation is that it points to a phenomenon which, I think, reveals why it is so strange to speak of knowledge in this context. If honesty --*i.e.*, the lack of dishonest intentions— in saying something is all that is needed to make unassailably true what one says, then what is said is not something the speaker knows. Knowledge has to do with the subject's being able to cognitively exclude all relevant alternatives; usually, one first comes to know a thing, by acquiring a cognitive state which enables one to exclude the alternatives, and then one is able to tell others. But in saying what one thinks, it doesn't work this way. One excludes the alternatives simply by not being dishonest in saying what one says. Yet if honesty in saying something is sufficient to fully guarantee the truth of what is said, then what is said is not something of which the speaker displays knowledge, in saying it. Honesty is a great thing, and given favourable conditions it may suffice to establish the *truth* of what is said; but it is not enough to render the honest man a knowing subject.

## 2. The ability to think out loud

*No, I must not try to think, simply utter.*  
Samuel Beckett

Now what explains our ability to say, authoritatively, what we think? I suggest that it is our ability to think out loud. By this I mean the ability to *put out*, *manifest*, or *display* the thought one is

consciously entertaining, in whatever mode, in this exact moment – *i.e.*, the thought one is having as one puts it out.

Thoughts can be entertained in various modes, many more than those which are usually considered in the philosophical literature; we can entertain a thought questioningly (“should I believe it?”), critically (“what are its weaknesses?”), affirmatively (as accepted premises in a process of consideration), playfully (as a toy, as it were), daydreamingly, fictionally (as something which may go into the novel one is writing), hedonistically (as something which to think is delightfully pleasant), etc., etc.

In thinking out loud, we put out the very thought we are having. The question *in which mode* the thought is entertained is not settled (and not even addressed) by what we do when we think out loud. Metaphorically speaking, in thinking out loud, we turn the mute function off and present sayable thoughts of our current thinking in their original version (without subtitles of any kind).

It should be noted that if and when we act on this ability in public (and aim at no other illocutionary purposes with our utterance) --which, by the way, is something we do only very rarely, fortunately--, we do not perform *constative* or *assertive* speech acts. In fact, no commitment at all concerning the *truth* of what we utter need be involved here. (We *say what we think*, in the sense explained above; but this does not entail that the thought we are thinking is one we hold true, nor does it mean that by our utterance we claim, state, or affirm that we are thinking the thought we put out.) Moreover, the frankness and honesty which it characteristically takes a sane adult human being to think out loud, at least in the presence of an audience, is one of its *conceptual* ingredients. Someone who acts as if he were thinking out loud but in fact tries to

hide several of the sayable thoughts he is consciously entertaining, is not really engaged in what he pretends to be doing. He would not be thinking out loud; rather he'd be acting dishonestly.<sup>8</sup>

In pure acts of thinking out loud<sup>9</sup>, it might be argued, we do not even perform any *communicative* speech acts. At least, we clearly do not, then, *mean* anything by our utterances, in the Gricean sense of “to mean something by one’s utterance”. The famous Gricean mechanism is not at work when we think out loud. We don’t intend, when we’re thinking out loud, to get our audience to recognize our higher order intention to recognize our basic intention to bring about, in them, particular beliefs. In fact, we do not even intend to produce beliefs in our audience in the first place, neither beliefs about the topics of our thoughts on display (e.g., Harvey’s being stupid or not) nor beliefs about *our own beliefs* concerning these topics.

Some people doubt that they have the ability to think out loud. A good friend of mine who had read an earlier version of this paper, remarked to me, annoyedly, that there is no such thing among people who aren’t off their head; at least he himself could not even dream to do such a thing. Well, we use to play chess, occasionally. Each time we do it, I can hear him murmur things like: “First this, then this, then that. Hhm, looks good. No, that won’t work. No. Hhm. First *this*, then ta-ta-ta. Hhm, this may work.” [Pause] “O.K.”; and then he draws his pawn to e4. This is a first rate piece thinking out loud. By the way, any sort of pronounced soliloquy is a case of thinking out loud, not only the special sort I am here focussing on, namely cases in which one thinks out loud in full awareness of the presence of an audience within earshot.

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<sup>8</sup> In the next section I shall return to the issue of the conceptual connection between thinking out loud and honesty.

<sup>9</sup> Notice the word “pure”. – It might be worth mentioning in passing that *impure* acts of thinking out loud are much more common. Performing regular speech acts of various sorts, in what Ryle calls *normal unstudied talk*, can be a way of thinking out loud. (See Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, London 1949, pp. 181 ff.) But it is characteristic of many such acts that we are aware of the fact that we commit ourselves, in making the utterance, to holding true the thought which we put forward, and sometimes even to the thought’s truth. – In this paper, I shall be use “thinking out loud” as a short way of referring to a pure act of thinking out loud in the presence of an audience (it’s being common knowledge between speaker and audience that such an act is being performed).

The speech act of thinking out loud seems not to fit in the usual taxonomies which focus on communicative speech acts. Superficially, it may seem to bear some similarity with what Searle has called *declarations*: speech acts like declaring war or making a gift, by uttering sentences like “It is war” or “This is yours”.<sup>10</sup> But clearly the similarity breaks down at a crucial point: the performance of a declarational speech act brings into existence the very state of affairs which corresponds to the propositional content of the speech act. But when someone says, in the course of thinking out loud, “Harvey is stupid”, he thereby neither brings it about that Harvey is stupid, nor does he thereby bring about his own thought that Harvey is stupid. Maybe the term *Exhibitive* would be apt for labelling the category of speech acts to which thinking out loud belongs. It is the characteristic point of such speech acts that the speaker, in making his utterance, exhibits (presents, rather than re-presents) himself as being so-and-so. Assertives and many others types of speech acts represent the state of affairs which their propositional content is about (and they achieve other things on top); declarations bring states of affairs into existence; but an utterance performed in the course of thinking out loud, like an utterance of “Harvey is stupid”, is a manifestation of the utterer’s thinking that Harvey is stupid.

A thinking out loud is not a mere expression of a thought; it’s a manifestation – like in jumping over a fence one *manifests* oneself as possessing, in this very moment, the ability to jump over it. The thought that Harvey is stupid, or one's entertaining it, can be *expressed* in many ways, for example by raising one’s arm in reaction to the request “Who of you is, right now, entertaining the thought that Harvey is stupid? Please raise your arm exactly when you are entertaining this thought, in whatever mode!”. But in doing so, the arm-raising person does not *manifest* his having this thought. Even if he is honest, there is leeway for doubt: he may have misheard the

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<sup>10</sup> "It is the defining characteristic [of a declaration] that the successful performance of one of its members *brings about* the correspondence between the propositional content and reality, successful performance guarantees that the propositional content corresponds to the world ... Declarations *bring about some alteration* in the status or condition of the referred to object or objects solely in virtue of the fact that the declaration has been successfully performed." (John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, Cambridge UP 1979, p. 16 f.)

request, and so on. A manifestation, *sensu stricto*, of  $X$  is something that leaves no doubt at all about the existence of  $X$ . If honesty is granted, thinking out loud counts as a manifestation of the entertaining of the very thought which is displayed acoustically. Possibly, thinking out loud (with honesty granted) is the only way to manifest, in the realm of the sayable, that we are thinking the particular thought which we think out loud. (Of course, people who are very quick scribblers could do the same in writing. Remember the movement of automatic writing among the Dadaists and some of the Surrealists.) Maybe be someone like Jackson Pollock was able to do something of this kind with oil on canvas<sup>11</sup>; someone like Charlie Parker with a saxophone, someone like Sonny Sharrock with a guitar, etc. - I'm not sure about it, but it seems to me that some of our non-sayable thoughts can also be manifested, in some way analogous to thinking out loud.)

### 3. The ability to think out loud explanatory of the ability to say what one thinks

So here is one crucial fact about the ability to think out loud in virtue of which it is explanatory of the ability to say, with absolute authority, what one thinks: Given overall normal circumstances, it is conceptually sufficient. This is to say:

- (3) *Ceteris paribus*: If  $S$  is able to think out loud (in  $L$ ), then he is able to authoritatively say, (in  $L$ ), what he thinks.<sup>12</sup>

is a conceptual truth. Why is this so? And why should the antecedent of (3) be *explanatory* of the consequent?

As to the first question, and leaving the authoritativeness issue aside for a moment, it needs no argument to see that he who is able to think out loud, is normally able to say what he thinks. If he

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<sup>11</sup> Concededly, “thinking out *loud*” may not be the appropriate phrase for describing anything a painter does. Of course, the same holds for performing artists of other genres.

<sup>12</sup> *Nota bene*: in the *quid*-reading of “being able to say what one thinks”. Cf. note 5 above.

has the ability to present, by uttering “So-&-so”, what he’s thinking --and is, by assumption, a normal speaker and therefore has mastered the use of “I am thinking that ...”--, then, in overall normal circumstances, he plainly is also able to say “I’m thinking that so-&-so”, thereby telling us what he thinks. – If you don’t think this is obvious, here comes something like an argument: If *S* is able to think out loud, he is able to *quod*-say what he thinks - e.g., by uttering “Harvey is stupid”, therein performing the exhibitiv speech act of thinking out loud. But for anyone who has mastered the self-ascriptive use of “I’m thinking that ...”, it follows from this (excuse me for being excessively banal) that he is also, able to *quid*-say what he thinks - by uttering “I’m thinking that Harvey is stupid”, therein performing a truth-bound speech act of so-called self-ascription.

Now to the authoritativeness, which I claim to be a conceptual consequence of the ability to think out loud. Where is it supposed to come from?

Well, basically from two things: (4) in saying what he thinks, the speaker *could*, if he wished, act on his ability to think out loud;<sup>13</sup> and (5) if in fact he does so, his saying what he says has all the marks of authoritativeness. I shall not argue here for the first point, but merely for the second.

In doing so, I shall not try to cover all aspects, but rather focus on the epistemological most fascinating feature of absolute authoritativeness: that given the speaker’s honesty in saying what he thinks, the truth of what he says cannot be doubted. For as long as we, the others, presume that, in saying “I’m thinking that so-&-so”, he acts on his ability to think out loud, we can have no reason to doubt that he thinks that so-&-so. (Of course, we may have reason to doubt his honesty in saying this; but this is to say: we do not assume that he actually acts on the ability.) Moreover, in acting on his ability to think out loud, he simply cannot mistakenly give us something he actually does *not* think, in this exact moment, as something he’s thinking.

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<sup>13</sup> Thereby not excluding the possibility that there are other ways of saying what one thinks.

(Remember that we are not talking about what *S* holds true or judges.) There is just no scope for involuntary mistakes on his part. Errors of memory, for example, are out of the question because of the simultaneity. (Such errors would not be out of the question, if instead he were to say: “One moment ago, I had exactly the same thought that you just mentioned: Harvey is stupid”. Even if he's an honest person to the bone, he may err in *this*. His actual thought may have been that Harvey is silly. But if in acting on his ability to think out loud, he says “I’m thinking that Harvey is stupid”, he simply cannot be mistaken in some such way; he puts out the thought as and how he is entertaining it.)

Of course, in any particular attempt to think out loud, *S* may fall victim to a slip of the tongue, momentary linguistic confusion, etc. But this is irrelevant. It does not impair –in fact, it does not even concern- his *ability* to say what he is thinking with absolute authoritativeness. In an attempt of acting on this ability, no speaker is immune to the usual linguistic mishaps; but nevertheless, he is, at the same time, *able* to present his sayable thoughts as and how he is thinking them. So given that he acted on this ability, the question “But was it *really* what you were thinking at this particular moment?” has only one correct answer: Yes. – In a nutshell, deceitfulness is excluded by his honesty; his being mistaken about what he (‘really’) thinks is excluded by the exhibitiveness of the ability on which he acts.

One may feel uneasy about the requirement, or stipulation, that honesty be a conceptual ingredient of thinking out loud. Three remarks on this. First, I hold that this is simply the right way of explicating the concept. Just like the appropriate analysis of informing contains a condition to the effect that what one is informed about is true (otherwise one has, at best, been misinformed)<sup>14</sup>, the analysis of thinking out loud should require the speaker’s honesty. If the

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<sup>14</sup> Fred Dretske straightened me out on this in a lecture he gave in Heidelberg 2008.

speaker is not honest, if he, e.g., recites sentences with his mind elsewhere<sup>15</sup>, his utterance ought not to be described as a thinking out loud. Just as there are not two types of information (true and false), there are not two types of thinking out loud (honest and dishonest). Secondly, no vicious circle is involved in such an explication. The relevant honesty is not to be characterized as *saying what one thinks*, or suchlike.<sup>16</sup> It is simply the absence of any pertinent intention to conceal, mask or withhold the sayable thought in question. Put in old fashioned terminology, it's not a 'real and positive' cognitive attitude but rather a 'privation': a lack of a certain family of such perfidious attitudes.

So the fact that *S* is able to think out loud is conceptually sufficient for her ability to say what she thinks. More importantly, the fact that she has the first ability *explains* that she has the second. But what sort of explanation is this? Given the conceptual truth of (3), it cannot be a causal explanation. Putting aside marginal bits of detail, the true sentence "*S* is able to authoritatively say what she thinks, *in virtue of* her being able to think out loud" expresses a conceptual explanation. It's like saying that Mr Bird is a bachelor, in virtue of his being a male adult who is, and always was, unmarried. In real life, conceptual explanations of contingent facts may be rare, and usually not an appropriate reaction to the request for an explanation.<sup>17</sup> But in philosophy, this is a significant and, I think, indispensable kind of explanation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This can be done, but is no little feat. As the Unnamable aptly puts it: ... it's difficult to speak, even any old rubbish, and at the same time focus one's attention to another point ..." (Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, Grove Press, 1958, 27).

<sup>16</sup> It should be obvious by now that the kind of honesty, or frankness, in question hasn't anything to do with saying what one *believes*.

<sup>17</sup> But think of a typical learner's questions. A novice in chess may ask "Why has Black won this game?". Answers like "Because Black checkmated White", "Black trapped the white king", etc. may give him *exactly* the sort of explanation which was hoped for. More 'informative' answers (like "Because from the 29<sup>th</sup> move on, White was not able to prevent the promotion of Black's free pawn") may not yet be helpful.

<sup>18</sup> Conceptual explanation appears to be a fairly neglected topic. But see Benjamin Schnieder („A Certain Kind of Trinity: Dependence, Substance, Explanation“, *Philosophical Studies* 129, 2006, 393-419, especially 402 – 411; and „Truth-making without Truth-makers“, *Synthese* 152, 2006, 21-46, especially 31–39) for some interesting stuff.

Yet, even if the admissibility and potential value of conceptual explanations is granted in general, an objection might be raised against the particular explanation I have presented. The objection can be put as follows: “Couldn’t we simply reverse the explanation, *i.e.*, explain the ability to think out loud in terms of the ability to say what one thinks? But if this works equally well (or equally poorly), then this shows that your alleged conceptual explanation is no genuine explanation. To pick up your own example: Mr Bird’s bachelorship can be explained in terms of his being adult, unmarried, etc. *only* because we *cannot* explain the fact that he is adult, unmarried etc. in terms of his being a bachelor. If there is as much reason in favor of the truth of ‘*A* in virtue of *B*’ as there is for the truth of ‘*B* in virtue of *A*’, neither sentence expresses a genuine explanation”.

So much is correct about this objection: It still needs to be argued that there is no good reason to assume that the ability to think out loud can be conceptually explained by the ability to say what one thinks. Here is what I have to offer: First, if (3) is reversed, it is not obvious that the result, namely

(R3) *Ceteris paribus*: If *S* is able to authoritatively say, (in *L*), what he thinks, then he is able to think out loud (in *L*),

is a conceptual truth at all.<sup>19</sup> But, secondly, even if it were one, it is hard to see how its antecedent could be explanatory of its consequent. But third, and most importantly, as regards (3), the corresponding explanatory relationship is very easy to see. For there is a strikingly simple three-step aetiological picture which suggests itself: Teach a child many things about the use of *L*, but not yet the use of “to think that” (and of other linguistic devices with similar purposes); then

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<sup>19</sup> Might there not be fully normal, adult speakers who (in overall normal circumstances) simply are not able to think out loud? It’s not only that they don’t do it, because they don’t like it; they just couldn’t do it, even if they tried. Whereas they are fully able to speak of themselves as thinking this and that. (One could think of various causes for their lopsided inability.) Maybe such people would not be fully normal people; but still they might be normal speakers of their language. See note 7 above.

teach or encourage her, if needs be, to soliloquize in your presence (so she learns to think out loud); and in the third step teach her the knack about “I am thinking that ...”, in the sense of this phrase which is pertinent for our topic. This third step amounts basically to the following: Teach her which parts of her speech productions are such that the result of her prefixing them by “I am thinking that ...” is something true. As soon as the child has learnt this, she is able to say, authoritatively, what she thinks. - What is crucial for our present purposes is not that this simple three-step model comes close to the truth about how the ability to correctly use “I’m thinking that ...” is *actually* acquired. It suffices that this model is coherent and therefore shows a way how, in principle, the ability to authoritatively say what one thinks could be developed by exploiting the ability to think out loud (and without presupposing an independent ability to ‘find out’ what one is thinking). Moreover, as to (R3), no equally coherent and persuasive model of how the antecedent ability may lead to acquiring the consequent ability suggests itself.

This completes my sketch of an argument for the claim that the ability to think out loud is explanatory of the ability to authoritatively say what one thinks.

#### 4. Self-knowledge acquired by thinking out loud unglamorous

Above I had mentioned my misgivings about the appropriateness of speaking of *knowledge*, with regard to the phenomenon of consciously entertaining sayable thoughts. But does not the clever exploitation of the ability to think out loud clearly lead us to knowledge, properly so-called?

Here's the thought. In acting (honestly) on the ability to say what one thinks, one inevitably says what one thinks. (Don't forget that, as we have noticed, the sense in which one *says* it, is a peculiar one: one performs a hybrid type of speech act.) But if only we knew that the speaker is genuinely thinking out loud (that is, does so with the honesty required), we would obviously

*know* what he is thinking in the exact moment in which he says it. It may be that *we* can never remove each and every possible doubt about his honesty. Anyway, under normal circumstances, honesty is not a problem for *the speaker himself*. So if he were to think out loud, in full awareness, as only he can be, of the fact that he is honest in doing so (and not, for example, inwardly thinking other things while outwardly reciting some text he knows by heart), there could be no doubt left *for him* about what he is thinking. If by no other method, certainly by acting on his ability to think out loud, he may acquire indubitable ... --and there seems to be only *one* word for it:-- *knowledge* of what he thinks.

Hence, it may seem fully proper and flawless to speak of knowledge here, in this far-fetched case. And a piece of such knowledge would be clearly deserve to be called *self*-knowledge, for it is something only the subject himself cannot rationally have doubts about; everyone else can rationally doubt the truth, to the extent in which they can doubt his honesty. - So one may be tempted to think.

Fine. Now, imagine a speaker who decides to think out loud in order to acquire knowledge about his own next thoughts. As long as he does this, he knows (in fact: he hears), it seems, what he is then thinking. Indeed, it is knowledge, properly so called, about his current thinking which he acquires by this method. And, yes, concerning one pertinent aspect he is in a better epistemic position than everybody else: He can legitimately dismiss the possibility of his being dishonest in saying what he says, whereas others would have to make an extra effort to exclude this possibility, which, for them but not for him, is a relevant alternative. But nevertheless, the knowledge the speaker gets in this way lacks a lot of the glamour allegedly characteristic of self-knowledge about one's own current thought. Clearly, it is not *a priori*, for it is acquired by sense-perception. It is neither infallible, nor glamorously immune to any sort of rational (albeit far-

fetched) doubt. After all, may he not fear that some nasty gimmick in his surroundings distorts his speech sound, and other things of this kind?

So the upshot is that, with regard to its epistemological status, self-knowledge acquired by acting on one's ability to think out loud is regular commonplace knowledge, maybe a variant of 'expert' knowledge – in spite of the fanciful manner in which it is gained.

### 5. Stale glamour

Let's take stock. I have tried here to find a way of explaining our ability to authoritatively say what we think, without presupposing that we have self-'knowledge' of our current sayable thoughts. The way I have suggested is winding and thorny, and my description of it is at best a sketch. Moreover, I doubt that my arguments appear to be compelling, since the explanation, being a conceptual one, depends on several claims to the effect that certain *ceteris paribus* generalizations are conceptual truths. Such claims are bound to be contentious.

But assuming, 'for the sake of the argument', that what I have presented here is on the right track, what would it show about the issue of self-knowledge? It shows at least one thing, namely that such knowledge is not needed in order to account for our ability to say what we think, and moreover to fully accept the epistemologically remarkable features characteristic of the special authoritativeness with which each of us can say what he or she thinks. Acting on these abilities is what gives a certain epistemological glamour to some of our (first-person) sayings: *e.g.*, infallibility and guaranteed truth.<sup>20</sup> And this, as we have seen, in turn can be conceptually explained by our ability to think out loud – presuming the honesty which is required in acting on

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<sup>20</sup> I am not so sure about the applicability of some of the other labels to be found in the literature. But "*a priori*" definitely is a horrid misnomer. What one says (when one says what one currently thinks, *e.g.*, that one is thinking that Harvey is stupid) is not an *a priori* truth; moreover, even if it were at least tolerable to speak of knowledge of one's own current thought, its content (*e.g.*, that Harvey is stupid) would usually be nothing we could know *a priori*.

it. So, there seems to be no urgent reason to assume that we have glamorous self-knowledge, or just knowledge, in order to understand whence we have first person authority concerning what we currently think or why we can speak with absolute authoritativeness on this issue.

If some people nevertheless want to speak of self-*knowledge* in this context, it is most probably because they find it hard *not* to speak of (a manifestation of --or, at least, a matchless evidence for--) *S*'s knowing that *p*, when the following holds: (a) The proposition that *p* is contingent; (b) *S* has an ability such that *S*'s acting on it, in saying that *p*, guarantees that *p*. For those who are fascinated by the sheer existence of an ability to be *infallibly* right about *contingent* matters, the honorific word "knowledge" may seem a meagre minimum of linguistic appropriateness, when it comes to characterizing the epistemic relation in which the agent stands to the fact that *p*, if he were to say that *p* and therein to act on such a grandiose ability. The friend of *GSK* will ask: How on earth could an ability to say certain substantial and true things (*e.g.*, on the topic of what one currently thinks) not be knowledge-involving, - especially when there is a guarantee that acting on it entails getting things right? – The short answer suggested by my considerations in this paper is this: If honesty in saying something is *all* it takes for getting certain things right without fail, then knowledge is simply not needed (for getting *these* things right).

Anyway, those who still find it irresistible to speak of knowledge in this connection should also recognize some of the less glamorous aspects of one's 'knowledge' about one's own current thoughts. Let me, in concluding, mention some of the features I have in mind:

- (a) Such 'knowledge' is cheap – in the sense that it is a conceptual free gift which comes with acquiring the status of a normal speaker.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. (5) and (3) above, and appreciate their conceptual truth.

- (b) The infallibility of such 'knowledge' is extremely ephemeral – the expiring date for the infallibility is the time when the next thought occurs. Its glamour lasts exactly as long as the thinking of the thought.
- (c) Items of such 'knowledge' are indeed substantial, if only in the sense that they are about contingent facts. But usually they are not very interesting, at least not for other people. Usually, we are not curious about what people just think and wouldn't give a penny to be told. (Lovers, biographers and psychologists may be exceptions.) What we, occasionally, are interested in is what they think-*and-believe*, or at least think-*and-take-to-be-conversationally-relevant*. As for myself, almost all of my conscious sayable thoughts are not worth mentioning. And I myself definitely prefer to live in social surroundings in which people are not given to share with me items of their 'knowledge' which have this shabby sort of epistemological glamour.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Thanks to Fred Dretske, Stefanie Grüne, Friederike Schmitz and Steven Davis for kindly pointing out to me a lot of mistakes and unclarities in earlier versions of this talk.