

An Account of Willful Ignorance: Blameworthy Willful Ignorance, Praiseworthy Willful
Ignorance, and Self-Deception

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INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to give an in-depth account of willful ignorance. For some time, the notion of willful ignorance has been a topic for scholars of law and those involved in philosophy of law (Charlow 1992; Husak 2010; Lynch 2016; Sarch 2015, 2017). Concurrently, an *epistemology of ignorance* has recently been a topic for (feminist) social epistemologists (Alcoff 2007; Bailey 2007; Code 2007; Fricker 2016; Harding 2006; Medina 2013, 2016; Pohlhaus 2012; Townley 2006, 2011; Tuana 2004, 2006; Tuana & Sullivan 2006; Wieland 2017), and critical race theorists (Mills 1997, 2007, 2017; Dotson 2011, 2012; Sullivan & Tuana 2007) working in different fields of philosophy.¹ Yet, even before the term ‘willful ignorance’ was coined, philosophers were discussing what it meant for one to be willfully ignorant. In *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas suggests that ignorance is *voluntary* “when it regards that which one can and ought to know” (1-2.6, 8.). More recently, Michele Moody-Adams (1994) suggests that *affected* ignorance is “essentially a matter of choosing not to be informed of what we can and should know” (1994: 301). It is this notion of voluntary (or affected) ignorance I wish to take up in this paper, a phenomenon which I will refer to as *willful ignorance*.

Although the notion of willful ignorance has been given significant attention, the idea of a kind of *praiseworthy* willful ignorance has been grossly overlooked.² In the first section of this paper, I will define willful ignorance and address a puzzle concerning how *willful* ignorance is possible. In the second section, I will distinguish between willful ignorance that is *blameworthy*

and willful ignorance that is *praiseworthy*. Whereas the first section will be concerned with defining willful ignorance, the second section will consider the moral dimension of willful ignorance. In the third section, I argue that a distinguishing feature of blameworthy willful ignorance is its close relationship (making it sometimes appear synonymous) with self-deception. Here, I wish to show that *blameworthy* willful ignorance always involves some self-deception; while *praiseworthy* willful ignorance never involves self-deception. Finally, the fourth section of this paper will be committed to addressing objections that could be brought against my account.

This paper aims to accomplish three major tasks, these are (1) propose an adequate definition of willful ignorance (one that holds for instances of blameworthy *and* praiseworthy willful ignorance), (2) show that there are (at least) two kinds of willful ignorance,³ and (3) illuminate the fact that blameworthy willful ignorance always involves a cognitive element, namely, self-deception. It is also my aim, following philosophers like Cynthia Townley (2006, 2011), that my positive account of willful ignorance will help to challenge the *epistemophilia*⁴ that permeates Western epistemology. That is to say, I hope this paper can help defend the notion that knowing isn't always better than not knowing.

I. WILLFUL IGNORANCE

In the first part of this section, I propose an answer to the seemingly paradoxical nature of willful ignorance. That is, I will explain how one can be *knowingly ignorant* of some proposition *p*. Whereafter, I provide a definition of willful ignorance, one that is meant to hold for instances of blameworthy *and* praiseworthy willful ignorance.

1.1. How is Willful Ignorance Possible?

The term *willful ignorance* might initially strike the reader as paradoxical. On one hand, if a subject, *S*, *knows* they are avoiding some proposition *p*, we might assume that *S is not ignorant* of *p* (because *S* must know what *p* entails if they know to avoid it). And on the other hand, if *S* does *not know* they are avoiding some proposition *p*, then we cannot consider *S* to be properly *willful* in their ignorance of *p*. In the first case, *S knows* and is therefore not properly ‘ignorant,’ and in the second case, *S does not know* and we cannot properly call this ignorance ‘willful’. How is it possible that one can be *willfully ignorant* toward some proposition *p*?

Philosophers have proposed different solutions to this paradox. For instance, Kevin Lynch (2016) proposes that one needs a *suspicion* (that proposition *p* might be the case), in order to be considered willfully ignorant and takes it to be “uncontroversial that in willful ignorance, the doxastic attitude of *S* towards *p* can be a suspicion” (2016: 509). However, in opposition to Lynch, Jan Willem Wieland proposes that one need not have a specific doxastic attitude toward some proposition *p* (in order to be considered willfully ignorant), but that knowledge of *p* must be *inconvenient* for *S* (2017: 115).

I agree with Wieland regarding the first matter mentioned above and diverge from him on the second. First, I agree that one does not need to add a suspicion requirement to willful ignorance because, surely, one can be willfully ignorant without suspicion. For instance, say a parent receives an email from their child's school stating that they have received an influx of new students, all of whom are *deathly* allergic to peanuts. The parent glances at the email in their inbox, decides it's most likely spam, and puts it into their trash folder. Later that week, the same parent receives a voicemail from the school. The voicemail begins by stating that the information which follows concerns *all* parents and *all* students, but is especially sensitive because it

concerns children with allergies who attend the school. The parent immediately presses ‘next’ on their voicemail, and rationalizes ‘My kid doesn’t have allergies, so this voicemail doesn’t concern me.’ A month later the parent receives a flyer from the school in the mail, the front cover reads ‘Health Awareness: Parents, Please Read’ alongside a picture of three smiling toddlers. The parent immediately throws the flyer in the recycle bin and thinks ‘Gosh! The precautions these schools have to take nowadays.’ In this example, it is clear that the parent doesn’t have a *suspicion* that there are school children with deathly peanut allergies, only that peanut allergies *might be the case*.

Someone might make the argument that the above is an example of *ignorance*, but not *willful ignorance*. However, we can imagine that the example continues: Two months from having received the flyer (which the parent did not read), the school asks the parent to send some baked goods with their child for a fundraiser. The parent thinks this is a perfect opportunity to use their grandmother’s chocolate chip and peanut butter cookie recipe. The parent sends their child to school with the cookies and another child, who is allergic to peanuts, eats one of the cookies and is sent to the hospital. The continuation of this example makes it apparent that the parent was willfully ignorant of *p*, as they voluntarily ignored that which they *could* and *should* have known.⁵ Further, this particular illustration is an example of *blameworthy* willful ignorance, reasons for which will become clearer in section II of this paper.

Concerning Wieland’s second suggestion, that knowledge of *p* must be *inconvenient* for *S*, I must diverge from his account. Wieland claims that “what all [willful ignorant] cases seem to have in common is that the agent wants to remain ignorant because it is *convenient* to do so, while knowledge of *p* is inconvenient” (2017: 110). I believe that Wieland uses the word

‘in/convenient’ because his is an account of blameworthy willful ignorance. This is apparent in the definition Wieland gives of willful ignorance, where he states, “*S*’s ignorance of *p* is willful if (i) *p* implies that *A*, an action of *S* or another agent *S*^{*}, is wrong” (2017: 111). I diverge from Wieland concerning this inconvenience condition because the majority instances of *praiseworthy* willful ignorance will not adhere to this condition. In instances of *praiseworthy* willful ignorance, *S* does not choose to remain ignorant because it is *convenient* to do so but because, for example, they believe it’s the right thing to do. For this reason, and because this paper seeks to give an accurate definition of willful ignorance (one that covers instances of blameworthy and *praiseworthy* willful ignorance), I must reject the idea that one chooses to engage in willful ignorance because knowledge of *p* is ‘inconvenient’.⁶

Instead, I suggest that all we need in order to solve the ‘paradox’ outlined above is that: *S* knows that proposition *p* might be the case.⁷ This solves the problem because in knowing that something might be the case one can *choose* to ignore evidence confirming *p* (i.e. their ignoring can be *willful*), while still remaining *truly ignorant* toward *p*.

1.2. Defining Willful Ignorance

With my solution to the willful ignorance puzzle in hand, I suggest that willful ignorance should be explained as follows:

***S* is willfully ignorant regarding proposition *p* iff:**

- (i) *S* knows that proposition *p* might be the case;
- (ii) proposition *p* is available;
- (iii) knowledge of proposition *p* is normatively relevant;
- (iv) *S* decides they wish to remain ignorant of proposition *p*, for some reason *R*;

(v) *S* takes the appropriate steps, and is successful, in remaining ignorant of proposition *p*.

Allow me to explain (ii) - (v) in order to better understand how willful ignorance is defined. By (ii), that proposition *p* is available, I mean that *p* can be obtained without an *unreasonable* amount of expectation on the part of *S*.⁸ By ‘unreasonable,’ I mean something like *beyond the limits of reason, moderation, or fair expectation*. However, it’s important to note that there will be different constraints on this condition. First, there might be *physical constraints* on the availability of *p*. For instance, if proposition *p* is locked in a safe, and I cannot access the code, it would be unreasonable to expect me to gain access to *p*. Further, some propositions will be available to some (e.g. those with high-security clearance) and not to others (e.g. those without said security clearance). Similarly, it would be silly to expect someone to gain *p*, if *p* were, e.g. what it is like to give birth if the person did not have a uterus or vagina. There might also be *cognitive constraints* on the availability of some proposition *p*. For instance, I do not take it (outside the work of Science Fiction) that one is able to telepathically communicate with other humans, or non-human animals, to gain some *p*. Just as it would be unreasonable to expect a person who does not read English to gain some *p*, e.g. the title of this paper, simply by placing the paper in front of them. It should also be mentioned that some individuals have mental disorders or impairments that may make it extremely difficult (or even impossible) to gain knowledge of some *p*. And, reversely, that people without these impairments will not be able to gain knowledge of *p*, where *p* is the knowledge of what it’s like to live with said impairments.

There may also be *time constraints* on the availability of *p*. For instance, I do not have access to the birth names of my grandchildren (or even the knowledge that they might, one day, exist). However, time constraints might work in trickier ways. Elizabeth Harman gives us an

illustration of what this might look like (2017: 118). Harman describes an instance where Emily, an engineer, is faced with a task of rescuing 10 people from a partially destroyed building. Emily has the cognitive power, training, and proper tools at her disposal to save all 10 people trapped in the building. However, because of time constraint t (t being if she doesn't act quickly all 10 people will die from suffocation), Emily manages to come up with Plan A, which only saves 9 people. If Emily had *more* time, it would be reasonable to expect her to come up with Plan B (which saves all 10 people). However, it is *unreasonable* to expect her to spend an excessive amount of time searching for Plan A if the result would be that all 10 people should die.

There might also be *resource constraints* on the availability of proposition p . For instance, it would be unreasonable to expect an individual to spend their life savings to gain knowledge of proposition p if p was 'when it will next snow in Montreal'. However, if the stakes were higher and, e.g., an individual could spend their life savings in return for knowledge of p , where p is the cure for cancer, it might become reasonable for that individual to trade their savings to gain knowledge of p . Resource constraints, as well as the constraints mentioned above, will vary from case-to-case and from person-to-person. It also happens that these different constraints may overlap or affect one another in different contexts, making it either more or less reasonable for S to gain some proposition p .⁹

By **(iii)**, that knowledge of proposition p is normatively relevant, I mean that acquiring knowledge of p will have direct bearing on what S *ought* to do. Let us use the example of the parent and the peanut allergies to see how this condition works. The normatively relevant proposition in the peanut case was 'children attending school X have deadly peanut allergies.' The acquisition of this proposition has a direct bearing on what the parent *ought* to do because it

directly affects the parents ability to avoid some evil by e.g., not sending their child to school with peanut butter cookies that could potentially harm the children attending school X. Here, I allow that different normative ethical theories can act as a guide in determining what actions S ought to take (what actions should be considered praiseworthy or blameworthy (good or evil)).

Conditions (iv) and (v) of the definition are more straightforward. Condition (iv), that S decides they wish to remain ignorant of proposition p for some reason R , simply means that S engages in willful ignorance and that some reason R motivates this decision. For instance, the parent in our peanut allergy example seems to be motivated by reason R : this proposition doesn't concern me or my child, or learning p is a waste of valuable time. Whereas condition (v), that S takes the appropriate steps to remain ignorant of proposition p , means that S engages in and is successful at being willfully ignorant of p . These appropriate steps might be, e.g. the parent putting the allergy email in the trash, avoids listening to the school's voicemail message, or recycling the Health Awareness flyer. In other instances, appropriate steps might be considered as, e.g. not looking for evidence (although one knows said evidence might be available), or refusing to ask questions that might lead to knowledge of p .

II. BLAMEWORTHY & PRAISEWORTHY WILLFUL IGNORANCE

Having defined willful ignorance and explained each condition, we are in a position to distinguish between blameworthy willful ignorance and praiseworthy willful ignorance. As stated above, there has been a vast amount of philosophical literature written on the topic of ignorance. In this section, I distinguish between different accounts of ignorance (both blameworthy and praiseworthy) in order to distinguish *willful ignorance* from related but distinct phenomena; as well as offer illustrations of blameworthy and praiseworthy willful ignorance.

2.1. An Account of Blameworthy Willful Ignorance

As I've mentioned above, there have been many accounts of blameworthy (willful) ignorance provided by philosophers of law, social epistemologists, and critical race theorists. Here, it is important to distinguish between accounts of *blameworthy ignorance*, *blameworthy moral ignorance*, and *blameworthy willful ignorance* (that latter of which is the proper topic of this paper).

2.1.1. Blameworthy Ignorance

Although there has been a great deal written on *blameworthy ignorance*, the degree of culpability associated with this kind of ignorance is still highly debated. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle suggests that it is the right of legislators to “punish those who are ignorant of any uncomplicated point of law that they ought to have known” (1114a1-4). More recently, Holly Smith (1983) takes up the debate concerning culpable ignorance and provides the reader with an abundance of examples depicting blameworthy ignorance. Perhaps her most famous example is that of a doctor who accidentally administers too much oxygen, causing an infant to have permanent eye damage. In the example, the doctor is ignorant of the fact that too much oxygen would have this effect, but *would have known* if they had read the latest issue of a medical journal. Smith states, that in this case, “the doctor should have read his journal, and if he had done so, would have realized he ought to use less oxygen” (1983: 543). I bring our attention to these examples of blameworthy ignorance not to stake a claim in the culpability debate, but to show the difference between *ignorance* and *willful ignorance*. In the examples above, although it is true that the individual is ignorant of some proposition *p*, they are not *willfully* ignorant of *p*. This is because

they do not *choose* to be ignorant of *p*, i.e. condition (iv) of the definition is not fulfilled in these cases.

2.1.2. Blameworthy Moral Ignorance

Concerning *moral ignorance*, Elizabeth Harman (2011; 2017) suggests that while an individual might be ignorant of some moral truth, this does not mean that they are blameless for actions resulting from said moral ignorance. However, directly opposed to Harman, some philosophers argue that...

if [individuals] have thought hard about morality, if they are trying to act as they are morally required to act, and if it would be difficult for them to realize the moral truth then their moral ignorance renders them blameless for their morally wrong behavior.¹⁰ (Harman 2017: 117)

Let us take Harman's example of Sam the slaveholder to get a better grasp on this debate. In the example, Sam the slaveholder holds slaves but "believes that slaveholding is not morally wrong" (Harman 2017: 118). We can expand on this example and imagine that Sam has grown up in a time and place where it is the norm to keep slaves and that *many* people are morally ignorant toward the fact that slaveholding is wrong. Those opposed to Harman would argue that, because Sam is ignorant of the moral fact that slaveholding is morally wrong, they should *not* be blamed for holding slaves. That is, although Sam's actions are in fact morally blameworthy, their moral ignorance exculpates. Harman, on the other hand, argues that moral ignorance does *not* exculpate and states that "beliefs (and failure to believe) are blameworthy if they involve inadequately caring about what is morally significant" (2011: 460). Sam is blameworthy, according to Harman, because (although ignorant of some moral fact) they display a level of *inadequate care*

concerning the moral implications of slaveholding (i.e. that slaveholding is wrong). I don't stake a claim in this debate but give it attention in order to show the difference between *moral ignorance* (e.g. not knowing slaveholding is *wrong*), and *ignorance of non-moral facts* (e.g. not knowing Sam lives up the street).

2.1.3. Blameworthy Willful Ignorance

The proper topic of this paper are instances of *willful ignorance toward some non-moral fact*, which can be considered blameworthy (or praiseworthy).¹¹ Fortunately, the literature on willful ignorance is rich with instances of this kind of blameworthy willful ignorance. For example, Lynch (2016) discusses the case of Albert Speer, an architect for Hitler during WWII, who chose to be willfully ignorant toward the true horrors of the Holocaust (horrors to which he was a contributing factor). After gaining testimonial evidence from his colleague Karl Hanke-the testimony being that Hanke “advised him never to accept an invitation to inspect [a concentration camp] under any circumstances” (Lynch 2016: 505) - Speer certainly knew that it *might be the case* that what was happening in the concentration camps was horrifying. However, after gaining said testimony, Speer admits that he “did not investigate - for [he] did not want to know what was happening there [...] from fear of discovering something which might have made [him] turn from [his] course” (Speer 1970: 376).

Michele Moody-Adams (1994) provides us with another example of blameworthy willful ignorance. She describes an instance of a Mother “who repeatedly accepts expensive gifts from [her] teenage son with a modest income” (1994: 301). In the example, the teenage son is making the money for the gifts by selling drugs, however, the mother chooses to remain willfully ignorant of this fact and accepts the gifts without investigating or questioning her son.

Let us go through the examples described above, and see why they are exemplary of willful ignorance. In the case of Speer, it was true that Speer knew that **(i)** proposition *p* *might be the case*; that is, he knew that it might be the case that people in the concentration camps were being mistreated (and possibly even murdered). It's also true that proposition *p* was **(ii)** available. That is, if Speer *had* inspected one of the camps, or perhaps asked Hanke *why* he should never accept an invitation to inspect, we can assume that Speer could have reasonably gained knowledge of *p*. It is also the case that **(iii)** knowledge of *p* was normatively relevant; that is, acquiring knowledge of *p* had direct bearing on what Speer *ought* to have done. In this case, upon acquiring knowledge of *p*, Speer might have forced himself to try to make some positive change, or perhaps ceased working for the Nazi Party. Condition **(iv)** of the definition, that Speer wished to remain ignorant of proposition *p*, for some reason *R*, also holds. That is, Speer wished *not to know* for some reason *R*, where *R* seems to be that Speer did not wish to discover something that might make him 'turn from his course.' Lastly, the case fulfills **(v)**, that *S* took appropriate steps to remain ignorant of *p*, as Speer himself admits: "I did not query [Hanke], I did not query Himmler, I did not query Hitler, I did not speak with personal friends. I did not investigate" (1970: 376).

Moody-Adams' example is also one of blameworthy willful ignorance. First, we can reason that the mother knew that it *might be the case* that her son was making money illegally (as the gifts were too expensive to afford on a modest income). Further, proposition *p*, that the son was buying the gifts with money he received from selling drugs, was available. If the mother investigated or took the time to question her son, she could reasonably gain knowledge of *p*. Knowledge of *p*, in this case, is also normatively relevant. That is, knowledge of *p* had bearing

on what the Mother ought to have done. For instance, maybe she could have convinced her son to stop distributing illegal drugs, or prevented her son from inevitable arrest. However, for some reason *R*, the mother decided she wished to remain ignorant of proposition *p*. We can imagine reason *R* being something like, e.g. she did not wish to confirm that her son was breaking the law, she did not want to confront her son, or she didn't want to have to report her son to authorities.¹² Thus, the mother takes the appropriate steps to remain ignorant of proposition *p*; steps which are apparent in the mother's readiness to "ask no questions about the state of affairs, in spite of evidence that an inquiry may be needed in order to stop or prevent wrongdoing" (Moody-Adams 1994: 301).

2.2. An Account of Praiseworthy Willful Ignorance

Unlike blameworthy accounts of ignorance, praiseworthy accounts of ignorance are harder to find in the literature. Here, it is important to distinguish between accounts of *praiseworthy ignorance*, accounts of *praiseworthy performed ignorance*, and accounts of *praiseworthy willful ignorance* (the latter of which is the proper topic of this paper).¹³

2.2.1. Praiseworthy Ignorance

Cynthia Townley states that "while it may seem surprising that any form of ignorance can be an epistemic good, ignorance is practically indispensable for a community of knowers and an account of ignorance is theoretically necessary for an adequate epistemology" (2011: x). Against those under the spell of *epistemophilia*, Townley strives to give a positive account of ignorance (2006; 2011). Townley suggests that ignorance is imperative to the flourishing and existence of epistemic communities, and gives a treatment of the (positive) role ignorance plays in *empathy* (2006: 42-46).¹⁴ Townley suggests that...

empathic knowledge must always be provisional, revisable, and modifiable. That is to say, in empathy there is a space of ignorance; my empathic knowledge is always incomplete. This ignorance is not provisional or strategic, rather it is intrinsic to empathy that even as I know, I am also ignorant. Successful empathic knowledge and the elimination of ignorance do not converge. (2006: 44)

If one wishes to know some proposition p they can gain from another (or even a community of knowers) different from themselves, one needs to realize that their knowledge of p will always be necessarily incomplete (or at least subject to revision). Townley suggests that this becomes increasingly apparent between individuals and groups that have different socioeconomic, racial, and/or gender positions within an epistemic community. This makes it so that “an epistemic agent who successfully makes an empathic knowledge claim is in the paradoxical position of saying ‘I know’ *and* ‘you can tell me that I am wrong’” (Townley 2016: 45). That is, one cannot completely know what it is like to exist as another individual (as their experiences, emotions, knowledge, and positionality are epistemically out of reach). Thus, in order to properly empathize, one must come to terms and even embrace this ‘space of ignorance’. Although Townley’s account is of positive ignorance, we should not conflate this with an account of praiseworthy willful ignorance. Instead, the *simple ignorance* Townley refers to is intrinsic to ‘epistemically responsible empathy’ (2006: 43).

2.2.2. Praiseworthy Performed Ignorance

Alison Bailey (2007), while discussing techniques available to oppressed groups resisting white ignorance,¹⁵ gives a positive account of what she refers to as *strategic ignorance*. Bailey proposes that “strategic ignorance is a way of expediently working with a dominant group’s

tendency to see wrongly. It is a form of knowing that uses dominant misconceptions as a basis for active creative responses to oppression” (2007: 88). An example of *strategic ignorance* could be the exploitation of the (white supremacist) misconception that people of color are *by nature*, e.g., clumsy or uneducated/stupid. For instance, black workers in the Jim Crow era could seek revenge for poor wages by ‘accidentally’ breaking expensive objects belonging to their employers and, when confronted, escape punishment by pointing out that it was in their nature to be ‘clumsy’ (Bailey 2007: 88). They could also avoid responsibility and potential harm by pretending that they couldn’t read or ‘acting dumb’ when their employers confronted them with Civil Rights literature (Bailey 2007: 88).¹⁶ Here, I would like to suggest that what Bailey refers to as ‘strategic ignorance’ is actually a kind of *performed or pretended ignorance*. Bailey herself defines strategic ignorance as a *kind of knowing* that can be utilized by oppressed individuals to manipulate and exploit the unjust (white) ignorance of others. So, although what Bailey gives treatment to is a *praiseworthy* phenomenon, what she gives treatment to is not actual ignorance (*ergo*, not willful ignorance).

2.2.3. *Praiseworthy Willful Ignorance*

We are now in the position to give an account of the kind of praiseworthy *willful ignorance*. I will proceed in the same way as the subsection on blameworthy willful ignorance; by providing examples of praiseworthy willful ignorance and then showing why they are exemplary of willful ignorance. As a first example, imagine a professor who has been asked to teach an introductory philosophy course. Recently, the professor has read literature concerning the positive outcomes of anonymous grading and, although they’ve never imposed anonymous grading before, they decide that it’s the right thing to do. When it comes time to distribute the topic of the first paper,

they ask students to provide their student number at the top of their paper instead of their first and last name. They know that this will eliminate gaining proposition p (p being this paper was written by a student of gender X), and that this will help avoid assigning a gender to those papers without gender-neutral names.

Another example of praiseworthy willful ignorance could be as follows. A professor who teaches in California knows that the United States has recently made it *extremely* difficult for undocumented immigrants to continue to live in the United States. Further, they also know that it *might be the case* that some of their students are undocumented immigrants. Because of this, the professor decides they *wish not to know* the citizenship or residential status of as many of their students as possible. The professor believes that it would be unjust if one of their students was deported, so considers it the right thing to do to remain ignorant of any potentially jeopardizing information.

In the first example, it's clear that the professor knows that proposition p , this paper was written by a student of gender X , *might be the case*. It is also true that proposition p is available, that is, if the professor desired they could reasonably acquire the names of the students and assign them to their papers. It's also true, because of implicit biases and sexism, that knowledge of p is normatively relevant. In this case, acquiring knowledge of p directly affects what the professor ought to do because they wish to mark in the most neutral and fair way possible (or at least try to minimize unintended biases into their marking; biases that are often attributed to gender, but also biases attached to certain races, ethnicities, or religions). The professor also wishes to remain ignorant of proposition p for some reason R , where R might simply be in order to 'do the right thing'. And finally, we can see in the example above that the professor takes the

appropriate steps to remain ignorant of proposition p , by asking their students to provide their student numbers instead of their names.

Our second example also adheres to the definition of willful ignorance. First, the professor knows that proposition p , the existence of undocumented immigrants attending their classes, might be the case. They also know that p is available. That is, if they wished they could reasonably attain the names of students who were undocumented. Further, knowledge of proposition p is normatively relevant. Where, in this case, acquiring knowledge of p will have a direct bearing on e.g., the professors ability to protect students from being deported against their will.¹⁷ We can also see that the professor decides they wish to remain ignorant of p for some reason R , where R might be ‘I do not want to support the deportation of undocumented immigrants’.¹⁸ Lastly, we can imagine that the professor takes appropriate steps in order to remain ignorant of proposition p ; perhaps ‘appropriate steps’ in this case are, e.g. avoiding student records, or not sharing grant information with students when the grant will expose their status or citizenship.¹⁹

III. WILLFUL IGNORANCE AND SELF-DECEPTION

In this section, I propose that we can gain an even richer understanding of praiseworthy and blameworthy willful ignorance, by realizing their different relation to self-deception. In the first part of this section, I outline Kevin Lynch’s argument concerning self-deception and willful ignorance, where he suggests that willful ignorance and self-deception are *two distinct psychological kinds* (2016). In the second part, I argue that although it’s possible to understand praiseworthy willful ignorance and self-deception in the manner Lynch suggests, the same

cannot be said for blameworthy willful ignorance. This is because, in cases of blameworthy willful ignorance, *S will always be self-deceptive concerning the normative relevance of p.*

3.1. Lynch's Account of Self-deception and Willful ignorance

Lynch (2016) suggests that when willful ignorance is given treatment in mainstream philosophy it is often conflated with self-deception,²⁰ and makes it his aim to disentangle these two phenomena. Lynch believes that in drawing a sharp line between the two, we can “[see] that willful ignorance is different from self-deception in many ways: it involves, among other things, a different range of doxastic states, a different relation to evidence, [and] different behaviour” (2016: 507). As Lynch points out, it’s hard to give an analysis of a phenomenon like self-deception because there is disagreement on exactly how to define self-deception and what the paradigm cases are.²¹ However, Lynch suggests there are “[two] features that are generally recognised to be present in paradigmatic self-deception” (2016: 513). Lynch’s methodology here is simple, he wishes to argue that willful ignorance and self-deception are two distinct psychological kinds by showing that willful ignorance does not adhere to these two features. The features Lynch identifies in paradigmatic self-deception are:

1. The subject encounters evidence indicating that some true proposition, *p*, is true.
2. She strongly desires that *p* is not true. (2016: 513)²²

Let us take these features in turn and give treatment to the arguments Lynch provides, in order to see why he considers willful ignorance and self-deception to be two distinct psychological kinds.

Concerning the first feature, Lynch argues that the *evidence* one must encounter in cases of self-deception is the *evidence* one takes steps to strategically avoid in cases of willful ignorance. He states that “in willful ignorance, though such unwelcome evidence exists or

potentially exists, the subject has avoided exposing himself to it. Such strong evidence has *not* been encountered” (2016: 517). That is, although willfully ignorant subjects know that p might be the case, they have not encountered evidence that warrants the truth of p . Contrariwise, in cases of paradigmatic self-deception, the subject has encountered concrete evidence confirming p . The following is an example to better illustrate this point.

Jasmine, an individual who knows that breast cancer runs in her family, comes to realize that having breast cancer *might be the case* because of symptoms she’s recently experienced. If Jasmine visits a doctor who confirms that she has breast cancer, and gives her testimonial evidence of p (p being her testing positive for breast cancer), Jasmine might choose to convince herself of not- p . For example, she might tell herself the doctor is not adequately trained, or that the doctor must have read the scans wrong. This would be an illustration of paradigmatic self-deception.²³ However, if Jasmine (knowing that breast cancer might be the case because of symptoms she’s recently experienced) refused to see the doctor, avoided future check-ups, and even refused to carry out a self-examination for breast cancer, we could say that she was, instead, willfully ignorant of her breast cancer. Lynch suggests that...

This difference is quite important: it is the reason why we associate different *behaviours* with these phenomena, partly making them different ‘psychological kinds’. Willful ignorance is a matter of steering clear of evidence. Self-deception, however, is a matter of maintaining a belief in the face of contrary evidence.

(2016: 518)

Concerning the second feature of self-deception, that the subject strongly desires that p is not true, Lynch argues desiring that not- p “does not seem to be a necessary feature of willful

ignorance” (2016: 517). In the case of Albert Speer, Lynch admits that Speer may have desired that people were *not* being murdered in the camps he helped build (i.e. *not-p*). However, Lynch urges us to imagine cases of willful ignorance where the second feature does not hold. For instance, Lynch gives us the example of a corporate boss who tells their employees to gain some result using *any means necessary* (2016: 517). In this example, the boss tells their employees they do not wish to know *how* the result is achieved but realizes that it *might be the case* the law is broken while achieving said result. This gives the boss a certain amount of ‘deniability’ if questioned on how the results were obtained (Lynch 2016: 517). Lynch argues that, in this example of willful ignorance, it’s easy to imagine that the boss “could not care less whether *p* or *not-p*; he just wants the results to be achieved” (2016: 517). So, although Lynch admits that in *some* cases of willful ignorance it holds that *S desires that p is not true* (like in the Speer case), he proposes that this is not a necessary feature of willful ignorance.

3.2. The Normative Relevance Account of Self-deception and Willful ignorance

When we compare *praiseworthy* willful ignorance and self-deception, I am in agreement with Lynch that these are two distinct psychological kinds. However, when we analyze *blameworthy* willful ignorance and self-deception, I argue that we should not consider them in the way Lynch suggests. First, I wish to show that blameworthy willful ignorance always involves some self-deception on the part of *S*, because *S will always be self-deceptive concerning the normative relevance of p*. After which, I will argue that praiseworthy willful ignorance never involves self-deception concerning the normative relevance of *p*.

3.2.1. Blameworthy Willful Ignorance and Self-Deception

To defend the argument that blameworthy willful ignorance always involves some self-deception, I will utilize the two features found in all cases of paradigmatic self-deception. I propose that blameworthy willful ignorance always involves self-deception because:

1. The subject encounters evidence indicating that some true proposition, p , is *normatively relevant*.
2. They strongly desire that p is *not normatively relevant* (i.e. *normatively irrelevant*).²⁴

Allow me to take a familiar example to help better illustrate this argument. In the Speer example, Speer heard some testimony which made him believe that some proposition p might be the case (where p = there are horrific acts taking place in the concentration camps). However, instead of giving p further consideration (e.g. seeking further evidence), Speer strongly desired that proposition p be *normatively irrelevant*. That is, he desired that p be closer to a descriptive claim which held no moral significance. Here, we can see that Speer exhibits behaviors typically associated with self-deception, such as “being hypercritical, rationalising, and explaining away evidence” (Lynch 2016; 518). Perhaps Speer rationalized that although there *were* people being held in the camps, they were all being well fed and well looked after. If this were the case, Speer wouldn’t (necessarily) need to know this information because there was no normative judgment that needed to be made (no right action that should have been pursued/no wrong action that should have been avoided). That is, Speer remained willfully ignorant of p because he convinced himself that p was normatively irrelevant, making it the case that no further investigation was necessary.

Concerning cases of blameworthy willful ignorance like the Corporate Boss, I propose that these cases involve self-deception as well. This is because the corporate boss still *strongly*

desires that p (where p = the results were achieved in an unlawful way) be normatively irrelevant. We can imagine that if the boss was met with evidence suggesting that p were normatively relevant, we could expect the boss to engage in exactly the kind of self-deceptive behavior Lynch refers to, by ‘maintaining a belief in the face of contrary evidence’ in order to preserve deniability. Like Speer, we can imagine the boss rationalizing that although the desired results *were* achieved, they were likely achieved by lawful means. That is, they strongly desire that p be normatively irrelevant, making acquiring knowledge of p unnecessary because it has no direct bearing on what they *ought* to do (e.g., ensure that the results were achieved in a lawful way, avoid having their employees fired and/or incriminated, having themselves fired and/or incriminated, having the company audited, etc.).²⁵

From the examples above it becomes clear that, in cases of blameworthy willful ignorance, the issue becomes that of S 's self-deceptive attitude toward the normative relevance of p . That is, in cases of blameworthy willful ignorance, S can remain willfully ignorant of p and, at the same time, 1) encounter evidence indicating that some true proposition, p , is normatively relevant, and 2) strongly desire that p is normatively irrelevant.

3.2.2. *Praiseworthy Willful Ignorance and Self-Deception*

Contrary to blameworthy willful ignorance, I suggest that praiseworthy willful ignorance never involves self-deception concerning the normative status of p . Rather, in instances of praiseworthy willful ignorance:

1. The subject encounters evidence indicating that some true proposition, p , is *normatively relevant*.
2. They *do not* strongly desire that p is *normatively irrelevant*.

Let us take the example of the California professor to better illustrate this point. In our example, the professor *knows* that proposition p (where p = the existence undocumented immigrants attending their classes) holds normative weight, and further, that if they acquire p it will have a direct bearing on what they ought to do. So, although the professor has encountered evidence of the normative relevance of p , they don't strongly desire that p be normatively irrelevant. Quite the contrary, the professor understands and fully accepts the normative relevance of p , and thus decides to remain willfully ignorant of p . The same is true in our example of anonymous grading. In this example, the professor recognizes that p might be the case (where p = students have names which might not be gender-neutral), and fully accepts the normative relevance of p . Opposed to individuals engaging in blameworthy willful ignorance, there is no need for praiseworthy individuals to engage in behaviors typically associated with self-deception. These individuals are fully aware of the fact that p is normatively relevant, so there is no reason to be hypercritical, rationalize, or explain away evidence that indicates the normative relevance of p .

From the discussion above, I hope it is clear that blameworthy willful ignorance and praiseworthy willful ignorance have different relations to self-deception. On both accounts, when S decides whether they wish to know proposition p , the praiseworthy and the blameworthy individuals can both answer 'No!' However, when pressed and asked *why they wish not to know*, the praiseworthy willfully ignorant individual fully accepts that avoiding proposition p is necessary because p is normatively relevant. Whereas the blameworthy willfully ignorant individual, having encountered evidence that proposition p is normatively relevant, *strongly* desires that the p be normatively irrelevant. For this reason, blameworthy willful ignorance involves self-deception because it adheres to both features of paradigmatic self-deception,

whereas praiseworthy willful ignorance does not involve self-deception because it fails to adhere to the second feature.

IV. OBJECTIONS

4.1. The Republican

Objection: In the California Professor example it's suggested that the professor is praiseworthy for their willful ignorance, the question here is: *praiseworthy for whom and under what normative framework?* For example, we can imagine an onlooker to this situation as being a staunch Republican. According to *their* normative framework, the professor would actually be *blameworthy* for their willful ignorance. This is because what the professor *ought* to do is learn the status of their students and notify ICE upon learning if any of their students are not American Citizens (or without proper documentation). Here, the question concerns how this account deals with conflicting intuitions of what is considered praiseworthy and blameworthy (as a result of diverging normative frameworks).

Response: This objection arises from the fact that our intuitions about whether the California professor is blameworthy or praiseworthy are divided. That is, from the Republican view the professor is blameworthy, and from a more Democratic view the professor is praiseworthy. However, there is a clarification that needs to be made before we proceed. What the Republican takes issue with is that the California professor is blameworthy for being ignorant toward some *moral fact* (the moral fact being that *deportation is the right action to take*). For argument's sake, let's say the Republican has the correct normative framework (and that deportation is the right action to take). Here, there are two options, both of which my theory can account for.

First, it might be the case that the California professor is *genuinely ignorant* of the moral fact that deportation is the right action. That is, the professor has not been met with any evidence suggesting that deportation-as-right-action might be the case. Perhaps the professor has grown up in a time and place that only allows for Democratic values, and that this results in the professor's ignorance. In this case, it can be debated whether or not the professor should be blameworthy for their genuine moral ignorance (as we've seen from the discussion concerning moral ignorance above). However, the professor is not *willfully ignorant* toward said moral fact, thus making it impossible for them to be blameworthy for their willful ignorance toward the moral fact that deportation is the right action.

But what if the California professor *is* willfully ignorant toward the moral fact that deportation is the right action (that is, the professor fulfills conditions **(i)-(v)** outlined above)? If, as we said, the Republican has the correct normative framework, then under my account there is no reason why the California professor could not be considered blameworthy for their willful ignorance. However, as stated elsewhere in this paper, self-deception works differently in these cases. That is, self-deception still co-occurs with blameworthy willful ignorance because the professor is self-deceptive about the moral fact that 'deportation is the right action to take' (i.e., 1. They are met with evidence indicating some true moral proposition, p , is true; and 2. They strongly desire that p is not true).

4.2. Outcomes Attributed to Willful Ignorance

Objection: Above it is mentioned that in remaining willfully ignorant toward the citizenship and status of their students, the California professor refuses to share grant information with their students. In response to this, one could argue that not sharing grant opportunities with students is

actually quite detrimental and should, therefore, not be considered any part of a praiseworthy action.

Response: It will be a necessary part of the account that sometimes willful ignorance will result in *unintended positive* and/or *negative outcomes*. For instance, in the example of the California professor, I take it that the professor is still praiseworthy for their willful ignorance and that the act of not sharing grant information should be considered an *accidental negative outcome*. We can also imagine instances where blameworthy willful ignorance results in *accidental positive outcomes*. Let's take Moody-Adams example of Mother and Son Drug-Dealer to better illustrate this point. Suppose the mother, knowing it might be the case that her son is dealing drugs, stops asking the son questions about his personal life (for fear an answer might expose *p*). Although it unsettles the mother to no longer acquire about her son's life, the son is quite pleased with this result, as he considered his mom a 'total nag' in the past. Because the mom no longer asks so many questions, the son warms up to his mother and they start spending more time together. Here, I consider the son and mother growing closer to be positive, however, it is a direct result of the mother's blameworthy willful ignorance (making this an *accidental positive outcome*).

I do not believe the existence of accidental positive or negative outcomes poses a threat to my overall account. However, one might point out that these outcomes could potentially outweigh the 'good' or 'bad' being sought by the initial act of willful ignorance. For instance, say someone is initially willfully ignorant toward some *p*, and that their willful ignorance is praiseworthy. However, the accumulation of accidental negative outcomes makes it so their act of praiseworthy willful ignorance is actually resulting in more harm than good. If said individual knows that such accidental negative outcomes *might be the case*, yet chooses to ignore said

outcomes (convincing themselves, instead, that the truth of said outcomes is a p which is normatively irrelevant), than I would argue that this new instance of willful ignorance is blameworthy (despite the individuals initial praiseworthy engagement in willful ignorance).²⁶

4.3. Two Sisters

This objection centers around a thought experiment like this:

A woman of color lives in a minority community (this community is also made up of people of color) within a larger population that is extremely racist toward said minority community. The community continues to dwell in this larger population because it affords them job opportunities they could not find elsewhere; which, in turn, affords them a higher standard of living. The woman knows that it *might* be the case that her sister is being abused by her husband. Thus, the woman has two options: 1) confirm that her sister is being abused, tell the authorities and stop the abuse; however, in doing so, this will further perpetuate the negative stereotype that men of said community are abusive, dangerous, aggressive, and violent. In turn, making it harder for the community to flourish because of the extreme racism/biases inherent in the dominant population. Or, 2) choose to be willfully ignorant of her sister's abuse in order to preserve the community's (already dismal) status and stability. However, this option would allow the sister's abuse to continue.²⁷

Objection: The objection here is that this example seems to provide an illustration of willful ignorance that is both praiseworthy *and* blameworthy. In the case that the woman chooses to *ignore* to abuse of her sister, she saves the community's status and is thus praiseworthy for her willful ignorance. That is, she recognizes that acquiring knowledge of proposition p is normatively relevant and chooses to be willfully ignorant of p in order to protect her community.

However, in the act of remaining ignorant toward her sister's abuse, she is blameworthy because she avoids acquiring knowledge of proposition p (which could help stop the abuse) and, instead, strongly desires that p be normatively irrelevant (e.g., something closer to a descriptive claim like 'my sister and her husband have never abused one another').

Response: What I would like to suggest in response to this objection is that one would have to look at the *specific context* at work in this example. For instance, again, assuming that the woman does not wish her sister be harmed, it would be up to the woman to decide if the consequences would be beneficial enough for her to willfully ignore her sister's abuse (or beneficial enough to allow the reputation of the community to be sullied). For example, say that the woman was aware that dominant group had grown increasingly hostile and aggressive toward her community. So much so, that she knew of several men of color who had been severely beaten and some who had even been killed at the hands of the dominant group. Suppose there had even been a threat recently that if community's 'aggressive behavior' persisted, the authorities would have to implement new laws which would allow police officers to arrest and detain men from that community without justification. If we get clearer on the context in which this thought experiment is supposed to take place, we can see that the woman's justification, as well as *what is at stake* (e.g., increasing happiness and safety for the greatest number of people), will be extremely important in determining whether this is an instance of praiseworthy or blameworthy willful ignorance.

I don't take it to be a pitfall of my account that it should sometimes appeal to a kind of contextualism. Contrary, many of the authors listed above have argued for the importance of realizing that moral and epistemic agents are always *situated* (Alcoff 2007; Code 1993, 1995;

Harding 1991; Mills 1997, 2007). So, although I provide an account that is meant to hold for cases of willful ignorance, I do not pretend that *S*'s situatedness will not play a crucial role in whether their willful ignorance is deemed blameworthy or praiseworthy.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I hope this paper has satisfied the three objectives with which it started, these were (1) propose an adequate definition of willful ignorance (one that holds for accounts of blameworthy *and* praiseworthy willful ignorance), (2) show that there at (at least) two kinds of willful ignorance, and (3) illuminate the fact that blameworthy willful ignorance always involves a cognitive element, namely, self-deception. I believe that in allowing a kind of praiseworthy willful ignorance to be part of the conversation, we will only gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of willful ignorance as a whole.

ENDNOTES

1. The scholars mentioned are not meant to act as exhaustive lists, however, they do provide the reader with a list of preliminary readings concerning philosophy and ignorance.
2. All the scholars thus far, with the exception of Alison Bailey (2007) and Cynthia Townley (2006, 2011), have focused on accounts of blameworthy (willful) ignorance.
3. I say 'at least' because I think there is potential for a third kind of willful ignorance, which I will call *neutral* willful ignorance. Included in this category are acts like not spoiling the end of a mystery novel for oneself or a couple choosing not to know the sex of their unborn child. However, because this paper is concerned with the moral dimension of willful ignorance (i.e.

praiseworthiness and *blameworthiness*), giving treatment to a kind of neutral willful ignorance will not be its central concern.

4. Cynthia Townley defines *epistemophilia* as “the love of knowledge to the point of myopia” (2006: 38), and suggests that when knowledge is “taken in excess, it can and has limited the understanding of epistemic practices and values, because increasing knowledge is not always good, and not the only epistemic good” (2011: xii).

5. One might ask why this illustration could not be due to the parent’s negligence, or the parent’s recklessness? It is important to be able to distinguish between negligence, recklessness, and willful ignorance. Where recklessness “involves acting while aware of a substantial and unjustifiable risk or harm or another inculpatory fact,” negligence involves acting while being *unaware* of a substantial and unjustifiable risk or harm or another inculpatory fact, although said risk *should* have been known (Sarch 2018: 3). To illustrate, say a teen hurls a rock over an overpass and onto a busy highway below, which results in the death of a driver. If the teen was aware of the risk they might kill a driver when they hurled the rock, this would be considered an act of recklessness. However, if for some reason, the teen was *unaware* of the risk that their action might kill (or even harm) a driver, this would be considered an act of negligence. I would like to propose that cases of willful ignorance can involve either negligence or recklessness (in different degrees), however, willful ignorance is different in the way the actor deliberately takes steps to ignore evidence that would result in knowledge of *p*. So, regardless of whether our parent was aware that sending their child to *any* school with a batch of peanut butter cookies was risky, or whether they were generally unaware of this risk, the parent took steps to deliberately

ignore p (p being that children attending school X have deadly peanut allergies), knowledge which the parent *could* and *should* have known.

6. One might argue that knowledge of p could be considered ‘inconvenient’ in cases of praiseworthy willful ignorance, because gaining knowledge of p would inhibit S from, e.g. doing the right thing. In this way, knowledge of p can be seen as inconvenient, undesirable, unwanted, or unwelcome (as it prevents someone from taking some action they wish to take). However, I still cannot agree that people choose to engage in praiseworthy willful ignorance because it is *convenient* for them to do so. For instance, I don’t think a professor would implement anonymous grading out of convenience. In fact, it seems like a greater *inconvenience* for the professor to have to explain and enforce anonymous grading in their classroom. Exactly why anonymous grading counts as an example of praiseworthy willful ignorance will become clearer in section II.

7. In knowing that something *might be the case* I wish to make it explicit that this does not mean that S must be constantly conscious of the fact that p might be the case, or even that S has meditated or thought about p being the case for any period of time. Rather, in knowing that something *might be the case*, S must know that p is empirically probable, and that p is available to them (more on the *availability* of p in the following section).

8. I acknowledge that ‘unreasonable’ is a highly debated term, especially in philosophy of law. However, I do not wish to take up this debate here. For the debate (in law) concerning the ‘Duty of Reasonable Investigation’, see Husak (2010) and Sarch (2015; 2017). For the debate (in law) concerning what constitutes a ‘reasonable person’, see Sifferd (2018). For an overview of the

debate (in philosophy) concerning the ‘Reasonable Expectation Criterion’, see FitzPatrick (2017).

9. For example, given my 9-year-old sister’s cognitive abilities, current resources, and under a time constraint of say, five minutes, it would be unreasonable to expect her to know whether she identifies as a virtue ethicist. However, if we shifted the time constraint and gave her 20 years to gain knowledge of p (p being whether she identifies as a virtue ethicist), the availability of p becomes more reasonable for my sister to obtain. However, we can also imagine a number of situations where, even *given* the new time constraint of 20 years, it may remain unreasonable for my sister to gain knowledge of p . For example, maybe my sister never gains the resources to buy books on virtue ethics or lacks the funding to get the proper virtue-ethics-education. Perhaps one of our parents falls ill and my sister decides to spend her cognitive abilities and resources learning how to properly care for them.

10. For a defence of this view see Rosen (2003, 2004).

11. This is not to say that someone couldn’t be *willfully ignorant toward some moral fact*. For instance, someone might *take the appropriate steps* to stay ignorant toward the moral fact that slaveholding is wrong by, e.g. ignoring anti-slavery literature, leaving the room when someone announces they will be making an argument against slaveholding, or perhaps putting someone else in charge of punishing their slaves (as to not have to see the reaction of said slaves). I do not deny that there may be overlap between willful ignorance and moral ignorance; I only suggest that the main topic of this paper will be the treatment of willful ignorance toward non-moral facts.

12. Jan Willem Wieland (2016) gives a treatment of this example, where he suggests that the mother's motivation (i.e *R*) is based on 'other-interest' rather than 'self-interest' (110). However, I believe that the example works either way; the mother could be motivated by 'other-interest' (e.g. she loves her son and wishes to keep him out of trouble), or she could be motivated by 'self-interest' (e.g. perhaps she enjoyed the expensive gifts and wanted to receive more).

13. I acknowledge that there may also be instances of *praiseworthy moral ignorance*, however, a great deal more would need to be said in order to argue for this. I mention it as a possibility as to not rule it out, however, I do not wish to spend time arguing for it here.

14. Townley also gives a treatment of the positive role ignorance plays in *trust* (see 2006: 42-46); and later discusses the positive role ignorance plays in the 'epistemic virtues' she names as *trust, empathy, cooperation, deference, discrimination, and discretion* (Townley, 2011).

15. Charles W. Mills defines white ignorance as a kind of "non-knowing, that is not contingent, but in which race, white racism and/or white racial domination and their ramifications - plays a crucial causal role" (2007: 20).

16. Both these examples come from Robin Kelley's book *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (1994).

17. Here, one might argue that this would *not* be an example of praiseworthy willful ignorance according to the view, e.g. 'undocumented immigrants *ought* to be deported.' I understand that this is a very serious concern, which is why I take it up in subsection 4.1.

18. It's possible to imagine cases where the professor does not investigate *p* for selfish reasons. For example, maybe the professor does not want to be bothered having to report a student so they

steer clear of any evidence confirming p . If this is the case, I am willing to argue that this is actually a case of blameworthy willful ignorance.

19. Here, one could argue that *not sharing grant information with students* is actually very bad and should not be considered praiseworthy. I acknowledge that this is a concern, which is why I take it up in subsection 4.2.

20. Lynch provides the reader with a substantial list of examples (2016: 506-507). For instance, Nancy Tuana describes willful ignorance as “a systematic process of self-deception” (2006: 11).

21. For those who require at least a minimal definition of self-deception, self-deception is defined as “[involving] a person who seems to acquire and maintain some false belief in the teeth of evidence to the contrary as a consequence of some motivation, and who may display behavior suggesting some awareness of the truth” (Deweese-Boyd, 2017).

22. It’s important to note that these features (although always present in cases of self-deception) are not jointly sufficient for self-deception. But that these two features leading S to believe that p is not true will also be necessary for self-deception.

23. Further, this example would fall under the *unwarranted belief account* of self-deception. This account holds that a subject is self-deceptive when they “end up believing that not- p , against the thrust of the evidence, after treating that evidence unjustly” (Lynch 2016: 513). There are also *implicit knowledge accounts* of self-deception and *intermediate accounts* of self-deception (Lynch 2016: 513-517). However, we need not give a treatment of these distinct accounts as they all share the two features of self-deception Lynch identifies.

24. If S considers p to be normatively *relevant*, it means that S recognizes that acquiring knowledge of p will have direct bearing on what S ought to do,. Reversely, if S considers p to be

normatively *irrelevant*, it means *S* recognizes that acquiring knowledge of *p* has no direct bearing on what *S* ought to do.

25. I believe this is the most intuitive way to imagine this case, that the boss strongly desires that *p* be closer to a descriptive claim (e.g. the results were achieved in a lawful way). However, for arguments sake, we can imagine a situation where the boss *truly* does not care whether *p* or *not-p* (i.e. whether *p* is ‘the results were achieved in an unlawful way’ or ‘the results were achieved in a lawful way’). In this case, it may look as if the boss avoids confirming *p* because they know that *p* is normatively relevant, i.e. that *p* will directly affect what they ought to do. However, even in these special cases, I’d like to propose that self-deception still co-occurs with blameworthy willful ignorance. In this illustration, the boss becomes self-deceptive concerning the *moral fact* that, e.g. one should not use their position of power to force others to do wrong/evil. That is, 1. The boss is met with evidence indicating some true moral proposition, *p*, is true; and 2. They strongly desire that *p* is not true.

26. If the person is instead simply ignorant of said accidental negative outcomes, this would mean that they could be considered blameworthy for their ignorance but would not be considered *willfully ignorant* toward said outcomes.

27. This thought experiment was inspired by Kimberlé Crenshaw’s article “Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color” (1991).

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