

Chapter 2

A reduction of Kripke-Wittgenstein's objections to dispositionalism about meaning

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Preview

A central part of Kripke's influential interpretation of Wittgenstein's sceptical argument about meaning is the rejection of dispositional analyses of what it is for a word to mean what it does (Kripke 1982). In this paper I show that Kripke's arguments prove too much: if they were right, they would preclude not only the idea that dispositional properties can make statements about the meanings of words true, but also the idea that dispositional properties can make true statements about paradigmatic dispositional properties such as a cup's fragility or a person's bravery. However, since dispositional properties can make such statements true, Kripke-Wittgenstein's arguments against dispositionalism about meaning are mistaken.

Chapter 2

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I. Introduction.

Kripke, in his influential rendition (1982, Ch. 2) of Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations (Wittgenstein 1953), presents some important objections to dispositional analyses of meaning. Kripke-Wittgenstein argues to the effect that dispositional properties cannot make statements about the meanings of words true.¹ I argue that Kripke's arguments target only what dispositionalism about meaning has in common with dispositionalism about any concept whatsoever, and that therefore, if he is right, then it also follows that dispositional properties cannot make statements about paradigmatic dispositional properties true. But of course such statements *can* be made true by dispositional properties, for surely what makes it true to say that a particular cup is fragile is that it has the dispositional property of fragility, and similarly *mutatis mutandis* for statements that, e.g., a sugar cube is water-soluble, a person is brave, or lazy, and so on. Kripke's arguments thus lead to absurdity and can be refuted.

Overall, Kripke-Wittgenstein's arguments are meant to establish that there can be no 'straight' solution to the rule-following problem, i.e. that no facts can make statements about the meanings of words true. In response to this one can, as Kripke does, provide a 'sceptical' solution, i.e. the best kind of solution we can hope for given that no facts can make statements about the meanings of words true (p. 66). Or one can attempt to provide a straight

solution by pointing out some meaning-constituting facts which are untouched by Kripke's arguments.² I do neither of these things. Rather, I show that Kripke doesn't establish that there can be no straight solution, for, if he did, then he would also establish, absurdly, that no dispositional properties can make it true to say that something is fragile or soluble or elastic or brave.

A dispositionalist about meaning proposes the following kind of account of meaning properties (see pp. 22, 27):

(DM) A subject S means F by a word $w \equiv S$ is disposed to apply w to all and only F s in favorable conditions C .³

Thus, adapting some of Kripke's examples:

(1) S means addition by '+' $\equiv S$ is disposed to apply '+' to all and only triples $\langle x, y, z \rangle$ such that z is the sum of x and y in C .

And:

(2) S means chair by 'chair' $\equiv S$ is disposed to apply 'chair' to all and only chairs in C .

An analysis of meaning must explain, in non-semantic terms, what constitutes meaning properties of the type: S means F by w . Such an explanation must cite facts that constitute which applications of w would be correct — i.e. in accordance with the meaning of w — and which applications would be incorrect. DM relies on the non-semantic notion of a disposition

to give the following type of explanation of the constitution of meaning:⁴ applications which S is disposed to make, in favorable conditions C , are the applications that are in accordance with the meaning of w . Applications which are made in non- C -conditions are then not in accordance with the meaning of w — they are mistakes. For example, if S is disposed to, in C , apply ‘+’ to all and only triples $\langle x, y, z \rangle$ where z is the sum of x and y , then S means addition by ‘+’. If S applies ‘+’ in non- C -conditions, then that application is not in accordance with the meaning of ‘+’.⁵ Of course, it is a consequence of this that, if S had been disposed to apply ‘+’ to all and only dogs in C , then S would mean dog by ‘+’.

Kripke-Wittgenstein’s central objection to DM is that it in fact has not got the resources to establish the distinction between correct and mistaken use:

[I]t cannot be the case that whatever seems right to me is (by definition) right. Most of us have dispositions to make mistakes. For example, when asked to add certain numbers some people forget to ‘carry’. They are thus disposed, for these numbers, to give an answer differing from the usual addition table. Normally, we say that such people have made a *mistake*. That means, that for them as for us, ‘+’ means addition, but for certain numbers they are not disposed to give the answer they should give, if they are to accord with the table of the function they actually meant. But the dispositionalist cannot say this. According to him, the function someone means is to be *read off* from his dispositions; it cannot be presupposed in advance which function is meant. [...] So, where common sense holds that the subject means the same addition function as everyone else but systematically makes computational mistakes, the dispositionalist seems forced to hold that the subject makes no computational mistakes, but means a non-standard function (‘skaddition’) by ‘+’ (p. 28-30).

The argument here is this: common sense tells us that *S*'s use of *w* can be *systematically* mistaken, that is, that *S* can be disposed to make mistakes. *Ex hypothesis*, these dispositions are dispositions to make mistakes so they cannot constitute what counts as correct applications of *w*. Since DM entails that dispositions for use are meaning-constituting, it cannot explain how some dispositions can be dispositions to make mistakes. The dispositionalist, it seems, can only classify the intuitively mistaken applications as mistakes by illicitly presupposing that they are mistakes.⁶

My argument against this objection will have the form of a *reductio*: We should all agree that there are paradigmatic dispositional properties, such as fragility, bravery and elasticity, which have *C*-conditions, and which can make statements about a thing's dispositional properties true. The dispositionalist reasonably assumes that there are dispositions for applications of words that also have *C*-conditions, and claim that they can make statements about what words mean true. We encounter Kripke-Wittgenstein's arguments which challenge that assumption on the grounds that the concept of meaning is a special normative case, and which seek to establish the conclusion that dispositional properties cannot make statements about what words mean true. However, we notice that Kripke-Wittgenstein's arguments in fact do not establish that the concept of meaning is a special case. In particular, the conditions of adequacy that Kripke-Wittgenstein formulates for dispositional accounts of meaning are similar to the conditions of adequacy we should formulate for all dispositional accounts, so, if failure to satisfy these conditions lead to rejection of DM, then, by parity of reasoning, such failure should lead to the rejection of dispositional accounts of concepts of fragility, bravery and elasticity and so on. Hence, it follows that, if Kripke-Wittgenstein is right that dispositional properties cannot make statements about what words mean true, then no dispositional properties can ever make any statements about dispositional properties true.

But, given our very first assumption, this is absurd. So we can refute Kripke-Wittgenstein's objections.⁷

Kripke-Wittgenstein develops his argument by objecting that DM is neither finitely or non-circularly stateable. I discuss the central objection in Section II and the development of it in Section III.⁸

II. On the objection that DM cannot explain how S can be systematically mistaken.

In order to assess Kripke's central objection we must begin by appreciating what is involved in proposing a dispositional analysis as such, in particular, we must appreciate the role of the notion of favorable conditions. In general, the notion of favorable conditions works to exclude various factors that prevent a disposition from manifesting properly. For example, if we say that someone is brave we mean she is disposed to do brave acts when called upon, unless of course the circumstances somehow prevent her from performing brave acts (thus we do not hold it against her if she failed to act bravely because she was drugged, or someone broke both her legs, and so on). Since we are competent with all sorts of concepts of dispositional properties we obviously have a good, albeit sometimes implicit, grasp of what the favorable conditions are for various dispositions. We know very well that the favorable conditions for, say, bravery are not like the favorable conditions for other dispositions, like laziness. For present purposes it is important to notice that all dispositions can come with an aspect of favorable conditions: if they couldn't, there would be no such thing as, e.g., a brave person who fails to act bravely due to her broken legs, or a soluble quantity of salt which fails to dissolve in water that is saturated with salt, and so on.⁹

In some cases, a disposition may fail to manifest properly, even though the favorable conditions obtain. Thus, using Mark Johnston's examples,¹⁰ a cup is fragile, but its guardian

angel makes sure that, were the cup struck, it would not break. This is a case of *masking*: something in the circumstances interferes with the proper manifestation of the disposition to break when struck, and makes it appear as if it hasn't got the disposition. An alternative case is where a piece of metal is not fragile, but where an angry demon makes sure that, were it struck it would break. This is a case of *mimicking*: for the piece of metal doesn't have the disposition it appears to have. Lastly, there is the case of the fragile cup which when struck loses its disposition to break when struck and therefore doesn't break. This is a case of *altering*: for even though the cup is fragile its dispositional properties are altered when struck in favorable conditions.

There is some discussion about how we should do the bookkeeping for these various factors that may influence the manifestation of dispositions.¹¹ Some maskings and mimickings should perhaps be dealt with under the rubric of favorable conditions. I shall bracket this discussion and assume that, when someone defends a dispositional analysis of something, the dispositions in question come with a notion of favorable conditions, and are such that they may be masked, mimicked and altered. It follows that objections to dispositional analyses must take this notion of a disposition into account.

Intuitively, there are some true statements about dispositional properties such as fragility, elasticity, resistance, solubility, bravery, laziness and the like, and indeed we take it for granted that concepts of these properties are all straightforwardly analyzable in terms of dispositions. I will take as my core example a paradigm of a dispositional property, viz. fragility, and I will assume that the concept of fragility can be given a dispositional analysis:

(DF) x is fragile $\equiv x$ is disposed to break when struck in favorable conditions C ,

which says that x 's fragility is constituted by x 's disposition to break when struck in C . The parallel to DM, which says that S 's meaning F by w is constituted by S 's disposition to apply w to all and only F s in C , should be clear.

In the context of Kripke's central objection we must assume that dispositional properties can make true statements about, for example, fragile cups, as DF implies. If we do not make this assumption, then Kripke's objections would be pointless: if no dispositional property could make true statements about any dispositional properties, then, *a fortiori*, dispositionalism about meaning is false.

With these general comments about dispositions in mind, Kripke's central objection about the possibility of systematic mistakes can be refuted. As we saw, it is part of any dispositional analysis that the proposed reducing dispositions can be masked, mimicked or altered. When they are, we get counterfactual systematicity: consider the examples of the cup which has its disposition to break when struck altered when struck, and therefore would not break when struck in C ; the mimicking case of the non-fragile piece of metal which would break when struck in C , the masking case of the fragile cup which would not break when struck in C . When a thing has its disposition masked, mimicked or altered we are not compelled to withdraw our previous ascription of dispositions to it. For example, the cup is fragile even though masking would make it fail to break when struck in C . No matter how we would want to incorporate these phenomena in the final analysis of the notion of a disposition, we must assume that all dispositions can be masked, mimicked or altered.

We can then reasonably also assume that the disposition underlying S 's applications of '+' can be masked, mimicked or altered in various ways. This gives us a way of saying that S may be *systematically* mistaken in the application of '+' (perhaps she doesn't carry), for her

disposition to apply '+' to sums may be masked, or undergo alterings. The case of mimicking allows us to deal with a problematic case not mentioned by Kripke, viz. where *S* doesn't have the disposition to apply '+' to sums in the first place but where something in the circumstances make it appear as if she has it though she forgets to carry. This story is in accordance with the common sense intuition that *S* may make mistakes with counterfactual regularity even though the *C*-conditions obtain, but it does not threaten the idea that *S*'s disposition for applying '+' to sums can be meaning-constituting. The reason is that, if dispositions can be masked, mimicked and altered, then such counterfactual regularities should not necessarily lead us to ascribe other dispositions to the entities in question.

The core point is that here the defender of DM is drawing on something which is available to defenders of all dispositional analyses, such as for example DF. For when we want to say, for example, that some fragile cups can systematically fail to break when struck what we say is that those cups have dispositions to break when struck in *C* that can be masked, mimicked or altered. Therefore, if Kripke-Wittgenstein's argument could help establish the claim that dispositional properties cannot make statements about what words mean true, then, by parity of reasoning, it would also help establish the claim that no dispositional property can make any statements about dispositional properties true. Since we know that dispositional properties can make statements about, for example, a cup's fragility true, Kripke's central objection is refuted.¹²

This may not entirely satisfy the opponent of DM for, though *S*'s disposition to apply '+' to sums may be masked, mimicked or altered, it is surely a possibility that there is no masking, mimicking or altering, and that *S* just is disposed not to carry when responding to queries of the type '*m+n*'. At this point the defender of DM should acknowledge that if the *C*-conditions obtain, and there is no masking, mimicking or altering, then *S does* mean some non-standard

function (e.g., 'skaddition') by '+'. Otherwise the defender of DM would not be defending a dispositional analysis at all (compare: if a cup is struck in *C* and doesn't break, and there is no masking, mimicking or altering, then the cup just isn't fragile but has some other disposition). This is not an outright denial of the common sense intuition that *S* can be systematically mistaken, for, as we saw, the notions of masking, mimicking and altering can accommodate this intuition to a reasonable extent. However, it follows that if common sense intuition really insists that in such cases *S* means addition by '+' but is systematically mistaken, then common sense intuition is misguided. But, as Forbes (1984, p. 232) also points out, the common sense intuition does not seem that strong.¹³ For there is also another common sense intuition which says that sometimes *S* appears to be so systematically mistaken that we should rather say that she just didn't grasp the standard meaning of '+' in the first place. Just as any account of meaning must account for the common sense intuition that *S* can be systematically mistaken in her application of *w*, it must also be able to account for the common sense intuition that *S* may have failed to acquire the standard meaning of *w* in the first place. DM can do both.¹⁴

III. Finiteness and circularity.

Kripke-Wittgenstein in effect counters the above conception of DM by developing the objection that it issues in an inadequate, i.e. circular or not finitely stateable, dispositional analysis of meaning. Given what I have said about Kripke-Wittgenstein's central objection, we should immediately be suspicious about this development: the above conception of DM builds only on something all dispositional analyses must be able to do, so, if it issues in an inadequate analysis of what words mean, then *all* dispositional analyses are likewise inadequate. If such inadequacy entails that dispositional properties cannot make statements about what words mean true, then it would also entail, absurdly, that dispositional properties

cannot make statements about the fragility of cups true.¹⁵ In the remainder of the paper I shall substantiate this suspicion and discuss its implications.

The development of the argument begins by noticing that DM must explain how meaning-constituting dispositions can determine, for example, that '+' is correctly applied to all and only the members of the infinite set of triples $\langle x, y, z \rangle$ such that z is the sum of x and y . The problem is that, since the totality of my dispositions is finite, some kind of sceptic could direct attention to the possibility that those dispositions really determine that '+' means the non-standard function quus such that '+' is correctly applied only to triples $\langle x, y, z \rangle$ where z is the quum of x and y (p. 26, the quus example is used throughout Ch. 2). The quum of x and y is their sum, unless x or y is so large a number that S cannot compute it in his or her lifetime, in which case the quum is 5. If DM cannot distinguish between these two possibilities, then it cannot make the required distinction between correct and incorrect applications of '+'. And there is an infinite number of non-standard functions such that whatever S does, as governed by her finite totality of dispositions, will be in accordance with one of them.

Kripke acknowledges that the obvious response to this is to introduce a *ceteris paribus* clause (i.e. a clause employing some notion of favorable conditions) which considers S 's application of '+' for large integers under the counterfactual assumptions, for example, that S 's brain is stuffed with extra matter, and S lives long enough etc. If, under those conditions, S would apply '+' to sums, not to quums, then S means addition by '+'. But this response is quickly scotched:

But how can we have any confidence in this? How in the world can I tell what would happen if my brain were stuffed with extra brain matter or my life were prolonged by

some magic elixir [...] We have no idea what the results of such experiments would be. They might lead me to go insane, even to behave according to a quus-like rule (p. 27).

Kripke's point seems correct. It is true we don't really know what would happen if our brains were enlarged etc. And, even if we did know, there would be an indefinite number of other conditions whose obtaining we would not know the consequences of. I think Kripke's point is best seen as the point that there is an indefinite number of ways in which a given disposition can be masked, mimicked or altered when the *C*-conditions obtain. We can make the situation worse still for the defender of DM. No doubt it is part of the favorable conditions that *S* is not drugged, not too tired, not drunk etc. In fact, there is an indefinite number of conditions whose obtaining must be ruled *out* for the *C*-conditions to obtain. In particular, there is an indefinite array of background beliefs which *S* should not have (e.g., the beliefs that the Pope says that the right response to '68+57' is '5' and that everything the Pope says is correct).¹⁶

DM will not be adequate unless we somehow take all these ways in which the *C*-conditions can obtain or fail to obtain, or in which their obtaining can influence the proper manifestation of a disposition, into account. But since there is an indefinite number of ways in which the *C*-conditions can obtain or fail to obtain, or in which a disposition can be masked, mimicked or altered, it seems out of the question to incorporate this into a finite statement of DM.

The defender of DM should not be concerned about this for no defender of a dispositional analysis about anything sets out impossibly to specify the indefinite number of ways in which *C*-conditions can obtain or fail to obtain, or in which a disposition can be masked, mimicked or altered. Defending DF, for example, does not involve being committed to give an infinite

list of the ways and conditions under which a cup can be struck and break or fail to break. Likewise, our ordinary grasp of the concept of bravery clearly allows for an open-ended set of conditions in which *S* may be required to act bravely or fail to act bravely. If dispositional properties can make some of our statements about fragility or bravery true, then it cannot be a requirement on attributions of dispositions that one specifies an indefinite number of ways in which *C*-conditions can obtain. Kripke in effect acknowledges this:

But of course what the *ceteris paribus* clause really means is something like this: If I somehow were to be given the means to carry out my intentions with respect to numbers that presently are too long for me to add (or to grasp), and if I were to carry out these intentions, then if queried about ' $m+n$ ' for some big m and n , I would respond with their sum (and not with their quum). Such a counterfactual is true enough, but it is of no help against the sceptic. It presupposes a prior notion of my having an intention to mean one function rather than another by '+'. It is in virtue of a fact of this kind about me that the conditional is true. But of course the sceptic is challenging the existence of just such a fact; his challenge must be met by specifying its nature. Granted that I mean addition by '+', then of course if I were to act in accordance with my intentions, I would respond, given any pair of numbers to be combined by '+', with their sum, but equally, granted that I mean quaddition, if I were to act in accordance with my intentions, I would respond with the quum (p. 28-29).

In the context of the above finiteness-worry the point is quite simple: the defender of DM can only cut through the indefinite number of ways in which the *C*-conditions can obtain or fail to obtain, or in which a disposition can be masked, mimicked or altered, by presupposing which definite disposition is in question: a disposition that determines that '+' means addition, or that determines that it means quaddition, or skaddition. And presupposing this

just seems to beg the question against a sceptic who doubts that dispositional properties could at all make statements about what words mean true. In short, the question is this: if our observations suggest to us that some foreign speaker *S* is disposed to apply *w* to *F*s in *C*₁, and to apply *w* to *G*s in *C*₂, then how can we without circularity favor one of these regularities and say, for example, that *S* means *F* by *w*, and that the applications of *w* to *G*s are produced in unfavorable conditions, or are the results of maskings, mimickings or alterings? Kripke's objection is crystallized in this slogan: 'One cannot favor one conditional rather than another without circularity' (ibid).

However, this circularity objection can only go into establishing that dispositional properties cannot make statements about what words mean true, if it also absurdly establishes that dispositional properties cannot make statements about dispositional properties such as fragility or bravery true. The reason is that one cannot put forward a dispositional analysis of anything at all without 'favoring a conditional', for it is by favoring one conditional over another that we are able to discriminate among dispositions in the first place. In other words, if we were not allowed to 'favor a conditional', then the only dispositional property we would be ascribing would be, as Forbes identifies it, "the vacuous one, that the object is disposed to do exactly what it does and nothing else" (1984, p. 230).¹⁷ Likewise, the fact that sometimes fragile cups break in unfavorable conditions, or systematically fail to break when struck in *C*, doesn't make us ascribe weird properties of 'schmagility', where something is schmagile iff it breaks when struck under any conditions whatsoever. Since we are obviously not restricted to ascribing vacuous or weird properties of schmagility and the like we must in fact be favoring conditionals. This implies that the fault Kripke-Wittgenstein finds in DM must be found in all dispositionalisms, and we can thus run the circularity objection against them all. We must therefore say, in terms of the above question whether *S* by *w* means *F* or *G*, that, if a dispositionalist about fragility could tell us without circularity whether a cup is

fragile or schmagile, then a dispositionalist about meaning could, without circularity, tell us whether w means F or G .¹⁸ Similarly, if failure to tell without circularity whether w means F or G were to lead to the claim that dispositional properties cannot make statements about what w means true, then failure to tell without circularity whether a cup is fragile or schmagile would lead to the absurd claim that dispositional properties cannot make statements about fragile cups true.¹⁹

It transpires that Kripke-Wittgenstein's circularity objection to DM doesn't target anything which is special about the concept of meaning, rather, it targets the idea that we can distinguish among dispositions at all, and thereby it absurdly targets the idea that statements about fragile cups, brave people etc. can be made true by dispositional properties.

It is interesting to note, in relation to this, that we should cease to see Kripke-Wittgenstein's objections to the dispositional analysis of meaning as turning on the celebrated notion of normativity of meaning. Kripke is not right in saying that 'almost all objections to the dispositional account boil down to [a failure to] find a past fact which *justifies* my present response' (p. 24). The objections boil down to an absurd general scepticism about the capacity of dispositional properties to make true statements about dispositional properties such as fragility or bravery.²⁰

This is an important result because, ostensibly, Kripke-Wittgenstein's objection is that one cannot show that dispositional properties can make statements about what words mean true without presupposing that dispositional properties can make statements about what words *mean* true. Such vicious circularity would obviously be detrimental to the project of establishing that dispositional properties can make statements about what words mean true. But my considerations above alter this conception of the dialectic: Kripke's circularity

objection at most demonstrates that one cannot show that dispositional properties can make statements about what words mean true without presupposing that dispositional properties can make true statements about paradigmatic *dispositional* properties such as a cup's fragility or a person's bravery. It is much less obvious that there is any vicious circularity involved in giving such an account.²¹ Therefore, the issue raised by Kripke's interpretation of the rule-following considerations, with respect to dispositionalism about meaning, is not whether non-semantic dispositional properties could make statements about what words mean true. Rather, if a question is raised at all, it is the question whether one can tell without circularity what distinguishes one disposition from another. In other words, what remains is the question whether we can tell without circularity what the extension of various concepts of dispositional properties are.²² This is a task for those who are engaged in giving a good analysis of the notion of a disposition, not for those who are engaged in giving an analysis of meaning.²³

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¹Bearing in mind that these are not Kripke's own views, but those that transpires from his reading of Wittgenstein. All subsequent page references are to Kripke (1982) unless otherwise indicated.

²For an overview of the debate see Boghossian (1989).

³I follow the convention instigated by Kripke (p. 9, n.8) for expressing the object of the verb 'to mean' (thus, e.g., *S* means dog by 'dog', *S* means plus by '+' etc.). As Kripke, I leave it unsaid whether 'to mean' means to refer to, or whether it denotes the meaning of the word in question, though mostly 'mean' can be taken to mean refer to. In general, expressions can be fitted into DM by nominalizing, but mostly it should be clear from the context what 'F' and 'Fs' stand for.

⁴For versions of this type of theory see, e.g., Forbes (1984), p. 227-9; Pettit (1990); (1993), Part I. See also Ginet (1992), Coates (1997) (but also Toribio (1999)), Heil and Martin (1998), and for a more involved dispositional approach, Horwich (1998).

⁵Why disqualify applications made in non-*C*-conditions if they happen to be correct? DM says that *S*'s applications of *w* in *favorable* conditions are correct. This is a normative notion: it seems plausible that if one application of '+' is made in favorable conditions, and another isn't, then that gives us some justification for accepting that the first application is in accordance with the meaning of '+' and the second one isn't. An application in non-*C*-conditions may happen to be correct, but only by mere coincidence, and it would thus not be justified by the meaning of that word. Since Kripke-Wittgenstein insists (e.g., p. 24) that correct applications be *justified* by meaning, this is precisely the kind of thing one should be able to say about applications in non-*C*-conditions, and DM allows us to say it. (This line of thought is expressed well by Miller (1997b), Ch. 6.2. It receives a substantial defence in

Pettit (1999), §3. Pettit's account usefully focuses on how we can view this kind of normativity as pertaining specifically to the concept of meaning).

⁶It is confusing that Kripke begins the above quote by implying that according to DM, 'whatever seems right to me is (by definition) right' (my emphasis). Putting the point of the argument like this implies that DM is committed to saying that *S* can *never* make a mistake, i.e. that *all S*'s applications of '+' are proper manifestations of her disposition for use of '+'. In order to show this the present objection would need the additional premise that all applications of '+' are dispositional. However, it seems a part of our ordinary concept of a disposition that we allow the possibility of occasional, non-systematic failures of manifestation.

⁷Notice that my argument is thus not an argument by analogy. An argument by analogy would go like this: Dispositions have *C*-conditions, hence, dispositions for applications of words have *C*-conditions. Therefore, dispositions for applications of words can make statements about what words mean true. This would beg the question in favor of the dispositionalist, for it is in effect the existence of appropriate *C*-conditions which is under debate, and indeed Kripke's argument can be seen as an argument that meaning and fragility are not analogous. It is this latter argument I target.

⁸Much of Kripke's discussion focuses on the normativity of meaning (see, e.g., pp. 11, 37). I agree with Boghossian [(1989), p. 513] that the problem for DM is the problem of the possibility of (systematic) error. It is not clear what else the notion of the normativity of meaning could come to. Certainly, if we operate with a notion of *favorable* conditions, then there is a clear way in which it would be rationally justified for *S* to apply *w* only in those conditions, and not in unfavorable conditions [Miller (1997b) §6.2; Pettit 1999, §3].

⁹Forbes [(1984), p. 229-30] also aligns dispositionalism about meaning with dispositionalism about other properties. See also Heil and Martin (1998).

¹⁰Johnston (1992), (1993); see also C. B. Martin (1994), Lewis (1997).

¹¹See Martin, Johnston, and, especially, Lewis, *op.cit.*

¹²We can elaborate this by noticing that when Kripke-Wittgenstein focuses on the possibility of systematic mistakes he makes two premature assumptions: (i) That systematic misapplication is special to the concept of meaning. This is premature because other dispositions may also systematically fail to manifest properly. (ii) That systematic failure entails that there is an additional disposition in play (e.g., the disposition to forget to carry). This is premature because systematic failure can be explained by masking, mimicking and altering.

¹³See also Coates (1997).

¹⁴Here are three considerations which lends credibility to this conception of DM. Firstly, it seems to me plausible that it can be a vague matter when *S* passes from being systematically mistaken to having misunderstood *w*, or when *S* progresses from not understanding the standard meaning of *w* to merely being systematically mistaken about it. However, vagueness does not have to entail non-factualism. Secondly, if *S* is disposed to apply ‘+’ to the skaddition function in *C*, then we could say that *S* attaches an idiolectic meaning to ‘+’. This is a welcome opportunity because we would want a way of explaining what it is for subjects to have (partial) idiolects. Thirdly, DM also furnishes us with a way of explaining ambiguity, for it may be the case that *S* has *two* dispositions for use of ‘bank’: one disposition to apply ‘bank’ to certain monetary institutions, and another disposition to apply ‘bank’ to river banks. This would be no different from observing that a cup has a disposition to break when struck and a disposition to break when nearby opera singers do high Cs.

¹⁵Failure of analysis does not on its own establish non-factualism: the facts in question could be *sui generis*, or primitive, dispositions. For discussion of primitivism, see Kripke and

Boghossian [Kripke (1982), p. 51-54; Boghossian (1989), §31]. For a criticism of primitivism, see Hohwy (2001).

¹⁶Boghossian [(1989), p. 539-40] stresses the point about the absence of beliefs. See also Miller (1997a).

¹⁷Forbes goes on to give a ‘straight’ solution which incorporates an analysis of the notion of a disposition. He argues that by simultaneous ascription of dispositions the circularity charge can be met. I don’t think this works: if ascribing one disposition involves circularity of the kind Kripke is concerned with, then presumably pairwise ascription also involves such circularity.

¹⁸Though of course what we actually *observe* may leave us uncertain which it is, but that is a familiar mere epistemic predicament.

¹⁹Notice that the finiteness-issue doesn’t seem to play any important role here. Even if we could arrive at a finite list of all the ways and conditions under which a cup can break or fail to break when struck, ascription of non-vacuous dispositions to the cup would still require us to favor some counterfactually underwritten breakings, in some set of conditions, as non-masked, non-mimicked and non-altered manifestations in favorable conditions of the disposition in question.

²⁰Much of Kripke’s discussion centres on the idea that dispositionalism fails to demonstrate that an account of meaning must show what *S ought* to do, not what *S would* do. If DM is on the right track, then this worry is unfounded (see also fn. 5 and 7 above). But the close alignment with other dispositional properties might give rise to another worry, viz. that this conception of meaning bizarrely entails that a cup’s being fragile is somehow a normative fact. However, the mere fact that all concepts of dispositional properties have certain features in common does not entail that there are not also substantial differences among such properties. We have a good, albeit often implicit,

grasp of wherein these differences consist, as witnessed by our command of dispositional concepts as diverse as bravery and elasticity. No doubt such differences are keyed to differences in *C*-conditions for different dispositions. It is the task of an analysis of particular concepts of dispositional properties to make explicit our implicit grasp of the way in which that concept differs from concepts of other dispositions.

²¹See Stalnaker for a good discussion along similar lines [Stalnaker (1984), pp. 13-14].

²²See Burgess (1984), Pettit (1999) for discussions of the notions of favourable conditions and circularity. See Lewis (1997) for an influential analysis of the notion of a disposition. If my line of argument is right, then what Kripke is really targeting is our capacity for specifying the extension of concepts of dispositional properties without circularity. He should not be seen as targeting our possession of concepts of dispositional properties as such. This makes things easier for someone trying to evade the meaning-sceptical vortex because one can employ the concepts one is analyzing in the *analysans* as long as grasp of the *analysans* doesn't presuppose knowing the extension of those concepts; the concepts in question could thus occur in the *analysans* when embedded in suitable intensional contexts (for discussion of this, see Humberstone (1997)).

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