

## Background to Lycan, *Real Conditionals*, Chs. 4 and 8

Chs. 1-2 of the book offer a theory of conditionals' truth-conditions, the Event theory. It is epistemic at bottom but constrained by reality. I translate any indicative or subjunctive conditional  $A > C$  as

$$(e)(\text{In}(e, A) \supset \text{In}(e, C)) ,$$

the variable 'e' ranging over "events," "cases," "circumstances" or "conditions" as may be stylistically appropriate. Such items will then be understood as possible states of affairs. Thus the analysandum  $A > C$  and its translation would both be glossed as *C in any possible state of affairs in which A, C in any event in which A, C in the event that A, C in case A, C on the condition that A*, and the like.

Naturally the quantifier is restricted; otherwise all conditional consequents would be held to be logically implied by their antecedents. The restriction class varies widely with context; I call it the class of events or circumstances that are "real and relevant possibilities" in the context--real in the sense of being epistemically envisaged rather than idle, and relevant in the sense of involving antecedent or consequent. My official analysis for *Q if P, If P, Q* or *If P, then Q* is

$$(e_{eR})(\text{In}(e,P) \supset \text{In}(e,Q)),$$

read roughly as *In any relevant event that is a "real" possibility relative to this occasion and in which P, Q.*

The contextual variation of my parameter 'R' is my analogue of Stalnaker's selection function and of Lewis' similarity relation; it is the means whereby a conditional antecedent directs us to a set of possible situations that differ minimally from the actual state of affairs. The contents of the restriction class R on an occasion of utterance are controlled by several requirements, two of which will give some of the flavor:

*The Weak Relevance Requirement.* R must contain at least one "event" in which the conditional antecedent itself is true. [Intuitively, because uttering or hearing the antecedent forces us to envisage a state of affairs in which it holds, however outlandish it may be.]

*The Reality Requirement.* All actual relevant events are members of R, envisaged or not. [Originally designed to save Modus Ponens.]

Requirements like these account for the various distinctive failures of inference exhibited by English conditionals as opposed to material or strict conditionals (the failures called to our attention by Stalnaker and by Lewis). For example, Antecedent-Strengthening fails because the antecedent of our

conclusion forces us (via the Weak Relevance Requirement) to envisage a possibility that had not been envisaged until after the premise had been tokened:

If my good friend Smedley finishes his book, I'll be happy.

---

∴ If my good friend Smedley finishes his book and concludes it with a vicious and totally unfair personal attack on me, I'll be happy.

What would otherwise be a valid argument form, “ $(e_{\varepsilon R})(\text{In}(e, F) \supset \text{In}(e, H))$  /  $\therefore (e_{\varepsilon R})(\text{In}(e, F \ \& \ A) \supset \text{In}(e, H))$ ,” is invalidated by contextual parameter shift; ‘R’ in the conclusion denotes a wider class than does ‘R’ in the premise.

Some arguments for the theory (Chs. 1-3):

- It is supported by the syntax of conditionals (conditional clauses are locative adverbials incorporating relative clauses, and *if* is like *where* and *when*).
- It blocks the paradoxes of material implication in an intuitive way.
- It explains the Stalnaker invalidities in an intuitive way.
- It allows for and explains the semantics of modifiers for *if*, such as *only* and *even*.
- It explains the disparity in directions of conditionship as between *If P, Q* and *P only if Q*.
- It explains further felt differences between textbook equivalents.
- It gives an actual solution to the problem of Simplification of Disjunctive Antecedents.
- It accommodates impossible antecedents.
- It handles cases better than do competitors such as Stalnaker's theory.

In Chs. 4 and 8, the label “NTV” refers to the doctrine that even if truth-conditional semantics holds of English more generally, indicative conditionals in particular lack truth-values.

Ch. 8 refers to various people's theories of "straight" conditionals as opposed to "boxarrows"; that terminology replaces the more usual "indicative"/"subjunctive."