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Ignorance and Incompetence: Linguistic Considerations

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Abstract

On an initially plausible view of ignorance, ignorance is equivalent to the lack or absence of knowledge-that. I argue that this view is incorrect, as lack of sufficient justification for one's true belief or lack of belief doesn't necessarily amount to ignorance. My argument rests on linguistic considerations of common uses of 'ignorant' and its cognates. The phrase 'is ignorant of', I argue, functions differently grammatically and semantically from the phrase 'does not know', when the latter is used propositionally. 'Is ignorant of' does not have a genuine propositional use but is best understood as equivalent to 'is not knowledgeable of'. I further argue that 'knowledgeable' and 'ignorant' are relative gradable expressions. Relative gradables typically are associated with an implicit or explicit standard of comparison, give rise to borderline cases and trigger the Sorites Paradox in their unmarked form. From these linguistic considerations, it follows that being ignorant admits of degree, and that one can fail to be ignorant despite lacking true beliefs concerning the propositions constituting a particular subject matter. The proposed treatment of knowledgeability and ignorance of facts and subject matters lends itself to an alternative reply to the problem of skepticism, which I will call the 'simple response'. In the final section of the paper I argue that ignorance can also reflect incompetence with respect to a particular activity. The latter, I argue, is a case of lacking a particular kind of ability-involving knowledge-how, viz. practical knowledge of how to perform the activity in question.

Keywords: degrees of ignorance, relative gradable adjectives, incompetence, knowledgeable, knowledge-that, knowledge-how, lack of knowledge, problem of skepticism, unified view of knowledge-how

1. Introduction

It's tempting to think that ignorance just is the opposite of knowledge. This is usually referred to as 'The Standard View' (see e.g. Peels, 2010; 2012; Le Morvan 2012, 2013). You are ignorant of something just when you don't know it. This temptation, I will argue, should be avoided. While we could introduce a new technical notion of ignorance and treat it as the complement of the notion of knowledge, our ordinary concept of ignorance is considerably more promiscuous in its application than our concept of knowledge.

We sometimes speak of people being ignorant simpliciter. However, like knowledge, ignorance is a matter of standing in a particular relation to either a proposition or a subject matter. If we say that John is ignorant, we normally mean that he is ignorant with respect to a fact or a subject matter that is salient in the given conversational context.

In this paper I argue on the basis of evidence from ordinary language use that there are three types of ignorance: Ignorance of facts, ignorance of a subject matter, and ignorance of how to perform a particular activity. None of these uses is equivalent to our ordinary use of 'do not know' or 'fail to know', when 'know' occurs propositionally. If you don't know that p , you don't know that p simpliciter. You can't know that p a lot, a little or to some extent. Conversely, we can be a little bit ignorant of the fact that p , very ignorant of the fact that p , and ignorant of the fact that p to some extent. Ignorance to some extent of the fact that p entails having a partial belief (or other comparable attitude) that p is the case or having some but not all the evidence one could (fairly easily) have had that p is the case. While ignorance of a fact does amount to a failure to know the fact, a failure to know a fact does not entail complete ignorance. That is, one can fail to know a fact without being completely ignorant of that fact.

As we will see, when you are ignorant about a subject matter, this entails having little or no knowledge of the claims that constitute the subject matter. Since you can know a subject matter to some degree, you can also be ignorant about the subject matter to some degree.

Finally, you can be ignorant of how to perform a particular activity. To be ignorant of how to perform an activity is to fail to know how to perform the activity. You might have the ability to perform the activity but nonetheless fail to know how to do it and hence be ignorant of how to do it. In some cases in which you are ignorant of how to perform a particular activity, we say that you are incompetent with respect to that activity.¹ When you are incompetent, you fail to possess an executable ability to perform. For example, if you lack knowledge of how to write a term paper by failing to have an internalized ability to do so, you are incompetent in that area, viz. the area of writing term papers.

Being ignorant of how to do something, I argue, is a special case of being ignorant of a fact. You can be ignorant of how to perform a particular activity by failing to have internalized the procedure required to perform it. But this involves being ignorant of a fact, namely the fact that doing x , y , z ... will make you perform the relevant activity.

The proposed treatment of ignorance of facts and subject matters lends itself to an alternative reply to the problem of skepticism, which I will call the 'simple response'. You are knowledgeable just when you fail to be ignorant. Knowledgeability and ignorance are both

¹ I say 'in some cases', because there is also a purely intellectual sense of 'knowledge-how' and 'ignorance of how'. Suppose I have been riding my bike for twenty years and I then lose both of my legs in an accident. After the accident, it seems that I still know how to ride a bike in the purely intellectual sense, even though I lack an executable ability to ride a bike.

degree notions. It is possible to fail to have knowledge or justification, in a technical sense, about the external world, and yet be relatively knowledgeable about the facts in question.

2. 'Ignorant' and 'That' Clauses

Although it may seem that our ordinary concept of being ignorant of facts is equivalent to our ordinary concept of lack of knowledge, ordinary language use tells a different story. Most saliently perhaps, and as Peter Unger (1978: 175) has pointed out long ago, the verb phrase 'to be ignorant' does not combine with a 'that' clause. Consider:

- (1)
- (a) John did not know that Mary came.
- (b) *John is ignorant that Mary came.

Unlike the 'know' construction in 1(a), the 'ignorant' construction in 1(b) is grammatically ill-formed. Googling the term 'ignorant that' yields some marginal uses of 'ignorant that', as in 'one can be miserable without knowing that he is miserable -- i.e. happy only because he is ignorant that he is "really" miserable'.² However, these uses are marginal. The string 'he is ignorant that he is "really" miserable' is not strictly grammatical in English.

'Ignorant' and its cognates do occur in sentences with 'that' clauses but, as Unger (1978) notes, to get a grammatical sentence from 1(b) one must interpose additional words between the verb and the 'that' clause, as in:

- (2)
- (a) John was ignorant of the fact that Mary came.
- (b) John was ignorant as to whether Mary came.

'To be ignorant of' is thus not the complement of 'to know' but rather of 'to be knowledgeable', as in:

- (3)
- (a) John was knowledgeable of the fact that Mary came.
- (b) John wasn't knowledgeable of the fact that Mary came.

Grammatically, the verb phrases 'to be ignorant' and 'to be knowledgeable' are on a par with constructions such as 'to be un/aware', 'to be cognizant', 'to be proud' and 'to be mindful', as illustrated in (4):

² <http://www.roangelo.net/logwitt/thrasymachus.html>, retrieved on Jan 15, 2015.

- (4)
- (a) John was ignorant of the fact that Mary came.
 - (b) John was knowledgeable of the fact that Mary came.
 - (c) John was unaware of the fact that Mary came.
 - (d) Lisa was cognizant of the fact that Mary came.
 - (e) Amy was proud of the fact that Mary came.
 - (f) Ellen was mindful of the fact that Mary came.

Like 'to be un/aware', 'to be cognizant', 'to be proud' and 'to be mindful', 'to be knowledgeable of' and 'to be ignorant of' combine with clauses of the form 'the fact that *p*'. This difference between the occurrence of 'knowledgeable' and 'ignorant' versus 'know' may seem a mere oddity of ordinary language. However, as we will see in the next section, it reflects a deeper difference. Unlike 'to know' and 'to fail to know', 'to be knowledgeable of' and 'to be ignorant of' are gradable expressions. In this respect, they are similar to gradable constructions, such as 'to be proud of' and 'to be mindful of'.

3. Relative Gradable Adjectives

As I will now argue, 'know' and 'knowledgeable of'/'ignorant of' differ in terms of their gradability. To see this, let's begin with the standard case of gradable adjectives. Gradable adjectives denote relations between objects and degrees (Cresswell 1977, von Stechow 1984, Bierwisch 1989, Heim 1985, Kennedy 1999). For example, 'expensive' denotes a relation between objects *x* and degrees of cost *d* such that the cost of *x* is at least as great as *d*. The value of the degree argument is determined by degree morphology: comparative morphemes, degree modifiers, and so on.

The definitive mark of gradable adjectives is that they are acceptable in comparative constructions and with other degree morphology. Consider the following constructions containing the gradable adjectives 'rich', 'dry' and 'flat':

- (5)
- (a) Heavy cream is richer than milk.
 - (b) This dough is not as flat as I would like it to be.
 - (c) This air is too dry for my skin.

5(a) and 5(b) are comparative constructions, and 5(c) is a construction with a degree modifier. The felicity of these constructions strongly indicates that 'rich', 'dry' and 'flat' are comparative adjectives.

Unlike gradable adjectives, non-gradable adjectives are unacceptable in comparative constructions. Consider:

(6)

- (a) *Dinosaurs are more extinct than woolly mammoths.
- (b) *These two lines are less perpendicular than the other two we looked at.
- (c) *Elisa is not as pregnant as I would like her to be.

The infelicity of the sentences in (6) show that 'extinct', 'perpendicular' and 'pregnant' are non-gradable. What goes for adjectives also goes for gradable versus non-gradable verb phrases. Consider:

(7)

- (a) Mary loves her mother more than her father.
- (b) Jane adores her boyfriend way too much.
- (c) *Aze unfriended Ted more on Facebook than Dan did.
- (d) *Sarah took the job too much on January 30.

The sentences in 7(a)-(b), in which 'love' and 'adore' occur in a comparative construction or with degree morphology, are felicitous, whereas the sentences in 7(d)-(e), in which 'unfriend' and 'take' occur in a comparative construction or with degree morphology, are not. This confirms that 'love' and 'adore' are gradable verbs, whereas 'unfriend' and 'take' are not.

Like 'love' and 'adore', 'ignorant of' and the alternative construction 'ignorant as to whether' are acceptable in comparative constructions and with degree morphology. Consider:

(8)

- (a) John is more ignorant of the fact that Mary came than Dennis is.
- (b) Eli is too ignorant of the fact that Nick is catching up to him.
- (c) Chris is just as ignorant as to whether Mary came as Joan is.

The fact that 'ignorant of' and 'ignorant as to whether' can occur felicitously in these constructions strongly suggests that these constructions are gradable. Contrast that with 'does not know':

(9)

- (a) *John does not know the fact that Mary came as much as Dennis does.
- (b) *Eli does not know enough the fact that Nick is catching up to him.
- (c) *Chris does not know the fact that Mary came just as much as Joan doesn't.

'To not know', unlike 'to be ignorant of' and 'to be ignorant as to whether' is not gradable expressions.

There is, however, more than one type of gradable: absolute gradables and relative gradables (Kennedy, 2007). Let's focus again on the standard case of gradable *adjectives*. The positive

form of a relative gradable adjective denotes a property of having a degree of a gradable concept expressed by the adjective that is at least as great as some implicit or explicit standard of comparison. For example, 'tiny' denotes the property of having a degree of tininess that is at least as great as the standard of comparison of tininess.

It is well-known that the standard of comparison associated with the positive form of relative gradable adjectives can occur with a for-PP or other local constituents that make the standard of comparison explicit, as in 'this apartment is tiny for an apartment in New York'.

The fact that the standard of comparison can be made explicit with a for-PP suggests that when the standard of comparison is implicit, it is still present in the logical form as an implicit variable associated with the predicate. The wide range of possible interpretations of implicit standards of comparison further suggests that the value of the standard of comparison is determined on the basis of some discourse-salient property.

Now, there are three diagnostic tests for whether a gradable adjective is a relative gradable expression. The first mark of relative gradables is that sentences containing them vary contextually in truth-conditions depending on which comparison class is determined by context or is made explicit in the sentence structure. Consider, for instance:

(10)

- (a) This apartment is tiny.
- (b) This apartment is tiny for an apartment in New York.
- (c) This apartment is tiny compared to the apartments I was looking at earlier this week.

When said about a 100 m² apartment in New York 10(a) would in most conversational contexts be judged false but it would be judged true if uttered by an apartment-hunting millionaire who has been touring 400+ m² apartments in New York that same week. 10(b) and 10(c) make the comparison class explicit. 10(b) is best interpreted as saying that this apartment has a significantly smaller size than the median size for an apartment in New York.

Note that making the comparison class explicit does not resolve the vagueness of the predicate. There is no contradiction in saying 'This apartment's size is smaller than the median size for a New York apartment, but it is still not small for a New York apartment'. So, 'This apartment is small for an apartment in New York' does not mean that this apartment has a smaller size than the median size for an apartment in New York. Rather, it means that this apartment is somewhat smaller than the median size for an apartment in New York, where the value of 'somewhat' is determined by a discourse-salient property.

As we will see below, this diagnostic for determining whether a gradable adjective or verb is relative or absolute is not super-reliable. In fact, there is a group of relative gradable adjectives and verbs that cannot occur with a standard of comparison in the absence of a modifier.

The second mark of relative gradable adjectives is that, owing to their inherent vagueness, they give rise to borderline cases. In the neutral sense of 'borderline case', a borderline case is an individual that does not evidently fall under the predicate and that does not evidently not fall under the predicate. For example, a 20 m² apartment is clearly tiny even for New York standards, whereas an 800 m² apartment clearly is not tiny but it may be indeterminate either epistemically or semantically whether a 45 m² apartment is tiny for New York standards.

On one widely accepted group of approaches to vagueness known as 'gap theories', the existence of borderline cases leads to truth-value indeterminacy (as opposed to an indeterminacy of our knowledge of which precisification is the semantic value of the predicate). On these approaches, 'this 45 m² apartment is a tiny apartment' is neither definitely true nor definitely false. The indeterminacy is usually explained as follows. A subject-predicate sentence 'a is *F*' is true if the reference of *a* is a member of the extension of *F*. So, 'this 45 m² apartment is a tiny apartment' is true if and only if the referent of 'this 45 m² apartment' is a member of the extension of 'tiny apartment'. But it is not determinate what set is the extension of 'tiny apartment'. There is the set of all apartments less than 46 m², the set of all apartments less than 45 m², the set of all apartments less than 44 m², and so on. None of these sets determinately constitutes the extension of 'tiny apartment'. As the reference of 'this 45 m² apartment' is a member of some but not all of the putative extensions of 'tiny apartment', 'this 45 m² apartment is a tiny apartment' is neither definitely true nor definitely false.

The third diagnostic of relative gradable adjectives is that owing to their inherent vagueness, they give rise to sorites paradoxes in their unmarked form, for instance:

1. An 800 m² apartment is huge for an apartment in New York.
2. If an apartment that is n m² is huge for an apartment in New York, then an apartment that is $n-1$ m² is huge for an apartment in New York.
3. An apartment that is 0 m² is huge for an apartment in New York.

The key feature of vague predicates which drives sorites paradoxes is the feature Crispin Wright (1975) calls 'tolerance'. A tolerant predicate *P* is one whose application is indifferent to small changes in the relevant respects. For example, 'huge for an apartment in New York' is tolerant of sufficiently small changes in the relevant respect, viz. square meters. Tolerant predicates thus satisfy the following condition:

Tolerance:

If *a* and *b* are observationally indistinguishable with respect to *P*, then $P(a) \leftrightarrow P(b)$ is definitely true.

A standard approach thought to resolve sorites paradoxes is supervaluationism. Roughly, supervaluationism treats claims as definitely true if they are true on all precisifications, definitely false if they are false on all precisifications, and neither definitely true nor definitely false if they are true on some precisifications and false on others. One problem with supervaluationism,

however, is that it entails that $\forall \{P(a_i) \ \& \ \sim P(a_{i+1}) / 1 \leq i \leq n\}$ is definitely true. For example, regardless of how we precisify 'huge for an apartment in New York' (e.g., larger than 100 m²), it will always be the case that some pair $P(a_i) \ \& \ \sim P(a_{i+1})$ is true (e.g., 'an apartment that is 101 m² is huge, and it is not the case that an apartment that is 100 m² is huge'). Yet, when a_i and a_{i+1} are observationally indistinguishable, this result is incompatible with the principle of tolerance. So, supervaluationism is incompatible with the semantic properties of tolerant predicates.

One way to resolve this conflict is to reject the standard version of tolerance and accept a contextual version that blocks transitivity. The non-contextual version of tolerance implies transitivity. If a is observationally indistinguishable from b , and b is observationally indistinguishable from c , and P applies to a , then P applies to c . However, this is not generally true. In a color spectrum, for example, even if a and b are perceptually indistinguishable, and b and c are perceptually indistinguishable, a and c may not be perceptually indistinguishable. If we dispose of transitivity, the second inductive premise in the sorites paradox is false.

Not all gradable adjectives are relative gradable expressions (Unger, 1978). Absolute adjectives are gradable but they are not associated with an implicit or explicit standard of comparison, they do not give rise to borderline cases, and they do not trigger sorites paradoxes in the unmarked form. There are two kinds of absolute adjectives: minimum standard absolute adjectives and maximum standard absolute adjectives (Kennedy 2007). Minimum standard absolute adjectives require their arguments to possess some minimal degree of the property they describe.

Consider:

(12)

- (a) This procedure is painful.
- (b) The gold is impure.
- (c) The door is open.

12(a) is true as long as the procedure hurts to some degree, 12(b) is true as long as the gold contains some amount of impurities, and 12(c) is true as long as there is some opening of the door.

Maximum standard absolute adjectives, on the other hand, require their arguments to possess some maximum degree of the property they describe. Some examples:

(13)

- (a) This procedure is painless.
- (b) The gold is pure.
- (c) The door is closed.

13(a) is true only if the procedure doesn't hurt, 13(b) is true only if the gold contains no amount of impurities, and 13(c) is true only if there is no opening of the door.

To see that absolute adjectives do not give rise to sorites paradoxes, consider the following sororities-like argument:

1. A door that is 10 inches open is open.
2. If a door is n inches open, then a door that is $n-1$ inches open is open.
3. So, a door that is 0 inches open is open.

Despite having the same structure as standard sorites paradoxes, this argument is not a paradox. It is just plainly invalid. The reason that it is not a paradox is that we are not the least tempted to think that the inductive premise is true. Even if a door that is one inch open is open, it obviously doesn't follow that a door that is 0 inches open is open.

In order for an adjective to give rise to a genuine sorites paradox, it must give rise to borderline cases. The sorites-like argument above fails to be genuine puzzles because absolute adjectives don't give rise to borderline cases.

As Chris Kennedy (2007) points out, there is a tendency to think that absolute adjectives sometimes give rise to borderline cases. Minimum standard absolute adjectives may seem to allow something more than a minimum standard, and maximum standard absolute adjectives may seem to allow something less than a maximum standard. This observation is not quite right, however. Such uses of absolute adjectives, though felicitous, are imprecise, just like common uses of 'it's 3 o'clock', 'this rod is 10 meters long' and 'Boston is 90 miles from Amherst'. There are various ways to account for imprecise uses of expressions pragmatically but none of them challenge the claim that absolute adjectives have truth conditions that make reference to fixed maximal or minimal standards of comparison.

4. Moderately, Relative Gradable Expressions

What we just said about relative and absolute gradable adjectives also applies to relative and absolute gradable verbs with some modifications. Not all relative gradable adjective can occur with a standard of comparison in the absence of a degree modifier (e.g., 'rather', 'quite', 'somewhat'). And the same goes for relative gradable verb phrases. Here are some examples of relative gradable adjectival and verb phrases that cannot occur with a standard of comparison, except in the presence of a degree modifier:

(14)

- (a) ?Amy sounds English for someone born in Sweden.
- (b) Amy sounds quite English for someone born in Sweden.
- (c) ?John is bald for someone who has had a hair transplant.
- (d) John is still rather bald for someone who has had a hair transplant.
- (e) *This shirt is red for a 2000-year-old shirt.
- (f) This shirt is really red for a 2000-year-old shirt.
- (g) *She loves him for someone who is unable to love.

- (h) She loves him a lot for someone who is unable to love.

The first sentence in each pair without a degree modifier is at best marginally acceptable, whereas the second sentence is perfectly fine. Like absolute adjectives but unlike standard relative gradable expressions, verb phrases and adjectival phrases like 'sound English', 'bald', 'red', and 'love' combine with proportional modifiers, as illustrated in (15):

(15)

- (a) The bottle is completely empty.
- (b) The door is partially closed.
- (c) *The house is completely expensive.
- (d) *The apartment is partially small.
- (e) Tina sounds completely English.
- (f) John is partially bald.

Though 'sound English', 'bald', 'red' and 'love' combine with proportional modifiers and cannot occur with a standard of comparison, they are nonetheless relative gradable expressions. Clear evidence that they are gradable comes from the fact that they are perfectly acceptable in comparatives and with other degree morphology, as shown by (16):

(16)

- (a) Chris sounds more English than Rose does.
- (b) John is too bald to be of use for this hair commercial
- (c) He doesn't love me as much as I would like him to.

Moreover, the fact that they give rise to genuine sorites paradoxes shows they are not absolute gradable expressions. Here are two examples:

- (1) A person who pronounces 3000 words in a 3000-word speech with a British accent sounds British.
- (2) If a person who pronounces n words in a 3000-word speech with a British accent sounds British, a person who pronounces $n-1$ words in a 3000-word speech with a British accent sounds British.
- (3) So, a person who pronounces 0 words in a 3000-word speech with a British accent sounds British.

- (1) A person who thinks romantically about another person 1,000 minutes a day loves the other person romantically.
- (2) If a person who thinks romantically about another person n minutes a day loves the other person romantically, a person who thinks romantically about another person $n-1$ minutes a day loves the other person romantically.

(3) A person who thinks romantically about another person 0 minutes a day loves the other person romantically.

Both arguments are genuine sorites paradoxes. There is no obvious sharp cut-off between sounding British and not sounding British or between loving a person romantically and not loving her romantically. So, the second inductive premise is not simply obviously false. Moreover, we cannot explain the indeterminacy in terms of imprecision. When we say that it's 3 p.m. even though it is actually 2:59 p.m., or that the dishes are dry even though there are microscopic amounts of water on them, what we are saying is close enough to the truth to count as true for the purposes of the conversation. Someone who sounds almost like a native British speaker, on the other hand, really does sound British. We are not simply riding roughshod over precision, when we say they sound British. Let us call relative expressions of this type 'moderately relative'.

As moderately relative expressions differ from standard relative expressions, I propose to modify Kennedy's (2007) framework. Standard relative expressions, as discussed by Kennedy, quantify over degrees in the semantics even in the absence of a modifier or other degree morphology. For example, 'this apartment is small' is to be read as saying that this apartment's size is somewhat smaller than some discourse-salient size. Sentences containing moderately, relative expressions behave differently. Except in the presence of degree or proportional modifiers or other degree morphology, these sentences do not quantify over degrees, they simply attribute an observational property to a subject. For example, 'John is bald' expresses the proposition that John has the observational property of being bald. 'John is quite bald', on the other hand, quantifies over degrees in the semantics. The sentence is to be read as saying that John has some degree of baldness that is greater than some discourse-salient degree of baldness. On this view, it is not because of reference to degrees that moderately relative adjectives give rise to borderline cases and trigger sorites paradoxes but because they express observational properties that trigger the initial appearance that they satisfy tolerance.

We can assign the following truth-conditions to sentences containing moderately relative adjectives: 'John is bald' is just a standard subject-predicate sentence that is true if John has the observational property of being bald. 'John is quite bald', on the other hand, is true iff there is a Q_1 and a Q_2 such that Q_2 is a discourse salient degree of baldness, and Q_1 is a degree of baldness which John has, and Q_1 is somewhat larger than Q_2 .

A worry here arises. The view just outlined seems to counter the standard analysis of gradable adjectives as denoting relations between objects and degrees. One way to address this worry is to say that sentences with moderately relative adjectives quantify over degrees after all. For example, it may be suggested that 'John is bald' is to be read as saying that John instantiates t degrees of baldness (where t is somehow implicitly assigned a value by the context). Note that if this suggestion is right, the context has to provide a precise value for the degree variable. The variable cannot simply be existentially bound. For, suppose otherwise. Then 'Lisa is as full as

Amy is' should imply 'Lisa is full' (as surely there is a degree to which Lisa is full'), but it does not (witness: 'Lisa is as full as Amy but neither is very full at all').

The proposal just outlined is implausible for a number of reasons. For one, it provides the wrong results for typical secondary qualities. For example, 'this tomato is red' cannot plausibly be read as saying that this tomato instantiates t degrees of redness; the sentence just says that this tomato has the quality red (Brogaard, 2010). For another, if moderately relative adjectives make implicit reference to degrees, then we cannot explain why they cannot occur with a standard of comparison in the absence of degree morphology.

I want to make a different suggestion, which is to say that in the case of moderately relative adjectives, reference to degrees is introduced by the degree morphology. On this view, moderately relative adjectives are partial functions from objects to truth-values (with a positive extension, a negative extension and an extension gap). Degrees are introduced by degree morphology like 'quite' and 'more than'. For example, 'quite interested in you' has the logical form ' t interested in you [C]' (where C is a standard of comparison). 'Dan is more interested in you than Jacob' has the logical form 'more [than wh Jacob is t interested in you] [Dan is t interested in you]'. This proposal can explain why moderately relative adjectives cannot occur with a standard of comparison: there is no implicitly specified degree to enter into the comparison. The proposal has the further advantage that it satisfies the intuitive principle that the meaning of 'quite F ' is a function of the meaning of ' F '.

If this view is right, then standard relative adjectives and moderately relative adjectives differ in terms of whether the adjective makes reference to degrees in its positive form or whether the degrees are introduced by the morphology.

'To be knowledgeable of' and 'to be ignorant of' are examples of moderately relatively gradable expressions. Below I will argue that they give rise to borderline cases and trigger sorites paradoxes. In the absence of a modifier they cannot occur with a standard of comparison, except marginally. Consider:

(11)

- (a) *For someone who is not normally very reflective, John is knowledgeable of the fact that there is always a reason for actions taken.
- (b) For someone who is not normally very reflective, John is quite knowledgeable of the fact that there is always a reason for actions taken.
- (a) ?For someone who is normally very attentive, John is ignorant of the fact that Mary was there.
- (b) For someone who is normally very attentive, John was quite ignorant of the fact that Mary was there.

'To be knowledgeable' and 'to be ignorant of' are thus moderately relative gradable adjectives. In the absence of a modifier, 'x is knowledgeable of the fact that p ' and 'x is ignorant of the fact

that p express the proposition that x has the property of being knowledgeable/ignorant of the fact that p . In the presence of a modifier, however, ' x is quite knowledgeable of the fact that p ' is to be read as saying that x has some degree of knowledgeability that is greater than some discourse-salient degree of knowledgeability. Likewise, ' x is quite ignorant of the fact that p ' is to be read as saying that x has some degree of ignorance that is greater than some discourse-salient degree of ignorance. So, the crucial difference between ' x is knowledgeable/ignorant' and ' x is quite knowledgeable/ignorant' is that only the latter quantifies over degrees in the semantics.

In the presence of a modifier, 'to be knowledgeable' and 'to be ignorant of' thus have interpretations that depend on a discourse-salient standard. They furthermore give rise to borderline cases both with and without a modifier. John can be neither definitely highly ignorant nor clearly not highly ignorant of the fact that his girlfriend is about to break up with him.

Turning to the third diagnostic for relative gradable adjectives, the fact that 'is knowledgeable of', 'is ignorant of' and related locutions trigger sorites paradoxes both in the presence and absence of a modifier yields further evidence that these locutions are relative gradable adjectives. Here is an example:³

1. Someone who notices 100 salient signs that his beloved is about to break up with him is not ignorant of this fact.
2. If someone who notices n salient signs that his beloved is about to break up with him is not ignorant of this fact, then someone who notices $n-1$ salient signs that his beloved is about to break up with him is not ignorant of this fact.
3. So, someone who notices 0 salient signs that his beloved is about to break up with him is not ignorant of this fact.

The trouble-maker here is the principle of tolerance: If a and b are observationally indistinguishable with respect to P , then $P(a) \leftrightarrow P(b)$ is definitely true. It is the apparent truth of the principle of tolerance that is responsible for the apparent truth of the inductive premise. Noticing one sign that p cannot obviously make a difference to whether 'is ignorant of the fact that p ' has application, but larger differences can, which suggests that while there is a way to proceed from ignorance to a lack of ignorance, there is no sharp cut-off between ignorance and a lack of ignorance.

'To be knowledgeable of', 'to be ignorant of' and related locutions thus satisfy the characteristics for being relative gradable expressions: they are associated with an implicit or explicit standard of comparison, and they give rise to borderline cases and sorites paradoxes.

³ Let it be granted for argument's sake that the person in question does not still believe that all those signs are misleading and does not irrationally discard all those signs.

'To be ignorant of the fact that p ' thus is not equivalent to 'to not know the fact that p '. While the latter may be context-sensitive (see e.g., Cohen, 1987, 1997; DeRose 1995; Lewis, 1996), it does not admit of degrees or borderline cases in a fixed context, whereas the former does.

Now, since we are interested in the ordinary-language concepts of knowledge and ignorance rather than specialized philosophical notions, linguistic considerations are our best guide to an adequate understanding of these concepts. So, the fact that 'to be ignorant of the fact that p ' is not equivalent to 'to not know the fact that p ' provides us with good reason to think that the thesis that ignorance is lack of knowledge is false.

5. Ignorance and Objectual Knowledge

Another way in which we express our thoughts about knowledgeability and ignorance is with the preposition 'about', as in:⁴

(17)

- (a) Chris Christie is knowledgeable about ebola.
- (b) Chris Christie is ignorant about ebola.

In the constructions in (17), 'to be knowledgeable' and 'to be ignorant' function on a par with 'to know' and 'fail to know' when 'know' is used objectually. One mark of the objectual 'know' is that it does not translate into the same word as the non-objectual 'know' in languages such as French, Italian, German and Danish. In German, for example, the objectual 'know' translates as 'kennen', whereas the non-objectual 'know' translates as 'wissen'. Thus, 'John knows Peter' translates in German as 'John kennt Peter', whereas 'John knows that Peter is the teacher' translates as 'John weiss das Peter der Lehrer ist'.

Some knowledge sentences are ambiguous between a 'kennen' (or objectual) reading and a 'wissen' (or non-objectual) reading. 'Natalie knows the way to Key Biscayne' can be translated in German as either 'Natalie kennt den Weg nach Key Biscayne' or 'Natalie weiss den Weg nach Key Biscayne' (Brogaard, 2005, 2008). The former requires that John is familiar with the way to Key Biscayne, while the latter merely requires basic knowledge of the directions. Another case: 'Stephanie knows the author of *Naming and Necessity*' can be read as saying that the author of *Naming and Necessity* is one of Stephanie's personal acquaintances but it also has a reading that requires for its truth that Stephanie know who the author of *Naming and Necessity* is, which she knows if she knows, say, that Saul Kripke is the author of *Naming and Necessity* or that the author of "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference" is the author of *Naming and Necessity*.

⁴Steven Beutler, "Chris Christie Is Ignorant About Ebola, But That Doesn't Mean He Was Wrong About Quarantines," *New Republic*, October 28, 2014.
<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/120013/chris-christies-ebola-quarantine-new-jersey-wasnt-totally-wrong>, accessed on December 23, 2014.

Constructions of the form 'knows [subject matter]', by contrast, seem to be unambiguously objectual. They do not involve different lexical items in other languages. 'Knows', as it occurs in 'John knows quantum theory', for example, admits only of the objectual reading.

Objectual knowledge is not factive in the standard sense. One can, in a theoretically important sense of the terms, know Lewis' counterpart theory even if modal realism is false. To know a subject matter involves, among other things, an ability to provide answers to questions about the implications of the theory. But knowing a theory does not require the theory to be true. Another example: John can know Greek mythology without believing that any of the sentences in Greek mythology is true, witness the awkwardness of Eli's response in the following dialogue:

Eli: Zeus' hammer Mjollnir was made for him by the dwarfs Brok and Eitri.

Nick: You clearly don't know your Greek mythology. Mjollnir is Thor's hammer, and figures in Norse mythology. Zeus didn't use a hammer. When he was pissed he threw lightning bolts.

Eli: What are you talking about? Greek mythology is false. There is nothing there to know.

Eli of course, is equivocating on the word 'know'. Even though Greek mythology is false, there is obviously something there to know, as long as 'know' is construed objectually. Knowing Greek mythology, in the objectual sense, does not require the sentences in the story to be true. It only requires the known claims to be true according to Greek mythology. Thus, one cannot have real knowledge of a theory without the presence of true beliefs about which claims are essential to the theory in question, but one can have real knowledge without these claims being true. Objectual knowledge of a theory is thus in an important sense non-factive. But there is also a sense in which it is factive. For it requires true beliefs about which claims are essential to the subject matter in question. It will, of course, be a vague matter how many claims one must know within a given subject matter to count as knowing the subject matter.

When 'know' is used objectually, it is a moderately, relative gradable expression. First, in the presence of a modifier, sentences containing them vary contextually in truth-conditions depending on which comparison class is determined by context or is made explicit in the sentence structure. Consider:

(18)

- (a) Elena knows quite a lot about ebola.
- (b) Elena knows quite a lot about ebola for someone who has never been in school.
- (c) Elena knows a lot more about ebola than Alan does.

Second, when used objectually 'know' gives rise to borderline cases in both the presence or absence of a modifier. For example, an ebola expert at the medical school of University of Miami definitely knows a lot about ebola, whereas a young child definitely does not know a lot

about ebola, but it may be indeterminate whether a person who has been attending to news posts about ebola knows a lot about ebola.

Third, when used objectually 'know' gives rise to sorites paradoxes in both the presence or absence of modifiers. Consider, for instance:⁵

1. Someone who has read a 1000 articles about ebola knows a lot about ebola.
2. If someone who has read n articles about ebola knows a lot about ebola, then someone who has read $n-1$ articles about ebola knows a lot about ebola.
3. Someone who has read 0 articles about ebola knows a lot about ebola.

Ignorance about a subject matter is the inverse of knowledge and knowledgeability of a subject matter. If Chris is ignorant about ebola, he fails to know the subject matter. Again, this does not require that the subject matter provides a true description of reality. You can be ignorant of Greek mythology by failing to know a significant number of the claims that constitute Greek mythology. Here, too, someone can be more or less ignorant about a subject matter. You may be somewhat but not completely ignorant about Greek mythology.

As 'know about' is semantically equivalent to 'knowledgeable about', the latter is a moderately gradable expression. Hence, in the presence of a modifier sentences containing 'knowledgeable about' and 'ignorant about' vary contextually in truth-conditions depending on which comparison class is determined by context or made explicit in the sentence structure. Consider:

(19)

- (a) Chris is quite ignorant about ebola.
- (b) Chris is quite ignorant about ebola for a leading politician.
- (c) Chris is more ignorant than Elan about ebola.

'Knowledgeable about' and 'ignorant about' furthermore give rise to border cases and sorites paradoxes both in the presence and the absence of a modifier. To illustrate:

1. Someone who has studied quantum mechanics for 60,000 minutes is very knowledgeable about quantum mechanics.
2. If someone who has studied quantum mechanics for n minutes is very knowledgeable about quantum mechanics, then someone who has studied quantum mechanics for $n-1$ minutes is very knowledgeable about quantum mechanics.
3. Someone who has studied quantum mechanics for 0 minutes is very knowledgeable about quantum mechanics.

⁵ Let it be granted for argument's sake that reading articles about ebola is the only way to learn about it and that the person who reads these articles actually believes at least most of what they say.

As in standard cases, it is the apparent truth of the principle of tolerance, if a and b are observationally indistinguishable with respect to P , then $P(a) \leftrightarrow P(b)$ is definitely true, that is responsible for the apparent truth of the inductive premise. Studying quantum mechanics for one minute cannot obviously make a difference to how knowledgeable one is about quantum mechanics, but larger differences can, say studying for 1,000 minutes, which suggests that while there is a way to proceed from being very knowledgeable to not being very knowledgeable, there is no sharp cut-off between being very knowledgeable and not being very knowledgeable.

6. A Simple Reply to the Skeptic

Our treatment of knowledgeability and ignorance of facts lends itself to an alternative reply to the problem of skepticism. Skepticism comes in many flavors: strong and weak, global and local (Fumerton, 1995). Weak skepticism is the view that we cannot have *knowledge* of a certain subject-matter or of all subject-matters, whereas strong skepticism is the view that we cannot have *justified beliefs* about a certain subject-matter or about all subject-matters. Although weak skepticism is considered worrisome by some, one could argue that it is not too troublesome if we cannot have knowledge as long as we can have justified beliefs. Presumably, justified beliefs can play most, if not all, the functional roles that knowledge is thought to play. So, the really worrisome position is strong skepticism.

Elsewhere I provided a response to strong skepticism (Brogaard, In Press). While this reply allows us to retain our entitlement to truly claim to be justified in our beliefs about the external world, there is a simpler reply to the skeptic, which may suffice for ordinary purposes. Both strong and weak skepticism, I will argue, can be refuted appealing to the distinction between knowledge of facts and knowledgeability of facts.

The standard skeptical argument proceeds by showing that the justification for some claim p is equally good justification for some alternative skeptical hypothesis q . For example, your perceptual evidence for thinking that the universe started billions of years ago is equally good evidence for the hypothesis that the universe started five minutes ago. If a deity had created the universe five minutes ago with its appearances of age and human beings rife with all their memories, things would phenomenally seem exactly as they actually do. Likewise, your perceptual evidence for thinking that there is an external world is equally good evidence for the hypothesis that we are all brains in vats. It is, of course, implausible to think that we somehow have direct conscious access to mind-independent physical objects in the non-veridical skeptical scenario. As we have the same justification in the actual world and the skeptical scenario, it is also implausible to think we have direct conscious access to mind-independent physical objects in the actual scenario, and hence it is unreasonable to think that we have non-inferential justification in the actual scenario. It follows that we don't have any non-inferentially justified beliefs about the external world. So, if we have justification for our beliefs about the external world, that justification is inferential. This is the first part of the

standard skeptical argument. The next part consists in arguing against the possibility of inferentially justified beliefs about the external world. I am not going to repeat the details of that part of the argument here (but see Brogaard, In Press).

Even if we grant that we cannot be justified in believing any empirical claims about the external world, however, it doesn't follow that we cannot be somewhat, or perhaps even highly, knowledgeable of the fact that the world is, roughly, as it appears to you. Recall that constructions of the form 'x is quite knowledgeable of the fact that *p*' are to be read as saying that x has some degree of knowledgeability that is greater than some discourse-salient degree of knowledgeability. In most everyday conversational contexts, knowledgeability of the fact that *p* does not require that we are internally justified in believing that we are not subject to a hoax or that a global skeptical scenario does not obtain. All we need in order to be knowledgeable of facts about our environment is what our senses and reasoning abilities ordinarily provide us with.

This simple solution to the skeptical problem differs from the standard contextualist response to the problem of skepticism. Contextualists of a traditional bent model the semantics of 'know' on the standard theory of indexicals (see e.g. Cohen, 1987, 1997; Lewis, 1996; DeRose, 1995). On the standard theory, the content of an indexical depends on some parameter of the context of use. For instance, the content of 'I' depends on a speaker parameter, and the content of 'now' depends on a time parameter.

According to standard variety contextualism, the content of 'know' depends on a speaker-dependent epistemic standard parameter that is supposed to be relative to what is salient to, or at stake for, the speaker. Whether someone is knowledgeable, on the other hand, will depend on a class of comparison. Just like a 450 m² apartment may be small in Miami but big in New York, so being knowledgeable of a fact to degree *d* may count as significant for one group of people but not for another. But degrees of knowledgeability are not influenced by which skeptical scenarios one happens to entertain at a given moment or which practical issues are at stake for one at the time in question.

Take Keith DeRose's bank case as an illustrative example (DeRose, 1987). Keith and his wife are driving home on a Friday afternoon. They plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit their paychecks. But as they drive past the bank, they notice that the bank is crowded. Thinking that it isn't very important that their paychecks are deposited right away, Keith says 'I know the bank will be open tomorrow, since I was there just two weeks ago on Saturday morning. We can deposit them Monday morning'. But Keith's wife then reminds him of an important check that will bounce if they don't deposit their paychecks before Monday morning. She says, 'Banks do change their hours. Are you certain that's not what is going to happen tomorrow?' Keith concedes, uttering 'Well, I suppose I don't really know that the bank will be open tomorrow after all'.

These sorts of cases were originally used to argue in favor of a contextual account of 'know' and have played a major part in the most influential defenses of contextualism (e.g., Cohen, 1987, 1997; DeRose, 1996). Whether these defenses are successful or not need not concern us here. What matters here is that while these types of cases may affect whether people know, they do not affect whether people are knowledgeable or how knowledgeable people are. Even when Keith concedes, uttering 'I suppose I don't really know that the bank will be open tomorrow after all', he is no less knowledgeable of the fact that the bank will be open the next day. Of course, one might argue that Keith is less knowledgeable of the fact that the bank is open tomorrow once he becomes aware of the practical issue of the paychecks. One would be hard pressed to actually make a good case for this point, however. Nothing has changed in terms of his informational state. Since 'know' is a success term, Keith may not know that the bank is open on Saturdays but if indeed it is open Keith is quite knowledgeable of that fact. After all, he was there two weeks ago and perhaps he has even looked up the hours on his iPhone. Whether he is knowledgeable or not does not depend on salient skeptical possibilities or what is at stake for the knowledge attributers or subjects but rather on how much information he has about the hours of the bank. Keith is less knowledgeable than the bank manager but more knowledgeable than his neighbor who never went to the bank on a Saturday and never bothered looking up the hours of the bank.

This particular solution to the problem of skepticism remains neutral on the question of whether one can possess knowledge or justification despite the skeptical challenge. It's thus providing us with an alternative epistemic value term that is relatively unaffected by changes in the salience of skeptical scenarios or the stakes of speakers or subjects. Unlike 'know' and 'justified', 'knowledgeability' is a degree notion, which isn't as easily undermined by stakes or salience of skeptical scenarios. So, the simple solution is not a solution to the skeptic's argument against justification and knowledge of empirical facts but is instead offering a new way to take the sting off of the skeptical argument by treating subjects who in principle neither know nor are justified in believing that p as potentially knowledgeable of the fact that p , when indeed p is true.

7. Ignorance-How and Incompetence

In addition to 'knowledgeable/ignorant of the fact that p ' and 'knowledgeable/ignorant about S ', we also speak of knowledgeability/ignorance of how to do A . Ignorance about how to perform an activity is also known as incompetence with respect to A -activities. For example, if you are ignorant of how to write a term paper, you are incompetent with respect to that activity: Writing term papers. As we will see, however, you can fail to be ignorant of how to perform a particular activity in one sense, and yet be incompetent with respect to the particular activity.

To be knowledgeable of how to perform a particular activity is a variant on knowing how to perform the activity, and to be ignorant of how to perform the activity is to fail to know how to perform the activity.

There are two competing views of knowledge-how: Intellectualism and anti-intellectualism. According to the reductionist varieties of intellectualism defended by Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson (2001) and Berit Brogaard (2007, 2008, 2009), knowledge-how simply reduces to knowledge-that. To a first approximation, *s* knows how to *A* iff there is a *w* such that *s* knows that *w* is a way to *A*. For example, John knows how to ride a bicycle if and only if there is a way *w* such that John knows that *w* is a way to ride a bicycle. John Bengson and Marc Moffett (2007) defend an anti-reductionist version of intellectualism which takes knowledge-how to require, in addition, that *s* understand the concepts involved in her belief.

According to the anti-intellectualist accounts originally defended by Gilbert Ryle (1946) and many others after him, knowledge-how requires the possession of a practical ability and so knowing that *w* (for some *w*) is a way to *A* does not suffice for knowing-how. For example, John knows how to ride a bicycle only if John has the ability to ride it; if John merely knows that *w* (for some *w*) is a way to ride a bicycle, John does not know how to ride a bicycle.

Elsewhere I have argued for a conciliatory position that is compatible with the reductionist variety of intellectualism: knowledge-how is reducible to knowledge-that. But there are knowledge states which are not justification-entailing and knowledge states which are not belief-entailing (Brogaard, 2011).

Consider the following case of knowledge-how, in which the subject fails to have a justified belief that *w* (for some *w*) is a way to fix the faucet. The faucet in Jason's apartment leaks. Jason finds a faucet manual in the kitchen drawer and fixes it. However, unbeknownst to him, the manual was created by the previous owner's parrot who liked to step dance on the keyboard of the owner's old type writer. Over the 50 years of step dancing the parrot had created a lot of nonsense but there was this one time where the parrot happened to hit the right keys and created something that made sense: The Faucet Manual. The owner never looked at it but had left it in the kitchen drawer where Jason found it. Under these circumstances, there is a way *w* such that Jason believes truly that *w* is a way to fix the faucet but the belief is acquired via a faulty method. So Jason cannot claim to have the knowledge that the method is a way to fix the faucet. Even so, it seems alright to say that Jason knows how to fix the faucet.

It is widely acknowledged that one can possess knowledge in virtue of possessing the right sort of cognitive capacities and exercising them in the right sort of way in the right sort of environment. Beliefs formed in this way are safe. They could not easily have been false. Further, a belief is reliably formed if, and only if, beliefs formed via the same method in the same sort of environment tend to give rise to safe beliefs. So, beliefs acquired through the exercise of an intellectual virtue are reliable. But, as I have argued on previous occasions, beliefs accompanied by the right sort of practical abilities also satisfy safety and reliability (Brogaard, 2011). Abilities are stable traits. If you have the ability to *A* by doing *P* in *S*, then doing *P* in *S* is a way for you to *A* in worlds in which you are sufficiently physically similar to the way you

actually are.⁶ So, if you believe that doing *P* in *S* is a way for you to *A*, and you have the ability to *A* by doing *P* in *S*, then your belief is safe. In the closest worlds in which you believe that doing *P* in *S* is a way for you to *A*, doing *P* in *S* is a way for you to *A*.⁷ So, in those worlds your belief is true. Moreover, your belief is reliably formed. Beliefs with the same sort of ground as your actual belief tend to be safe. Beliefs can thus be safe and reliably formed without being cognitively grounded.

We can thus distinguish two ways in which a knowledge state may be grounded: practically and cognitively. A cognitive ground, as envisaged here, is whatever makes the difference between mere true belief that *p* and cognitive knowledge that *p*, for instance, the fact that the belief was formed via a reliable and virtuous belief-forming method in the right sort of environment. A practical ground is whatever makes the difference between mere true belief that doing *P* in *S* is a way for one to *A* and knowing how to *A*, for instance, having the ability to *A*. Let us refer to both kinds of grounds as ‘justificatory grounds’.

Given this notion of a justificatory ground, let us now return to our case in which a subject appears to lack justification for his belief that there is a *w* (for some *w*) such that *w* is a way to perform *A*, yet knows how to perform *A*. Jason knows how to fix the faucet because there is a way *w* such that Jason knows that *w* is a way for him to fix the faucet in the right sort of environment. But what grounds his belief that doing *P* in the right sort of environment is away for him to fix the faucet is not the fact that his belief was acquired via a faulty method but rather the fact that he has an ability which he acquired by reading the manual: the ability to fix the faucet by doing *P* in *S*. One cannot acquire propositional knowledge by using methods which yield the right result only accidentally. However, one can acquire a practical ability by using such a method. Thus, one can acquire the ability to *A* by relying on a method which yields the right result accidentally, and once one has the ability, it can then serve as a justificatory ground for one’s true belief that doing *P* in *S* is a way for one to *A*. By reading the fake manual Jason acquires the true belief that doing *P* in *S* is a way for him to fix the faucet, and he acquires the ability to fix the faucet by doing *P* in *S*. The ability then serves as a justificatory ground for his true belief that doing *P* in *S* is a way for him to fix the faucet.

The position outlined here is not committed to the view that abilities to perform an activity are necessary or sufficient for knowing how to perform that activity. Having an ability is not necessary for knowing how to perform an activity, as I can know how to get to New York, even if I don’t have the means to get there. Nor is having an ability sufficient for knowing how to perform an activity. Consider Paul Snowdon’s well known counterexample to the view that to know how to *A* just is to have the ability to *A*:

⁶ I don’t succeed in swimming by making swim-like movements if I am not submerged in enough water. So, I don’t have the ability to swim by making swim-like movements. But I have the ability to swim by making swim-like movements while sufficiently submerged in water.

⁷ At least assuming that the closest worlds in which you believe that doing *P* in *S* is a way for you to *A* are worlds in which you are sufficiently similar physically to the way you actually are.

A man is in a room, which, because he has not explored it in the least, he does, as yet, not know how to get out of. In fact, there is an obvious exit which he can easily open. He is perfectly able to get out, he can get out, but does not know how to (as yet). (Snowdon 2003: 11)

It seems perfectly alright to say that the man has the ability to get out of the room (he just has to look around) and yet it seems highly plausible that he doesn't know how to get out. He doesn't know how to get out because there presently is no way *w* such that he knows that *w* is a way to get out.

The counterexample trades on an ambiguity in the word 'ability'. In one sense of the word, *s* has the ability to *A* just in case *S* is in an ability state with a content that represents a certain procedure for how to *A*, and *S* has the bodily capacities for carrying out the procedure. In another sense, *S* has the ability to *A* just in case *S* has certain bodily capacities which, if combined with the right sort of procedural information, will put *S* in a position to *A*. The man in Snowdon's example is not in a state with a content that represents a procedure for getting out. There is a procedure (namely looking around) which, when internalized by the man, will put him in a position to get out. Only the first kind of ability is essentially mind-involving and hence is of the sort that suffices for knowledge how.

Returning now to ignorance, one can be ignorant of how to perform an activity by lacking a sufficiently internalized ability to perform the activity. For example, you can be ignorant of how to exit the room in Snowdon's case because you haven't internalized the ability you have to get out.

As with knowledge-how, incompetence and hence ignorance of how to perform a given activity come in two different flavors. You can know what exactly to do to perform a yoga backbend and yet be unable to perform it, because you aren't flexible enough. There is a sense in which you are not ignorant about how to perform a yoga backbend, as you could easily teach others who are flexible enough how to do it. But since you actually cannot perform the backbend yourself, you are ignorant of how to perform it in a different sense. In this case, you are incompetent with respect to the particular activity: performing a yoga backbend, although you are not incompetent with respect to related activities, such as teaching others how to perform the backbend.

8. Conclusion

I have argued the phrase 'is ignorant' functions differently grammatically and semantically from the phrase 'does not know', when the latter is used propositionally. 'Is ignorant' does not have a genuine propositional use but is best understood as the converse of 'is not knowledgeable'. I have further argued that 'being knowledgeable' and 'being ignorant' are particular kinds of relative gradable expressions. Relative gradables typically are associated with an implicit or

explicit standard of comparison, give rise to borderline cases and trigger sorites paradoxes in their unmarked form. From these linguistic considerations, I argued, it follows that being ignorant admits of degree and that one can fail to be ignorant despite lacking true beliefs concerning the propositions constituting a particular subject matter. The proposed treatment of knowledgeability and ignorance of facts and subject matters lends itself to an alternative, “simple” solution to the skeptical problem. I have furthermore argued that ignorance can also reflect incompetence with respect to a particular activity. The latter is a case of lacking a particular kind of ability-involving knowledge-how, viz. practical knowledge of how to perform the activity in question.⁸

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