

(This is a penultimate version of an article forthcoming in *Ethics*. When citing, please refer to the published version).

Perspectivism, Accessibility and the Failure of Conjunction Agglomeration

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Abstract Potential perspectivism is the view that what an agent ought to do (believe, like, fear...) depends primarily on facts that are potentially available to her. I consider a challenge to this view. The problem stems from the fact that potentially accessible facts do not always agglomerate over conjunction. This implies that one can fail to have relevant access to a set of facts as a whole, but have access to proper subsets of it each of which can support different incompatible responses (actions, attitudes or omissions). I argue that potential perspectivism has no unproblematic answer to the question what the agent ought to do (believe, like, fear...) in such circumstances. I consider several possible responses and argue that they are all unsatisfactory, either because incompatible with central perspectivist assumptions or because independently implausible. Potential perspectivists can avoid this polylemma only at the cost of giving up fundamental tenets of their views. The challenge may also lend indirect support to alternative views unaffected by the problem, such as objectivism and some versions of actual perspectivism.

You have promised Jane that you will be at her place at 4 p.m. Jane's home is fifteen minutes from yours, and it is now 3:45. In order to keep your promise you need to leave now. However your clock indicates that it is only 2 p.m. You have no clue that your usually reliable clock is now indicating the wrong time, and you have no other available evidence of what time it is. What should you do in this circumstance? If your answer is that you should not go to Jane's home as you promised, but instead continue doing what you were doing, then you are a perspectivist. *Perspectivism* is the view that what an agent ought to do (believe, like, fear...) depends primarily on features of the agent's epistemic perspective. This view is contrasted with *objectivism*, according to which what an agent ought to do (believe, like, fear...) depends on all kinds of facts, including facts not accessible to the perspective of the agent.¹

An important difference amongst perspectivist views concerns which features of the agent's epistemic perspective are relevant to determine what an agent ought to do or the

attitude she should have. Some limit the relevant perspective to features that are actually accessed by agents, such as (a subset of) the contents of one's actual beliefs, currently available evidence, or facts that one presently knows. Let's call this kind of view *actual perspectivism*. Others extend the relevant epistemic perspective to features of the situation which are merely potentially accessible to the agent, such as facts that an agent is in a position to know or has the ability to know. We may call this latter view *potential perspectivism*.^{2,3}

The focus of the present paper is on potential perspectivism. During the last two decades this view has gained increasing popularity in metaethics and epistemology.⁴ Potential perspectivism carries the promise of solving several problems traditionally faced by other perspectivist views.⁵ Unfortunately, this view is not free from problems either. The aim of this paper is to consider a specific challenge to this kind of view which I consider particularly pressing. The problem stems from the fact that potentially accessible facts do not always agglomerate over conjunction. This implies that one can fail to have the relevant access to a set of facts as a whole, but have access to proper subsets of it each of which can support different and incompatible responses – where responses include actions, attitudes and omissions. The trouble becomes apparent when we ask what an agent ought to do (believe, like, fear...) in such circumstances. I shall argue that the potential perspectivist has no unproblematic answer to this question. I will consider several possible responses and show that they are all unsatisfactory, either because incompatible with central perspectivist assumptions or because independently implausible. Potential perspectivists could avoid this polylemma only at the cost of giving up fundamental tenets of their views. The alternative is to abandon potential perspectivism in favour of other views unaffected by the challenge, such as objectivism and several versions of actual perspectivism.

The paper unfolds as follows. In section 1 I introduce potential perspectivism in more detail. I distinguish various contemporary versions of this view and present some main motivations for preferring this to other perspectivist views. In section 2 I explain why potential accessibility fails to agglomerate over conjunction. In section 3 I introduce and discuss the challenge for potential perspectivism. I consider and reject five possible responses to this challenge. In the concluding section I briefly consider which views could avoid the challenge, and under which conditions.

Two remarks are in order here. First, for simplicity's sake, from now on my discussion shall focus on potential perspectivist views holding that the features of the agent's epistemic perspective relevant to what an agent ought to do (believe, like, fear...) are *facts*. Thus, I will talk of 'facts potentially available to an agent' rather than of 'features of the agent's potential

perspective'. This factualist assumption is consistent with potential perspectivist views in the existing literature. Observe, however, that the arguments in this paper do not hinge on this specific assumption and can be easily restated in non-factualist terms.

Second, while I present my argument as a problem for potential perspectivism, the challenge may also generalize to any view that holds that fundamental normatively relevant features do not agglomerate over conjunction, including a range of actual perspectivist views. In the concluding section I will briefly survey which forms of actual perspectivism are safe from the challenge.

1. Potential Perspectivism

Potential perspectivism can be stated in the following general terms:

Potential Perspectivism: What an agent ought to do (believe, like, fear...) depends primarily on facts that are potentially available to that agent.

Let me add some clarificatory remarks about this definition. First, in the above statement of the view 'primarily' is a qualification needed in order to accommodate the general assumption that what an agent ought to do doesn't depend exclusively on the support provided by a set of normatively relevant facts, but also on a range of enabling conditions that do not need to be epistemically accessible. An example is the condition that one be able to do what one ought to do.⁶ Second, as should be sufficiently clear from my previous discussion, the notion of potential availability is supposed to include also actually available facts (e.g., what the agent actually knows). These facts should be considered as potentially available in a trivial sense, to the extent that what is actually accessed is also potentially accessible. Third, in the above definition the object of 'ought' is not limited to actions, but extends to a wide range of attitudes such as believing, fearing, loving, preferring, liking, as well as to omissions of actions and attitudes. While in what follows I shall often limit my discussion to actions, the same points can be rephrased in terms of attitudes and omissions. Fourth, while the definition is formulated in terms of what an agent *ought* to do (believe, like, fear...), the view can be naturally extended to what an agent *may* or *may not* do (believe, like, fear...). Fifth, perspectivists focus on specific senses of 'ought', such as moral obligation or the so-called 'deliberative ought'. Nothing in my discussion hinges on a specific interpretation. To the

extent that my argument applies to any sense of ‘ought’, these distinctions are irrelevant to my present discussion.⁷

In the contemporary literature we can find several versions of potential perspectivism. According to one such version, recently defended by philosophers such as John Gibbons and Errol Lord, what an agent ought to do depends on what that agent is *in a position to know*.⁸ A standard way of conceiving the notion of ‘being in a position to know’ is in terms of the possession of warrant sufficient for believing a proposition plus the agent’s physical and psychological ability to know that proposition.⁹ For example, according to Lord, one is in a position to know p when all the ‘impersonal’ conditions for knowledge are met, where these conditions exclude believing p and believing it for the right reasons.¹⁰ One is in a position to know p when one has some beliefs or experiences such that, if one could and did attend to those beliefs’ contents or to certain features of those experiences and form a belief that p in the right kind of way, one would thereby know that p . According to this characterization, paradigmatic examples of facts that one is in a position to know include ones that the agent can come to know by introspection, reflection or attention, from the evidence (beliefs and experiences) that she already possesses.¹¹ Others endorse a slightly wider notion of ‘being in a position to know’, encompassing also facts that are not presently accessible from already possessed evidence but that the agent can be deemed blameworthy for not knowing.¹²

A more liberal version of potential perspectivism extends the set of normatively relevant facts beyond what the agent is in a position to know in the sense specified above. Jonathan Dancy suggests that there is “an agent-relative epistemic filter through which states of affairs or features of the situation have to pass if they are to be allowed to stand as grounds for duties for a given individual”.¹³ This filter is supposed to exclude that features that one has no chance to discern could be capable of grounding duties. Others argue for accessibility conditions related to what agents or human beings can in principle come to know. For example, Joseph Raz observes that “if some people cannot know of a fact it does not constitute a reason for them, even though other people can know about it”,¹⁴ and Judith Jarvis Thomson argues that “we should accept the general principle that we ought to do a thing only if a human being can know that we ought to. There is no way in which we can plausibly think that a person ought to have done a thing, or ought to have refrained from doing it, unless we think a human being could have known at the time that the person ought to”.¹⁵

Potential perspectivism enjoys several advantages over actual perspectivism. A first advantage is that this view can easily accommodate the natural assumption that facts relevant

to what we ought to do can be ignored and discovered.¹⁶ For example, suppose that a decisive reason not to boil lobsters alive is that boiling them would cause them excruciating pain. It seems plausible that one ought not to boil lobsters alive even if one actually ignores the latter fact. It seems also plausible that someone can discover that she shouldn't boil lobsters alive by learning that boiling them would cause them excruciating pain. Actual perspectivism cannot easily accommodate these intuitions. If all normatively relevant facts are already actually available to the agent, there is no room for ignorance or discovery of them.

A related advantage of potential perspectivism is that it avoids some implausible consequences of actual perspectivism. The latter view seems to imply that one can influence what one ought to do by modifying one's actual epistemic perspective about normatively relevant facts. This seems very counterintuitive. It seems that wilfully ignoring or intentionally managing to lose decisive evidence that one ought to do something cannot diminish the amount and force of one's normative commitments.¹⁷ Since modifications in the actual epistemic perspective do not necessarily affect the set of potentially available facts, potential perspectivism can avoid, or at least reduce, these problematic consequences.

Furthermore, there seem to be facts relevant to what we ought to do (believe, like, fear...) which may not be immediately accessible to us by introspection, but that we should know or should have known and we can be held responsible for not knowing – either because we ignored these facts because of blameworthy carelessness or inattentiveness, or because we had a duty to be informed about them.¹⁸ Consider a specific example from Lord:

Out of the Ordinary. Each morning I casually peruse a magazine while I eat my breakfast. I am doing this on Monday morning. As I'm doing this, my wife tells me that she has an unusual schedule that day. Given her unusual schedule, I need to pick up my son from school (this is something she almost always does because we have agreed that that is one of her daily tasks). She speaks clearly when she tells me these facts, and she is a mere 10 feet from me. However, I am engrossed just enough in the Newsweek I'm reading to not process the information. Given the fact that picking up my son is not one of my usual tasks, I believe that I don't need to pick him up that day. My son doesn't get picked up on time.¹⁹

Lord claims that the agent in *Out of the Ordinary* should pick up his son that day immediately after his wife tells him that information. Since he received very pertinent and obviously accessible information that decisively supports performing that action, it seems that

he can be criticized as careless and negligent for continuing to believe that he doesn't have to pick up his son. However the agent doesn't possess any actual attitude (belief or experience) that indicates that his wife cannot pick his son. On the contrary, it seems that all the information actually in his possession supports the proposition that he shouldn't do that. According to actual perspectivism, the agent cannot conclude from the attitudes actually in his possession that he should pick up his son, and thus, against common intuition, shouldn't be criticizable for lacking this belief and for not performing the relevant action. Lord concludes that what one ought to do and believe cannot just be a factor of one's actual perspective. What matters is rather what the agent was in a position to know. In the above case, the agent was in a position to know that his wife couldn't pick his son up, which is a decisive reason for him to go himself to pick his son up.

Other versions of potential perspectivism which relax the accessibility condition to some form of physical ability to know (such as those of Raz and Thomson) seem to have the resources to avoid also other traditional problems affecting perspectivism. For example, many perspectivist views seem to have problems accommodating the practices of advice and of seeking new evidence about what to do. If what an agent ought to do depends exclusively on one's easily accessible perspective, a better-informed third-party adviser should advise given the evidence accessible to the agent rather than given the adviser's better-informed perspective. Similarly, if an agent's reasons to act depend exclusively on her easily available perspective, it is unclear how to understand someone seeking evidence about what to do. After all, if what she should do is a factor of her already available evidence, she already has an answer to this question, one that in principle she could access by mere introspection into the evidence she already possesses or that she could easily acquire.²⁰ More relaxed accessibility conditions can easily avoid these counterintuitive consequences: the evidence that one can receive by advice or further inquiring is indeed something that the agent is physically capable of acquiring.

To sum up, potential perspectivism seems to have several important advantages over actual perspectivism. Unfortunately, this view has its own puzzling consequences. The challenge that I shall consider below applies to all variants of the view and doesn't seem to have any easy solution.

2. Potential accessibility and the failure of conjunction agglomeration

Several philosophers have recently pointed out that the notion of being in a position to know doesn't agglomerate over conjunction. An agent can be in a position to know a thing and in a position to know another thing, but from this it doesn't follow that that agent is in a position to know their conjunction. The following rule, expressing closure under the introduction rule for conjunction, is invalid (where K stands for 'one is in a position to know that'):

$$(IC-K) \quad K\phi, K\psi \not\vdash K(\phi \& \psi)$$

Some of the arguments for this claim are based on cases in which one is in a position to know any one of the propositions in a conjunction, but not in a position to know the whole conjunction. This type of case may occur, for example, because of natural limits to how many things a subject can attend to at once.²¹

Other cases of (IC- K) failure may occur because of structural limitations imposed by formal properties of knowledge.²² Consider a possible situation in which a subject is in a position to know a proposition and in a position to know that she does not know that same proposition. Sven Rosenkranz provides the following example:

Just let ϕ be a fleeting truth of little interest, for example, that there are exactly seven blossoms on the bougainvillea, in a context where 'the fact is open to one's view, unhidden, even if one does not yet see it' (Williamson 2000: p. 95), and one knows that a storm is about to hit, that one is presently the only one around, and also, by introspection, that one is far too unconcerned ever to form any belief about the matter.²³

In this situation, the subject is in a position to know that there are exactly seven blossoms on the bougainvillea (ϕ). She is equally in a position to know that she hasn't yet formed a belief on the matter, and thus that she doesn't know ϕ . However, given a few plausible assumptions about the nature of knowledge and 'being in a position to know', it is easy to prove that she cannot be in a position to know the conjunction [ϕ and she doesn't know ϕ]. This is because if one is in a position to know something (at least in the sense of 'being in a position to know' that perspectivists are interested in), then it is possible for one to know that thing. But, as is

familiar from Fitch's paradox of knowability, one cannot know propositions having the logical form $[P \text{ and it is not known that } P]$.²⁴ We are thus forced to deny that being in a position to know agglomerates over conjunction.²⁵

The same type of argument can be easily generalized to other notions of accessibility relevant for potential perspectivists (see §1). To the extent that these other notions imply the possibility of knowing, the argument is equally effective against the possibility of their agglomeration over conjunction. Moreover, other more liberal notions of accessibility are subject to their own specific counterexamples to conjunction agglomeration. Consider, for instance, a notion of accessibility in terms of physical ability for a human being to come to know a certain fact. Physical limitations provide obvious counterexamples to conjunction agglomeration for this kind of accessibility. For example, according to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, it is possible to come to know the position or the wave function of an atomic particle but not both. This constitutes a straightforward violation of conjunction agglomeration for this kind of accessibility.

3. The challenge

The failure of conjunction agglomeration for notions of potential accessibility leads to the following challenge to Potential Perspectivism. The challenge has the form of a polylemma. I first introduce a specific type of case, and invite the reader to consider what an agent should do in this sort of circumstance. A list including several alternative answers is considered. The list is supposed to exhaust the space of reasonable options. Some of these options are compatible with objectivism; others with versions of actual perspectivism. However, I argue that no available option is suitable for potential perspectivism. Each of the options is either incompatible with central perspectivist assumptions or it is independently implausible. The challenge could be avoided in either of two ways: either by giving up fundamental perspectivist tenets, or by abandoning the view in favour of alternatives which straightforwardly avoid the problem, such as objectivism or actual perspectivism.

Let me first introduce in abstract terms the type of circumstance that generates the problem. Consider a set of facts potentially relevant to what an agent ought to do (believe, like, fear...).²⁶ Suppose that any proper subset of this set is accessible to the agent in the relevant perspectivist sense of 'accessible'. However, due to conjunction agglomeration failure, the agent has no potential access to the set of facts as a whole. Moreover, suppose that

each subset of facts in this set would decisively recommend different incompatible courses of action. In this type of case, it seems that potential perspectivism has no unproblematic answer to the question what the agent ought to do (believe, like, fear...).

Consider, by way of example, a set constituted by two proper subsets of facts $[F^1, F^2]$.²⁷ For simplicity's sake, in what follows I shall restrict my discussion to actions, but the same point can be made for attitudes and omissions. Suppose that the following is the case – where A^1 - A^3 are different possible actions:

- If we consider only the set of facts $[F^1]$, this would decisively recommend A^1 ;
- If we consider only the set of facts $[F^2]$, this would decisively recommend A^2 ;
- If we consider the whole set $[F^1, F^2]$, this would decisively recommend A^3 .

Assume two further features about the case:

- (i) $A^1 - A^3$ are alternative, incompatible and jointly exhaustive courses of action. The agent must choose one of these actions, and can choose only one of them. Doing one precludes performance of the others.
- (ii) The agent has the relevant potential access to (e.g., is in a position to know) each proper subset of facts in the set: $[F^1]$ and $[F^2]$. However, she has no relevant epistemic access to the set $[F^1, F^2]$ as a whole. For my present purposes, it is irrelevant why this is the case. This may be due to any of the reasons for which potential accessibility conditions may fail to agglomerate over conjunction: human, physical or structural epistemic limitations.

The problem for potential perspectivism emerges when we consider the following questions: *what should the agent do in this kind of situation? Which of the three actions $A^1 - A^3$ should she perform?* As I am going to argue below, the potential perspectivist doesn't seem to have any unproblematic answer to these questions. In the following subsections I consider five possible answers and argue that from the standpoint of perspectivism each of them is seriously problematic.

For clarity's sake, let me introduce an illustrative example of the problematic type of circumstance, which will be used as a toy case in our subsequent discussions:

DOCTOR

Naoko is a doctor who should decide which cure to prescribe to a patient. She has just received the results of two medical tests undergone by the patient. The results support the following normative judgments:

- (i) Results of test 1 would decisively recommend prescribing cure X (A^1);
- (ii) Results of test 2 would decisively recommend prescribing cure Y (A^2);
- (iii) The results of the two tests together would decisively recommend prescribing cure Z (A^3);²⁸

The various options open to Naoko are alternative, incompatible and jointly exhaustive: she can prescribe one, and only one, cure amongst X, Y and Z. Unfortunately, Naoko has potential access to the result of each test taken individually but not to the joint information contained in the results of both tests. The reader is free to imagine details of the case as she thinks more suitable given her favorite notion of potential accessibility. For instance, we could imagine that the condition of the patient is rapidly deteriorating and Naoko must urgently make a decision. She has enough time to read and interpret the results of each test individually but not enough time to access both tests. Alternatively, Naoko could have read the results of both tests, but due to limits of time and attention and the complexity of the information she may be able to draw the conclusion from one of the two tests only.

This possible scenario quite faithfully exemplifies the abstract description considered above. Now let's consider how a potential perspectivist could answer the following question: *what should Naoko do in this situation?*

3.1. The agent should do what is supported by the total set of facts (A^3).

This response says that in the situation illustrated above the agent should do A^3 (the action supported by $[F^1, F^2]$). In *DOCTOR* Naoko should do what's best given the information included in the two test results taken together – namely, prescribe cure Z – even though she cannot access more than one result, and thus has no idea that the information in the two results would recommend this course of action.

One may think that this response is incompatible with perspectivism. After all, we stipulated that the total set of facts is not accessible to the agent as a whole. It seems to follow

that this set shouldn't be relevant to what the agent should do. However, observe that each subset of facts in the set is accessible. So in a sense we could still say that, according to this response, what the agent should do still depends on facts that are potentially available to her – the total set is indeed composed of individually accessible facts, even though the conjunction of these facts is not accessible. Therefore this response is, at least in principle, compatible with a version of potential perspectivism.²⁹

Nevertheless, from a perspectivist viewpoint this response will appear utterly unpromising. For one thing, even though the response doesn't violate the letter of perspectivism, it violates its spirit. A view that recommends doing what is supported by a set of facts to which one does not have access as a whole would completely lack the flavour and appeal of perspectivism. While this view would allow potential access to normative considerations individually, it would deny access to their totality and, thereby, to the possibility of discovering what one ought to do on the basis of these considerations by means of good deliberative routes. This view seems incompatible with the claim, endorsed by all perspectivists, that one cannot be required to do things that she could have not known she ought to do.

Moreover, this response clashes with one of the main motivations for accepting perspectivism. It is generally agreed that genuinely normative considerations must be capable of guiding our rational decision-making and rationally causing us to perform what we should do.³⁰ The primary role of norms is to guide us, but they can do this only by getting some grip on us, moving us to comply with them in a non-accidental way.³¹ However, in most circumstances in order to be capable of guiding one to do the right action, these considerations must be accessible from the agent's perspective. Someone who is completely unaware and in no position to know some of the normatively relevant facts in a circumstance could happen to do what she ought only by mere accident, by acting against her most reasonable judgments and taking weird and ungrounded guesses about what to do, not because properly guided by the relevant normative considerations.³² Since Naoko cannot have the relevant sort of access to the two test results together – which, by assumption, is the only set of facts in the circumstance that could support prescribing cure Z (A^3) – she cannot be properly guided by this set of considerations to act accordingly. Thus, if one accepts guidance constraints on normative considerations (as perspectivists do), in the type of circumstances we are considering the set of facts $[F^1, F^2]$ cannot be genuinely normative for the agent and count as a reason for A^3 . Action-guidance constraints imply that it is not the case that the agent should perform A^3 .

3.2. *The agent should do each of the actions supported by each subset of facts to which she has the relevant access (she should A^1 and A^2).*

According to this response, since the agent has access to the two sets $[F^1]$ and $[F^2]$, she ought to perform A^1 and A^2 . But we assumed that these are incompatible courses of action. The agent cannot perform more than one of them. This is obvious in *DOCTOR*: according to this proposal, Naoko should prescribe cure X and prescribe cure Y. But these courses of action are clearly incompatible: Naoko can prescribe only one cure. This response implies the possibility of normative dilemmas. The agent can do only one of the things she ought to do, and she will necessarily end up doing something wrong no matter which she does.

This response will sound clearly unacceptable to perspectivists, who have always denied the possibility of normative dilemmas.³³ This is quite unsurprising, since such dilemmas entail the existence of circumstances in which it is impossible to do what one ought to do (so-called cases of inevitable wrongdoing). This involves the violation of action-guidance constraints and versions of the ‘ought implies can’ principle typically advocated by perspectivists.³⁴ As recalled in §3.1, one of the main motivations for perspectivism is the idea that normative considerations are capable of providing guidance. However, if such considerations recommend incompatible responses they will work quite poorly as guides.³⁵

Moreover, the sort of situations we are considering seems to lack characteristic features typical of alleged cases of genuine normative dilemmas. The latter involve explicit and recognizable conflicts between different incompatible obligations. A classical example of normative dilemma is the situation in which someone made two incompatible promises and cannot keep both (e.g., attending two different meetings at the same time).³⁶ In contrast, the problematic type of situation discussed above is exclusively the product of the fragmented epistemic position of the agent. This alleged sort of dilemma would be fully determined by the impossibility of jointly accessing different potential perspectives. In such situations the agent couldn’t even come to recognize the incompatible obligations she would be under. Thus, these alleged dilemmas would be such that they could never be faced in deliberation. Even admitting the possibility of genuine normative dilemmas, it seems utterly implausible that one could be subject to them merely in virtue of a (fully reasonable) epistemic weakness in one’s potential perspective, and even less plausible that one could never be confronted with such dilemmas from a first-person perspective.

3.3. *The agent is permitted to do either of the two actions A^1 or A^2*

A third response to the problem consists in claiming that in the relevant situations the agent is permitted to do any of the actions supported by some subset of facts accessible from her perspective. In *DOCTOR*, Naoko would be permitted to choose either of the two incompatible courses of action A^1 or A^2 : either prescribe cure X, or prescribe cure Y. This is tantamount to saying that she ought to [either A^1 or A^2].³⁷

I can see at least two reasons why we shouldn't consider this response as a serious candidate. First, the response is not exempt from worries similar to those affecting the previous ones. Since in such cases the agent has no joint access to the two sets of facts $[F^1]$ and $[F^2]$, she cannot be in a position to know the full range of permissible acts in the circumstance. It follows that she is not in a position to be properly guided by the relevant normative considerations. This violates guidance constraints and the idea that an agent should be in a position to discover via correct deliberation what she ought or may do.

Second, notice that the disjunctive set of actions [either A^1 , or A^2] is not recommended by any of the subset of facts accessible to the agent – in *DOCTOR* none of the test results considered individually recommend prescribing the cure Naoko likes. Moreover, remember that (i) A^1 and A^2 are incompatible courses of action: doing one of these actions excludes performance of the other; and (ii) each set of facts *decisively* recommends only one specific action. Since each accessible set of facts speaks decisively in favor of only one action and each action is incompatible with the others, it follows that each set also speaks decisively *against* the other actions. So, for example, the set $[F^1]$ decisively recommends to A^1 *and not to* A^2 – in *DOCTOR*, result 1 decisively recommends prescribing cure X *and against* prescribing any other cure. Every single accessible set provides decisive reasons for one and only one action, and thus also decisive reasons not to perform any of the others. It is easy to verify that the permission to do either of the actions A^1 or A^2 is incompatible with any of the recommendations of each of the accessible sets of facts. According to every single accessible perspective, the agent is *not* free to do either of the two actions. If what the agent is permitted to do is exclusively a factor of things accessible to her potential perspective, it is pretty obvious that she is not permitted to do either of the two actions.³⁸

3.4. *This type of circumstance cannot occur*

Another option consists in claiming that it is impossible for an agent to be in a situation in which she has the relevant access to several subsets of facts but not to the set as a whole and each subset recommends different incompatible actions or attitudes. The kind of circumstances generating the problem is simply not possible.

I can't see any good rationale for such a move except the fact that it would avoid the specific problem discussed in this paper. Such a move seems completely *ad hoc*, not independently motivated. The move seems even less principled once we consider that the type of cases generating the problem do not concern merely abstract scenarios. Most of the examples used by potential perspectivists to illustrate the notion of 'being in a position to know' (e.g., Lord's Out of the Ordinary), as well as cases used to exemplify accessibility's conjunction agglomeration failure (e.g., Rosenkranz's bougainvillea blossoms), can be easily turned into cases displaying the paradigmatic type of situation that leads to the problem. Typical examples involve agents who don't know a certain fact p but could easily come to know or should have known it. Here is a simple recipe for building such examples: (i) start with a case in which a subject has potential access to p (or should have known p) and access to her state of ignorance about whether p ; (ii) add that each of the accessible facts decisively supports different incompatible actions or attitudes.

It is not hard to think of such cases. Consider a case such that an agent doesn't know a certain fact p but could easily come to know it. Imagine a paramedic on the scene of a car accident trying to save the life of an injured person. The person urgently needs a bandage. The paramedic is desperately searching for the necessary material in the ambulance, where she knows that somewhere there is one bandage roll. While searching, she looks in a certain direction and the roll appears in her perceptual field. However, due to the hurry and high pressure of the moment she doesn't immediately recognize it. The fact that there is a bandage roll just in front of her would decisively recommend taking it and saving the life of the injured person. The person urgently needs it, and it would be seriously imprudent to waste further time. Moreover, the paramedic is in a position to know where the roll is, since it's just under her eyes in clear sight. However, the fact that she doesn't notice the roll is something she can easily access by introspection, and that fact decisively recommends searching for the roll somewhere else. Again, there is no time to waste, and the fact that she doesn't notice the presence of the roll there is an excellent reason to move on in her search. This case illustrates the type of problematic situation, and seems to me both possible and realistic.^{39,40}

The above example relies on a situation in which the agent has potential access to a certain fact and to her actual ignorance of that fact. We can easily conceive of other cases instantiating the problem which do not depend on a potential access to a state of ignorance. For example, Williamson considers a situation in which an agent is in a position to know any one of a set of propositions p_1, \dots, p_n but is not in a position to know all of them – this may occur for different reasons: circumstantial impediments, limits to how many things one can

attend to at once, and so on.⁴¹ Just add to this situation the claim that each subset of facts recommends incompatible actions/attitudes and you will have an instance of the problem – *DOCTOR* provides a good illustration of this sort of case.

It is even easier to find similar problematic cases for perspectivist views that adopt more liberal notions of potential accessibility, such as the circumstantial or physical ability to come to know a certain fact. Imagine a scientist who can easily measure either the position or the wave function of an atomic particle. She has potential access to each of these facts. However, due to Heisenberg's Uncertainty principle, she has no potential access to both facts. Suppose that the results of each experiment give the scientist decisive reasons to do incompatible things, such as take note of the position of the atomic particle or take note of its wave function. Again, this case well exemplifies the abstract scenario illustrated above.

In sum, as the reader can observe from the previous examples, it is not hard to construct plausible cases instantiating the problem. This type of scenario not only seems possible, but easily conceivable and very likely to obtain in many real situations.

3.5. An alternative proposal

An anonymous reviewer considers an interesting alternative proposal. According to this view, a person should first look at the facts actually available to her at the present time. If these facts do not entail that she ought to make actually available some set of merely potentially available facts, then what she ought to do depends only on the facts actually available to her. If the actually available facts do entail that she ought to make actually available some set of facts which at the moment are merely potentially available, then what she ought to do at a later time will also depend on these potentially available facts. In complex situations in which someone's actual perspective entails that she ought to make actually available only one of several sets of potentially available facts, she would be momentarily permitted to do any of the actions recommended by some set until the moment in which one of the sets will be actually accessed – at that point she should do what the actually available facts recommend.⁴²

This view seems to provide a determinate answer to the question what to do in at least some of the problematic cases. In *DOCTOR*, Naoko should first look at what the actually available facts (e.g., facts that she knows) recommend. If these facts recommend having access to any one of the test results before prescribing a cure, all options are open to her until the time she has actual access to one of the results. After that finding, she will then have an obligation to prescribe a cure compatible with the result she had actual access to. The

proposal seems to provide a quite intuitive diagnosis of this case and to avoid problems affecting other proposed solutions, such as the violation of guidance constraints.

Unfortunately this proposal cannot avoid versions of the challenge. Consider a variant of Lord's Out of the Ordinary in which actually available facts make it the case that the agent (let's call him Errol) ought to attend to what his wife is saying. According to this proposal, what the wife told Errol is a reason for him to pick up his son. However, any plausible perspectivist theory will also say that other considerations actually available to Errol are normatively relevant as well. Every perspectivist agrees that if S knows that p at t , p is a reason S has at t . If so, when Errol has to decide whether to go to pick up his son, his actual perspective also includes his awareness that he didn't hear anything from his wife, and that if she doesn't tell him anything he shouldn't pick up his son. The issue is how to combine these separate sets of normatively relevant facts at the moment of decision: that Errol's wife told him to pick up his son and that he didn't hear anything from his wife. Taken individually, these facts decisively support incompatible attitudes and courses of action. However, it's clear that Errol cannot have access to these facts together. If Errol didn't hear anything from his wife, he doesn't know that his wife told him to pick up his son. Thus, for reasons advanced in §2, Errol is not in a position to know that [his wife told him to pick up his son and he didn't hear anything from his wife]. It follows that, according to this proposal, the latter conjunction is not a reason Errol could have, though each conjunct is a reason he has, each of which decisively supports incompatible responses. Again, from the standpoint of a potential perspectivist there seems not to be any unproblematic answer to the question what an agent should do in this type of case.⁴³

Moreover, the proposal faces most of the alleged problems commonly addressed to actual perspectivist views. Here is a short list:⁴⁴

- The view cannot easily accommodate the general intuition that some ignored facts can be relevant to what we ought to do even if no actually available fact entails that we should make them available. For example, someone might not know that boiling lobsters alive causes them excruciating pain, nor have any reason to be informed about this fact; still, this ignorance seems at most an excuse for boiling lobsters alive, not a full justification.

- The view doesn't exclude that someone can influence what she ought to do by modifying her actual epistemic perspective about normatively relevant facts – for example, by managing to forget evidence about what she should do.
- The view recognizes only a conditional normative weight to facts that an agent is supposed to know according to social or professional duties and expectations, a weight contingent on the agent's actual awareness of such duties and expectations. A conclusion that many find counterintuitive.⁴⁵
- The view has problems accounting for a range of data about the practice of advice. For instance, according to this view it is unclear why a better-informed third-party adviser should advise given her better-informed perspective. Withholding the information would make it just as easy – and maybe easier – for the agent to figure out what she should do.⁴⁶

It may be argued that the present view can avoid counterintuitive verdicts in cases such as *Out of the Ordinary*. In particular, the view could explain intuitive judgments in versions of the case in which facts actually available to the agent are sufficient to make it the case that he should attend to the relevant information (i.e., attend to what his wife is saying). However the view cannot account for variants of the case in which actually available facts do not imply any such obligation. Indeed this is precisely how Lord conceives this case. Lord anticipates a view along the above lines, according to which in *Out of the Ordinary* the real source of the agent's failure is the possession of decisive reasons to listen to his wife.⁴⁷ However, he criticizes such a view on the basis of a variant of the initial case in which the agent has no reason to listen to anything his wife says. Lord submits that in such a case it is equally wrong for the agent not to believe that his wife will be picking up his son later that day, and not to pick his son up on time.⁴⁸

A full assessment of these alleged problems goes beyond the target of this paper. However, it is important to stress that, as we saw in §1, potential perspectivists use the above considerations to criticize actual perspectivism and motivate their own views. To the extent that the present proposal is affected by the same problems, central motivations for preferring this view to actual perspectivism are undermined.⁴⁹

4. Conclusion

In this paper I have considered a challenge to potential perspectivism. The problem stems from the fact that potentially available facts do not always agglomerate over conjunction. This implies that we can fail to have relevant access to a set of facts as a whole but have access to proper subsets of it each of which can support different and incompatible responses. In such circumstances, it seems that potential perspectivism has no unproblematic answer to the question what the agent ought to do (believe, like, fear...). All plausible options seem unsatisfactory, either because incompatible with central perspectivist assumptions or because independently implausible.

I think that a careful examination and diagnosis of the challenge could be fruitful for all the parties engaged in this debate. Those unsympathetic to potential perspectivism will probably conclude that the problem provides a further reason to abandon this kind of view and instead embrace either some version of actual perspectivism or objectivism. The latter views can avoid the problem by ensuring that normatively relevant considerations always agglomerate over conjunction. The way out is an easy one for objectivism, which doesn't impose any perspectival constraint on facts that are normatively relevant. This straightforwardly excludes agglomeration failures due to one's limited perspective. Specific versions of actual perspectivism also can avoid the problem by limiting the range of normatively relevant considerations to the contents of a restricted set of actually possessed attitudes that agglomerate over conjunction.

More precisely, the challenge discussed in this paper generalizes to any view according to which fundamental normatively relevant features do not agglomerate over conjunction. This includes also versions of actual perspectivism, as long as failure of conjunction agglomeration applies to normatively relevant actually held epistemic conditions, such as doxastic states and known facts. However, several actual perspectivist views in the literature are not committed to such agglomeration failure. Philosophers who hold that knowledge and doxastic justification agglomerate over conjunction can unproblematically assume that known facts or justified beliefs count as normative grounds for actions and attitudinal responses. Moreover, the challenge doesn't affect views that admit that knowledge or justified belief fail conjunction agglomeration, but deny that such attitudes are normatively relevant in a substantive way. An instance of such views is credal reductivism, according to which actions and attitudes would be ultimately justified by probabilistically coherent credence functions.⁵⁰ This view holds that

knowledge and outright beliefs are merely derivative epistemic conditions deprived of any fundamental normative role.

However, the rejection of potential perspectivism is not the only possible reaction. Admittedly, the puzzle doesn't constitute a definitive objection to any possible version of the view. Potential perspectivists could try to find other more plausible responses, or modify their views in a way that escapes the problem. This may constrain potential perspectivist views and their notions of accessibility in interesting ways, hence providing new insights into specific features and consequences of such views. A suggestion in such a direction may be to retain a version of potential perspectivism but abandon action-guidance, epistemic constraints and 'ought' implies 'can' principles which, as we saw in the previous section, hinder the viability of several responses to the puzzle. While this seems to me the best prospect for a perspectivist solution to the puzzle, it may turn out to be an important weakening of the view, given that such constraints have been systematically used to motivate perspectivism. One of the main motivations to prefer perspectivism to objectivism is precisely that the latter view entails the uncomfortable claim that facts that are completely inaccessible and unavailable as guides can nonetheless be relevant for what the agent should do. Moreover, by admitting the existence of normatively relevant facts that cannot guide or be discovered by the agent, objectivism would often require performing actions which would look completely unreasonable from the agent's viewpoint. While perspectivism promises to avoid these odd implications, such important advantages would be irremediably lost by a version of the view that abandons guidance, accessibility and ability constraints. For such a view, a solution to the puzzle would come only at the price of losing the features that make perspectivism appealing in the first place.

Acknowledgments. I would like to thank Cameron Boulton, Jie Gao, Jacques Vollet, Julien Dutant, Clayton Littlejohn, Frank Hofmann, John Gibbons, Daniel Whiting, Paul Noordhof, Christian Piller, Sven Rosenkranz, Francesco Praolini, Lu Teng, Tommaso Piazza, Luca Fonnesu, Sandy Goldberg, Li Qilin, Zhang Yiwen, Jonathan Ichikawa, Ru Ye, Li Yong, Alexander Dinges, Roger Clarke and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier drafts and presentations of this paper. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 2018 Workshop 'Epistemic Normativity – its shape and nature' at the University of Luxembourg, the First Flemish Epistemology Workshop at KU Leuven, the 2018 Epistemology Reading Group at New York University-Shanghai, the Seminar of Philosophical Analysis at the University of Pavia, and the Conference 'Knowledge, Context and Responsibility' at Peking University. Thanks to the audiences for their helpful feedbacks.

¹ Perspectivist views have been defended by, for example, Jonathan Dancy, *Practical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); John Gibbons, “Things That Make Things Reasonable,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 81(2010): 335–361, and *The Norm of Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Frank Jackson, “Decision-theoretic consequentialism and the nearest and dearest objection,” *Ethics* 101 (1991): 461–482; Benjamin Kiesewetter, “‘Ought’ and the Perspective of the Agent,” *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 5 (2011): 1–24, and *The Normativity of Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), ch.8; Errol Lord, “Acting for the Right Reasons, Abilities, and Obligation,” in R. Schafer-Landau (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* Vol. 10. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), and *The Importance of Being Rational* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), ch.8; Elinor Mason, “Objectivism and Prospectivism about Rightness,” *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 7 (2013): 1–21; Harold A. Prichard, “Duty and Ignorance of Fact,” *Philosophy* 8 (1933): 226–228; Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1907); Michael J. Zimmerman, *Living with Uncertainty: The Moral Significance of Ignorance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and *Ignorance and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Objectivist views have been defended by, e.g., Krister Bykvist, “How to Do Wrong Knowingly and Get Away with It,” in *Neither/Nor. Philosophical Papers Dedicated to Erik Carlson on the Occasion of His Fiftieth Birthday* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2011), 31–47; Fred Feldman, *Doing the Best We Can: An Essay in Informal Deontic Logic* (Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Company, 1986); Peter A. Graham, “In Defense of Objectivism about Moral Obligation,” *Ethics* 121, no. 1 (2010): 88–115; George E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Dover Publications, 1903), and *Ethics: The Nature of Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); W. David Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); Michael A. Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994); Judith J. Thomson, *The Realm of Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Ralph Wedgwood, “Akrasia and Uncertainty,” *Organon F* 20, n.4 (2013): 483–505. A third option is that the question whether I should go to Jane’s home is ambiguous between several different senses (e.g., Richard Feldman, “Subjective and Objective Justification in Ethics and Epistemology,” *The Monist* 71, n.3 (1988): 405–419; Kristian Olsen, “A Defense of the Subjective/Objective Moral Ought Distinction,” *The Journal of Ethics* 21 (2017): 351–373; Mark Schroeder, “Means-end coherence, stringency, and subjective reasons,” *Philosophical Studies* 143, n.2 (2009): 223–248; Ralph Wedgwood, “Choosing Rationally and Choosing Correctly,” in S. Stroud & C. Tappolet (Eds.), *Weakness of Will and Practical Irrationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 201–229, and “Objective and Subjective ‘Ought,’” in N. Charlow and M. Chrisman (Eds.) *Deontic Modality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 142–168) or is context-sensitive (e.g., John Pittard and Alex Worsnip, “Metanormative Contextualism and Normative Uncertainty,” *Mind* 126, n.501 (2017): 155–193). These options appeal to the many ordinary uses of notions such as ‘should’ and ‘ought’. This paper’s exclusive focus is on perspectivism. In what follows I will set aside discussion of alternative views.

² For helpful discussions of various kinds of perspectivist views see, for example, Graham, “In defense of objectivism,”; Kiesewetter “‘Ought’ and the Perspective of the Agent,” and *The Normativity of Rationality*, ch.8. See §1 for a list and overview of potential perspectivist views. The distinction between actual and potential perspectivism is orthogonal to that between internalism and externalism. For instance, internalist views that claim that justification supervenes on what is available to one on reflection or is merely perceptually apparent are also versions of potential perspectivism (Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, ch.3; Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 202–203).

³ With expressions such as ‘accessed facts’, ‘held states’ or ‘currently available evidence’ I mean epistemic states and contents that are part of the actual perspective of the agent at some time, such as beliefs the agent actually holds, or facts that she knows. Following standard terminology, I shall denote these states and facts with ‘actually available’. I contrast them with states which an agent could have or facts she could access (e.g., that she is in a position to know). I label the latter conditions ‘potentially available’. The present distinction has been discussed by several philosophers in the literature, though some of them use a different terminology. For recent discussions see, for example, Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, 199–201, and Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 70. The reader should bear in mind that the notion of availability used in this debate refers both to the actual perspective (e.g., currently held mental states, facts one knows), and the potential perspective (e.g., facts one could come to know). The ‘-able’ in ‘available’ doesn’t refer to a potential epistemic condition of the agent, but to the possibility that the condition (state, content or fact) can play a rationalizing or justificatory role for actions and reactions. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to clarify these points.

⁴ See, for example, Dancy, *Practical Reality*; Gibbons, “Things That Make Things Reasonable” and *The Norm of Belief*; Lord, “Acting for the Right Reasons” and *The Importance of Being Rational*; Mason, “Objectivism and Prospectivism about Rightness”; Zimmerman, *Living with Uncertainty*. For potential perspectivism in the epistemic domain see, e.g., Sanford C. Goldberg, “Should have known,” *Synthese* 194, n.8 (2017): 2863–2894, and *To the Best of Our Knowledge: Social Expectations and Epistemic Normativity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); John Skorupski, *The Domain of Reasons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵ I will review the most important advantages of potential perspectivism in the next section.

⁶ for similar remarks see, e.g., Graham, "In defense of objectivism," 90-91; Kieseewetter *The Normativity of Rationality*, 198.

⁷ Let me also observe here that facts relevant to what one ought to do (believe, like, fear...) are generally identified with *normative reasons*. Notice however that some philosophers deny that all normative reasons are relevant to what one ought to do (believe, like, fear...). For example, according to Lord ("Acting for the Right Reasons," 28-29 and *The Importance of Being Rational*, §1.1), all kinds of facts can be reasons, but only available facts contribute to determine what one ought to do.

⁸ See, for example, John Gibbons, "Access externalism," *Mind* 115, n.457 (2006): 19-39; "Things That Make Things Reasonable," and *The Norm of Belief*, 176-177; Errol Lord, "Having reasons and the factoring account," *Philosophical Studies* 149, n.3, (2010): 283-296 (see pages 285-286.); "Acting for the Right Reasons," fn.5, and *The Importance of Being Rational*, ch.3.

⁹ For example, Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits*, 95, and Sven Rosenkranz, "Agnosticism as a third stance," *Mind* 116, n.461 (2007): 55-104 (page 69) characterize the notion in terms of being physically and psychologically capable of knowing *p* and nothing stands in one's way of successfully exercising these capabilities. It is worth observing here that not all notions of 'being in a position to know' in the literature are compatible with perspectivism. For example, Declan Smithies ("Moore's Paradox and the Accessibility of Justification," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85, n.2 (2012): 273-300; "The Normative Role of Knowledge," *Noûs* 46, n.2 (2012): 265-288; "Belief and Self - Knowledge: Lessons From Moore's Paradox," *Philosophical Issues* 26, n.1 (2016): 393-421) discusses a notion of being in a position to know which is compatible with the physical and psychological impossibility to know. This notion doesn't allow the type of accessibility perspectivists are interested in, involving a physiological ability to grasp and be guided by normative considerations. See, e.g., Gibbons, *The Norm of Belief*, 147-149; Lord, "Having reasons and the factoring account," §3.

¹⁰ Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 91-93.

¹¹ It is worth observing that Lord (*ibid.*, 93) expresses sympathies for a broader characterization of the notion. For example, he hints at the idea that someone entering a room where she has never been before with closed eyes is in a position to know the color of the room's walls (assuming that the room is lit in a normal way).

¹² An example is Gibbons "Access externalism," 28-29; *The Norm of Belief*, 178-180. Rosenkranz also endorses a more liberal notion, though one not necessarily related to blameworthiness (personal communication). Similarly, Zimmerman holds that the relevant perspective is determined by "evidence of which someone *can*, in some sense, and *ought*, in some sense, to avail himself" (*Living with Uncertainty*, 36), where the sense of "ought" at issue is an epistemic, non-moral one.

¹³ Dancy, *Practical Reality*, 56.

¹⁴ Joseph Raz, *From Normativity to Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 81.

¹⁵ Judith J. Thomson, *Normativity* (Chicago: Open Court, 2008), 198. See, also Stephen Kearns and Daniel Star, "Reasons: Explanations or Evidence?" *Ethics* 119, n.1 (2008): 31-56 (page 52). Thomas M. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 47-52. Skorupski, *The Domain of Reasons*, 43, endorses similar constraints for epistemic reasons but not for practical ones.

¹⁶ E.g., Kieseewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, 200; Zimmerman, *Ignorance and Moral Obligation*, 26-28.

¹⁷ Dancy, *Practical Reality*, 57; Roy Sorensen, "Unknowable Obligations," *Utilitas* 7, n.2 (1995): 247-271; Jan W. Wieland, "Access and the Shirker Problem," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 52 (2015): 289-300. Of course, there could be reasons not to lose evidence about normative facts in the first place. Still, it sounds seriously odd to say that someone can modify what she ought to do at time t^1 merely by changing her epistemic status at a previous time t^0 . A person who manages to forget evidence that she should keep promises doesn't seem thereby justified in breaking her promises.

¹⁸ Dancy *Practical Reality*, 57; Scanlon *Moral Dimensions*, 48 and 52; Gibbons, *The Norm of Belief*, 179-180; Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, §3.3; Zimmerman *Living with Uncertainty*, 36. In epistemology, see Goldberg "Should have known," and *To the Best of Our Knowledge*, for the view that the normative status of one's beliefs depends on what an agent should know according to social, moral and epistemic expectations, even though the subject is in no position to know it given her state of evidence at the time. Epistemologists who acknowledge the category of external normative defeaters on epistemic justification may also be classified as perspectivists of this sort (e.g., Gilbert Harman, *Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973); John L. Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1986), 192.

¹⁹ Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 72.

²⁰ Graham, "In defense of objectivism," §2; Kieseewetter "'Ought' and the Perspective of the Agent,," Niko Kolodny and John MacFarlane, "Ifs and Oughts," *Journal of Philosophy* 107, n.3 (2010): 115-143 (see §2.2), Judith

J. Thomson, "Imposing risks," in W. Parent (Ed.), *Rights, Restitution, and Risk* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, pp. 173–191), 179.

²¹ Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits*, 203. Other examples could involve limits of time or computational skills.

²² The following argument is from Jan Heylen, "Being in a Position to Know and Closure," *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy* 5, n.1 (2016): 63–67 (see pages.65-66). See Sven Rosenkranz "Being in a Position to Know and Closure: Reply to Heylen," *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy* 5 (2016): 68–72, and "The Structure of Justification," *Mind* 127, n.506 (2018): 309-338, for further discussion. Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits*, 203, presents another argument leading to the same result, though his argument aims to show that evidence cannot include facts that are merely potentially possessed by the subject. Another argument against (IC-K) based on considerations about vagueness, first suggested by Patrick Greenough, is discussed in Rosenkranz, "The Structure of Justification," §4.3.

²³ Rosenkranz, "The Structure of Justification," 317. For similar examples see Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits*, 272; Heylen, "Being in a Position to Know and Closure," 66.

²⁴ For an overview of the paradox see Berit Brogaard, and Joe Salerno, "Fitch's Paradox of Knowability," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. N. Zalta (2019). The argument runs as follows: suppose that a subject S can know a proposition having the form [P and S doesn't know P]. Since knowledge distributes over conjunction, it would be possible for S to know P and to know that she doesn't know P . Moreover, if S knows that she doesn't know P , by factivity of knowledge, it follows that S doesn't know P . Thus, knowledge of that proposition implies that S knows P and does not know P . But this is a contradiction, and contradictions are impossible. By *reductio*, one cannot know propositions with that logical form.

²⁵ A similar argument apply to views endorsing notions of 'being in a position to know' such that one is in a position to know what one should know or should have known (e.g., those defended by Gibbons and Goldberg). Suppose that (i) S doesn't actually know p but should know it (because it is her responsibility to know it, or because it is just obviously available that p). Therefore she is in a position to know p . However, (ii) S is in a position to know that she doesn't know p (e.g., by introspection). A case that may fit this description is Out of the Ordinary, discussed in §1. See also Gibbons' 'note on the fridge' example in "Access externalism," 22.

²⁶ By facts 'potentially relevant' to what an agent ought to do I mean here facts that would contribute to determining what the agent ought to do provided that they satisfied the perspectivist accessibility condition. For example, the fact that it is raining outside is potentially relevant to whether I ought to take an umbrella, in the sense that if this fact were accessible from my perspective (in the relevant perspectivist sense), it would contribute to determining whether I ought to take an umbrella.

²⁷ The choice of a two-sets example is motivated by presentational purposes. The set can be constituted by any number of facts strictly greater than one.

²⁸ For instance, imagine that results of test 1 make it very likely that the patient has a disease that should be cured with X. Results of test 2 make it very likely that the patient has a different disease whose cure is Y. However the results together indicate with near certainty that the patient has a different, extremely rare condition whose cure is Z.

²⁹ Thanks to Paul Noordhof for directing my attention to this point.

³⁰ Many philosophers state this idea in terms of a response constraint on reasons. For example according to Gibbons, "if you have most reason to ϕ , you can ϕ for those reasons in those circumstances" (*The Norm of Belief*, 149). Similarly, according to Lord, "if A ought to ϕ , then A has the ability to ϕ for the right reasons" "Acting for the Right Reasons," §3.1; cf. Lord *The Importance of Being Rational*, §8.4). According to Jonathan Way and Daniel Whiting, ("Reasons and Guidance (Or, Surprise Parties and Ice Cream)," *Analytic Philosophy* 57 (2016): 214-35) "[t]hat p is a reason for you to ϕ only if you are able to ϕ for the reason that p " (ibid., 214). See Way and Whiting, "Reasons and Guidance," for helpful discussions of these principles.

³¹ Perspectivists endorse such guidance constraints on the basis of a wide range of considerations. Let me briefly mention three of them: (i) it seems that what we should do is something for which we can be held responsible, but we cannot be held responsible for not following directives that cannot guide us (e.g., Gibbons, *The Norm of Belief*, 128 and 147-149. (ii) If there are normative considerations that cannot guide us, we can follow them only by mere accident, not by being properly responsive to them. Often the recommendations of such considerations would conflict with what we reasonably think we should do. In such cases, we could do what we ought only by being unreasonable, i.e., by failing to do what we reasonably judge we should do. But many have argued that rationality is normative: we shouldn't be unreasonable. It follows that normative considerations must be capable of guiding us (e.g., Gibbons *The Norm of Belief*, Lord *The Importance of Being Rational*). (iii) According to the 'ought implies can' principle, an agent ought to do something only if she can do it. However, in many circumstances, one cannot do what one ought if one is not properly guided by normative considerations. If 'ought' implies 'can', normative considerations must be capable of guiding one's actions and decisions. Most perspectivists endorse

versions of the ‘ought implies can’ principle. See, for example, Gibbons (*The Norm of Belief*, 129-130 and 149); Kieseewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, Lord, “Acting for the Right Reasons,”; Zimmerman, *Living with Uncertainty and Ignorance and Moral Obligation*.

³² Many perspectivists deploy variants of this argument in support of their views. See, for example, Gibbons *The Norm of Belief*; Jackson, “Decision-theoretic consequentialism”; Kieseewetter “Ought” and the Perspective of the Agent”; Lord, “Acting for the Right Reasons,” and *The Importance of Being Rational*, ch.8). See Mason, “Objectivism and Prospectivism about Rightness,” for a helpful discussion.

³³ See, for example, Benjamin Kieseewetter, “You ought to F only if you may believe that you ought to F,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 66, n.265 (2016): 760–782 (see pp. 765-766), and *The Normativity of Rationality*, ch1, Zimmerman *Living with Uncertainty*, 61-62, 122, 203; Thomson, *Normativity*, ch.10, §3. Some of them admit the possibility of dilemmas at the level of qualified, *pro tanto* ‘oughts’ such as the moral or prudential ‘ought’. But when it comes to the all-things-considered ‘ought’, the kind of ‘ought’ relevant for genuine normative deliberation, they deny that there can be decisive reasons for incompatible actions or responses, and thus that there can be conflicting ‘ought’s of this sort. While denial of dilemmas is a clear mark of perspectivism, this view is also shared by many non-perspectivists. See, for example, Bernard Williams “Ethical Consistency,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 39 (1965): 103–38 (pp. 123-4), and *Moral Luck*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

³⁴ An example is the Joint Satisfiability principle advocated by, e.g., Zimmerman *Living with Uncertainty*, 121-122; *Ignorance and Moral Obligation*, §1.3) and Benjamin Kieseewetter, “Instrumental Normativity: In Defense of the Transmission Principle,” *Ethics* 125, n.4 (2015): 921–946, according to which, if an agent both ought to ϕ and ought to ψ , then she can both [ϕ and ψ].

³⁵ For similar considerations see also J. Dutant & C. Littlejohn, “On the Normativity of Rationality and of Normative Reasons” (manuscript).

³⁶ E.g., Ruth B. Marcus, “Moral dilemmas and consistency,” *Journal of Philosophy* 77, n.3 (1980): 121–136. See John Horty, *Reasons as Defaults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), ch4, for a recent insightful discussion.

³⁷ A clarificatory remark: this response says that the agent is permitted to perform either of the two actions *and nothing more than that*. The obligation to perform any of the actions is conceived as non-derivative from further obligations. This remark is important since according to Standard Deontic Logic one may be obliged to [ϕ or ψ] in virtue of being obliged to ϕ . For discussion of the principle allowing this derivation see the next footnote.

³⁸ In personal conversation, John Gibbons pointed out to me that an obligation to [either A^1 , or A^2] follows from an obligation to perform any of the actions, plus the principle of deontic logic according to which if one ought to ϕ , one ought to ϕ or ψ (formally: $\vdash O\phi \rightarrow O(\phi \vee \psi)$). Assuming that the agent ought to do one of the actions supported by accessible subsets of facts, she should also do their disjunction. So, whatever the agent ought to do, she should also do either A^1 or A^2 . It is worth observing that the deontic principle in question is extremely contentious, generally considered responsible for a number of paradoxes of deontic logics such as Ross’s paradox (see Paul McNamara, “Deontic Logic,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Summer 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), §4.3). Moreover, the obligation to perform any of the actions is derived from and thus parasitic on the further claim that the agent ought to perform one (and only one) specific action amongst the two available. While from the above principle one could derive the most exotic conclusions, these obtain only in virtue of the fact that the agent ought to perform some specific action. The question we are trying to answer here is precisely which that action is.

³⁹ As a former Red Cross volunteer I must admit I personally experienced similar situations in the past.

⁴⁰ It’s equally easy to conceive a problematic case in which an agent doesn’t know a certain fact but is in a position to know it because she should know or have known it. In the above example, substitute the claim that the bandage roll enters in the perceptual field of the paramedic with the claim that the paramedic should have known the location of the roll. This is enough to ensure that the fact that the roll is in a certain place is relevantly accessible to the paramedic (at least according to philosophers such as Gibbons and Goldberg), which decisively recommends taking the roll and saving the life of the injured person.

⁴¹ Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits*, 203.

⁴² This view bears some similarities to those defended by authors such as Kieseewetter, ““Ought” and the Perspective of the Agent”; *The Normativity of Rationality*, §8.7) and Zimmerman (*Living with Uncertainty*, 135; *Ignorance and Moral Obligation*). It is worth observing that it is unclear whether this view should ultimately be classified as a kind of potential perspectivism. For example, Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 72, explicitly classifies this sort of proposal as a form of actual perspectivism (in his terminology, a Holding view). See also Kieseewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, 199-201).

⁴³ For another case exemplifying the challenge see the variant of the paramedic case considered in fn 40.

⁴⁴ See §1 for discussion and references.

⁴⁵ E.g., Gibbons, "Access externalism" and *The Norm of Belief*; Goldberg, *To the Best of Our Knowledge*.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of this and other problems related to the practice of advice which apply to the present view see, e.g., Kolodny and MacFarlane, "Ifs and Oughts," 119–20; Thomson, *Normativity*, 187–91; Kieseewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, §8.5).

⁴⁷ Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 72-73.

⁴⁸ Lord (ibid: 73) further bolster his conclusion with cases in which agents get unexpected information from strangers.

⁴⁹ For reasons of space I didn't consider here other possible responses that I deem less plausible. An example is the idea that what the agent ought to do in this type of circumstance is indeterminate. There is no single determinate set of actions that one should do or attitudes that one should hold, but a variety of obligations relative to each potential perspective accessible to the agent. Skorupski, *The Domain of Reasons*, ch.2, considers a similar approach for epistemic reasons – which, in his view, are relative to what he calls 'epistemic fields'. He also recognizes some important problems for this view (ibid., §2.4). This strategy seems *ad hoc* and incompatible with standard perspectivist assumptions. In particular, an indeterminate 'ought' would clash with the idea that genuinely normative requirements should be capable of properly guiding rational decision-making and action. According to another proposal the agent should do what is supported by the disjunction of the accessible subsets of facts: [F¹] or [F²]. Again, since the two sets of facts are not jointly accessible, this proposal also cannot be reconciled with perspectivist commitments to proper action-guidance and to the idea that one should be in a position to discover via correct deliberation what she ought to do. Thanks to Julien Dutant for bringing this further option to my attention.

⁵⁰ E.g., Richard C. Jeffrey, "Probable Knowledge," *Studies in Logic and the Foundations of Mathematics*, 51 (1968): 166-190; David Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74, n.4 (1996): 549-567.