Should von Fintel & Gillies be mothballed?

von Fintel & Gillies

Sollten von Fintel & Gillies eingemottet werden?
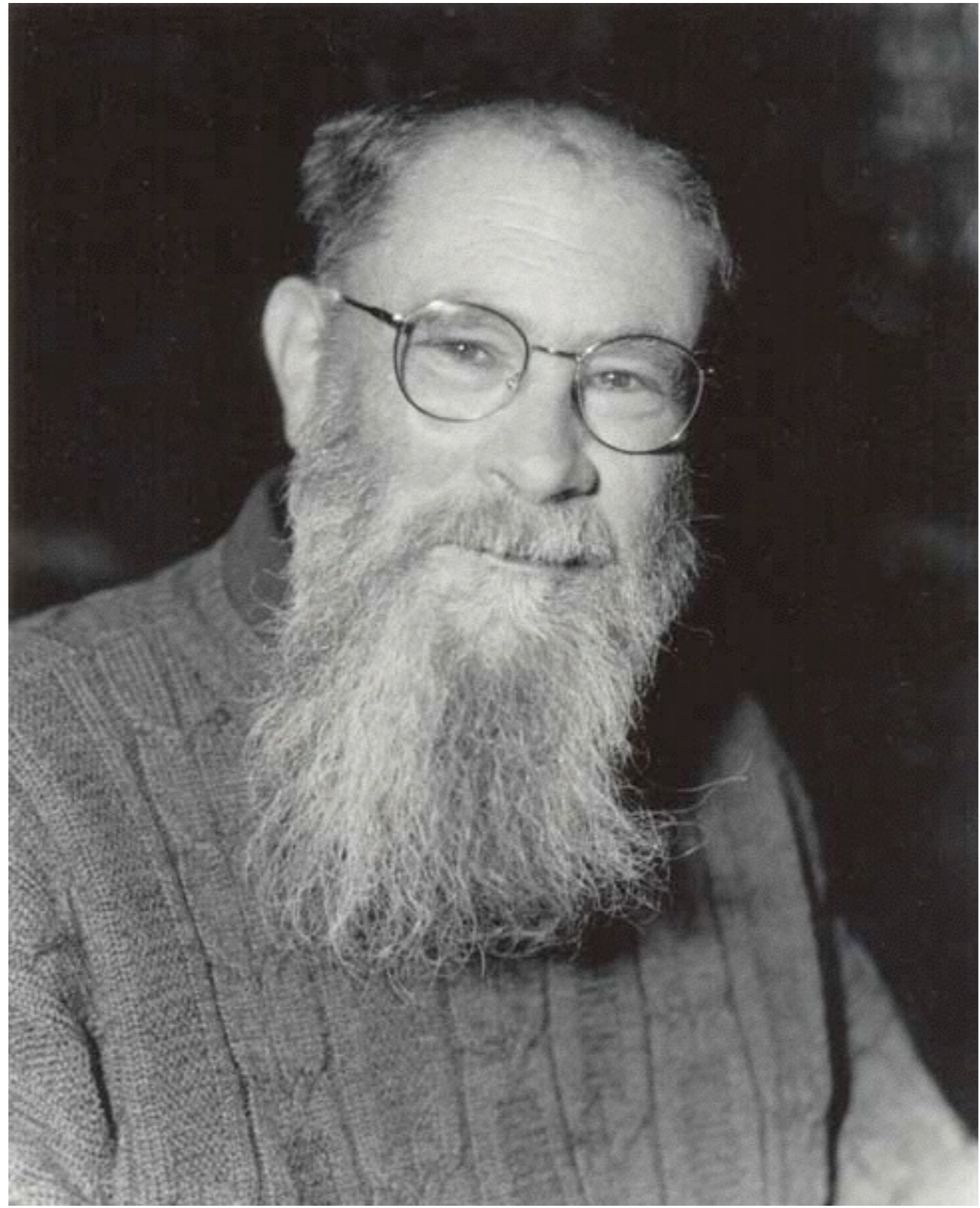
von Fintel & Gillies

What do conditionals mean?

How do conditionals get to mean
what they mean?

Compositional semantics

- truth-conditions

- presuppositions

- implicatures

- context-dependency

- possible dynamic interaction with evolving context

The plan

1. Lewis (& Stalnaker)

2. von Fintel 2001 & Gillies 2007

3. Moss 2012

4. von Fintel & Gillies strike back

5. Cliffhanger

If Sophie had gone to the parade,
she would have seen Pedro.

The variably strict analysis

If p, q is true in *w* iff
<u>the *p*-worlds most similar to *w*</u> are all *q*-worlds

If Caesar were in command, he would use the atom bomb.

If Caesar were in command, he would use catapults.

The strict conditional analysis

If p, q is true in *w* wrt an accessibility function *h* iff the *p*-worlds in the modal horizon *h(w)* are all *q*-worlds

the *p*-worlds most similar to *w*
vs.
the *p*-worlds in the modal horizon *h(w)*

Sobel sequence:

If Sophie had gone to the parade, she would have seen Pedro; but if she had gone to the parade and and been stuck behind a tall person, she would not have seen Pedro.

Lewis:

"our problem is not a conflict between counterfactuals in different contexts, but rather between counterfactuals in a single context. It is for this reason that I put my examples in the form of a single run-on sentence, with the counterfactuals of different stages conjoined by semicolons and 'but'."

Lewis:

"It is still open to say that counterfactuals are vague strict conditionals based on similarity, and that the vagueness is resolved-the strictness is fixed-by very local context: the antecedent itself. That is not altogether wrong, but it is defeatist. It consigns to the wastebasket of contextually resolved vagueness something much more amenable to systematic analysis than most of the rest of the mess in that wastebasket."

Edgington:

"a piece of masonry falls from the cornice of a building, narrowly missing a worker. The foreman says:

 'If you had been standing a foot to the left, you would have been killed; but if you had (also) been wearing your hard hat, you would have been alright.'"

Edgington:

"the building foreman's remarks above [...] constitute a single, pointful piece of discourse"

Reverse Sobel

\# If Sophie had gone to the parade and been stuck behind a tall person, she would not have seen Pedro; but if she had gone to the parade, she would have seen Pedro.

Sobel again:

A: If Sophie had gone to the parade, she would have seen Pedro; but if she had gone to the parade and and been stuck behind a tall person, she would not have seen Pedro.

B: But then she wouldn't <u>necessarily</u> have seen Pedro, right?

The dynamic strict analysis

if p, q is true in *w* wrt *h* iff
<u>the *p*-worlds in *h+(w)*</u> are all *q*-worlds

where *h+* is an expansion of *h* so as to include the *p*-worlds most similar to *w*, and

where *h+* is then relevant for subsequent utterances

Sobel

If Sophie had gone to the parade, she would have seen Pedro; but if she had gone to the parade and and been stuck behind a tall person, she would not have seen Pedro.

Reverse Sobel

If Sophie had gone to the parade and been stuck behind a tall person, she would not have seen Pedro; but if she had gone to the parade, she would have seen Pedro.

Negative Polarity Items (NPIs)

\# Sophie left <u>any</u> later than 3pm.
\# Some student left <u>any</u> later than 3pm.
No student left <u>any</u> later than 3pm.
Every student who left <u>any</u> later than 3pm missed Pedro.

If Sophie had left any later than 3pm, she would have missed Pedro.

Moss:

independently motivated pragmatics
+
Lewis semantics

"my analysis shares a general virtue of pragmatic theories: it explains more, using less"

That animal was born with stripes.

But cleverly disguised mules are not born with stripes.

Cleverly disguised mules are not born with stripes.
But that animal was born with stripes.

(EI) It is <u>epistemically irresponsible</u> to utter sentence S in context C if there is some proposition φ and possibility μ such that when the speaker utters S:

(i) S expresses φ in C
(ii) φ is incompatible with μ
(iii) μ is a salient possibility
(iv) the speaker of S cannot rule out μ.

if p & r, not q raises the possibility that
if p, might r
(which is incompatible with *if p, q*)

If Sophie had gone to the parade, she would have seen Pedro; but if she had gone to the parade and and been stuck behind a tall person, she would not have seen Pedro.

If Sophie had gone to the parade and and been stuck behind a tall person, she would not have seen Pedro; but if she had gone to the parade, she would have seen Pedro.

Moss' analysis of Sobel sequences doesn't deliver the original Lewis diagnosis (of a perfectly consistent set of sentences).

Moss (early in the paper):

"Intuition says that the counterfactuals in [the Sobel sequence] can be true together."

Moss (later in the paper):

"(2a) expresses the proposition that if Sophie had gone to the parade, she would have seen Pedro. But this proposition is intuitively no longer common ground once (2b) is uttered."

Why <u>does</u> *if p & r, not q* raise the possibility that
if p, might r ?

Under Lewis' semantics, *if p & r, not q* does not entail *if p, might r.*

A: The closest Shell stations are great.

B: # So, you think that some of the closest gas stations are Shell stations?

BTW

if p & r, not q does dynamically entail *if p, might r* under the dynamic strict analysis!

If the USA threw its weapons into the sea tomorrow, there would be war. Well, if the USA and the other nuclear powers all threw their weapons into the sea tomorrow, there would be peace. <u>But of course, that would never happen.</u> So, as things stand, if the USA threw its weapons into the sea tomorrow, there would be war.

A: If John had been at the party, it would have been much more fun.

B: Well, if John had been at the party and had gotten into a fight with Perry, that wouldn't have been any fun at all.

A: Yes, but Perry wasn't there. So, if John had been at the party, he wouldn't have gotten into a fight with Perry.

If John had proposed to Mary and she had said yes, he would have been really happy.

But if John had proposed, he would have been really unhappy.

Reasons to not mothball von Fintel & Gillies

1. Explanation of the Sobel Asymmetry

2. NPIs

3. Some inferences *(if p&r, q => if p, might r)*

Cliffhanger

The closest gas stations are crummy. But the closest Shell stations are great, of course.

The closest Shell stations are great. But the closest gas stations are crummy.

The closest gas station is crummier than the closest Shell station.

?? The closest Shell station is nicer than the closest gas station.

1. Lewis, David. 1973. *Counterfactuals*. Oxford: Blackwell.

2. von Fintel, Kai. 2001. Counterfactuals in a dynamic context. In Michael Kenstowicz (ed.), *Ken Hale: A life in language*, 123–152. MIT Press.

3. Gillies, Anthony S. 2007. Counterfactual scorekeeping. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 30(3). 329–360.

4. Moss, Sarah. 2012. On the pragmatics of counterfactuals. *Noûs* 46(3). 561–586.