

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Conditional analyses of options for action: A partial defence

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Germany.Email: jacob.rosenthal@uni-konstanz.de**Abstract**

The idea of multiple options for action in a specific situation is essential for choice and deliberation. But what exactly is an option for action? A simple and natural approach to this question is via conditional analyses. While conditional analyses of *dispositions* and *abilities* face well-known objections and are widely considered untenable, I argue that several of these objections do not apply to conditional analyses of *options*. Others do, but the analyses can be modified or interpreted in a suitable way so as to deal with them. One central difficulty, however, remains and can only partially be resolved. Still, all things considered, the prospects of conditional analyses of options for action are quite good; they should not be lightly dismissed.

KEYWORDS

abilities, action, compatibilism, conditional analysis, dispositions, options, possibilities

1 | OPTIONS FOR ACTION

The idea of there being different options for action, that is, that an agent can do various pairwise incompatible things in the circumstances he is in, figures prominently in our understanding of agency. The existence of different options is clearly assumed in choices and decisions as well as in the associated practical deliberations. One may add, more controversially, that agency as such presupposes that what is actually done could also be omitted, so that when someone acts, she has the option to refrain from doing what she does up until the action is completed. Moreover (but ever since Frankfurt came up with his examples also controversially), free will and moral responsibility seem to be impossible without alternative courses of action being, or having been, open to the agent.

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Thus the idea of there being different options for action permeates our understanding of agency and our self-understanding as agents. But what does it mean that a subject S has the option to φ in circumstances C ? One could take the notion of an option for action as a primitive, and base the other ‘agentive modalities’ on it.¹ Such an approach is suggested by decision theory in particular, which takes the notion of a possible action for granted without analysing it. But if one wants to hear more, conditional analyses are a very natural candidate for an explication. The *locus classicus* for conditional analyses of ‘can’ is of course Moore.² Such analyses have been severely criticised on different counts; at the same time, support for them has never ceased.³ The sense of ‘can’ I am interested in is the more specific ‘having the option to’. My aim is to show that several of the objections to conditional analyses of abilities or dispositions do not apply to conditional analyses of options. Others do, but the analyses can be modified or interpreted in a suitable way so as to deal with them. One central difficulty, however, remains and can only partially be resolved.

Agents deciding and at least potentially deliberating what to do are the paradigm fixing the here-relevant meaning of ‘option’. Options in this sense are always options for intentional action.⁴ I will subsume intentional omissions under them in order to keep things simple. I take no stance on the question whether animals or infants have options. They have them to the extent they are able to deliberate about possible courses of action and decide in favour of one of these. Actions are always chosen with regard to a particular situation (token) the agent is in. When ascribing an option, I follow a prevalent use and talk about ‘circumstances’, but this should be understood such that both a type- and a token-reading are admitted. While there seems to be no need to settle on one of these, the latter sense is primary. It is particular agents in particular situations who have or lack options.⁵

There are several near-synonyms for ‘option’ as well as notions in the vicinity: what agents *can* or *could* or *are able to* or *have the ability to* do, or what is *possible for* them to do, or what *possibilities* for action they have, or which courses of action are *open* to them, etc. In what follows, reasons will emerge to clearly set apart options from possibilities, but also from abilities, so the terminology must be handled with care. The emphasis on the notion of an option is not a mere idiosyncrasy, as will become clear.

In particular, ‘possibility’, ‘can’ and ‘could’ admit of epistemic interpretations, but ascriptions of abilities and options do not invite an epistemic reading. That an agent S has the option to φ in C is an objective fact about which all epistemic subjects, including the agent, can be mistaken. Moreover, one may be certain that S will not φ in C *because* one thinks that he is unable to φ in C . The epistemic attitude is justified by a judgement about what S can or cannot do, so the latter cannot plausibly be construed in an epistemic manner. Conversely, one may with good reason be sure that S will not φ in C *although* he can or could. Ascribing an option to an agent seems to be perfectly compatible with knowledge that it will not be chosen, because, for

¹See Maier (2015).

²See Moore (1912), ch. VI.

³See recently, e.g., Huoranszki (2011), Vihvelin (2013), Mandelkern et al. (2017), Boylan (2022).

⁴In contrast, Portmore (2019, ch. 2, 3) argues for a conception of options that also applies to beliefs, desires, emotions, etc. His main interest is in normative theorising, and he wants to straightforwardly apply ‘ought’ and hold people responsible with regard to things that are no proper objects of intention and choice. Correspondingly, his conception revolves around what he calls rational control rather than volitional control. I do not share some of the relevant intuitions he cites and tend to think that others should be construed in an indirect manner. Moreover, even if ‘ought’ can rightly be applied to, for example, feelings, it is still another matter to say that there are corresponding options. In any case, I confine myself to what I take to be a more standard sense of options, i.e., options for intentional and potentially deliberate action. The latter feature implies that there is a rational aspect to this notion of options, too.

⁵The often-used alternative is to ascribe abilities or options relative to points in time rather than situations. This has the advantage that ‘point in time’ is a much more clear-cut notion, but it does not fit the manner in which courses of action are considered and selected. Hardly ever does anybody ask whether or not some agent can φ at some precise moment t . This would add additional complications to the task of φ ing, as it is often doubtful whether an agent who clearly has the option to φ in his circumstances also has the option to φ at some precise moment. It is, moreover, the circumstances that are causally relevant for an agent’s having or not having the option to φ , whereas the point in time as such is not: it merely serves as an index. So I will stick to circumstances or situations, but will not try to make these notions precise.

example, there are strong and quite obvious reasons against it and the agent is a prudent person.⁶

When *S* deliberates whether to φ in *C* or decides in favour of or against φ ing in *C*, she takes φ ing to be one of her options in *C*, but she can be wrong about this. Conversely, she can have several options in *C* she does not know about. But this does not mean that there is no connection whatsoever between *S*'s knowledge or epistemic capacities and her options. That *S* has the option to φ in *C* implies that *S* has voluntary control over φ ing in *C*, which in turn implies that *S* knows how to φ in *C*. Otherwise, she lacks the option, although it may still be the case that she is able to φ in *C* in a broader sense. Someone who does not know the combination of a safe (and is not equipped with proper explosives, etc.) does not have the option to open the safe.⁷ At best, she has the option to try, with minuscule chances of success. Suppose the combination is 448-961-5237. Under normal circumstances, the person has the option to dial 448-961-5237 and pull the handle. But to do so *is* to open the safe. Thus, she has the option of performing a certain action under one description, but not under another. Therefore an option is strictly speaking not to an action (or action type) simpliciter, but to an action type under certain relevant descriptions. This may be an unwelcome feature of options, but we have no choice here. The point of combination locks is precisely that people who do not know the combination do not have the option to open the safe, while at the same time it is very easy to dial the correct numbers, if one only knows them, and pull the handle. After all, access should be no problem for authorised persons! Ascriptions of options even create hyperintensional contexts: If *S* does not know the first ten digits of the decimal expansion of π (pi) and also cannot acquire this knowledge in *C*, he does not have the option in *C* to recite the first ten digits of π . And yet, he very likely has the option to say: '3 1 4 1 5 9 2 6 5 3'.⁸

The (hyper)intensionality sets options apart from abilities, or makes them a special kind of abilities. Moreover, options, like abilities, are to be distinguished from possibilities. That they are no epistemic possibilities is but a special case in the sense that they are not adequately captured by sentential operators like 'it is possible that' or 'possibly'. The logic of ascriptions of abilities and options is different from standard modal logic, as is shown by Anthony Kenny's well-known points. First, if *S*, being an unskilled darts player, tries to hit double-18 from the regular distance and succeeds, this shows that it is (or was) possible that *S* scores double-18, that he can (or could) do so, and even that, in a sense, he is (or was) able to do so. But it is not the case that he has (or had) the ability or the option to score double-18. He was just lucky. The only option an unskilled darts player has in this respect is to *try* to score double-18. So, if one were to represent abilities or options by the 'it is possible that' sentential operator, actuality does not imply possibility: axiom T of modal logic is not fulfilled. Second, if *S* has the option to hit the dart board, it does not follow that he has the option to hit the 1-segment, or the option to hit the 2-segment, or the option to hit the 3-segment, etc. He may be skilled enough not to miss the board altogether, but not skilled enough to have the option to hit any specific number segment. This means that axiom K is not fulfilled for this kind of possibility. Third, if an agent has the option to φ in *C*, this does not entail that he does *not* have the option *not* to have the option to φ in *C*. He may well have the option in *C* to deprive himself of the option to φ in *C*. Thus axiom 5 is not fulfilled either.⁹

⁶This creates an obvious problem for libertarianism about free will that is discussed in Rosenthal (2019). While the present topic is options for action, not whether the agent is free or responsible with regard to them, one may claim that in order to *really* have an option the agent must be free to choose it. So there is a connection of the matter of options to the free-will debate, which will indeed come up in Section 4. Still, that debate is not my main concern. I do not mean to settle the dispute between compatibilism and incompatibilism about free will or moral responsibility in passing.

⁷See Schwarz (2020), p. 2.

⁸See again Schwarz (2020), p. 2.

⁹See Kenny (1975, ch. VII). See also Vetter (2015, ch. 6) for potentiality and Jaster (2020, ch. 3) for abilities. I take the validity of these points largely for granted here and do not discuss them further. But I will come back to axiom T – actuality entails possibility, here: success entails ability/option – in Section 3.

Therefore, while abilities or options are or may be conceived as *some* sort of possibility, this modality is not adequately expressed by ‘it is possible that’ or ‘possibly’ clauses. Rather, ascriptions of abilities or options logically behave like predications.¹⁰ This is the main reason to set the notion of an option apart from the notion of possibility, although one may still use possibility talk in a guarded way. One might put it thus: That an agent *S* has the option or ability to φ in *C* implies that it is possible *for S* to φ in *C*, but not that it is possible *that S* φ s in *C*, or that *S* *possibly* φ s in *C*.¹¹ This is not to deny that there are entailments of this kind, i.e., there will presumably be possible worlds in which (a counterpart of) *S* φ s in (a counterpart of) *C*. But such entailments cannot be used to explicate the notion of an ability or option to act in an illuminating way. They have to be specifically argued for, depending on the pertinent sense of ‘possible’, and they are all problematic, even with respect to metaphysical possibility.¹²

2 | CONDITIONAL ANALYSES OF OPTIONS

Conditional analyses of options use counterfactual conditionals (or subjunctive conditionals, as their antecedent may be true in the actual world) and have the following form:

S has the option to φ in *C* if and only if *S* would φ in *C* if some appropriate condition were fulfilled. This condition could be one of the following: (1) *S* tries to φ in *C*; (2) *S* intends/wills to φ in *C*; (3) *S* chooses/decides to φ in *C*; (4) *S* judges that she should φ in *C*; (5) *S* considers it best to φ in *C*.

It is worth noting that options according to conditional analyses are by no means conditional options. What is conditioned by the antecedent of the counterfactual is the consequent, i.e., *S*'s φ ing in *C*, but not *S*'s being able or having the option to φ in *C*. Thus it is a mistake to say that conditional analyses yield a ‘conditional can’ or a ‘conditional ability’, perhaps adding that what an agent needs to be *really* able to φ in *C* is an *unconditional* ability to do so. Analysing ‘can’ (simpliciter) by a conditional is very different from claiming that a ‘conditional can’ is sufficient for there to be an option for action, or that options are in themselves conditional.¹³

Conditional analyses of options have several advantages. First, the conditionals provide simple and natural answers to the question of what an option for action is. Second, options according to conditional analyses are fully objective, or to be more precise: as objective as truth conditions for counterfactuals are. Third, they yield plenty of (unactualised) options for action even if determinism holds and thus serve the course of compatibilism. While I am not going to defend compatibilism about free will or moral responsibility, I do not believe that the mere idea of a subject's being able to act in different ways in a given situation is *prima facie* incompatibilist. We often rely on agents to take certain courses of action, although others are also open to them in their circumstances. Moreover, decision theory, act-utilitarianism, etc., do not seem to presuppose indeterminism.¹⁴

¹⁰See Vetter (2015) with regard to potentiality in general.

¹¹See again Vetter (2015, ch. 6) for the context of potentiality, and Nida-Rümelin (2016).

¹²We will come back to this in Section 4.

¹³The latter course is pursued by Clarke (1992), who provides an analysis of the presuppositions of rational deliberation that proceeds via conditional abilities. While his account, if successful, would show once and for all that deliberation between options is meaningful in a deterministic setting, it does not do justice to the ordinary meaning of the ascription of options. It is *because* we think we have various options for action that we deliberate. We do not think that we acquire an option only *by* reaching the corresponding result in deliberation. If *S* thinks that she can φ in *C* only if she comes to the conclusion that she should, how can she rationally deliberate whether or not to φ in *C* in the first place? Alternatives of which kind is she pondering *before* reaching any conclusion about what to do?

¹⁴There is a problem of conditional analyses that looks more severe with *indeterministic* settings. If the indeterminism is thoroughgoing, there will always be *some* chance that *S* would *not* φ in *C*, even if *S* tried (intended, decided) to do so. In a thoroughly indeterministic world, interferences can occur anytime and anywhere. A similar problem, however, may arise in deterministic settings, too, so that there is the possibility that ‘most counterfactuals are false’ (Hájek, 2014). I bracket this problem, noting that it is a general one for counterfactuals.

Having the option to φ implies knowing how to φ and being in control with respect to φ in a sense of ‘know how’ and ‘control’ that fits conditional analyses. This is a fourth point in favour of them. In particular, they show how an option is not to an action or action type simpliciter, but to a type of action under certain relevant descriptions. Take the example of the safe: If the person does not know the combination, she does not have the option to open the safe, but at the same time, she has the option to dial 448-961-5237 and pull the handle. And indeed, she would dial 448-961-5237 and pull the handle if she tried (intended, chose, considered it best) to do so, but it is not true that she would open the safe, if she tried (intended, chose, considered it best) to. This corresponds to the fact that she knows how to perform and is in control with respect to the action under the former description, but not under the latter. Conditional analyses get that point exactly right.

Fifth, conditional analyses fit the process of deliberate action very well, the candidate antecedents mirroring the stages of this process. If S is deliberating whether to φ in C , she has the aim of making up her mind with regard to φ and to act accordingly, and thus tacitly assumes the following: If she came to the conclusion that it would be best to φ , she would *decide* in favour of φ because of that conclusion, *intend* to φ in line with that decision, *try* to φ according to that intention, and finally φ in C due to that attempt. At least this appears to be the regular course of events following the deliberation if S concludes that she should φ in C .¹⁵ If these steps are secure, what more should be needed for S to have the option? In particular, it does not seem to be required that it is possible that S comes to the conclusion that she should φ in C . There may be strong and quite obvious reasons to do something else which a person like S will not miss. No matter – as long as she *would* φ in C if she came to the conclusion that she should, this seems to be enough for her to have the option to φ in C . This speaks in favour of *some* kind of conditional analysis being adequate, while at the same time making clear why there are different candidates for the conditional’s antecedent. The candidate antecedents correspond to the different phases of deliberate action, and at first sight any of them seems to be as good as any other.

Which antecedent should be preferred? I take no definite stance on this, but will proceed with willing/intending, for the following reasons. The latter three antecedents – S chooses/decides to φ in C , S judges that she should φ in C , S considers it best to φ in C – presuppose a view of S towards possible alternative courses of action, i.e., options. Choices or decisions are *between* actions; one judges that one should φ *rather than* do something else in the circumstances; S considers it best to φ in C *in comparison with* certain alternatives. Thus, explicating the concept of an option via one of those antecedents is not in line with the natural order of explanation. The notion of an option is prior: First there are options for action, and then, and because of that, there are deliberations, comparative judgements and choices with regard to these.¹⁶ There is no such difficulty with the first two antecedents, and both are frequently used in the literature. Thus, the candidate explications are:

(CA-1) S has the option to φ in C if and only if S would φ in C if S tried to φ in C .

(CA-2) S has the option to φ in C if and only if S would φ in C if S intended to φ in C .

Now, trying to do something is itself an action that can be chosen deliberately, and while it seems to be easy in most cases, it certainly has prerequisites. So trying to φ may or may not be among S ’s options in C . Applied to this kind of action, (CA-1) yields that S has the option to try to φ in C if and only if S would try to φ in C if S tried to try to φ in C . If trying to try entails trying, the analysis reduces to triviality: the counterfactual is always true. While I do not want

¹⁵This is not to claim that these stages are all separate. For example, reaching the conclusion that one should φ may mean, or entail, or usually be simultaneous with, deciding to φ .

¹⁶This is not meant to be a decisive point. The idea of a natural order of explanation may not carry much weight. Moreover, an explication of options need not be pursued as a reductive analysis to be illuminating. In any case there are interesting further differences between these antecedents, which is the reason that I reconsider one of them at the end of Section 4.

to straightforwardly claim that trying to try amounts to trying (simpliciter), I do not want to dispute it either, as it is hard to get a grasp on what trying to try exactly means. Therefore I set aside (CA-1), too. The kind of problem generalises: it potentially arises whenever the condition in the antecedent denotes an action, in which case the analysis can be applied to its own antecedent. In contrast, I assume that intending is *not* a type of action, at least not one that can be decided in favour of or be the object of deliberation, and proceed with (CA-2).

The case of trying needs to be considered for still another reason. It can be argued that options proper are *always* options to try, because all actions are strictly speaking attempts. If φ is an action in the ordinary sense, one might say that what is under the agent's control is not φ ing itself, but at best the attempt to φ , and it is the circumstances that have to provide for success, i.e., for the completed action. And then one might go on and say that attempts in the sense of external doings presuppose favourable circumstances, too, for example, a certain room to move, so that the attempts are to be construed as internal events.¹⁷ In particular, it may turn out that decision theory is best conceived to be strictly speaking not about external doings at all, but about attempts construed as internal, even purely mental events, or about decisions themselves, or about other types of internal action. One is pushed into this direction with decision theory in particular, because according to it, what an agent ought to do depends on his subjective beliefs along with his subjective preferences rather than on external facts, while at the same time some version of 'ought implies can' is to be upheld. This yields an incoherent mix unless the 'actions' between which the agent chooses are independent of circumstances about which he could be mistaken. The possible 'actions' must be under his direct control in a very strict sense of the term.¹⁸ In this way the notion of an action (and along with it, of an option) is turned into a theoretical term without any clear correspondence in our experience, while it remains doubtful that we have really hit upon something that has the required independence of actual circumstances.¹⁹ While there are reasons for following this course, the notion of an (option for) action threatens to dissolve in that way. I will not pursue this line further, but rather stick to a more mundane view of options that in particular retains the phenomenological difference between decisions in favour of a full-blown action and decisions in favour of a mere attempt, and likewise for deliberations.²⁰

3 | SOLVABLE PROBLEMS OF CONDITIONAL ANALYSES

First, there are things people can do, but only unintentionally. It is possible that S can make funny jokes, but if he aims at doing so, he fails. One can put this aspect directly, albeit somewhat artificially, into the description of the action, like 'absent-mindedly playing with one's jewellery' or 'unintentionally (or even counter-intentionally) reading advertisements'.²¹ If an agent can make funny jokes, that does not entail that he would do so if he intended to. While this is a difficulty for conditional analyses of agents' abilities in a broader sense, it is none for conditional analyses of options. What cannot be done intentionally is not an option for action at all.

Second, φ ing in C may be an option of S , but at the same time it may be obviously unreasonable, or absurd, or very strenuous, or require a lot of courage to φ in C . Now, if S intended to φ in C , would she then carry the action through to the end or rather abstain at some point, because φ ing in C is so absurd, unreasonable, strenuous or requires so much courage?

¹⁷See Hornsby (1980), ch. III.

¹⁸See Hedden (2012), Schwarz (2021).

¹⁹Even such conceptions of options are subject to the problem to be discussed in Section 4. Cases in which the agent lacks the internal ability to choose certain of his options (so conceived), or even merely suspects that he may be incapable of doing so, are denied the status of genuine decision problems (see Schwarz, pp. 189–190).

²⁰I suspect that if one really goes so far as to deny all external doings of agents the status of genuine options and starts to contract (possible) actions and pushes them ever further back into the agent, one will never regain one's footing, except by *fiat*. Relatedly, the notion of control and the distinction between agents and the circumstances they are in cannot be pressed too strongly.

²¹See Vetter (2019), sec. 2.3 and fn. 9.

That depends on the details of the case, but surely counterfactual abstaining, or a considerable probability thereof, would not by itself entail that S does not have the option to φ in C . Thus we have to interpret the antecedent of the conditional in a way that is tailored to our purposes. What is meant are firm intentions that are not prematurely abandoned, but upheld. Upheld until when? ‘Until completion of the action’, one is tempted to say, but one cannot add this to the antecedent on pain of getting a trivially true conditional. I do not, however, take this to be a serious problem of the analysis. It is rather a difficulty of making fully explicit the meaning of the antecedent as it is required to make the analysis work, but it should be reasonably clear what that meaning is.

Third, the truth of a counterfactual is an all-or-nothing affair, and consequently options according to conditional analyses are not gradable. This is as it should be: neither common sense nor decision theory treat options as gradable. The notion may be somewhat vague, there are very plausibly borderline cases, but this does not mean that options naturally come in degrees. Some options are more difficult to execute than others – the agent has to focus better or try harder – but they are options all the same.

It has been objected to conditional analyses of *abilities* that these are gradable and therefore conditional analyses are inadequate. Romy Jaster distinguishes two dimensions in gradability: achievement and reliability. First, T 's ability to φ can be greater than S 's. They both have the ability to φ , but T φ s better than S when they both exercise their ability. Second, T may be able to φ in a greater range of circumstances.²² What does this mean for options? Options are ascribed with respect to specific circumstances, so whether an agent has the option to φ in *other* circumstances, and how large the range of these is, does not make a difference as to whether or not he has the option to φ in C . If he has that option, it does not somehow become greater when he can φ in many other circumstances, too. As far as achievement is concerned, it seems artificial to talk about an agent having more or less of an option to φ , or a greater or smaller option to φ . Rather, these are differences regarding the action at issue: the agent may have the option to play a certain piece of music on the piano, but not to play it in a way that would satisfy the conductor of a famous orchestra. We are simply talking about different types of action here.

This also deals with the closely related topic of the context sensitivity of abilities: Whether S is able to play a certain piece on the piano depends in part on the context of ascription. The conductor of a famous orchestra will expect a lot more in that respect than the piano teacher of a child. Again, the difference is in the action: the agent may have the option to φ , but not of a certain more specific action φ^* . All in all, there is no need to view options as gradable, and the same could even be said about agents' abilities in general. While there are strong reasons to view *dispositions* as gradable,²³ the relevant reasons are not compelling for abilities.

Fourth, conditional analyses of dispositions and abilities face the problems of finks and masks.²⁴ An ability may be finkish, i.e., disappear when it is about to be displayed. As long as the display is not called forward, the ability is there, but the relevant conditionals are false. Similar for masking: some factor thwarts the regular display of an ability in case it is tested, and then, again, the ability is present, but the relevant conditionals are false. Thus it seems that these are too demanding; their truth is not necessary for there being the respective ability. Moreover, there can be a finkish *lack* of an ability: the ability comes into being only when, and as soon as, it is called forward. As long as it is not, there is no ability, but the relevant counterfactuals are true. Finally, there can be a masked lack of an ability: Upon being tested, the performance that is characteristic for the ability is forthcoming, but this is not due to the ability, which is in fact absent, but due to something else. Again, the counterfactuals are true without the corresponding ability being there. Thus the conditionals are not sufficient either. All this

²²See Jaster (2020), sec. 1.3, 2.5.

²³See Manley and Wasserman (2008).

²⁴See, e.g., Lewis (1997) and Fara (2008).

holds in the same way for dispositions. The possibilities of finking or masking a disposition or ability, and of finking or masking its absence, show that simple conditionals are too strong *and* too weak to serve as analyses of dispositions or abilities.

One can try to answer this array of objections to conditional analyses by proposing more complicated conditionals,²⁵ but I will not go into that direction, as the objections are much less powerful with regard to *options*. First, take moderately *reliable* finks or masks of an agent's ability that interfere with a considerable probability. Such finks or masks deprive the agent of the corresponding option. The relevant conditionals get this exactly right: If it is the case that when *S* intended to φ in *C*, she would fail due to some factor that would with considerable probability block the display of her ability to φ or even make that ability disappear, then *S* does not have the option to φ in *C*. If *S*, being able to play a certain piece at the piano, spots a fearsome critic in the audience and gets so excited over this that she cannot perform, she does not have the option to play the piece in this situation. If *S* has the ability to get up from his chair, but a demon would paralyse him as soon as he wanted to rise, he does not have the option to get up.²⁶

In a certain sense the agents in these examples retain the relevant ability. In cases of masking, they retain it throughout; in cases of finkishness, they retain it as long as they do not try to exercise it. But in another sense, that is to my mind equally intuitive, they lack the ability in the specific circumstances, and it is this latter sense that is relevant for there to be the corresponding option.²⁷ As long as one identifies dispositions and abilities with their 'categorical bases', masks and finks refute simple conditional analyses, but if one does not, they do not. Only if abilities and dispositions are viewed as intrinsic properties of their bearers, is the former understanding of them mandatory. Options, by contrast, insofar as they are viewed as properties of agents, are clearly extrinsic properties, and thus it is unambiguously clear that the agents in the examples do *not* have the option in question.

Having an option is not only about somehow having an ability to φ , but about actually φ ing when one wants to. This means in particular that proposals like the one put forward by Michael Fara for analyses of abilities do not work for options. For *S* to have the option to φ in *C*, it is not enough that *S* has the disposition to φ in *C* when he tries, in *C*, to φ .²⁸ Notably, agents in Frankfurt-style scenarios lack the option to do otherwise while retaining the ability to do otherwise in certain dispositionalist senses of 'ability'. Fara's and the other new dispositionalists' attempts to deal with Frankfurt-style cases are questionable precisely because they do nothing to undermine the claim that agents lack alternative *options* in such cases.²⁹

Analogously for finked or masked *inabilities*. If *S* is paralysed so that he cannot get up from his chair, but the paralysis would be removed as soon as he intended to get up, *S* has the option to get up all the time. Keith Lehrer used this example against conditional analyses of 'can',³⁰ but it simply fails if 'can' is given the sense of 'having an option for action'. In the option-sense, the agent *can* rise from his chair anytime, but in another sense, he cannot as long as he does not intend to.

Thus, reliable finks or masks of agents' abilities or inabilities pose no problems for conditional analyses of options. More serious are *accidental* finks and masks. Examples of finking and masking evoke different intuitions with regard to options depending on whether the fink or mask is presented as being due to some mechanism waiting in the wings to interfere, or as being

²⁵See Lewis (1997), Huoranszki (2011, ch. 4), Vihvelin (2013, ch. 6).

²⁶See Lehrer (1968).

²⁷Taking up the often-used distinction between general and specific abilities, one can equate options with (maximally) specific abilities. I avoid this terminology, although nothing much hinges on this. First, options are only about intentional (and potentially deliberate) action, while abilities are standardly conceived in a broader sense. Second, abilities in a standard sense are something agents carry with them through different situations. In this sense there are no specific abilities in contrast to general ones, but only less and more specific abilities, and even a very specific ability can be performed in potentially infinitely many situations. Options, by contrast, are held with respect to particular situations.

²⁸See Fara (2008).

²⁹For a general assessment and critique of the 'new dispositionalism', see Clarke (2009) and Whittle (2010).

³⁰See again Lehrer (1968).

due to a mere incident. The distinction is shaky upon closer inspection and indeed a matter of degree, that is, of the probability with which the relevant interference would take place. Nevertheless, one can contrast reliable and accidental masking (or finking) as the end points of a spectrum. In the following I investigate accidental masks. The more far-fetched case of accidental finks can be treated analogously.

Austin's experienced golfer tries to sink a short putt, but fails for no salient reason and angrily says to himself: 'I could have holed it'.³¹ His ability to sink short putts is accidentally masked in the situation, and the relevant conditional is false. Did the golfer have the option to hole the putt? One may deny this and rather say that he, though having the option to try with very good chances of success, did not have the option to hole the putt. If this seems too harsh, one is driven into the direction of putting the probability into the consequent of the conditional, so that it comes out true:

(CA-2-prob) *S* has the option to φ in *C* if and only if *S* would with high probability φ in *C* if *S* intended to φ in *C*.

There is a lot to be said in favour of this kind of weakening of the consequent anyway. In particular, the proposal escapes the arguments to the effect that 'most counterfactuals are false'.³² The downside is that it makes the notion of an option a gradual one, after all. Introducing some threshold for the probability only masks this, as any specific threshold is largely arbitrary. Moreover, how is the probability to be interpreted? Since the analysis is supposed to apply to particular situations, it should be a (counterfactual) single-case probability, and be objective, too, or else there is no objective fact of the matter whether or not *S* has the option to φ in *C*. But if the reference here really is to objective single-case probabilities chances the compatibilist character of (CA-2-prob) is hanging by the thread of 'deterministic chance': not a very attractive option for a compatibilist.³³

A possible alternative consists in interpreting the probability not as referring to an objective single-case probability of success that would hold if the agent intended to φ in *C*, but as being about the ratio of success in the set of those possible worlds that are close to the actual world and in which (a counterpart of) the agent intends to φ in (a counterpart of) *C*. Such a view seems to nicely capture the difference between reliable and accidental masks: If there were some hidden mechanism in place making the golfer's failure quite probable, he would, intuitively, *not* have the option to hole the putt, but he (or rather, his respective counterparts) would also fail in most close possible worlds, since the mechanism would be in place there, too. If, by contrast, a pure accident is responsible for his failure, this does not carry over to many nearby possible worlds. The golfer (or rather, his respective counterpart) succeeds in most close possible worlds in which he intends to sink the putt.³⁴

Appealing as such a view is, there is a serious difficulty to it. It is obscure how the idea of a success ratio within some set of possible worlds can be cashed out in general. There is an infinity, even a continuum, of such worlds, even of very close ones. Thus, a measure (in the sense of mathematical measure theory) on the relevant set of possible worlds is tacitly assumed. If one

³¹See Austin (1961 [1956]), fn. 9.

³²See again Hájek (2014).

³³Glynn (2010) defends the possibility of chances in a deterministic world, countering Schaffer (2007). Eagle (2011) draws a general parallel between compatibilist free action and deterministic chance and defends the possibility of the latter ('compatibilism about chance') via reference to the former. Likewise, according to Huoranszki (personal communication), there are far-reaching analogies between the idea of being able to do otherwise in the same situation and chance in a deterministic world, such that the two stand or fall together.

³⁴Different varieties of such 'success ratio views' are put forward by Manley and Wasserman (2008) with respect to dispositions, by Vihvelin (2013, ch. 6) as an account of dispositions and abilities, and by Jaster (2020, ch. 4) with respect to abilities. According to her, an agent *S* has the ability to φ if and only if *S* φ s in a sufficiently high proportion of the relevant possible situations in which *S* intends to φ , where relevance is context dependent. All proposals of this kind face the problem of the (choice of) measure, to be discussed immediately.

comes up with a measure or hypothesises that there is one, transformations of it may alter the success ratio in question, except in trivial cases where the ratio is 0 or 1. In principle, the success ratio, if not 0 or 1, can be set to any arbitrarily selected value between 0 and 1 by a suitable transformation of the given measure. Thus, it is not enough to assume that there is a measure on the relevant set of possible worlds; one also needs to suppose that one (or a relevant equivalence class) of the many possible measures is singled out by objective criteria. This cannot simply be posited, but has to be substantiated, and that in turn requires a mathematically surveyable context to start with. Outside such a context the term ‘success ratio’ is without meaning. One is easily led astray by intuitions here, as one tends to assume that there must be a straightforward generalisation from the case of finitely many possible worlds, where ‘success ratio’ is an unproblematic notion, to the case of infinitely or continuum-many possible worlds. But to even introduce a measure on such a set, one has to be able to survey and do serious work with the ‘structure’ of the set, and considerably more so when one wants to justify the choice of a particular measure.³⁵ This problem affects ratio-of-success views of dispositions, abilities and options alike. As far as options in particular are concerned, there is the additional (and actually foregoing) problem of the choice of a reference class of possible worlds. It does not arise or is at least less serious for views that embrace context dependence, but this can only be done with regard to dispositions or abilities, not options.

Now to accidentally masked *inabilities*. *S*, being an unskilled darts player, tries to score double-18 and succeeds to everybody’s, including his own, surprise. His inability to purposefully hit previously identified small regions on the dartboard is accidentally masked in the case at hand, and so the conditional comes out true in the standard semantics. But he did not have the option to score double-18, but only the option to try. A possible way to go here is to abandon the Lewis semantics for counterfactuals and rather follow Nozick: For a counterfactual to be true, it is not enough that the consequent be true in the closest antecedent-worlds, but it must also be true in those antecedent-worlds that are a little farther away – there must be a certain robustness to the consequent’s truth.³⁶ Thus, if an unskilled darts player tries to score double-18 from the regular distance and succeeds, the conditional ‘If he had intended to score double-18, he would have succeeded’ comes out false. While its consequent is true in the closest antecedent-world – the actual world – there are very similar possible worlds, for all practical purposes indistinguishable from the actual world in advance of the throw, where the player tries and fails.³⁷

Alternative routes are taken by John Maier and John Boylan.³⁸ According to Maier, if $S \varphi$ in C , then S has the option to φ in C . Options are held in particular situations, and the darts player’s success upon a purposeful trial shows that he had the option to score double-18 in this particular situation. Axiom T of modal logic is true for options, after all. In contrast, Boylan’s tense-sensitive account of specific abilities distinguishes between statements regarding past abilities concerning past events and statements regarding present abilities concerning future events. According to him, past success entails past ability, present inability entails ‘will not’, but it is not the case that success entails ability (simpliciter). Both accounts provide clear-cut solutions to the present problem, but the price to pay is that we either have to say that there are options without know-how and control on the part of the agent, or that the mere fact that the agent hit

³⁵Paradigmatic examples where such an approach to probability works are provided by games of chance and by the phase space of an ideal gas in statistical mechanics, comprising the physically possible states of the gas. Starting from these cases, tentative generalisations are possible (see Strevens, 2013).

³⁶See Nozick (1981), ch. 3.1, p. 176.

³⁷A reference class problem like it was mentioned in the preceding paragraph seems to be recurring here. Which sphere of possible worlds are we referring to exactly? But the difficulty is lesser here, because the required ratio of success equals 1. For this reason, there is also no problem of the choice of a measure. Having an option for action requires know-how and volitional control, and I take it that the degree of robustness of the truth of the conditional’s consequent that is necessary for there to be the option to score double-18 in the situation, is vaguely but objectively fixed by what it means to have the requisite control in such a case.

³⁸See Maier (2018, sec. 4.2) and Boylan (2022).

double-18 upon trying implies that he was in control and knew how to do it in this particular case. I do not want to say either of these and rather stick to rejecting axiom T for options in any variety.

To sum up, the possibility of accidentally masked abilities or inabilities poses considerable difficulties for conditional analyses of options. The analyses must be modified or interpreted in a special way to deal with them. There is more than one way of doing this, and it is fair to say that conditional analyses can somehow cope with the problems, although there is no fully satisfactory solution. I would recommend doing without the probability in the consequent and concede that in the case of masked abilities the agent lacks the corresponding option, though she may retain the option to try with very good chances of success. As far as accidentally masked *inabilities* are concerned, the agent does not have the respective option and the relevant conditionals come out false if they are evaluated according to Nozick. The price to pay for this package is that according to it we have fewer options for action than we are inclined to think. But options to try with a high probability (however interpreted) of success are almost as good.

4 | THE SERIOUS PROBLEM OF CONDITIONAL ANALYSES

The main problem of conditional analyses is that the agent may be unable to fulfil the conditional's antecedent. Does *S* still have the option to φ in *C* if *S* cannot intend to φ in *C*? Intending to do something seems so very easy that the further condition that the agent be able to intend may escape one's attention. And this may explain the intuitive appeal of an analysis that is in fact an irremediable failure.

Having an option means to be able to do something deliberately. When *S* carries out her option to φ in *C*, she not only φ s in *C*, but also intends to φ in *C*, so it follows that, when she *cannot* is unable to intend to φ in *C*, she *cannot* execute her option to φ in *C*. But an option that cannot be executed looks like an absurdity. While it need not be absurd for *every* conceivable sense of 'can', it will surely be so for *some*. It follows that *S* does not have the option to φ in *C* if she cannot intend to φ in *C* in the relevant sense of 'can'. There seems to be no way around this, and there is also no way around the fact that the simple conditional is silent on whether the agent can intend to φ in *any* sense.³⁹

Another, related, general consideration is this: Counterfactuals are by stipulation true if their antecedent is necessarily false. Therefore, if the agent *necessarily* does not intend to φ in *C*, he necessarily does not φ in *C* (as long as the topic is intentional action), but the analysis nevertheless grants him the option to φ in *C*. We have, however, already noted that abilities and options are not adequately captured by the sentential operator 'possibly'. Therefore, that it is impossible that *S* φ s in *C* does not by itself imply that *S* does not have the ability or option to φ in *C*. He may well have that option, but necessarily abstain from exercising it: for example, because it would be obviously irrational for *S* to φ in *C*. At first sight, this reply seems to be insufficient to dispel the worry, because it would be surprising if *S* could have the option to φ in *C* without its being in *any* sense possible that *S* φ s in *C*. But as we will see, it is in principle possible to bite that bullet, so the compelling objection goes via an inability of *S* to intend rather than an impossibility.

Let us turn to examples. First, the proposed conditional can be true of unconscious subjects.⁴⁰ It may be the case that *S* would φ in *C* if she intended to, but she cannot intend anything, and does not have any options for action, because she has fainted. Examples of this kind show most clearly that *some* amendment to the conditional is necessary for the analysis to be sufficient for the agent's having the option to φ in *C*. It is, however, not enough to add the

³⁹An argument of this kind was first put forward by Chisholm (1966).

⁴⁰See Van Inwagen (1983), p. 119.

condition that the mental faculties of S are in proper working order in C . There can also be fundamental barriers to the agent's intending to φ in C that concern specifically φ ing, as follows.

Second, S may lack the conceptual resources to represent φ ing and therefore be unable to intend to φ . According to all conditionals proposed in Section 2, medieval knights had the option to embark on a quest for an iPhone and only come back to their family and fellows if they had found one.⁴¹ Needless to say, it would never have occurred to them to pursue that 'option'. They were unable to mentally represent iPhones, and not just for psychological reasons. If it had ever occurred to a medieval knight to think of anything *like* an iPhone, it would not have been an iPhone, but something like a smartphone in general. Thus the analyses imply that agents, with their mental faculties in good working order, have options for action of which it is *metaphysically impossible* that they take them.⁴² While it is not strictly speaking impossible to live with that consequence – remember that an ability to φ in C does not by itself entail that the agent possibly φ s in C – it is very hard to accept. I would rather say that medieval knights did have various options for action, but to search the lands for an iPhone was not among them.

The problem cases so far share the feature that they do not occur from the perspective of the first person. If an agent deliberates what to do, she is not unconscious or in a coma. And if somebody, be it a medieval knight or anybody else, deliberates whether to search the country for an iPhone, he is able to mentally represent iPhones. With the following examples there is no such difference between the first-person and the observer's perspective.

Third, an agent with a strong phobia against φ ing may not be able to intend to φ , while the conditional is true for her.⁴³ Such an agent very plausibly does not have the option to φ in C . While one could try to dispute either the conditional's truth in cases of phobia, or that the agent really lacks the option, neither line of defence is particularly promising. The first line suggests itself with conditionals like 'If S wanted to φ in C , S would φ in C '. There is undoubtedly a sense of 'want' in which this conditional is false for phobics. 'Want' is ambiguous between different readings, among them predominantly cognitive ones, according to which 'wanting' means something like 'judging it best'. We will come back to cognitive antecedents below, but our preferred one is volitional in kind. Here, it is only with respect to 'just somehow' intending, but not with respect to the relevant sense of intending that it could be argued that the conditional is in fact false. S cannot bring herself to intend to φ in C , but *if* she did, she would φ . Moreover, in the case of a strong phobia, it would be implausible to grant the agent the relevant option, after all. While a successful therapy may result in the agent's acquiring the option, she does not have it before. And while there may well be extraordinary circumstances in which the agent would φ in spite of her phobia, this does not entail that she also has the option to φ in C when C is not of that special type.

Generally speaking, it is not uncommon for people to say: 'I know myself, I could not bring myself to do such a thing, even if I wanted to', and this *may* be literally true (except perhaps for certain extraordinary circumstances), while it is clear that the problem is not in doing the thing *given* the intention, but with forming and upholding an intention to this effect in the first place. It is not only phobias that pose the problem, but a whole spectrum of importantly different cases. Another type within this spectrum is, fourth, Frankfurtian volitional necessities, where the agent identifies with the necessity rather than being alienated from it: 'Someone who is bound by volitional necessity is unable to form a determined and effective intention – regardless of what motives and reasons he may have for doing so – to perform (or to refrain from performing) the action that is at issue. If he undertakes an attempt to perform it, he discovers that he simply cannot bring himself to carry the attempt all the way through.'⁴⁴

⁴¹See Clarke (2015).

⁴²See Spencer (2017) for a general defence of this conclusion.

⁴³This type of example was used by Lehrer (1968) against the sufficiency of conditional analyses of 'can'.

⁴⁴See Frankfurt (2004), p. 46.

This concludes my list of types of examples. How can one stick to conditional analyses in view of them? Kadri Vihvelin intends and tries to solve all these issues in a straightforward manner. According to her, it is perfectly possible that an agent who lacks the ability to intend or try to φ nevertheless retains the ability to φ .⁴⁵ While her approach may work for a certain carefully delineated understanding of ‘ability’ (according to which, e.g., an unconscious person may have the ability to get up, but not the ability to intend or try to get up), it is certainly inappropriate for options: an unconscious person does not have any options. But it is worth noting that it is only this kind of knockdown example that is decisive against the proposal. It is not *obviously* absurd to grant the medieval knight and the phobic the relevant options while maintaining that they cannot intend (in the relevant sense) to execute them and that it is therefore guaranteed that they will not take them.

Another proposal that may work for certain senses of ‘can’, but not for options, is Christopher Peacocke’s. He supplements a conditional analysis of ‘can’ by the requirement that there be a close possible world where the antecedent is true. Closeness, in turn, is treated as an epistemic notion, roughly meaning ‘For all we know, it can be or could easily have been the case that the agent intends to φ in C .’⁴⁶ We have, however, already seen that this is too demanding when options are at stake. *Prima facie*, ascribing an option seems to be compatible with knowledge that it will not be chosen. Agents have all kinds of options they would, for various reasons, never seriously think of pursuing. This counts against any such proposal, no matter what the criteria for closeness of possible worlds are. As long as they are not artificially selected so as to make the proposal work, S may, intuitively speaking, have the option to φ in C while S , C and φ are such that the next possible world where (a counterpart of) S intends to φ in (a counterpart of) C is quite far away, and either the circumstances there, or S ’s counterpart there, or both, are clearly distinguishable from how the situation or the person is in the actual world.

Thus there is no way around an additional requirement to the effect that the agent be able in some appropriate sense to (firmly, effectively) intend to φ in C . For lack of a better expression, I speak of a ‘psychological’ ability and leave open what exactly is required here. It is also at this point that the topic of options connects to and merges with the issue of free will:

(CA-2*) S has the option to φ in C if and only if S is psychologically able to intend to φ in C , and S would φ in C if S intended to φ in C .

This is a high price to pay for a defence of a conditional analysis. Options can either be viewed as a special kind of ability or as something in the vicinity, and therefore it is undesirable that their explication via conditionals should lead back to abilities. Moreover, an ability or option to act is, intuitively, easier to grasp than a psychological ability to intend. Nevertheless, this seems to be the only way to make conditional analyses of options for action work.⁴⁷ In particular, this means that the analyses are dialectically less effective or maybe even ineffective against an incompatibilist. If you are not already convinced that there can be unactualised options for action when determinism holds, you will not be easily convinced that the relevant psychological ability to intend to φ in C can be present when it is settled that the agent will not intend to φ in C .

With regard to this amendment to the conditional, it is instructive to finally look at conditionals with cognitive antecedents, which were laid aside at the end of Section 2. The gap between these and the volitional antecedents is somewhat narrowed by the fact that we are in

⁴⁵See Vihvelin (2013), sec. 6.6.

⁴⁶See Peacocke (1999), ch. 7.

⁴⁷Mandelkern et al. (2017) and Boylan (2022) build their conditional analyses of specific abilities on a presupposed notion of ‘(practically) available actions’. This addition would render any analysis of options for action uninformative: the ‘practically available actions’ precisely *are* the subject’s options. (This need not bother Mandelkern et al. and Boylan, who pursue different goals.) The addition of a psychological ability to intend is not that far-reaching, but comes too close to be really satisfactory.

the realm of intentional and potentially deliberate action throughout, but still, there are differences. Take, for example:

(CA-5) *S* has the option to φ in *C* if and only if *S* would φ in *C* if *S* considered it best to φ in *C*.

Proposals of this kind are less apt as an analysis of options. First, they are not in line with the proper order of conceptual explanation (see above Section 2). Second, in cases of akrasia, the agent does not do what he considers to be best, without this by itself showing that he lacks the option.⁴⁸ Barring such cases for the moment, we can see that cognitive antecedents serve the conditional analysis of options better than volitional ones. First, they bring out explicitly that options are tied to contexts of potential deliberation and choice. Second, they much less invite the idea that the agent needs to be in control with respect to the truth of the antecedent. What we intend or try or decide seems to be ‘up to us’ in *some* relevant sense, whereas what we judge to be best is not, or at most indirectly. In particular, the latter much less invites an incompatibilist construal.

(CA-5) does not fare better than (CA-2) with respect to unconscious people or medieval knights searching the lands for iPhones, so an addition to the effect that the agent be able to mentally represent φ ing in *C* is necessary. But this is a far cry from the requirement that the agent be psychologically able to fulfil the antecedent, that is, to judge φ ing in *C* to be best. Indeed, such a requirement seems to be far-fetched. Why *should* an agent be able, for each of her options, to consider this option to be the best one, even when there are strong and obvious reasons against it? And with phobias and other cases in which the agent cannot bring herself to effectively intend to φ , it is precisely because of the fact that she could not do so *even if* she judged φ ing in *C* to be best that we are under the impression that she lacks the option. Thus, in these cases, (CA-5) yields the correct result even without amendment.

What about agents who are unable to represent or appreciate the reasons in favour of φ ing and who will certainly not φ because of this? Imagine that *S* is a not too strong chess player facing a critical position on the board. He could only save the game by playing a subtle pawn move. But *S*, being the player he is, would never seriously consider this move. The calculations and considerations in its favour are far beyond his grasp, and there are other, seemingly promising moves that, however, all lose in the end. In such a constellation it may well be impossible that *S* chooses the pawn move. Does *S* have the option to make that move? Surely. At least, this seems to be the intuitive thing to say. It is just that *S* will definitely not choose this move.

Options seem to be threatened much more by a volitional inability to form a firm enough intention than by a cognitive inability to correctly assess the reasons in favour of the action. Therefore it seems sufficient to add to (CA-5) the requirement that the agent be able to mentally represent φ ing in *C*. Allowing for akrasia, we get:

(CA-5*) *S* has the option to φ in *C* at least if *S* is psychologically able to represent φ ing in *C*, and *S* would φ in *C* if *S* considered it best to φ in *C*.

Unfortunately, the gap that now opens up between the addition to the conditional and its antecedent – a gap not present in (CA-2*) – allows for Frankfurtian interveners.⁴⁹ While the inability to consider φ ing to be best does not in general take the option away from the agent, it would be another matter if an intervener blocked any consideration whether to φ while allowing the mental representation of φ ing along with the truth of the conditional. This possibility calls for further amendments which I do not attempt to spell out. But they do not threaten the

⁴⁸Thanks to Ferenc Huoranszki for pointing this out to me.

⁴⁹Thanks to Thomas Blanchard for pointing this out to me.

compatibilist character of the analysis: It is still the case that the *mere* fact that *S* is unable to consider it best to φ in *C*, and is guaranteed not to φ because of that, is not sufficient to deprive *S* of the option.

5 | CONCLUSION

Conditional analyses of ‘can’ face several objections. Most of them can be answered if ‘can φ ’ is understood as ‘has φ as an option for action’. This is true in particular for all objections that invoke finking or masking, although the case of accidental masks proved to be tough. One central difficulty, however, remains: Conditional analyses of ‘can’ are insufficient without a condition that ensures the realisability of the conditional’s antecedent in *some* relevant sense. What exactly this sense is depends on the target notion of ‘can’ as well as the details of the analysis. As far as options are concerned, there are ‘volitional’ and ‘cognitive’ proposals for the conditional’s antecedent, which require different amendments. These invoke either volitional or cognitive abilities of agents:

(CA-2*) *S* has the option to φ in *C* if and only if *S* is psychologically able to intend to φ in *C*, and *S* would φ in *C* if *S* intended to φ in *C*.

(CA-5*) *S* has the option to φ in *C* at least if *S* is psychologically able to represent φ in *C*, and *S* would φ in *C* if *S* considered it best to φ in *C*.

The required amendments deprive the analyses of much of their original allure, since ‘ability’ is a notion in the vicinity of ‘option’ and, moreover, psychological abilities to mental performances are, if anything, harder to understand than ordinary abilities to act. Furthermore, the addition in (CA-2*) suggests that the agent is in control with respect to the truth of the conditional’s antecedent, thereby entering the free will debate and rendering the analysis dialectically ineffective as an argument for compatibilism. The latter problem does not arise with (CA-5*). Here, the amendment to the conditional is nothing so demanding or specific as the ability to fulfil the antecedent and is not needed at all in cases of phobias, of Frankfurtian volitional necessities and the like. The price to pay is that (CA-5*) yields only a sufficient condition for options, due to the possibility of akrasia, and even further amendments are necessary to deal with the possibility of Frankfurtian interveners. All in all, the attempted defence of conditional analyses of options is only a partial success. But within these limits they seem to work, and they still yield a natural answer to the question what options for action are. Therefore it seems possible to stick to such analyses, after all.

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