

# Rule-Following, Ideal Conditions and Finkish Dispositions<sup>\*</sup>

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According to Saul Kripke, my meaning addition by “+” (and, more generally, my meaning a certain thing by a certain sign) cannot be analysed in terms of my having certain dispositions for two reasons. The first being that the relation of meaning and intention to future action is *normative*<sup>1</sup>. The second being, on the one hand, that the totality of my dispositions covers only a *finite* segment of the total function<sup>2</sup> and, on the other hand, that some of us have dispositions to make *mistakes*<sup>3</sup>. Here I will not say anything of interest about the “Argument from Normativity” (which I have already discussed elsewhere<sup>4</sup>); I will rather focus on the “Argument from Finitude and Mistake”. The most popular objection to this latter argument is that it takes into account only the most naïve of the dispositional analyses and that it does not work against a less rough approach. Here I will discuss what we may call the “Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis”, the sole “less rough

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<sup>\*</sup> Earlier versions of (some parts of) this paper were given at the VIII National Conference of the Italian Society for Analytic Philosophy and at the Università degli Studi di Milano in February 2009. A distant ancestor of the argument of this paper appeared in my *Il Mito del Dato*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis, 2009, II, § 3, pp. 80-82. The book is a slightly revised version of my PhD thesis, which I defended in January 2008.

<sup>1</sup> Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language – An Elementary Exposition* (1981), Oxford, Blackwell, 1982, 2, pp. 23-25 and 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, *cit.*, 2, pp. 26-27.

<sup>3</sup> *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, *cit.*, 2, pp. 28-30. This latter point must not be assimilated to that concerning the alleged normativity of meaning and intention. The two points are distinguished very clearly in Paul A. Boghossian, *The Rule-Following Considerations*, V, part II (Dispositions and Meaning: Normativity), in *Mind*, vol. XCVIII, 1989, pp. 507-549, as well as in Åsa Maria Wikforss, *Semantic Normativity*, I, § 1, pp. 207-209, in *Philosophical Studies*, vol. CII, 2001, pp. 203-226.

<sup>4</sup> Andrea Guardo, *Kripke’s Account of the Rule-Following Considerations*, forthcoming in *European Journal of Philosophy* and Andrea Guardo, *The Argument from Normativity against Dispositional Analyses of Meaning*, in Volker A. Munz, Klaus Puhl, Joseph Wang, *Language and World – Papers of the XXXII International Wittgenstein Symposium*, Kirchberg am Wechsel, Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society, 2009.

approach” Kripke considers in his rejoinder to this objection<sup>5</sup>. In the first part of the paper I will argue that Kripke’s discussion of the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis is wanting; in the subsequent sections, I will show that it doesn’t matter all that much, since a few steps into the ongoing debate on the metaphysics of dispositions are sufficient to show that this approach is not very promising<sup>6</sup>.

## I – Rule-Following and Ideal Conditions

Let us start with the Argument from Finitude and Mistake. Kripke’s point of departure is that something can constitute my meaning a certain thing by “+” only if it can determine the correctness criteria for my use of that sign<sup>7</sup> (for simplicity’s sake, Kripke works with a simplified notion of correctness: correctness as accordance with some fact in my past history<sup>8</sup>; I will do the same). From this it follows that in order to analyse my meaning addition by “+” in terms of my having certain dispositions, the dispositionalist must produce a suitable definition of the relevant correctness criteria in terms of my dispositions (it is worth stressing that this claim is weaker than that of

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<sup>5</sup> For other proposals see, *e. g.*, Fred I. Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1981 and Jerry A. Fodor, *A Theory of Content, II: the Theory*, in Jerry A. Fodor, *A Theory of Content and Other Essays*, Cambridge-London, MIT Press, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> An anonymous referee for this journal remarked that my discussion seems mostly directed at a conceptual analysis claim, rather than at some *a posteriori* form of reduction. The referee is right, and, therefore, I think I owe the reader some explanation here. Well, take a paradigmatic example of *a posteriori* reduction: that of heat to molecular motion. It should be clear that even if such a reduction can be seen as an explanation of the phenomenon of heat, it would be a mystification to say that before the reduction we had no idea of what heat is. And, indeed, it seems that if we had not had the faintest idea of what heat is, no *a posteriori* reduction would have been possible (actually, the issue would not even have arisen). Now, I am pretty sure that many semantic dispositionalists believe the case of (the mental state of) meaning to be analogous to that of heat; however, I think they are wrong: I do not believe that we have a clear enough idea of what meaning is. The very fact that meaning has been identified with things as diverse as *qualia* and dispositions is inconsistent with the idea that we have strong enough intuitions on the matter. Of course, we have a use for sentences of the form “*X means Y by Z*”, but this is fully compatible with the idea that the notion of meaning relevant in this paper is, say, a philosophical daydream. What we need here is an *Erläuterung* of the concept. Hence my conceptual-analysis reading of semantic dispositionalism.

<sup>7</sup> Wittgenstein on *Rules and Private Language*, *cit.*, 2, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Wittgenstein on *Rules and Private Language*, *cit.*, 2, p. 8.

the normativity of meaning<sup>9</sup>). The following Simple Dispositional Analysis seems to be the most natural candidate:

When I perform an application of “+”, the application is correct if and only if it is in accordance with my past dispositions concerning its use (in a mathematical context, of course). When asked for “68 + 57”, the answer I *have* to give is “125” because this is the answer that, in the past, I *was disposed* to give when queried about this sum<sup>10</sup>.

However, some pairs of numbers are too large for my mind to grasp; therefore, I may have been disposed to shrug my shoulders when asked for the corresponding sums. According to the analysis in question, that would then be the correct response; and this is absurd (note that the point is that my dispositions cover only a finite segment of addition, not that the totality of my dispositions is finite, as sometimes Kripke seems willing to maintain<sup>11</sup>). Moreover, some of us have dispositions to make mistakes; therefore, I may have been disposed to give the response “5” when asked for the sum “68 + 57”. According to the analysis in question, that would then be the correct response; and this is, once again, absurd (note that there would be no point in objecting that *some* of the speakers that have dispositions to make mistakes also have dispositions to withdraw the wrong responses and substitute the right ones and that we could define the right response in terms of my dispositions to answer when queried plus my dispositions to retract: the unquestioned existence of subjects not disposed to withdraw the wrong responses or disposed to withdraw the right ones would indeed be sufficient to disqualify this definition too<sup>12</sup>).

This was the argument. And this is the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis:

When I perform an application of “+”, the application is correct if and only if it is in accordance with my past dispositions concerning its use *in ideal conditions*.

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<sup>9</sup> See, e. g., Anandi Hattiangadi, *Is Meaning Normative?*, § 1, p. 222, in *Mind & Language*, vol. XXI, 2006, pp. 220-240.

<sup>10</sup> See *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, *cit.*, 2, pp. 22-23 and 26.

<sup>11</sup> This is an answer to an objection put forward in Simon Blackburn, *The Individual Strikes Back*, § 2, pp. 289-290, in *Synthese*, vol. LVIII, 1984, pp. 281-301.

<sup>12</sup> This is an answer to an objection put forward in *The Individual Strikes Back*, *cit.*, § 2, p. 290.

When asked for “68 + 57”, the answer I *have* to give is “125” because this is the answer that, in the past, I *was disposed* to give when queried about this sum *in ideal conditions*<sup>13</sup>.

Since the ideal conditions are those in which when asked for a sum, I give the right response, it is clear that the Argument from Finitude and Mistake is of no use here. However, if all we have to say on the ideal conditions is that they are those in which when asked for a sum, I give the right answer, then the account presupposes the very notion it should explain (that of right answer) and it is therefore viciously circular. But is it possible to clarify what “ideal conditions” means here without reference to this notion? Kripke maintains that we might try, but a little experimentation will reveal the futility of such an effort<sup>14</sup>.

If we cannot clarify the notion of ideal conditions without reference to that of right response, then the account is bound to be viciously circular. So far, so good: the conditional definitely holds. However, Kripke fails to prove its antecedent. Actually, he does not even try to. He just maintains that “a little experimentation” will do the job; and this, no doubt, underestimates the complexity of the problems involved<sup>15</sup>.

Now, once it is recognized that Kripke’s argument against the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis is incomplete, we find ourselves with a certain number of options. We can try to prove Kripke’s unproved assumption<sup>16</sup>, we can try to build a brand new argument against the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis<sup>17</sup>, we can even drop the Argument from Finitude and Mistake and concentrate on something else<sup>18</sup>. In what follows, I will turn the second way. More precisely, I will argue that the dispositions with which the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis identifies my meaning

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<sup>13</sup> See *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, *cit.*, 2, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, *cit.*, 2, pp. 30-31.

<sup>15</sup> See *The Rule-Following Considerations*, *cit.*, V, part IV (Optimal Dispositions), § 23, p. 537.

<sup>16</sup> See, *e. g.*, *The Rule-Following Considerations*, *cit.*, V, part IV. It is worth noting that Boghossian works with a wider concept than that of ideal conditions. This allows him to apply his remarks to theories such as Dretske’s, too.

<sup>17</sup> See, *e. g.*, Martin Kusch, *Fodor v. Kripke: Semantic Dispositionalism, Idealization and Ceteris Paribus Clauses*, in *Analysis*, vol. LXV, 2005, pp. 156-164.

<sup>18</sup> See, *e. g.*, *Kripke’s Account of the Rule-Following Considerations*, *cit.*, § II.

addition by “+” do not exist (in so doing, I will develop a suggestion by Paul Boghossian<sup>19</sup>).

It is worth stressing once again that the argument I will outline is an argument *against the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis*. There are other ways for refining the Simple Dispositional Analysis and there are ways for resisting the Argument from Finitude and Mistake other than refining the Simple Dispositional Analysis. Martin and Heil, for instance, argued that the limitations the Argument from Finitude and Mistake finds so meaningful can be explained in terms of masks and/or finks and that this fact can be used to show that the argument in question is flawed<sup>20</sup> (as we will see, this strategy is to the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis as Martin’s overall attitude towards masks is to Hauska’s treatment of masking). Now, my argument does not presume to constitute a threat to any of these options; however, it is of some interest to note that Martin and Heil’s proposal has been criticized on a basis somewhat parallel to that on which I will criticize the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis<sup>21</sup>. This seems to suggest that the difficulties I will call attention to cannot be bypassed easily. Furthermore, I think that my strategy might be useful for the assessment of other philosophical arguments involving the notion of a disposition in ideal conditions and, hence, I believe it to be of general interest.

We can now turn to the first step of my argument. I will start with some remarks on the concept of a disposition.

## II – The Actuality Constraint

Though it turns out to be rather difficult to clarify what exactly it consists in, most philosophers think that there is some conceptual link that ties statements about dispositions to conditionals; after all, there seems to be a conceptual link between, say, the fragility of a Bohemian glass and the fact

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<sup>19</sup> *The Rule-Following Considerations, cit.*, V, part I (Dispositions and Meaning: Finitude), § 19, pp. 529-530. For some more recent remarks about the Argument from Finitude and Mistake see Paul A. Boghossian, *Epistemic Rules*, § II, pp. 495-497, in *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. CV, 2008, pp. 472-500.

<sup>20</sup> John Heil, C. B. Martin, *Rules and Powers*, in *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. XII, 1998, pp. 283-312.

<sup>21</sup> See Alexander Bird, Toby Handfield, *Dispositions, Rules, and Finks*, in *Philosophical Studies*, vol. CXL, 2008, pp. 285-298.

that it would break if struck. Of course, philosophers being what they are, a quick survey of the relevant literature will soon reveal dissenting voices; as early as the fifties, for example, Stuart Hampshire hurled himself at the idea that descriptions of character, dispositional statements such as “Elaine is irascible”, involve conditionals<sup>22</sup> (actually, Hampshire often speaks of “dispositions”, period, but in the sense in which he uses the word while descriptions of character are statements about dispositions, descriptions of “the causal properties of things” are not<sup>23</sup>)<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless, as I said before, the idea of a conceptual link between dispositional statements and conditionals continues to enjoy a good press, and several philosophers still think that statements about dispositions are liable to a real conditional analysis.

According to David Lewis, «[...] statements about how a thing is disposed to respond to stimuli can be analysed straightforwardly in terms of *counterfactual* conditionals»<sup>25</sup>. This might seem to be far too strong a thesis: an irascible man does not cease to be irascible once angry, even if a fragile thing does cease to be fragile once broken<sup>26</sup>. However, Lewis’ claim is not as strong as it might seem, since his use of the word “counterfactual” is (as well as his reading of counterfactual constructions) a technical one, and his theory allows for counterfactuals with true antecedents; that is: counterfactuals that are not counterfactual<sup>27</sup>. Since I will rely heavily on Lewis’ work in what follows, I will often use counterfactual constructions without implying that the relevant antecedents are false.

Until some years ago, the following Simple Conditional Analysis seemed a viable option:

X is disposed at time T to give response R to stimulus S if and only if *if* X were to undergo stimulus S at time T, *then* X would give response R<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Stuart Hampshire, *Dispositions*, in *Analysis*, vol. XIV, 1953, pp. 5-11.

<sup>23</sup> *Dispositions*, *cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Fara, *Dispositions and Habituals*, in *Noûs*, vol. XXXIX, 2005, pp. 43-82 can be seen as a development of some core ideas of Hampshire’s work, even if Fara does not mention it.

<sup>25</sup> David Lewis, *Finkish Dispositions*, I, § 1 (The Analysis Stated), p. 143 (my italics), in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. XLVII, 1997, pp. 143-158.

<sup>26</sup> See, e. g., *Rules and Powers*, *cit.*, § 2, p. 291.

<sup>27</sup> David Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (1973), Oxford, Blackwell, 2001, 1, § 1.1, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> See *Finkish Dispositions*, *cit.*, I, § 1, p. 143.

(do not mistake this Simple *Conditional* Analysis for the Simple *Dispositional* Analysis: the latter is an analysis of meaning in terms of dispositions, the former an analysis of dispositions in terms of conditionals). Then, however, came C. B. Martin's justly famous paper on dispositions and conditionals<sup>29</sup>. Martin's point of departure is that dispositions can be caused to come and go. Now, S itself may be the very thing that causes the disposition to go away. If the disposition disappears quickly enough, it will not be manifested. Therefore, it will be false that if X were to undergo stimulus S at T, then it would give response R. Nevertheless, it will still be true that X is disposed at T to give response R to stimulus S. Such a disposition is called "finkish", and it is clear that every finkish disposition is a counter-example to the analysis<sup>30</sup>. And just as the right side of the analysis may be false while its left side is true, the right side may be true while the left side is false. S itself may be the very thing that causes X to gain the disposition. If the disposition is gained quickly enough, it will also be manifested. Therefore, it will be true that if X were to undergo stimulus S at T, then it would give response R. Nevertheless, it will still be false that X is disposed at T to give response R to stimulus S. In such a case, we can say that the lack of the disposition is finkish, and it is clear that also every finkish lack of a disposition is a counter-example to the analysis<sup>31</sup>.

Martin's original examples involve a wire connected to what he calls an "electro-fink", a machine that instantaneously makes a dead wire live, and (by operating on a reverse cycle) a live one dead, as soon as the wire is touched by a conductor (note that the reverse-cycle electro-fink is just an electrical safety switch)<sup>32</sup>. These examples presuppose that there is such a thing as instantaneous causation. The argument I presented is Lewis' version of Martin's refutation, which does not rely on this controversial assumption (it is worth noting that Lewis worked out a version of Martin's refutation that does not rely on the assumption in question simply because he acknowledged that it is controversial, not because he deemed it wrong<sup>33</sup>).

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<sup>29</sup> C. B. Martin, *Dispositions and Conditionals*, in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. XLIV, 1994, pp. 1-8.

<sup>30</sup> See *Finkish Dispositions, cit.*, I, § 2 (How a Disposition Can Be Finkish), pp. 143-144.

<sup>31</sup> See *Finkish Dispositions, cit.*, I, § 3 (How a Lack of a Disposition Can Be Finkish), p. 144.

<sup>32</sup> *Dispositions and Conditionals, cit.*, § II.

<sup>33</sup> *Finkish Dispositions, cit.*, I, § 5 (Resisting the Refutation: a Dilemma about Timing?).

Another, and for some purposes better, source of finkish cases is Lewis' meddling sorcerer, who watches and waits, resolved that if ever his beloved but fragile, or hated but unbreakable, glass is struck, then, quick as a flash, he will cast a spell that renders the glass no longer fragile, or (*mutatis mutandis*) no longer unbreakable<sup>34</sup>.

There is a general consensus that Martin made his case against the Simple Conditional Analysis. However, the refutation of the Simple Conditional Analysis is not sufficient to show that there is no conceptual link that ties statements about dispositions to conditionals. One could argue that the link, albeit real and also important, cannot take the form of an if-and-only-if analysis. And, needless to say, Martin's argument also leaves room for *other* conditional analyses of dispositions.

Here is Lewis' Reformed Conditional Analysis:

X is disposed at time T to give response R to stimulus S if and only if *for some intrinsic property P that X has at T and some time T\* after T, if X were to undergo stimulus S at time T and retain P until T\*, then S and X's having P would jointly be an X-complete cause of X's giving response R*<sup>35</sup>.

We can define the concept of an *intrinsic* property by saying that P is an intrinsic property of X if and only if X has P regardless of what is going on outside of itself (such a definition leaves open the possibility that P be intrinsic to X<sub>1</sub> but extrinsic – that is: non-intrinsic – to X<sub>2</sub>; other definitions<sup>36</sup> do not; however, this need not bother us here). Perfect duplicates share all their intrinsic properties, and the converse also holds. A cause is *X-complete* if and only if it is «[...] complete in so far as havings of properties intrinsic to X are concerned [...]»<sup>37</sup>.

The analysis takes into account, first, that, intuitively, X's having a given disposition at a certain time and a certain world has something to do with X's having a given intrinsic property *at that time and that world* and, sec-

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<sup>34</sup> *Finkish Dispositions, cit.*, I, § 6 (Resisting the Refutation: a Compound Disposition?), p. 147.

<sup>35</sup> See *Finkish Dispositions, cit.*, II, § 4 (Towards an Analysis: End), p. 157. In what follows, my use of the term “property” will be somewhat loose: I will use it to refer both to universals and to the corresponding tropes.

<sup>36</sup> Such as that of Jennifer McKittrick, *A Case for Extrinsic Dispositions*, § II, p. 158, in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. LXXXI, 2003, pp. 155-174.

<sup>37</sup> *Finkish Dispositions, cit.*, II, § 4, p. 156.



ond, that, just as intuitively, X's having the property in question must be, together with X's undergoing the relevant stimulus, an X-complete cause of X's giving the relevant response *only under the assumption that X were to retain this property for long enough*. The second point solves the problem posed by finkish dispositions: since finkish dispositions disappear, together with their "grounding properties" (the intrinsic properties cited in the analysis, which in the literature are usually called "causal bases"<sup>38</sup>), *before they succeed in bringing about their manifestations*, it is not a problem that "it will be false that if X were to undergo stimulus S at T, then it would give response R". Likewise, the first point solves the problem posed by the finkish lack of dispositions, for the finkish lack of a disposition is marked out by the fact that the disposition in question appears, together with its grounding property, *at a later time and often also at another world* (in Martin's examples the disposition appears at that time – since in these examples causation is instantaneous – but always at another world; it is far from being widely recognized that if Martin had built his examples with the disposition appearing at that world, they would not have been counter-examples to the Simple Conditional Analysis – the point also applies to Martin's examples of finkish dispositions). The concept of an X-complete cause is needed in order to account for our intuitions about the causal role of grounding properties<sup>39</sup>.

It is generally agreed that Lewis' analysis fares well with finks; however, it is often maintained that it fares considerably less well with masks<sup>40</sup>. Consider, for example, a Bohemian glass with internal packing to stabilize it against hard knocks (a paradigmatic case of masking). It is fragile, and still

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<sup>38</sup> As Lewis himself stresses (*Finkish Dispositions, cit.*, II, § 2 (Towards an Analysis: Beginning), p. 152), the expression "categorical bases" may be a bit too strong. Whatever the terminology, the concept of causal basis is absolutely central to the Reformed Conditional Analysis: «A finkish disposition is a disposition with a finkish base» (*ibidem*, § 1 (Causal Bases), p. 149 – see also the remarks on the "variety of finkishness that has so far escaped our notice" in *ibidem*, pp. 150-151 and those on the "modification of the notion of causal basis" in Jan Hauska, *In Defence of Causal Bases*, § II, pp. 26-27, in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. LXXXVI, 2008, pp. 23-43).

<sup>39</sup> *Finkish Dispositions, cit.*, II, § 4, p. 156.

<sup>40</sup> The terminology is that of Mark Johnston, *How To Speak of the Colors*, § 2 (Are Color Concepts Primary or Secondary?), p. 233, in *Philosophical Studies*, vol. LXVIII, 1992, pp. 221-263. Instead of "mask" it is sometimes used (following Alexander Bird, *Dispositions and Antidotes*, § 2, in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. XLVIII, 1998, pp. 227-234) "antidote".

it would not break if struck, *even under the assumption that it retains the intrinsic property that grounds its fragility till the end of time*. A finkish disposition is prevented from carrying out its causal work by an *intrinsic* change of its bearer. A masked disposition fails to carry out its causal work because of some *extrinsic* interfering factor. Lewis' analysis does a good job of dealing with intrinsic changes, but has problems in handling extrinsic factors; or so it seems (as the finkish lack of a disposition is, so to speak, the opposite of a finkish disposition, the opposite of a mask is a mimic<sup>41</sup>; it is worth noting that Lewis' analysis has no problems with mimicking).

Well, maybe some strengthened version of Lewis' analysis can overcome the problem of masking (an interesting suggestion is that of treating positive and negative background conditions of a disposition's manifestation alike and adding to the antecedent of the conditional on the right-hand side of the analysis a *ceteris paribus* clause<sup>42</sup>). Or maybe not: maybe the problem of masking is fatal to Lewis' analysis<sup>43</sup>. Maybe it does not matter all that much: be that as it may with masking, maybe there are other chal-

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<sup>41</sup> The terminology is that of *How To Speak of the Colors*, *cit.*, § 2, p. 232.

<sup>42</sup> For a promising version of this suggestion see Jan Hauska, *Dispositions Unmasked*, in *Theoria*, vol. LXXV, 2009, pp. 304-335. Here Hauska maintains that, contrary appearances notwithstanding, the *ceteris paribus* clause can be non-vacuously specified by means of a combination of description, exemplification and enumeration (see *ibidem*, § 4, p. 319 for a clear formulation of Hauska's claim; see also Jan Hauska, *Dispositions and Normal Conditions*, in *Philosophical Studies*, vol. CXXXIX, 2008, pp. 219-232 for a convincing criticism of the idea that the *ceteris paribus* clause can be non-vacuously specified by means of an appeal to normal conditions). Hauska also notes that since the *ceteris paribus* clause solves the problem posed by finkish dispositions too, its addition allows us to drop the requirement that the grounding property be retained for long enough (*Dispositions Unmasked*, *cit.*, § 6). The remarks of *Finkish Dispositions*, *cit.*, II, § 2, pp. 152-154 may seem in line with Hauska's approach, as Hauska himself seems to tentatively suggest in *Dispositions Unmasked*, *cit.*, § 2, note 12. Implicitly, Alexander Bird, *Nature's Metaphysics – Laws and Properties*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, §§ 2.2.7-9 suggests the complete opposite (in Bird's terminology, Hauska's approach is a version of response (ii), while Bird maintains that Lewis' remarks are a version of response (i); truth be told, what Bird regards as the correct reading of Lewis' remarks looks fairly similar to a version of response (ii)). On this issue see also *Dispositions and Habituals*, *cit.*, § 3, pp. 49-50 and David Manley, Ryan Wasserman, *On Linking Dispositions and Conditionals*, § 2, pp. 63-64, in *Mind*, vol. CXVII, 2008, pp. 59-84.

<sup>43</sup> See, e. g., *Dispositions and Antidotes*, *cit.*, *Dispositions and Habituals*, *cit.*, § 3 (which features a quite exhaustive discussion of the possible strategies to save Lewis' analysis) and *Rules and Powers*, *cit.*, § 2, p. 290.

lenges which Lewis' analysis is unable to meet<sup>44</sup>. Maybe conditionals are ill-suited to the task of accounting for dispositions<sup>45</sup>. Maybe the point is just that the link *dispositions-conditionals* cannot take the form of an if-and-only-if analysis<sup>46</sup>. Or maybe there actually is an if-and-only-if analysis of dispositions in terms of conditionals, only it has little to do with the one put forward by Lewis<sup>47</sup>. Here I will not take sides in this dispute. The only goal of my brief *excursus* in the metaphysics of dispositions was to call attention to the fact that there are some intuitions that any account of dispositions has to respect (in some form or another). More precisely, I wanted to highlight that the main reason why Lewis' analysis fares well with finks while the Simple Conditional Analysis is unable to deal with them would appear to be that the former respects the aforementioned intuitions about grounding properties, while the latter does not.

Now, among the intuitions in question, that which interests me most here is the one that helps us to solve the problem posed by the finkish lack of dispositions; namely the idea that:

X's having a given disposition at a certain time and a certain world has something to do with X's having a given intrinsic property at *that* time and *that* world.

In what follows, I will refer to this claim by means of the label "Actuality Constraint", and I will maintain that it can be used to show that the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis of meaning does not work<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> *On Linking Dispositions and Conditionals, cit.*, §§ 3-4 lists under this heading the problem of Achilles' heels (and reverse Achilles' heels), that of accidental closeness, the problem of comparatives, that of explaining context sensitivity and that of absent stimulus conditions.

<sup>45</sup> See, e. g., *Dispositions and Antidotes, cit.* and *Dispositions and Habituals, cit.*

<sup>46</sup> See, e. g., *How To Speak of the Colors, cit.* and *Dispositions and Conditionals, cit.*

<sup>47</sup> See, e. g., *On Linking Dispositions and Conditionals, cit.*, § 5.

<sup>48</sup> It is worth noting that my argument is fully consistent with the idea that the intuitions in question leave room for some exceptions. In particular, it is consistent both with the existence of dispositions with extrinsic causal bases and with that of baseless dispositions, both of which would be counterexamples to the Actuality Constraint (it is important not to mistake the notion of a *baseless* disposition, *i. e.* a disposition with no causal basis, for that of a *bare* disposition, *i. e.* a disposition with no *distinct* causal basis – for this latter concept see Jennifer McKittrick, *The Bare Metaphysical Possibility of Bare Dispositions*, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. LXVI, 2003, pp. 349-369). *A Case for Extrinsic Dispositions, cit.*, presents several examples of (alleged) extrinsic dispositions, and some of them (truth be told, the less convincing, at least in my opinion) are

### III – Ideal Conditions and Finkish Dispositions

Let us go back to the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis, namely:

When I perform an application of “+”, the application is correct if and only if it is in accordance with my past dispositions concerning its use in ideal conditions. When asked for “68 + 57”, the answer I have to give is “125” because this is the answer that, in the past, I was disposed to give when queried about this sum in ideal conditions.

As it stands, the analysis is somewhat ambiguous. The root of the ambiguity lies in the fact that expressions such as “my past dispositions in ideal conditions” can be used to make reference to different sets of dispositions. On the one hand, there are the dispositions *I would have had* if I had been in ideal conditions. On the other, there are, among the dispositions *I actually had*, my past dispositions to give, if conditions had been ideal, certain responses to certain stimuli. The difference is, roughly, that between “If I had been in ideal conditions, I would have had the disposition to give response R to stimulus S” and “I had the disposition to give, if conditions had been ideal,

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also examples of dispositions with (allegedly) extrinsic causal bases (note that, as Lewis himself stresses in *Finkish Dispositions, cit.*, II, § 2, pp. 151-152, the Reformed Conditional Analysis is consistent both with the idea that dispositions are identical with their causal bases and with the idea that they are not – on this issue see, *e. g.*, Frank Jackson, Robert Pargetter, Elizabeth W. Prior, *Three Theses about Dispositions*, § II, in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. XIX, 1982, pp. 251-257 and *How To Speak of the Colors, cit.*, § 2, p. 234 –; note also that there is a trivial sense in which all dispositions are extrinsic – see *Finkish Dispositions, cit.*, I, § 6, pp. 147-148 and *A Case for Extrinsic Dispositions, cit.*, § II, pp. 158-159 –; for a useful discussion of McKittrick’s work see *Nature’s Metaphysics, cit.*, § 2.2.6). As for baseless dispositions, I am inclined to accept Hauska’s argument to the conclusion that there are not (*In Defence of Causal Bases, cit.*, §§ V-VI – the argument is an attempt to amend that of *Three Theses about Dispositions, cit.*, § I –; note that Hauska maintains that, in virtue of its commitment to the causal efficacy of some dispositional properties, his argument relies on the idea that dispositions are, at least sometimes, identical with their causal bases – *In Defence of Causal Bases, cit.*, § VII, p. 42; for the link between the “identity thesis” and the “efficacy thesis” see, *e. g.*, *Three Theses about Dispositions, cit.*, § III and Jennifer McKittrick, *Are Dispositions Causally Relevant?*, in *Synthese*, vol. CXLIV, 2005, pp. 357-371). Be that as it may, my argument does not assume either that there are no extrinsic causal bases or that there are no baseless dispositions. What it *does* assume is that all the dispositions relevant here have intrinsic causal bases.

response R to stimulus S". In the latter sentence, a more detailed specification of the stimulus could make pleonastic the reference to ideal conditions; in the former, it could not. The question is: which one is the intended reading here?

If the intended reading were the first one, the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis would claim that an application of "+" is correct if and only if it is in accordance with some dispositions the speaker would have had in ideal conditions. Since, by hypothesis, what determines the correctness criteria for my future use of "+" is my meaning a certain thing by that sign, the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis would come down to the thesis that my meaning, say, addition by "+" must be identified with some dispositions I would have if conditions were ideal. The idea would be that my meaning addition by "+" at  $W_1$ , the actual world, must be identified with a set of dispositions I have at  $W_2$ , the world where the conditions are ideal that most resembles the actual world (let me pretend, for the sake of simplicity, that there is only one such world; furthermore, it should be clear that since in the actual world the relevant conditions are never ideal, it is never the case that  $W_1 = W_2$  – more on this later). Or better: the idea would be that my meaning addition by "+" at  $W_1$  is *no more* than a set of dispositions I have at  $W_2$ . According to this reading of the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis, if I say that, in all my life, by "+", I always meant the addition function, I just *seem* to make a statement about the actual world. In fact, I am talking about another, merely possible, world. Kind of sad. And quite puzzling.

Anyway, the intended reading is clearly the second one. The idea is that my meaning addition by "+" must be identified with my actual dispositions to give, if conditions were ideal, certain responses to certain stimuli. Let us now consider one of these dispositions, namely my disposition to reply, if queried about the sum of two huge numbers  $N_1$  and  $N_2$  in ideal conditions, with their actual sum  $N_3$ . From the discussion of the previous section we know that:

I am disposed at time T and world W to give, if conditions were ideal, the response " $N_3$ " to the stimulus " $N_1 + N_2$ " if and only if for some intrinsic property P that I have at T and W and some time  $T^*$  after T, if I were to undergo, in ideal conditions, the stimulus " $N_1 + N_2$ " at T and W and retain P until  $T^*$ , then this stimulus

and my having P would jointly be an X-complete cause of my giving the response “N<sub>3</sub>”

(or something like this). And now let me ask what kind of property P is. Here is an excerpt from Kripke’s essay:

[...] if my brain had been stuffed with sufficient extra matter to grasp large enough numbers, and if it were given enough capacity to perform such a large addition, and if my life (in a healthy state) were prolonged enough, then given an addition problem involving two large numbers, *m* and *n*, I would respond with their sum [...]<sup>49</sup>.

The excerpt seems to suggest that P is a state of an *extra-strengthened* brain: a brain stuffed with sufficient extra matter to grasp huge numbers and provided with enough capacity to perform additions involving them. Of course, to say that P is a brain state is a bit loose. It would definitely be more accurate to say that P is the property of *having* an extra-strengthened brain in a given state. Moreover, it would be better to speak of a state of some brain *area*. After all, we no doubt want to be able to say that even if the overall state of the speaker’s brain changed, the speaker retains P. However, for simplicity’s sake, at least for the time being, I will stick to this wording.

That P is a state of an extra-strengthened brain seems the most plausible hypothesis; after all, what else could play the causal role P is supposed to play? But it should be clear that if P is really a state of an extra-strengthened brain, then P is not a property any human being has ever *actually* had. But the Actuality Constraint implies that I am disposed at T and W to give, if conditions were ideal, the response “N<sub>3</sub>” to the stimulus “N<sub>1</sub> + N<sub>2</sub>” only if I have P at T *and* W. In Jan Hauska’s words:

[...] the possession by an object of a disposition is a matter of what properties it actually has (and not, for example, of what properties it may possibly acquire)<sup>50</sup>.

From this it follows that no human being has ever actually had the disposition in question. And from this, in turn, it follows that if the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis is right, then no human being has ever meant addi-

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<sup>49</sup> Wittgenstein *on Rules and Private Language*, *cit.*, 2, p. 27.

<sup>50</sup> *In Defence of Causal Bases*, *cit.*, § II, p. 25.

tion by “+”. And this sounds like a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis.

This is my argument. Its core idea is that the dispositions with which the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis identifies my meaning addition by “+” do not exist, at least not in this world. Of course, they seem to exist. However, this is just a deceptive by-product of the confusion between my disposition to give, if conditions were ideal, the response “ $N_3$ ” to the stimulus “ $N_1 + N_2$ ” and the disposition to give the response “ $N_3$ ” to the stimulus “ $N_1 + N_2$ ” I would have if I were in ideal conditions. After all, even if the disposition to give, if conditions were ideal, the response “ $N_3$ ” to the stimulus “ $N_1 + N_2$ ” is a disposition I cannot have (at least not in this world), it may nevertheless be true that if I were in ideal conditions I would have the disposition to give the response “ $N_3$ ” to the stimulus “ $N_1 + N_2$ ”<sup>51</sup>. The ambiguity of the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis is therefore the root of its apparent plausibility. The confusion in question is understandable. The excerpt quoted above shows that Kripke, too, fell victim to it, since what he in fact describes in that passage is the disposition to give the right response to the stimulus “ $m + n$ ” he would have if he were in ideal conditions. However, albeit understandable, this confusion is nonetheless harmful.

#### IV – Is P Really a State of an Extra-Strengthened Brain?

If I am right, in the excerpt I quoted, Kripke makes *two* mistakes. As we have just seen, he gives the ideal conditions the wrong role: that of favouring the acquisition of a disposition, rather than its manifestation. However, he also describes as part of the ideal conditions something, namely my brain being stuffed with extra matter *etc...*, the description of which should in fact enter in the specification of P. And this suggests a possible objection to my argument. «Maybe – so the objection goes – this latter is not a mistake. Maybe *you* wrongly described P, which in fact is a state of your *actual* (alas!) non-extra-strengthened brain, and not of your merely possible extra-strengthened brain. If it is so, then your “Actuality Constraint” poses no problem for the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis, for the alleged problem was simply that P is not a property any human being has ever *ac-*

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<sup>51</sup> But see *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, *cit.*, 2, p. 27.

*tually* had». In a nutshell, the idea would be that, of the two analyses I list below, I picked the wrong one.

(1) I am disposed at time  $T$  and world  $W$  to give, if conditions were ideal, the response “ $N_3$ ” to the stimulus “ $N_1 + N_2$ ” if and only if at  $T$  and  $W$  I have the intrinsic property  $P$ , *i. e.* the property of having *an extra-strengthened brain* whose area  $A$  is in state  $S$ , and for some time  $T^*$  after  $T$ , if I were to undergo the stimulus “ $N_1 + N_2$ ” at  $T$  and  $W$  and retain  $P$  until  $T^*$  and if my life (in a healthy state) were prolonged enough *etc...*, then this stimulus and my having  $P$  would jointly be an  $X$ -complete cause of my giving the response “ $N_3$ ”.

(2) I am disposed at time  $T$  and world  $W$  to give, if conditions were ideal, the response “ $N_3$ ” to the stimulus “ $N_1 + N_2$ ” if and only if at  $T$  and  $W$  I have the intrinsic property  $P$ , *i. e.* the property of having *a brain* whose area  $A$  is in state  $S$ , and for some time  $T^*$  after  $T$ , if I were to undergo the stimulus “ $N_1 + N_2$ ” at  $T$  and  $W$  and retain  $P$  until  $T^*$ , *if my brain were extra-strengthened* and if my life (in a healthy state) were prolonged enough *etc...*, then this stimulus and my having  $P$  would jointly be an  $X$ -complete cause of my giving the response “ $N_3$ ”.

The first is the analysis I picked, the second is the one I should have picked (note that both analyses imply that in the actual world the relevant conditions are never ideal).

Let us consider an old radio, tuned to wavelength  $W_1$  but switched off. And now consider the disposition  $D$ , namely the disposition to receive, if switched on in ideal conditions, wavelength  $W_2$ . The question is: has the radio got  $D$ ? To me, the most natural thing to say is that no, it has not. Let us now suppose we accepted that, of the two analyses of the disposition to answer “ $N_3$ ” if asked for “ $N_1 + N_2$ ” in ideal conditions I have just listed, the second one is the right one. I do not see on what basis we could discard the line of thought that follows: «The idea that the radio in question has not got  $D$  is a consequence of the idea that the relevant grounding property is the property of being tuned to wavelength  $W_2$ . But in fact being tuned to wavelength  $W_2$  is part of being in the ideal conditions. Hence, there is nothing in the situation as described that warrants the idea that the radio has not  $D$ » (it should be clear that this line of thought is completely analogous to the one behind our imaginary objection). This seems to show that if we accept the reading suggested by our imaginary objector, we find ourselves with counterintuitive disposition ascriptions. And this seems to give us some reason to reject such a reading.



Some may be inclined to think that the spirit of the objection can survive the rejection of (2). In its original formulation, the objection is an attempt to defend the *Ideal-Condition* Dispositional Analysis of meaning. First, it insists that when asked for “ $N_1 + N_2$ ”, the answer I have to give is “ $N_3$ ” because this is the answer that, in the past, I was disposed to give when queried about this sum in *ideal conditions*. Afterwards, it stresses that the disposition to give, if conditions were ideal, the response “ $N_3$ ” to the stimulus “ $N_1 + N_2$ ” must be identified with the disposition described in the right-hand side of (2). In its revised formulation, the objection is an attempt to defend a weaker claim, namely the general thesis that my meaning a certain thing by a certain sign can be analysed in terms of my having certain dispositions. As in the original formulation, the idea is that what makes “ $N_3$ ” the right answer to “ $N_1 + N_2$ ” is my having had the disposition described in the right-hand side of (2). However, while in the original formulation the idea stems from a twofold commitment to, on the one hand, the *Ideal-Condition* Dispositional Analysis and, on the other, the interpretative approach exemplified by (2), this time the idea in question is embraced, so to speak, “directly”. In other words, while in the original formulation what we had was the *Ideal-Condition* Dispositional Analysis plus some footnotes concerning the intended reading of “ideal conditions”, what we have now is just something along the lines of the following Reformed Dispositional Analysis (which, of course, must not be confused with Lewis’ Reformed *Conditional* Analysis):

When I perform an application of “+”, the application is correct if and only if it is in accordance with my past dispositions concerning its use in conditions *such as those sketched in the right-hand side of (2)*. When asked for “ $68 + 57$ ”, the answer I have to give is “125” because this is the answer that, in the past, I was disposed to give when queried about this sum in *such* conditions.

I do not believe that this kind of analysis can work. To see why, let us come back to the Simple Dispositional Analysis of meaning. According to this analysis, when asked for “ $N_1 + N_2$ ”, the answer I have to give is the answer that, in the past, I was disposed to give when queried about this sum. But  $N_1$  and  $N_2$  are huge numbers and, therefore, they are too large for my mind to grasp. Hence, we can no doubt suppose that the answer that, in the

past, I was disposed to give when queried about this sum was a shrugging of the shoulders. According to the analysis in question, that would then be the correct response; and this is absurd. The Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis' recipe for solving the problem is to argue that, in fact, the correctness-determining disposition is another one, namely my past disposition to give, if conditions were ideal, the response "N<sub>3</sub>" to the stimulus "N<sub>1</sub> + N<sub>2</sub>". But what makes this disposition the correctness-determining one? What makes it the one that determines which response I have to give? Why this one and not, for instance, my disposition to shrug my shoulders? As far as I can see, there is only one answer available to the proponents of the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis. All they can do is appeal to the internal relation that links the adjectives "ideal" and "right" (or "correct"). Now, I am not sure that this can work. What I am sure about is that it is much more than what the proponents of the Reformed Dispositional Analysis can offer. They, too, must explain what makes the relevant disposition the one that determines which response I have to give. However, having given up the idea of characterizing this disposition in terms of ideal conditions, they have no non-question-begging way to do it.

But let us grant, for the sake of argument, that there is a way to make the Reformed Dispositional Analysis of meaning work. Or let us grant that (2) actually is the analysis that most accurately depicts the situation; in other words: let us grant that P is a state of an ordinary brain and that the reference to my brain being stuffed with extra matter *etc...* plays the very same role as that to my life being prolonged. The Actuality Constraint will be no problem. But what about the other intuitions that the comparison between the Simple and the Reformed Conditional Analysis of disposition ascriptions should have taught us to respect? Well, consider the conditional part of the right-hand side of (2). The intuition that shapes this part of the analysis is, roughly, the following one: if given enough time, P must be able to join forces with the stimulus, the extra-strengthening of my brain, *etc...* and bring about the response. But can a state of an ordinary brain actually join forces with the extra-strengthening of the brain of which it is a state? To be able to do that, it should be able to survive this extra-strengthening process. But is this possible? I think not.

All this talking of brains stuffed with extra matter and lives whose duration is indefinitely prolonged may weaken one's grip on reality; however, it

should be clear why I find implausible the idea of a state of an ordinary brain surviving a process such as that sketched by Kripke. Stuffing a brain with sufficient extra matter to grasp huge numbers and providing it with enough capacity to perform additions involving them is not like connecting a new printer to your computer. It involves a drastic reorganization of the brain in question. And I find it hard to believe that a state of the required complexity could come out of such a reorganization unscathed<sup>52</sup>.

If I am right, then we must conclude that (2) implies that no human being has ever actually had the disposition to give, if conditions were ideal, the response “ $N_3$ ” to the stimulus “ $N_1 + N_2$ ”<sup>53</sup>. And, as we have already seen, from this, in turn, it follows that if the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis were right, then no human being would have ever meant addition by “+”. Once again, we find ourselves with a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Ideal-Condition Dispositional Analysis. And, *mutatis mutandis*, the same holds for the Reformed Dispositional Analysis.

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<sup>52</sup> These remarks are, of course, highly speculative. Their role is just to explain why I am inclined to believe that even if (2) actually were the analysis that most accurately depicts the situation, we nevertheless would lack the relevant dispositions. My “official position” on the topic is the one I argued for in the first part of this last section: (2) is not the analysis that most accurately depicts the situation (*mutatis mutandis* for the Reformed Dispositional Analysis).

<sup>53</sup> In fact, the previous remarks would be a refutation of the idea that the relevant causal basis involves only my current, non-extra-strengthened brain. I tried to keep things simple.

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