Road Map

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Two Stories about Conditionals

- Conditional Propositions:
  - Conditional constructions work like conjunctive or disjunctive constructions: *If A, then B* expresses a particular sort of proposition, one that's derived from A, B, and the rules for the *if…then* connective.
  - Asserting a conditional is asserting that a conditional proposition is true.
- Conditional Assertion:
  - Conditional constructions don't work like conjunctive or disjunctive constructions. They're used, not to build a special sort of conditional proposition, but to perform a special sort of conditional speech act.
  - Asserting a conditional is making a conditional assertion.

Conditional Assertion

- The story about context change – what happens with a conditional assertion that if A, B? An assertion that B, under the scope of a (temporary) assumption that A.

(i) Remove not-A worlds from context set.
(ii) Remove not-B worlds from remaining set.
(iii) Replace the not-A worlds you removed in step (i).

Norms of Assertion and Standards of Assessment

Standards of assessment for regular assertions:

- Truth Norm: Is it true?
- Knowledge Norm: Does the speaker know it was true? (Not so obviously different from the whole story on a truth norm view.)
- Commitment Norm: Is the speaker prepared to argue for, defend, and withdraw in the right kinds of circumstances?
- Bayesian Norm: Is the speakers' credence above threshold?

Norms of Assertion and Standards of Assessment

Standards of assessment for conditional assertions:

- Truth Norm: If the antecedent is true – is the consequent true? (Effectively, same as truth norm for MC.)
- Knowledge Norm: Does the speaker have conditional knowledge? (What's that?)
- Commitment Norm: Speaker committed to argue for, defend, consequent, where given antecedent for free. (Looks a lot like straight assertion of MC.)
- Bayesian Norm: Is the speaker's conditional credence sufficiently high? (Different from straight assertion of MC.)

A Conditional Proposition Account

- Selection function semantics
  - $A \rightarrow B$ is true in β iff B is true in $F(A,\beta)$
- Pragmatic constraint for indicatives
  - If A is compatible with the context set **C**, then for all β in **C**, $F(A,\beta)$ is also a member of **C**.

A Conditional Proposition Account

- So:
  - For worlds compatible with presuppositions, selection function delivers another world compatible. Effect is to not allow presuppositions to lapse.
  - For worlds incompatible, pragmatic constraint is idle.

Nice Features

- Lets us say both that
  - The proposition expressed by an indicative is stronger than the material conditional.
  - Acceptance of the material conditional is sufficient for acceptance of the indicative.

Equivocation?

- I'm certain that if A, B.
- You're not, but you don't rule out A.
- We must be equivocating – the selection function semantics can't give us a single proposition to disagree about.

Equivocation?

- How come we have to be equivocating?
  - To be certain that if A, B, I have to be working with a CS that rules out A&~B.
  - To *not* be certain, you have to be working with a CS that includes some A&~B worlds.
  - Different CSs, different selection functions. Different selection functions, different propositions. So, equivocation.

Against Equivocation

- It's not what the speaker or addressee believes that determines the selection function.
- It's what's *common ground*.
- (In the non-defective case, what everybody presupposes.)
- The CS is, in this case, going to include some A&~B worlds. What we disagree about is, as usual, just where in the CS the actual world is to be found.

Sensitivity to Private Belief

- All you need to know in order to assert *if A, B* is that the material conditional is true.
- Looks like not so on standard selection function semantics: Danger of selection function taking ~A&~B worlds that my beliefs leave open to A&~B worlds.
- Fix: Make selection function sensitive to private beliefs of speakers.

A Bad Notion of Truth?

- In weird context sets, any old goofy conditional can come out true, since we can push the selection function around with our screwy presuppositions, and force it to point away from A&~B worlds.

A Bad Notion of Truth?

- Nope. The constraint on the selection function only applies to worlds within the context set. If the CS doesn't include w, the selection function is free to take w wherever it likes.
- In particular, if the CS excludes the actual world, the selection function is free to take the actual world to an A&~B world.

A Bad Notion of Truth?

- An equivocation on "true in a context":
  - True in the world in which the conversation is happening. No funny behavior here.
  - True in every world in the CS. Doesn't act like a respectable kind of truth, but it's not supposed to be a kind of truth.

Concerns from Gibbard

- Sly Pete:
  - Pete and Mr. Stone are playing poker. It's time for Pete to call or fold.
  - Zack sees Stone's hand, signals it to Pete. (So Pete won't call unless his hand is better.)
  - Jack sees both hands, sees that Stone's is better than Pete's.
  - Zack tells Allan: "If Pete called, he won".
  - Jack tells Allan: "If Pete called, he lost".
  - Pete folds.

Concerns from Gibbard

1) Zack is not in a position to rule out the actual situation.
2) He *is* in a position to assert "If Pete called, he won"
3) So, what Zack expressed when he said "If Pete called, he won" is true in the actual situation.

Same goes for Jack's assertion of "If Pete called, he lost".

Concerns from Gibbard

- So: Zack and Jack both spoke truly.
- If a selection function semantics is right, there must be different selection functions at work in the two claims.
- So, the selection function has to be constrained, not just by publicly accessible common ground, but also by their private beliefs or knowledge.

Two Ways to Communicate with a Context-Sensitive Sentence

1) All of the information that determines what S means in this context is available to everybody. So, everybody knows what S means.
2) Some of the information that determines what S means isn't available to everybody. But everybody knows how what S means depends on stuff they don't know about, and so everybody knows how things have to be in order for S to express some truth or other.

Summary of the Big Move

- Lesson from Edgington and Gibbard: conditionals are information-sensitive, both to public and private information.
- So: Revise the pragmatic constraint. The selection function is sensitive not just to what's common ground/common knowledge, but also to what's believed/known by the speaker.

Summary of the Big Move

- That means it's sensitive to information that is not, in general, publicly available.
- But, this does not require any non-standard notion of proposition, or of truth, and it doesn't imply that speakers and addressees who are ignorant of each other's private beliefs do not understand each other.

A Problem Case for Everybody

- Three suspects: butler, gardener, chauffeur.
- Two investigators: Alice and Bert.
- Alice was with the gardener at the time of the murder, so certain that he's innocent.
- Bert has shared conclusive evidence that clears the chauffeur.
- Bert also has (unshared, misleading) evidence that seems to clear the butler.

A Problem Case for Everybody

- Alice and Bert tell each other who they each think did it (without sharing their evidence) but neither is convinced.
- Bert says: "Look, it's common knowledge between us that it was either the butler or the gardener. So surely you should agree that if the butler didn't do it, the gardener did."
- Alice agrees about what's common knowledge, but – reasonably – doesn't accept the conditional.

Why This is a Problem Case

- For the original CP account: If common knowledge and common ground coincide, and the selection function is restricted just by what's common ground, then the conditional ought to be true, and Alice ought to know that it is.

Why This is a Problem Case

- For the revised CP account: Should also be fine if selection function is constrained by what the speaker knows.

Why This is a Problem Case

- For the CA account: CA account says that, if A, added to the common ground, entails B. So it should be okay.
- But, Alice's acceptance of the conditional looks like a violation of a conditional knowledge norm, and the Bayesian conditional probability norm.

How We Might Fix It

- Not everything that's common knowledge is common ground.
- "When it becomes clear that the guilt of the butler is in dispute, so that it is a live option in the context that the butler didn't do it, Alice should insist that we reopen the possibility that the guilty party was the chauffeur."
- Expand the context set to include possibilities compatible with the conditional knowledge of the parties on any condition compatible with the context.

The End

Three Thoughts

- A revision to Bob's account of conditional assertion.
- A worry about picking out the set that the pragmatic constraint constrains the selection function to, and maybe an argument for a CA over a CP account.
- Another (?) revision to the account of conditional assertion, in light of the Case of the Murderous Butler.
- A worry about the last CS-expanding move.

A Revision to the Account of CA

Instead of:

(i) Remove not-A worlds from context set.
(ii) Remove not-B worlds from remaining set.
(iii) Replace the not-A worlds you removed in step (i).

Say:

(i) Temporarily presuppose A. (So, drop worlds from context set.)
(ii) Remove not-B worlds from remaining set.
(iii) Drop the presupposition that A.

Worries about the Constraint

- If the selection function's constrained by common ground, or speaker belief, the actual world will very often be outside of the set where the restriction is active. So the actual truth values are liable to go funny.

Worries about the Constraint

- If it's restricted by common knowledge, or speaker knowledge, then we never get the actual world falling outside the restricting set.
- But maybe we get another unavailable information worry, since:
  (a) We're likely not to know what we know and what we don't.
  (b) Even if we do know, if CK(P), that CK(P), we won't necessarily know, if ~CK(P), that ~CK(P).
- Not sure how worried to be about this.

Conditional Assertion and the Case of the Murderous Butler

- Better to understand conditional assertion and acceptance something like this way:
- Conditional assertion of B on A is committing to assert, B if you find out that A. (Or pre-loading assertion, or…)
- Acceptance of conditional assertion of B on A is committing to accept an assertion of B if you find out that A.

Conditional Assertion and the Case of the Murderous Butler

- This comes apart from the story Bob offered in cases where learning that A would make us rethink our consent to some of the currently active presuppositions.
- Might let us capture the "reopening the possibility" idea more naturally than Bob's proposal.

Conditional Assertion and the Case of the Murderous Butler

- Also explains the difference between info-pooling and divergent opinion cases:
  - Where all the parties to the conversation's credence distributions mirror the common ground, the stories say the same thing.
  - Where parties have significant credence outside of the CS, esp. when it's differently distributed, not.

A Worry about the CS-Expanding Move

- Now the CS isn't what's compatible with everything that's common knowledge. It's also not what's compatible with everything that's presupposed. The sense of 'live option' at work seems to have shifted a lot.