

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Perspectives and good dispositions

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## Abstract

In some cases we can only conform to norms like Choose the best! by luck, in a way that is not creditable to us. According to the perspectivist diagnosis, the problem with such norms is that they make reference to facts that may lie outside our perspectives. The first aim of this paper is to argue that the perspectivist diagnosis of the problem of luck is not ultimately correct. The correct diagnosis, I argue, is feabilist: in some situations it is not feasible to choose, act, or believe in ways that conformity to objectivist norms robustly depends on. The same, I argue, is true of perspectivist norms: sometimes it is not feasible to track facts about our own perspectives. This shift in focus from the limits of our perspectives to limits on feasible ways of acting, choosing and believing has deep ramifications for normative theory. My second aim is to sketch an alternative, feabilist way of thinking about a more subject-directed kind of normativity that takes into account our limitations as human agents. The result is a normative picture that unifies the practical and theoretical domains.

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## 1 | TROUBLE FOR OBJECTIVIST NORMS

I will begin by looking at a challenge for a wide range of norms that has its source in the observation that in some situations one can only conform to these norms by luck.<sup>1</sup> This observation is often followed by the complaint that they fail to carve out an important part of normative space. How are these challenges to be answered? The aim of this paper is to contrast two broad approaches to seeking a more subject-directed kind of normativity, *perspectivism* and *feasibilism*, and to defend *feasibilism*.

As an instructive example, consider the norm *Choose the best!*. This norm strikes many as inadequate when assessing a subject in a very well-known type of case, *Miners*:

### Miners

10 miners are trapped in one of two shafts (shaft 1 or shaft 2), and floodwaters are rising. You must decide which shaft to block before finding out where the miners are. They are no more likely, given your evidence, to be in shaft 1 than in shaft 2. You are able to block the water from reaching one of the shafts, but you don't have enough sandbags to block both. If you manage to completely block the shaft where the miners are, they are all saved; if you block the other shaft, they all drown. If you do nothing, letting both of the shafts fill halfway with water, one miner will drown in any case, but nine will be saved.<sup>2</sup>

It is often pointed out that even if you manage to block the shaft the miners are all in, you do what is best merely by luck, accident, or fluke and hence, your conformity to the norm *Choose the best!* is merely lucky. The problem is not just that it is possible to conform to a wide range of norms by luck, but that sometimes it is impossible to conform to them in any other way. We are reluctant to positively assess such merely lucky conformity. Indeed, it would even seem fitting to blame you for doing something so risky. Relatedly, if you let both shafts flood halfway, thereby failing to choose the best, you nevertheless merit some sort of positive normative assessment. I tend to agree that appeal to excuses and blamelessness is not enough here.<sup>3</sup> The category of excuses is just too diffuse, and as a result, the tool too blunt. Someone who lets both shafts flood halfway in order to save nine lives for certain doesn't merely have an excuse for failing to make the best choice. At the very least, more needs to be said.

Cases like *Miners* have been used to motivate the idea that there is both an objective and a subjective sense of 'ought'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, many authors think that such oughts arise across different

<sup>1</sup> I am using 'norm' in a looser sense that does not entail that the standard in question is normatively authoritative, or that it is prescriptive (cf. McHugh (2012)).

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Regan (1980: 265), Parfit (1988). There are many structurally similar cases, such as Jackson's (1986: 462–3) case of *Dr. Jill*.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Olsen (2017, §4).

<sup>4</sup> This was a rather standard view among moral philosophers working in the first half of the twentieth-century. For more recent examples, see Jackson (1986), Gibbard (1990, 2005), Oddie and Menzies (1992), Olsen (2017), H.M. Smith (2010), Wedgwood (2016).

normative domains, including the epistemic one.<sup>5</sup> If all of the miners are in shaft 1, then you objectively ought to block shaft 1. But what you subjectively ought to do is to let both shafts flood halfway. My project here won't be to provide a truth-conditional semantics for natural language ought-statements. What I want to focus on, rather, is how we should think of the kinds of more subject-directed normative assessments that cases like *Miners* call for. I leave open whether such assessments are in the end prescriptive, evaluative, or something else entirely.

I have used the case *Miners* and the norm *Choose the best!* as a dialectical starting point. But a very wide range of norms give rise to similar observations. Consider the norm *Keep your promises!*. Sometimes you can only keep your promise by luck. Assume, for instance, that you promised to return my book, but its cover got swapped by a trickster with that of another book, so that you unwittingly return the wrong one.<sup>6</sup> You are positively assessable when you return that other book, even if you did not in the end do what you promised to. Indeed, given your state of ignorance, you could only do what you promised by some strange twist of luck.

Or, consider the norm *Only believe what you know!*. The knowledge norm, too, appears to leave uncharted an important portion of normative space. Victims of evil deceivers have massively false beliefs and yet, there is a dimension of epistemic assessment along which they excel. Similarly, a subject in a Gettier case lacks knowledge due to some happenstance, such as a clock stopping exactly 12 hours before they looked at it. We want to positively assess, even praise, some beliefs that fail to constitute knowledge. Whether cases of merely lucky conformity can arise for the knowledge norm is admittedly more controversial, but I have argued (Lasonen-Aarnio 2010) that there is unreasonable knowledge: sometimes, as when acquiring putatively defeating evidence, a subject can continue to know, even though her belief is no longer reasonable. In such cases a subject can be criticized for believing *p*, even though she knows *p*. Even if knowledge is incompatible with belief that is true merely by luck, there is a sense in which one can be lucky to know.

The queasiness many feel when considering situations in which a subject can only conform to a relevant norm by luck is often voiced in tandem with a range of other thoughts. A common complaint is that at least sometimes we cannot be *guided* by objectivist norms. And even if you in fact block the correct shaft, thereby saving all of the miners, you are not *creditable* for making the choice that is in fact the best. And since you are not creditable for this success, you cannot be praised for saving all of the miners. It is no surprise that luck, guidance, and credit are often mentioned in one breath, for guidance is assumed to yield the kind of non-lucky conformity to a norm required for being creditworthy for choosing, doing, or believing as one ought.<sup>7</sup>

It is important to distinguish two very different reactions to the observations made.

The first is that any norm giving rise to the problem of luck is simply to be rejected. Many have found the thought that sometimes we can only do what we ought to by luck or accident difficult to live with: it should always be possible to act as one ought in a creditworthy or praiseworthy

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Gibbard (2005), Wedgwood (2016). Along similar lines, some think that there are objective and subjective senses of 'justification', e.g. Feldman (1988).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ross (1939: 147).

<sup>7</sup> For examples of authors who see guidance as ruling out mere accidental conformity to a rule or norm, see Wedgwood (2002, 2017), H. M. Smith (2012), and Väyrynen (2006). This is also assumed by many who think of normative guidance as a matter of responsiveness to the normative reasons in virtue of which one ought to do this or that, which in turn is a matter of being motivated to act by those reasons (see e.g. Way and Whiting (2017), Gibbons (2013: 135), Kiesewetter (2017: 11), Lord (2015, 2018). On a rather different view of guidance that often comes up in discussions of the usability of norms, guidance is a matter of using a normative principle in deliberation about what to do (see H. M. Smith (2012) and Hughes (2018); see also Pollock's (1987: 67) discussion of "the intellectualist model").

manner.<sup>8</sup> Perspectivism has often been put forth in this spirit. But this response, I will argue, is a mistake. I think there is little hope of grounding ethics – or any other normative discipline – on norms not susceptible to the problem of luck. Our lives are inevitably subject to normative fortunes in that sometimes we are doomed to either wrongdoing or to doing the right thing by luck.<sup>9</sup>

But there is a second very different reaction to the problem, which I think is the correct one. It is that a full normative picture must supplement norms of the sort discussed with norms or standards of assessment that are in a relevant sense more subject-directed. In what follows, the question I will ask is how we should go about seeking such a more subject-directed kind of normativity. My aims in this paper are twofold. The first is to provide the correct diagnosis of why more objectivist norms are inadequate on their own, giving rise to the problem of luck. I think the problem has been widely misdiagnosed, and that this misdiagnosis has deeply influenced normative theorizing. The standard diagnosis is what I call *perspectivist*, and a more subjective kind of normativity is normally approached by formulating perspectivist norms. The correct diagnosis, I will argue, appeals not to limited perspectives, but to limits of what ways of choosing, acting and believing are *feasible*. My second aim is to outline an alternative, feasilist approach for normative theory that takes into account our limitations as human agents.

I will begin (§2) by outlining the perspectivist diagnosis of why certain norms, such as those listed above, are inadequate on their own. In §3 I outline my alternative, feasilist diagnosis of the problem. Perspectivist norms have often been assumed by their proponents to avoid the kind of problem of luck faced by objectivism. In §4 I spell out a revenge problem for perspectivism, arguing that perspectivist norms, too, are susceptible to the problem of luck. In §5 I outline a feasilist normative framework. In §6 I discuss whether feasilist norms can avoid the problem of luck. In §7 I conclude by making some general remarks about how opposing parties – for instance, internalists and externalists in epistemology – have often been locked in a perspectivist framework, and how perspectivist thinking may have impeded progress in various debates.

## 2 | PERSPECTIVISM

Solutions to problems begin with diagnoses.

The problem with more objective norms, it is often argued, is that they make reference to facts that may not, in Jackson's (1991: 467) words, be "present to the agent's mind". A natural understanding of being present to an agent's mind is epistemic: the agent has some sort of epistemic access to the fact. According to the *access diagnosis*, the heart of the problem is that we often lack access to the facts that the recommendations of objectivist norms depend on. For instance, in *Miners* you don't know which shaft the miners are trapped in.<sup>10</sup> Unsurprisingly, the subjective ought is sometimes referred to as information-relative.<sup>11</sup>

As noted above, here the notion of guidance is often brought in. Objectivist norms don't provide us with adequate guidance about what to do, and the reason for this is precisely that we often

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Lord (2018: 236–7).

<sup>9</sup> For a fuller discussion see Lasonen-Aarnio (forthcoming b, c).

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Gibbard (1990): "The basic normative precepts that ground a subjective *ought* are subjectively applicable – applicable in light of information the agent has" (p. 343). H. M. Smith (2010) characterizes one of the attractions of the notion of subjective rightness as follows: "it could be used to identify a type of duty to which the agent has infallible access in his decision-making" (p. 84).

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Wedgwood (2016).

lack epistemic access to whether their application conditions obtain.<sup>12</sup> It is often assumed that guidance is both necessary and sufficient for acting as one ought in a way that is not merely lucky. Indeed, non-lucky, creditable normative success is one of the central goods that guidance has been looked upon to deliver. My view is that we do best to keep guidance and non-lucky normative success apart. Though I will have much more to say about luck, I will largely set aside the issue of guidance, which I take up elsewhere.<sup>13</sup>

I will now characterize a broad range of views in terms of the notion of a *perspective*.<sup>14</sup> A subject's perspective is whatever is, in the required sense, present to her mind. What a perspectivist norm requires of a subject depends on nothing but the subject's perspective. So, for instance, perspectivism about moral rightness is the claim that facts about which available choices or actions are morally right for a subject supervene on nothing but the subject's perspective. (Compare: internalism about justification is the claim that facts about justification for a subject supervene on the subject's internal mental states.) Here I will be interested, in particular, in perspectivism as an attempt to close the kind of normative lacuna outlined above. In line with the two reactions sketched in the previous section, the perspectivist either replaces or supplements objectivist norms with perspectivist ones. Either way, the thought is that there is an important normative status that is fixed by facts about a subject's perspective. To close the normative lacuna left open by objectivist norms, perspectivist norms had better not be susceptible to the problem of luck discussed above.

Note that the central contrast of this paper between perspectivist views, on the one hand, and the kind of view I will defend appealing to feasible dispositions, on the other, is not tantamount to that between internalism and externalism. Though one might assume that internally alike subjects have identical perspectives, the perspectivist framework as such is not internalist. For instance, it is difficult to find a paper discussing cases like *Miners* which doesn't point out that in *Miners* one doesn't know which shaft the miners are in. Against this it may be appealing to assume that a subject's perspective consists of the totality of propositions she knows. But on no candidate understanding of 'internal' do facts about what a subject knows supervene on her internal states.

According to many views, a subject's perspective is a set of propositions. There are many candidates for the kind of relation a subject must bear to a proposition for it to be part of her perspective. On one popular view, a perspective consists of the totality of propositions constituting a subject's *evidence*. Or, it may consist of the totality of *reasons* she has.<sup>15</sup> Or, as mentioned above, it may consist of the totality of propositions a subject *knows*, or the totality of propositions she is in a *position to know*. Such a view is compatible with either of the previous ones, for one might take a subject's evidence or possessed reasons to consist of her knowledge. Or, perhaps a subject's perspective consists of the totality of propositions she justifiably believes, has justification to believe, or ought to believe.<sup>16</sup> On the more subjective

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Gibbard (1990: 344), Jackson (1991: 466–7) and Sepielli (2012). For a discussion of guidance and epistemic access, see Hughes (2018) and Lasonen-Aarnio (forthcoming c).

<sup>13</sup> See Lasonen-Aarnio (2019, 2020) and Lasonen-Aarnio (forthcoming c).

<sup>14</sup> For a similar notion of a perspective, see Alston's (1986) discussion of what he calls "perspectival internalism". See also Kiesewetter (2011), Way and Whiting (2017) and Gibbons (2010: 335).

<sup>15</sup> One prominent way of understanding the distinction between subjective and objective oughts is in terms of subjective and objective reasons (e.g. Schroeder (2018)). See Lord (2018) and Kiesewetter (2017) for views of subjective reasons formulated either in terms of knowledge, or in terms of what a subject is in a position to know.

<sup>16</sup> Parfit (1988) characterizes subjective rightness in terms of what one has reason to believe, and Gibbard (2005: 346) in terms of what one ought to believe.

end are views on which a subject's perspective consists simply of the totality of propositions she believes.

Alternatively, perhaps a subject's perspective does not consist of propositions, but of a subset of her mental states.<sup>17</sup> For instance, some think that there is a *sui generis* kind of mental state called a *seeming*. According to a phenomenal conservative variant of perspectivism, a subject's perspective consist of the totality of her seeming-states at a time, or over a period of time. Or, it might consist of the totality of mental states that are phenomenally conscious.<sup>18</sup> Note though that even views that think of perspectives as consisting of propositions typically take them to be fixed by some class of mental states. For instance, according to a dominant form of evidentialist internalism, one's evidence supervenes on one's non-factive mental states.<sup>19</sup> Externalists might think instead that one's perspective is fixed by the mental state of knowledge, or by mental states that include veridical perceptual states.

Many think that belief comes in degrees, and that we don't always represent a candidate fact as either obtaining or not obtaining, even in cases in which we have some view of the matter. One might think that perspectives either are, or at least give rise to, probability functions. For instance, on many views the correct subjective norm does not tell one to block shaft 1 in *Miners* precisely because it is not likely enough on a relevant probability function that the miners are all in shaft 1. On one view, a subject's perspective is her subjective credence function. Or, perhaps we should look to credences one ought to have, to those a reasonable subject in one's position would have, or to evidential probability.<sup>20</sup>

Though there are significant differences, all of the conceptions of perspectives outlined have important features in common. Perspectives are closely connected with some class of *mental states*: indeed, it is precisely because a class of mental states gives rise to a subject's perspective that perspectives are constrained by what is present to an agent's mind. Second, perspectives are *representational*. According to many views, a perspective is a set of true propositions corresponding to a subset of the facts – namely, those facts that the subject has access to (e.g. those constituting her evidence, her reasons, or her knowledge). And mental states like seemings have propositional, representational contents. Further, even a probability function can be seen as a degreed representation of the world.

However one thinks of perspectives, they can be *incomplete*: not all facts are present to one's perspective. And however one thinks of perspectives, they can be *misleading*. Even if one's perspective consists exclusively of true propositions, a body of truths can support or make likely falsehoods. For instance, if many normally reliable testifiers I have no reason to distrust tell me that the miners are all in shaft 2, then true (and known) propositions regarding what these testifiers tell me can make likely the falsehood that the miners are all in shaft 2.

Just about all views that endorse subjective oughts in response to cases like *Miners* appeal to perspectivist norms. According to a prevalent way of thinking, what we subjectively ought to do is maximize some quantity, where that quantity is a function of

- (i) a probability function, and
- (ii) an objective value function.

<sup>17</sup> Pollock and Cruz (1999) think that some reasons are mental states, while others are propositional.

<sup>18</sup> Cf Sepielli (2014), who also uses the term 'perspective' (p. 524).

<sup>19</sup> E.g. Conee and Feldman (2004).

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Williamson (2000) for evidential probabilities.

According to a prominent class of views, one subjectively ought to choose the action that maximizes expected value (or an action among those with highest expected values) by the lights of the relevant probability function, a function that is fixed by (or identical to) one's perspective. For instance, according to Jackson's (1991) consequentialism, one ought to maximize expected moral utility. According to Parfit (1988), the subjectively right act is one that maximizes expected goodness.<sup>21</sup> I will try to set aside debates about what form perspectivist norms should take. Instead, I will sketch what I take to be a fundamental problem for any perspectivist norm, in so far as that norm is offered in response to the challenge for more objectivist norms raised above.

In what follows I will outline an alternative diagnosis of why the kinds of objectivist norms we began with fail to map out an important part of normative space, and in particular of why they give rise to the problem of luck. The diagnosis points to a distinctive outlook on a more subjective kind of normativity. Why is it that in *Miners* you can only choose what is best by luck? Begin with the following observation. In the situation described it is just not feasible for you to make a choice in a way that is sensitive to the location of the miners. I will think about feasible ways of choosing (acting, and believing) in terms of feasible dispositions. The core of the problem, then, is that any feasible disposition that manifests in the situation described as choosing to fully block one of the shafts issues in tragic choices across a range of cases in which various contingencies of the actual case are not held fixed. Hence, choosing to fully block one of the shafts cannot be a manifestation of a good enough disposition. To fully understand the more subject-directed dimension of normative assessment we are after we must focus not on a subject's perspectives, but on which ways of choosing, acting, and believing are feasible for her.

The feasibility diagnosis is an alternative to a perspectivist diagnosis on which the source of the problem is that sometimes the application conditions of more objectivist norms lie outside our perspectives. The fundamental reason why the problem of luck arises for a wide range of norms is not because of limited perspectives, but because of limits on what dispositions we can feasibly manifest. To argue for the feasibility diagnosis, we will need to get clearer on the kind of luck at issue, which I take to be closely connected with creditable normative success.

Facts about perspectives and those about feasible dispositions are intertwined in many ways. Indeed, deceptively so. Facts about epistemic access often explain the feasibility, or lack thereof, of manifesting certain kinds of dispositions. For instance, the fact that you don't know where the miners are explains why it is not feasible to make a choice in a way that tracks their whereabouts across a portion of modal space and hence, why managing to save all of them would be merely lucky. Indeed, the best feasible dispositions are often sensitive to our perspectives.<sup>22</sup> For instance, the best we can do may be to roughly proportion our beliefs to our evidence (though, as I will argue, sometimes even that is not feasible). We often manage to track or be sensitive to how things stand with respect to some domain of facts by being sensitive to our own representations of those facts. However, I will argue that the perspectivist diagnosis of why objectivist norms are inadequate doesn't get to the heart of the matter. Further, perspectivism forces us to draw the conclusion that the problem we started out with is unsolvable: just as it is sometimes not feasible to track facts about the whereabouts of objects in space, it is sometimes not feasible to track facts about one's

<sup>21</sup> Alternatively, one might propose, for instance, that one ought to choose what is subjectively most likely to maximize actual value. Such a proposal has come under many attacks (e.g. Parfit (1988), Jackson (1991)). For an overview and criticism of various proposals, see H. M. Smith (2010).

<sup>22</sup> Not always though: I'm impressed by the mounting empirical evidence on how much of our mental processing happens below the level of consciousness. The relationship between perspectives and the conscious mind is not straightforward, but much of the subconscious mind is no more accessible than the external world.

perspective. As a result, in some situations one can only conform to perspectivist norms by luck or fluke. The problem of luck starts to look unsolvable.

I will now argue that the perspectivist diagnosis of the problem of luck is not ultimately correct.

### 3 | THE FEASIBILIST DIAGNOSIS

A diagnosis of why a wide range of norms is susceptible to the problem of luck is best made against an understanding of what such luck involves. What we need is a general account of what it takes for a normative success – or any success of an agent, for that matter – to not be merely lucky in the relevant sense. Such an account should explain why the problem of luck arises for a wide range of norms, whether norms governing choices, actions, or mental states. I take this to rule out a view, often gestured at in the literature on moral luck, that cashes out luck in terms of control, notions like intentionality being brought in. Setting aside other problems, it is difficult to see how such control-based accounts could apply to belief.

It is commonly assumed that the main alternative is a modal account on which an event is not lucky if it occurs in every case, or at least in most cases, within a certain portion of modal space. The best-known view takes the relevant portion of modal space to consist of cases that are modally close to the case under assessment, modal closeness being understood in terms of similarity.<sup>23</sup> According to a familiar modal account, one's success is not lucky just in case one succeeds in every (or at least most) modally nearby case in which certain conditions obtain. When it comes to belief, these conditions are often taken to include the subject deploying the same belief-forming method.

While I am sympathetic to a broadly modal account, I do not think the simple modal account gives us what we need. The kind of luck we are interested in is intricately connected with whether a success is *creditable* to an agent.<sup>24</sup> Creditability for a success, in turn, involves a kind of responsibility for it. However, the simple modal account provides neither necessary nor sufficient conditions on such responsibility.

Consider a 5-year old attempting to bake a cake. Assume that the child's father corrects everything she does, taking some ingredients out of the bowl while adding others in. If the child's father is very diligent, then the cake may well be edible in all modally close cases, even holding fixed the child's haphazard method. There may be a perfectly good sense in which it is not merely by fluke or luck that the resulting cake is edible, but it seems clear that its edibility is not suitably connected with the actions of the child. It is not to her credit. A related problem with the simple modal account of luck has been persuasively spelled out by Ernest Sosa over the years: the fact that something could very easily have interfered with one's success need not make the success less creditable. For instance, the fact that a gust of wind could very easily have blown an archer's arrow off its course does not make the success of hitting the bullseye less creditable to the archer (e.g. Sosa 2007). These points are two sides of the same coin: the modal robustness of a success can be gained or lost in ways that have little to do with credit.

<sup>23</sup> Pritchard (2005, 2006), Lackey (2008), and Coffman (2015) all assume the relevant cases to be modally close. See Pritchard (2005, 2006) for a defence of a modal account of luck. Lackey (2008) also contrasts the modal and control accounts, arguing against both, but she only considers the kind of modal account Pritchard defends. See also Coffman (2015) for criticism.

<sup>24</sup> I am inclined to think that the kind of luck ruled out by knowledge is of a different kind, and does not involve being creditable for either true belief or for knowledge itself.



Creditable success involves a kind of responsibility, which requires some sort of connection between the success and the agent. Further, this connection must be such as to rule out a kind of luck. To me this suggests the following starting point. A success is creditable to an agent when it depends in the right manner on the agent's way of choosing, acting, or believing. Talk of ways here is just a placeholder for something playing a given theoretical role. In my view certain dispositions manifested by the agent are well-suited to play this role. Minimally, these must be dispositions of *the agent*, and hence, properties she has.<sup>25</sup> Since they manifest themselves, they are not merely latent properties, but ones at play on the particular occasion. Their manifestations are or constitute mental events and actions with causal powers. And we can ask how successful manifestations of these dispositions are in various counterfactual circumstances, across a relevant portion of modal space. Hence, we can inquire into whether the connection between the dispositions and the success is modally robust in a way that rules out the kind of luck at issue.

My proposal, then, is that for a success to not be merely lucky in a way connected with credit, there must be a suitable dependence between dispositions manifested by the agent – her way of choosing, acting, or believing – and the relevant success. For the purposes of this paper I will largely leave open how this dependence is to be cashed out, though I do assume the correct account to be broadly modal. Elsewhere I defend an explanationist account.<sup>26</sup> According to this account, there must be a sufficiently invariant, modally robust generalization tracing a relation of dependence between the dispositions manifested by the agent and the success in question, a generalization that explains the token success on this occasion. For instance, it is not merely lucky in this sense that a child baked an edible cake just in case her success is explained, via a sufficiently invariant generalisation, by her way of baking the cake.

More generally, I suggest that not being a matter of fluke or luck is a matter of depending on something in a suitably modally robust manner. For instance, it is not merely by fluke that the Covid rate in a given district is so low, because the low Covid rate depends in a modally robust manner on the inhabitants having been vaccinated. It is worth noting that robustly depending on something is not tantamount to being modally robust. Indeed, the low Covid rate could be modally fragile, due to the modal fragility of the inhabitants having been vaccinated. Consider also the following case, which will provide a helpful analogy later on. Let us assume that the meanings of our words depend on how they are used. But as facts about use shift from one possible world (or time) to another, so do meanings. In fact, many of our words could very easily have had slightly different meanings: perhaps, for instance, the extension of 'table' could very easily have been just slightly different. Hence, facts about the (exact) meanings of words are highly fragile, and not at all modally robust. But does it follow that it is a fluke that our words mean what they do? It is no fluke, for meanings depends in systematic ways on how words are used. They are not created by gods flipping coins. There are presumably systematic, invariant generalisations connecting values of use-variables with values of meaning-variables, even if we have no access to what these generalisations are.

In what follows the only assumption I will draw on is that creditable success requires a modally robust dependence between the agent's way of choosing (acting, believing) and the success in question. Hence, non-lucky, creditable conformity to a given norm requires manifesting

<sup>25</sup> Further conditions on these dispositions may be needed in order to get the kind of responsibility required by credit, especially if it involves a kind of accountability. For instance, a psychopath, sociopath or child may in acting manifest dispositions that are genuinely theirs. Despite this, they cannot be held fully accountable for their actions. I leave open whether being creditable for an action requires responsibility in the sense of accountability.

<sup>26</sup> See Lasonen-Aarnio (forthcoming c).

dispositions that track what one ought to do, according to the norm, across a portion of modal space. It follows that whether or not a subject is in a position to conform to a given norm in a non-lucky, creditworthy manner depends on what the menu of feasible alternative dispositions is. If it is not feasible to manifest a disposition that conformity to the norm robustly depends on, then creditworthy conformity is out of reach.

Consider again a subject in *Miners* who chooses to block shaft 1. This is objectively the best course of action, for all of the miners are saved. But assuming that we are dealing with a somewhat ordinary human agent, they are in no position to conform to the norm *Choose the best!* save by luck. And here is why. The subject doesn't know where the miners are, and her evidence favours neither the hypothesis that they are in shaft 1 nor the hypothesis that they are in shaft 2. Because of her epistemic uncertainty, it is not feasible to make a choice in a way that is sensitive to the location of the miners. It is not feasible to manifest dispositions that manifest as different choices depending on which of the two shafts the miners are in. Any feasible way of choosing – that is, any feasible alternative disposition – that manifests as fully blocking one shaft will indiscriminately manifest across a wide range of relevant cases as blocking the wrong shaft, and letting the one containing all 10 miners flood. This is why in *Miners* it is only possible to conform to norms like *Choose the best!* by luck.

Feasibility is a kind of possibility.<sup>27</sup> There are limits both to which dispositions a subject can have in the first place, and to which ones are alternatives in the sense that they can manifest as an available choice (action, doxastic state) in the situation at hand. For instance, it is not feasible to have dispositions that manifest in using safety belts only on car rides that end in crashes, or buying insurance only for trips that end up involving some sort of calamity. It is not feasible for climbers to only check their knots when they have mis-tied them. Or, consider the fact that our total evidence is sometimes misleading. We couldn't be disposed to only take into account total evidence making a proposition *p* very likely when that evidence is not misleading regarding whether *p*. In general, we cannot be disposed to be sensitive to our perspectives only when those perspectives are neither incomplete nor misleading regarding a given subject matter. And even if it is feasible to have a disposition, it may not be feasible to manifest it in one's current situation. One might have some perfectly good dispositions that cannot be manifested because their stimulus conditions don't obtain. For instance, if I have a clear perception as of a cat on the street, I can form a belief by manifesting dispositions that are not available if I have no perceptual experience as of a cat, or if the cat is surrounded by dense fog, its form barely visible. If I know where the miners are I can make a choice by manifesting dispositions that are simply not alternatives if I am uncertain about their whereabouts.

According to the *feasibilist diagnosis* the problem of luck arises for a wide range of norms because in some situations it is not feasible to choose, act, or believe in a way that tracks the application conditions of these norms. Ultimately, the problem of luck arises not because of limited perspectives, but because of limits of feasibility. The feasibility diagnosis points to an alternative approach to seeking more subject-directed norms and assessments: instead of taking into account limited perspectives, we need to take into account the limits of feasibility. Later on I will outline such feasibility norms.

At this point one might wonder: are the perspectivist and feasibility diagnoses really alternatives? Isn't the reason why you cannot track the application conditions of the norm *Choose the best!* in *Miners* that your perspective is limited? Feasibilism often mimics perspectivism because our perspectives tend to constrain what dispositions it is feasible for us to manifest, and the best

<sup>27</sup> For a fuller account of the kind of possibility at issue, see Lasonen-Aarnio (forthcoming c).

feasible dispositions are often sensitive to our perspectives – to how we, or our evidence, represent the world as being. Indeed, in many paradigm cases, it appears that our only way of tracking how things are in the world is by tracking our own perspectives. However, sometime it is not feasible to manifest dispositions that track how things stand with our own perspectives, whether we think of perspectives in terms of what we have epistemic access to, or in terms of a select class of mental states. I take up this claim in the next section, in which I argue that perspectivism does not solve the problem of luck.

Before doing so, I want to point to an important distinction between *epistemic* and *dispositional* discrimination. Roughly, one epistemically discriminates between cases of kinds **F** and **G** just in case one knows which kind of case one is in. One dispositionally discriminates between these kinds of cases by manifesting a disposition (or dispositions) that manifests as different beliefs, choices, or actions depending on whether one is in a case of kind **F** or **G**. Epistemic and dispositional discrimination often go hand in hand, one explaining the other. In *Miners* there are no feasible dispositions the subject could manifest that discriminate between cases in which the miners are in one shaft and those in which they are in the other shaft precisely because they lack epistemic access to which shaft the miners are in. Whichever dispositions a human subject manifests by choosing to block shaft 1, those dispositions indiscriminately manifest across a range of relevant cases as tragically choosing to let the shaft the miners are all in flood. Hence, one can neither epistemically nor dispositionally discriminate between the relevant cases. Nevertheless, it is important to keep these two kinds of discrimination apart. For instance, I know that I am not plugged into the Matrix so that things seem just as they do to me now, but I cannot dispositionally discriminate between my actual case and a counterfactual Matrix case. My doxastic dispositions would manifest as believing that I am not in the Matrix even if I was. Hence, epistemic discrimination does not entail dispositional discrimination. Though I lack space to argue that here, I very much doubt whether dispositional discrimination entails epistemic discrimination. For instance, some dispositions operating below the level of consciousness might be able to discriminate between cases, issuing in different choices, actions, and even beliefs, even if one is in no position to know which kind of case one is in.

Sometimes we are in no position to dispositionally discriminate between cases that differ when it comes to our own perspectives. In particular, sometimes there are no feasible alternative dispositions that issue in different choices, actions, or beliefs depending on how things are with our own perspectives. This is why the problem of luck arises for perspectivist norms.

#### 4 | REVENGE OF THE MINERS

According to the access diagnosis, the norms we started out with are susceptible to the problem of luck because we don't always have access to their application conditions. But motivating perspectivism by appeal to the access diagnosis faces a problem that will strike many epistemologists as rather obvious by now. The problem has its source in the observation that we sometimes lack access to the application conditions of perspectivist norms. However, what is at stake is not just the ability of perspectivism to escape the problem of luck: several epistemologists have relied on the access diagnosis to argue that *no* norm is immune to the problem of luck.

We need to tread carefully here. I argued that the ultimate reason why the problem of luck arises is not that our perspectives are limited. It is not that we lack access to a range of facts. Rather, the ultimate source of the problem is that there are limits on what ways of choosing, acting, and believing are feasible in a given situation. This is so whether we think of perspectives

in terms of epistemic access, or in some other way. It remains to be seen whether the problem of luck is inescapable. I agree, however, that perspectivist norms do not escape it, and it is instructive to see why. Even though it is often motivated precisely by appeal to cases like *Miners* involving structural uncertainty, perspectivism is no panacea to the challenge raised by such cases. That is because sometimes it is not feasible to track facts about our own perspectives.

But first, it is instructive to see why the access diagnosis creates trouble for perspectivism, at least if perspectivism is motivated by its putative ability to escape the problem of luck. Doing so allows reiterating why the access diagnosis leads to the conclusion that the problem of luck is inescapable. As will become clear, I think such a conclusion is premature.

The problem, of course, is that sometimes we don't have access to the application conditions of perspectivist norms. Perspectives don't always accurately represent facts about themselves. A perspective is part of the world. Just as there are facts regarding where miners are located, there are facts about just what one's perspective consists in, and about what one ought to do by the lights of a perspectivist norm. For instance, there are facts about what we believe, what we know, and what evidence we have. And one's perspective on such facts can be incomplete or even misleading.<sup>28</sup> Let a perspective be *transparent* to itself just in case it has full access to facts about what it consists in. In so far as a perspective is a set of propositions, transparency requires that one's perspective accurately represents exactly what this set of propositions is. It requires both a claim of positive and negative access. If  $p$  is part of one's perspective, then it is part of one's perspective that  $p$  is part of one's perspective. And if  $p$  is not part of one's perspective, then it is part of one's perspective that  $p$  is not part of one's perspective. Such access conditions are extremely strong.<sup>29</sup>

It is blatantly clear that transparency fails given externalist takes on perspectives, such as a view on which an agent's perspective consist of all and only the propositions she knows. I can fail to know  $p$ , without being in any position to know this. But internalism as such provides no guarantee against failures of transparency. For instance, empirical evidence confirms that we are very far from even having positive access to our own beliefs.<sup>30</sup> Further, the transparency of one's perspective as such does not guarantee access to the recommendations of perspectivist norms, not even if one knows what the correct norms are. To make the problem vivid, consider the following case, in which one's access to mathematical facts about expectations is incomplete:

#### *Another Mining Disaster*

You often find yourself in situations involving mining disasters. To prepare, you spend your evenings analyzing particular scenarios, and calculating the expected values of various actions. You now find out that there has been another accident. Luckily, just last night you calculated the expected values of the available actions in the very situation you now face. But alas, you have forgotten the exact results of those calculations, which were rather complex. There is no time for new calculations. If you don't act quickly, all miners will die with certainty. You face a choice between actions A, B, and C. You remember the following facts: one of A or B has the highest expected

<sup>28</sup> For a seminal discussion of luminosity, see Williamson (2000); see also Srinivasan (2015). For discussions of problems in this ballpark for theories of subjective oughts in particular, see H. M. Smith (1988, 2010), Sepielli (2014), Hawthorne and Srinivasan (2013), Kagan (2018), and Spencer and Wells (2019).

<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere (forthcoming c) I have raised doubts about whether they even suffice for transparency.

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. Wilson (2002). H. M. Smith (2010) also discusses problems for theories of subjective oughts (or "subjective rightness") raised by the fact that we don't always have access to our beliefs.

value (10), while the other one has the lowest expected value (0). You know, and are certain, that C has quite a good expected value (9). What should you do?<sup>31</sup>

I do not think the problem for perspectivist norms created by such cases assumes the access diagnosis of the problem of luck. What we have looks like a version of the miners problem: you would be positively assessable for choosing option C, even though you know that doing so does not maximize expected value. There is a parallel problem of luck here: though you could make a choice that in fact maximizes expected value, your conformity to the norm *Maximize expected value!* would be merely lucky. Correspondingly, in the situation at hand it looks like you cannot genuinely follow or be guided by this norm. Even were you to conform to it, you could not be credited or praised for your normative success.

Several epistemologists have argued on the basis of anti-transparency considerations that *no* plausible norm is immune to the problem of luck.<sup>32</sup> For any norm, what the norm tells one to do on a particular occasion will depend on how things stand with respect to some domain of facts, or multiple such domains. These might be facts about which actions have the best consequences, about what is true, about what one knows, or about one's experiences or seemings. But, it is argued, no domain of facts is transparent. And so there is no norm that is immune to the problem of luck. We are sometimes in no position to know whether the application conditions of a norm obtain. And in such circumstances, it is argued, we are in no position to conform to the norm save by luck.

However, I have argued that the access diagnosis is not ultimately correct. Indeed, the access diagnosis prematurely leads to seeing the problem of luck as unsolvable. Further, it leaves open an escape strategy for the perspectivist. They may simply deny that we should think either of perspectives, or of non-lucky conformity to norms, in terms of epistemic access. Consider the following view. The problem with objectivist norms is not that we lack access to their application conditions, but that these application conditions concern matters beyond our own minds. One's perspective consists of some class of mental states. On this alternative mentalist view, the application conditions of perspectivist norms only concern one's mental states, and non-lucky conformity to those norms requires responding in an appropriate way to being in those mental states. One need not engage in deliberation involving beliefs about one's mental states, and about what the correct norms recommend in one's current situation – that is, one need not take an epistemic perspective on one's mental states.

However, I argued above that the ultimate reason why the problem of luck arises is not that certain facts sometimes lie outside our perspectives. Numerous norms face the problem of luck because it is not always feasible to track their application conditions. In such cases a subject's conformity to them cannot depend in a sufficiently modally robust manner on her way of choosing, acting, or believing. Perspectivism does not escape the problem of luck because sometimes it is not feasible to track facts about our own perspectives.

The problem of luck, I argued, arises from limits on what dispositions are feasible alternatives in a given situation. And as far as I can see, there are no necessary entailments of the sort the perspectivist would need between perspectives and feasible dispositions. In particular, mental

<sup>31</sup> Adapted from Kagan (2018), p. 155. Spencer and Wells (2019) discuss a case with a similar structure, *The Fire*. See also H. M. Smith's (1988: 98-99) much earlier discussion of what she calls the 'Problem of Doubt'. And there is, of course, a large literature on related problems having to do with normative uncertainty.

<sup>32</sup> See e.g. Srinivasan (2015) and Hughes (2018).

differences between cases can outstrip our abilities of dispositional discrimination.<sup>33</sup> Consider, for instance, a series of cases over which one gradually transitions from one experiential state to another. Perhaps, for instance, in the first case  $c_1$  one has a clear perception as of a cat some distance away on the road, and in  $c_n$  one has no such experience, but an experience as of a road covered with fog. As we move along the series of cases, the fog gets denser, so that by the end the cat is no longer in sight. At some point in the series, one no longer has an experience as of a cat. Now consider a candidate perspectivist norm according which one ought to believe there is a cat just in case one has an experience as of a cat. Is there any reason to think that, in a situation in which one *barely* has this experience, it will always be feasible to manifest a belief-forming disposition tracking whether one has the experience or not?

One of the core points made above was that features of one's situation constrain the menu of feasible alternative dispositions. For instance, if I know where the miners are, then I can make a choice by manifesting dispositions that I cannot manifest when ignorant of their whereabouts. Similarly, whether a disposition that suitably tracks features of my perceptual experience is available for me to manifest depends on the nature of my experience. In a borderline case of barely having an experience as of a cat, the cat being almost completely immersed in the fog, it may not be feasible to manifest a disposition that tracks whether or not I have an experience as of a cat in the first place. I see no reason to think that we must always be able to dispositionally discriminate between cases that differ when it comes to the contents of our own minds. Indeed, the perspectivist would need to establish a necessary harmony between what dispositions are feasible, on the one hand, and the repertoire of mental states we can be in, on the other.

For any norm, what the norm tells one to do on a particular occasion depends on how things stand with respect to some domain (or domains) of facts. Conforming to a perspectivist norm in a way that is creditable to the agent requires manifesting dispositions that track how things stand with respect to one's perspective across a portion of modal space. The problem is that sometimes it is not feasible to manifest such dispositions.

However, even if we could always track facts about our own mental states, this would not guarantee being able to track the application conditions of perspectivist norms. Recall the problem raised by *Another Mining Disaster* for the norm *Maximise expected value!*, where expectations are calculated by the lights of a probability function fixed by one's mental states. Even if one could track one's own mental states, one might not be able to track facts about expected value.

Perspectivism does not solve the problem of luck. This is only an issue, of course, if a given form of perspectivism is motivated by its putative ability to solve it. And indeed, the standard response to the kinds of observations made at the outset regarding how objectivist norms leave uncharted an important part of normative space has been to seek perspectivist norms. It is important to acknowledge, however, that perspectivism could be motivated in other ways. Further, the main claim I have argued for above is that perspectivism gets the diagnosis of the problem wrong: the problem is not that objectivist norms fail to take into account the limits of our perspectives, but that they fail to take into account the limits of feasibility. There is a lot at stake here. In the remainder of this paper I will gesture toward an alternative, feasibility, way of thinking about a more subjective kind of normativity.

<sup>33</sup> The reader might here be reminded of the speckled hen problem, though note that my points are not restricted to contents of experience. For the speckled hen problem see Chisholm (1942), Pace (2010, 2017), Sosa (2003), Bonjour and Sosa (2003), Markie (2009), Schellenberg (2016), and Smithies (2019).

## 5 | FEASIBILISM

According to feasibilism, the notion of feasibility, not that of a perspective, is key to uncovering the more subjective kind of normativity we need across different domains. But what form should feasibilist norms take? In my view the most promising norms urge manifesting dispositions that compare favourably with the best feasible alternatives. I explain and spell out the feasibilist normative framework in more detail elsewhere. The aim in this section is to give the reader a general idea.<sup>34</sup>

Let me first make a few brief remarks about the role of dispositions in my account. We need to assess doxastic states, choices, and actions in a manner that is sensitive to the way in which those doxastic states are formed and retained, the choices are made, and the actions performed. The epistemology literature is replete with proposals for how to understand assessments sensitive to ways of forming beliefs: a belief is formed in a good way – and hence, justified, rational, or reasonable – if it is properly based on sufficiently good, undefeated reasons or evidence, if it is the output of a reliable process, or if it is an exercise of epistemic competence. On my view the dispositions that manifest as one's  $\varphi$ 'ing (coming to believe something, retaining a belief, making a choice, performing an action) are best suited to play this theoretical role of ways.<sup>35</sup> The dispositions at issue pertain to the psychological level of reality, broadly understood. I simply assume here that when an action or mental act (such as a doxastic transition) is attributable to an agent, then even if it is atypical for her and may not reflect her character, it is a manifestation of some of her dispositions.<sup>36</sup>

My project in this paper has been to discuss how the kinds of norms we started out with should be supplemented. Recall that each of these norms made reference to some valuable success. The thought is that a more subject-directed normativity is gotten by looking at whether a choice, action, or doxastic state is a manifestation of dispositions conducive to such successes. Moreover, given the feasibilist diagnosis of the problem of luck, such norms had better take into account the limits of feasibility. Putting these thoughts together, my favoured feasibilist norms urge manifesting dispositions that are among the most success-conducive feasible alternatives. A choice, for instance, is assessed positively just in case it is a manifestation of dispositions that are among the most success-conducive feasible ones.

The basic feasibilist framework can be implemented in very different ways, depending on one's favoured valuable success. In the case of a truth norm, for instance, it is truth; in the case of a knowledge norm, it is knowledge.<sup>37</sup> In the case of the norm *Choose the best!*, the relevant values are the values of choices, thought of in terms of their consequences. Applied to *Miners*, for instance,

<sup>34</sup> For more details, see Lasonen-Aarnio (2021) and Lasonen-Aarnio (forthcoming b, c, d).

<sup>35</sup> Note though that the basic structure I will outline is compatible with different accounts of ways: in principle, the theoretical role played by dispositions could be played by something else, such as *methods*, *processes*, or *rules*, assuming that one could give a satisfactory account of their feasibility.

<sup>36</sup> Hence, I do not claim that actions attributable to an agent always arise out of *habit*, or that we only ever do things we are generally disposed to do. For more discussion, see Lasonen-Aarnio (2021). Note also that talk of a single disposition is a useful idealization. It would be more realistic to assume that one's  $\varphi$ 'ing is the joint manifestation of multiple dispositions.

<sup>37</sup> Since I am sympathetic to a knowledge first starting point, my favoured feasibilist norm in epistemology urges manifesting dispositions that are among the most knowledge-conducive feasible ones. I have argued that such assessments explains a large class of data that has been used to support internalism in epistemology. For how my view solves the New Evil Demon problem, see Lasonen-Aarnio (forthcoming a) and Lasonen-Aarnio (forthcoming c). For defeat, see Lasonen-Aarnio (2010, 2021, forthcoming c). For suspension of judgment and broadly consequentialist epistemology, see Lasonen-Aarnio (forthcoming c, d).

the value at issue is a function of the number of human lives saved. Choices will be evaluated very differently from a moral perspective depending on whether the more objectivist moral norms are consequentialist, deontological, or something else entirely.

Hence, doing well by the kinds of feasilist norms I defend is a matter of manifesting dispositions that compare favourably with the best feasible ones. Such relative goodness is a matter of relative conduciveness to value. I understand such conduciveness to value to be a function of the values of the manifestations of these dispositions across a relevant portion of modal space.<sup>38</sup> So, for instance, a disposition is conducive to knowledge if it manifests as knowledge-constituting belief across a relevant portion of modal space. And a disposition *D* is more conducive to knowledge than a disposition *D'* if its manifestations have more value, given a knowledge-centric value function, than the manifestations of *D'*, across a relevant portion of modal space.

What is the relevant portion of modal space across which feasible alternative dispositions are to be compared? I concede at the outset that feasilist assessments are somewhat malleable and context-dependent: what counts as relevant can shift depending on our focus and context of assessment. Nevertheless, there are general structural points to be made. Relevance should not be understood in terms of a relation that any situation trivially bears to itself (to a maximal degree). Hence, relevance is not a matter of *relevant similarity*. The situation under assessment might be deviant and hence, it – and ones very much like it – may have little or no relevance when assessing a subject's choice, action, or doxastic state. For instance, a subject who perceives a real-looking fake tree in a forest, or who experiences an intricately crafted perceptual illusion with no hints that she is being deceived, can still be manifesting the best feasible dispositions.

Here is a toy model for how to think about relevance. We consider some features of a case as peculiar to it, while holding others fixed. For instance, when assessing a subject in *Miners* we hold some features, largely given by the description of the case, as fixed: that there are several miners trapped in one of two shafts, that floodwaters are rising, that all the miners in the blocked shaft will be saved and that those in the flooded shaft will die, that if both shafts are flooded one miner will die in any case, that the subject must make a choice without much delay, that they cannot communicate with the miners, and so forth. Other features we consider to be peculiarities of the case at hand: the precise location of the miners, as well as various irrelevant features such as the colour of the sandbags. We consider, then, a portion of modal space in which the features we are holding fixed obtain – we could think of these features as fixing a *type* of situation – while letting other features vary in somewhat typical ways. The goodness or success-conduciveness of a disposition is a matter of how well it does across such a portion of modal space.

The starting point of this paper was the observation that objectivist norms leave uncharted an important portion of normative space. They give rise to cases of merely lucky conformity and of positively assessable non-conformity. For instance, in some situations one can only conform to the norm *Choose the best!* by luck. And in those very situations we want to positively assess choices that do not conform to the norm. I have offered a feasilist diagnosis of the problem of luck. Further, the kinds of feasilist norms I have outlined explain why subjects who fail to choose the best option are sometimes positively assessable. As we saw, the goodness of a disposition is always relative to some value function. Above I assumed that in *Miners*, the objective value of a choice is a linear function of the number of human lives saved (indeed, this is also assumed by

<sup>38</sup> More precisely: the goodness of a disposition is given by a *score*, which is fixed by the weighting of situations according to relevance, and a value function. The value function assigns values (which may be positive or negative) to manifestations of the disposition. On a natural view the score of a disposition is a weighted average of the values of its manifestations in relevant situations, the weightings being by relevance.



perspectivist views on which one should let both shafts flood halfway because doing so maximizes expected value). Assuming such a value function, we can provide a feasilist explanation of why one would be positively assessable in *Miners* for letting both shafts flood halfway, and criticisable for making the objectively best choice: only the former choice would manifest the best feasible dispositions.

Consider again a human subject in *Miners* who chooses to block shaft 1. This is objectively the best course of action, for all of the miners are saved. But assuming that we are dealing with a human subject, could such a choice be a manifestation of good dispositions, dispositions that are relatively conducive to saving human lives? The subject doesn't know where the miners are, and her evidence favours neither the hypothesis that they are in shaft 1 nor the hypothesis that they are in shaft 2. It is not feasible in the situation described to manifest a disposition that is sensitive to the location of the miners, one that would manifest as different choices depending on which shaft they are in. We could also talk about dispositional discrimination here: there are no feasible dispositions the subject could manifest that discriminate between cases in which the miners are in one shaft and those in which they are in the other shaft. Whatever dispositions a human subject manifests by choosing to block shaft 1, those dispositions indiscriminately manifest across a range of relevant cases as tragically choosing to let the shaft the miners are all in flood with water. Though it is not feasible to track the whereabouts of the miners, it is feasible to make a choice that saves 9 lives across all cases. Uniformly saving 9 lives is better than haphazardly saving all 10 in roughly half of the relevant cases, but making a choice that results in all 10 miners being killed in the other half. Choosing to fully block one shaft cannot be a manifestation of a good enough disposition, for the best feasible dispositions manifest as choosing to let both shafts flood halfway.

It is important to note that making feasilist assessments does not require having access to the exact dispositions manifested by agents. We often have a good grasp of the kinds of dispositions that are feasible for a human agent in a given situation. If none of the best, or close enough to the best, feasible dispositions would manifest as choosing (believing, acting) as the subject does, this is all we need to know in order to correctly negatively assess her choice (belief, action).

I want to emphasise, however, that my aim here is not to reject perspectivist norms *tout court*. A perspectivist norm need not be motivated by the perspectivist diagnosis of the problem of luck. Assume that we have some other reason to accept a norm like *Maximise expected value!*. I argued that the problems of merely lucky conformity and positively assessable non-conformity will arise for this norm as well. And this is where even the perspectivist should, I urge, deploy feasilist resources. In particular, feasilism can explain why a subject in *Another mining disaster* can be positively assessable despite not conforming to the perspectivist norm *Maximise expected value!*. Recall the case described: you face a choice between actions A, B, and C. You remember that one of A or B has the highest expected value (10), while the other one has the lowest expected value (0). You know, and are certain, that C has quite a good expected value (9), though not as high as that of the best of the three options (A or B). It is not, of course, trivial how we should think of dispositions that are conducive to maximizing expected value. But on a somewhat natural view, choices with values that are at least close to those with the highest expected values are better than ones with values that are significantly lower. It is feasible for you to manifest a disposition that, across relevant cases, manifests as opting for the choice (in this case action C) that you know to have a rather high expected value, not too far from the best. Or, you can venture a guess between A and B, but any such disposition would manifest as choosing the action with the lowest expected value across a significant range of relevant cases. It looks like the feasible dispositions most conducive to maximizing expected value manifest as choosing C, which knowably does not maximise

expected value. This is how the perspectivist could deploy feasilist resources to deal with cases like *Another mining disaster*.

My aims so far have been twofold. First, I have argued that the correct diagnosis of why more objectivist norms are inadequate on their own, giving rise to the problem of luck, is feasilist, not perspectivist. Second, I have outlined a feasilist approach to seeking a more subject-directed kind of normativity.<sup>39</sup>

At this point the reader may be wondering whether there is any reason to think that feasilism escapes the kind of revenge problem that perspectivism faces. It bears emphasis that my overall case for feasilism does not rest on its ability to solve the problem of luck. Nevertheless, I do think feasilism makes some progress on it. Before concluding, I will say how.

## 6 | FEASIBILISM AND THE PROBLEM OF LUCK

Some think that the revenge problem faced by perspectivism is but one manifestation of an inescapable fact. For any norm, we will sometimes be doomed to either violating it, or to conforming to it by sheer luck. Such conclusions, however, normally rest on the access diagnosis. But I argued that neither the access diagnosis, nor a more general perspectivist diagnosis, get at the very heart of the problem. Given the feasilist diagnosis I have defended, it remains an open question whether the problem of luck is inescapable.

Consider the feasilist norm *Manifest dispositions that are among the best!*. The best dispositions are those most conducive, in the sense outlined above, to a relevant success. Assume that a subject manifests a disposition  $D_1$  that is among the best feasible ones, thereby conforming to the feasilist norm. Might they still conform to it merely by luck or fluke? One might worry that this could happen in one of two ways. First, it might be merely by luck or fluke that the subject manifests  $D_1$ , rather than some other, norm-violating disposition. Second, one might worry that facts about which dispositions are among the best feasible ones are not themselves modally robust. As a result, might it not be merely by fluke that by manifesting  $D_1$  the subject manifests one of the best feasible dispositions? I will take up these worries in turn.

Consider first cases in which it is merely by luck that a subject manifests  $D_1$ , instead of some other, worse disposition. The first thing to note is that this sort of luck was not why the revenge problem for perspectivism arose. The problem wasn't that one might, for instance, deliberate in a way that reliably leads to choosing the act that maximises expected value, but that one was lucky to deliberate in this way. The problem was much worse: it was that sometimes any feasible way of making a choice will only lead to maximising expected value by luck.

According to the view presented above, a success is creditable to an agent and hence, not merely lucky, just in case it depends in the right manner on dispositions manifested by the agent – on the agent's way of acting, choosing, and believing. Since such credibility involves a kind of responsibility, the dispositions in question must minimally be dispositions of the agent. Further conditions on them might have to be imposed. However, on my view the fact that an agent could easily have failed to manifest a good disposition need not detract from credit. As pointed out above, a success can depend on one's dispositions in a modally robust manner, even if it does not occur robustly. Indeed, the obtaining of the stimulus conditions of a disposition may be highly modally fragile. Similarly for the absence of various masks. As an example, consider a subject who has just

<sup>39</sup> I here leave open the nature of feasilist norms: questions about whether they are prescriptive, evaluative, or something else. I take up these questions in Lasonen-Aarnio (forthcoming b).

enough oxygen to think clearly, but whose good cognitive dispositions could very easily have been masked due to lack of oxygen. In so far as she manifests these good dispositions and her cognitive success depends in the right way on them, the success can be creditable to her. I do not claim that the fragility of manifesting good dispositions is entirely normatively uninteresting. It is plausible, for instance, that more virtuous agents have dispositions that manifest more robustly, under a wider range of circumstances. Nevertheless, I do claim that such robustness does not matter when assessing whether a particular success is creditable to an agent.

Similar points have been made in other debates, such as the debate on morally worthy action. Moral worth is often cashed out in terms of creditable success: when an agent's action is morally worthy, she is creditable for doing the morally right thing.<sup>40</sup> According to a popular view, a right action is morally worthy just in case it is performed for the right reasons, namely, reasons that make the action morally right. But of course, one's acting for those reasons – or indeed, for any reasons – might be highly fragile. There is a debate as to whether this detracts from the moral worth of one's action. I am convinced by arguments made by Julia Markovits (2010) that it does not. Though I do not endorse this view of moral worth – indeed, my account of creditable success within the feasilist framework provides an alternative – that is not, in my view, where the right reasons account falters.<sup>41</sup>

Let me now turn to the second worry. Assume again that a subject manifests  $D_1$ , and that  $D_1$  is among the best feasible dispositions. Even holding fixed the set of feasible alternative dispositions, one might worry that their comparative ordering is not modally robust. On my view the relative goodness of the feasible alternative dispositions is a function of the values of their manifestations across a range of relevant situations. But might facts about what these relevant situations are shift from one world or case to another? If so, the worry is that a subject's conformity to the feasilist norm could be highly modally fragile due to the fact that by manifesting  $D_1$  she flouts the norm across a portion of modal space.

One way of cashing out what the relevant situations are is in terms of the notion of normality: they are somewhat normal instances of a given, possibly contextually determined, type. Such a view is far from obligatory, but considering it is helpful for spelling out the present worry. For while many discussions assume that facts about comparative normality are necessary, several authors have argued that they are contingent: the ordering of worlds or cases by normality depends on contingent features of the world or case one is in.<sup>42</sup> The worry is that due to the contingency of normality, the range of relevant situations across which feasible alternative dispositions are compared is not modally robust, and can shift from one case to another. But then, the worry goes, it might be merely by fluke that by manifesting  $D_1$  one conforms to the feasilist norm. A variant of the objection can be raised irrespective of how relevance is cashed out, as long as the relative goodness of dispositions is not fixed across modal space. Perhaps disposition  $D_1$  is the best, or amongst the best, in my actual case @, but moving almost anywhere in modal space would mean that by manifesting  $D_1$  I would not conform to the feasilist norm. If in a slightly different case I would still have manifested  $D_1$ , but would not thereby have manifested a disposition that is among the best feasible ones, isn't my conformity to the feasilist norm merely lucky?

We must be careful here, for on the account sketched above creditable success is not a matter of succeeding in modally nearby cases. For instance, we can credit an agent for the deliciousness of a

<sup>40</sup> See e.g. Sliwa (2016), Lord (2017), and Singh (2020).

<sup>41</sup> See also Sosa's (2010: 469) discussion of the fragility of an agent's competence.

<sup>42</sup> See e.g. M. Smith (2007) and S. Carter (2019).

cake, even if the oven could very easily have broken – indeed, even if the oven malfunctions almost anywhere else in their modal vicinity. The success can still depend in the right kind of way on the agent's way of going about baking a cake. One could object, however, that the goodness ordering of feasible alternative dispositions is not like any old background conditions that we can keep fixed when making assessments of creditability. If  $D_1$  is not among the best feasible dispositions across a range of cases, then one's conformity to the feasilist norm may not be sufficiently robustly dependent on one's manifesting  $D_1$ . In the end I think the feasilist should concede this. In a context in which we do not keep the goodness ordering of the feasible alternative dispositions fixed, it can be true to say that it was a matter of fluke that one conformed to the feasilist norm. However, that does not show that feasilism makes no progress with the problem of luck.

The first thing to note is that the revenge problem for perspectivism was much simpler. Consider again the perspectivist norm *Maximize expected value!*, and assume that the relevant expectations are expectations by the lights of an evidential probability function. One might worry that facts about evidential support are modally contingent, that the evidential prior probability function is not fixed across modal space. Or one might worry that facts about objective values can shift across modal space. And so one might worry about cases in which these facts are a certain way, but in almost any nearby cases they have shifted. Though I make a choice that maximizes expected value, my way of choosing would not have maximized expected value had these facts been different. However, to raise a revenge problem for perspectivism, we did not need to assume any of this. Even if we hold all of these facts as fixed, in some situations any feasible ways of choosing will result in a choice that maximises expected value by fluke or luck.

Having said that, I think we must concede that if the goodness ordering of feasible dispositions is modally fragile, then there are contexts in which it can be true to say that it was a matter of fluke that one conformed to a feasilist norm. However, I do not think that such contexts are very natural.<sup>43</sup> Consider the following example. Assume that I am disposed to use a given word in a certain way. The way I am disposed to use it in fact matches its meaning. However, the meaning of the word is modally fragile. Now assume that I correctly apply the word on a given occasion, thereby conforming to the norm *Use words in accordance with their meanings!*. Assume that had the meaning of the word been slightly different, I would have used it incorrectly. Does it follow that it is a mere fluke, a matter of luck, that I conform to the above norm? It is quite natural to say that it is not, and in saying this, we simply hold the meaning of the word fixed: holding fixed the meaning of the word, there is a robust dependence between my use-dispositions and the success of using the word in accordance with its meaning. These dispositions track the use called for by the meaning of the word across a wide range of situations. Applying the word correctly on this occasion depends in the right kind of way on my use dispositions. As a result, I am creditable for using the word in accordance with its meaning: my so doing flows from my linguistic dispositions and competence.

The shifting of the comparative ordering of feasible dispositions across modal space is, I contend, very much like the shifting of meanings across modal space. When asking whether my conformity to a feasilist norm was a matter of fluke, or whether I was creditable for so conforming, it is very natural to hold fixed facts about how success-conducive the various feasible alternative dispositions are.

The relationship of dependence between manifesting a disposition  $D_1$  and conforming to the feasilist norm is logically tighter than that involved in a wide range of dependencies that make for non-fluky or non-lucky events and facts. Even if facts about the comparative goodness of

<sup>43</sup> I am grateful to Timothy Williamson for discussion.

the feasible alternative dispositions are contingent, it is very natural to hold such facts fixed when considering whether a subject is creditable for conforming to the feasibility norm. Similarly, it is natural to hold fixed possible contextual facts about just how close to the best a disposition must be in order to count as succeed-conducive enough. Holding fixed such facts, manifesting  $D_1$  logically entails conforming to the feasibility norm. Consider, by contrast, the dependence between the residents of a given district being vaccinated and the district's low Covid rate. The dependence is certainly not a matter of logic: it is perfectly possible, for instance, that the vaccine just happens to be ineffective for almost all of the residents.

Feasibilism makes progress with the problem of luck because in natural contexts there is simply no room for the problem to arise. The problem arose because we sometimes find ourselves in situations in which there is no feasible way of choosing, acting, or believing that suitably tracks norm-conforming choices, actions, or beliefs. But holding fixed normative facts about which dispositions are good enough, there is no gap whatsoever between manifesting a feasible disposition that is in fact among the best and conforming to the feasibility norm. By contrast, such a gap is always there for perspectivist norms, even if we keep fixed a range of facts about values, evidential support relations, etc. Even keeping fixed such facts, in some situations there are no feasible alternative disposition that one's conformity to a perspectivist norm robustly depends on.

Let me wrap up. Judgments about flukiness and luck are context-sensitive, reflecting the context-sensitivity of what makes for a robust enough dependence. It is possible to cook up contexts in which it is true to say that one conforms to a feasibility norm by fluke, and is perhaps even doomed to do so. It was objected that facts about the comparative goodness of feasible alternative dispositions can be modally fragile. If this is right, then focusing on this fact can create such contexts. But, I argued, such contexts are not very natural. Indeed, when discussing the revenge problem for perspectivism, I was implicitly holding a range of analogous facts (e.g. about evidential support relations, values, and so forth) fixed. If a given disposition that one manifests is among the best feasible ones, then holding fixed these facts, by manifesting it one necessarily conforms to the feasibility norm. And so it cannot be a matter of fluke that by manifesting a disposition  $D_1$ , one conforms to the feasibility norm.

## 7 | CONCLUSIONS

A wide range of norms, on their own, seem to provide us with impoverished normative resources. For instance, in *Miners* we want to positively assess choices that fail to conform to the norm *Choose the best!*, and to negatively assess ones that do conform. One can only choose the best by luck or coincidence, by happening to block the shaft that all ten miners are in. Such luck rules out creditably conforming to the norm. In attempting to save all ten miners one risks losing all of them, and so choosing to fully block one of the shafts strikes many as deeply problematic.

Perspectivism arises naturally from a diagnosis of why norms like *Choose the best!* are inadequate: such norms make reference to facts that may lie outside a subject's perspective. I argued that the perspectivist diagnosis does not get to the heart of the matter. Non-lucky conformity to a norm, I argued, requires manifesting dispositions that conformity to the norm robustly depends on. The problem of luck ultimately arises not because our perspectives are limited, but because of limits on what dispositions – what ways of choosing, acting, and believing – are feasible in a given situation. What a norm recommends in any given situation depends on how things stand with respect to some domain of facts, and for almost any such domain, sometimes it is not feasible to manifest dispositions that track how things stand in that domain. Hence, sometimes it

is not feasible to manifest dispositions that track what the norm recommends across a range of cases.

What we have access to often constrains what dispositions it is feasible to manifest. For instance, in *Miners* the fact that you don't know where the miners are located explains why you can only choose what is objectively best by luck. Nevertheless, the perspectivist and feasibility diagnoses of the problem of luck are distinct, and I argued that their differences have deep ramifications for normative theory. Further, I argued that perspectivism does not avert the problem of luck. There are no necessary connections between having a given perspective, on the one hand, and the feasibility of having and manifesting dispositions tracking it, on the other.

The feasibility diagnosis of the problem of luck points to an alternative outlook on a kind of normativity more attuned to our limitations as human agents. Feasibility norms take into account not the limits of our perspectives, but limits on what ways of choosing, acting, and believing are feasible in a given situation. I sketched what I see as the most promising form for such norms to take. They urge manifesting dispositions that are relatively good when compared with feasible alternatives – and in particular, that are relatively conducive to a relevant normative success. The resulting normative picture is general, unifying the practical and theoretical domains.

A broader theme that emerges is that a perspectivist focus on issues of epistemic access, or on what is present to an agent's mind, prevents us from seeing the full range of options available. Too often both sides of a dispute have been locked within what is essentially a perspectivist framework. Externalists have pointed out that we sometimes lack access to our perspectives, no matter how deeply buried within our minds they are – and indeed, especially if they are so buried. On this basis they have painted what many see as a bleak picture on which we are inevitably hostages to normative fortune: sometimes only a bout of good luck will enable us to believe and act as we ought.<sup>44</sup> No matter how hard we try, sometimes the most that can be said in our favour is that our normative violations are blameless. Indeed, from this viewpoint the conclusion to draw from my discussion of perspectivism is that the problem with seeking norms that close the normative lacuna we started out with is that there are no such norms. Perspectivism doesn't solve our original problem, not because its diagnosis of the problem is wrong, but because its diagnosis is right, and the problem is unsolvable.

To some such bleak conclusions are intolerable: acting as we ought in a creditworthy way, not merely by luck or coincidence, must always be possible.<sup>45</sup> Internalists unable to accept the externalist's outlook have tried to shun access worries, sometimes resorting to internal states stipulated to be immune to anti-luminosity-style arguments.<sup>46</sup> Recently several authors have tried to evade access worries altogether by resorting to views that deploy *epistemic filtering*, insisting that the normative reasons that determine a relevant range of normative facts about what one ought to do or believe in the first place must be known (or otherwise epistemically accessed). But such views are a form of perspectivism, perspectives being now understood in terms of knowledge. And as such, we should expect them to face the kinds of problems I have spelled out above.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> See e.g. Srinivasan (2015).

<sup>45</sup> For a recent example, see Lord (2015, 2018: 236-7).

<sup>46</sup> A recent example of this is appeal to a sui generis kind of mental state called a *seeming* as a way to answer the so-called speckled hen problem as it arises for contents of experience. See, for instance, Tucker (2010).

<sup>47</sup> Indeed, I have argued that epistemic filtering does not solve the problem of luck, for it makes normative facts depend on facts about our knowledge (or more generally, on facts about what passes the epistemic filter) and it is sometimes not feasible to track facts about what we know (see Lasonen-Aarnio 2019, 2020, forthcoming b, c).

Parties to these disputes are often focused on issues of access, or on issues having to do with what is or isn't part of an agent's perspective. But ultimately, I have argued, what matters is the feasibility of certain kinds of dispositional, modal profiles. With this shift in focus there is more hope, I have argued, of closing the normative lacuna we started out with. In place of norms focused on a subject's perspective, I have proposed norms focused on feasible ways of choosing, acting, and believing – on feasible dispositions. My view is that everyone will need such normative resources. To arrive at an adequate normative framework, even perspectivist norms – whether internalist or externalist, whether ones appealing to knowledge, evidence, experiences, or seemings – will have to be supplemented with feasilist ones.<sup>48</sup>

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