

XIV LEWIS: SCOREKEEPING

Presupposition

Two approaches:

Semantic: presuppositions are, in the first place, properties of *sentences*: one sentence presupposes another (Frege)

Pragmatic: presuppositions are, in the first place, properties of *people*, or, at least, of people's attitudes: people believe, or otherwise accept, a certain set of sentences, and these are the presuppositions of a conversation (Stalnaker, Lewis)

The rule of accommodation for presupposition. Note its limit: we might fill a void by a presuppositionally required sentence, but do we reject prior beliefs?

Permissibility

Note the different forms that the master's orders might have: 'You are required to shut the door'; 'You will shut the door'; 'Shut the door'. Do all come out as true on Lewis's account? And do we also accommodate speakers' authority?

Vagueness

The account here is basically supervaluational (a vague sentence is true iff it is true on all precisifications), but with the additional feature that a sentence can count as true if it is 'true enough', where this is understood as obtaining when it is true in a large enough set of precisification. But then context will determine what is meant by large enough; and this in turn will be governed by a rule of accommodation. Note the tendency of standards to go up easily as a result of accommodation, but to come down is harder.

Relative Modality

'Can' and 'Must' as relative to certain worlds. Again the tendency to change is asymmetric.

Special application: knowledge. To know something is to exclude its falsity from all of the relevant possibilities. A possibility is not relevant iff it is properly ignored. Lewis's rules governing when a possibility is properly ignored (a selection from 'Elusive Knowledge'):

Rule of Actuality (the actual world is never properly ignored)

Rule of Belief (what you believe to obtain is not properly ignored, even if it is false)

Rule of Resemblance (a world which is saliently like one which is not properly ignored is not properly ignored)

Rule of Attention (a world which is not ignored is not properly ignored)

Performatives

Against Austin, Lewis holds that declarative performative sentences (e.g. 'I promise to be there') have truth conditions in a straightforward way. 'I promise to be there' is true just in case I promise to be there; and since, typically, there is no more to promising than uttering the appropriate sentence with the appropriate intent, such utterances will typically make themselves true. (Note that this doesn't make *all* performatives true just in virtue of uttering them; 'I command you to open the door' is perhaps true whenever I sincerely assert it, but 'I *legitimately* command you to open the door' requires much more if it is to be true; and 'I marry you' requires all sorts of things.) If this is right though, why does it sound so odd to say that a performative is true?