Conditional desires

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Slides at http://kvf.me/cd
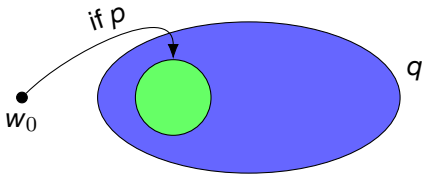
The perennial puzzle

$$2 + 2 = ?$$

if + *want* = ?

The plan

- starting points
- an expected reading
- another reading (or even two?)
- the solution space
- what are conditionals?

Starting point: *if*

$\lambda w_0.\ \forall w' \in f(p, w_0): q(w')$

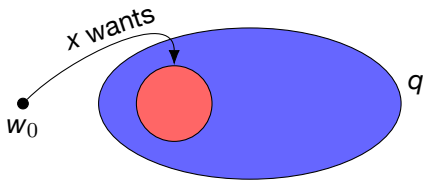Stalnaker*: $f(p, w_0)$ = the p-worlds most similar to w_0
centering: if $w_0 \in p \Rightarrow w_0 \in f(p, w_0)$

Some *if*s

(1)   If I have three cups of coffee, I will be completely wired.

(2)   If I had had three cups of coffee, I would have been completely wired.

(3)   If I had three cups of coffee, we're out of beans.

Starting point: *want*

A picture that's too simple:

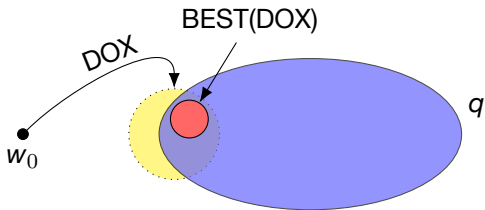$\lambda w_0. \ \forall w' \in DES(x, w_0): \ q(w')$

The realism of desires

(4)   Next semester, I want to teach Mondays and
        Wednesdays.

x wants $q \rightsquigarrow$

among x's doxastic alternatives, the best ones (as far as
x's desires are concerned) are all q-cases

von Fintel 1999 illustrated

$$\lambda w_0. \, \forall w' \in BEST_{x,w_0}(DOX_{x,w_0}) : \, q(w')$$

Some *wants*

(5)   I want to have no more than two cups of coffee.

(6)   Julie wants Alyssa to buy beans.

(7)   *Erika will,   daß Petra Kaffee kauft.*
        Erika wants that Petra coffee buys

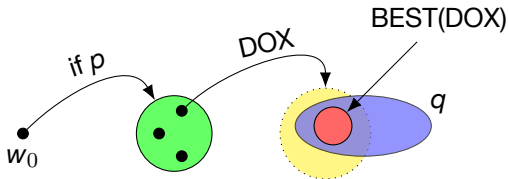   "Erika wants Petra to buy coffee."

If + want

(8)   If I have three cups of coffee, I will want to work all night.

(9)   If April lives in Bolivia, she wants to live in Bolivia.

If over *want*

$$\lambda w_0. \ \forall w' \in f(w_0, p): \ \forall w'' \in BEST_{x,w'}(DOX_{x,w'}): \ q(w'')$$

Call this the **C-reading**: "conditional with *want* in consequent"

Another reading of *if + want*

Pasternak 2018:

(10)   If I become a zombie, I want you to shoot me.

My current actual desire *for* the zombie scenario.
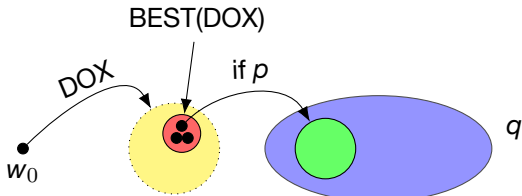
Not what my desires will be if I become a zombie.

Wanting a conditional to be true

(11)   We want [the light to go on if the door is opened].

(12)   If the door is opened, we want the light to go on.

Wanting to be shot

(13)   I want [you to shoot me if I become a zombie].

(14)   Shoot me if I become a zombie!
         If I become a zombie, shoot me!

(15)   It's all set. Gina will shoot me if I become a
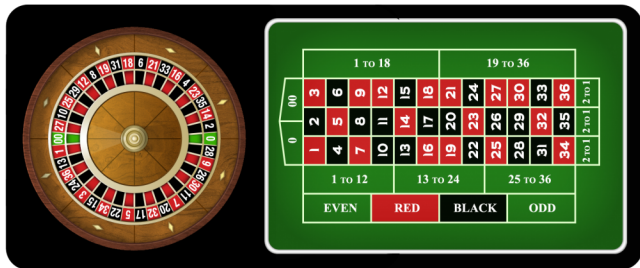   zombie.

Want over *if*

$$\lambda w_0. \; \forall w' \in BEST_{x,w_0}(DOX_{x,w_0}): \; \forall w'' \in f(p, w'): \; q(w'')$$

Call this the **W-reading**: "wide scope for *want*"

Yet another reading?

(16)   I want Borussia Dortmund to win the Champions League.

(17)   But if they don't, I want Barça to win.

Roulette

(18)   If it isn't 11 that comes up, Dawn wants an even
        number to come up.
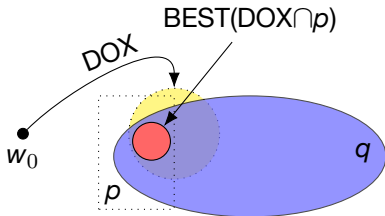
Coffee

(19)   If I have three cups of coffee, I want the network
         to crash.

A different perspective

if + *want* can express a **restricted desire**

Among the *p*-worlds in the doxastic set, the agent prefers the *q-worlds*

The restricted reading illustrated

$$\lambda w_0. \forall w' \in BEST_{x,w_0}(DOX_{x,w_0} \cap p): q(w')$$

Call this the **R-reading**: "restricted"

R isn't just about second best desires

Dawn bets on 8 and 11.

(20)   If the number is odd, Dawn wants it to be 11.
   If the number is even, Dawn wants it to be 8.

(21)   If a German club wins, I want it to be Dortmund.
         If a Spanish club wins, I want it to be Barça.

Is R a special case of W? [Take One]

- R isn't the same as wanting a run-of-the-mill conditional proposition to be true
- But maybe we need to look beyond the run-of-the-mill

Why this isn't straightforward

What would the selection function *f* have to be like to
deliver the R-reading?
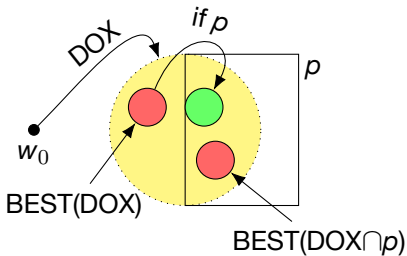
BEST(DOX)

BEST(DOX∩*p*)

f(BEST(DOX),p) = BEST(DOX∩p) ??

Partisans of restricted readings

Defenses of irreducibly conditional desires or "restricted" desires:

- McDaniel & Bradley 2008
- Lycan 2012, 2016
- Blumberg & Holguín 2018
- Pasternak 2018

Whence the R-reading?
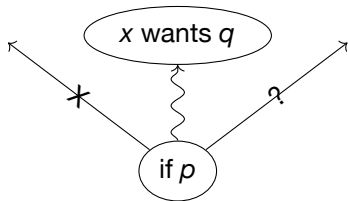
Questions

- How is the R-reading derived?
- What happened to the meaning of *if*?

The solution space

1. a dedicated mechanism for R
2. R as a special case of W, after all

Kratzer's Restrictor Theory

The history of the conditional is the history of a syntactic mistake. There is no two-place if … then *connective in the logical forms for natural languages.* If-*clauses are devices for restricting the domains of various operators. Whenever there is no explicit operator, we have to posit one. (Kratzer 1986)*

Applications to other cases of restricted readings

- adverbs of quantification
- deontic conditionals
- epistemic conditionals
- determiner quantifiers

How we get three readings

R = *if p* restricts (the modal base of) *want*
W = *if p* restricts an implicit operator in the scope of *want*
C = *if p* restricts an implicit operator with scope over *want*

Compositional implementation?

- *if*-clause makes salient a set of worlds, which an operator can restrict itself to
- *if*-clause as restrictive modifier of the domain of an operator

von Fintel 1994 applied to R-desires

if$_n$ p   x wants$_n$ q
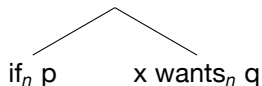
$$[\![\text{if}_n\ p, q]\!]^g = [\![q]\!]^{g^+} \qquad \text{where } g^+ \text{ is just like } g \text{ except that}$$
$$g^+(n) = g(n) \cap [\![p]\!]^g$$

$$[\![\text{want}_n]\!]^g = \lambda q.\lambda x.\lambda w.$$
$$\forall w' \in BEST(DOX(x, w) \cap g(n)) \colon\ q(w')$$

von Fintel & Heim 2011 applied to R-desires
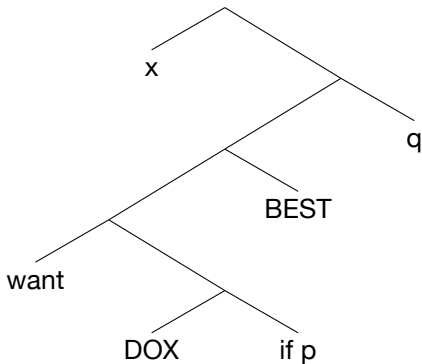
$$\llbracket \text{if} \rrbracket = \lambda p_{st}. \; \lambda m_{s,st}. \; \lambda w. \; \lambda w'. \; w' \in m(w) \;\&\; w' \in p$$

The costs

- unsettled compositional implementation

    - in general
    - the LF of attitudes is not well-understood

- no uniform meaning for conditionals

Can we (should we) go for a cheaper solution?

- R as a special case of W, after all?

Some ways to get R from W

- Way 1: Decomposing attitudes
- Way 2: Belnap or Hook+

Way 1: Decomposing attitudes

Kratzer 2006, Moulton 2009, 2015, Moltmann 2017:

- attitude verbs are not modal operators
- they are predicates of mental states
- their prejacent describes the content of the mental state
- the prejacent contains an implicit modal

x wants q $\leadsto$ wants(x,e) & $\forall w' \in BEST_e(DOX_e): q(w')$

Getting R

- The implicit modal can be restricted by *if* in however way we get restricted O-readings of modals
- The LF of desire predicates does not need to be specially massaged to allow O

Way 2: funky conditionals

- We don't get R with a "normal" conditional below.
- But there are at least two other options.
- See von Fintel & Gillies 2015 for more.

Way 2A: Using Belnap to get to R

Two ingredients:

1. *if p, q* ⤳ three-valued proposition

   - T if p & q
   - F if p & not q
   - ⋆ if not p

2. the BEST function in desire ascriptions is not applied to DOX but to those worlds in DOX for which the prejacent is either T or F
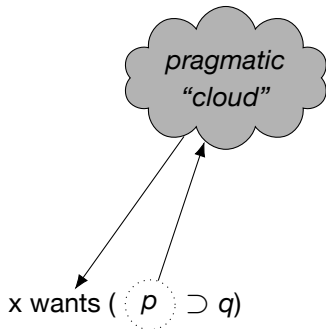
[Belnap 1970, 1973, Lewis 1975, von Fintel 2007]

Way 2B: Hook+

Kratzer 2015:

- the material conditional ("hook", ⊃)
- plus: makes the proposition p salient
- the higher operator can restrict itself pragmatically to that salient proposition

Pragmatic restriction from below

Way 2 redux

For a domain that consists only of p-worlds,
many conditional meanings collapse into q!

Belnap = Hook = strongly centered Stalnaker

The magic in Way 2 is all in the restriction to p-worlds.

Where we are

Conditional desires have a reading (R) that can only be delivered by

- the compositionally adventurous restrictor theory, and/or
- a non-standard meaning for conditionals

Outlook

- Conditional desires are an underexplored testbed for theories of conditionals (and desires).
- Connections to deontic conditional and conditional imperatives.
- Evaluate alternative theories of desire ascriptions.

Bonus material

(22)   If he's comatose, he wants to be comatose.

(23)   I have three cups of coffee and I want the network to crash.

(24)   #If I {became/had become} a zombie, I wish you had shot me. (Pasternak 2018)

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