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Epistemic Authority: Preemption Through Source Sensitive Defeat

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Abstract. Modern societies are characterized by a division of epistemic labor between laypeople and epistemic authorities. Authorities are often far more competent than laypeople and can thus, ideally, inform their beliefs. But how should laypeople rationally respond to an authority's beliefs if they already have beliefs and reasons of their own concerning some subject matter? According to the standard view, the beliefs of epistemic authorities are just further, albeit weighty, pieces of evidence. In contrast, the Preemption View claims that, when one discovers what an authority believes, it is not permissible to rely on any of one's own reasons concerning the subject matter. The original version of this view, as proposed by Linda Zagzebski, has recently been severely criticized for recommending blind trust and for abandoning even minimal standards for critical thinking. In our paper, we defend a new version of the Preemption View—Defeatist Preemptionism—in a way that differs radically from Zagzebski's. We argue that our view can be derived from certain widely accepted general epistemic principles. In particular, we claim that preemption can be identified as a special case of source sensitive defeat. Moreover, we argue that Defeatist Preemptionism does not lead to the undesirable consequences that critics ascribe to the Preemption View. The paper thus articulates the foundations and refinements of the Preemption View that aims to adequately capture the phenomenon of epistemic authority and the rational requirements related to it.

The beliefs of epistemic authorities within their domains of authority are highly trustworthy. Indeed, an authority's belief is significantly more trustworthy than that of the average layperson. Typically, the authority's epistemic superiority is due to an extensive body of evidence and highly competent reasoning skills. Authorities play various roles in modern societies. As teachers or advisors, they supplement our limited evidence and help us gain a more comprehensive understanding of reality.¹ In this way, they may help us become experts ourselves. But when matters get more complicated, when highly specialized cognitive abilities or complex mathematical calculations are required or when there is not much time to acquire disciplinary expertise, laypersons often defer to the experts' conclusions. Typically, average

¹ Jäger (2016) and Lackey (2018) place special emphasis on this aspect of epistemic authority (or expertise) when they talk about "socratic authorities" or "experts-as-advisors".

people can neither fully understand nor reproduce the complicated mathematical operations that are used in books about relativity theory, quantum physics or climate change. But even more mundane things, such as medical diagnoses, technical reports or articles in the business section of the daily newspaper, often transcend the limits of intelligibility for laypeople. In these and similar cases they tend to take the authority's verdict on the subject matter, as it were, "on authority". This is certainly the right way to go when laypeople lack prior evidence, for expert statements are cases of particularly trustworthy testimony and should be treated as such. But how should laypeople rationally respond if they have beliefs and evidence of their own about the subject matter when confronting authority views?

Consider a case in which we learn that current experts disagree with a piece of folk physics. Based on observations of everyday occurrences of pairs of events, it appears obvious to a layperson that two events are either simultaneous or they are not. Now she hears that widely respected physicists who specialize in relativity theory believe that this is not true. In this case, it seems completely irrational for the layperson to give any epistemic weight to her own everyday experiences in the face of the verdict of clearly identified experts. She should just follow the authorities' lead. This seems to support what can be called "Simple Preemptionism": Learning about an authority's belief always screens off one's own reasons by making it rationally impermissible to continue to rely on them in addition to the reason from authority. However, Simple Preemptionism is clearly too strong. Consider the astrophysicist Edmond, who predicts that a well-known comet will be visible to the naked eye at a certain time t . Suppose that at time t Lucy carefully looks for the comet but fails to see it. Edmond himself is ill that night and therefore not able to test his prediction. Moreover, Lucy doesn't tell him about her observations. Intuitively, in this case, it is acceptable for Lucy to use her own observations as (probably inconclusive) evidence against Edmond's authority belief that the comet would be visible to the naked eye at t . It clearly is irrational for Lucy to defer to Edmond and to disregard her own observations, as Simple Preemptionism would have it. According to Simple Preemptionism's chief rival, both the simultaneity case and the comet case are best explained by the distinctive influence that learning of the belief of an authority has on one's *total evidence*. Specifically, rather than screening off any other considerations, the belief of an authority² is always to be added to one's other reasons and,

² The question of whether we rely on someone's beliefs or on their assertions is a complex one that is much discussed. Typically, we have access to testifiers' beliefs via their utterances. From their more general behavior, we can also obtain clues as to the level of certainty or credence with which they hold those beliefs, even though exact values are, of course, rarely determinable. Moreover, the testifier's belief does not seem necessary for learning from a speaker. Lackey (2008) demonstrates this with her creationist teacher case. Nevertheless, we will

depending on its relative weight, may sometimes outweigh those other reasons, like in the simultaneity case, or rightfully fail to fully convince the layperson, like in the comet case. Call this view the “Total Evidence View” (TEV; the label is from Kelly 2010). TEV can safely be called the standard view on the effects of epistemic authority and has appealed to authors for a long time (e.g. Gadamer 1975).

Yet, recently attempts have been made to formulate a properly restricted account of epistemic preemption by authority belief. The most notable contribution is Linda Zagzebski’s view, which we will call “Ungrounded Preemptionism”. This view is an adaptation of Joseph Raz’ preemptionist view of practical authoritative reasons to the epistemic realm, on which an authority’s belief screens off one’s own reasons, because fully deferring to an authority improves one’s error-quota to the point where it is identical with the authority’s and therefore better than one’ original quota (cf. Raz 1988, 68-69), thus recommending a strategy of “probability-maximizing” (Zagzebski 2012, chapter 6, note 10).³ Zagzebski modifies this position, claiming that an authority’s belief screens off one’s own reasons, *unless one is in certain abnormal cases*. Zagzebski is mostly moved by cases of outrageous authority beliefs, like a doctor prescribing 4,000 pills a day, where it seems counterintuitive to defer to the authority. The problem with Ungrounded Preemptionism is that it is undermotivated. The explanation for the phenomenon of preemption is not integrated with more general epistemic principles. A corollary of this is the ad hoc character of the implemented restrictions in response to counterexamples from outrageous authority beliefs and others. The trouble, more generally put, is that mere case intuitions are not enough to underpin a substantial epistemic principle like Preemptionism that seems to clash with other relatively well-established principles, like the evidentialist norm, especially given that the rival TEV conforms with these principles.

One may argue that it becomes clearer to see the theoretical foundation of Ungrounded Preemptionism once one considers further details of Zagzebski’s inspiration, Joseph Raz’ theory of practical authoritative reasons. Raz provides a further argument for preemption from the threat of double-counting: Since one can reasonably assume that an authority has considered a set of reasons that includes any layperson’s, relying both on one’s own reasons

describe cases in terms of reliance on authorities’ beliefs and the credences they give to those beliefs since this is how the debate surrounding epistemic authority proceeds.

³ Raz restricts this principle to the reasons against the authority’s judgment, so that one can still rationally rely on one’s positive reasons. While this could be reasonable for the case of practical authority, it is implausible in cases of epistemic authority because of the plausibility of the double-counting argument discussed in the next paragraph.

and the known belief of an authority, would amount to counting the shared reasons twice (once as included in the authority's evaluation and once in one's own). Counting reasons twice in this way is clearly unwarranted and so, given that the authority is more competent, one should rely only on the authority's judgment (Raz 1988: 58). The irrationality of double-counting has its legitimate analogue in epistemology (Keren 2007: 374) and Raz' restriction of an authority command's preemptive power to the authority's *area of jurisdiction* (Raz 1990: 46) could conceivably also be accommodated to epistemology in order to account for cases like Edmond the physicist. However, the analogies between epistemology and the practical realm have limits which still prevent a Raz-inspired view from being fully grounded in epistemology. If authority beliefs really do screen off one's own reasons, the threat of double-counting constitutes at best a sufficient, but not a necessary condition for this effect. To see this, consider a case in which a layperson who believes that *p* on the basis of a reason *r* is confronted with an authority on *p* who disbelieves that *p* and who has considered *r*, but dismissed it *as irrelevant* to whether *p* on the basis of what her numerous other reasons regarding *p* tell her about the issue. This kind of case should be quite familiar, given that authorities very often consider laypeople's everyday-type evidence on seemingly simple, but really quite complex matters as irrelevant: as in the simultaneity case, physicists really do not base their judgments on everyday experiences of the temporal relations between events in coming to a conclusion about the nature of time and space. In such cases the Preemptionist cannot explain her verdict in terms of the threat of double-counting, since the layperson would *not* double-count her experiences by relying on them in making up her mind about *p*, in addition to the authority's belief. After all, the authority does not use every-day experiences at all, deeming them irrelevant. So, why does it still seem reasonable for the layperson to disregard them? If the answer is that it is because by relying on only the authority's verdict, the layperson avails herself of the reasons that lead the authority to dismiss as irrelevant everyday experiences, thereby improving her own chances of being right about simultaneity (Raz 1988: 68-69), this answer must rely on a more general epistemic framework than an adaptation of Raz' view can provide. Since TEV is fully motivated by just such a framework, it looks like the clear winner.

In this paper, we show that this conclusion is premature. There is a widely accepted, general epistemic principle that not only fully explains and sufficiently motivates the screening-off effect of authority beliefs, but also validates Preemptionist verdicts on paradigmatic cases of this kind: epistemic defeat. We argue that the nature of epistemic authority gives learning about an authority's belief that *p* a distinctive rational profile that

corresponds to the profile of a source sensitive defeater with respect to one's own reasons concerning *p*. That defeater doubles as a reason for following the authority's lead on *p*. This distinctive rational profile quite naturally predicts and accommodates counterexamples to the much too broad Simple Preemptionism, such as the comet case, while fully motivating most case verdicts of Ungrounded Preemptionism. Furthermore, this "Defeatist Preemptionism" (DP) is not only able to deal with the more pressing objections that have been raised against preemptionist views, but also puts some pressure on TEV, which is unable to properly accommodate the parallels between source sensitive defeaters and reasons from authority belief.

The rest of this paper is as follows. In Section 1, we will clarify the relevant concepts and draw appropriate conceptual distinctions. Then, in Section 2, we will fully state and defend DP, along with some circumscriptions. Finally, in Section 3, we will apply our account to explain relevant cases and defend it against some basic objections.

1. Terms of Engagement: Authorities, Preemption and Defeaters

What exactly is an epistemic authority? When we learn about the belief of a *knowledgeable epistemic agent*, this seems to give us a strong reason to follow suit and adopt that belief. The information that your doctor, upon examining the red spots on your face, believes that you have the measles gives you an excellent reason to believe that you do have the measles. In contrast, your bank accountant's belief upon seeing the spots that you have Lupus does not give you a good reason to believe that you have Lupus. There seems to be a highly relevant epistemic difference between your doctor and your accountant as sources of evidence for your medical condition. That difference can be spelled out in different ways. As far as you know, the doctor is an *expert*, while your accountant is not. Your doctor is in all likelihood epistemically *superior* to you in that she is more likely to be right with respect to medical issues, while your accountant is not. Since you reasonably expect your doctor to embody certain epistemic qualities, you ought to treat her, but not your accountant, as an *authority* on your illness. In this section, we will rely on the reasonably well understood notions of *expert* and *superior* to characterize the less clear, but equally important concept of *authority*. Based on the results, the question of how we rationally ought to react to the beliefs of authorities can be sharpened. In addition, we will prepare the ground for our own view by taking a closer look at the idea of preemptive reasons and relating this to the concept of epistemic defeat.

Let us start with an important methodological remark. Throughout the discussion, we will rely on a framework for doxastic attitudes that assigns credences to beliefs or disbeliefs according to their strength, rather than the traditional picture of flat-out belief, flat-out disbelief or suspension of judgment. In this picture, roughly, credences within a range sufficiently above 0.5 amount to flat-out belief, credences within a corresponding range below 0.5 amount to flat-out disbelief and credences within a range around 0.5 amount to suspension of judgment. The exact value of the credence represents the strength of the corresponding flat-out attitude. We agree with Jäger (2016: 170) that the study of epistemic authority benefits from this framework because the question of whether the belief of an authority can constitute a preemptive reason concerns the epistemic relevance or “force” that one’s own assessment of the available evidence can have in relevant cases. The proponent of TEV wants to claim that the information that an authority *agrees* with you is to be *added* to your total evidence. If your other evidence is to retain its epistemic force, this aggregation may even license a doxastic attitude that is more affirmative than the authority’s. A credence-based framework, but not the traditional picture, can model this claim, as the force of your own evidence may raise the credence you assign to a belief above that assigned by the authority.

Let us now turn to the question of what an epistemic authority is. As the red-spot example suggests, authorities are epistemic subjects who can *justifiedly be taken as* extremely good sources of evidence. Plausibly, someone can be a good source of evidence for someone else in virtue of having certain epistemic qualities. Therefore, if one reasonably ascribes such qualities to a person, one is rationally required to give the corresponding epistemic weight to their judgments. The doctor is to be treated as a better source of evidence than the accountant because you have reason to believe that she is more thorough in gathering information about symptoms and illnesses and more capable with respect to interpreting that information adequately. In other words, from your perspective, unlike the accountant, she is very likely to be right. Notably, whether A is an authority for S only depends on A’s actual epistemic qualities insofar as S has reasons to ascribe them to A that make it rational for S to believe that A has the relevant epistemic qualities (see Zagzebski 2012: 68, 110; Jäger 2016: 167-170). This is supported by the following kind of case: Suppose that although it is *true* that your neighbor is a doctor, you have no reason to think that she is. She is thus someone who is highly likely to be correct about medical matters and potentially an excellent source of evidence, but she is not someone whose judgment on such matters gives you a particularly good reason to follow suit. Once you have sufficient evidence to rationally believe that she is a doctor, however, she *becomes* an authority on medical matters for you. If your evidence

about her epistemic capabilities changes, she might also lose that status again. A subject A's epistemic-authority status for another subject S thus depends on *what S has sufficiently good* (here meaning *rationalizing*) *reasons to believe about A's epistemic qualities*.⁴

It is tempting to think of authorities as subjects we can reasonably take to be *experts*. Experts are people who, in the domain of their expertise, a) have a substantial body of evidence and b) have methods that reliably lead to true beliefs and adequate credences and are able to employ these (see Goldman 2001: 91, 92). However, construing authority solely in terms of reasonably ascribable expertise overlooks the relational character of authority. While one's status as an authority may vary in relation to different persons, one's status as an expert may not. What this shows is that being an authority is not a robust state, but a three-place relation between a given person (or set of persons) A, another person (or set of persons) S, and some doxastic domain D (Jäger 2016: 170).⁵ A can be an authority in a domain D for S but not for another person S*, whereas A is either an expert in D or not.

This suggests an analysis of epistemic authority that involves the notion of an epistemic *superior* rather than an expert. Roughly speaking, A is an epistemic superior in relation to S on a given subject matter D iff A is *more likely than S* both to assign the right credences to propositions in D for a given pool of evidence and to be correct about matters in D. However, a subject S's having sufficiently good reasons for taking A as a mere superior to herself regarding D is not sufficient for A to be an authority for S about D. An authority must also be reasonably expected to be *sufficiently likely* to assign the right credence and to be correct. If a subject S is pretty incompetent in these respects when assessing the proposition that *p* and knows that A is only slightly more competent than S, but still pretty bad (let us say that S succeeds 30% of the time and A succeeds 35% of the time), it is implausible to count A as an authority for S regarding *p* (Zagzebski 2012: 111; Keren 2014b: 70-72).⁶ Thus, in order for A to be an epistemic authority for a subject S, S must have sufficiently good reasons both for taking A to be her superior and for taking A to be generally good at forming fitting and correct judgments. The latter amounts to S having sufficiently good reasons to believe that A is an expert in our sense.

The above considerations suggest the following definition of epistemic authority:

⁴ We think of the relationship between the evidence one has about the other person's epistemic qualities and the belief that she is an authority to be propositional justification, but we need not commit ourselves to this here and so prefer to use the more neutral description.

⁵ Jäger adds that authority status is also time relative. Since this is of limited relevance for our present purposes, we will omit it here for simplicity's sake.

⁶ Reference omitted.

EA: A is an epistemic authority for S with respect to domain D iff S has sufficiently good reasons⁷ to believe that

- (i) A is an expert about D,
- (ii) A is an epistemic superior to S with respect to D.

(i) ensures that recognized superiors who are generally incompetent don't count as authorities, while (ii) allows experts to rationally refrain from treating other experts as authorities. The general idea that an authority is someone who is a source of exceptionally good evidence due to her recognized superior epistemic capabilities is maintained and spelled out in the following way: According to EA, the reason why you should adopt the belief of your doctor regarding medical matters but not the belief of your accountant is that you have sufficiently good reasons to believe that your doctor is an expert and superior to you with respect to medical matters, while you have no reason to think that your accountant is either of these.

We take EA to be an account of *grounded* authority. It is supposed to identify epistemically relevant properties of persons or institutions in virtue of which we plausibly may have to treat them as preempting our own reasoning. Our goal is to show that *in virtue of these properties ascribed to the authority*, the recognized beliefs of authorities, in addition to providing strong reasons to believe, constitute source sensitive defeaters and therefore count as “preemptive reasons”. This is notably not the same approach that is taken by at least some proponents of Preemptionism. According to Linda Zagzebski, “What is essential to authority is that it is a normative power that generates reasons for others to do or to believe something preemptively” (Zagzebski 2012: 102; see also Keren 2007: 373). She and others take an epistemic authority to be *defined by the capacity to give preemptive reasons*. Such a conception provides an account of *role authority* in that it first identifies the normative force of preemptive reasons and then defines authorities with respect to it. To illustrate the difference between grounded authority and role authority, consider what would happen if it turned out that preemptionism, for example in the form of our position, turned out to be false: If the properties ascribed to an authority would not result in the recognized beliefs of

⁷ We will assume in this paper that defeaters must be sufficiently supported in order to defeat. However, we are not committed to this somewhat controversial (e.g. Bergmann 2006; Alexander 2017) position. Should it turn out that (e.g.) merely believed defeaters are possible, we would be willing to drop the condition that one needs sufficient reason for taking somebody to be an authority.

authorities amounting to preemptive reasons, as we claim, there would still be grounded authorities, since there would still be persons who *have* the relevant epistemic properties we identified. An authority's judgment could then still be said to give us weighty reasons. However, if preemptionism failed, there would be no role-authorities at all, since there would not be persons who can generate preemptive reasons. Accordingly, for a defender of an account of epistemic authority as role-authority, but not for a defender of epistemic authority as grounded authority, the existence of epistemic authorities depends on the plausibility of preemption. Since we assume that everybody in this debate, including Zagzebski, Keren, us and other defenders of preemptionism, takes epistemic authorities to exist, we take it to be preferable to talk about grounded authorities, rather than role-authorities.

Two further clarifications about EA have to be added. The first concerns the role of evidence for authority status. It is tempting to make an authority's superior *competence in evaluating evidence* the sole defining criterion. However, in many situations, one relies on an expert's general likelihood to arrive at the truth. Mere competence is not sufficient for this general reliability. Substantive evidence is also needed: The most methodologically capable forensic expert will not be able to tell you very much about a given murder case without access to the evidence collected at the crime scene or a functioning laboratory. Experts generally have substantive evidence because developing effective capabilities for identifying and gathering evidence is part of how one becomes an expert. Thus, given that authorities are taken to be experts, when one has identified an epistemic authority, one has *prima facie* sufficiently good reasons to believe that she has a substantial body of evidence within the domain of authority (cf. Elga 2007: 479; Keren 2014a: 2611, 2612). Furthermore, if you have reason to believe that the authority is better than you are at gathering the relevant evidence, we take it that you also have *prima facie* sufficiently good reasons to believe that the authority has considered all of *your* evidence on the matter. For example, it seems that a layperson who bases her belief that all events are either simultaneous or not on arguments from a pre-relativistic physics book has reason to believe that the disagreeing physicist is well aware of those arguments. This is because she has reason to believe that trained physicists are unlikely to miss such readily available evidence within their fields. Of course, it *might* turn out that an authority has missed crucial evidence, but absent any independent reason to think so, one should not assume that this is the case. Therefore, when A is an authority for S with respect to a proposition p within A's domain of authority D, S has *prima facie* sufficiently good reasons to believe that 1) A is better than S at gathering evidence within D and 2) A considers all evidence about p that S has.

The second clarification concerns the boundaries of the domain within which an authority is an authority. Stephen Hawking is an authority with respect to physics, but not with respect to Byzantine art history. But what does it mean to be an authority with respect to physics? If Hawking predicted the visibility to the naked eye of a certain comet at time t , his belief would seem to have the weight of authority for a layperson. So, it would appear that propositions like *the comet will be visible to the naked eye at t* are part of his domain of authority. But when a layperson carefully looks at the sky at t and fails to see a comet, she appears to be perfectly rational in not relying solely on Hawking's belief (cf. Goldman 2001: 106, 107). The explanation for this is that the proposition at issue was part of the domain of authority before t but stopped being part of that domain at t . The truth-value of the proposition before t was assessable only via the specialized methods that allow predictions within the realm of physics, and the authority qua expert has not only mastered more of these methods but is also more capable in applying them and additionally has superior evidence with respect to the prediction. Before t , the proposition is thus what Goldman calls *esoteric* for the layperson (Goldman 2001: 94, 106).⁸ At t , the proposition is no longer esoteric, but becomes *exoteric* (ibid.): At t , the layperson has a method available to her for assessing the proposition's truth-value that is at least as good as the authority's methods, namely, perception. The phenomenon that was only predictable before t has become observable. Since at t the proposition's truth-value is no longer more accessible by the authority than it is by the layperson, it no longer falls within the authority's domain of authority. The domain D on which an authority A is an authority for a subject S is thus the set of propositions that are esoteric for S and exoteric for A . In other words, as a technical term, "domain" does not refer to a metaphysically individuated set of facts, but to exactly those facts, whatever they are, that are best accessible via specific methods.⁹

Now that we have a firm grip on the concept of a grounded epistemic authority, we can take a closer look at what is called a "preemptive reason". According to Zagzebski, "The fact that the authority has a belief p is a reason for me to believe p that replaces my other reasons relevant to believing p and is not simply added to them" (Zagzebski 2012: 107). While this formulation does not quite capture the version of DP we want to defend, it

⁸ Goldman claims that the truth-values of esoteric propositions are *inaccessible* to the layperson (Goldman 2001: 94). We understand "esoteric" in a weaker sense in that it applies to propositions that laypeople are *less reliable* in assessing than is the authority, due to their less reliable arsenal of methods. This is meant to leave open the possibility that a layperson *can* have access to the truth-value of an esoteric proposition. Esotericism is thus a matter of degree.

⁹ The general idea of scope-restricted preemption can already be found in Raz 1990: 46-47. However, on Raz' view the scope-affecting reasons are primarily conventional or institutional facts.

expresses the general idea: Learning about the belief of an authority renders further use of one's own evidence *in assessing the content of that belief* irrational. The known belief of an authority can thus be said to preempt one's *evidence*. This can be unpacked into two components of preemption:

Preemption:

- 1) An authority A's known belief that p, where p lies within A's domain of expertise, preempts subject S's evidence E *with respect to S's assessment of p*.
- 2) Evidence E is preempted with respect to S's assessment of p iff E is *rationaly unusable* for S with respect to the assessment of p.

Since this conception of preemption concerns the rationality of a certain use of evidence, it is a normative thesis (Keren 2007: 373; Zagzebski 2012: 113; Jäger 2016: 174-178; Dormandy manuscript; Lackey 2018: 231). Furthermore, it is important to note that it does not entail the “replacement” of evidence. In fact, preempted evidence neither vanishes (see Jäger 2016: 175, 176; Dormandy manuscript; Lackey 2018: 231) nor becomes generally unusable. While A's claim that p may make E rationally unusable for S in the assessment of p, S can still rationally use E to assess *any proposition other than p*,¹⁰ unless S possesses information about other relevant authority beliefs regarding such a proposition.¹¹

It is now easier to see why one may think that preemption shows significant parallels to the more general phenomenon of defeat. At least some kinds of defeaters fulfill the same function as preemptive authority beliefs, namely *undercutting* and *higher-order defeaters*. Undercutting defeaters indicate that certain pieces of evidence do not properly support the

¹⁰ Strictly speaking, it is also not permissible to use E for the assessment of any proposition that is derivable from p. If, e.g., E is preempted from being used as evidence for the assessment of p, then we must not use it as indirect evidence for assessing the proposition $p \wedge (q \vee \neg q)$, if we inferentially derive this proposition from p.

¹¹ There are some uses of E where it misleadingly looks as though preemption should hold, but it doesn't. One example would be a use of evidence E that *makes a difference* with respect to which attitude to adopt towards p but that *does not amount to an assessment* of p itself. This may sound strange at first, but cases like this are well known in epistemology: Undercutting defeaters, for example, make a difference regarding what one is to believe, but cannot be used in an assessment of the content of the defeated belief. Another type of apparent counterexample to preemption concerns cases where preemption applies and where one does not use E but rather evidence about psychological states or events that contain or are closely related to E in the assessment of the relevant proposition p. Since evidence about psychological states related to E is not the same as E itself, such cases turn out to be compatible with preemption. We will discuss examples of both kinds of cases in detail later in this article.

defeated belief, thereby rendering it rationally unusable (Pollock 1986: 37-39). A common example contains a testifier telling an observer that red light is illuminating the widgets the observer is seeing. Intuitively, due to the testifier's testimony, the observer can now no longer rely on her color perception in determining the color of the widgets, rendering her belief that the widgets are red unjustified. Higher-order defeaters indicate that there is something wrong with the way the evidence is processed in forming the defeated belief, e.g. because the subject is cognitively impaired (Christensen 2010). An example involves a subject being told that she has taken a reason-distorting drug, which makes it irrational for the subject to continue to rely on reasoning from her evidence and thus to hold beliefs on the basis of reasoning. This type of defeater, too, makes it irrational to rely on the evidence that is exploited through the incriminated process. To keep things simple, we will refer to undercutting and higher-order defeaters as "source sensitive defeaters" (Casullo 2003: 45; see also Loughrist 2015: 63) or, for short, "S-defeaters" and understand them to be subsumed under Timothy Loughrist's conception of defeaters:

Defeater: S's belief that r would be a defeater with respect to S's belief that q if and only if S's belief that r would be an epistemic reason for S to not believe that q on some basis (Loughrist 2015: 88,89).¹²

Thus, it seems that S-defeaters have just the preempting effect that we argue that learning about an authority belief has. Notably, the parallels go even further: Clearly, **Defeater** leaves it open for a defeater to double as a reason and this is fortunate. Imagine trustworthy testifier A tells you that p . Then, even more trustworthy testifier B comes along and tells you that A is currently drunk, but that p . B's testimony is a defeater for your belief that p on the basis of A's testimony and, at the same time, a reason to believe that p .¹³ Furthermore, a source-sensitive defeater can be *partial* (cf. Thune 2010). There are two kinds of partial S-defeaters: scope-related and strength-related. Scope-related partial S-defeaters render only part of one's evidence unusable. Having received an undercutting defeater that only concerns vision, for example, one may still rely on testimony in holding the partially undercut belief. The same

¹² Rebutting defeaters, which simply indicate that the defeated belief is false, are supposed to be accommodated by this account because a rebutting defeater is a reason not to hold the defeated belief *on any basis at all*, including any particular basis (Loughrist 2015: 86-87).

¹³ Loughrist discusses such "double-agent" cases, as he calls them, in great detail (Loughrist 2015: 76 ff; 90 ff).

phenomenon can be found with respect to authority beliefs. For illustration, consider a case where a layperson S uses a set of evidence E when forming the belief that p and is then confronted with an authority A's judgment that p is false, such that S has good reason to believe that A has only considered a subset of E, E*. In that case, it seems that S would be perfectly rational in relying on the part of E that remains when E* is subtracted, possibly resulting in it being rational for S to merely lower her credence or suspend judgment. Strength-related S-defeaters, on the other hand, are not sufficiently well supported to fully undercut and merely make it irrational to give the relevant evidence its full weight. This would be fulfilled, for example, if, in the case of the red widgets, the testifying co-worker is only minimally trustworthy.¹⁴

In light of these remarkable parallels between what a preemptionist claims an authority's judgment to do to a layperson's epistemic situation and a defeater's typical effect on it, a natural explanation of the phenomenon of preemption would analyse preemptive reasons to be S-defeaters with respect to the subject's own evidence. This idea lies at the heart of Defeatist Preemptionism. In the next section, we will further motivate and defend this view by connecting the features of epistemic authority to the concept of a defeater that doubles as a reason. Specifically, it will be shown how the authority's superior competence accounts for the undermining effect of learning about not only her beliefs, but also about the credences she assigns to them.

2. Why Defeatist Preemptionism is correct

On DP, being informed about what an epistemic authority believes within her domain of authority—that is, receiving an authoritative reason—renders any kind of reliance on one's own reasons about *domain-specific* facts (that is, specific to the authority's domain) irrational. This is so even if those reasons are excellent. What at first glance might look like a mysterious phenomenon fits well with the evidential role of S-defeaters. Whenever we acquire an S-defeater, that is, some evidence suggesting that basing our own belief on a particular body of first-order evidence would likely lead to an inadequate credence, it is no longer rationally permissible for us to rely on the defeated first-order evidence in our belief formation, no matter how good the first-order evidence in fact is. Thus, S-defeaters, too, can normatively screen off the defeated evidence from one's proper evidential basis for belief

¹⁴ More details on strength-related S-defeaters in authority contexts will be given on page 18.

formation. The structural parallel between preemption and S-defeat quite naturally suggests that authoritative reasons must somehow provide us with S-defeaters, at least if we want to make any sense of preemptive reasons.

In order to understand how authoritative reasons might provide us with S-defeaters, let us look more closely at a scenario in which one is confronted with the belief of an epistemic authority. Consider a case in which you learn that someone, A, entertains the doxastic attitude DA towards proposition p. You have sufficiently good reasons to believe that A is an authority about matters like p, that is, A is much more competent than you are in assessing the relevant evidence and can be assumed to have already considered all of your relevant evidence. In addition, A most likely possesses even more relevant information with respect to p. Within the framework of graded beliefs, the authority's attitude DA can be specified as a particular credence that the authority assigns to p. Let us assume that A believes that p with a credence of 0.75. Knowing the credence that A assigns to p provides you with a reason to believe that p with the same credence. However, the body of your evidence that is relevant to p includes much more than just your knowledge about the authority's attitude towards p. Among other things, it includes evidence that either confirms (i.e., provides pro reasons for) or disconfirms (i.e., provides con reasons against) p more directly. Assume for this case that your evidence alone supports the assignment of a credence of 0.25 to p. In the case at hand, you have two doxastic options. According to the first option, you adjust your own doxastic attitude DA* towards p to the total evidence available to you such that your evidence independently of the authoritative reason makes a difference to DA*. If your own evidence includes, e.g., weighty con reasons, you might end up with suspension or even disbelief. According to the second option, you base your doxastic attitude DA* on the authoritative reason alone such that $DA^* = DA = 0.75$. The first option is what the proponent of TEV recommends. The second option is the choice recommended by DP. Which option is rationally preferable?

Notice that you can learn two different things from the authority's doxastic attitude. First, you learn that it is reasonable to believe that p. Second, you learn that someone who is much better than you in assessing the evidence and who has already taken into account all of your relevant evidence ends up with a credence of 0.75 regarding p. It is this second piece of information that is relevant to S-defeat. Typically, if we take someone to ignore relevant evidence in the field, we no longer have prima facie justification to believe that she has excellent and more trustworthy beliefs than we have. Thus, we should not regard her as an

epistemic authority. But if you learn that the authority has formed her attitude while taking into account all of your relevant evidence, then you also have good reasons to believe that the authority's credence is adequate based on evidence that includes yours and, at the same time, that your own credence would be inadequate insofar as it would differ from the authority's. Moreover, relying on any evidence in addition to the authoritative reason for the assessment of *p* would lead to a deviation from the credence the authority assigns to the proposition. Hence, any reliance on evidence other than the authoritative reason itself would render your credence less likely to be adequate. Recognizing this fact generates an S-defeater for any doxastic attitude based on relevant evidence that goes beyond the authoritative reason itself and renders such evidence rationally unusable.¹⁵ Note that the S-defeater in play here would *typically* be a full defeater, since, on our definition, you have prima facie reason to believe that the authority has evaluated *all* of your relevant evidence. This looks like a vindication of DP.¹⁶

If this analysis is basically correct, then the aggregation of one's own evidence with the authoritative reason is always prima facie irrational because it results in an attitude that deviates from the authority's rational response to the relevant body of evidence. There are four different explanations of why the original evidence is rationally unusable and the resulting deviation from the authority's credence is irrational, although typically one does not know exactly what would go wrong:

- 1) First, a subject may assess the relevant evidence she has in addition to the authority belief in a less competent way than the authority herself. Since authorities are

¹⁵ It is important to keep in mind that the defeater that is in play here does not undermine *ex post* the rationality of a belief that has already been formed, but threatens *ex ante* the rationality of any doxastic attitude that would be based on the total body of evidence. *retroactively* render reliance on the relevant evidence irrational, which would make it the case that the defeated belief was *never* rational. Rather, the defeater makes it irrational to rely on the evidence, *starting from the point in time when the defeater is obtained*. Note that this also affects possible future instances of relying on the relevant evidence: Once the S-defeater is obtained, it is generally irrational to rely on evidence obtained from the source the defeater calls into question.

¹⁶ One might object that the above argument relies on the controversial Principle of Uniqueness (defended by White 2005; attacked by Kelly 2013b). According to Uniqueness, there is exactly one fully rational response to any given body of evidence. One might argue that only under this assumption can we rule out the possibility that a credence that deviates from the authority's can be rational as well. Without this principle, the authority's credence and a deviant response that is partly based on the layperson's assessment may both be fully rational. Uniqueness, however, seems to be highly doubtful as a universal claim (see Kelly 2013b). However, Uniqueness is still true in many cases (Kelly 2013b: 298-299) and the layperson's credence may lie outside the range of rationally permissible credences in permissive cases. Hence, the layperson must possess evidence for the claim that the case at hand is permissive and some further evidence for the claim that her credence lies in the range of rationally permissible credences in order to acquire a defeater-defeater of the prima facie S-defeater that is constituted by the authority's credence.

epistemic superiors, this can easily happen. In that case, the authority's belief would serve as a *higher-order defeater* for the subject (cf. e.g. Christensen 2010).

- 2) Second, a subject may have some evidence E, over and above the authoritative reason, that supports p, but the authority has gathered further evidence E' (opaque to the subject) that *undercuts* the evidential force of E. The simultaneity case from the beginning is such a case, where the authority dismisses everyday experiences because their evidential force is undercut by her theoretical findings.
- 3) Third, a subject's authority-independent reasons may be falsified by the authority's further evidence in a way that is opaque to the subject. The authority's opinion would then constitute a *reason-defeating defeater*. In order to see the difference between this kind of defeater and (2), consider the following case: You travel through a particular country district and, so far, you have only seen animals that appear to be brown cows. That inductively justifies your belief that the cows belonging to your friend Jim, who lives in this district, are also brown. In case (2), the authority would possess evidence that suggests that your observations of brown cows are not representative for the district. In contrast, an authority would possess a reason-defeating defeater if, for example, she has reason to believe that your observations were false since you have seen cleverly disguised black and white cows rather than brown ones (Grundmann 2011: 158).
- 4) Finally, it may just be a case of illegitimate *double-counting* of evidence if a subject relies on some evidence E and aggregates it with an authority's doxastic attitude that is based upon E itself (see also Keren 2007: 374).

We need not *identify* one of these explanations in order to acquire evidence that the aggregation would lead to an inadequate credence and thus to acquire an S-defeater. We can know this simply by recognizing that our attitude would differ from the authority's credence. And this kind of knowledge (or justified belief) rather than the fact of leading to an inadequate credence constitutes an S-defeater.

The explanation of preemption we have given relies on the assumption that we have good reasons to believe that the authority has already considered all of our relevant evidence. On this assumption, we have good reason to believe that the authority's credence is the adequate one and that reliance on additional evidence and the resulting deviating credence would lead to a (more or less) inadequate result. This result is not restricted to cases in which the authority and her inferior have conflicting propositional attitudes, such as cases of

believing vs. disbelieving or believing (disbelieving) vs. suspension. Even in cases of assigning differing credences within the range of either belief or disbelief, the same explanation of preemption holds. If, for example, the authority believes that *p* with a credence of 0.7 and her inferior would believe that *p* with a credence of 0.6 when aggregating the authoritative reason with her own evidence, the inferior still has good reason to believe that the authority's credence is most likely to be adequate based on the given evidence and that her own credence is less likely to be adequate, insofar as she has justification to believe that it would deviate from the authority's.¹⁷

On our account, the preemptive force of authoritative reasons is explained as a special case of S-defeat. Although all S-defeaters are preemptive reasons, not every S-defeater is also a direct reason with respect to the target belief as known authority beliefs are. As we dubbed this point before: they double as reasons. Explaining preemption through S-defeat restricts the scope of preemption in interesting ways. One of them is the following: Our own evidence about *p* is preempted by the authoritative reason, due to the authority's superior evidence-gathering capacities, *unless* we have good reason to believe that it has not been considered by the authority. In this case, we must aggregate the authority reasons with our own independent reasons, as TEV requires. This is so because the authority's rational response to a body of evidence *E* does not determine which response is rational if *E* is significantly extended. If there is evidence that one has justification to take as not having been considered by the authority, one has no reason to bow to her superior competence with respect to it, and no undermining takes place. The same is true for all evidence that is not specific to the authority's domain, since this evidence was also never evaluated via the authority's special competence. Typically, the identification of epistemic authorities by inferiors is based on credentials such as academic degrees, reputation or research impact. This kind of evidence is not preempted by the authority, and it can also be a basis for withdrawing an attribution of authority. Competing authorities are, therefore, not preempted, nor is the attribution of

¹⁷ One worry here may be that on our proposal, even conclusive evidence or what the inferior knows can be preempted by authoritative reasons, and you might think that this is a counterintuitive consequence. Notice, however, that preemption is motivated through S-defeat, and S-defeaters can be rationally misleading. On our view, it may be rational to ignore pieces of evidence that are in fact conclusive or known, but this is far from counterintuitive. Consider a case in which the inferior performs some mental calculation in an absolutely impeccable way. She then may confront an epistemic authority about mental math who either is in fact not an expert or is an expert who makes a mistake on this particular occasion. Although the inferior knows her result on the basis of conclusive evidence, she is rationally required to adjust her credence to the *in fact* inadequate credence of the authority. Admittedly, this is to some extent controversial. Whereas Feldman (2009) and Christensen (2010) claim that higher-order defeaters can even defeat conclusive evidence, Lasonen-Aarnio (2014) disputes this. Williamson (2011) claims that knowledge is indefeasible. We cannot settle this controversy here. We just want to flag that we take higher-order defeat of conclusive evidence and knowledge to be the more plausible option.

epistemic authority indefeasible. Preemption is also a matter of degree. As noted in the previous section, we can distinguish between full and partial preemption in the same way we can distinguish between full and partial defeat. Like scope-related S-defeaters, authority beliefs might only preempt a part of one's evidence. There can also be strength-related S-defeaters in cases of epistemic authority: Consider a case in which you have rather weak reasons to believe that someone is an expert and superior to you with respect to a certain domain. Being confronted with the belief of such a "weak authority" does not seem sufficient to fully preempt all your relevant evidence with respect to a proposition in this domain, in the sense that it may not make it irrational to rely on the evidence at all, but in that it makes it irrational to give the evidence its full weight. It may thus be plausible to rely on your further evidence about the subject matter, at least to some degree.¹⁸ In other cases, when your independent evidence for the other person's authority status is significantly stronger, a relevant threshold is passed such that you get full preemption of all your additional evidence in the domain.

This is the upshot of our account: Whenever someone is an authority for us on a matter at hand—that is, whenever we have a sufficiently strong reason to believe that someone who has considered all of our relevant evidence and who relies on superior competences with respect to assessing a proposition *p* entertains a particular doxastic attitude towards *p*—we should not give any epistemic weight to our other (relevant) evidence in the assessment of *p*. In standard cases, this requires us to simply adopt the authority's credence, since only the authority's testimony is rationally usable. These cases of preemption are explained by the epistemic mechanism of S-defeat. In contrast, our own reasons are not preempted by the authority belief if we have reason to believe that either (i) the authority has not considered these reasons or (ii) our belief about *p* does not rest on (domain-specific) reasons that are assessed more competently by the authority.

3. Application and Defense

Given the theoretical scaffolding consisting of a merger between a theory of epistemic authority and the concept of source sensitive undercutting and higher-order defeat, Defeatist Preemptionism can now be applied to various cases and problems.

¹⁸ The exact way to model cases like this is very complicated because it depends on details in the context, the content of the evidence in play, the strength of the testimonial reason and many other factors. It will thus have to be a subject for future work.

First, reconsider the cases of *simultaneity* and *the comet* we started with. How should the layperson adjust the credence she assigns when she confronts a physicist who, on the basis of a prior application of his domain-specific competence, believes with a credence of 0.2 that two events are either simultaneous or not, although the layperson herself strongly believes that any two events are either simultaneous or not on the basis of what she experiences in everyday life? According to our pre-theoretical judgment, the layperson should fully adjust her credence to the physicist's credence because she should not give any weight to what she experiences in everyday life. Given our theoretical framework, one can easily understand why this verdict is rational. The belief of the physicist provides the layperson with an authoritative reason to believe as she does since the layperson has every reason to consider her an expert and superior; and it is extremely likely from the perspective of the layperson that the physicist has considered (and dismissed the relevance of) laypeople's ordinary counterevidence. Since it would be irrational for the layperson to continue to rely on her ordinary counterevidence anyway, *simultaneity* is a clear case of preemption. In the comet case, the astrophysicist Edmond makes a prediction about when and where a well-known comet will be visible to the naked eye in the nighttime sky based on a well-confirmed hypothesis. However, although Lucy—a hobby astronomer—carefully looks for the comet on the predicted date, she fails to see any trace of it. Since Edmond is severely ill that night, he is not able to test his prediction himself. Lucy knows this but does not tell Edmond that she was unable to spot the comet. Our pre-theoretical verdict on this case was significantly different from the one about the first case. Although Lucy's observation is not conclusive evidence against Edmond's hypothesis (she might, e.g., just have missed the comet by virtue of being inattentive or distracted), Lucy should give at least some evidential weight to it rather than utterly disregarding her own perceptual evidence. Again, given our theoretical framework we can easily explain this. The case, by stipulation, is a case in which Lucy has good reason to believe that the epistemic authority Edmond does not know about her observation. Thus, her observation is not part of his considered evidence and Lucy knows this. Hence, it is not undercut by the authority's judgment, and thus a crucial condition for preemption is violated. Thus, both case verdicts, which initially seemed to support competing views on the epistemic impact of authority beliefs can be straightforwardly accommodated by DP. What this shows more generally is that, as soon as we understand preemption as a case of S-defeat, we can restrict its application to specific conditions. Thus, an authoritative reason preempts one's own further reasons only insofar as there is no indication that the authority has ignored any of these further reasons. Moreover, only reasons that either confirm or disconfirm the propositions believed by the

authority on the basis of her specific competence (i.e., the authority's domain-specific beliefs) are preempted. This does not, for example, include the layperson's typical reasons for attributing or withdrawing an attribution of epistemic authority, i.e., the credentials, reputation or publication track record of the relevant person. Non-domain-specific reasons are never preempted by the epistemic authority.

The flexibility that these features provide help DP to defuse a potential problem from cases of *outrageous* beliefs on the authority's part. Let us look at a specific case: If you go to the doctor with red spots on your face and she examines you and then tells you that you have the measles and should take 3 pills a day to get rid of them, you rationally ought to take that advice on authority. If, on the other hand, she examines you and tells you that you have the measles and should take 4,000 pills a day, you should definitely look for a new doctor. This is because the verdict is outrageous and patently absurd (Zagzebski 2012: 116; Lackey 2018). If this is right, we would have a case of a layperson rationally relying on her own evidence *within the domain D* to dismiss the belief of someone whom she has good independent reason to treat as an authority *in that same domain*. If this is plausible, it constitutes a clear counterexample to any kind of Preemptionism, including our model.

Whereas Simple Preemptionism cannot protect any relevant reason from being defeated and Zagzebski's Ungrounded Preemptionism restricts preemption only by a maneuver that seems fully ad-hoc given her own point of view (Lackey 2018: 235-236), DP provides better resources for a proper response. Depending on the details of the case, two responses are open to us: Either there are hidden, *domain-independent* reasons available to the layperson in such cases that can motivate rational doubt about the putative authority's status as an authority, or, if there are no such reasons, we simply have to accept that such judgments belong to the group of intuitively implausible and outrageous beliefs that experts sometimes hold and that are perfectly rational for laypeople to adopt. Let us take a closer look at the first option. In the 4,000 pills case, there are two potential sources of domain-independent reasons that are available to the subject. On the one hand, there is the fact that some recommendations are physically impossible to follow. Had the doctor asked the subject to take 40,000 pills a day, for example, the sheer impossibility of doing so would have been a clear indicator lying outside of the domain of medicine that there is something wrong with the recommendation and that it is therefore not preempted. This could then be rationally taken into account against the authority's outrageous claim. On the other hand, in modern society other authority beliefs are easily available that may similarly serve to rebut the outrageous judgment. For example,

we know that other doctors, when presented with the very same symptoms, never make such a recommendation. Again, this information is not part of the domain of authority and therefore is a legitimate defeater regarding taking the authority's word at face value. Accordingly, we can accommodate the intuitively rational refusal to accept outrageous authority beliefs on the grounds of these two kinds of reasons. If the subject has no such information about the beliefs of other authorities or the existence of an impossibility, however, we hold that even outrageous claims can be rational to adopt on authority. Physicists make claims all the time that are outrageous from the perspective of the layperson: According to quantum mechanics, for example, objects are not definitely located and may materialize spontaneously. None of these claims fit in any way with the everyday evidence that laypersons gather, and they all surely seem crazy at first glance. Yet not only do we find it irrational to resist them on the grounds of the layperson's assessment, but we also find it quite rational to accept them on the grounds of the physicists' assessment. If it were rationally permissible to resist outrageous authority beliefs on the basis of our own assessment of the matter as laypersons, it should be rationally permissible to deny such claims of physics on the grounds of outrageousness. However, it clearly is not.

Another case frequently discussed in connection with epistemic authority is that of conflicting authorities. Here, too, a Defeatist position holds significant advantages. Consider the following variant of *simultaneity*: Suppose that two leading experts on physical time disagree about whether there are cases of absolute simultaneity. Suppose, further, that a layperson who strongly believes in absolute simultaneity because she takes it to be self-evident traces the persisting controversy among leading experts in physics. How should she rationally respond to this epistemic situation? For the friend of TEV, the following line of argument is very tempting: The reasons given by the disagreeing authorities cancel each other out, such that one's own remaining reasons that support the belief in absolute simultaneity can tip the scale (Jäger 2016: 173). However, upon further reflection, this result looks highly counterintuitive. If the epistemic authorities are not able to come to an agreement on the subject matter, laypersons should not trust their own premature judgment either. Now, DP does much better in accommodating the relevant phenomena than either Ungrounded Preemptionism or TEV. Unlike Ungrounded Preemptionism it does not require adopting an authority's belief, nor does an authority judgment preempt *all* of one's other reasons on DP. The authority's belief that p provides the layperson with a *defeasible* reason for believing that p. Furthermore, it preempts all of her other *domain-specific* pro and con reasons with respect to p, such that they become rationally unusable. Thus, when a layperson who strongly

believes in absolute simultaneity confronts the authority opinion A1 about p, all her other first-order reasons regarding p are preempted. She can still acquire the rational belief that another person is also an epistemic authority about the relevant domain. This belief may be based upon the credentials of that person, i.e., non-domain-specific reasons that are not preempted by the belief of the first authority. The second authority may then hold a conflicting view A2 about p that, once again, preempts all of the layperson's other domain-specific reasons regarding p. Since the conflicting authority beliefs A1 and A2 provide the layperson with reasons that cancel each other out and all the other relevant reasons are preempted, it is rational for the layperson to withhold belief.¹⁹ Contrary to Jäger's claim, therefore, DP comes up with exactly the right verdict about cases of conflicting authorities.²⁰

Finally, in order to make the case for Defeatist Preemptionism complete, the challenge from "weak disagreement" must be met. The apparent inability of Preemptionist accounts of epistemic authority to account for this phenomenon goes beyond the mere threat of counterexample, as it both evokes clear intuitions and is *structurally distinct*.²¹ Two subjects are in weak disagreement about p when they hold the same flat-out attitude but do not assign the same credence. Thus, they both believe or both disbelieve that p, but they are not equally confident. Our model entails that in cases of weak disagreement between a subject and an authority, the subject is rationally required to give no evidential weight to her initial evidence when judging the target proposition. This is what preemption requires. Accordingly, when the subject learns that the authority assigns a certain credence to p, she does not thereby acquire a further piece of evidence such that the total evidence makes it rational to raise her credence even *above* the authority's degree of confidence. This result seems counterintuitive to some philosophers who hold that it is rational in such cases to raise one's credence above the degree

¹⁹ This is, of course, a highly idealized case. If the conflicting authorities assign credences with asymmetric distances from 0.5, a view that favors splitting the difference rather than suspension may seem more appropriate. In this paper, we cannot discuss these more specific questions.

²⁰ The proponent of TEV might come up with a rival explanation of why it is rational to suspend judgment in the case of conflicting authorities. She might argue that the conflict of authorities indicates that trustworthy judgments about the domain are generally impossible. If even the authorities do not agree, then nobody can have justified beliefs about the domain in question. Thus, one should rationally suspend belief about the target proposition. QED. In response to this line of argument, we must admit that TEV can explain why, in the face of conflicting authorities, suspension may *sometimes* be rationally required. But this explanation has a certain price. It relies on the assumption that judgments in the domain are generally irrational. In contrast, DP can explain why we must suspend belief when we confront conflicting authorities, *even if there is no reason to believe that domain-specific judgments are generally untrustworthy*. Suppose, for example, that you observe a specific conflict between authorities and that you know at the same time that there is a broad convergence of authorities on the controversial issue, but you do not know with which side most authorities agree. Intuitively, we must suspend belief even in this case. But in this case, it is hard to see with what kind of explanation a defender of TEV could come up with.

²¹ This issue is brought up by Jäger (2016: 171, 177, 178), who calls the phenomenon "weak agreement".

assigned by each of the weakly disagreeing parties on their own (see, e.g., Kelly 2013a: 35, fn 4; Jäger 2016: 176, 177). That there is a *boost* to the rational degree of confidence can be motivated by cases like the following:²² Suppose A is much better at doing mental math than the fairly reliable S, but is not perfect. Since both are fully aware of their respective levels of competence, A assigns a much higher credence to her solutions than S does to her own solutions. Moreover, S treats A as an authority on these matters. On a particular occasion, S learns that A agrees with her about the solution to a certain mathematical problem but assigns to it a much higher credence than S does. Now, DP seems to require that S adopt A's credence on that occasion because S's own calculation should count for nothing when S is confronted with the authority's belief. Intuitively, however, it would be rational for S to assign a credence that is even higher than A's own credence. The thought here is that for any of A's calculations, there is a small risk of error that is further reduced when S agrees with her. This is true even if S's reliability is far lower than A's. Thus, the intuition about this case seems to conflict with DP's verdict.

However, this impression is misleading. To see why, notice that in order to rationally raise her credence above A's in response to recognition of her agreement with A, S must have sufficient reasons for believing (i) that S is sufficiently reliable about the relevant matter and, more importantly, that (ii) S's beliefs are sometimes true when A's beliefs are false and thus are independent indicators of truth. The case at hand guarantees by stipulation that S has sufficient reasons for believing (i). But does S have any reason to believe (ii) as well? Here, two types of errors must be distinguished: competence errors and performance errors. A competence error manifests some deficiency in the ability of the agent. She may, e.g., generally use a deficient heuristic or rule. In contrast, performance errors result from interfering factors such as a shift of attention, distraction, or fatigue. They may occur even if the agent has impeccable abilities. Let us apply this distinction to the case at hand. As long as S cannot rule out that errors in their mental calculation may be due to a lack of competence, S has no reason to believe that she does not replicate all of A's errors. Both may simply use the same deficient heuristic. As long as this is an open possibility, S is not justified in believing (ii). In the case at hand, S has reasons to rule out competence errors. Basic psychology tells her that errors in mental calculation are typically performance errors. This helps to explain why the boosting intuition is correct about this case. At the same time, one can understand why this intuition is compatible with DP after all. DP requires that, in response to her

²² We are grateful to an anonymous referee for articulating this worry in detail.

agreement with the authority, the layperson no longer uses her mental calculation as a direct reason for believing the solution of the mathematical problem. This constraint is satisfied in the case at hand. Here, the layperson uses psychological evidence, i.e., evidence about what she believes relative to what the authority believes, rather than her initial evidence processed by her mental calculation, as evidence for the claim that no performance error has occurred. This domain-independent fact can in turn support the truth of the target proposition if S also rules out that any error would be of the competence type. Preemption prohibits using the initial evidence in the initially intended way to support the target proposition. But it does not prohibit the use of psychological facts involved in the initial processing of the preempted evidence as (indirect and partial) further evidence for the target proposition. The case at hand falls into the latter category and thus does not conflict with DP when properly understood. Other versions of Preemptionism perform badly in this regard. Simple Preemptionism does not exclude any reason from being preempted by the authority's credence. Hence, there are no further reasons left over to be aggregated with the authority reason in order to explain the boost. Ungrounded Preemptionism, on the other hand, cannot explain why it is psychological evidence, specifically, that is excluded from being preempted. On this view, exclusions from preemption are always motivated case by case. Thus, only Defeatist Preemptionism stands undefeated.

4. Conclusion

A view according to which one ought to disregard one's own evidence and reasoning and typically ought to defer to the belief of others is often met with understandable suspicion. However, this suspicion is based on a number of misunderstandings with respect to the reasons for and the implications of such a view. A plausible version of the Preemption View does not rest on local intuitions, and it does not require us to blindly follow the whims of those we see as our betters. On the contrary, it reveals how general and broadly accepted epistemic principles provide us with opportunities to effectively divide epistemic labor and to get closer to the truth than our epistemic shortcomings would otherwise permit. The best motivation for a preemptionist stance concerning cases of epistemic authority is careful consideration of the special nature of authority beliefs. As we have argued, the best candidates for the status of epistemic authority are individuals whom we have justification to take as highly competent and, importantly, more adept than ourselves in forming doxastic attitudes with respect to their relevant domains of authority. The epistemic qualities that ground this

competence render the beliefs of such individuals excellent reasons for others to follow suit and typically constitute S-defeaters, and this naturally leads to Defeatist Preemptionism. However, this view is not a crude cure-all rule, but rather a view that aims to take those prerequisites seriously and that has circumscriptions that are clearly prescribed by them. This is why Defeatist Preemptionism is more flexible than Preemptionism's other versions. While explaining the rationality of disregarding one's own evidence in many cases, it leaves room for defeasibility at different points and in different ways. Far from devaluing careful reflection, it shows how our evaluations of the epistemic competence of others and sometimes even some of our own evidence within the domain of authority can remain highly relevant when confronted with authority beliefs. This flexibility allows the account to accommodate pre-theoretic judgments and epistemic principles in a more balanced and accurate way than its contenders, as we have argued. Therefore, there is no reason to be suspicious about Preemption in general. If understood correctly, it provides a plausible and differentiated picture of the theoretically interesting and practically relevant phenomenon of epistemic authority.

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