

Premise Semantics and Possible Worlds Semantics for Counterfactuals

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A typical possible worlds semantics (*PWS*) for counterfactuals is modal logic with the addition of the so-called selection function, whose role is to somehow separate important from unimportant worlds. A counterfactual $A > C$ is true iff C holds at the important A -worlds. The older, premise semantics (*PS*) says that $A > C$ is true iff A , together with some further true premises B_1, B_2, \dots , entails C . The main problem for *PWS* is to explain which worlds are important, and for *PS* it is to specify which truths are to be included among the B 's. That problem is very difficult to be solved in general, but in particular cases we often do have clear intuitions about the importance of worlds and about the B 's. I argue that our intuitions used in *PS* are more basic, since in testing our selection function we use our intuitions from *PS*, rather than the other way around, that is, we say that the important worlds are those where the B 's hold, and we do not explain the B 's in terms of important worlds. Although *PWS* is a much more powerful logical tool, if what I said is correct, we still need to investigate the relation between the two semantics. That explains the motive behind the two results I will defend. The first says that the standard interpretation of Goodman's *PS* is not correct since it validates conditional excluded middle, which Goodman rejects, and, second, that Lewis' notion of cotenability, which allegedly captures the intentions of the premise semanticists, fails to do so, and that this is a problem for Lewis' and not for the premise semantics.