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How Reasons Are Sensitive to Available Evidence

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As limited beings, we are often ignorant or uncertain about facts that are potentially relevant for our decision making. Does this circumstance affect our normative reasons for action? There is a live debate about whether ignorance has any bearing on what we *ought* to do and on what we are *morally obliged* to do. Consider the following example by Judith Jarvis Thomson:

Day's End: Billy always comes home at 9:00 P.M. and the first thing he does is to flip the switch in his hallway. He did so this evening. Billy's flipping the switch caused a circuit to close. By virtue of an extraordinary series of coincidences, unpredictable in advance by anybody, the circuit's closing caused a release of electricity (a small lightning flash) in Alice's house next door. Unluckily, Alice was in its path and was therefore badly burned.¹

Thomson and some other moral philosophers hold that flipping the switch was impermissible for Billy; that Billy *ought not* to have flipped the switch no matter whether there was a way for him to come to know the relevant facts.² According to this view, the epistemic circumstances in which an agent finds herself are entirely irrelevant for the question of what she ought to do. Call this view *pure objectivism*. According to the opposite view, which I will call *perspectivism*, the epistemic circumstances of an agent *are* relevant for what the agent ought to do. Though perspectivist accounts differ with respect to how exactly epistemic

¹ Thomson (1990, 229). I have taken the liberty to substitute 'B' with 'Billy' and 'A' with 'Alice'.

² See Bykvist (2011); Graham (2010); Moore (1912, 80–2); Thomson (1990, 229–34); Wedgwood (2013). Of the mentioned authors, only Wedgwood explicitly endorses this view with respect to the deliberative sense of 'ought', while the other authors are primarily concerned with the 'ought' of moral obligation (see below for this distinction).

circumstances are relevant, they would all agree (I take it) that flipping the switch was permissible for Billy, given that he did not know and indeed could not have known that flipping the switch would cause any harm.³

Just as we can ask the question of whether moral obligations depend on epistemic circumstances, we can ask the question of whether what we ought to do, in the sense of ‘ought’ that figures in the deliberative question ‘What ought I to do?’ and in deliberative conclusions of the form ‘I ought to ϕ , all things considered’, depends on epistemic circumstances. Indeed, given that truths about moral obligations have implications for deliberative conclusions about what one ought to do all things considered, as seems natural to assume, we can expect that the answer to the first question will pretty much carry over to the second question. I will not presuppose that this is so, however. My topic in this chapter is the relevance of epistemic circumstances for the deliberative ‘ought’ rather than for the ‘ought’ of moral obligation.

This focus has two advantages. First, it seems clear that it makes sense to ask the question of whether epistemic circumstances are normatively relevant in non-moral contexts as well as in moral contexts. For example, it makes sense to ask this question in prudential contexts (consider a variant of *Day’s End* in which Billy burns himself rather than his neighbour). It also makes sense to ask this question in epistemic contexts: Should we believe only what is true or only what the available evidence suggests (even if it’s false)? It’s difficult to see why we should limit our discussion to morality, and this limitation is avoided if we focus on the ‘ought’ of deliberation.

The second advantage is that by understanding the debate between pure objectivists and perspectivists as being concerned with the deliberative ‘ought’, we avoid the complaint that it is a merely verbal dispute that can be dissolved by distinguishing different senses of ‘ought’, as is sometimes suggested.⁴ According to this view, there is a purely objective sense of ‘ought’, which warrants the

³ What I call ‘perspectivism’ is often referred to as ‘subjectivism’, but I think it is appropriate to reserve the latter term for a subgroup of perspectivist views (see below). Different versions of perspectivism can be found in Gibbons (2010); Jackson (1991); Kiesewetter (2011); Lord (2015); Prichard (1932); Ross (1939, 146–67); Scanlon (2008, 47–52); and Zimmerman (2008). As above, some of these authors focus on moral obligations rather than the deliberative ‘ought’.

⁴ Though some of them accept the dominance of one or more of these senses, Ewing (1947, 112–44), Parfit (2011, 150–64), and Schroeder (2007, ch. 1.3) all emphasize the need to distinguish different senses of ‘ought’ or ‘reason’. Alternatively, but in the same spirit, ought and reason statements are sometimes taken to be elliptical, i.e. claimed to be meaningless unless they at least implicitly refer to a particular body of information; see especially Björnsson and Finlay (2010) and Henning (2014).

verdicts of the pure objectivist, but there are other, belief- or evidence-relative senses of ‘ought’, which warrant the verdicts of the perspectivist. Yet, while distinguishing different senses of ‘ought’ may be useful and legitimate for various purposes, there remains an important question about which is the correct account of ‘ought’ in the deliberative sense of the term. The point of deliberation is, after all, to guide rational decision making and belief formation, and it can fulfil this function only if there is one univocal sense of ‘ought’ that figures in deliberative conclusions rather than a variety of potentially conflicting senses. There is thus a substantial question of whether the deliberative ‘ought’ is sensitive to the epistemic circumstances of the agent or not—a question that cannot be dissolved by distinguishing different senses of ‘ought’.

As is widely acknowledged, and as I will assume throughout this chapter, coming to a deliberative conclusion to the effect that one ought to ϕ amounts, roughly, to judging that one’s reasons, taken together, decisively count in favour of ϕ -ing. And so a view about the relevance of epistemic circumstances for the deliberative ‘ought’ has implications for the theory of normative reasons. These implications are the main concern of this chapter. My overall aim is to develop an account that takes reasons to be sensitive to the epistemic circumstances of the agent while at the same time preserving the ideas that reasons are facts and that reasons can be discovered in deliberation and disclosed in advice, and to provide an argument for it. The discussion will focus on normative reasons for action, but questions about the sensitivity of reasons to epistemic circumstances arise with respect to other reasons as well, and my account can be applied to normative reasons of all kinds.

The chapter comprises three parts. The aim of Section 1 is to outline a version of perspectivism that can accommodate the natural view that normative reasons are facts. The kind of perspectivism I defend holds that reasons are subject to an availability constraint, which can be spelled out in terms of an agent’s body of evidence. Section 2 develops this account further by drawing on the distinction between synchronic and diachronic reasons, i.e. reasons that call for immediate responses and reasons that call for responses at later times. I argue that synchronic and diachronic reasons are evidence-sensitive in different ways and show how this fact can accommodate phenomena in the contexts of deliberation and advice that strongly suggest that truths about reasons need not be conditional on the agent’s present evidence. Section 3 finally presents an argument for my account. I argue that views denying the kind of evidence constraint I put forward seriously *misguide* agents in forcing them, on pain of irrationality, to make irresponsible decisions in circumstances of uncertainty.

1 Objectivism and Perspectivism about Reasons

This chapter is about normative reasons, i.e. reasons that count in favour of a response that an agent can give, such as an action or a belief. My reasoning is based on two basic assumptions about normative reasons. Both of these assumptions seem supported by ordinary discourse, and they are widely shared in the literature, but they cannot be regarded as uncontroversial. I will take them for granted in what follows.

The first assumption was already mentioned; it concerns the connection between what we ought to do and what our reasons favour on balance (from now on, I always refer to the deliberative ‘ought’ when I use ‘ought’ without qualification). Deliberating about what one ought to do is a matter of figuring out what reasons there are and, in case these reasons point into different directions, weighing them against each other. Hence, a deliberative conclusion to the effect that one ought to ϕ entails a judgement to the effect that one has decisive reason to ϕ .

The second assumption is that normative reasons are, at least typically, facts or true propositions about the external world, such as the fact that you have promised to attend a meeting, or the fact that some treatment will provide the cure for a disease. Some reasons are also facts about one’s internal states (consider the fact that you have a headache). But they are typically not mental states themselves, and they are never false propositions. I say that they are ‘typically’ not mental states, because I do not want to deny that mental states can, in particular cases, qualify as reasons. For example, I do not want to deny that perceptual seemings can qualify as reasons for belief. Typically, however, normative reasons (for both action and belief) are ordinary facts about the external world. This is at least what we seem to presuppose in ordinary discourse. Firstly, we typically refer to reasons by citing ‘that’-clauses; we may say, for example: ‘that you have promised to attend the meeting is a reason to leave now’.⁵ Secondly, once a proposition p is accepted as false, a statement to the effect that p is a reason to ϕ is usually retracted or regarded as falsified as well. If you haven’t promised to attend, then that you have promised to attend cannot be a reason for anything.

⁵ This is not to deny that we sometimes express reason statements without citing ‘that’-clauses. However, as Schroeder (2007, 20–1) has convincingly argued, whenever something other than a proposition is cited as a reason, a proposition can equally well be cited to make the same point, while the converse is not true. Therefore, only views that take reasons to be propositionally structured can give a unified account of what reasons are.

In the light of these natural assumptions, it pays to distinguish two quite different ways to spell out the idea that what we ought to do may depend on our epistemic circumstances:

Subjective perspectivism: What A ought to do depends primarily on the (possibly false) contents of A's actual or counterfactual beliefs.

Objective perspectivism: What A ought to do depends primarily on the facts that are epistemically available to A.⁶

This distinction is often overlooked in the debate, if, as is common, authors label the denial of pure objectivism as 'subjectivism', or assume that pure objectivism is supported by the idea that what we ought to do must depend on the facts.⁷ Note that only objective versions of perspectivism seem compatible with my basic assumptions that 'ought' is a function of reasons, and reasons are facts. I will therefore disregard subjective perspectivism in what follows.⁸

According to a widespread assumption in the literature, pure objectivism and perspectivism can be defined as variants of the teleological thesis that what we ought to do is a function of value—objective value, in the case of pure objectivism; believed, expected, or prospective value in the case of perspectivism.⁹ I believe that this is a mistake. One problem is that the question of the relevance of epistemic circumstances applies not only to normative judgements about actions, but also to normative judgements about beliefs and other attitudes, and the teleological setup cannot plausibly be applied to such judgements.¹⁰ A further problem is that the teleological account presupposes the substantial thesis that what we ought to do is always a function of the value of our actions. This is controversial: many philosophers hold that the right is not in this way determined by the good. Whatever account is correct here, it should be clear that the

⁶ Note that both of these claims are compatible with the assumption that there are enabling conditions for ought-claims that need neither be believed nor epistemically available, such as the condition entailed by the principle that 'ought' implies 'can'.

⁷ Compare Thomson (1983, 178–9): 'Surely what a person ought or ought not to do . . . does not turn on what he thinks is or will be the case, or even on what he with the best will in the world thinks is or will be the case, but instead on what *is* the case.'

⁸ Some versions of subjective perspectivism (namely those according to which what we ought to do depends primarily on what we would believe if we believed in accordance with our evidence) may converge in their normative verdicts with some versions of objective perspectivism (namely those according to which what we ought to do depends primarily on those facts that are part of our evidence), though this is not a trivial assumption. Even if these views converge in their verdicts, however, they still disagree about the explanation of why these verdicts are correct.

⁹ Examples include Jackson (1991), Kolodny and MacFarlane (2010), Moore (1912, 80–2), and Zimmerman (2008).

¹⁰ Here I agree with Raz (2011, 41–5) that epistemic reasons are not to be explained in terms of value, such as a putative value of having true beliefs.

question of how what we ought to do relates to epistemic circumstances is a different one and should not be conflated with the first by defining positions on the normative relevance of epistemic circumstances in terms of value-determination.

An alternative route is suggested by the assumption that the deliberative 'ought' is a function of a person's reasons. Given that an agent ought to ϕ if and only if she has decisive reason to ϕ , the following strikes me as a very natural way of spelling out objective perspectivism:

The evidence-relative view: A has decisive reason to ϕ iff A's *available reasons* count decisively in favour of ϕ -ing.¹¹

What does it mean to say that a reason is available? I shall take for granted the idea, common in philosophical debates about theoretical rationality, that agents have at their disposal a body of evidence that provides reasons for beliefs.¹² Further, I shall assume that for something to be part of an agent's evidence, it is a sufficient condition that the agent knows it. If you know that it is raining, then the fact that it is raining is part of your evidence; it might be your evidence for believing that the streets are slippery, for example. It follows that facts or true propositions about the external world can be evidence. As propositions or facts that are part of an agent's body of evidence can figure as reasons for belief that are available in the relevant sense, the very same propositions or facts can also figure as practical reasons that are available in the relevant sense. If the fact that it is raining is among your evidence, it might provide you with an available reason to believe that the streets are slippery, but it might just as well provide you with an available reason to take an umbrella with you.

Is being known not only a sufficient but also a necessary condition for something to be part of an agent's body of evidence, as Timothy Williamson claims?¹³ Everything I go on to argue is, I think, compatible with this view, but it is also compatible with more liberal accounts of evidence, which allow that evidence might also consist in, for example, phenomenal experiences that are not propositionally structured, internal facts about which the agent has not formed a belief, or truths that the agent justifiably believes but does not know. There is no need to decide these questions here. What I will assume, however, is

¹¹ By contrast, *subjective* versions of perspectivism may be defined in terms of apparent reasons, i.e. reasons we *would* have if our actual or counterfactual beliefs were true. This is, in effect, Parfit's view (2011, 150–64) about the deliberative 'ought', which I have criticized elsewhere (Kiesewetter 2012).

¹² See e.g. Kelly (2006, §1), Williamson (2000, 186–90).

¹³ Williamson (2000, ch. 9).

that evidence is in an important sense *factive* and that evidence is *mentally accessible*. More precisely, I will assume that for E to be part of an agent's body of evidence, E either needs to be the case (if E is propositionally structured) or occur, and E either needs to be believed or be some internal fact or experience. Williamson's conception of evidence satisfies these criteria, but it is not necessary at this point to exclude other possible views that satisfy them.

The evidence-relative view claims that what an agent ought, or has *overall* decisive reason, to do is determined only by her available reasons. It is natural to ask what must be true on the level of *pro tanto* reasons in order for this view to be true. According to one interpretation of the evidence-relative view, all facts can be *pro tanto* reasons, but only available reasons count when it comes to determining what we ought or have overall decisive reason to do.¹⁴ According to another interpretation, only facts that are part of an agent's evidence can be reasons to begin with. Facts that are not part of an agent's evidence, but would be available reasons if they were, are merely *potential* reasons.¹⁵

Nothing essential seems to hang on the question which of these two interpretations of the evidence-relative view we adopt. And yet there are some considerations that arguably favour the latter view over the former. The first is that the former view allows for the existence of reasons that do not contribute to the truth of deliberative conclusions at all, and it seems doubtful how something that has no relevance for deliberation could still be a reason.¹⁶ The second is that a view that allows for unavailable, non-contributing *pro tanto* reasons is committed to the possibility that an agent ought to ϕ even though there are in fact stronger reasons for this agent not to ϕ . It seems to me preferable to avoid this commitment. The third and perhaps most important consideration has to do with the fact that admitting unavailable reasons creates problems if one accepts certain kinds of available reasons that a proponent of the evidence-relative view should be willing to accept. These are reasons that are constituted by evidential probabilities. For example, if there is a high chance (conditional on your evidence) that box 1 contains the main prize, then the proponent of the evidence-relative view should be willing to say that this is a reason for you to choose box 1. But if box 1 does not in fact contain the prize, and unavailable facts can provide reasons, then this fact is a reason for you not to choose box 1. The interpretation of the evidence-relative view that allows for unavailable reasons is now committed to the following description of your reasons: that there is a high chance that

¹⁴ Lord (2015, 28–9) adopts the view that all facts can be reasons that *there are* for us, but only the reasons that *we possess* contribute to the truth of deliberative conclusions about what we ought to do.

¹⁵ Compare Gibbard (1990, 162).

¹⁶ See also Henning (2014, 608–12).

box 1 contains the prize is a reason to choose box 1, but that box 1 does not contain the prize is a reason not to choose box 1. This description does not seem to be sensible. The mentioned facts could not both be reasons in the same situation; they could not be weighed against each other. This is not because weighing them is practically impossible from *your* point of view, but because there is *no* single point of view from which these two facts can sensibly be weighed against each other. It is better, then, to regard the fact that box 1 does not contain the prize as a *potential* reason against choosing box 1, i.e. as a fact that *would* be a reason if it were available.

The evidence-relative view, thus understood, holds that something can be a reason for an agent only if it is part of this agent's evidence. Given my assumption that evidence must be mentally accessible, this seems to entail that an external fact can be a reason only if it is believed. This, in turn, conflicts rather obviously with the natural assumption that reasons can be discovered, that we can learn that we had a reason that we ignored before. In order to avoid this implication, we might feel the inclination to adopt a broader conception of availability, which includes not only everything we know, but also everything that we are in a position to know.¹⁷

This view poses a number of problems, however. First, an agent might be in a position to know *p*, but end up being still ignorant of *p* if she conforms to all of her decisive reasons. In such a case, it is difficult to see why, from the standpoint of perspectivism, what this agent ought to do should be taken to depend on whether *p* is the case. Second, we are psychologically incapable of believing everything we are in a position to know, and it is difficult to see why, from the standpoint of perspectivism, what we ought to do should be taken to depend on the truth of a set of propositions that we cannot believe together. Third, and most importantly, a view that adopts this broad notion of availability faces a serious problem when we focus on reasons to act immediately. The problem is that coming to believe what one is in a position to know takes time—time that we sometimes cannot spend on coming to believe what we are in a position to know without thereby acting irresponsibly. Reasons to act immediately should be immediately accessible; their mediate accessibility is beside the point. I will be in a better position to substantiate this objection below, but I hope it is at least clear why one might think that it makes sense to insist on a stricter notion of availability, at least for reasons to act immediately.

¹⁷ Gibbons (2013, 176–7) and Lord (2015, 29, n. 5) both seem to adopt this view.

2 Evidence Constraints on Synchronic and Diachronic Reasons

My own account deals with this problem by drawing on the distinction between *synchronic* and *diachronic* reason statements—statements to the effect that at some time t , A has reason to ϕ at that time t ; and statements to the effect that at some time t , A has reason to ϕ at some time *later* than t . To get a grip on this distinction, consider a case in which on Monday, Anna promises Bob to help him move on Friday. Given this setup, we can distinguish the following two reason statements:

- (S) *Synchronic*: On Friday, Anna has reason to help Bob move on Friday.
- (D) *Diachronic*: On Monday, Anna has reason to help Bob move on Friday.

Before discussing this distinction in a bit more detail, I would like to make two clarificatory remarks. First, I will sometimes, for convenience, speak of synchronic and diachronic *reasons*, even though strictly speaking, the distinction I want to draw applies to *statements* or *propositions* about reasons, not to reasons themselves. It is not that (S) and (D) mention two different reasons, one of which is synchronic while the other is diachronic. Rather, one and the same reason (the fact that Anna has promised her help), figures in synchronic or diachronic reason *propositions*. Second, the following discussion is based on the simplifying assumption that reasons relate to *points* in time, even though strictly speaking, the relevant units of time must be temporally extended, at least to a degree that allows one to respond to the relevant reason with appropriate promptness. This follows already from the fact that the responses favoured by reasons are themselves temporally extended. But even apart from this fact, it seems clear that many reasons allow for considerable latitude with respect to the time of their satisfaction and must therefore be seen as relating to periods rather than points of time. To handle the discussion and keep focused on the main question of this chapter, I shall ignore this complication, however. I hope to come back to it on another occasion.

It may be asked why we should accept truths of the form (D) over and above truths of the form (S). In terms of our example, the answer is that (S) alone cannot account for the fact that once Anna gives the promise on Monday, this changes the normative situation. For example, on Tuesday Anna has a derivative reason against going on a one-week road trip because doing so is incompatible with her helping Bob on Friday. Plausibly, this reason derives from a reason to help Bob on Friday. But since it cannot derive from a *future* (synchronic) reason that Anna *will* have on Friday, it must derive from a *present* (diachronic) reason

to help Bob on Friday. For one, if we assume that the future synchronic reason provides a derivative reason against leaving for the trip on Tuesday, then we should likewise accept that it provides such a reason on Sunday. Plausibly, however, on Sunday, before she gave the promise, Anna did not have a derivative reason against going on the trip. Call this the argument from overgeneration. For another, Anna might have the derivative reason even if (S) is false and she will not in fact have a reason to help Bob move. To see this, suppose that despite having promised to help, Anna leaves for the trip and thereby makes it the case that on Friday, she is no longer able to help Bob move. If, as seems plausible, 'having a reason' implies that one can do the thing in question, this falsifies (S).¹⁸ But we should not conclude from this that Anna did not have a reason against leaving for the trip. This reason thus cannot derive from a future reason to keep her promise; it must derive from a present reason to do so. And so we need to accept truths of the form (D) over and above truths of the form (S). Call this the argument from undergeneration.¹⁹

Neither of these arguments turns on particular assumptions about the reason-giving force of promises. The argument from undergeneration works for any reason to ϕ that you might have in the future and which, intuitively, provides present derivative reasons not to incapacitate yourself from ϕ -ing in the future. These might be reasons to go to the doctor, reasons to help others in need, or whatever other reasons you accept. The argument from overgeneration works for any reason to ϕ that you might have in the future and which, intuitively, provides derivative reasons against incapacitation that you have at some, but not all, earlier times. These might be reasons that you have because you gave a promise, but also reasons to apologise because you wronged someone, or reasons to care for a child because you adopted it and thus undertook the responsibility to foster it.

The basic idea of the evidence-relative account I am proposing is that the constraint that a reason must be part of an agent's body of evidence applies only to synchronic reasons:

Synchronic evidence constraint: At t , R is a reason for A to ϕ at t , only if at t , A 's evidence includes R .

¹⁸ As this argument is presented here, it presupposes that *pro tanto* reasons imply 'can', which is more controversial than the claim that 'decisive reason' or 'ought' implies 'can'. This is not essential, however, since the same argument can be restated in terms of decisive reasons. For a forceful defence of the claim that not only 'ought' but also 'reason' implies 'can', see Streumer (2007).

¹⁹ Similar considerations have led other authors to distinguish between synchronic and diachronic reasons or obligations (though not necessarily by using my terminology); compare, for example, Goldman (1976, 449–50), Streumer (2007, 368; 2010, 80–2), and Vranas (2007, 175–8).

On the notion of evidence sketched above, this constraint guarantees that synchronic reasons are immediately accessible to an agent. But it also allows that reasons can consist in facts that are yet to be discovered by the agent, provided that these are reasons to do something at a later time. As a matter of course, this raises the questions of what the evidence-relative view has to say about diachronic reasons, how what it has to say relates to the synchronic evidence constraint, and what justifies the assumption that different constraints apply to synchronic and diachronic reasons. I shall answer these questions in turn.

My main thesis is that all reasons are subject to the following general constraint:

General evidence constraint: At t_1 , R is a reason for A to ϕ at t_2 , only if A 's evidence at t_2 would include R if A conformed to her decisive reasons at every t from t_1 to t_2 .²⁰

On this view, the relevant evidence that constrains diachronic reason claims is not the actual present evidence, but the evidence that the agent *would* have at the time at which she is supposed to give the relevant response, *if* up until that time she followed a course of responses that we might call 'normatively optimal', i.e. a course that is such that following it involves no violation of a (synchronic) decisive reason claim.

The constraint is *general* because it provides the correct conditions not only for diachronic but also for synchronic reasons. If we assume that t_1 and t_2 are identical, then the condition that A conforms to all her decisive reasons between t_1 and t_2 is trivially satisfied, and the evidence that A would have if she satisfied that condition just is the evidence that she actually has. The general evidence constraint thus entails the synchronic evidence constraint. And so it is not really true to say that on this account, different constraints apply to synchronic and diachronic reasons; rather, there is one constraint that applies to all reasons, and there are others that can be derived from it.

Still, the question is why we should not think that both synchronic and diachronic reasons are subject to the simpler constraint that requires all present reasons to be part of the present evidence. This view is implicit (and in some cases explicit) in almost all (if not all) perspectivist treatments—implicit in those that do not distinguish between synchronic and diachronic reasons; and explicit in

²⁰ Though still in the same spirit, this claim involves some revisions of the account I proposed in Kiesewetter (2011, 16). One difference is that the view suggested here takes as relevant the possible worlds in which one conforms to *all* one's decisive reasons, and not only to one's decisive reasons for seeking evidence. This step is suggested by the general account of synchronic and diachronic reasons below.

those that particularly claim that diachronic reasons depend on present epistemic circumstances.²¹

The first point against this standard way of understanding perspectivism is that the arguments that favour epistemic constraints in general, at least the arguments I am aware of, simply do not support the claim that diachronic reasons depend on present evidence, and that in the absence of such an argument, we should not accept such a restrictive constraint on diachronic reasons. The second point is that my alternative proposal allows us to accommodate a number of phenomena in which the use of ‘ought’ and ‘reason’ is geared to evidence that is better than the agent’s present evidence and thereby solves the most pressing problems that perspectivism faces. For example, it allows for making sense of the fact that agents, when deliberating about what they should do, often seek new evidence in order to find out the correct answer to their deliberative question. While standard forms of perspectivism can account for the fact that agents sometimes ought to seek new evidence (namely if their present evidence favours doing so), they cannot explain why agents in doing so usually understand themselves as finding out what they ought to do rather than changing the truth about what they ought to do. My account makes sense of this, because when agents are trying to find out what they ought to do, they are concerned with future actions, and reasons for future actions do not depend on the present evidence, but on the evidence one would have in the future if one followed a normatively optimal course.

Similar considerations apply to the much-discussed problem that standard forms of perspectivism have with accommodating advice. As Thomson and many others have pointed out, it is clear that a better-informed adviser will base his advice on what the agent ought to do not on the present evidence of the agent, but on his own better evidence. Standard forms of perspectivism may be able to explain why advisers ought to do this (their own evidence favours doing it), but they have a hard time making sense of our strong intuition that such statements of advice could be *correct*, rather than constituting justified lies.²² My account, in

²¹ See Zimmerman (2008, 135) for a perspectivist view that distinguishes synchronic and diachronic reasons (in Zimmerman’s terms ‘immediate’ and ‘remote’ obligations, cf. p. 128) and directly entails that diachronic reasons depend on present information.

²² Compare Graham’s (2010, 92) complaint against Zimmerman’s (2008, 32–3) treatment of advice. In a more recent discussion, Zimmerman (2014, 82–7) aims to vindicate the intuition that advisers can truthfully base their advice on better information. But since he continues to hold that diachronic ‘oughts’ depend on present evidence, he can accommodate this idea only by positing a particular interpretation of what requests for advice ask for, which strikes me not only as *ad hoc* but also as independently unattractive, because it sacrifices the natural idea that agents seek advice because they seek an answer to their deliberative question ‘What ought I to do?’

contrast, is perfectly compatible with the truth of such statements of advice. Since advising people is pointless unless we assume that there is still time for the agent to take new information into account before acting, advice must be concerned with diachronic rather than synchronic reasons, and such reasons depend, according to my account, not on the present evidence, but on the evidence that the agent will have at the time of acting if she follows a normatively optimal course. Apart from far-fetched cases, this course will include taking account of the information of the adviser, and so advisers can correctly base their advice on this information.²³

So there is much to gain for perspectivists by accepting the general evidence constraint rather than a simple constraint according to which both synchronic and diachronic reason claims depend on present evidence. In addition to these considerations, I shall now present an entirely independent argument that purports to show that if one accepts the synchronic evidence constraint, then one should also accept the general evidence constraint. The argument is based on the following claim:

Compatibility constraint: At t_1 , A has decisive reason to ϕ at t_2 , only if A's ϕ -ing at t_2 is compatible with A's following a normatively optimal maximal course of responses available at t_1 .

Let me explain. At some time t_1 , there are various courses of responses available to an agent. An available course is *maximal* just when no other available course includes it. Among the available maximal courses, only some will be normatively optimal, i.e. only some will be such that if A followed that course, then at every t from t_1 forward, A would conform to her decisive reasons at t . The compatibility constraint says that satisfying a present decisive reason claim must be compatible with following a normatively optimal maximal course.

We can see how plausible this claim is by looking at what it means to deny it. Let us suppose that A has decisive reason to ϕ at t_2 , even though ϕ -ing at t_2 would *not* be compatible with following a normatively optimal maximal course. Then, either there is no normatively optimal maximal course, or there is one, but following it is incompatible with ϕ -ing at t_2 . In either case, the only way for A to conform to her present decisive reason would be to violate another present or future decisive reason. Hence, denying the compatibility constraint commits one to accepting the possibility of some kind of tragic dilemma between decisive

²³ The case of advice from better-informed sources raises further questions that I cannot satisfactorily discuss here. I have tried to do this elsewhere; see Kieseewetter (2017, 221–9) for an extensive discussion.

reason claims—a case in which whatever you do, you will do something wrong. Some embrace this possibility in the case of moral obligations, but even those who do are quick to point out that such dilemmas cannot occur at the level of the all-thing-considered ‘ought’ of deliberation.²⁴ Certainly, we should expect there to be a way of conforming to a decisive reason that does not necessitate the violation of another (present or future) decisive reason. At every t , there must be a course of responses available to an agent that is normatively optimal, and conformity with present decisive reasons must be compatible with following such a course.

In order for the compatibility constraint to be true, there must be some kind of systematic connection between synchronic and diachronic reason claims. What is this connection? The constraint itself suggests an account along the following lines:

General account: At t_1 , R is a reason for A to ϕ at t_2 iff (i) at t_1 , R is the case (as are background conditions C_i, \dots , and C_n), and (ii) if A conformed to her decisive reasons at every t from t_1 to t_2 , then at t_2 , R would be a reason for A to ϕ at t_2 (partly because of C_i, \dots , and C_n).

A detailed discussion of the relation between synchronic and diachronic reasons is a topic for a separate paper. What is important in our context is that the compatibility constraint strongly supports the idea that diachronic reasons correlate with the synchronic reasons of a normatively optimal course, which is at the core of the general account. As far as I can see, any systematic account of the relation between synchronic and diachronic reasons must correlate diachronic reasons with the synchronic reasons of some course of responses or a set of such courses. Suppose that we correlate diachronic reasons with the synchronic reasons of a suboptimal course. At some point during that course, your synchronic reasons might very well require an action that you can only perform because you deviated from the optimal course. It would follow that your diachronic reasons require an action that you can only perform if you deviate from the normatively optimal course, and this violates the compatibility constraint. It is thus difficult to see how an account that does not correlate diachronic reason claims with synchronic reason claims of a normatively optimal course could accommodate the compatibility constraint.

The general account states that our diachronic reasons correlate with the synchronic reasons of a normatively optimal course. According to the synchronic

²⁴ See Williams (1965, 123–4). I argue in more detail against the possibility of conflicting deliberative ought claims in Kiesewetter (2015, 930–4).

evidence constraint, synchronic reasons must be part of the synchronic evidence. It follows from these two assumptions that facts provide diachronic reasons only if they would be part of one's evidence if one followed a normatively optimal course. That is, the general evidence constraint follows from the synchronic evidence constraint and the general account, which in turn seems part of the best explanation of the compatibility constraint. All that is left to motivate the view that I put forward here, then, is an argument for the synchronic evidence constraint.

3 In Defence of the Synchronic Evidence Constraint

In my view, perspectivism is best understood along the lines of a constraint which entails that a fact can be a synchronic reason for an agent only if it is part of that agent's evidence. Pure objectivism can be understood as the view that there is no such evidence constraint, neither on the existence of *pro tanto* reasons, nor on which *pro tanto* reasons bear on the truth of deliberative conclusions about what an agent ought or has decisive reason to do. Intermediate views are possible, of course. Such views deny the synchronic evidence constraint but accept some weaker constraint on reasons (or contributing reasons), such as the condition that R must in principle be knowable by a human being, or by the agent herself.²⁵ Even though the argument that I will present in this section is, strictly speaking, concerned only with pure objectivism, it eventually affects such intermediate views as well, and so it is really an argument against all views that deny the synchronic evidence constraint.

As is well known, pure objectivism faces a lot of pressure from what I will call 'known ignorance cases', such as the following famous example by Frank Jackson:

Jill is a physician who has to decide on the correct treatment for her patient, John, who has a minor but not trivial skin complaint. She has three drugs to choose from: drug A, drug B, and drug C. Careful consideration of the literature has led her to the following opinions. Drug A is very likely to relieve the condition but will not completely cure it. One of drugs B and C will completely cure the skin condition; the other though will kill the patient, and there is no way that she can tell which of the two is the perfect cure and which is the killer drug.²⁶

²⁵ For the former view see Thomson, who now (whilst slightly modifying her former view) accepts the constraint that 'we ought to do a thing only if a human being can know that we ought to' (Thomson 2008, 198). For the latter view, see Raz (2011, 110): 'if some people cannot know of a fact it does not constitute a reason for them, even though other people can know about it'.

²⁶ Jackson (1991, 462–3). Parfit (2011, 159) and Regan (1980, 265) present structurally equivalent cases.

As Jackson points out, the intuitively correct verdict in this case is that Jill ought to prescribe drug A. This is also what the evidence-relative view entails (if we combine it with any plausible first-order normative theory). The relevant *available* reasons are the following facts: drug A is very likely to relieve the condition; there is a 50 per cent chance that drug B will completely cure the condition and a 50 per cent risk that drug B will kill the patient; and there is a 50 per cent chance that drug C will completely cure the condition and a 50 per cent risk that drug C will kill the patient. According to any plausible normative theory, the balance of *these* reasons clearly weighs in favour of giving A and against giving B or giving C. So what Jill ought, intuitively, to do is provided by the balance of her available reasons.²⁷

Pure objectivism, in contrast, seems incapable of giving the intuitively correct verdict in this case, for there is a fact of the matter which of the drugs provides the complete cure. Let us say that this is drug C ('C' as in 'cure'). Since the pure objectivist denies the existence of an evidence constraint, he cannot exclude this fact from Jill's reasons; he is committed to the claim that the fact that C provides the cure is a reason to give drug C. Once we accept this, it is difficult to see how this reason could be outweighed by any other consideration that is relevant in this case. What better reason could there be? Surely the fact that C provides a complete cure is not outweighed by the fact that A relieves the patient's condition. Could it be outweighed by the fact that there is a 50 per cent risk that drug C will kill the patient? That does not make any sense. The risk in question is epistemic, it is relative to a set of information that does *not* include the fact that drug C will cure the patient. Once we accept that the fact that C is the cure as a reason to give C, we cannot at the same time take the fact that there is a risk that C is not the cure as a reason not to give C. There is no coherent standpoint from which both of these facts could provide reasons.²⁸ Could the fact that C is the cure be outweighed by the fact that Jill does not know whether C is the cure?²⁹

²⁷ I here assume that moral considerations provide reasons. But note that nothing in the argument hinges on the assumption that moral considerations provide reasons for every person no matter her desires or interests. If you doubt this, you are free to assume that Jill has moral desires or that John is identical to Jill.

²⁸ The same point applies to the suggestion that Jill's reason against giving C is that doing so is incompatible with maximizing expected value; accepting this fact as a reason also does not make sense if one also accepts the fact that C is the cure to be among Jill's reason. For this reason, I think that Broome's view (in 2013, ch. 3) according to which we should maximize expected rather than objective value in situations where, as he puts it, 'consequentialism . . . applies' (2013, 36), is coherent only in combination with an evidence constraint.

²⁹ Dancy (2000, 56) makes a suggestion along these lines in response to an example of Prichard's (1932, 93). Dancy's aim in this context is not to defend pure objectivism, but to show that one can make sense of Prichard's point that ignorance is normatively significant while maintaining that reasons are facts, i.e. without following Prichard in becoming a subjectivist. His suggestion that facts about one's ignorance can be reasons is compatible, and, I think, makes most sense in combination

That also does not make sense. Perhaps the fact that Jill does not know whether C is the cure is a reason for her not to give C. But this could only be so if the fact that C is the cure is not at the same time a reason for her to give C. Again, there is no point of view from which both of these two facts can sensibly be weighed against each other.

Hence, unless we accept an evidence constraint either for the existence of reasons or the relevance of reasons for deliberative conclusions, we are stuck with the conclusion that Jill ought to give C. This gives rise to a number of complaints against such a view. First of all, the conclusion is at least *prima facie* implausible. Second, it conflicts with intuitive connections between ought-judgements and legitimate criticism. In standard cases of ignorance, such as *Day's End*, pure objectivists can reply that our intuitions are misled by the fact that the agent justifiably believes the relevant action to be permissible, although in fact it is not. But this kind of debunking explanation is not available in known ignorance cases. Jill knows that giving A is not permitted by the pure objectivist's lights, and so the objectivist cannot explain the intuitions that Jill ought to give A and that she would not be criticizable for giving A by reference to the fact that Jill could justifiably, though falsely, believe that she ought to give A.

A further argument is that pure objectivism cannot account for the eminently plausible assumption that risks and chances, understood in terms of evidential probability, provide reasons for action. For example, the fact that giving C involves a 50 per cent risk of killing clearly seems a good reason against doing it, but as we have already seen, one cannot plausibly maintain this claim if one rejects an evidence constraint. Finally, there is of course the point that pure objectivism fails to provide normative guidance in circumstances of uncertainty and that we should expect a theory about the 'ought' of deliberation to provide guidance in a case like Jill's.³⁰

I believe that these are powerful arguments for accepting an evidence constraint on reasons, but in the remainder of this chapter, I will suggest that things are even worse for the pure objectivist. I will argue that pure objectivism not only fails to account for normative guidance, it seriously *misguides* agents, forcing them, on pain of irrationality, to make extremely irresponsible decisions.

with the evidence-relative view defended here. Indeed, Dancy suggests himself that there is an 'agent-relative epistemic filter' for facts to be reasons, and he provides independent support for this claim (2000, 56–9).

³⁰ For a further, independent argument for perspectivism, see also Kieseewetter (2016).

3.1 *The misguidance argument*

It is clearly a condition for an acceptable theory of reasons that it allows a person in Jill's circumstances, who deliberates in accordance with that theory, to rationally make a responsible decision. This is the first premise of the argument:

- (1) It is rationally possible for a person in Jill's circumstances to make a responsible decision while deliberating in accordance with the correct theory of reasons.

What decision could Jill responsibly make? No doubt, it is irresponsible to impose a 50 per cent risk of death on someone in order to gain a 50 per cent chance of curing a minor complaint, so Jill cannot responsibly give B or C. Let us assume that postponing the treatment would be likely to lead to a fatal deterioration of John's disease. It is then inevitable to accept:

- (2) The only responsible decision to make for a person in Jill's circumstances is to give drug A.

Pure objectivists and perspectivists agree on this premise; it cannot reasonably be denied that if Jill acts responsibly, she will give drug A.³¹

Next, let us suppose that Jill deliberates in accordance with pure objectivism. Jill must then come to believe that she either ought to give B or ought to give C. Let us suppose that she can only give one drug (for example because the financial resources only suffice for one treatment). It follows that, in a reasonably broad sense of 'means' that includes not only actions but also omissions, *not giving A* is a necessary means to giving B as well as to giving C. If Jill knows this, she has to conclude that not giving A is a necessary means to doing what she ought to do. And so she has to conclude that she ought not to give A. This follows from the transmission principle, according to which we ought to take the necessary means to actions we ought to perform, which is a valid inference rule for the deliberative 'ought'.³² Thus:

- (3) A person who deliberates in accordance with pure objectivism in Jill's circumstances must believe that she ought not to give drug A.

My final assumption concerns the connection between deliberative conclusions about what one ought to do and rational decision making. Deliberation aims at forming intentions and beliefs in the light of reasons. The point of practical deliberation, in particular, is to come to a decision to act. There is thus an

³¹ See, e.g. Graham (2010, 97).

³² As I have argued in Kiesewetter (2015).

important connection between ought-judgements and intentions: roughly speaking, one cannot rationally refrain from intending an action that one believes one ought, in the deliberative sense, to perform. Following John Broome, we can call this the *enkratic principle*.³³

The enkratic principle is subject to qualifications. For example, if you rationally believe that you will ϕ no matter whether you intend to ϕ or not, then, plausibly, you may rationally refrain from intending to ϕ while believing that you ought to ϕ . How exactly to spell out the qualifications of the enkratic principle is a matter of debate that I would like to bracket here.³⁴ For the purposes of the discussion, I will therefore only assume a much weaker principle, according to which one cannot rationally make a *positive* decision for an action that one believes one ought *not* to perform. I can find no good reason to think that this weaker principle is subject to any qualifications:

- (4) *Weak enkratic principle*: It is not rationally possible to decide for an action while at the same time believing that one ought not to perform this action.

Assumptions (1)–(4) entail that pure objectivism is false:

- (5) It is not rationally possible for a person in Jill's circumstances to decide to give drug A while deliberating in accordance with pure objectivism (*from 3 and 4*).
- (6) It is not rationally possible for a person in Jill's circumstances to make a responsible decision while deliberating in accordance with pure objectivism (*from 2 and 5*).
- (7) Therefore, pure objectivism is not the correct theory of reasons (*from 1 and 6*).

I shall refer to this as the *misguidance argument*, because according to it, pure objectivism not only fails to account for positive guidance in circumstances of uncertainty, it seriously *misguides* agents into making irresponsible decisions. If Jill believes in pure objectivism, she cannot rationally make the only responsible decision; she must, on pain of irrationality, risk the death of her patient by either refraining from any intentional action or by giving B or C.³⁵

³³ See Broome (2013, 170–5). Note that by affirming the enkratic principle, I do not (like Broome) assume the existence of a structural requirement of rationality, but only a claim about sufficient conditions for having the property of irrationality. See Kieseewetter (2017, 17–20) for a discussion of this distinction.

³⁴ See again Broome (2013, 170–5) for a discussion of these qualifications.

³⁵ Broome (2013, 40) and Ross (2012, 164) make similar points.

Note that the argument also applies to views that accept a weaker constraint than the synchronic evidence constraint, including versions of the evidence-relative view that assume that for R to be a reason (or for R to be a contributing reason) for A, A need not believe or know R, she only needs to be in a position to know R.³⁶ To see this, imagine an example in which Jill must order the treatments online, and she has exactly ten seconds left to send the order for A, B, or C (the order will not be mailed in time unless it is made before 6 p.m.). Suppose that she is in a position to know whether B or C is the cure, but it would take longer than ten seconds to do the thinking. Suppose that she knows all this; a reliable colleague has told her that she has all the information necessary to conclude which is the cure, but she has found it impossible to figure it out on the fly. If Jill believes in the envisaged version of the evidence-relative view, she has to conclude that she ought not to order A. But clearly this is the only responsible decision that she can make. And so the misguidance argument shows that synchronic reasons (or contributing synchronic reasons) must be immediately accessible; it is not enough that we are in a position to know them.

3.2 *The misguidance argument defended*

Let us reconsider the premises of the misguidance argument, in order to see where the opponent of the evidence constraint may try to resist it. Premise (1) seems beyond reasonable dispute. If it does not constitute a *reductio* of a view about reasons that deliberating in accordance with it forces Jill, on pain of irrationality, to risk John's death, then I do not know what would. That the only responsible decision for Jill is to give drug A (2) cannot seriously be questioned. That deliberating in accordance with pure objectivism in Jill's circumstances involves believing that one ought not give A (3) seems similarly uncontroversial: to my knowledge, it has not been denied and is often explicitly embraced by pure objectivists.³⁷ Moreover, rejecting that assumption is, as we have seen, incompatible with the transmission principle, which is intuitively plausible and can be supported by independent arguments.³⁸ It thus seems that the only way for objectivists to avoid the conclusion is to deny (4) the weak enkratic principle.

³⁶ By the same token, it also applies to the view defended by Raz, who accepts that reason-giving facts have to be in principle knowable by the agent, but denies that 'temporary epistemic limitations affect the force of reasons' (2011, 126).

³⁷ For example, both Bykvist (2011, 34–5) and Graham (2010, 97–8) assume that pure objectivism entails that Jill ought not to give A, and it is clear that if this is an implication, then it is one that Jill can, in her epistemic circumstances, come to believe by deliberation.

³⁸ See Kiesewetter (2015, §4).

It is just very difficult to see how one can deny this principle given that we are concerned with the ‘ought’ of what one has overall decisive reason to do, and not, at least not primarily, with the ‘ought’ of moral obligation. Note that everything I have claimed is consistent with denying the thesis of moral rationalism, according to which we always have overall decisive reason to do what we are morally obliged to do. If you deny this thesis, then you might also deny that it is not rationally possible to intend what you believe you ought not to do, where ‘ought’ refers to moral obligation. But the rejection of moral rationalism gives no cause for denying the weak enkratic principle, according to which it is not rationally possible to intend what you believe you ought not to do, where ‘ought’ refers to overall decisive reason.

The whole point of coming to a deliberative conclusion about what one ought to do is to guide decision making in a rational way. How then can it be rational to maintain a deliberative conclusion to the effect that one ought, all things considered, not to perform an action and then decide to do it nonetheless? In abandoning the weak enkratic principle, the pure objectivist seems to concede that the ‘ought’ that he has in mind is not, after all, the ‘ought’ that we employ in deliberative conclusions.

At this point of the debate, pure objectivists will be inclined to propose a qualification of the weak enkratic principle, which allows them to say that we can guide our decisions by ought-judgements in usual cases, but not in known ignorance cases. For example, Krister Bykvist seems to suggest that the weak enkratic principle applies *only in case the agent believes of a particular alternative option that it is permitted*.³⁹ If Jill believes in pure objectivism, then she does not believe of a particular option that this option is permitted. Hence, this qualification of the weak enkratic principle saves her from being irrational in deciding to give drug A. Similarly, Ralph Wedgwood claims that the weak enkratic principle applies *only in case the option referred to in the ought-judgement is sufficiently specific*, by which he means that the option is described as specific as ‘is rational for the agent to regard as potentially relevant to the decision in question’.⁴⁰ Since not giving A is not an option that is, under this description, as specific as is rational to regard as potentially relevant in Jill’s situation, the weak enkratic principle does not apply to Jill’s judgement that she ought not to give A.

The first thing to note about these replies is that they seem *ad hoc*; they introduce a condition on an intuitively plausible claim in order to save a controversial theoretical assumption. Wedgwood, for example, argues for his qualification of the enkratic principle on the sole basis of pure objectivism’s

³⁹ Cf. Bykvist (2011, 39).

⁴⁰ Wedgwood (2013, 495).

verdict in known ignorance cases. This may be a legitimate move if this verdict were independently plausible. But as is generally agreed between both proponents and opponents of pure objectivism, it is at least *prima facie* plausible to assume that Jill ought to give A, or that Jill can correctly conclude in deliberation that she ought to give A.⁴¹ The relevant qualification of the weak enkratic principle therefore cannot be justified by plausibility assumptions about Jill's case (or other known ignorance cases). It is not well motivated.

Second, if pure objectivists make this manoeuvre, they still owe us an explanation of how Jill can rationally make the decision for A if she believes in the correct view about reasons. So far, Jill only believes that she ought not to give A, and does not believe of any other particular option that it is permitted—how is she going to decide, then? There must be some kind of judgement that licenses her to rationally decide in favour of A despite her judgement that she *ought not* to give A.⁴² The pure objectivist, in effect, has to say that even though Jill ought not to give A, she *shmought* to give A. And he will then have to agree that an agent cannot be rational if she decides in favour of an action that she believes she *shmought* not to do.

For example, Krister Bykvist says that even though Jill ought not to give A, it is 'sensible' for Jill to give A, it is 'rational to prefer' giving A; and Jill 'should be willing' to give A.⁴³ Similarly, Peter Graham claims that even though Jill morally ought not to give A, Jill ought to give A in a 'pragmatic' sense 'associated with means and ends'.⁴⁴ Joseph Raz suggests that even though Jill's 'best reason supports one of the other drugs', Jill could rationally decide for A on grounds of the judgement that doing so 'is the best approximation to what she has best reason to do in the circumstances'.⁴⁵ And Ralph Wedgwood proposes that Jill can rationally intend to give A because this intention 'maximizes expected choiceworthiness',⁴⁶ where by 'choiceworthiness' he seems to mean the degree to which an option is favoured by reasons.⁴⁷

All of these suggestions may be understood as variants of the claim that the decision to give A can be licensed by a normative judgement *other than* an ought-judgement, which, for convenience, I call a *shmought*-judgement. They all face the same dilemma. Either we have sufficient reason to do what we *shmought* to do or not. If we have sufficient reason to do what we *shmought* to do, then, since Jill *shmought* to give A, Jill has sufficient reason to give A. But then pure

⁴¹ For example, Bykvist explicitly says that giving A is 'the intuitively right option' (2011, 34).

⁴² Andrić (2013) considers various options for what this judgement might be and convincingly refutes all of them.

⁴³ Bykvist (2011, 38–9).

⁴⁴ Graham (2010, 103).

⁴⁵ Raz (2011, 124).

⁴⁶ Wedgwood (2013, 496).

⁴⁷ Wedgwood (2013, 494).

objectivism is false, for pure objectivism entails that Jill has decisive reason not to give A, and one cannot have sufficient reason for an action one has decisive reason not to perform. If, on the other hand, we do not have sufficient reason to do what we shmought to do, it is unclear how we could rationally make decisions on grounds of shmought-judgements. To say that we may not have sufficient reason to do what we shmought to do is to admit that the normative question ‘Why do what I shmought to do?’ might not have an answer even though it can reasonably be asked. But if this is so, then it seems that we can rationally ignore what we shmought to do. The point is that what has normative authority for us are reasons; judgements about what is rational or sensible, even judgements about what is the best approximation to what one has reason to do, or what maximizes the expected degree of conformity with reasons, do not have normative force and thus cannot guide our decision making *unless we can assume that we have sufficient reason to follow them, which is exactly what the pure objectivist needs to deny*.

I conclude that the pure objectivist’s attack on the weak enkratic principle does not withstand scrutiny and the misguidance argument stands.

4 Conclusion

Let me briefly sum up the results of this chapter. Perspectivists claim, while pure objectivists deny, that what an agent ought (or has overall decisive reason) to do can depend on this agent’s epistemic circumstances. I have first presented a version of perspectivism that holds on to the natural, objectivist ideas that what we ought to do depends on our reasons, and that our reasons are facts. According to this view, reasons are subject to an availability constraint, which can be spelled out in terms of an agent’s body of evidence. I have then put forward a particular account of this constraint, which draws on the distinction between synchronic and diachronic reasons. According to this account, all reasons are subject to a counterfactual evidence constraint, which entails that synchronic but not diachronic reasons must be part of the agent’s present actual evidence. I have outlined (if only briefly) how this account can deal with phenomena in deliberation and advice, which suggests that reason statements can be geared to evidence that is better than the agent’s present evidence and which therefore poses significant problems for standard versions of perspectivism. Moreover, I have argued that the counterfactual evidence constraint is independently motivated by considerations about the general relation between synchronic and diachronic reasons if one accepts the synchronic evidence constraint. Finally I have sketched a number of arguments for the synchronic evidence constraint and defended one

of these arguments in detail. The argument purports to establish that a theory that denies this constraint misguides agents towards making irresponsible decisions on pain of irrationality and must therefore be false. I thus hope that this chapter has contributed to a better understanding of how reasons are sensitive to available evidence—and why.⁴⁸

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⁴⁸ Earlier versions of this chapter have been presented at Humboldt University of Berlin, Lund University, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, and, first of all, at the conference 'Normativity: Practical and Epistemic' at the University of Southampton in September 2015. I would like to thank the organizers of these events for giving me the opportunity to present my work and the participants for discussing it with me. I am especially grateful to Ben Bramble, John Broome, Jan Gertken, David Hunter, Wlodek Rabinowicz, Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen, Thomas Schmidt, and the editors of this volume for written comments and/or extensive discussion of the material that entered into the chapter. Parts of this chapter draw on ideas of my article "Ought" and the Perspective of the Agent' (Kiesewetter 2011) and chapter 8 of my dissertation, a revised version of which has been published as a book in the meantime (Kiesewetter 2017). I owe thanks to everyone who contributed to these writings as well. Work on this chapter has been supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG project 'Principles of the Deliberative Ought').

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