

KNOWLEDGE, TRUE BELIEF, AND THE GRADABILITY OF IGNORANCE

ABSTRACT

Given the significant exculpatory power that ignorance has when it comes to moral, legal, and epistemic transgressions, it is important to have an accurate understanding of the concept of ignorance. According to the Standard View of factual ignorance, a person is ignorant that p whenever they do not know that p , while on the New View, a person is ignorant that p whenever they do not truly believe that p . On their own though, neither of these accounts explains how ignorance can often be a degreed notion – how we can sometimes be slightly ignorant, quite ignorant, or completely ignorant that p . In this paper, I will argue that there is a route for advocates of the Standard View and the New View to accommodate the gradability of ignorance. On the view I defend, ‘ignorant’ picks out everyone that is ignorant to some degree, making it possible that ignorance can be both degreed and characterized as a lack of knowledge or true belief. Even though we can be ignorant to a greater or lesser extent, the only way to avoid being ignorant that p is to know or truly believe.¹

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INTRODUCTION

1 Ignorance makes a significant normative difference. If my doctor knows that I
2 have a serious allergy to penicillin but gives it to me anyways, they are typi-
3 cally morally responsible for its adverse side effects. If my doctor is ignorant
4 of my allergy, on the other hand, they could be off the hook. For this reason,
5 Gideon Rosen holds that “when a person acts from ignorance, he is culpable
6 for his action only if he is culpable for the ignorance from which he acts.”² The
7 exculpatory power of ignorance can also extend to issues related to legal theory
8 and epistemic injustice. With legal responsibility, Douglas Husak holds that
9 “ignorance of law should usually be a complete excuse from criminal liability.”³
10 And when it comes to epistemic injustice, Miranda Fricker and Adam Piovarchy
11 argue that many agents who commit testimonial or hermeneutical injustice are
12 excused due to their ignorance of their wrongdoing.⁴

13

14 Because ignorance can have such a profound normative influence, it is worth
15 asking what it is to be ignorant. Advocates of the **Standard View** of factual
16 ignorance take it that, if someone fails to know that p , then they are ignorant
17 that p :

18 **Standard View** – S is ignorant that p if and only if S does not know
19 that p

20 The **Standard View** divides all facts into one of two camps, the facts which
21 S knows and the facts of which S is ignorant. As Kit Fine says in adopting the
22 **Standard View**, “one is ignorant that p if one does not know that p .”⁵ Sup-
23 pose, for example, that S does not believe that p . In this case, because S does
24 not know that p , the **Standard View** classifies S as ignorant that p , regardless
25 of whether S has a wealth of information concerning p or is completely unaware
26 that p .

27

28 Berit Brogaard has recently argued that, because knowing that p does not come
29 in degrees, the **Standard View** of ignorance is mistaken. It is commonly ac-
30 cepted that factual knowledge is not gradable.⁶ Gilbert Ryle, for instance, holds

²See Rosen (2003).

³See Husak (2016)

⁴See Fricker (2016) and Piovarchy (2021). For others who have defended the view that ignorance can serve as a legitimate excuse, either eliminating or greatly reducing a person’s blameworthiness for moral and legal transgressions, see Baron (2016), Fischer and Ravizza (1998), Kelly (2012), and Peels (2014). As suggested by Rosen’s account, the exculpatory power of ignorance disappears if we intentionally remain ignorant. For work on willful ignorance, see Husak and Callender (2010), Lynch (2016), Sarch (2018) and (2019), Wieland (2017), and Zimmerman (2020), and for work on culpable ignorance more generally, see FitzPatrick (2008), Robichaud (2014), and Smith (1983).

⁵See Fine (2018), p. 4032. Others who adopt the **Standard View** include Blome-Tillman (2016), p. 96; Le Morvan (2011a), (2011b), (2012), (2013), and (2019); Lynch (2016), p. 509; Unger (1975), p. 93; and Zimmerman (1988), p. 75, and (2008), p. xi.

⁶For the purposes of this paper, I will assume that knowledge is not gradable. For positions on which knowledge can be gradable, however, see Hetherington (2001) and (2011); and Sosa (2001), (2009), and (2011).

31 that “we never speak of a person having partial knowledge of a fact or truth [...]
32 either he knows this fact or he does not know it,”⁷ while Fred Dretske claims
33 that “knowing that something is so, unlike being wealthy or reasonable, is not a
34 matter of degree.”⁸ But Brogaard points out that ignorance is different. Unlike
35 with knowledge, “we can be a little bit ignorant of the fact that p , very ignorant
36 of the fact that p , and ignorant of the fact that p to some extent.”⁹ Because
37 ignorance is gradable, Brogaard argues that ignorance is not simply a lack of
38 knowledge.

39
40 On Brogaard’s view, ‘ignorant’ is a relative gradable adjective, meaning that
41 what ignorance requires can change from context to context. Perhaps, in some
42 situations, being ignorant that p only requires not knowing that p . In other
43 situations, though, someone might only count as ignorant if they have no idea
44 whatsoever that p is true. If it is true that the standards of ignorance change
45 from context to context, then the **Standard View** does not tell us everything
46 there is to know about the concept of ignorance, or under what conditions we
47 are not responsible for our moral, legal, and epistemic transgressions.

48
49 Even though Brogaard focuses on the **Standard View** of ignorance, if she is
50 right that ‘ignorant’ is a relative gradable adjective, this also raises questions
51 for the **New View** of ignorance. Instead of taking ignorance to be a lack of
52 knowledge, the **New View** holds that ignorance is a lack of true belief:

53 **New View** – S is ignorant that p if and only if S does not truly believe
54 that p

55 Alvin Goldman and Erik Olsson defend the **New View**, saying that “[The
56 Standard View] about the meaning of ‘ignorance’ is plainly wrong. It is highly
57 inaccurate, inappropriate, and/or misleading to characterize somebody who un-
58 justifiedly believes (the fact that) p as being ignorant of p .”¹⁰ Like the **Standard**
59 **View**, the **New View** divides all facts into two camps, in this case those that
60 S truly believes and those of which S is ignorant. And, as with the **Standard**
61 **View**, if S fails to believe some fact p , S is ignorant that p regardless of whether
62 S has a wealth of information concerning p or is completely unaware that p . If
63 Brogaard is right, however, that the standards for ignorance can change from
64 context to context, then the **New View** may also need to be developed to ac-

⁷See Ryle (1949), p. 59.

⁸See Dretske (1981), p. 363. This thought, that factual knowledge does not come in degrees, has been used to defend various accounts of knowing that and knowing how. Using the premise that factual knowledge is not gradable, Ryle (1994) has argued that knowing how cannot be reduced to knowing that, while Jason Stanley (2004, 2005) has argued that knowledge contextualists cannot motivate their views by comparing the contextual variability of knowledge to the context-sensitivity of gradable expressions.

⁹See Brogaard (2016), p. 57.

¹⁰See Goldman and Olsson (2010), p. 21. Advocates of the **New View** include Goldman (1986), p. 26, and (1999), p. 5; Guerrero (2007), p. 63; Peels (2010), (2011), (2012), and (2014); and van Woudenberg (2009), p. 375.

65 commodate degrees of ignorance.¹¹

66

67 In this paper, I will argue that there is a strategy for advocates of the **Standard**
68 **View** and the **New View** to accommodate the gradability of ignorance. Even
69 if we assume that ignorance is gradable and that knowledge and true belief are
70 not, there is still a route to maintaining that ignorance is a lack of knowledge
71 or true belief. According to a number of linguistic tests, ‘ignorant’ is not a re-
72 lative gradable adjective but a partial absolute gradable adjective. As a partial
73 absolute gradable adjective, ‘ignorant’ applies to everyone that is ignorant to
74 some degree, only leaving out those who are not at all ignorant. It is then open
75 to proponents of the **Standard View** and the **New View** to claim that they
76 give the correct account of those who are not at all ignorant, making knowledge
77 or true belief the contrary of ignorance.¹²

78

79 Here is how we will proceed. After covering some preliminaries in Section 1,
80 I further detail Brogaard’s view in Section 2 before introducing the distinction
81 between relative and absolute gradable adjectives in Section 3. I then discuss
82 the further distinction between total and partial absolute gradable adjectives
83 in Section 4 before arguing in Section 5 that ‘ignorant’ is a partial absolute
84 gradable adjective. I then use this point to defend the **Standard View** and
85 the **New View** against Brogaard’s critique in Section 6. Even if knowledge
86 and true belief are not gradable, this does not decisively preclude them from
87 shedding light on concepts that come in degrees.

88 1 PRELIMINARIES

89 A couple notes before we begin. The first is that I will only be concerned with
90 factual ignorance – ignorance that a particular fact obtains. This, of course, is
91 not the only kind of ignorance. It is also possible to suffer from objectual igno-
92 rance (I am ignorant of the color of the car), propositional ignorance (Aristotle
93 was ignorant of the proposition that cars cannot start without gasoline), and
94 procedural ignorance (I am ignorant of how to start the car).¹³ If these kinds of

¹¹The **Standard View** and the **New View** are not the only accounts of ignorance. Brogaard’s objection may also cause problems for more recent understandings of ignorance, like Piedrahita’s (2021) access view or Siscoe and Silva’s (2024) awareness account, but because the **Standard View** and the **New View** are the most popular accounts of ignorance, those are the views which I will focus on here. For more on how the gradability objection affects Pritchard (2021a, 2021b) and Meylan’s (2020, 2024) views that ignorance is a failure of inquiry though, see Section 1.

¹²Another route for responding to Brogaard’s criticism is to appeal to contextualism about knowledge, arguing that ‘know’ is context-sensitive in ways that mirror the context sensitivity of ‘ignorant’. If this is right, then a distinct way to reconcile the gradability of ignorance with the **Standard View** would be to argue that knowledge and ignorance shift together across contexts. Because I’m persuaded that ‘ignorant’ is a partial absolute gradable adjective rather than a relative gradable adjective, however, I do not pursue this strategy here. Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this possible solution to Brogaard’s challenge.

¹³Some authors use ‘propositional ignorance’ to refer to what I have described as ‘factual ignorance’, but I take them to be importantly distinct. In his work on ignorance, Le Mor-

95 ignorance are connected to factual ignorance, then the results of this paper may
96 well have upshots for these other varieties of ignorance as well, though due to
97 limitations of space, such applications will have to be reserved for future work.¹⁴

98
99 The second thing to note is that Duncan Pritchard and Anne Meylan have re-
100 cently argued that that a lack of knowledge or true belief is not all there is
101 to factual ignorance. Instead, ignorance is also importantly a failure of inquiry,
102 meaning that ignorance has both a psychological and a normative component.¹⁵
103 In this paper, I will remain neutral on the question of whether ignorance has
104 a normative dimension, focusing instead on the psychological element of igno-
105 rance. After all, even though Pritchard holds that ignorance is always due to
106 an intellectual failing of inquiry, he also acknowledges that this view must be
107 supplemented with an account of the psychological relation that is lacking in
108 cases of ignorance.¹⁶ Nothing I say in this paper will rule out the idea that
109 ignorance is always a failure of inquiry, but I will be principally concerned with
110 the psychological condition of those who are in a state of factual ignorance.

111
112 Finally, there are multiple ways to formulate statements of factual ignorance.
113 We could, for example, describe someone who is factually ignorant with either
114 of the following:

- 115 (1) S is ignorant that p
116 (2) S is ignorant of the fact that p

117 Brogaard and Peter Unger have both suggested that type (1) constructions are
118 ungrammatical, and that the only way to appropriately describe factual igno-
119 rance is by using a sentence like (2).¹⁷ I see no reason to think this is the
120 case, as both constructions are common English sentences. The *News on the*
121 *Web* English language corpus contains several recent examples of factual uses of
122 ‘ignorant that’,¹⁸ and there have also been a number of recent uses of type (1)
123 constructions in academic texts as well.¹⁹

124

van (2011b, 2012, 2013) distinguishes between ignorance of the content of a proposition and
ignorance of a fact. In the first case, a person lacks a concept that prevents them from un-
derstanding the proposition in the first place, while in the second case, they understand the
proposition even if they do not know whether it obtains.

¹⁴For more on the various types of ignorance, see Kyle (2021), Le Morvan and Peels (2016),
Nottelmann (2016), and Siscoe and Silva (2024).

¹⁵See Pritchard (2021a) and (2021b) and Meylan (2020) and (2024).

¹⁶See Pritchard (2021b), pp. 237-238.

¹⁷See Unger (1975), p.175, and Brogaard (2017), p. 58.

¹⁸See Areddy (2010), Dunning (2016), and Hooke (2021).

¹⁹See Lynch (2016), p. 511, Peels (2014), p. 479, and Wieland (2017), p. 106.

`Ignorant That,' News Sources	
“No one can be ignorant that the center of gravity of the world has moved to Beijing.”	- <i>Wall Street Journal</i> , December 15, 2010
“To sum it up, the knowledge and intelligence that are required to be good at a task are often the same qualities needed to recognize that one is not good at that task — and if one lacks such knowledge and intelligence, one remains ignorant that one is not good at that task.”	- <i>Politico</i> , May 25, 2016
“When I was younger, I was blissfully ignorant that my Cerebral Palsy would be a factor in my love life.”	- <i>MamaMia</i> , March 23, 2021

125
126

Figure 1: Uses of ‘Ignorant That’ in News Sources

`Ignorant That,' Academic Sources	
“Consider the slaveholder in ancient times. As one may imagine her, she was ignorant that keeping slaves is wrong.”	- <i>Ethical Theory and Moral Practice</i> , February 2017
“In certain countries, for instance, it is prohibited to sell intoxicating liquors to minors and one will be liable to legal punishment if one sells intoxicating liquors to minors, even if one is blamelessly ignorant that the person in question is of minor age.”	- <i>Philosophical Quarterly</i> , July 2015
“Is he, like Speer, willfully ignorant that he is supporting a nasty organisation?”	- <i>Philosophical Studies</i> , February 2016

127
128

Figure 2: Uses of ‘Ignorant That’ in Academic Sources

129 Not only are type (1) sentences grammatical, but they are also used by philoso-
130 phers writing on ignorance.²⁰ For this reason, I will treat both type (1) and
131 type (2) constructions as expressing factual ignorance.

132 2 THE GRADABILITY OF IGNORANCE

133 Factual ignorance can come in degrees, differentiating it from knowledge.²¹ As
134 can be seen in Figure 3, it is possible to be somewhat ignorant, rather ignorant,
135 quite ignorant, or completely ignorant that p .²²

136

²⁰Siscoe and Silva (2024), p. 234, simply treat type (1) constructions as contractions of type (2) constructions.

²¹Though for philosophers who have thought that factual ignorance is not gradable, see Nottelmann (2016), p. 52, and Olsson and Proietti (2016), p. 85.

²²See Bamford (2005), Bianculli (2020), Boteach (2016), Clarke (2018), Jones (2017), Keertana (2012), and Usher (2014).

The Gradability of Ignorance	
“Bernie appears <i>slightly ignorant</i> of the fact that not a single home has been built for any refugees in camps in Gaza with those billions, and that much of the aid was siphoned off.”	- <i>The Observer</i> , April 2016
“It seems the public want answers and they want them now, <i>somewhat ignorant</i> that immediacy and accuracy don't usually make for good bedfellows.”	- <i>LinkedIn Articles</i> , June 2018
“Journalists, for the most part, seemed <i>fairly ignorant</i> that audiences could quite possibly be citizen contributors to the news-making process.”	- <i>Making News at the New York Times</i> , April 2014
“It's safe to say that most Americans have heard of <i>Gone With the Wind</i> at some point in their life before high school, but being an immigrant, I was <i>rather ignorant</i> of the fact that this novel was, in fact, a Great American Classic.”	- <i>The Readventurer</i> , November 2012
“A minority of English people do seem to be <i>quite ignorant</i> of the fact that people speak Welsh as their first language.”	- <i>North Wales News</i> , June 2017
“Through it all, the general in charge of the country's military was <i>completely ignorant</i> of the fact that the United States was under its worst attack in nearly two centuries.”	- <i>A Pretext for War</i> , June 2005
“Much of the film is improvised, and some of the ‘co-stars’ are <i>wholly ignorant</i> that they are being put on and put into potentially awkward situations.”	- <i>NPR</i> , December 2020

137
138

Figure 3: The Gradability of Ignorance

139 Brogaard uses the gradability of ignorance to argue against the **Standard**
 140 **View**. In particular, Brogaard argues that ‘ignorant’ is a relative gradable
 141 adjective, opening up the possibility that ignorance is more than just a lack
 142 of knowledge.²³ Why would it undermine the **Standard View** if ‘ignorant’
 143 is a relative gradable adjective? Relative gradable adjectives (RAs) require a
 144 contextual threshold to determine whether or not they apply. Take the RA
 145 ‘large’. Whether or not a raven is large depends on the context. Are we saying
 146 that the raven is large when compared with other birds, or large for an animal
 147 in general? Because there is no one standard of size that makes a raven large,
 148 what it takes to be large can change from context to context.

149
 150 If Brogaard is right that ‘ignorant’ is an RA, the standards for ignorance can
 151 change from context to context as well. Perhaps, in some situations, being
 152 ignorant that p only requires not knowing that p . In these contexts, someone
 153 would count as ignorant even if they suspect that p or have strong evidence
 154 that p . In other situations, though, someone might only count as ignorant if
 155 they have no idea that p is true. In cases like these, the contextual threshold
 156 for what counts as ignorance would be more stringent. The person who has

²³See Brogaard (2016), p. 69-70. Brogaard’s official position is that ‘ignorant’ is a “moderately relative gradable adjective”, a term which she coins to distinguish some of the properties of ‘ignorant’ from other relative gradable adjectives. The differences between relative gradable adjectives and moderately relative gradable adjectives, however, will not be relevant for the arguments I make in this paper, so I will stick to the received terminology.

157 a lot of evidence that p would no longer count as ignorant even if they failed
158 to know that p . Thus, just like with ‘large’, what counts as ignorance would
159 change from context to context, revealing that the **Standard View** is too
160 simple to accurately characterize the notion of ignorance.

161
162 Along with showing the **Standard View** to be too simplistic, Brogaard’s
163 position also raises questions about the **New View** of ignorance. In some
164 contexts, it might be right that anyone who does not have a true belief that
165 p is ignorant that p , but in other contexts, when the standards for ignorance
166 are a bit more demanding, a person might only be ignorant if they have no
167 inkling whatsoever that p is the case. Thus, if the standards for ignorance shift
168 from context to context, then advocates of the **New View** must develop their
169 account in order to explain such a possibility.

170
171 Of course, one advantage proponents of the **New View** have is that, unlike
172 knowledge, belief *is* thought to come in degrees. Epistemologists theorize not
173 just about full beliefs, but also about credences, which opens the door to an
174 account of the degrees of ignorance that relies on degrees of belief. Never-
175 theless, as it is currently formulated, the **New View** seems more a proposal
176 about full belief rather than credences. Only full beliefs are typically described
177 as true or false, whereas credences are usually thought of in terms of as coher-
178 ent/incoherent or accurate/inaccurate. Furthermore, Brogaard proposes that ig-
179 norance is both degreed and context-dependent, raising further questions about
180 the context-dependence of belief and how that might interact with credences. So
181 even though those who think of ignorance as a lack of belief have more resources
182 to answer Brogaard’s challenge, it is not readily apparent what such an account
183 might look like. In this paper, I will explore one possible way of understanding
184 the **New View** that can hold both that ignorance is a lack of true belief and
185 comes in degrees.

186 3 RELATIVE VS. ABSOLUTE GRADABLE ADJECTIVES

187 If Brogaard is right that ‘ignorant’ is an RA, this creates the possibility that
188 both the **Standard View** and the **New View** of ignorance are insufficient,
189 as neither account suggests that what it takes to be ignorant changes from
190 context to context. I will argue, however, that ‘ignorant’ is not an RA, making
191 it possible to characterize ignorance as a lack of knowledge or a lack of true
192 belief. In the next couple sections, I will describe the characteristics of both
193 relative and absolute gradable adjectives, laying the foundations to argue that,
194 according to several linguistic tests, ‘ignorant’ is an absolute rather than a
195 relative gradable adjective.

196
197 Gradable adjectives come in two primary forms. Along with RAs, words like
198 ‘large’, ‘tall’, and ‘long’, there are also absolute gradable adjectives (AAs), words

199 like ‘pure’, ‘straight’, and ‘flat’.²⁴ Both RAs and AAs can be used comparatively,
 200 distinguishing between objects that have more or less of a given property. If
 201 a dog has a greater degree of size than a bird, then the dog is larger than the
 202 bird. Likewise, if a stick is curved more than a line, then the line is straighter
 203 than the stick:

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \llbracket \text{er} \rrbracket (\llbracket \text{straight} \rrbracket) (\llbracket \text{than the stick} \rrbracket) \\
 & = [\lambda g \lambda y \lambda x. g(x) \succ g(y)] (\text{straight}) (\text{the stick}) \\
 & = [\lambda y \lambda x. \text{straight}(x) \succ \text{straight}(y)] (\text{the stick}) \\
 & = \lambda x. \text{straight}(x) \succ \text{straight}(\text{the stick})
 \end{aligned}$$

208 RAs and AAs differ, however, when they are used noncomparatively. Consider,
 209 for example, the noncomparative use of ‘large’ in (3):

210 (3) The raven is large

211 As we have already mentioned, whether (3) is true depends on the contextual
 212 standards at play. Are we comparing the raven just to other birds, or to all
 213 animals? Depending on the contextual standard we choose, (3) can take different
 214 truth values. From this, we can see that noncomparative forms of gradable
 215 adjectives still have a place for comparison in their semantics:

$$\llbracket [\text{DegP } \textit{pos} [\text{AP } \textit{large}]] \rrbracket = \lambda x. \textit{large}(x) \succeq c(\textit{large})$$

217 With noncomparative uses of gradable adjectives, an object is judged by how it
 218 measures up to a standard of comparison chosen by the function c , a function
 219 that chooses a standard of comparison such that the objects that satisfy it “stand
 220 out” along the underlying dimension. Thus, a statement like (3) is true only if
 221 the raven stands out in terms of its size relative to the standard of comparison
 222 picked out by our function c .²⁵

223 3.1 “POINT TO” TEST

224 When it comes to relative gradable adjectives, alterations to the domain will
 225 affect our standard of comparison, changing what it takes in order to stand out
 226 along a particular dimension. In most natural language cases, we are considering
 227 a comparison across a large number of objects, like when we judge whether a
 228 highway is long or short. But this domain-shifting can occur even in the case
 229 of one-off comparisons with only two objects.²⁶ For example, suppose that you
 230 were presented with Roads 1 and 2 in Figure 4 and given the command in (4):

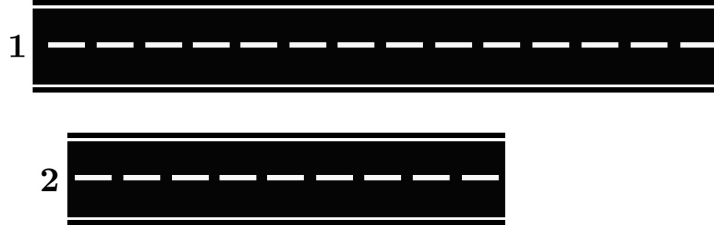
²⁴Those who pioneered the distinction between relative and absolute gradable adjectives include Kennedy (2007), Kennedy and McNally (2005), and Rusiecki (1985). For more recent work on the relative/absolute distinction, see Burnett (2014) and (2017).

²⁵Those who hold that gradable adjectives makes use of a standard of comparison include Barker (2002), Bartsch and Vennemann (1972), Bierwisch (1989), Cresswell (1977), Fine (1975), Kamp (1975), Klein (1980), Lewis (1970), Pinkal (1995), Sapir (1944), and Wheeler (1972), while those who specifically argue that an object must “stand out” relative to the contextual threshold include Rotstein and Winter (2004), Kennedy (2007), and Kennedy and McNally (2005).

²⁶For linguists who motivate and employ the “point to” test, see Kennedy (2007), Kyburg and Morreau (2000), Sedivy et al. (1999), and Syrett et al. (2006 and 2010).

231

(4) Point to the long one



232

Figure 4: Roads 1 and 2

233

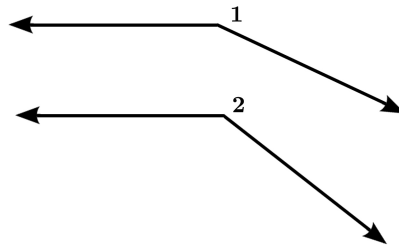
234 Even though neither road is particularly long, it seems possible to satisfy
 235 the request in (4) by pointing at Road 1. This is because the contextual
 236 thresholds used by RAs like ‘long’ are fairly accommodating, able to distinguish
 237 between objects that fall close to one another on the underlying degree scale.
 238 By creating an artificial context with this manufactured, one-off comparison,
 239 we can see the flexibility of this threshold. Despite this relative flexibility,
 240 however, the thresholds employed by RAs are not endlessly accommodating.
 241 Consider, for example, two extremely long roads, Highway 1 stretching
 242 across Australia (9,010 miles) and the Pan American Highway running from
 243 Alaska to Argentina (18,640 miles). Even though the second is clearly
 244 longer than the first, it is difficult, if not impossible, to create a context
 245 in which Highway 1 does not count as a long road, making (4) infelicitous.
 246 This is because a 9,000 mile road will always stand out on the underlying
 247 scale of length, preventing the “point to” test from differentiating between the
 248 Pan American Highway and Highway 1 using the noncomparative form of ‘long’.

249

250 Even though shifting the domain can affect the standards of application for RAs,
 251 the same does not occur with AAs. Whereas RAs permit one-off comparisons
 252 between two objects in the middle of the scale, the same type of command is
 253 anomalous with AAs:

254

(5) #Point to the straight one



255

Figure 5: Lines 1 and 2

256 Even though Line 2 is straighter than Line 1 in Figure 5, (5) is infelicitous.
 257 This is because the AA ‘straight’ does not operate using the same sort of
 258 contextual threshold as RAs, preventing (5) from drawing a distinction between
 259 the straighter Line 2 and the less straight Line 1. The behavior of ‘straight’

260 also departs from that of RAs at the extremes of the underlying scale. If Line
261 2 is a perfect 180° and Line 1 forms an angle of 175° , (5) would be felicitous
262 because the uppermost degree is what stands out on the underlying scale. RAs
263 and AAs thus differ in the following way – RAs can be used to distinguish
264 between objects in the middle of a scale but not at the scale’s extreme, while
265 uses of AAs cannot distinguish between objects in the middle of the scale, but
266 can at the end of the scale.

267
268 The reason that RAs and AAs differ in the “point to” test is that AAs have
269 natural endpoints. Conceptually speaking, it is always possible to be a bit
270 larger or a bit taller, and so there is no single, uppermost degree of size or
271 height that always stands out on the underlying scale. AAs, on the other hand,
272 do have natural endpoints. A line that is 180° cannot become any straighter,
273 and a surface that is perfectly flat cannot become any flatter. This maximal
274 point, then, always stands out on the underlying scale, explaining why (5) is
275 infelicitous when used for Figure 5 but not if it were to be used for lines that
276 are 180° and 175° .

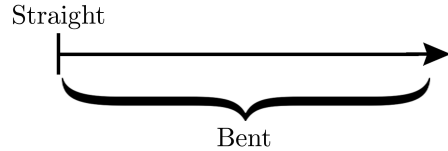
277
278 These natural endpoints, then, play a role in what it takes to stand out on
279 the underlying scale. For AAs, an object stands out by being at the endpoint
280 of the underlying scale. This is why it is not possible to differentiate between
281 Lines 1 and 2 using ‘straight’, because neither stands out on the underlying
282 scale. Because RAs do not have a natural endpoint, on the other hand, they
283 must depend on a contextual standard to determinate what it takes to stand
284 out along a particular dimension. For RAs, an object stands out if it is clearly
285 greater than the contextual standard under consideration. This, then, allows
286 that we can differentiate between Roads 1 and 2 by setting the threshold for
287 being long such that Road 1 exceeds it.

288 4 TOTAL AND PARTIAL ABSOLUTE GRADABLE ADJECTIVES

289 Just as there is a distinction between RAs and AAs, we can also differentiate
290 between total and partial AAs.²⁷ As AAs, total and partial AAs are both
291 associated with closed underlying scales, but they can be distinguished based
292 on which part of the scale they pick out. Total AAs pick out the maximal point
293 on the scale, whereas partial AAs pick out everything except the maximal point.
294 Consider, for instance, the total/partial pair ‘straight’ and ‘bent’. As we can see
295 in Figure 6, ‘straight’ is a total AA because it picks out lines that are a perfect
296 180° , while ‘bent’ is a partial AA because it picks out everything else, all lines
297 that have some slight bend in them.

298

²⁷A key contributor to the distinction between total and partial AAs is Rotstein and Winter (2004).



299

Figure 6: Scale of Straightness

300 Both total and partial AAs fail the “point to” test in the middle of the scale,
301 albeit for different reasons. When paired with Figure 5, ‘straight’ fails the
302 “point to” test because neither of the lines are straight, whereas ‘bent’ fails the
303 “point to” test because both lines are bent. Either way, it is not possible to
304 differentiate between Lines 1 and 2 using the AAs ‘straight’ and ‘bent’. This, of
305 course, changes at the end of the scale. If Line 2 is a perfect 180° and Line 1
306 forms an angle of 175° , then it is possible to point to both the straight line and
307 the bent line.

308 4.1 ‘SLIGHTLY’ TEST

309 Along with their differences in the “point to” test, there are also other ways of
310 distinguishing between total and partial AAs. Partial AAs, for instance, easily
311 accept modification by ‘slightly’, as they can pick out a point on the scale that
312 is just a bit below the maximal point.²⁸ Consider the following examples:

313 **Partial Absolute Gradable Adjectives**

- 314 (6) The line is slightly bent
- 315 (7) The sidewalk is slightly uneven
- 316 (8) The gold is slightly impure

317 **Total Absolute Gradable Adjectives**

- 318 (9) #The line is slightly straight
- 319 (10) #The sidewalk is slightly flat
- 320 (11) #The gold is slightly pure

321 In (6)-(8), all of the partial AAs are able to be combined with ‘slightly’. A line
322 can be slightly bent, and a hunk of gold can be slightly impure. The total AAs,
323 however, when combined with ‘slightly’, are much more difficult to interpret.
324 What would it mean for a line to be slightly straight, or for a bar of silver to be
325 slightly pure? The latter could mean that one part of the bar is pure, but that
326 interpretation feels forced at best. Thus, one potential way to bring out the
327 distinction between total and partial AAs is through modification by ‘slightly’.

²⁸For examples of the ‘slightly’ test, see Bylinina (2012), Kennedy (2007), Rotstein and Winter (2004), and Solt (2012).

328 4.2 BEING MORE ϕ ENTAILS BEING ϕ TEST

329 Another way to distinguish between total and partial AAs is through testing
 330 for entailment. If one surface is flatter than another, this does not entail that
 331 either surface is flat, as they could still both be quite uneven. With partial AAs,
 332 though, because any departure from the maximal point on the scale means that
 333 an object falls within the extension of a partial AA, being more ϕ entails being
 334 ϕ :

335 **Partial Absolute Gradable Adjectives**

336 (12) The gold is more impure than the silver \Rightarrow The gold is impure

337 (13) The stick is bent more than the line \Rightarrow The stick is bent

338 **Total Absolute Gradable Adjectives**

339 (14) The gold is more pure than the silver \nRightarrow The gold is pure

340 (15) The line is straighter than the stick \nRightarrow The line is straight

341 As we can see with the total AAs ‘pure’ and ‘straight’, it is possible for one
 342 object to be more ϕ than another object with neither of them being ϕ . Because
 343 total AAs have to meet the maximum point on their underlying scales, having
 344 a greater degree of the property in question does not guarantee possessing that
 345 property simpliciter. We can, thus, also distinguish between total and partial
 346 AAs by testing for entailment.²⁹

347 5 ‘IGNORANT’ AS A PARTIAL AA

348 Brogaard holds that ‘ignorant’ is a relative gradable adjective, meaning that
 349 what ignorance requires may shift from context to context. As I will show,
 350 however, the linguistic tests we have surveyed do not confirm Brogaard’s
 351 thesis. According to these diagnostics, ‘ignorant’ is associated with a closed
 352 scale, preventing its meaning from changing from context to context. Instead,
 353 ‘ignorant’ is a partial AA, applying to everyone that is ignorant to some degree,
 354 leaving out only those who are not at all ignorant.³⁰

355
 356 Before we are able to show that ‘ignorant’ is a partial AA, we will need a pre-
 357 liminary account of degrees of ignorance. Many of the tests we have considered
 358 compare objects that have more or less of a given property, so in order to run
 359 these diagnostics, we must say a bit about what might make a person more or
 360 less ignorant. The first thing to say is that, if the **Standard View** is correct,
 361 then Person A can be more ignorant than Person B if Person B knows that p
 362 while Person A does not. Consider, for example, the following case:

²⁹Those who employ the entailment test to distinguish between types of gradable adjectives include Kennedy (2007), Kennedy and McNally (2005), and Rotstein and Winter (2004).

³⁰For more work on relative and absolute gradable adjectives in epistemology, see Beddor (2020a) and (2020b) on certainty; Hawthorne and Logins (2021), Fassio and Logins (2023), and Logins (2023) on justification; and Siscoe (2021a), (2021b), (2022a), (2022b), and (2023) on rationality.

363 **Overnight Rain**

364 Rebecca and Sarah are housemates. Before they went to bed, they both
365 watched the weather report and saw that there was a 70% chance of rain
366 overnight. It in fact did end up raining, but Sarah sleeps in the windowless
367 basement of their house, so she did not hear the rain. Rebecca, on the
368 other hand, sleeps upstairs and heard the rain on the roof throughout the
369 night. When they wake up in the morning, Rebecca knows that it rained
370 overnight, and while Sarah believes that it might have rained, she does
371 not know if it did.

372 Rebecca knows that it rained last night while Sarah does not, making Sarah
373 more ignorant than Rebecca that it rained last night. Even though they
374 both have some evidence that it rained, only Rebecca's evidence is strong
375 enough to grant knowledge. Thus, one way that Person A can be more ig-
376 norant than Person B is if Person A fails to know some p that Person B knows.³¹

377
378 This, of course, is just one way that someone can be more or less ignorant.
379 Person A can also be more ignorant than Person B if Person B is closer to
380 knowing that p than Person A. One way in which this can happen is through
381 the strength of a person's evidence. If someone has some evidence that p is true,
382 they are less ignorant than someone who has little to no evidence whether p is
383 true. Take, for example, a slightly modified case:

384 **Overnight Rain***

385 Rebecca and Sarah are housemates. Before they went to bed, Rebecca
386 watched the weather report and saw that there was a 70% chance of rain
387 overnight. Sarah, on the other hand, did not watch the weather report,
388 but heard from a friend that there was a 30% chance of rain. It in fact
389 did end up raining, but because Rebecca and Sarah both sleep in the
390 windowless basement of their house, neither heard the rain. When they
391 wake up in the morning, both Rebecca and Sarah believe that it might
392 have rained last night, but they do not know if it did.

393 Rebecca has stronger evidence than Sarah that it rained, making Sarah more
394 ignorant than Rebecca that it rained last night. Even though Rebecca does not
395 know that it rained, she comes far closer to knowing that it rained than Sarah.
396 Thus, another way that Person A can be more ignorant than Person B is by
397 being further from knowing p than Person B.³²

398

³¹Even though I have spoken here strictly in terms of knowledge, if we instead suppose that the **New View** is correct, **Overnight Rain** can still be used as an example of degrees of ignorance. Rebecca truly believes that it rained last night, while Sarah merely believes that it might have rained, making Sarah more ignorant than Rebecca that it rained last night.

³²Like before, **Overnight Rain*** can be adapted to make comparative judgments on the **New View** as well. If we suppose that Rebecca assigns a high credence to it raining overnight while Sarah assigns that proposition a low credence, then Rebecca comes closer than Sarah to truly believing that p .

399 With these examples, we have a preliminary account of what makes a person
400 more or less ignorant. In both of these cases, we have considered someone who
401 is further from knowledge because they have weaker evidence. However, given
402 that knowledge is multi-faceted, requiring justification, belief, etc., there may
403 also be other factors that play into the gradability of ignorance. Brogaard, for
404 example, suggests that, since knowledge requires belief, someone might be more
405 or less ignorant if they have “a partial belief (or other comparable attitude) that
406 p is the case.”³³ This may well be correct, that there are multiple ways to be
407 more or less ignorant, but for the purposes of this paper, it will not be necessary
408 to give an exhaustive account of the factors that contribute to being more or less
409 ignorant. In order to run our diagnostics for whether ‘ignorant’ is an RA or AA,
410 we will only need examples of those who are more or less ignorant, examples
411 that we now have in **Overnight Rain** and **Overnight Rain***.

412 5.1 “POINT TO” TEST

413 In order to discover whether ‘ignorant’ behaves more like an RA or an AA in
414 the “point to” test, a study was conducted using Amazon Mechanical Turk
415 with fifty-one native English speakers. Participants were first given control
416 cases that tested their reactions to the RA ‘long’, the total AA ‘straight’, and
417 the partial AA ‘bent’. After viewing Roads 1 and 2, subjects were presented
418 with the following prompt: “If I asked you to point at the long one, which
419 would you point to?” The majority of participants (98%) said that they would
420 point to Road 1, indicating that the overwhelming majority thought it was
421 possible to distinguish between the two roads using the RA ‘long’. Subjects
422 were then presented with Lines 1 and 2 and given the prompts “If I asked you
423 to point at the straight one, which would you point to?” and “If I asked you to
424 point at the bent one, which would you point to?” Unlike with the RA ‘long’,
425 most participants thought that it was not possible to distinguish between the
426 two lines using the AAs ‘straight’ and ‘bent’, with the majority answering the
427 neither line was straight (92.2%) and that both lines were bent (86.3%).

428
429 After responding to the control cases, study participants were then presented
430 with the vignette in **Overnight Rain*** to test their reactions in the middle of
431 the scale of ignorance. After reading **Overnight Rain***, subjects responded
432 to the following prompt: “If I asked you to point to the one that is ignorant
433 that it rained, who would you point to?” In this case, because neither knew
434 that it rained, the majority of participants thought that it was not possible to
435 differentiate between Rebecca and Sarah using ‘ignorant’ (84.3%), with most
436 respondents saying that both Rebecca (Object 1) and Sarah (Object 2) were
437 ignorant that it rained (66.7%). Thus, as we can see in Figure 7, ‘ignorant’
438 acts more like an AA than an RA in the middle of its scale.

439

³³See Brogaard (2016), p. 57.

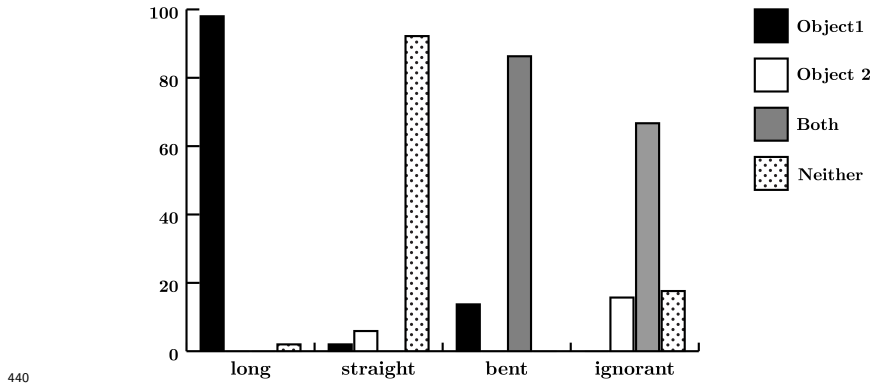


Figure 7: Study Results

441 ‘Ignorant’ also behaves like an AA at the end of its scale. Recall that, if one line
 442 is a perfect 180° and the other line only forms an angle of 175°, it is possible to
 443 distinguish between the two lines using the AAs ‘straight’ and ‘bent’. However, if
 444 we have two extremely long roads like the Pan American Highway and Highway
 445 1, it is not possible to differentiate between them using the RA ‘long’. In order
 446 to test how ‘ignorant’ behaves at the end of its scale, participants completed the
 447 study by responding to **Overnight Rain**, a case in which Sarah is somewhat
 448 ignorant that it rained and Rebecca is not at all ignorant that it rained. When
 449 subjects responded to the same prompt as before, “If I asked you to point to
 450 the one that is ignorant that it rained, who would you point to?”, the majority
 451 now indicated that they would point to Sarah (78.4%). Thus, ‘ignorant’ cannot
 452 differentiate between Rebecca and Sarah in the middle of the scale, but can at
 453 the end of the scale, a contrast brought out in Figure 8:

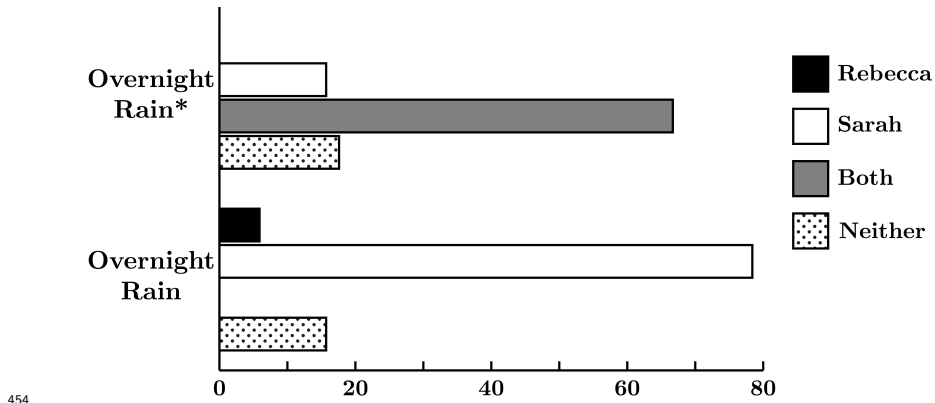


Figure 8: Study Results

455 Not only does ‘ignorant’ behave as an AA, it appears to act as a *partial* AA.
 456 Consider, for example, the survey results for the “point to” test. When neither
 457 Sarah nor Rebecca knew that it had rained, study participants said that both

458 Sarah and Rebecca were ignorant, a result similar to how subjects said that
 459 both Lines 1 and 2 were bent. ‘Bent’ of course, is a partial AA, as it applies to
 460 all lines that are bent to some degree, suggesting that ‘ignorant’ is also a partial
 461 AA, applying to everyone that is ignorant to some degree.

462 5.2 SLIGHTLY TEST

463 Another clue that ‘ignorant’ is a partial AA comes from the ‘slightly’ test. Like
 464 other partial AAs, ‘ignorant’ accepts modification by ‘slightly’, as our corpus
 465 data gives us recent examples of those who are slightly ignorant, as we saw in
 466 Section 2:³⁴

- 467 • “Bernie appears *slightly ignorant* of the fact that not a single home has
 468 been built for refugees in camps in Gaza with those billions, and that
 469 much of the aid was siphoned off.” – *The Observer*, April 2016
- 470 • “Mashaba might be *slightly ignorant* of the fact that the honeymoon period
 471 is over.” *Sowetan Live*, March 2015

472 In these examples, factual uses of ‘ignorant’ easily accept modification by
 473 ‘slightly’, and we can generate other cases as well. In **Overnight Rain**, Sarah
 474 and Rebecca are not completely ignorant that it rained. Because they watched
 475 the news report, which said that there was a 70% chance of rain, they are now
 476 only slightly ignorant that it rained last night. These tests seem to confirm that
 477 ‘ignorant’ can be used to pick out a point a bit just below the maximal point
 478 on the underlying scale, making it a partial AA.

479 5.3 BEING MORE ϕ ENTAILS BEING ϕ TEST

480 What about our final test? As we have seen, partial AAs exhibit certain en-
 481 tailment patterns. If a stick is more bent than a line, we can conclude that the
 482 stick is bent rather than straight. Likewise, if a hunk of silver is more impure
 483 than a hunk of gold, we can conclude that the silver is impure rather than pure.
 484 Again, we see the same behavior with ‘ignorant’. Regardless of whether Rebecca
 485 knows that it rained or not, we get the following entailment pattern:

- 486 (16) Sarah is more ignorant than Rebecca that it rained last night \Rightarrow
 487 Sarah is ignorant that it rained last night

488 Just like with other partial AAs, being more ignorant entails being ignorant.
 489 In both **Overnight Rain** and **Overnight Rain***, the fact that Sarah is more
 490 ignorant than Rebecca that it rained entails that Sarah is ignorant. When
 491 Rebecca knows that it rained but Sarah does not, Sarah is both more ignorant
 492 than Rebecca and ignorant simpliciter. Similarly, when neither of them know
 493 that it rained but Rebecca has stronger evidence, Sarah is both more ignorant
 494 than Rebecca and ignorant simpliciter, confirming that being more ignorant
 495 entails being ignorant.

³⁴See Boteach (2016) and Molefe (2015).

496 6 DEFENDING THE STANDARD VIEW AND THE NEW VIEW

497 Given the evidence of the previous section, it looks doubtful that Brogaard
498 is right to think that ‘ignorant’ is an RA. Rather, based on its entailment
499 patterns and behavior in the “point to” test and the ‘slightly’ test, ‘ignorant’
500 appears to be a partial AA. Now this linguistic point is itself interesting, but
501 what we are really after is whether the gradability of ignorance is incompatible
502 with the **Standard View** or the **New View** of ignorance. In this section, I
503 will argue that, if ‘ignorant’ is a partial AA, then this can give the canonical
504 accounts of ignorance a way to accommodate the gradability of ignorance.

505
506 As we have already discussed, AAs come with a closed underlying scale, with
507 total AAs picking out the maximal point and partial AAs picking out everything
508 except that point. If it is true that ‘ignorant’ is a partial AA, then it picks out
509 everything except the top point on the scale, as can be seen in Figure 9:

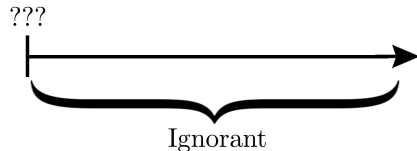


Figure 9: Scale of Ignorance

511 Because ‘ignorant’ is a partial AA, its noncomparative form applies to all of the
512 scale except its uppermost point. So long as a person does not rise to the maxi-
513 mal point on the underlying scale, then they are ignorant that p . This, of course,
514 still captures the fact that ignorance is gradable. Even if one line is more bent
515 than another, they can both still be bent simpliciter, and likewise, even if one
516 person is more ignorant than another, they can both still be ignorant simpliciter.

517
518 An important feature left out of Figure 9, of course, is what happens at the
519 top of the scale. On the **Standard View**, that point is knowledge, whereas on
520 the **New View**, that point is true belief. Here, I will not be taking a position
521 on which is correct. Rather, my goal is to show that, because ‘ignorant’ is a
522 partial AA, both the **Standard View** and the **New View** are compatible
523 with the gradability of ignorance. According to Brogaard, ignorance is gradable
524 while knowledge is not, making it impossible that ignorance is simply a lack of
525 knowledge. However, we have seen that we can have it both ways. If knowing
526 that p is the top point of our scale, factual ignorance can both be gradable
527 and at the same time pick out everyone that does not know that p . This both
528 puts knowledge as the only state which prevents ignorance while at the same
529 time allowing that some people can be more ignorant than others. The same
530 response can be used by advocates of the **New View**, putting those with true
531 belief at the top of the scale while everyone else remains ignorant. Thus, even
532 if Brogaard is correct that knowledge is not gradable and that ignorance is,
533 this still does not serve as a decisive objection against either the **Standard**
534 **View** or the **New View**.

535
536 Where does Brogaard go wrong? After all, she is well aware of the distinction
537 between relative and absolute gradable adjectives. What makes her think that
538 ‘ignorant’ is an RA instead of an AA? In arguing that ‘ignorant’ is an RA, Bro-
539 gaard employs two linguistic tests. To begin with, Brogaard considers whether
540 it is possible to modify the standards for ignorance using a comparison class.
541 Because changing the domain when using an RA can affect our standard of
542 comparison, sentences like (17) can be used to alter the standard of comparison
543 for the RA ‘tall’:

544 (17) John is tall for a twelve-year-old

545 Total AAs and partial AAs, on the other hand, always pick out particular parts
546 of their scales, preventing constructions like (17) from altering the standard of
547 comparison. Consider, for example, the oddity of (18) and (19):

548 (18) ?The hunk of gold was pure for a precious metal

549 (19) ?The thumb was bent for a fractured finger

550 Both (18) and (19) sound a bit strange because including the comparison class
551 does not seem to add anything to what is said. The gold is either pure or it is
552 not. Comparing it to other precious metals does nothing to alter the extension
553 of ‘pure’. Likewise, if the thumb is bent, it is appropriate to call it ‘bent’
554 regardless of how bent other fractured fingers can be.

555
556 This pattern also holds for factual ignorance. When Brogaard considers the
557 sentence (20), she dismisses it as infelicitous:³⁵

558 (20) ?For someone who is normally very attentive, John is ignorant of the
559 fact that Mary was there.

560 John is either ignorant that Mary was there or he is not. The fact that he
561 is normally very attentive is neither here nor there. It does not change the
562 standard for what counts as ignorance. The oddity of (20) makes ‘ignorant’
563 appear to be an AA, but Brogaard argues that there are other uses of ‘ignorant’
564 that can be affected by a comparison class. Take, for example, ‘quite ignorant’
565 in (21):

566 (21) For someone who is normally very attentive, John was quite ignorant
567 of the fact that Mary was there

568 Unlike with (20), the first clause in (21) no longer seems inappropriate. Instead,
569 it can be read as establishing “a discourse-salient standard”³⁶ for what counts
570 as being quite ignorant. Even though I agree with Brogaard that (20) is odd
571 in a way that (21) is not, I do not think that this shows that ‘ignorant’ is
572 an RA. If anything, the contrast between (20) and (21) strengthens the case
573 that ‘ignorant’ is an AA. By introducing degree modifiers, we can also create
574 acceptable versions of (18) and (19):

³⁵See Brogaard (2016), p. 69.

³⁶Ibid.

- 575 (22) The hunk of gold was rather pure for a precious metal
 576 (23) The thumb was quite bent for a fractured finger

577 In (22) and (23), ‘rather pure’ and ‘quite bent’ occur very naturally with
 578 comparison classes. This is not because ‘pure’ and ‘bent’ are RAs, but
 579 because being rather pure and being quite bent are different properties than
 580 those expressed by the AAs ‘pure’ and ‘bent’. Partial AAs, like ‘bent’,
 581 accept modification by ‘slightly’, but the fact that there is something wrong
 582 with the phrase “slightly quite bent” does not demonstrate that ‘bent’ is
 583 not a partial AA. Likewise, the fact that the standards for being quite igno-
 584 rant can be altered by a comparison class does not show that ‘ignorant’ is an RA.

585
 586 The second test that Brogaard uses to argue that ‘ignorant’ is an RA is vulner-
 587 ability to the Sorites paradox. Because RAs do not have natural endpoints and
 588 instead must make use of contextual thresholds, they naturally give rise to the
 589 Sorites march. With ‘long,’ the paradox gets going with a premise like (24):

- 590 (24) For however long an object is, one centimeter of length does not
 591 change whether or not it is long

592 The reason that (24) seems true is that ‘long’ cannot be used to pick out a
 593 cutoff point on its underlying scale. Even though it is clear that some ropes
 594 are long while others are not, there are others for which it is unclear whether
 595 or not they are long. This vagueness makes (24) intuitively correct, leading to
 596 the Sorites paradox.³⁷

597
 598 Because absolute gradable adjectives can pick out a specific point on their scales,
 599 there are cases in which they do not give rise to the Sorites. Because ‘straight’
 600 applies to the endpoint of the scale and ‘bent’ applies to everything below that
 601 point, there is no temptation to think that principles like (25) and (26) are
 602 always true:

- 603 (25) For however straight a line is, one degree of bend does not change
 604 whether it is straight or not
 605 (26) For however bent a line is, one degree of bend does not change
 606 whether it is bent or not

607 For a line that is a perfect 180°, (25) is false - bending the line by one degree
 608 *does* make the line bent. Similarly, if two lines form an angle of 179°, modifying
 609 that angle by one degree can make the line straight.

610
 611 Using this diagnostic, Brogaard argues that, when it comes to the Sorites, ‘ig-
 612 norant’ more closely resembles RAs than AAs. In order to demonstrate this,
 613 Brogaard uses the following argument to show that a Sorites march can be
 614 created using ignorance:

³⁷For more on how semantic accounts attempt to represent the Sorites, see Graff Fara (2000), Kennedy (2007), Pinkal (1995), and Rusiecki (1985).

615 (27) Someone who notices 100 salient signs that his beloved is about to
616 break up with him is not ignorant of this fact.

617 (28) If someone who notices n salient signs that his beloved is about to
618 break up with him is not ignorant of this fact, then someone who notices
619 $n - 1$ salient signs that his beloved is about to break up with him is not
620 ignorant of this fact.

621 (29) So, someone who notices 0 salient signs that his beloved is about to
622 break up with him is not ignorant of this fact.³⁸

623 According to Brogaard, the fact that (28) seems true shows that ignorance is
624 vulnerable to the Sorites paradox. This would make ‘ignorant’ similar to the
625 RAs ‘tall’, ‘long’, and ‘large’ in that there is no clear cutoff between being
626 ignorant and not being ignorant.

627

628 Even though I think that Brogaard is right that there is some uncertainty about
629 when someone passes from knowledge to ignorance or vice versa, I do not think
630 that this supports the thought that ‘ignorant’ is an RA. When it comes to AAs,
631 even though the top of the scale can halt the Sorites paradox, this does not
632 mean that borderline cases never arise for AAs. There may be uncertainty, for
633 example, about when the top of the scale is reached. In mathematically precise
634 cases like (25) and (26), such uncertainty does not arise. With other AAs,
635 however, there is not always the same degree of clarity. Consider, for example,
636 the AA ‘closed’. Is a door closed when no light can pass through the opening, or
637 is it not closed until it latches? Even though ‘closed’ is an AA and has a clear
638 maximum on its scale, uncertainty surrounding when that maximum is reached
639 can then give rise to borderline cases. Likewise, it can also be unclear when
640 knowledge is reached. As Roy Sorensen has pointed out, the point at which
641 someone has enough justification to pass from ignorance to knowledge is itself
642 vague,³⁹ making it less than clear when someone reaches the end of the scale
643 of ignorance. Thus, even though there is an end to the scale of ignorance that
644 can stop the Sorites march, when exactly we reach the end of the scale can still
645 remain somewhat unclear.

646 CONCLUSION

647 By pointing out that ignorance is a degreed notion, Berit Brogaard has added a
648 whole new dimension to the debate over ignorance. Even though the **Standard**
649 **View** and the **New View** are compatible with the gradability of ignorance,
650 they nevertheless leave many questions about degrees of ignorance unanswered.
651 In their current forms, the **Standard View** and the **New View** are silent on
652 what it takes to be slightly ignorant or the difference between being somewhat
653 ignorant and completely ignorant, and whether or not these views will be able
654 to provide insightful answers to these further questions is yet to be seen. If

³⁸See Brogaard (2016), p. 70.

³⁹See Sorensen (1987), pp. 769-700.

655 we attempt to give a full theory of ignorance in terms of knowledge, all while
656 maintaining that knowledge that is not gradable, then more will have to be
657 said about how a knowledge account has the resources to explain the many
658 shades of ignorance.

659
660 Ignorance, of course, is not the only concept that comes in degrees. Culpability
661 also comes in degrees, and degrees of ignorance can affect the degree to which
662 we are culpable. My doctor is completely excused for prescribing me penicillin
663 if they have no reason to think I have an allergy, but they deserve at least
664 some blame if they already know I am allergic to many similar medications.
665 While this might not be strong enough evidence for my doctor to know that I
666 am allergic to penicillin, it is enough to prevent them from being completely
667 ignorant. Knowledge and true belief might be able to help us understand the
668 difference between being ignorant and not, but there remain many important
669 questions about degrees of ignorance, and by extension, the role they play in
670 degrees of culpability.

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