The Epistemic Dimensions of Ignorance

Ignorance is a neglected issue in philosophy. This is surprising, for, contrary to what one might expect, it is not clear what ignorance is. Some philosophers say or assume that it is lack of knowledge, whereas others claim or presuppose that it is absence of true belief. What is one ignorant of when one is ignorant? And what kinds of ignorance are there? This neglect is also remarkable because ignorance plays a crucial role in all sorts of controversial societal issues. Ignorance is often thought to be a moral and legal excuse, it is a core concept in medical ethics and debates about privacy, and it features in religious traditions and debates about belief in God. This book does not only study an epistemic phenomenon that is interesting in itself, but also provides important tools that can be fruitfully used in debates within and beyond philosophy.

Rik Peels is an Assistant Professor at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands. His primary research interests are the ethics of belief, ignorance, scientism, and various issues in the philosophy of religion, such as whether God has a sense of humour. He is the author of Responsible Belief: A Theory in Ethics and Epistemology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), the editor of Perspectives on Ignorance from Moral and Social Philosophy (London: Routledge, 2016), and the co-editor of Scientism: A Philosophical Exposition and Evaluation (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Martijn Blaauw is Secretary General of the Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management, Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands. He is interested in the area of research where epistemology meets the technological challenges of the 21st century. He has published widely in epistemology, including papers in such journals as Analysis, The Australasian Journal of Philosophy, and Episteme. He is the editor of Contrastivism in Philosophy (London: Routledge, 2012).

Cover photo “Spring’s Landfall” by Tom Chambers. www.tomchambersphoto.com
The Epistemic Dimensions of Ignorance

Rik Peels
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Martijn Blaauw
Delft University of Technology
Not ignorance, but ignorance of ignorance is the death of knowledge.

attributed to Alfred North Whitehead
Contents

Introduction
RIK PEELS AND MARTIJN BLAAUW page 1

1 The Nature of Ignorance: Two Views
PIERRE LE MORVAN AND RIK PEELS 12

2 The Varieties of Ignorance
NIKOLAJ NOTTELLENNANN 33

3 Ignorance and Incompetence: Linguistic Considerations
BERIT BROGAARD 57

4 Explicating Ignorance and Doubt: A Possible Worlds Approach
ERIK J. OLSSON AND CARLO PROIETTI 81

5 Ignorance and Epistemic Contextualism
MICHAEL BLOME-TILLMANN 96

6 Anti-Intellectualism and Ignorance
JESSICA BROWN 114

7 Ignorance and Epistemic Value
DUNCAN PRITCHARD 132

8 Ignorance and the Religious Life
JUSTIN MCBRAYER 144

9 Epistemic Injustice and the Preservation of Ignorance
MIRANDA FRICKER 160

10 Ignorance and Racial Insensitivity
JOSÉ MEDINA 178

References 202
Index 215
vii