

Hope, knowledge, and blindspots

Jordan Dodd¹

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Abstract Roy Sorensen introduced the concept of an epistemic blindspot in the 1980s. A proposition is an epistemic blindspot for some individual at some time if and only if that proposition is consistent but unknowable by that individual at that time. In the first half of this paper, I extend Sorensen work on blindspots by arguing that there exist blindspots that essentially involve hopes. In the second half, I show how such blindspots can contribute to and impair different pursuits of self-understanding. My arguments throughout this paper draw on Luc Bovens's account of hope.

1 Introduction

Roy Sorensen introduced the concept of an epistemic blindspot in the 1980s.¹ A proposition is an epistemic blindspot for S at t iff that proposition is consistent but unknowable by S at t.² For example,

(1) It is raining and Bob does not know that it is raining.

is a blindspot for Bob. (1) is obviously consistent, and Sorensen showed that (1) is unknowable by Bob with the following argument, where 'K', 'b', and 'q' stand for 'knows that', 'Bob', and 'It is raining':

¹ Sorensen's essays on blindspots are largely collected and expanded upon in his 1988.

² This definition mirrors one in Sorensen (1984, p. 131). The ensuing example in (1) and the argument of Sorensen's that follows are on the same page of that article. Although some parts of Sorensen (1984) are included in Sorensen (1988) (Chapter 9), these are not.

✉ Jordan Dodd
jordan_dodd@carleton.ca

¹ Department of Philosophy, Carleton University, 3A46 Paterson Hall 1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6, Canada

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|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. $K_b(q \ \& \ \neg K_b q)$ | Assumption for proof by contradiction |
| 2. $K_b q \ \& \ K_b \neg K_b q$ | 1, Knowledge distributes over conjunction |
| 3. $K_b q \ \& \ \neg K_b q$ | 2, Knowledge implies truth; TF-false |

Sorensen was interested in blindspots for a number of reasons. For example, he argued that understanding the existence of particular blindspots can help towards resolving various epistemic paradoxes, such as the prediction paradox.³ As well, he argued that some particular blindspots undermine “certain generalizations about the scope of knowledge,” such as the hypothesis that “[w]hatever can be known by someone, can be known by anyone else” (Sorensen 1984, pp. 131–132).⁴

Like Sorensen, I am interested in blindspots. But I am interested in them for different reasons than those that guided his work. My interest is to better understand some aspects of the relationship between *knowledge* and *hope*. Specifically, I am interested in two questions. First: Are there any blindspots that essentially involve hopes? Second: If there are, what positive or negative effects may these blindspots have for us?

I will argue for the following answers to those questions. First, given plausible assumptions about the nature of hope and about second-order knowledge, there are blindspots that essentially involve hopes. Specifically, there are what I will call *hope-knowledge blindspots*.⁵ In my terminology, a proposition is a hope-knowledge blindspot for S at t iff that proposition is consistent, unknowable by S at t, and unknowable by S at t partly in virtue of it having a sub-proposition of the form ‘S hopes that p’.⁶ For example, I will argue that:

(2) Bob knows that it is raining and Bob hopes that it is raining.

is a hope-knowledge blindspot for Bob.

Showing that (2) is a hope-knowledge blindspot for Bob will be my focus in the first half of this paper. Focusing on this example is useful because of the way that we can generalize from our discussion of it. Specifically, in (2), ‘Bob’ is obviously just being used as a name for an arbitrary subject and ‘It is raining’ is just being used as an example of a proposition that can be known and can be hoped. So, my argument that (2) is a hope-knowledge blindspot for Bob is, by extension, an argument for the following generalization:

³ For a brief overview of the application of epistemic blindspots to epistemic paradoxes, see Sorensen (2011), Sect. 5.4.

⁴ Two other hypotheses that Sorensen argues are undermined by some epistemic blindspots are “[w]hatever can be true, can be known” and “[w]hatever can be known to a person at one time, can be known to him at any other time” Sorensen (1984, p. 131).

⁵ The English noun ‘hope’ translates in Greek to ‘elpis’. So, one alternative to the term ‘hope-knowledge blindspots’ would be ‘elpisic-epistemic blindspots’. But that is a bit of a mouthful.

⁶ Just like my concept of a hope-knowledge blindspot is derived from Sorensen’s concept of an epistemic blindspot, Sorensen reports that his “concept of an epistemic blindspot was derived from Jaakko Hintikka’s concept of an anti-performatory statement” (Sorensen 1984, p. 131). See Hintikka (1962, pp. 90–91).

- (3) For any subject S and any proposition p that can be known by S at t and hoped by S at t , ‘ S knows that p at t and S hopes that p at t ’ is a hope-knowledge blindspot for S at t .⁷

Second, given the preceding result and a plausible assumption about the epistemic value of hope, hope-knowledge blindspots can contribute both to successes and failures in *self-understanding*. Whether they stand to help or, instead, hinder an individual’s self-understanding plausibly depends in part, as we will see in the second half of this paper, on some ways that individuals vary in their dispositions towards learning about themselves.

2 Hope-knowledge blindspots

In his 1999 Luc Bovens gives an account of the *nature of hope*. His account is controversial, but even its critics agree that it rightly includes the following necessary condition for hope⁸:

- (4) S hopes that p only if: S has “a degree of confidence that $[p]$ will come about which ranges between some threshold value close to 0 for confidence that $[p]$ will not come about and some threshold value close to 1 for confidence that $[p]$ will come about” (Bovens 1999, p. 673).

Let us call this *the subjective probability condition*⁹ and represent it as follows, where ‘ H ’, ‘ S ’, ‘ \rightarrow ’, ‘ \circ ’, and ‘ P_{Sp} ’ stand for ‘hopes that’, ‘(Subject) S ’, ‘implies’, ‘close to (but not equal to)’, and ‘the subjective probability for S of p ’:

⁷ Like work on epistemic blindspots, work on hope-knowledge blindspots is about what propositions cannot be known by particular individuals at particular times. But one analogue of such issues of *knowability* is issues of *hopeability*—that is, of what propositions cannot be hoped by particular individuals at particular times. I will not pursue that topic in this paper, but it deserves investigation. For example, there are presumably some propositions that cannot be hoped by anyone, ever. For example, as Scott Soames points out, “[t]here are propositions ... too complex for me to entertain, as well as propositions which, if I did try to entertain them, would be too complex for me to respond to in any coherent way” (Soames 2003, p. 374). As well, the set of hopeable propositions may be so broad that it even includes, for example, self-defeating hopes. For example, suppose that Linda hopes that all her hopes are frustrated. In order for Linda’s hope that all her hopes are frustrated to be satisfied, it would have to be case that not all of her hopes are frustrated. But if not all of Linda’s hopes are frustrated, then Linda’s hope that all her hopes are frustrated is unsatisfied. So, Linda’s hope that all her hopes are frustrated is self-defeating, since a necessary condition for it being satisfied is that it is not satisfied. Even so, this does not seem to require that Linda could not have such a self-defeating hope. For example, perhaps Linda could have such a hope in some scenarios where she fails to realize the self-defeating nature of such a hope.

⁸ For example, although Martin (2014, pp. 17–34), McGeer (2008, pp. 244–246), and Walker (2006, pp. 50–53) raise objections to Bovens’s account of the nature of hope, none objects to this proposed necessary condition for hope. Similar necessary conditions to that given in (4) figure explicitly in the analyses of the nature of hope given by, for example, Martin (2014) and Pettit (2004).

⁹ As an aside, it is worth noting that a similar necessary condition is plausibly true for mental events of *deciding*. For example, Stuart Hampshire and H.L.A. Hart propose that “[i]f a man is in a position of still having to decide between two or more courses of action open to him, then he must be uncertain what he will do” (Hampshire and Hart 1958, pp. 2–3). On this proposal, if, for example, Bob is deciding whether he will make a hamburger, then he must not have a confidence of 0 that he will make one and not have a confidence of 1 that he will make one.

$$(5) H_{Sp} \rightarrow {}^{\circ}0 < P_{Sp} < {}^{\circ}1$$

We will assume that the subjective probability condition is true.¹⁰ In virtue of doing so, we also assume (since it is weaker than that condition) the following conditional probability, where ‘Pr(A / B)’ stands for ‘the objective probability that A given B’:

$$(6) \Pr(P_{Sp}=1 / H_{Sp})=0$$

(6) says that given that (at t) S hopes that p, the objective probability that (at t) S is certain that p is 0.

Let us also assume another conditional probability, which we will call *the conduciveness principle*:

$$(7) \Pr(P_{Sp}=1 / K_s K_{Sp}) \neq 0$$

(7) says that given that (at t) S knows that she knows that p, it is not the case that the objective probability that (at t) S is certain that p is 0.

Is the conduciveness principle plausible? I have three points to make:

First, I believe the conduciveness principle for the following reason. Intuitively, if S knows that she knows that p, then S is in an excellent metacognitive position to be certain that p. In particular, S’s second-order knowledge puts S in such an excellent metacognitive position to be certain that p that there is, plausibly, never 0 probability that S is certain that p if S knows that S knows that p.¹¹

Second, it is worth flagging that the conduciveness principle does not require, for example, that there are no cases where it is attractive to say both that S is uncertain that p and that S knows that she knows that p. Rather, when it comes to proposed counter-examples, the conduciveness principle requires only that for any case where it is proposed both that S is uncertain that p and that S knows that she knows that p, there is not 0 probability that the case fails to deliver what it proposes.

Third, to illustrate this point about the demands on potential counter-examples to the conduciveness principle, let us see it at work in relation to a particular case. Suppose that some psychologists tell you that they have discovered individuals with a form of paranoia wherein the afflicted have some second-order knowledge but are incapable of being certain about anything. What does the conduciveness principle require in relation to what these psychologists propose to have discovered? It requires that: there is not 0 probability that there are no such individuals. Or, in other words, it requires that: there is some objective chance that, contrary to what these psychologists are claiming, there are no individuals with such a condition. This verdict seems to be justified by applying to this case the same core idea that I used to argue for the

¹⁰ Bovens considers the following objection to the lower bound of the subjective probability condition: “Could I not hope for world peace in my life time and yet be confident that this will not come about?” (Bovens 1999, p. 674). His reply is: “It is notoriously difficult to make sense of utopian hopes. Either, the projected state in utopian hopes functions as a guiding ideal. But then, what I am hoping for strictly speaking is that the world will move closer toward peace in my life time and it is not true that I am confident that *that* will not come about. Or, utopian hopes may require a divided mind. Upon reflection, I admit that the evidence warrants confidence that world peace will not come about in my life time, but a part of me resists this confidence and this is what enables me to continue to hope” (Bovens 1999, p. 674, italics in original).

¹¹ It has been argued that even (first-order) knowledge requires certainty. See Klein (1981) for a defense of that view. See Stanley (2008) for a defense of the view that knowledge does not require certainty.

conduciveness principle itself: having second-order knowledge that p puts one in such an excellent metacognitive position to be certain that p that it is plausible that there is not 0 chance that an individual is certain that p if they have second-order knowledge that p .¹²

So far we have taken on, as assumptions, the subjective probability condition and the conduciveness principle. With them in hand, we can turn more directly to building an argument that there exist hope-knowledge blindspots. Consider again the following proposition:

(2) Bob knows that it is raining and Bob hopes that it is raining.

I will show that (2) is a hope-knowledge blindspot for Bob, if we grant the subjective probability condition and the conduciveness principle. To show that, I must demonstrate both that (2) is consistent and that (2) is unknowable by Bob.¹³

We can see that (2) is consistent if we consider cases where Bob knows that it is raining, hopes that it is raining, but *fails to know that* he knows that it is raining. The literature on counter-examples to the KK principle—that is, the principle that if S knows that p , S knows that she knows that p —is full of ways that such cases can occur. Here is one way. If we assume a plausible principle of epistemic closure, we can create cases where S knows that p but S does not believe that she knows that p and, so, does not know that she knows that p . The principle of epistemic closure that I have in mind is defended at length by John Hawthorne in his 2005:

(8) “If one knows P and competently deduces Q from P , thereby coming to believe Q , while retaining knowledge that P , one comes to know that Q ” (Hawthorne 2005, p. 29).

Here is such a counter-example to the KK principle. Suppose that Bob knows that it is cloudy and raining ($P =$ it is cloudy and raining). Suppose further that Bob deduces that it is raining ($Q =$ it is raining) from P , thereby coming to believe that it is raining.

¹² Another way to respond to the imagined psychologists would be to argue that: there is an objective probability of 0 of there being such individuals. We would be justified in believing this stronger probability claim if, for example, we were justified in believing that the best explanation for why having second-order knowledge that p puts one in excellent meta-cognitive position to be certain that p is that having such second-order knowledge entails being certain that p . But, although I am sympathetic to both this stronger probability claim and this way of arguing for it, I will not pursue these ideas further. Each is a stronger commitment than we need to take on in order to take on the conduciveness principle.

¹³ Strictly speaking, I must also demonstrate that (2) is unknowable by Bob partly in virtue of it having a sub-proposition of the form ‘ S hopes that p ’. But if my argument that (2) is unknowable by Bob is successful, it will be obvious that it also shows that (2) is unknowable by Bob partly in virtue of it having such a sub-proposition. It is worth asking, though: What is the exact function of the ‘partly in virtue of’ clause in my definition of hope-knowledge blindspots? To see the answer to that question, consider the following alternative definition: A proposition is a hope-knowledge blindspot for S at t iff that proposition is consistent, unknowable by S at t , and *has a sub-proposition of the form ‘ S hopes that p ’*. If we operated with that definition, then there would be no question that there exist hope-knowledge blindspots. The reason why is that if we were to simply amend (1) to be ‘(1*) It is raining, Bob does not know that it is raining, and Bob hopes that it is raining’, then Sorensen’s argument that (1) is an epistemic blindspot would generalize to show that (1*) is a hope-knowledge blindspot. But clearly the reason why (1*) is unknowable by Bob has nothing to do with it having a sub-proposition of the form ‘ S hopes that p ’. In contrast, because of its ‘partly in virtue of’ clause, my definition of hope-knowledge blindspots requires that such blindspots essentially involve hopes.

Suppose also that Bob retains knowledge that it is cloudy and raining. Given (8), it follows that Bob comes to know that it is raining. But it does not follow that, and it is not intuitively required that, Bob also comes to know that he knows that it is raining. For example, Bob may falsely believe that such deductions yield mere belief rather than knowledge. But if Bob does not believe that he knows that it is raining, then the fact that he knows that it is raining seems perfectly compatible with it being the case that he hopes that it is raining.¹⁴

Since the most obvious way to see that (2) is consistent is to use cases that are also counter-examples to the KK principle, there will be an interesting relation between hope-knowledge blindspots and the KK principle. Specifically, every new type of counter-example that we discover to the KK principle will broaden our understanding of how frequently individuals may find themselves in cases where they both know that *p* and hope that *p*. Although it is beyond my interests in this paper to survey even all of the best types of counter-examples to the KK principle, it is worth flagging that there exists a powerful argument for the conclusion that “our knowledge is pervaded by failures of the KK principle” (Williamson 2000, p. 119). I have in mind Timothy Williamson’s ‘Mr Magoo’ argument.¹⁵ As John Hawthorne and Ofra Magidor say, the core idea of Williamson’s argument “is that one cannot know the exact limits of what one knows [in any given case] because one knows in general that the cases just beyond the limits of what one knows have to match in truth value with the proposition that one knows. If one knew the limits of what one knows, they would not then, after all, be the limits of what one knows since one could use those general considerations about the limits to push them further” (Hawthorne and Magidor 2009, p. 381). Williamson uses this line of thought to show that, for example, “virtually all perceptual knowledge” involves knowing without knowing that one knows (Williamson (2000), p. 119). So, if Williamson’s argument is sound, then it indicates, at least if we also assume that people frequently engage in hoping that the world is particular ways, that cases in which individuals both know that *p* and hope that *p* may be extremely common.

If we accept that (2) is consistent, then to see that (2) is a blindspot for Bob it just remains for us to see that (2) is unknowable by Bob. Here is an argument, which uses the subjective probability condition and the conduciveness principle, to show that (2) is unknowable by Bob¹⁶:

¹⁴ Before defending a very different version of the KK principle, Connor McHugh says the following about why friends of KK principles should reasonably look elsewhere than to the strong version of the KK principle that the preceding example in the main text targets: “The KK principle is sometimes formulated as a conditional from knowing *p* (given normal conditions) to *in fact* knowing that you know *p* ... Such a formulation seems to me to place too much emphasis on psychological facts about thinkers. ... You can always fail to take advantage of good epistemic circumstances” (McHugh 2010, p. 32, italics in original). The preceding case in the main text uses this general idea, with Bob making an error that causes him to not seize on a good opportunity for second-order knowledge. I suspect that, as Hawthorne and Magidor propose, “it is hopeless to defend the transparency of knowledge [i.e., the KK principle]” (Hawthorne and Magidor 2009, p. 387). But see Stalnaker (2009) for a number of considerations in favour of the KK principle.

¹⁵ See Williamson (2000, pp. 114–119). Williamson’s argument is the most discussed argument in recent work on the KK principle. For one objection to his argument, see Dokic and Égré (2009).

¹⁶ Assume, for simplicity, that the material conditional (\supset) is an adequate account of implication (\rightarrow).

1. $K_b(K_bq \ \& \ H_bq)$	Assumption, for proof by contradiction
2. $K_bK_bq \ \& \ K_bH_bq$	1, Knowledge distributes over conjunction
3. $K_bH_bq \ \supset \ H_bq$	2, Knowledge implies truth
4. $\Pr(P_bq=1 \ / \ H_bq)=0$	Assumption, from the subjective probability condition
5. $\Pr(P_bq=1 \ / \ K_bK_bq) \neq 0$	Assumption, from the conduciveness principle
6. $[H_bq \ \& \ \Pr(P_bq=1 \ / \ H_bq)=0] \ \supset \ \Pr(P_bq=1)=0$	3,4 Modus Ponens for conditional probabilities ¹⁷
7. $[K_bK_bq \ \& \ \Pr(P_bq=1 \ / \ K_bK_bq) \neq 0] \ \supset \ \Pr(P_bq=1) \neq 0$	2,5 Modus Ponens for conditional probabilities
8. $\Pr(P_bq=1)=0 \ \& \ \Pr(P_bq=1) \neq 0$	6,7 TF-False

3 Hope-knowledge blindspots and the epistemic value of hope

I have argued that there can be hope-knowledge blindspots. Let us turn now to our second target question: If there are hope-knowledge blindspots, what positive or negative effects may these blindspots have for us? Let us again start by drawing from Bovens's work on hope, but this time from his account of the *value of hope*.

Bovens's account of the value of hope includes a proposal about the epistemic value of hope. That proposal is about the epistemic value of hope in the sense that it proposes a particular way in which hoping may be conducive to learning and, so, may present individuals with opportunities to gain knowledge.¹⁸

Bovens proposes that the epistemic value of hope is that "hoping is conducive to increased self-understanding" (Bovens 1999, p. 676). Specifically, he proposes that since "[t]hrough hoping we spend a certain amount of mental energy on the projected states of the world," it can be the case that through hoping "[w]e restructure our hopes by reflecting on what it is that we truly want and what is attainable in our lives" (Bovens 1999, pp. 672, 676).¹⁹ Bovens's example of this is suitably self-reflective:

¹⁷ Strictly speaking, in 6. and 7. the first conjuncts of the antecedents should be, respectively, the equivalent probability claims, namely ' $\Pr(H_bq)=1$ ' and ' $\Pr(K_bK_bq)=1$ '. Wagner gives the form of modus ponens for conditional probabilities as follows: "if $0 \geq a \geq 1$ and $0 < b \leq 1$, then: $p(H|E) = a$ and $p(E) = b \Rightarrow ab \leq p(H) \leq ab + 1 - b$ " (Wagner 2004, p. 750; cf. Sobel 2009, p. 104).

¹⁸ As we will see, Bovens states his proposal as being about gaining *understanding*, rather than as being about gaining *knowledge*. I will trade freely between those terms, since I doubt that any differences between those concepts are crucial in the present context. In particular, it is really *self-learning* that is the crucial concept for Bovens and self-learning can be described both in terms of gaining *self-understanding* and gaining *self-knowledge*. For the view that understanding is just a species of knowledge, see Grimm (2006). But see Pritchard (2009) for a defence of an opposing view.

¹⁹ Bovens uses an example to indicate the types of activities that he means to designate with his talk of spending "mental energy on the projected states of the world": "Consider the following case. Sophie shows up late at some party and asks me very self-confidently whether I had been hoping that she would come. Now suppose that I did indeed believe that Sophie might come and that I consider her to be a welcome guest - i.e. I prefer her coming to the party to her not coming to the party. Still, it seems to me that it would be a lie to say that I had been hoping she would come, unless I had devoted at least some mental energy to the question whether she would or would not come to the party - e.g., I had been looking at my clock wondering whether Sophie would still come, I had been turning my head earlier to check whether Sophie was amongst some newly arrived guests, etc." (Bovens 1999, p. 674).

“I may start off hoping to win the prize ... in order to gain more recognition in the field, but through [spending mental energy hoping this] I may come to realize how unattainable or how futile my pursuits really are. As I shift my hopes to more attainable and meaningful pursuits that are no less constitutive of a better professional life, I have come to learn something about myself and my place in the world” (Bovens 1999, p. 676).²⁰ Let us call Bovens’s proposal that hoping is in this way conducive to self-understanding his thesis about *the epistemic value of hope*.²¹ We will assume that his thesis is true.²²

What necessary conditions must be satisfied for any individual to enjoy this epistemic value of hope? Presumably, something second-order is necessary. That is, the self-understanding in question comes with reflection on our hopes through hoping, which seems to require having a second-order mental state about that hoping.

What sort of second-order mental state is necessary? A first thought might be that it will do for S to have merely the true belief that she hopes that p. But more than mere true belief seems to be necessary. The problem is that it is hard to see how lucky true beliefs could ever reasonably put S in a cognitive position to enjoy the epistemic value

²⁰ Could there be cases where Bovens both *knows that he wins the prize* and *hopes that he wins the prize*, just like there are cases where Bob knows that it is raining and hopes that it is raining? Yes. One way to see this is to again draw on the plausible epistemic closure principle in (8). Suppose that Bovens knows that it is currently 12pm on June 15th, knows that he is currently receiving a phone call from 555–2222, and knows that only the prize winner will receive a phone call from 555–2222 at 12pm on June 15th. Suppose further that Bovens deduces from that set of propositions that he is the prize winner, thereby coming to believe that he is the prize winner. And suppose also that he retains knowledge of the original conjunction. It follows from (8) that Bovens knows that he wins the prize. But it is possible that in the heat of the moment Bovens falsely believes that knowledge does not transmit across his deduction. In such a case, it is intuitive that he would both know that he wins the prize and hope that he wins the prize. Such a state need not be short-lived, of course. For example, suppose that Bovens’s phone drops the call before he answers it, that Bovens does not return the call, and that it is some time before the prize-awards call Bovens again. Note, as well, that this variation on Bovens’s example is still a case where Bovens could reflect on his hope and learn about what he takes to be meaningful. For example, the time period before the prize-awards call back may be a fruitful occasion for Bovens to do this.

²¹ Here are two points about the epistemic value of hope that Bovens identifies that Bovens does not himself mention. First, it seems that not only reflecting on *actual* hopes but also reflecting on *hypothetical* hopes is conducive to self-understanding in much the way that Bovens identifies. For example, Derek Parfit argues that by reflecting on what we would hope in some hypothetical cases, we can learn that most of us “are biased towards the future” (Parfit 1987, p. 165). Parfit’s idea is that we can learn this by seeing that we need to posit a bias towards the future in order to explain what most people would hope in his target hypothetical cases. For Parfit’s cases and arguments, see Parfit (1987): Chapter 8, especially Section 64. Second, there may be more ways that hoping is epistemically valuable than the one that Bovens identifies. For example, it seems plausible that through reflecting on cases in which you hope, you may come to understand both what conscious experiences may well come with hoping (e.g., experiences of concern) and what cognitive vulnerabilities may well come with having such conscious experiences (e.g., a disposition to pay less attention to other matters than one ought). These gains in understanding may be put to various purposes. For example, they may help us to aid or hinder others, since they may help us to determine how others’ hopes are affecting their mental lives. I thank an anonymous referee for this journal both for the first of these points and for ideas that led me to the second point.

²² Walker (2006, p. 51) also explicitly accepts Bovens’s thesis about the epistemic value of hope. I know of no critics of the thesis.

of hope that Bovens identifies.²³ Luck comes and goes at random, but to access this epistemic value, we need to *consistently* access and assess our hopes. Since the scope of things that it is possible for anyone to hope at any given time is vast, it is highly improbable that luck will bring anyone the necessary consistency in this area.

As such, it seems that not merely true belief, but at least non-lucky true belief is the necessary second-order supplement for enjoying the epistemic value of hope that Bovens identifies. While the analysis of knowledge is obviously contested, it seems not unreasonable to suppose, at least for simplicity, since settling that analysis is well beyond the present paper, that S knows that p if S has a non-lucky true belief that p.²⁴ If we accept that sufficient condition, then the above considerations suggest that *something like* the following is true:

- (9) S enjoys the epistemic value that Bovens identifies for her hope that p only if S knows that S hopes that p.

As it stands, though, (9) seems implausible. There are two problems with it. The first is that (9) does not allow for the possibility that S could enjoy the epistemic value of hope that Bovens identifies even if, rather than knowing that she *hopes* that p, S knows that *previously* she *hoped* that p. But it seems plausible that some individuals may gain self-understanding in much the way that Bovens proposes, but by using their knowledge that *previously* they *hoped* that p.

The second problem with (9) is that while it seems possible that many individuals may access the epistemic value of hope that Bovens identifies either through knowing that they hope that p or through knowing that previously they hoped that p, it also seems possible that individuals may vary widely in whether they are disposed to learn about themselves through reflecting on their current hopes or, instead, through reflecting on their previous hopes. For example, compare Tina, Gene, and Louise. Suppose that Tina is the sort of person who best learns about herself through reflecting on states of mind that she no longer occupies. For example, suppose that she is better at learning about herself through reflecting on her past experiences of elation and hatred than she is at learning about herself through reflecting on such experiences when she is actually having them. Given her personal dispositions, when it comes to accessing the epistemic value of hope, Tina will typically only succeed in accessing it through reflecting on her previous hopes.

In contrast, suppose that Gene best learns about himself through reflecting on his current mental states. For example, suppose that he is not disposed to learn about himself through reflecting on what he previously found valuable or un-valuable, but that he is disposed to learn about himself through reflecting on his current value judgements. Given his personal dispositions, Gene will typically only succeed at accessing the epistemic value of hope that Bovens identifies through reflecting on his current hopes. Both Gene and Tina contrast with individuals like Louise, who typically learns about

²³ The type of luck that is at work here is what, for example, Pritchard (2005) calls “veritic epistemic luck”, which occurs when “[i]t is a matter of luck that the agent’s belief is true” (p. 146).

²⁴ One established view of knowledge that is compatible with my simplifying supposition is Unger’s (1970, pp. 114–115) proposal that knowledge is non-accidental true belief. But for an account that departs widely from my simplifying supposition, see Baumann’s (2014) defense of the view that knowledge is compatible with luck.

herself both through reflecting on her current and previous states of mind. (9) clearly fails to cope with differences like these in learning dispositions across individuals.²⁵

These problems suggest some particular ways to build on (9) in order to distinguish what is necessary for enjoying the epistemic value of hope that Bovens identifies. Specifically, they suggest that we adopt the following set of commitments:

- (10) Some individuals may enjoy access to the epistemic value of hoping that *p* only if: (A) it is both the case that they *no longer* hope that *p* but know that they *previously* hoped that *p*.
- (11) Some individuals may enjoy access to the epistemic value of hoping that *p* only if: (B) it is both the case that they *currently* hope that *p* and know that they *currently* hope that *p*.
- (12) Some individuals may enjoy access to the epistemic value of hoping that *p* only if: (A) or (B).

Let us call (10)–(12) *the variability account* of the conditions for accessing the epistemic value of hope that Bovens identifies. In what follows we will assume that the variability account is true.

So far, in Section 3, we have taken on, as assumptions, Bovens's thesis about the epistemic value of hope and the variability account of the conditions for accessing that epistemic value. With them in hand, we can identify two ways that hope-knowledge blindspots may have positive or negative effects for us:

(I) Hope-knowledge blindspots seem to create the potential for both epistemically beneficial and epistemically harmful actions. To see this, consider Tina and Gene, again. Since Tina will typically only succeed in accessing the epistemic value of hope that Bovens identifies through reflecting on her previous hopes, Tina stands to benefit from particular hope-knowledge blindspots. For example, suppose that while knowing that she hopes that *p*, Tina intentionally and successfully takes steps to come to know and know that she knows that *p*. Since, given my argument for hope-knowledge blindspots, Tina cannot know both that she knows that *p* and that she hopes that *p*, something has to fall away in this situation. In particular, what will happen is that Tina will cease to know that she hopes that *p*, and, in all likelihood, also cease to

²⁵ This idea of variation across agents in learning dispositions is based on more extensive distinctions that are made in research on experiential learning in, for example, higher education. For example, David Kolb's learning theory distinguishes four types of learning dispositions: diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating (see, e.g., Kolb 1984; Kolb and Kolb 2005). Ruth Fanning and David Gaba summarize these distinctions as follows: individuals "with diverging learning styles use concrete experience and reflective observation to learn. ... Individuals with this learning style prefer to work in groups, listening and receiving feedback. Individuals with assimilating learning styles prefer abstract conceptualization and reflective observation. They like reading, lectures, and analysis. Converging-styled learners use abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. They like to find practical uses for ideas and theories. In a formal learning setting, they prefer to experiment with new ideas, simulations, laboratory experiments, and practical applications. Accommodating-styled learners use concrete experience and active experimentation. People with this style learn primarily from hands-on experience. In formal learning, they prefer to work in teams, to set goals, to do fieldwork, and to test different approaches to compiling a project" (Fanning and Gaba 2007, p. 117). In terms of Kolb's concepts, Tina could be understood as a diverging-styled learner, Gene could be understood as an accommodating-styled learner, and Louise could be understood as combining elements of both of those learning styles. Tina, Gene, and Louise are also modelled on the characters with those names in the cartoon show *Bob's Burgers*.

hope that *p*. But given Tina's learning dispositions, this development stands to be beneficial for her. Tina is better positioned to access the epistemic value of hope in relation to her hope that *p* now that she can merely know that *previously* she hoped that *p*.

Gene's situation is the opposite of Tina's. Since he will typically only succeed in accessing the epistemic value of hope that Bovens identifies through reflecting on his current hopes, Gene is at risk of losing out because of hope-knowledge blindspots. If Gene, while knowing that he hopes that *p*, intentionally and successfully takes steps to come to know and know that he knows that *p*, then the presence of a hope-knowledge blindspot will make it the case that he ceases to know that he hopes that *p*. But given Gene's learning dispositions, that means that he will now typically not be able to access the epistemic value of hope that Bovens identifies in relation to his hope that *p*.

One moral of the Tina and Gene cases is that, given the existence of hope-knowledge blindspots, when we hope that *p*, we ought to genuinely deliberate before we intentionally takes steps to come to know and know that we know that *p*. Successfully taking such steps will open the Tinas amongst us to a source of epistemic value, but close the Genes amongst us to the same. To not deliberate before proceeding would be *epistemically reckless*, since to not do so would be to ride roughshod past the prospect that, for example, if you are a Gene, then sometimes it may be more epistemically valuable for you to know that you hope that *p* than to know and know that you know that *p*.²⁶

Similarly, there is a prospect for *epistemically weak-willed* action in this type of scenario. Suppose, for example, that Gene (a) knows that he hopes that *p*, (b) knows that he has more to gain epistemically through knowing that he hopes that *p* than by coming to know and know that he knows that *p*, but (c) intentionally take steps to know and come to know that he knows that *p*. In this case, Gene would be intentionally acting against what he knows to be in his epistemic best interests and, so, would be performing an epistemically weak-willed action. As well, it seems relatively easy for this sort epistemically weak-willed action to occur. For example, suppose that despite it being the case that both (a) and (b), Gene's curiosity as to whether *p* gets the better of him and he does as indicated in (c).²⁷

(II) Hope-knowledge blindspots also have consequences for our general social interactions. Specifically, given our two assumptions in Section 3, hope-knowledge

²⁶ This characterization of epistemically reckless acts is based on Jeanette Kennett and Michael Smith's characterization of the familiar, normative type of reckless action: "An agent acts recklessly when, in forming her beliefs about what she has most normative reason to do - that is, in deciding what she would most want to do in the circumstances she faces if she were fully rational - she takes insufficient care, making a judgement she would not have made if only she had taken her time and thought about matters more carefully" (Kennett and Smith 2004, p. 70).

²⁷ The type of epistemically weak-willed action that I am identifying here is different from that which is the focus of the literature on epistemic weakness of will. That literature is interested in problems about agents who believe something that they believe is unsupported by their evidence. See, for example, Horowitz (2014). In contrast, the type of epistemic weakness of will that I identify is directly akin to the familiar, normative cases of weakness of will, where an agent intentionally acts in a way that she knows to be against her best interests.

blindspots help to create the grounds for many ordinary conversations to either open or close others to occasions for self-understanding. Here are two examples of this:

First, consider cases in which (a) we are unaware of what individuals who we are talking with both hope and know that they hope, but (b) we happen to know something important about the matter that their hopes concern. For example, suppose that you are talking with Bovens shortly after he starts to hope that he will win the prize and that you do not know that he hopes to win it. Suppose further that you have prior knowledge that this prize competition is fixed, that someone other than Bovens will win, and that you inform Bovens of this. Suppose also that Bovens has the same type of learning dispositions as Gene does. By informing Bovens that someone else will win, you risk depriving him of an opportunity for him to learn something about himself through reflecting on his hope. As a result he may just turn his attention to applying for other prizes, rather than achieving a new self-understanding and turning his attention to other professional pursuits.

Second, consider cases in which (a) we know what individuals who we are talking with hope, but (b) they are ignorant of what they hope. For example, suppose that Linda falsely believes that she is indifferent as to whether her daughter is succeeding in school, but that you know that Linda actually hopes that her daughter is succeeding in school. Suppose further both that her daughter is succeeding in school and that you control Linda's access to information about this fact. Suppose also that Linda has the same type of learning dispositions as Gene does. If you inform Linda that her daughter is succeeding in school, she may well just persist in her false belief, since telling her this is probably not grist to the mill of getting her to recognize what she hopes. But if you mislead Linda for some time, you may create an occasion both for her to come to realize that she hopes that her daughter is succeeding in school and for her to gain self-understanding through reflecting on her hope.²⁸

These points about consequences of hope-knowledge blindspots for our general social interactions are instances of a broader phenomenon, of course. Both our ignorance of and our knowledge of the mental states of others help to create many opportunities for conversations to have positive and negative consequences, both intended and unintended. For example, we are often at risk of offending others given that we often lack knowledge of what they know that they hold dear. But we are all well aware of that risk of ordinary conversation. It seems much less likely that we are similarly aware of the above ways in which in conversation we may either open or close those with whom we are talking to occasions for self-understanding.

²⁸ This example is based on a story told in *Plutarch's Lives* about the utility of misleading evidence that an anonymous referee for this journal told me. According to Plutarch, Solon "expressed astonishment" that Thales was indifferent both to marriage and to having children, and, so, Thales wanted Solon to learn why he had this attitude. So, Thales arranged for pieces of misleading evidence to come to Solon about the well-being of Solon's own son, to the effect of leading Solon to believe that his son had died. When Solon came to believe this, "Solon began to beat his head and to do and say everything else that betokens a transport of grief. But Thales took him by the hand and said, with a smile, 'This it is, O Solon, which keeps me from marriage and the getting of children; it overwhelms even thee, who art the most stout-hearted of men. But be not dismayed at this story, for it is not true'" (*Plutarch's Lives*, Vol. 1, Trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Harvard University Press, p. 417–419).

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