

Dispositional Evaluations and Defeat

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I. Success and good dispositions

Consider the following example, which many would diagnose as involving defeat by so-called higher-order evidence:

Lobelia and evidence about hypoxia

It's just the first day, but Lobelia is getting bored on her vacation in the Pyrenees, waiting in the hut while her friends climb a mountain. To pass the time, she starts working through some real forensic cases for practice. Her task is to identify the culprit in a case, given a range of evidence (laboratory evidence, evidence about the crime scene, etc). The task is far from straightforward. Lobelia competently evaluates a case, and forms the opinion that Penelope committed the crime (p). In fact, she comes to know this. Shortly thereafter one of her friends, a doctor specialised in expedition medicine, comes in, examines Lobelia, and tells her that given the altitude and various symptoms she exhibits, Lobelia is suffering from hypoxia. Such hypoxia impairs one's reasoning while making it seem perfectly fine – it is likely, her friend warns Lobelia, that her belief in p is the output of a flawed process. This time, however, Lobelia's friend is mistaken: Lobelia's original reasoning was impeccable.

Despite being an expert, on this occasion Lobelia's friend is deeply confused: though Lobelia does not know this, people just don't normally develop hypoxia at her altitude. Let us assume that despite the warnings, Lobelia

retains her belief in p . Many epistemologists think that a variety of familiar epistemic statuses are *defeated* in such cases: Lobelia's belief in p is no longer rational, no longer justified, and no longer constitutes knowledge.

Yet, as many have argued, familiar stories of these statuses fail to yield defeat. Of all proposed conditions on knowledge apart from truth and belief, *safety* is perhaps the most widely endorsed. But it is far from clear that Lobelia's belief is no longer safe from error.¹ Nor is it easy to see why it is no longer produced by a reliable process.² Perhaps more promising would be to argue for knowledge defeat *via* justification defeat. A popular way of thinking about justification is in terms of evidential support. But it is far from clear whether Lobelia's total evidence ceases to support p (e.g. by ceasing to make p likely): a peculiar feature of higher-order evidence is that it often seems to have no bearing whatsoever on the relevant first-order propositions.³ And wholly independently of particular conditions on knowledge, consider the following verdict: "Lobelia can just see, based on the evidence, that Penelope did it!" To me this sounds like a perfectly natural thing to say. But if seeing that is a way of knowing that, then Lobelia still knows p .⁴ Further, I have argued that there are principled reasons to think that correct epistemic norms cannot allow for a systematic phenomenon of

¹ See Lasonen-Aarnio (2010), Baker-Hytch and Benton (2015).

² See Beddor (2015) for a discussion of process reliabilism

³ David Christensen (2010) argues that it is peculiar to higher-order evidence that conditionalising on it leaves the degree to which one's evidence supports the relevant proposition p intact. Indeed, that is why he thinks that one must "bracket" part of one's evidence. See Schoenfield (2018) for a discussion of whether conditionalizing on a self-locating proposition might help. See also Baker-Hytch and Benton (2015).

⁴ I think this is also a natural thing to say at least in some putative cases of ordinary undercutting defeat. If Lobelia is looking at a red object, but then acquires misleading evidence about trick lighting, it seems natural to say that she can still see *that* the object is red.

defeat by higher-order evidence⁵, and that there is a serious tension within views that aim to accommodate it⁶.

My aim here is not to argue that there is no possible theory able to adequately accommodate and explain defeat by higher-order evidence. The project of this paper is more positive: to explore a new kind of strategy for explaining the seeming badness of retaining a belief in the face of evidence that it is flawed.⁷ Though my main focus will be on defeat, this paper is an implementation and application of a broader framework. What I see myself as doing is providing the most promising account of a kind of evaluation indispensable for making sense of cases ranging from ones involving victims of massive deceit to so-called Jackson cases – and most importantly for my present purposes, cases involving higher-order evidence like Lobelia's.⁸ As I see things, cases structurally similar to those that originally prompt the search for more “subjective” or “internalist” kinds of evaluations and norms – evaluations normally expressed by epistemologists using the ideology of *justification* and *rationality* – keep cropping up for a wide range of views, and there are principled reasons to think that they will keep cropping up.⁹ The inability of various views of justification to deal with higher-order defeat is, I think, yet another symptom of this general malaise.

The reason we want to negatively evaluate Lobelia, I will argue, is that she manifests dispositions that are bad relative to a range of candidate epistemic successes such as true belief and knowledge. My hypothesis is that for pretty much any success, manifesting good dispositions is neither

⁵ Lasonen-Aarnio (2014).

⁶ Lasonen-Aarnio (*forthcoming B*).

⁷ This diagnosis is continuous with one that I sketch in my 2010 paper “Unreasonable Knowledge”. I here outline the approach in more detail and refine it, applying it, in particular, to putative cases of defeat by higher-order evidence.

⁸ For so-called Jackson cases – and more generally, cases that have been invoked to argue for so-called subjective oughts – see Lasonen-Aarnio (*forthcoming C*). For the New Evil Demon problem, see Lasonen-Aarnio (*forthcoming A*).

⁹ See Lasonen-Aarnio (2014, *forthcoming B*, *forthcoming C*).

necessary nor sufficient for success: even knowing is compatible with manifesting dispositions that lead one astray across a range of relevant counterfactual cases. This general hypothesis, however, is too big a claim to defend in this paper. Rather, I will argue that given considerations about humanly feasible ways to be, subjects such as Lobelia who obstinately retain beliefs in putative cases of defeat by higher-order evidence are naturally construed as manifesting problematic dispositions. This, I will argue, is ultimately why Lobelia is criticisable.¹⁰

2. Ways and dispositions

The kinds of evaluations I will be concerned with evaluate doxastic states (choices, actions, etc.) in a manner that is sensitive to the way in which those doxastic states are formed and retained (the choices made, the actions performed, etc.). Instead of thinking of these ways in terms of methods, processes, or bases, I will let the dispositions that manifest themselves as one's ϕ 'ing (coming to believe something, retaining a belief, making a choice) do the work of identifying these ways. I will simply assume – like I think everyone should – that there are dispositions of a wide variety of different kinds, and that inanimate objects and rational subjects alike are constantly manifesting them.¹¹

¹⁰ Someone might take manifesting good dispositions to be a condition on knowledge. I won't here take on the task of arguing against such views, though see the remarks in Lasonen-Aarnio (2010).

¹¹ Given a realist background metaphysics of dispositions, thinking about ways of forming and revising beliefs in terms of dispositions makes progress with the generality problem: there simply is a fact of the matter regarding what dispositions a subject has and manifests. On my view the goodness of a disposition depends on the values of its manifestations across relevant counterfactual cases, and what might be seen as a version of the problem re-arises in connection with what counts as relevant. I endorse the context-sensitivity of dispositional evaluations: I think it is a good outcome that our focus as evaluators can shift what counts as relevant. Further, I don't think there is any view in epistemology that can escape all versions of the generality problem.

Metaphysicians (e.g. Lewis 1986) often draw a distinction between a sparse and abundant notion of a property; correspondingly, we can distinguish between a sparse and abundant notion of a disposition.¹² Being formed in the same or very similar ways should make for a real, objective similarity between two beliefs. A project aimed at drawing evaluative conclusions about doxastic states based on what dispositions they are manifestations of is best served by focusing on sparse dispositions. I will assume that we can find sparse dispositions at every level of reality, not just the microphysical level. The kinds of dispositions of interest when evaluating beliefs and choices occupy the same level of reality as these objects of evaluation – namely, the psychological level, broadly construed.¹³

My starting point will be that when an action, doxastic transition, or doxastic state can in some sense be attributed to an agent, it is the manifestation of some of these dispositions. (Sometimes things more or less happen to us: if, for instance, my mind comes to be controlled by some

¹² Abundant properties come cheap. As a general rule, there is one corresponding to every coherent, non-paradoxical predicate of a language. They can be wildly extrinsic and unnatural, and any two things share an indefinite number of them. They are closed under various logical operations, or satisfy various comprehension principles. For instance, if there is the property of being an F, there is also the property of being either an F or a G, and the property of not being an F. By contrast, from the fact that F and G are sparse properties, we cannot trivially infer that *having either F or G* is a sparse property; that *having F and G* is a sparse property, or that *not having F* is a sparse property. For arguments that we should distinguish between *fundamental* properties pertaining to a fundamental level of nature (assuming there is one) and *sparse* properties, see Schaffer (2004).

¹³ Corresponding to these different levels of reality are different levels of explanation. Dennett (1969: 93) famously distinguished between personal and subpersonal levels of explanation, taking both to be psychological explanations. Dennett's concern was with explanations of behavior, but such a distinction could be extended to explanations of belief. Following Dennett, we could distinguish between personal and subpersonal dispositions. Dispositions that work at the personal level are dispositions of (entire) persons. By contrast, subpersonal dispositions are dispositions of subsystems or parts of persons. There is much controversy about whether subpersonal explanations are really psychological in the first place (for a good overview, see Drayson *forthcoming*). I will remain neutral on these issues. The dispositions I am interested in are psychological, whether or not this means that they must be dispositions of persons.

external force causing me to be in a neural state that makes for believing *p*, then, believing *p* is not something properly attributable to me.) The claim that in standard cases, our actions and beliefs are manifestations of our dispositions should not be conflated with the false claims that actions attributable to an agent always arise out of *habit*, or that we only ever do things that we are *disposed to do*. We sometimes act out of character, but are still criticisable in a way that I want to be able to capture. Consider, for instance, a subject who uncharacteristically snaps at another person due to being tired and hungry. Even if she is uncharacteristically irritable, she might still be disposed snap at others in circumscribed conditions, when very tired and hungry, or perhaps she is disposed to become irritable (acquiring a new disposition) in these conditions. But further, doing something can originate in and be a manifestation of one's dispositions even in the absence of such more local or circumscribed dispositions: one might do it because of the way various specific situational factors interact with one's dispositions.¹⁴ For instance, a combination of certain company, an uncommonly boisterous mood, and some recent life-changing news might activate various dispositions a subject has (to try new things, to do things that are putatively good for her health, etc.), while masking others (having to do with avoiding discomfort). In these circumstances, jumping into an icy lake can be a manifestation of the subject's dispositions, even if she is disposed to avoid cold water. In this way, even doing things that one is not disposed to do, can be a manifestation of one's dispositions.

These points are related to an important way in which my dispositional evaluations differ from virtue-theoretic ones appealing to the notions of virtue and competence. Even if we think of competences and virtues dispositionally, the associated dispositions are general, complex and entrenched, impinging on a very wide range of different situations. In the

¹⁴ Cf Sher (2006: 23), and the range of cases he discusses.

case of moral virtue, for instance, what is at issue is character traits bearing on how one responds to and weights reasons, how one feels, acts, deliberates, and reacts; what one notices and attends to, desires, and values. Subjects can on particular occasions act excellently, in ways that an evaluative perspective oriented on good dispositions should be able to pick up on, without manifesting anything like full-blown virtue or competence. An unkind person might have a soft spot, responding on this occasion in a commendable way to the needs of those around her. Similarly for a person who is only in the process of learning to be kind – she might only unreliably be able to manifest dispositions to act kindly. Even when people act out of character, or fail to manifest full-blown competence or virtue, we can ask how good the dispositions they manifest on this occasion are.¹⁵

Dispositional evaluations share important features with evaluations standardly expressed by epistemologists using the ideology of *justification* or *rationality*, and differ from evaluations having to do with mere blamelessness or excuses. First, the evaluative perspective I outline below can be directed at an agent's acts in a broad sense of the term: for instance, one's coming to believe a proposition – and hence, one's belief – can be positively or negatively evaluated depending on whether it is a manifestation of good dispositions (which is not to say that a person cannot be criticized for manifesting bad dispositions). By contrast, blame is a reaction to a person on the basis of what they have done, or on the basis of their character traits; it is persons who are blameworthy or blameless.¹⁶ Second, manifesting good

¹⁵ Though I am not offering a theory of blameworthiness, for similar reasons I am very sympathetic to Sher's (2006, Ch 2) criticism of a Humean theory on which one can only be blameworthy for doing something bad if it originated from a vice or defect in one's character, thought of as some more general disposition to act in bad ways. See also Hurka's (2006) criticism of contemporary virtue ethics.

¹⁶ Cf Sher (2006: 7). Just as we may blame the hurricane for the low voter turnout, we may blame one's way of forming a belief for the falsity of the belief, but this kind of blaming is standardly taken to be essentially different from e.g. moral blame directed at persons (cf Sher 2006: ix) – it is not normative in a broad sense of the term.

dispositions is not merely a matter of a negative evaluation being inappropriate, in the way that blamelessness is. I share a common dissatisfaction with appeal to blamelessness and excuses in defense of more externalist or objectivist norms, which is that the tool is too blunt to carve out distinctions we want to make: our reactions to a range of cases seem to involve a kind of positive evaluation distinct from a mere failure to blame an agent.¹⁷ Blamelessness is disunified in the sense that there are multiple different ways of being blameless, and manifesting good dispositions is but one. Further, just as being positively evaluable from the dispositional perspective is not a matter of mere blamelessness, being negatively evaluable is not a matter of blameworthiness. Agents who manifest problematic dispositions are often, but not always, blameworthy. For instance, had Lobelia grown up in a community that instilled in her bad dogmatist habits under the guise of epistemic virtue, or had she been cognitively impaired in a way that excused her dogmatic habits, she might be blameless, but she would still be manifesting problematic dispositions.¹⁸

Let me now outline in more detail how I think of good dispositions.

¹⁷ This is a widespread criticism; for a recent elaboration in epistemology, see Simion, Kelp, and Ghijsen (2016).

¹⁸ What about praise? The objects of praise appear to be broader than those of blame. We often praise ways of acting or believing: we might praise Mahler for his orchestration, but we can also praise the orchestration itself, just as we can praise the technique displayed by an expert archer's shot. Indeed, by praising the orchestration in a Mahler symphony, we bestow praise on the symphony itself, and by praising the technique displayed by a shot we praise the shot. One reason I am cautious, however, of expressing my view in terms of praise is that where failing to merit blame is not positive enough, meriting praise seems excessively positive. A composer's orchestration might not be praiseworthy, but not criticizable or negatively evaluable, for it might simply be perfectly fine. By contrast, subjects who fail to manifest good dispositions in the sense I will outline below are criticizable. Relatedly, it is not clear, for instance, whether it is appropriate to praise the forming of an ordinary perceptual belief in good conditions, or other routine acts that require little expertise or effort. Nevertheless, such beliefs are positively evaluable, being paradigmatic examples of beliefs labelled justified or rational.

3. Dispositional evaluations

We form beliefs, normally retain them for some period of time, and often retrieve them from memory. One might, for instance, originally form a belief about a particular event through an exemplary perceptual process, but the belief about the event retrieved from memory might involve misremembering or confabulation. Conversely, one's memory about a past event might correspond to one's past experience, but the experience itself may have involved misperception that manifests bad dispositions, such as cognitive biases. Hence, our focus should not be exclusively on belief-formation, on acts of coming to believe. Especially important in connection with discussions of defeat will be ways of retaining beliefs in light of new evidence. Despite the good credentials of one's original belief, the dispositions at play in its retention might be problematic. Indeed, this will be my diagnosis of what happens in many putative cases of defeat. Hence, for a belief to be evaluated positively from the dispositional perspective, the formation of the belief must manifest good dispositions, and similarly for its retention and possible retrieval from memory.

Assume that a subject ϕ 's (e.g. comes to believe a proposition p , retains belief in p , or retrieves a belief in p from memory), and that her ϕ 'ing is the manifestation of some disposition D .¹⁹ What makes D good? Goodness is always relative to some success: the dispositions at play when one comes to believe that one's lottery ticket will lose just based on the odds may be good if epistemic success is a matter of believing truly, or believing what is likely on one's evidence, but not if it is a matter of knowing. The goodness of a disposition will depend on how successful its manifestations are across relevant counterfactual cases in which it manifests itself – more precisely, on

¹⁹ For the purposes of stating my view, I will assume for simplicity that there is just one disposition. It is, however, more realistic to assume that one's ϕ 'ing is the joint manifestation of multiple dispositions. In that case, the relevant cases will be ones in which *all* of these dispositions jointly manifest themselves.

the **values** of its manifestations in counterfactual cases, weighted according to **relevance**. Given a weighting of counterfactual cases in which a disposition manifests itself according to relevance, and a value function, we can determine an overall **score** for the disposition. We then need to say how the overall relevant kind of goodness of a disposition is related to its score. On the account I favour, manifesting good dispositions is a matter of manifesting the best **feasible alternative dispositions**, or at least ones that compare favourably enough with the best feasible alternatives. One's ϕ 'ing is to be evaluated positively just in case it is a manifestation of the best (or close enough to the best) feasible alternative dispositions. I will take up the different components of the account in turn. I will then say how the role played by feasibility in my account allows for taking shortcuts in making dispositional evaluations.

Relevance: I think that dispositional evaluations are highly malleable and context-dependent: what counts as relevant can easily shift depending on our focus and context as evaluators. Nevertheless, there are some general structural points to be made. The first thing to emphasize is that relevance should not be understood in terms of any relation that a case trivially bears to itself (to a maximal degree). In particular, relevance is not a matter of *relevant similarity*: counterfactual cases are not weighted according to how similar they are to the actual case. Similarly, relevance is not a matter of what could easily have occurred. This is because the case a subject is actually in might be deviant or *abnormal* and as a result, it – and cases very much like it – may be irrelevant when evaluating the goodness of a disposition. I won't here offer a theory of what such normality consists in, but even lacking a precise account, we have some initial grasp on what sorts of cases count as normal. Various circumstances involving highly misleading evidence, for instance, are abnormal: it is abnormal to encounter a real-looking fake tree

among real ones, to experience an intricately crafted perceptual illusion with no hints that one is experiencing it, etc. The dispositions manifested by a subject who comes to form a belief on the basis of such an illusion might be good, for across somewhat normal cases they manifest as knowledge-constituting (or otherwise epistemically successful) belief.²⁰

Here is a toy model that at least comes close to how I think about relevance. As evaluators, we consider some features of a case to be idiosyncratic, while holding others fixed. We can think of the features held fix as determining a contextually determined *type* of case. Relevant cases are somewhat normal or typical instances of the type. The relevance weighting might be binary, each normal case instantiating the relevant case getting the same, positive weight. Or relevance might come in degrees, a case being assigned more weight the more normal or typical it is. In the case of Lobelia, for instance, a very natural type to focus on is Lobelia receiving a certain kind of higher-order evidence regarding her own cognitive functioning from a certain kind of expert. We then consider other counterfactual cases falling under this type in which the same dispositions that Lobelia actually manifests manifest themselves.

Scores: The *score* of a disposition, representing how well the disposition does across counterfactual cases, is a function of the weighting of these cases according to relevance, and a *value* function. I will assume that the score of a disposition is a weighted average of the values of its manifestations in

²⁰ In my treatment of the new evil demon problem, I have argued that what counts as normal often depends on the kind of world or case that a subject is *anchored* to – she might in fact be in a case that is abnormal for her (see Lasonen-Aarnio *forthcoming A*). Hence, “alien cognizers” living in environments that are abnormal by our lights can be evaluated positively from the dispositional perspective, for their dispositions fare well in counterfactual cases that are not too abnormal for *them*.

counterfactual cases, the weightings being by relevance. (I think this is a natural view, though it is not the only possible one.)

The nature of the value function will, of course, depend on what the relevant success under consideration is. For some successes all that matters is whether a manifestation is a success or failure – coming close to succeeding doesn't get assigned any extra value (e.g. penalty shots in football). In other cases success itself comes in degrees. Consider, for instance, throwing darts, where one gets more points the closer the dart lands to the central region. And even if knowledge, for instance, itself is an all-or-nothing matter, one might think that a value function should assign less value to a belief that is false than to a belief that is merely true, but doesn't constitute knowledge. I return to these issues below.

It is worth noting that even fixing the success being focused on, the framework sketched is compatible with the value function shifting depending on the situation under consideration – being sensitive, for instance, to what is practically at stake for a given subject. Compare a subject in a low-stakes situation in which the practical cost of holding a false belief is not great, and a subject in a high-stakes situation in which false belief has dire practical consequences. The serious cost of false belief might incline us, as evaluators, to assign greater disvalue to false belief. The result of this may be that whereas disposition D_1 gets a higher score than D_2 when considering the low-stakes situation, this order is reversed when considering the high-stakes situation. As a result, though D_1 might be better for a low-stakes subject, D_2 will be better for the high-stakes subject. This is one of the ways in which the framework can accommodate a stakes-sensitive kind of epistemic evaluation.

Goodness and feasible alternative dispositions: How does the score of a disposition determine its overall goodness? There are various

approaches one could take here. On one possible view, goodness is a matter of having a score that is high enough in absolute terms. According the approach I favour, dispositional goodness is a matter of doing the best one feasibly can, or at least coming sufficiently close: whether one manifests good dispositions depends on what *feasible alternatives* there are, which in turn depends on one's cognitive makeup. If D_1 and D_2 are both feasible alternatives in one's situation, then D_1 is better D_2 than just in case it has a higher score. Just how close a disposition must be to the best feasible alternatives might depend on context.

There are various constraints, of different strengths, on how we could be disposed in the first place, and on what dispositions could be manifested in specific circumstances. Some are logical, some nomological, some metaphysical. Of particular importance below will be feasibility constraints flowing from broad features of our cognitive design: as a general rule, feasibility is constrained by our cognitive architecture, allowing for some idealizing.²¹ Hence, feasible alternative dispositions are dispositions that could, in a relevant sense of 'could' determined by context but constrained by our cognitive architecture, be manifested in the situation under consideration. An *alternative* disposition is one that would manifest itself as a relevant doxastic state, choice, or action in one's situation. For instance, relevant alternative dispositions in the Lobelia case manifest in the situation at hand as some doxastic state regarding the relevant proposition

²¹ Consider the literature on heuristics and biases – for instance, the systematic patterns of fallacious probabilistic reasoning exhibited by humans. Psychologists tend to think that such errors flow from features of our cognitive design, which consists of different systems tacked together (e.g. what is known as System 1 and System 2). If a subject commits the so-called bankteller fallacy, thinking a conjunction to be likelier than its individual conjunct, then even if she manifests some dispositions typical of human beings, she is not manifesting good dispositions: there is a better available disposition – indeed, we are sometimes able to pick up on such errors ourselves.

p .²² (It is feasible in Lobelia's situation to manifest a disposition to scratch one's head, but this disposition is not an *alternative* to the doxastic dispositions Lobelia manifests when retaining her belief in p .)

Of particular importance below will be considerations of feasibility regarding dispositions that *discriminate* between various cases. For instance, the rationale for safety precautions that we routinely take is that we cannot be disposed to only take those precautions in situations in which they are not redundant. We cannot be disposed to only use safety belts on car rides that end in crashes, or to buy insurance only for trips that end up involving some sort of calamity. But there are other, perhaps more interesting cases, in which our dispositions cannot pick up on certain features of the case we are in, even if the good and bad cases differ in some respects "from the inside". For instance, climbers are taught to check their harnesses and knots every time before relying on them. The aim is to be almost automatically disposed to go through certain checks in every situation. It would of course be more efficient to only double check when one has made some sort of error, but the problem is that in situations in which one has made an error, and in which double checking would reveal (or would at least be likely to reveal) the error, the error has already gone undetected until the procedure of double checking. These are, of course, often precisely the kinds of situations in which one's cognitive skills are somehow compromised due to fatigue, altitude, dehydration, etc. In order to be disposed to double check only when one has committed an error, one would have to be sensitive to having committed the error. But how could one be thus sensitive when the

²² Assume that the subject in fact manifests disposition D_1 . Then, in the actual case she manifests D_1 , and no other disposition. Nevertheless, we can ask whether some other disposition that *could* have been manifested is better. This is why I talk about *situations*: when asking what the best feasible dispositions are in one's situation, we keep fixed other features about the actual case, but not facts about what dispositions (if any) one manifests. My account also assumes counterfactual facts regarding what doxastic state a given disposition *would* have manifested as in one's situation.

error was undetected in the first place, often due to compromised cognitive skills?

Cases involving higher-order evidence that one's doxastic state is flawed are, I will argue, similar in many respects. The thought will be that given natural assumptions about human psychology, it is plausible that in a wide range of somewhat paradigmatic cases involving putative higher-order defeaters, a subject cannot be disposed to retain belief in light of higher-order evidence pointing to some sort of cognitive error *only* when no such error has in fact occurred. It is not humanly feasible to have retention-dispositions that discriminate between cases in which the higher-order evidence is misleading and cases in which it is not. As a result, the dogmatic subject's dispositions manifest as retaining belief *whether or not* the higher-order evidence is misleading. Her dispositions are problematic, for they will lead her to retain a botched belief – a belief that fails to constitute knowledge, and that fails to be appropriately based on one's reasons or evidence – across many relevant counterfactual cases. This is why she is negatively evaluable: there are better feasible dispositions.

According to the evaluative standard I have sketched, then, a doxastic state is positive evaluable just in case it is a manifestation of dispositions that compare favourably with feasible alternatives. A subject is criticisable if she manifests dispositions that are is worse (or significantly worse) than feasible alternatives. I think that evaluations that thus take into account feasibility constraints arising, in particular, from a subject's cognitive architecture are the most promising for capturing a more subjective dimension of evaluation across both the theoretical and practical realms – a dimension often picked out by talk of justification, or of a subjective sense of 'ought'.²³

That is not to say, however, that how good a disposition is in absolute terms is of no evaluative significance. Assume that a subject succeeds at

²³ See Lasonen-Aarnio (*forthcoming B*).

something (for instance, at goaling in football, or at knowing). We can now ask: given the dispositions manifested, would she have succeeded across a sufficiently wide range of cases involving somewhat normal variations of the idiosyncratic-seeming features of her situation? If so, the relevant dispositions have a kind of non-accidental connection to success: the subject's success does not essentially hinge on idiosyncrasies of her situation.²⁴ The non-accidentality of a success seems important, in particular, for being praiseworthy or creditworthy for succeeding.²⁵ Hence, not all cases of manifesting the best feasible dispositions are on a par.

I claimed at the outset that we often deploy the kind of dispositional evaluative perspective I have outlined. But at this point the reader might worry whether this is so, for occupying the perspective requires making judgments we rarely make, or are in a position to make. For instance, it seems to require tracking exactly which dispositions a belief manifests. But surely, the thought goes, we have very little access to the fine details of another subject's psychological processes. Moreover, the evaluations involve engaging in complicated calculations involving indefinitely many counterfactual cases. In response to these worries, let me point to various shortcuts one can deploy to make dispositional evaluations.

First, we often have plenty of knowledge about how good the dispositions manifested are, even if we are unable to identify the exact dispositions at play. If, for instance, a belief was formed as a result of ordinary

²⁴ Virtue epistemologists often talk about success being creditable to a subject: a subject succeeding in virtue of, or because of her competence. Knowledge, then, is belief that is true in virtue of being competent. As I am thinking about things, a belief can constitute knowledge, and be evaluated positively from the dispositional perspective, even if the fact that it constitutes knowledge is largely explained by somewhat invariant features of one's situation. I think this is plausibly true in many cases of testimony – indeed, testimony has been raised as a problem for virtue epistemologists (e.g. Lackey 2007).

²⁵ See Lasonen-Aarnio (*forthcoming C*).

perception, we don't need to be able to identify the exact dispositions, many of which might be sub-personal, to be able to judge that the dispositions involved are good: we have, after all, plenty of knowledge about how ordinary perception fares across counterfactual cases.

Moreover, it is important to see that considerations of feasibility alone can help determine that a subject's belief manifests bad dispositions. Consider the following simple case. You observe a subject not putting on a seatbelt. You are not sure exactly what dispositions she manifests, and just how circumscribed they are. (Perhaps, for instance, the subject is only disposed to forget when very distracted.) Nevertheless, you know that certain possible ways to be – certain possible dispositions to have – are just not ways that ordinary human beings could be. It is not feasible to be disposed to not put on a seatbelt only when the ride won't end in a crash. So whatever the dispositions in fact being manifested are, it is reasonable to assume that they cannot discriminate between cases in which the safety belt will prove useful and cases in which it won't. But dispositions that are thus indiscriminate between good and bad cases are problematic; it would be better to take the safety precaution and be systematically disposed to put on a seatbelt. Note also that this judgment does not depend on actually calculating the precise scores of the no-seatbelt and seat-belt dispositions, and then comparing these. We simply know that when crashes do happen, the outcomes for subjects wearing seatbelts tend to be much better, and that there are no significant harms to wearing seatbelts.

To sum up: we often have a good idea of what kinds of dispositions are humanly feasible. We often have a good idea of what kinds of humanly feasible dispositions a subject's belief (choice, action) could be a manifestation of. If all of the feasible dispositions are dominated by (significantly) better alternatives, then this is all we need to know in order

to correctly negatively evaluate her belief (choice, action) from the dispositional perspective.

Let me now finally apply dispositional evaluations to Lobelia's case.

4. Putative defeat and dispositional discrimination

Consider again the example *Lobelia and evidence about hypoxia* presented in the very beginning of this paper. Assume that despite the testimony of her friend, Lobelia retains her original belief. In what follows, I will evaluate Lobelia's dispositions relative to the success of knowing, but parallel points could be made given other kinds of epistemic success, such as true belief. (Indeed, the reasoning in the section that follows is neutral between veritism and gnosticism.)

What dispositions does Lobelia's belief manifest? Some of these are no doubt excellent: her belief was originally formed in an exemplary way. But as pointed out above, we must also evaluate the dispositions at play when Lobelia retains her belief in light of expert testimony that it was formed by a flawed process. In fact, we don't need to know exactly what dispositions Lobelia manifests, for considerations of feasibility provide a shortcut. Begin with the following question: could Lobelia be disposed to retain belief in the face of similar evidence (e.g. expert testimony) about her cognitive malfunctioning *only* when such evidence is misleading? It is plausible that she could not, if she is an ordinary human being. Consider, in particular, counterfactual cases in which Lobelia has similar higher-order evidence that is not misleading, cases in which she holds a belief formed through a flawed process that nevertheless seems to her to be perfectly fine. Being disposed to only give up belief in response to such higher-order evidence *when that evidence is not misleading* would require Lobelia to have dispositions that

discriminate between cases in which her original cognitive process is fine, and cases in which it merely seemed to be fine. But such dispositions are not humanly feasible.

Someone might object that by retaining her belief, Lobelia is acting in a way that is highly atypical of human subjects. In fact, most of us might be psychologically incapable of retaining belief in Lobelia's situation, and for this reason Lobelia's case might seem puzzling. But a natural response to such puzzlement is to start looking for explanations of what might make it feasible for Lobelia to retain her belief. Perhaps Lobelia has a dogmatic strain, resulting from being overconfident in her own epistemic abilities. Or perhaps she has a high need for closure, tending to seize on the first piece of evidence available, and to then freeze her opinion, being more generally indifferent to subsequent evidence. The fact that Lobelia's obstinacy is atypical seems to only strengthen my case, for all such explanations involve problematic dispositions.

Hence, whatever the precise dispositions manifested by Lobelia are, it is natural to take her to manifest a kind of obstinacy that is indiscriminate in problematic ways – obstinacy that manifests itself as retaining a belief formed by a flawed cognitive process in cases in which her higher-order evidence is not misleading.

Though I cannot defend these further claims here, on my view Lobelia can still *know* that Penelope committed the crime. (After all, she can just see that this is what the evidence points to – there is nothing whatsoever wrong with her cognitive faculties!)²⁶ Further, perhaps she could even come to

²⁶ Hence, when it comes to judgments about knowledge, my view is error theoretic: many epistemologists have misdiagnosed cases like Lobelia's as ones involving knowledge defeat, falsely inferring failure to know from the manifestation of problematic dispositions. I can here only gesture toward an error-theoretic explanation, but the rough idea is that in paradigm cases knowledge is accompanied by good dispositions – indeed, in paradigm cases, good dispositions play an important role in explaining how a subject came to know.

know that the testimony of her friend is on this occasion misleading. She might, for instance, reason that if she was hypoxic, it would be very unlikely for her to have come to truly believe p , and yet, she does truly believe p . If Lobelia knows that her higher-order evidence is misleading, then there is a perfectly good sense in which she can discriminate the case she is in from those in which she is in fact hypoxic, or the victim of some other cognitive defect. Call such discrimination **epistemic**. This is compatible, I think, with Lobelia not being able to discriminate her case and cases in which she is hypoxic in a **dispositional** sense. It is not feasible, I have argued, for Lobelia to only be disposed to ignore the kind of higher-order evidence she has in cases in which it is misleading, and her original cognitive process was in perfect order. In retaining her knowledge, Lobelia is manifesting dispositions that fail to discriminate between cases in which her cognitive process was flawed and cases in which it was not. As a result, the very dispositions she manifests lead her to retain belief formed by a botched process across a wide range of counterfactual cases. Epistemic access or discrimination does not entail dispositional doxastic discrimination, or vice versa.

It is worth emphasizing that the mere fact that our doxastic dispositions indiscriminately issue false beliefs in some counterfactual cases may be of no significance, for these cases might not be relevant. For example, assume that I come to believe there is a tree just outside the window. Now consider counterfactual cases in which I am looking at a very realistic-looking tree replica instead. My dispositions cannot discriminate between cases involving real trees and ones involving very realistic fakes. Nevertheless, my belief may still be dispositionally good, manifesting the best (or close enough to the best) feasible dispositions, for recherché cases involving highly realistic tree-replicas planted outside windows are just not relevant. What is different about putative cases of defeat by higher-order evidence is the fact that in such cases subjects have fairly strong evidence

that their cognitive abilities are malfunctioning or, more generally, that a doxastic state they are in fails by some normative standard. It is very natural to evaluate Lobelia's belief, now retained in light of the higher-order evidence, by looking at other, somewhat normal cases involving such evidence. (Indeed, epistemologists tend to talk about cases involving higher-order evidence as forming one epistemically salient kind). There is nothing abnormal about such higher-order evidence *not* being misleading. In fact, if anything, it is more normal for expert testimony not to be misleading than for it to be misleading.

In sum, I have argued that by retaining her belief despite the expert testimony that it is the output of a flawed process, Lobelia manifests dispositions that fail to discriminate between cases in which her higher-order evidence is misleading and cases in which it is not. As a result, these dispositions manifest as retaining a belief that is in fact the result of a flawed cognitive process across a wide range of relevant counterfactual cases – namely, cases in which the higher-order evidence is not misleading. I will now argue that there are better feasible alternative dispositions.

5. A better feasible disposition

There are two salient kinds of dispositions that a subject in Lobelia's situation could manifest. First, she could retain her true belief (and, on my view, knowledge), thereby manifesting dispositions that would have her retain flawed beliefs in other relevant cases involving higher-order evidence. Second, she could give up her belief by suspending judgment, manifesting dispositions that in other relevant cases manifest as giving up belief, whether or not the belief was formed by a flawed process. For ease of exposition, in what follows I will simply speak of a “retention-disposition” and a “suspension-disposition”. Many epistemologists have urged that a subject in

Lobelia's situation ought to give up her belief. I will now argue that given plausible assumptions about the value of knowledge/true belief and the disvalue of false belief, the best feasible dispositions manifest in Lobelia's situation as suspending judgment. This is so *even if* we concede, as I think we should, that Lobelia can retain knowledge.

We will evaluate the retention-disposition by only looking at cases in which Lobelia retains her belief, and evaluate the suspension-disposition by only looking at cases in which Lobelia suspends judgment. Nevertheless, the relevant counterfactual cases are otherwise similar: for instance, those assigned some significant weight, or considered relevant, are ones in which Lobelia gets higher-order evidence that is similar to the evidence that she acquires in the actual case. Whichever disposition we are evaluating, we can divide the relevant counterfactual cases into three classes:

- (1) Lobelia's initial belief is the result of a good doxastic process, p is true, and the higher-order evidence is misleading.
- (2) Lobelia's initial belief is the result of a flawed process, but nevertheless true.
- (3) Lobelia's initial belief was false (whether are a result of a good or bad doxastic process).

Instead of assigning each individual case a weight, for each disposition, we can just divide all of the counterfactual cases into these three classes according to which kind they fall under, and assign these classes weights (I will assume that these weights sum up to 1). Assuming each relevant case to have the same weight, we can think of the weight assigned to the first class of cases, for instance, as corresponding to the proportion of counterfactual cases in which Lobelia's higher-order evidence is misleading. Moreover, it is plausible that these weights should be the same whether or not we are

evaluating the retention-disposition or the suspension-disposition: the weighting of counterfactual cases should depend on issues like how often expert testimony of the sort that Lobelia receives tends to be misleading.

In order to score the two dispositions, we need to determine the values of believing p (Bp) and not believing p ($\sim Bp$) in cases falling into each of the three classes. I have assumed that if Lobelia is able to retain her belief, the higher-order evidence need not destroy her knowledge. I will assume that if Lobelia retains belief in cases that fall under (1), she continues to know (this will just make it more difficult, not easier, to argue that the suspension-disposition is better).²⁷ In the table below, \mathbb{k} denotes the value of knowing, \mathbb{t} the value of truly believing, and $-\mathbb{f}$ the disvalue of falsely believing. Not believing (for instance, suspending judgment), I will assume, has a neutral value 0 across the board.

Kind of case	U (Bp)	U ($\sim Bp$)
(1) HOE misleading, p	\mathbb{k}	0
(2) HOE not misleading, p	\mathbb{t}	0
(3) $\sim p$	$-\mathbb{f}$	0

There are different ways of thinking about the value of true belief *versus* the value of knowledge *versus* the disvalue of false belief. According to *veritists*, true belief is valuable, and there is no added value to knowing; knowing inherits its value from the value of true belief.

Veritist evaluations: $\mathbb{k} = \mathbb{t} > 0 > -\mathbb{f}$

²⁷ One might object that there are some cases in which p is true, and the HOE is misleading, but Lobelia nevertheless does not know p , due to being in some sort of Gettier-case. I agree, but relaxing this idealization would only make a suspension-disposition *better*, not worse.

According to *gnosticists*, knowledge is valuable, and more valuable than true belief. Gnosticists have various options when it comes to the value of true belief.²⁸ They nevertheless all agree that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief, and that mere true belief is no worse than false belief:

Gnosticist evaluations: $k > 0 > -f, k > t \geq -f$

All of this, I take it, is rather uncontroversial. I will also make the following assumption: $k < f$. That is, the disvalue of false belief is greater than the value of true belief or knowledge.²⁹

Whether one is a veritist or a gnosticist, it follows from these assumptions that if the weight assigned to (3) is at least .5, then not believing does better than retaining belief across the relevant counterfactual cases. Assume for simplicity that each individual case is assigned the same non-zero weight. We can then rephrase the point as follows: if at least half of the relevant counterfactual cases are ones in which Lobelia's initial belief is false, then suspending judgment is a better overall strategy – that is, the suspension-disposition is better. And it is plausible that Lobelia's initial belief is false in at least half of the relevant counterfactual cases, cases in which she gets evidence akin to the testimony of an expert that her cognitive process is flawed. Assume, for instance, that in 90% of relevant counterfactual cases, Lobelia's higher-order evidence is not misleading: she is in fact hypoxic (or suffers from some other defect). In those cases Lobelia's dispositions will manifest as retaining a flawed belief. In none of those cases does the belief constitute knowledge (presumably, even true beliefs that are outputs of flawed cognitive processes don't constitute knowledge). Moreover, Lobelia's

²⁸ See Dutant and Fitelson (*manuscript*).

²⁹ See Dutant and Fitelson (*manuscript*) for discussion.

belief will be false in the vast majority of these cases, for flawed processes rarely happen to produce true beliefs.

One consequence of this approach is that if Lobelia's higher-order evidence was weaker, retaining belief might manifest good dispositions. Assume, for instance, that Lobelia is told that at an earlier time, prior to forming her initial belief, there was an objective chance of 10% that she would be hypoxic by the time she formed this belief. Depending on the value of knowledge/true belief, and the disvalue of false belief, in this case the best feasible dispositions might manifest as retaining belief. I think this is a very good result. After all, we should almost always assign some non-zero credence to the hypothesis that any given belief was formed by a flawed process. Nevertheless, this shouldn't lead us to an unending process of second-guessing ourselves or calibrating our opinions.

Before wrapping up, I want to distinguish my way of evaluating dispositions from a more instrumentalist one, and to say how my view is not susceptible to various objections levelled against consequentialist views in epistemology.

6. Contrast with instrumentalist views

On the broad approach outlined, doxastic states are evaluated by evaluating the dispositions that these states are manifestations of, dispositions being evaluated by looking at the values of their manifestations across relevant counterfactual cases. Consider a success *S*, and a disposition *D* manifested by a subject in a given situation. Here are two importantly different ways of evaluating the goodness of *D*, relative to *S*.³⁰ Take manifestations of *D* across

³⁰ Earlier statements of my view did not clearly distinguish between these, though it was always the first kind of view I had in mind. For instance, in Lasonen-Aarnio (2010) I talk about "adopting or being guided by policies, thought of as sets of rules, that have certain consequences for knowledge".

relevant counterfactual cases. First, we could ask whether manifestations of D tend to *be successful* – or at least as successful as those of feasible alternative dispositions. (This is a rough and ready way of putting things: I intend it to be compatible with assigning values to these manifestations depending on how close to success they come). Second, we could evaluate manifestations of D by asking whether they tend to *produce* the relevant success, whether they tend to be good *means* to success, or whether they tend to have the relevant success as a downstream consequence. It should be clear that I have been assigning values to dispositions in accordance with the first approach.

I think it would be wrong to restrict epistemic evaluations to dispositions that manifest as forming, revising, retaining, or retrieving doxastic states. For instance, engaging one's rational brain before reasoning about difficult, emotionally laden topics and consulting a variety of sources are good things to do from the epistemic perspective. This is a point I return to below. Nevertheless, I have focused on a specific kind of epistemic evaluation of doxastic states. Some dispositions are good when evaluated from the more instrumental perspective focused on the consequences of their manifestations, but bad when evaluated from the perspective focused on the manifestations themselves. To take an example from Horowitz (*forthcoming*), consider an arachnophobic subject who is almost bound to form botched beliefs about a wide range of topics whenever she believes that there are spiders nearby. She has plenty of evidence about the proximity of spiders, but she manages to believe that there are in fact no spiders nearby. For such a subject, a disposition to believe, no matter what evidence she has, that there are no spiders nearby might be an instrumentally good disposition, since it allows her to form other good beliefs (beliefs that are true, proportioned to the evidence, that constitute knowledge, etc.). Nevertheless, such a disposition is not good in the sense that I have outlined,

for it does not tend to have successful manifestations: across a range of counterfactual cases including the actual one, it manifests as belief that is false, that fails to be proportioned to the evidence, and that fails to constitute knowledge.

It should be clear, then, that the view outlined is not susceptible to an objection often levelled against more consequentialist views – namely, that it allows for problematic kinds of tradeoffs.³¹ Relatedly, one might object that evaluating dispositions in terms of the epistemic consequences of their manifestations takes us out of the traditional epistemic realm: though failure to get enough sleep might have bad epistemic consequences, norms telling one to get enough sleep are not epistemic, but practical ones.³² But of course, the manifestations of a disposition to stay up too long at night are not doxastic states and hence, not even the sorts of things that could constitute epistemic successes like knowing.

Whether we call dispositions that are good in the more direct way outlined *knowledge-conducive* is a terminological choice. Similarly, whether the evaluations I have outlined are *consequentialist* may be a terminological issue: there might be a perfectly good sense in which a disposition has good consequences in virtue of its manifestations tending to be successful. What matters is that there is an important difference between two ways in which a disposition could be said to be conducive to success, or to have good consequences for success. The kinds of dispositional evaluations I have outlined evaluate dispositions by looking at how successful their manifestations are across relevant counterfactual cases, compared with feasible alternatives.³³

³¹ For a discussion of consequentialist views in epistemology and how they allow for tradeoffs, see Berker (2013).

³² Cf. Horowitz (*forthcoming*).

³³ Though this should be very clear by now, it is also worth emphasizing that my account does not evaluate dispositions in terms of subjective expectations. Consider the success of

Nevertheless, I think it is a virtue of focusing on dispositions that while we can simultaneously make sense of the kinds of more narrow epistemic evaluations that epistemologists have often been exclusively concerned with, the kind of framework outlined can be tweaked to make sense of epistemic evaluations in a broader sense. Indeed, we can evaluate a wide range of dispositions relevant to successful inquiry. As an example, consider a very narrowly focused subject whose everyday habits don't expose him to much evidence. There isn't anything wrong, as such, with his sources, it's just that they are not very plentiful or diverse: he tends to read a single newspaper, restricting his attention to certain topics within it. His beliefs are reasonable in light of the available evidence – indeed, many are even true, and constitute knowledge. Or, consider an even more worrying case involving limited evidence. As a result of subconscious biases, an employer only superficially glances over a job candidate's CV. As a result, he fails to gain relevant evidence about her – for instance, he never learns about a highly pertinent degree. However, given the evidence he has, he reasonably decides that she is not a suitable candidate: among other things, he knows that she has a(nother) degree in an area not very relevant for the job. The employer's beliefs might be perfectly proportioned to the reasons and evidence he has.³⁴ A broader evaluative perspective focused on dispositions

having accurate credences, where a credence in a proposition p is more successful the closer it is to 1 if p is true, and the closer it is to 0 if p is false. Schoenfield (2016) proposes a way of evaluating a doxastic plan by asking what the (subjective) expected accuracy of *making* the plan – of trying to update in accordance with a given procedure – is. (Similarly, we could evaluate doxastic dispositions by asking what the expected accuracy is of credal states produced by those dispositions.) Though our accounts have some structural similarities, dispositional evaluations are more objective: a subject's opinions about the goodness of a disposition might themselves be inaccurate, or she might lack any such opinions. Note also that Schoenfield's results (like many results concerning the expected accuracy of update procedures) also rely on assumptions about evidence that I would reject, like partitionality.

³⁴ See Miracchi (*forthcoming*) and Flores and Woodard (*manuscript*) for a more detailed discussion of such cases.

allows criticizing the evidence-seeking dispositions of these subjects – for instance, the dispositions manifested by the employer when he merely glances over the candidate’s CV. For instance, one might point out that they are not as conducive, in the instrumental sense, to knowledge as alternatives. Or, we might instead focus on the success of having a representative, sufficiently comprehensive body of evidence. The evidence-seeking dispositions of these subject are not very good (in the more direct, non-instrumental sense) when it comes to this success.

7. Conclusions³⁵

I have outlined an evaluative perspective that explains why Lobelia, as well as other subjects who acquire seemingly defeating higher-order evidence, are criticisable for retaining their beliefs. I argued that it is not feasible to manifest dispositions that discriminate between cases in which the kind of higher-order evidence Lobelia has is misleading and cases in which it is not. Whatever dispositions Lobelia manifests, her obstinacy is indiscriminate in problematic ways – it manifests itself across a range of relevant cases involving similar evidence as retaining flawed beliefs. There are better feasible dispositions, dispositions that would manifest in her situation as suspending judgment. This is so given a range of veritist and gnosticist views and hence, given a range of different ways of assigning epistemic values to doxastic states.

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