

Ignorance and Autonomous Belief

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A common thesis about ignorance is the Knowledge View, which holds that S is ignorant that p if and only if S doesn't know that p (cf. Le Morvan 2011a,b, 2012, 2013; Blome-Tillmann 2016; Bondy 2018; De Nicola 2018; Goldman & Olsson 2009; Williamson 2000; Zimmerman 2008). We present a new argument against the Knowledge View. According to the argument, which draws from recent insights about epistemic autonomy (e.g., Carter 2022; Gaultier 2021; McCain 2023; Sylvan 2023; cf. eds. Matheson and Loughheed 2021), knowledge undermining infringements on a belief's autonomy don't necessarily lead to ignorance, and on this basis, the Knowledge View should be rejected. We conclude by showing some implications of our view—that a thinker can nonautonomously escape ignorance without possessing knowledge—for epistemic axiology and for the epistemology of learning.

Keywords: ignorance, autonomous belief, knowledge, inquiry

1 Introduction

Jack is accused of a serious crime and his innocence hangs in the balance as the police struggle to build a coherent case. Marcos, his father, torn between his love for Jack and awareness of his troubled past, remains open to the possibility of his son's guilt, but also

recognizes Jack's recent visible efforts to change. While he waits for more evidence to make up his mind, Marcos cannot fully commit to either believing in his son's innocence or accepting his guilt. Unbeknownst to Marcos, Jack is genuinely innocent and has worked hard to reform himself. Yearning for his father's trust and realizing his predicament, Jack decides to employ a hypnotic, 'brainwashing' technique to guide Marcos into believing him. Through this skilled and covert hypnosis, Jack reliably and smoothly manipulates his father's assessment of the situation. Marcos, swayed by his son's words, not only believes that he is innocent but also through the hypnosis comes to think that this belief aligns with Jack's recent positive changes and the lack of evidence against his son.

Consider Dr. Lee, a skilled psychologist who has been treating her patient, Agnes, for several months. Agnes struggles with anxiety and self-doubt, often feeling unworthy and questioning her abilities in both her personal and professional life. Throughout their sessions, Dr. Lee has worked diligently to help Agnes recognize her strengths and challenge her negative thinking. In a breakthrough session, Dr. Lee employs a well-established therapeutic technique known as cognitive restructuring, guiding Agnes to identify and replace irrational, unhelpful beliefs with more rational, well-founded ones. However, during this session, Dr. Lee crosses an ethical line. In a moment of frustration, she uses suggestive language, subliminal associations, and subtle leading questions to influence Agnes' thought processes, leading her to conclude that she is competent and worthy. Furthermore, the effects of the intervention include an integration of Agnes' cognitive and emotional dispositions, aligning her thoughts and feelings, and reshaping the way she evaluates her emotions and self-assessments. For example, when asked about her overall happiness or career fulfilment, she immediately forms the belief that she is content and satisfied—and she genuinely is. These beliefs seem entirely reasonable to Agnes, as they align with her assessments of recent accomplishments and her relationships with others.

Despite the other things we might say in favor of our subjects' beliefs epistemically (e.g., they're true, propositionally justified, arguably doxastically justified and also modally safe¹,

¹ Their beliefs will qualify as doxastically justified, given that they're propositionally justified, if they're properly based. Whether the beliefs are properly based is open for debate. They're properly based, at least, given doxastic accounts of the basing relation, which require of the subjects that

etc.), there is an important sense in which they're not *autonomously* acquired. Scoping out for a moment: the general idea that some of our attitudes (beliefs, desires, etc.) are autonomous and others aren't is a familiar one in work on moral responsibility, where *heteronomous* attitudes are taken to make an important difference when it comes to our assessments of moral responsibility, credit, praise, and blame (Mele 2001; Fischer and Ravizza 1998; Weimer 2009). More recently, epistemologists have considered whether a belief's status as autonomous (or heteronomous) might also make a difference for our assessments of whether one *knows* (Carter 2021, 2022; Gaultier 2021; McCain 2023; Sylvan 2023; Pritchard 2023).

If we are correct in thinking that the way a belief is acquired—specifically, through brainwashing, manipulation or hypnosis, where that acquisition bypasses a thinker's cognitive traits—has a bearing not *merely* on moral responsibility but also on whether the belief is a candidate for knowledge, then an interesting result follows with import in the epistemology of ignorance. As we'll see, there are independently good reasons to think that one can be manipulated or otherwise compelled (e.g., via hypnosis) *out* of ignorance. In particular, the apparent compatibility between (i) knowledge-incompatible belief compulsion and (ii) non-ignorance offers a thus far overlooked line of reasoning against the standard view of ignorance in the literature, the Knowledge View:

Knowledge View

Necessarily, for any proposition *p*, S is ignorant that *p* if and only if S doesn't know that *p* (cf. Le Morvan 2011a,b, 2012, 2013; Blome-Tillmann 2016; Bondy 2018; DeNicola 2018; Goldman & Olsson 2009; Williamson 2000, Zimmerman 2008).

they have an appropriate meta-belief to the effect that what propositionally justifies their beliefs is a good reason for holding the belief (see Tolliver 1982; Leiter 2008; cf. Korcz 2021, §3). Our subjects satisfy this condition; arguably, given the way they're disposed to use the belief, they also satisfy basing criteria required by a more recent knowledge-first virtue account of basing (Titus and Carter, *forthcoming*). It will also satisfy historical causal accounts of basing, though plausibly not causal sustaining accounts. We will return to the issue of whether their beliefs are safe in §3 below.

The basic idea behind the Knowledge View is that for one to escape the state of ignorance, with respect to a given fact p , it's necessary and sufficient for one to come to *know* that p . On this view, then, knowledge and ignorance are contradictories: the existence of one of these states entails the denial of the existence of the other. Now, if one can be manipulated or otherwise compelled (e.g., via hypnosis) out of ignorance in a way that is incompatible with knowledge, not only would it follow that ignorance and knowledge are *not* contradictories (i.e., absence of knowledge that p due to the presence of a non-autonomously acquired belief in p doesn't entail ignorance with respect to p), but also, as we'll see, the role of the subject's cognitive abilities in overcoming ignorance differs from the role such abilities must play to attain knowledge.

Here is the plan. After characterizing our target in §2, we will motivate and defend a new argument against the Knowledge View that exploits the compatibility of (i) *knowledge-incompatible belief compulsion* and (ii) *non-ignorance* (§3). In §4, we conclude by exploring some of the consequences of this argument and which a tacit commitment to the Knowledge View would have otherwise obscured.

First, though, let us clarify that the kind of ignorance at issue in what follows is *propositional ignorance*—viz. ignorance *that* something is the case. It refers to the state (or the lack of it) of a thinker, S , with respect to a proposition p , which makes the statement “ S is ignorant that p ” true.² So, for the purposes of our discussion, to say that an autonomously acquired belief that p is necessary for knowledge but not for non-ignorance that p amounts to saying that the *absence of propositional ignorance* differs from *propositional knowledge* with respect to whether the acquisition of the belief bypasses the manifestation of any of the thinker's own cognitive traits.

² It's important to note that the Knowledge View, as defended by, for example, Le Morvan (2022), predicts that one can be propositionally ignorant of non-facts, i.e., that S can be ignorant that p when not- p . This follows from the claim that ignorance and knowledge are contradictories, because—assuming that knowledge is factive—if not- p , then S doesn't know (and thus is ignorant) that p . Some note that propositional ignorance isn't non-factive (cf. Nottelmann 2016, 34; Kyle 2021; DeNicola 2018, 201-202). However, allowing propositional ignorance with respect to non-facts isn't essential for the Knowledge View (see, for instance, Zimmerman 2008, ix; Goldman & Olsson 2009, 19; Nottelmann 2016), and our argument from autonomous belief is orthogonal to this issue. For further discussion, see Le Morvan & Peels (2016, 22 and ff.) and Le Morvan (2022).

2 Two Conceptions of the Knowledge View

The Knowledge View is the most widely accepted conception of ignorance within and outside of epistemology, either implicitly (e.g., Dasgupta 2015; Driver 1989, 373-376; Turri et al. 2015, *passim*; Unger 1975, 93; Williamson 2000, v) or explicitly (e.g., Blome-Tillmann 2016; Nottelmann 2016, 34; Bondy 2018; DeNicola 2018, 23 and ff.; Goldman & Olsson 2009, 19 and ff.; Le Morvan 2011ab, 2012, 2013; Zimmermann 2008, ix). For instance, Le Morvan & Peels (2016, 15-16) indicate that an implicit commitment to the idea that ignorance is the lack of knowledge follows from linguistic usage across many languages from several linguistic families. Similarly, our intuitions about related cognitive notions seem to support the Knowledge View. For example, as DeNicola (2018, 26-27) points out, we normally think that ignorance can be removed through *learning*, but that the type of learning that replaces ignorance requires propositional knowledge.

There are at least two different ways of construing the idea at the heart of the Knowledge View. On what we can call a *substantively committed construal*, ignorance is type identical with lack of knowledge in so far as knowledge is unpacked along the lines of a particular, explicitly endorsed theory of knowledge. This is the strategy taken by Michael Zimmerman (2008, ix):

Ignorance ... is a failure to know what is true. To know what is true, one must believe it (something that involves having a certain level or degree of confidence in it) and do so with adequate justification. Thus ignorance can come about in one of two ways: either by way of failure to believe the truth or by way of believing it without adequate justification.

As well as by Goldman & Olsson (2009), where they argue that there is a sense of “knowing”—a *weak* sense—in which it simply means “believing truly”. To support this claim, they appeal to the Knowledge View, which they characterize as a “principle” according to which knowledge is the complement of ignorance. They also notice that, as a matter of intuition, there are cases in which someone has a true but *unjustified* or *lucky* belief—that is, a belief falling short of knowledge in a *strong* sense—and yet we wouldn’t

say that she is ignorant of the relevant fact. For example, we might think a quiz show contestant who gives the correct answer based on an educated guess or hunch isn't ignorant *simply on account of having a true belief*, even if that true belief falls short of knowledge_{STRONG} due to insufficient evidence or justification. From cases like this, Goldman & Olsson reason that if the Knowledge View holds, and if someone who (like the quiz show contestant) doesn't know_{STRONG} that *p* might not be ignorant that *p*, then it must be the case that there's a sense of 'knowing'—that is, knowing_{WEAK}—in which it's equivalent to just 'believing truly'.

[...] Ignorance and knowledge are complements of one another, that is, S is ignorant of *p* if and only if S doesn't know that *p*. How could this principle hold, however, if knowledge consisted in something more than true belief? (2009, 20).

On this way of conceiving the Knowledge View, one's view of knowledge "plays first fiddle" in that the plausibility of the account of ignorance offered directly depends on the plausibility of one's view of knowledge. As such, the substantively committed construal of the Knowledge View leaves it as vulnerable as one's conception of knowledge is. For example, whereas in Zimmerman's version, ignorance equals lack of knowledge just in case knowledge equals true belief plus what he refers to as "adequate justification", in Goldman & Olsson's version the plausibility of the claim that ignorance equals lack of knowledge depends on accepting the weak sense of 'knowing' as merely 'believing truly'. But this way of glossing the Knowledge View is hostage to highly contested debates about the nature of knowledge.³ Maybe Zimmerman or Goldman & Olsson have gotten it wrong. Importantly, though, even (for instance) if Zimmerman, or Goldman & Olsson, have latched on to the correct substantive view of knowledge, a shortcoming that remains for their approach to ignorance is that it continues to be highly intuitive—as suggested by considerations from usage across various languages and intuitions about related cognitive notions (cf. Le Morvan & Peels 2016, 15-16, DeNicola 2018, 26-27)—that ignorance *would track lack of*

³ But, "if we do not yet know what knowledge is", as DeNicola asks, "how can we presume to know what its lack is?" (2018, 17). Why should something as contested as the nature of knowledge determine the intuitiveness of the idea that ignorance equals lack of knowledge?

*knowledge even if, e.g., there's no weak sense of 'knowing', or knowledge doesn't equal true belief or true belief plus adequate justification.*⁴

This suggests an alternative way of glossing the Knowledge View: in short: ignorance equals lack of knowledge *regardless of* what knowledge turns out to involve. This is a substantively non-committed view. More carefully, we can distinguish these theses as follows: on the *substantively committed view*, (i) necessarily, for any fact p , S is ignorant that p if and only if S doesn't know that p ; (ii) account A is the correct substantive account of knowledge; and so (iii) necessarily, for any fact p , S is ignorant that p if and only if S doesn't know _{A} that p . In contrast, the *substantively non-committed construal* holds that, for any analysis X of knowledge, if X is a correct analysis of knowledge, then, necessarily, for any fact p , S is ignorant that p if and only if S doesn't know _{X} that p .

The substantively non-committed Knowledge View, as an account of the nature of *ignorance*, is such that its plausibility isn't tied to any epistemological claim about the nature of knowledge. This means that there's little substantive one can say about ignorance, except that it is what knowledge is not, *whatever* knowledge is. Pierre Le Morvan, one of the main defenders of the substantively non-committal Knowledge View, puts it this way:

on the [Knowledge] View, ignorance has no substantive and positive nature of its own. Being purely privative and negational, its nature is completely determined by its contrast with the nature of knowledge. [...] If ignorance thus has nothing more than a privative or negational nature relative to knowledge, then this nature can only be properly understood in contrast with the latter (Le Morvan & Peels 2016, 17).

This second way of conceiving the Knowledge View lets the view's intuitiveness take the lead rather than requiring that any account of knowledge do so. If, as per the *knowledge-*

⁴ For instance, Marcos' belief that Jack is innocent and Agnes' belief that she's improved are true and have adequate justification—remember Marcos and Agnes see the adequate grounds they have to form true beliefs about Jack's innocence and her emotional states, respectively. This doesn't mean, however, that their beliefs amount to knowledge, at least not if, as we will explain shortly, this kind of belief is compelled in a way that prevents it from being knowledge.

first approach (e.g., Williamson 2000), knowledge is a theoretical primitive, then we simply say (on this second way of conceiving the Knowledge View) that ignorance is the lack of knowledge. If knowledge is understood (non-primitively) as true belief plus adequate justification, then ignorance is the absence of true belief plus adequate justification. And if, following our opening cases, it's shown that one can have a true belief plus adequate justification without thereby knowing, it follows that such an account of knowledge, *rather than an account of ignorance*, is in need of revision (cf. Le Morvan & Peels 2016, 20 and ff.). In other words, one's account of knowledge doesn't compromise the plausibility of the intuitive idea that ignorance is type identical to the absence of knowing. Because this conception of the Knowledge View doesn't open itself up to refutation as a more substantively committed conception, we would understand and address the Knowledge View in what follows in this manner.

Accordingly, if Marcos and Agnes don't know what they believe, respectively, then they are ignorant (end of story). This way of reading the cases, according to the second, *non-substantively* committal gloss of the Knowledge View predicts that our intuitions about ignorance ought to track, and entirely as a function of, the presence of knowledge, exactly in the way that would be borne out by the above negational characterization offered by Le Morvan.

Even so, it remains far from clear that ignorance ascriptions are (or should be) responsive exclusively to knowledge's presence or absence. For instance, as one line of thought goes, assessments of ignorance are sensitive to the presence (or lack) of mere *true belief*, regardless of whether one possesses (or lacks) knowledge (consider again the quiz show contestant example).⁵ Another line of reasoning says that ascriptions of lack of ignorance may track something weaker than knowledge but stronger than true belief—such as whether a subject's belief is true due to her cognitive abilities. In barn-facade cases, for instance, the subject arguably doesn't know there's a barn in front of them given the

⁵ The idea that ignorance assessments track (exclusively) the presence or absence of true belief is embraced by proponents of the True Belief View of ignorance: Necessarily, for any true proposition *p*, *S* is ignorant that *p* if and only if *S* doesn't believe *p* truly (cf. Peels 2010, 2011, 2012, 2023; see also Guerrero 2007; van Woudenberg 2009).

knowledge-undermining luck involved, yet it doesn't seem correct to characterize their epistemic states as one of ignorance, since they see the real barn and forms a true belief about its presence because they see it (cf. Piedrahita 2021).

In line with these strategies, below we explore an argument that challenges the intuitive appeal of the Knowledge View. Recent discussions on epistemic autonomy suggest that it's not so straightforward that ignorance ascriptions, or their withholding, track only whether a subject lacks knowledge. However, the argument we present doesn't commit to any of the previously mentioned views about ignorance. We take no stand on this for our current purposes.⁶

3 Nonautonomous Lack of Knowledge without Ignorance

Let's now zero in on the core idea we want to motivate, and trace out the implications of, namely, the idea that ignorance attributions—and in our case of interest, the *withholding* of such attributions (e.g., as in the cases of Marcos and Agnes)—might very plausibly track epistemically relevant features of a belief we should expect to be present even when knowledge, on account of the target belief's *non-autonomy*, is not.

Here is the reasoning we will rely on explicitly, and defend, in the remainder of what follows:

(AAB1) Necessarily: S knows that p only if S has a (suitably) autonomous belief that p .

(AAB2) If the Knowledge View is true and (AAB1), then [Necessarily, every non-autonomous belief that p is a case of ignorance that p].

⁶ Alternatives to the Knowledge and True Belief views have been proposed recently (cf. Pritchard 2021ab; Meylan 2024; El Kassar 2018; Silva & Siscoe 2024). These differ in their level of opposition to the Knowledge View. For example, Silva & Siscoe's Awareness View posits that one can be non-ignorant that p even if one doesn't believe that p , while Pritchard's (and Meylan's) Normative View adds a normative necessary condition to the effect that one is ignorant that p if and only if one fails to know/truly believe what one should have known/truly believed. Also, the Knowledge View has recently received various types of criticisms, including arguments from the semantics of ignorance ascriptions (Kyle 2021), the normativity of ignorance (Pritchard 2021ab; Meylan 2024), and barn-façade cases (Piedrahita 2021).

(AAB3) Possibly: S has a non-autonomous belief that p and is non-ignorant that p .

(AAB4) Therefore, the Knowledge View is false.

Let's look first at AAB1. There is a stronger and a weaker way to read this premise, and we want to emphasize that, for the purpose of our argument, we need only rely on the weaker and less philosophically contentious reading. According to the strong reading of the premise, the claim that knowledge requires *autonomous* belief is meant to capture an *irredundant* necessary condition, the satisfaction of which is *not* going to be entailed by the satisfaction of any other epistemic condition on knowledge (e.g., a justification condition). For instance, Carter's (2022, Ch. 1) defense of the irredundancy reading of AAB1 relies on the idea⁷ that epistemic conditions on knowledge (e.g., epistemic basing, coherence, reliability, etc.) could all *in principle* be met simply via interference of a 'TrueTemp'-style device (cf., Lehrer 1990) and yet still bypass (in a way incompatible with knowledge creditable to the subject) the thinker's manifesting any of her own cognitive traits.

Crucially, for our purposes, our argument doesn't rely on an irredundancy reading of AAB1. The weaker way to read AAB1 commits one only to the idea that autonomous belief is necessary for knowledge; in cases where, e.g., a thinker's belief acquisition is non-autonomous (minimally, for our purposes: its acquisition bypasses the manifestation of any of the thinker's own (non-compelled) cognitive traits), the belief thereby falls short of knowledge, where *that in virtue of which* beliefs the acquisition of which bypass the manifestation of cognitive traits fall short of knowledge might very well be (for all that one is committed to on the weaker reading) on account of failing some more standard epistemic condition on knowledge. To use but one example, in radical illustrative cases of non-autonomous beliefs which feature, e.g., belief implantation (Carter 2022, Chs. 1-2) or brainwashed hypnosis (Carter 2021; cf., Sylvan 2023), it might very well be that the subject fails to exercise cognitive traits in the way that acquiring knowledge requires, according to those (e.g., virtue epistemologists) who embrace the view that one knows only if it's to some significant degree creditable to one's abilities that one knows (e.g., Greco 2010; Sosa

⁷ Though see Sylvan (2023) for criticism.

2015; Pritchard 2012; cf., Lackey 2007). Or perhaps, as some (e.g., McCain 2023) hold, it might be that knowledge relevant epistemic basing—or knowledge relevant doxastic justification that would implicate such basing—simply isn't the sort of thing that could be 'compelled' in the first place.⁸ Put another way, perhaps epistemic basing is an *essentially* autonomous activity of a thinker, one that in principle won't feature in cases where one's thinking is in some way controlled or externally manipulated.⁹ If that's right, then if a belief isn't known when it bypasses the exercise of (non-compelled) cognitive traits, this might (on the weaker reading of (AAB1)) simply be on account of the subject failing to properly base her belief.¹⁰

Accordingly, in order to get on board with AAB1, one needs to be disinclined to attribute knowledge in cases like our opening cases, but one *needn't* support this assessment by assuming that Marcos or Agnes fail any kind of *irredundant* autonomy condition. One might think just that the interventions that cause and sustain their beliefs render those beliefs doxastically unjustified—perhaps failing a Boghossian-style 'taking' condition in the course of their appreciation of the evidence they have for their beliefs—or that these interventions prevent them from forming beliefs in a manner that manifests to an adequate and significant degree their cognitive abilities. We can be neutral on this point.¹¹

⁸ Or maybe, as per Pritchard (2023), and contra Carter (2022), knowledge-apt beliefs are as such not the kinds of things that could be compelled.

⁹ This idea also features in recent work on basing due to Miracchi Titus and Carter (2023).

¹⁰ Another possibility is that non-autonomous beliefs are detrimental to the kind of knowledge one can acquire only through understanding or grasping for oneself the epistemic connections between one's beliefs, as proponents of a 'taking' condition on good reasoning might require (e.g., Boghossian 2014). On this view, Marcos's and Agnes's respective beliefs are incompatible with knowledge because knowledge requires each of them to 'see for themselves' the relevant relationships between, for Marcos, his son's innocence and his wider set of beliefs; and, for Agnes, the link between her emotional and cognitive states and her wider set of beliefs.

¹¹ While our motivation for AAB1 has assumed that knowledge is analyzable (with autonomy as one condition a belief must meet to qualify as knowledge), the case for an autonomous belief condition isn't incompatible with views that treat knowledge as unanalyzable, such as knowledge-first epistemologies. A key feature of these views, especially those influenced by Williamson (2000), is that knowledge is the most general factive stative attitude, meaning that for any stative attitude SA toward p —i.e., an attitude one has toward p only if p —if one SA's p , then one knows p . However, as Carter (2022, 24) points out, the factive nature of an SA doesn't ensure it's autonomously acquired. For instance, one could remember p in a way that bypasses cognitive abilities, as in certain cases of hypnosis. Thus, the idea that knowledge is the most general factive stative attitude doesn't account

So far so good. Premise AAB2 is an *a priori* premise that is logically implied by the conjunction of the Knowledge View and AAB1. For the friend of the Knowledge View who is on board with AAB1, then, the only way to escape the conclusion is to reject AAB3, viz., by rejecting the very possibility that a thinker can have a non-autonomous belief of which they are non-ignorant.¹²

Let's assume that the proponent of the Knowledge View who opts to reject AAB3 does so with at most a background acceptance of the weak reading of AAB1.¹³ The onus will

for the bulk of cases suggesting that knowledge excludes cognitive bypassing. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that a knowledge-first epistemologist cannot accommodate this insight—and, by extension, AAB1. In line with the aforementioned key feature of knowledge-first epistemology, they could assert that knowledge is the most general *autonomous* factive stative attitude (see Carter 2022, 23-25).

¹² An anonymous referee suggests that Sosa's (2015) distinction between animal and reflective knowledge might allow proponents of the Knowledge View to avoid the conclusion of the argument while maintaining their position. For example, if, as Sylvan (2023) proposes, only reflective knowledge requires autonomous belief, a proponent could argue that ignorance is lack of animal knowledge, which doesn't require autonomous belief, while reflective knowledge does. Thus, Marcos and Agnes might lack both ignorance and reflective knowledge when their true beliefs fail the condition of autonomous belief but still qualify as animal knowledge. While this approach is available to defenders of the Knowledge View, it relies on a substantively committed conception of it, whose plausibility directly depends on a genuine distinction between animal and reflective knowledge, one that arises in this case only through further substantive commitments about the relationship between knowledge and aptness (at the first and second-order).

¹³ Can't the friend of the Knowledge View protest that, by the lights of her own view, she doesn't have to be on board with AAB1, even in its weaker reading? For, as the non-committed conception of the Knowledge View under discussion suggests, ignorance equals not knowing because it's intuitive, regardless of what knowledge is, e.g., whether knowledge requires a redundant or irredundant autonomous belief condition. One might think that this is less a way of resisting the argument and more of begging the question against it, because if one starts with the thesis that the Knowledge View is true regardless and independently of any other claims about knowledge, then any argument that leads from premises asserting anything controversial about knowledge to the conclusion that the Knowledge View is false will inevitably be unsound. A proponent of the Knowledge View might claim—as suggested by an anonymous referee—that it's AAB1 that begs the question against the Knowledge View, given its intuitive plausibility. However, AAB1 it's far from being an arbitrary claim or assumption opposed to the Knowledge View; it's supported by two different epistemological considerations—namely, the redundancy and irredundancy readings of the autonomous belief conditions for knowledge, which follow from different epistemological views about knowledge and justification. Now, while some might find the Knowledge View more intuitively compelling than AAB1 or any of the more general epistemological views from which AAB1 follows, there is room to accommodate AAB1 within various epistemological frameworks. While the Knowledge View may seem more straightforward and hence intuitive, AAB1 is motivated by deeper epistemological concerns. In the end, it may not be a case of choosing one intuition over

effectively then be to account for *why* it is that one couldn't be 'brainwashed' or 'compelled' *out* of ignorance. Of course, one could *question-beggingly* get this result by beating the drum of the Knowledge View: if one starts with the thesis that the Knowledge View is true, then *if* the weak interpretation of AAB1 is true and nonautonomous beliefs aren't known (perhaps because they fail some condition on knowledge), one can then logically derive the denial of AAB3. This is, however, at best a question begging approach that—dialectically—leaves the proponent of the Knowledge View at a stalemate (*vis-à-vis* the truth of AAB3) with the proponent of the argument we've developed here. So is there a way to navigate beyond this standoff about AAB3?

We think there is. Let's return again to Marcos's and Agnes's beliefs. It's not *merely* that their beliefs are true and propositionally justified. Depending on what one's substantive views are about doxastic justification and basing, one might even think that Marcos and Agnes are doxastically justified in his beliefs about Jack's innocence/her emotional states¹⁴, despite the beliefs external causal sources. What's more, notice that their beliefs are, in an important sense, *non-accidentally* true, despite being acquired in a way that bypassed their faculties, similar to beliefs that have been effectively implanted in them. In fact, the methods by which Marcos and Agnes formed their beliefs deliver true beliefs not only in the actual world but also in a suitable proportion of nearby possible worlds (cf. Williamson 2000; Pritchard 2015).

One might press back here about the claimed modal robustness of their beliefs, given that, as one thought might go, the mechanisms involved seem as though they could very easily lead, in certain other kinds of cases, to false beliefs. However, in order to determine whether a belief is safely formed, we should individuate the relevant method *externally*, which includes not only the thinker's cognitive processes—in the case of hypnosis or manipulation, e.g., focused attention, suggestibility, memory alteration, priming, anchoring, etc.—but *also* the environment in which such processes take place (for discussion of

the other but rather finding a balance between the pull of these intuitions and one's theoretical commitments.

¹⁴ One might, for instance, accept this result if one rejects a causal theory of basing and embraces some version of the doxastic theory of basing. For discussion, see Korcz (2015).

externally individuated methods, see Williamson 2000; Goldberg 2010; Broncano-Berrocal 2014; Grundmann 2020).

At this point, it will be useful to consider, by way of comparison here, Pritchard's (2012) case of 'Temp':

TEMP: Temp forms his beliefs about the temperature in the room by consulting a thermometer. His beliefs, so formed, are highly reliable, in that any belief he forms on this basis will always be correct. Moreover, he has no reason for thinking that there is anything amiss with his thermometer. But the thermometer is in fact broken, and is fluctuating randomly within a given range. Unbeknownst to Temp, there is an agent hidden in the room who is in control of the thermostat whose job it is to ensure that every time Temp consults the thermometer the "reading" on the thermometer corresponds to the temperature in the room (260).

Pritchard's assessment of the case is that—regardless of whatever else we might say about Temp (positive or negative)—, it looks like his belief is safe. As he puts it: "his beliefs are guaranteed to be true given how he is forming them, and hence it can hardly be the case that his cognitive success is merely a matter of luck" (Ibid., 260).¹⁵

This is because *not easily* would forming a belief guided to truth by the helper in this way issue in a false belief for Temp. Pritchard's assessment of Temp extends *mutatis mutandis* to Marco and Agnes; if Temp's belief is safe, so are Marcos's and Agnes's. Jack's reliable manipulation allows Marcos's (non-autonomous) exercise of his cognitive faculties to be connected up reliably to the fact that his son is innocent. Similarly, Dr. Lee's skillful intrusive psychological influence remaps Agnes' thought processes, ensuring her beliefs about her emotional states reliably match those states. In this way, by parity of reasoning,

¹⁵ Note that Pritchard remarks, even more strongly, that "whatever formulation of the anti-luck condition one opts for, Temp will satisfy that condition" (Ibid. 260). That said, some authors in the literature have questioned this. For example, in Beddor and Pavese (2020) offer a variant formulation of safety, construed in terms of normality, that is designed to deliver the result that Temp's belief is unsafe.

Pritchard's helper allows Temp's autonomous exercise of his cognitive faculties to be connected up reliably to the fact that the temperature is what the thermostat says.

It looks then like propositional justification and (arguably) doxastic justification as well as safety are epistemically good features of Marcos's and Agnes's non-autonomous beliefs. Moreover, because their beliefs have the properties they have, they are well-positioned to do a range of things one would seemingly *not* be in a position to do if *ignorant*: First, Marcos and Agnes are positioned to draw *justified inferences* from their beliefs, despite their nonautonomy. For instance, Marcos will be justified in inferring that other of Jack's behavior will be explained by his innocence. Agnes will also be justified in inferring that her previous beliefs about her unworthiness were unreasonable. In so far as ignorance of *p* prevents one from gaining justified beliefs inferred *from p*, we have some reason to be skeptical that Marcos and Agnes remain in ignorance of *p* following Jack's and Dr. Lee' interventions.

Secondly, and importantly, Marcos and Agnes are no longer plausibly (post-hypnosis) in a position to *appropriately inquire* into the respective contents of their beliefs. Take, for instance, Marcos' belief that Jack is innocent. As the zetetic turn in recent epistemology suggests, norms on inquiry include not only doxastic, representational norms, but also erotetic norms, or norms that govern the appropriateness of interrogative attitudes, such as questions, wonderings, suspensions, etc. (see, e.g., Friedman 2013).¹⁶ Although there are several schools of thought here, one of the most widely embraced norms governing the appropriateness of taking up a given interrogative attitude, to a given question, is the *ignorance norm*, on which one shouldn't inquire into a question whether *p* unless one is ignorant of its answer, viz., ignorant whether *p*.¹⁷ What this means in our guiding example case is the following: Were Marcos really ignorant of Jack's innocence, his inquiring (post-hypnosis) would be permissible. That is, it would be appropriate for him to inquire despite coming to think what he does following Jack's interference. But such inquiring looks

¹⁶ For some other discussions of inquiry norms, see, e.g., Kelp (2021), Falbo (2021; 2023), Friedman (forthcoming).

¹⁷ In favor, see Whitcomb (2010; 2017), Friedman (2017), Millson, (2020: 685), Sapir & van Elswyk (2021), Willard-Kyle (2022, 2023), and Haziza (2023). Though see, e.g., Woodard (2024) for criticism on the basis of double-checking cases.

straightforwardly defective, given that hypnosis has (even if artificially) effectively closed for Marcos what had previously been a live question. That was, after all, the point of Jack's hypnosis. This concludes our defence of AAB3.

4 Concluding Remarks and Further Upshots

According to the Argument from Autonomous Belief, a thinker can nonautonomously escape ignorance *without* gaining knowledge, and in a way that offers a new basis for rejecting the Knowledge View. We conclude by sketching out what we take to be some of the argument's interesting downstream upshots.

First, in addition to demonstrating a viable way to resist the Knowledge View *without* either siding with the True Belief View or taking a stand on any particular substantive account of ignorance, the Argument from Autonomous Belief is suggestive of new questions about epistemic value that a tacit commitment to the Knowledge View would have otherwise obscured. For one thing, it invites a reconsideration of the framing of the *Meno* Problem guiding contemporary debates about the value of knowledge (Kvanvig 2003; Zagzebski 2001; Pritchard et al. 2010). This problem traditionally begins with the intuitive idea that knowledge is more valuable than mere (unknown) true belief. It recognizes through examples that mere true belief often provides many of the same benefits as knowledge, prompting us to explain why knowledge is ultimately superior. However, this proves to be a challenging task.¹⁸ We can anticipate a similar philosophical problem once it's pointed out that we can escape ignorance without knowledge. To the extent that escaping ignorance is itself something we take to be pretheoretically valuable, we might ask why (if at all) the value of avoiding ignorance exceeds the value of mere correct opinion that is neither known *nor which avoids ignorance*. An answer to this question tells us about the special value of escaping ignorance even if not about what makes *knowledge* distinctively valuable. Relatedly, for those who accept our argument, and who take avoiding ignorance to be pretheoretically valuable, a corollary axiological question arises: why at the end of the day should we prefer to escape ignorance knowledgeably than to fail to know

¹⁸ For discussion, see Pritchard, Turri, and Carter (2021).

while *nonetheless* escaping ignorance? Why would the value of the latter not ‘swamp’ the value of the former?

Second, consider again that the autonomy of an agent is often regarded as a prerequisite for moral responsibility (e.g., Frankfurt 1971; Mele 2001; Fischer and Ravizza 1998; Weimer 2009). This same principle, when applied epistemically, raises the question: should nonautonomous beliefs diminish epistemic responsibility? If, as our argument suggests, nonautonomous beliefs can still dispel ignorance, it remains to be clarified whether the individual holding such beliefs would be less epistemically praiseworthy, blameworthy, or neither in those cases where they nonetheless escape ignorance.

Third, the result that withholding ascriptions of ignorance would track epistemically good-making features of a belief, features which don’t jointly entail knowledge on account of the target belief’s non-autonomy, indicates an important difference between ignorance and lack of knowledge *vis-à-vis* the contribution of the thinker’s cognitive traits in the processes of her belief exhibiting such good-making features. Take, for instance, the idea that ignorance is overcome through learning (Le Morvan 2020; Piñeros Glasscock 2022); this platitude is typically taken to support the Knowledge View because learning typically entails the acquisition of knowledge. But, if the Argument from Autonomous Belief is on the right track, ignorance can *also* be overcome via forms of learning that don’t entail knowledge due to the thinker’s lack of epistemic autonomy. As it happens, this is consistent with how we normally would think about overcoming ignorance.

Consider now a case where a true belief, acquired through learning, *is* to a significant degree creditable to the learner’s cognitive traits (e.g., abilities or virtues), such as learning word definitions in a foreign language. In such a case, it’s going to be felicitous to say that the learner not only lacks ignorance of linguistic facts learned, but also that they *know* these facts. By contrast, and at far opposite end of the autonomy axis, suppose a learner learns a fact about which we wouldn’t say that she has knowledge because her cognitive traits are bypassed entirely in her acquisition of the belief (e.g., an implanted belief through a device); we wouldn’t in such a case say that the learner is thereby ignorant of the same fact. This is arguably in line with how young children seem to overcome ignorance of, say,

some normative facts—such as facts of politeness—in which a child learns that in such and such circumstances, she should do so and so, but we hesitate to treat the early stages of this learning processes as *knowledge* of the normative facts (at least, not early on) when the child is largely parroting and imitating.¹⁹

Fourth, if, as we've suggested, the Argument from Autonomous Belief is sound for the reasons outlined, it prompts us to consider new questions in debates where knowledge, contrasted with ignorance, plays special explanatory roles. Take, for instance, Williamson's (2000) introduction to the "knowledge-first" project:

If I had to summarize this book in two words, they would be: knowledge first. It takes the simple *distinction between knowledge and ignorance as a starting point from which to explain other things*, not as something itself to be explained (2000, v, our italics).

An implication of the idea that ignorance can be escaped in ways that are both non-autonomous and non-knowledgeable invites us to explore what phenomena non-ignorance might explain, beyond what knowledge is taken to explain. Consider one example from the knowledge-first framework: *assertion*. Within that framework, knowledge is said to constitute a rule governing assertion: one should only assert something only if one knows it. The argument in this paper suggests that we might reasonably inquire what explanatory work this rule accomplishes that isn't achieved by a weaker rule, such as: one ought to assert that *p* only if one isn't ignorant as to whether *p*. Similarly, we could apply this line of questioning to knowledge-centred norms in practical reasoning: what explanatory work does the rule "Treat the proposition that *p* as a reason for acting only if you know that *p* (Hawthorne & Stanley 2008, 578) accomplish that isn't achieved by the weaker rule: "Treat the proposition that *p* as a reason for acting only if you aren't ignorant that *p*"? We don't claim that this weaker rule is in fact superior; rather, we propose that the Argument from Autonomous Belief challenges the knowledge-centric view of ignorance in such a way

¹⁹ For instance, young children's disposition to express gratitude, e.g., by spontaneously saying "thank you", depends on the relationship with the listener (i.e., their parents, an adult, a peer) (Becker & Smenner 1986). See also Nelson et al. (2013).

as to create pathway for these questions to become relevant and open for further exploration.

Zooming out: in the above ways the route we offer for AAB4—predicated on the idea that a thinker can nonautonomously escape ignorance without possessing knowledge—has implications not only for epistemic axiology but also for a range of other research questions in philosophy that take for granted both the position we challenge generally and the strategy we employ to challenge it in particular.

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