

CONDITIONALS AND SOME PRAGMATICS

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Abstract

In this paper I argue that the several kinds of readings identified by J. Bennett's 2003 typology (presented in his *A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals*) have a truth-conditional import. In particular, I claim that conditionals can, regardless of counterfactuality, be used to literally express more than one proposition, according to the pragmatic idiosyncrasies of the utterance situation. I also use this idea to account for the puzzling behaviour of conditionals in Hypothetical Syllogism arguments.

Keywords

Conditionals, argument form, hypothetical syllogism, pragmatics, truth condition, validity.

1. Bennett's typology and its truth-conditional import

In his recent "guide" to conditionals¹, J. Bennett presents a typology of explanatory relations that can be expressed by *if* conditionals.

Bennett identifies three basic elements whose contribution is essential to securing the (hypothetical) acceptance of a conditional's consequent C: (i) the hypothetical acceptance of the antecedent A (ii) evidence E available to speakers as they semantically compute the conditional, "minimally adjusted to assimilate A" (in accordance to the Ramsey Test) (iii) a set of general principles P "containing whatever basic doctrine you use in inferring C from A&E". P is said to contain logical and other a priori and causal principles, besides (possibly) moral ones (a point Bennett illustrates by saying that the combination of the second and third kind lends credence to a deontic conditional like "If you give him the injection, you will be behaving wrongly").

Different readings of conditionals arise from the fact that all of A, C and E can, most of the time (if not always) be thought of as *explananda*, i.e. as the element a conditional aims at explaining. (The assumption here is, of course, that every genuine conditional falls under one of these explanatory schemata. I will take this to be a true assumption). The most natural reading is

¹ Bennett (2003), pp. 336 ff

perhaps the one Bennett describes as grounded on an explaining-C basis (or C reading, for short). This is illustrated by the following *if* conditionals:

- (1) If it rained, the streets are wet.
- (2) If Johnny's father slapped him, Johnny wept.
- (3) If Johnny wept, his father slapped him.

In each case, the hypothetical acceptance of the antecedent can be taken to provide an explanation for the consequent's truth: the rain explains the wetness, the slapping explains the weeping (in the sense that the former was the cause of the latter), the weeping explains the slapping (again, by acting as a cause).

Explaining-A basis readings of conditionals (or A readings, for short) are also widespread. In these cases, the explanatory relation is reversed: it is the consequent which appears as the explanation for the antecedent.

- (4) If Ann is at home at this hour, she and John had a row.
- (5) If the streets are wet, then it rained.

To these we could add (2) and (3), of course, since both can have an A as well as a C reading: in (2) the weeping can be taken to explain a subsequent slapping and in (3) the slapping can be taken to be the explanation for a subsequent weeping². By the same token, in asserting (4), the speaker may be taken to be saying that all hypothetical circumstances where Ann is now at home are also ones where a row between her and John took place, in the sense that, according to the available evidence, there is no other reasonable motive why she could be at home; similarly, in (5), the rain can be taken to explain the wetness. Under these readings, the necessary condition is therefore also that which is acting as the explanans. The fact that (2) and (3) are also liable to the readings they were given above (that is, the ones according to which it is the antecedent that acts as the explanans for the event described by the consequent) only goes to show that these conditionals are, at least on the face of it, ambiguous.

Bennett calls his third type of reading "explaining-E basis" (I will call them E readings for short). In this case neither the antecedent nor the consequent can be assigned the role of explanandum. Rather, it is the body of evidence (E) supporting the conditional which is being explained. The following three examples (the first is Bennett's and the third is also mentioned by him in this connection) illustrate this third variety:

- (6) If those are desert verbena, then this fire is many days old.
- (7) If it rained all day, John has set up an internet connection at home.
- (8) If the butler didn't do it, then the gardener did.

Suppose I am standing before the cold ashes of what has been a huge fire and spot a few plants nearby. I also know that whenever heavy rain falls on desert verbena plants, they flower immediately. Since these particular plants have not flowered, I also know that if they are desert verbena, then there has been no rain recently, and therefore the coldness of the ashes can only be explained by the circumstance that it is an old fire. Clearly, neither the possibility that the plants are desert verbena nor the possibility that the fire is many days old are being *explained*. Instead, it is the evidence that the ashes are cold and the plants have not flowered that is ultimately explained

² A number of authors point out that these readings are easily identified by the "must" test: on these readings and only on them conditionals can the modal "must" occur at the beginning of the consequent (e.g. "if Johnny wept, his father must have slapped him"). I do not think this is an effective way of identifying A readings, since both C and E readings also take such paraphrases (e.g. "If it rained, the streets must be wet" may very well be understood under a C reading).

by the circumstance that either the plants are not desert verbena (in which case it may have rained recently, which would in turn explain the coldness of the ashes) or they are desert verbena and the fire is many days old (and so this, rather than the rain, would explain the coldness of the ashes). In other words, the antecedent of (6) “knocks down” (Bennett’s wording) one of the two reasonable candidates for explaining the coldness of the ashes (i.e. the rain), leaving the other (their belonging to an old fire) as the best explanation available.

Similarly, rather than the rain explaining John’s setting up the internet or vice-versa, (7) may well be read as putting across the latter circumstance as the best explanation for one’s body of evidence in favour of the conditional. For instance, suppose that John is under surveillance by the police and knows about it. Suppose further that the speaker also knows about it, and that she is also aware that John’s accomplice Mole could only have known about the plan for robbing the bank from John, which in turn could only have happened if they had met at the usual outdoor cafe by the sea (all of their phones being tapped). Other than that, John could have emailed Mole (using a secret account, unknown to the police); unfortunately for him, he has, at least until recently, no internet connection at home. There are, furthermore, no internet facilities within miles. Now, rain would have made the meeting impossible (it is an outdoor cafe). Nevertheless, it is certain that Mole knows about the plan. So, under the hypothesis that it rained all day, the only way Mole could have been informed would be for John to have had the internet set up at home.

(8) is a famous example of Stalnaker’s (presented to illustrate quite another point). There is evidence that only the butler and the gardener could have done it (suppose nobody else had the key to the room where the victim was assassinated); hence if not the butler, then the gardener. Under this assumption, the hypothesis that the butler did not do it does not exactly *explain* (or so Bennett claims) the gardener’s having done it; neither does the latter explain the former. Rather, *under the hypothesis that it was not the butler*, the gardener having done it explains the evidence that nobody else besides him and the butler could have done it.

The best example of a conditional bearing the three Bennett categories³ is probably the infamous (9) If Oswald didn’t kill Kennedy, somebody else did.

The Kennedy conditional has a straightforward E reading: it means that somebody other than Oswald must have killed Kennedy in the event that Oswald did not - since, under that assumption, only the fact that somebody else did it would explain the hard evidence that Kennedy was in fact killed. But it also has a C reading (sometimes described as the “conspiracy” reading), according to which the circumstance that Oswald failed to do it prompted one of the other contract killers to step in and get the job done. Finally, it has an A reading: that according to which Oswald did not do it because somebody else already had⁴.

The construal I have made of the Bennett typology is committed to a certain picture of what a conditional is from a semantic point of view. Firstly, it is supposed to be the kind of construction which purports to establish a connection (for lack of a better term, I will call this a “conditional” connection) between antecedent-circumstances and consequent-circumstances, to the effect that, according to the available evidence, all those circumstances of the former type are also of the latter

³ This is not to say, of course, that others (e.g. most of the above) are not, for the most part, liable to the same variety of readings

⁴ Bennett’s typology constrains our initial (fairly loose) notion of what counts as explanans/explanandum pair and accordingly of the way different explanatory roles may be assigned to the antecedent and consequent of a given conditional. In particular, it tightens up the relationship between the particular setting in which a conditional can be said to be assigned a particular reading and what counts as an explanans and explanandum in such a setting. For instance, in the butler example a loose notion of what an explanatory role is would condone an analysis according to which the circumstance that the butler didn’t do it can be said to explain the circumstance that the gardener did it, given the evidence that one of them must have done it (thus justifying the assignment to (8) of a C reading). But on Bennett’s

type. Secondly, alongside this conditional connection, there is an *explanatory* one, whose terms may or may not coincide with those of the first (i.e. whose *explanans* may or may not coincide with the antecedent, or whose *explanandum* may or may not coincide with the consequent). In other words, a conditional is supposed to always (or at least typically⁵) provide an explanation for some state of affairs. In this connection, I suggest that Bennett's typology provides an illuminating overview of the relevant possibilities: the *explanandum* may correspond to the consequent (in which case the antecedent acts as *explanans*), or to the antecedent (in which case it is the *consequent* which acts as *explanans*), or to a piece of relevant evidence supporting the conditional's assertion (in which case the antecedent's truth plays the role of ensuring that the consequent's hypothetical truth best explains that evidence).

The reference to conditionals in general is deliberate. Indeed, it should be pointed out that the multi-reading phenomenon is generally available in counterfactuals as well as in indicatives⁶. Take the (also famous) counterfactual version of (9):

(10) If Oswald hadn't killed Kennedy, someone else would have.

(10) could easily be paraphrased in the following way:

(10') If Oswald hadn't killed Kennedy, then a fellow conspirator would have stepped in and killed him.

On this typical⁷ reading, someone uttering (10) would be saying that in the closest counterfactual circumstance(s) where Oswald didn't do it, it could not have been the case (in some appropriate sense of the modal) that no one did it; she would therefore be committing herself to the belief that things are such that, in the event of a blunder by Oswald, there would have been enough other guys available to make sure the job was done. But there it is also possible to interpret (10) as asserting the same as

(10'') If Oswald hadn't been the one who killed Kennedy, then someone else would have been that person.

By uttering (10) under this reading, a speaker would be making exactly the same point as in the corresponding reading of (9), with the sole difference that she would now also be committing herself to the belief that Oswald was in fact the one who did it: what is effectively being put across by (10) on such a reading is that, since someone killed Kennedy, every relevant *counterfactual* circumstance where Oswald did not do it is also one where someone *else* did it.

And, of course, besides these E and C readings, (10) can also receive the same A reading as its indicative counterpart: it can be paraphrased as

(10''') If Oswald hadn't kill Kennedy, that would have been because somebody else (possibly a fellow conspirator) already had.⁸

account of what a relevant explanation is the only thing that makes sense is to say that the available evidence is the explanandum, the hypothetical acceptance of the antecedent merely paving the way for the assignment of the status of "best explanans" to the consequent. The same comment applies, of course, to (6) and (7) and their respective settings, as well as to other settings where conditionals can reasonably be said to have E readings (including, of course, the E reading of the Kennedy example just mentioned).

⁵ Tautologous conditionals, for instance, seem to be exceptions to this characterization.

⁶ Here I follow a remark by Fogelin (cf. (Fogelin 98)).

⁷ At least to the extent that this is the reading assigned to it when one, following Adams and Lewis, semantically contrasts (10) with its indicative counterpart.

⁸ Not all of these readings is equally identifiable at first glance. But however "typical" these readings happen to be, the fact remains that the other two equally legitimate and recognizable as such by competent speakers. From this it follows that using the distinction to argue for a semantic distinction between indicatives and counterfactuals, like Ernest Adams and David Lewis did, is a questionable move.⁶⁴ Here I follow a remark by Fogelin (cf. (Fogelin 98)).

Thus, some evidence exists for the view that, regardless of counterfactuality, the truth-conditions of a token conditional cannot be determined until the communicative intentions of the speaker who is asserting it have been identified. This view entails, in turn, that the semantics of “if” conjoined with that of the antecedent and consequent fall short of determining the literal propositional content of a given conditional in a given context of assertion. The semantic contribution of the conditional connective to the proposition expressed by a given conditional seems instead to parallel the one made by the genitive construction to the propositional content of any sentence it occurs in (the construction is often discussed, notably by Recanati, in connection with the role of pragmatic mechanisms in truth-condition determination⁹): it constrains the sort of proposition being expressed, but does not go as far as identifying it. When I say “if Oswald didn’t/hadn’t kill(ed) Kennedy”, I may be referring to a host of different circumstances where Oswald did not kill Kennedy or (e.g. circumstances where, besides, Kennedy was killed, or where, besides, a conspiracy was set up). In each case, I will be saying different things (i.e. making different assertions) by adding a consequent. To be sure, “if” establishes a connection between antecedent- and consequent-circumstances to the effect that all the relevant antecedent ones are also consequent ones; but until we know which antecedent-circumstances are being taken as relevant, we are in the dark as to exactly which connection is being said to obtain. And this need not be a feature of problematic conditionals like the Kennedy one. Take a seemingly innocuous example such as “If Ann is in the kitchen, then George isn’t”. Which point is the speaker making when she asserts that Ann’s presence in the kitchen is a sufficient condition for George’s absence? Is she making the point that things are such that exactly one person is in the kitchen? Or is she making the point that things are such that Ann would not be alone with George *anywhere*? This reading shift mimics the one in the Kennedy example. Which point is the speaker making when she asserts that Oswald’s having failed to kill Kennedy is a sufficient condition for somebody else to have done it? Is she making the point that Kennedy was undeniably killed or is she making the rather different point that a conspiracy was set up to kill him? One seems to endorse (as true) and reject (as false) the respective conditionals depending on whether one takes the person asserting those conditionals to be making either of these (or possibly other) points. This strongly suggests that each of the points being made corresponds to different statements about the way things are. In other words, the context-dependent way in which, on the face of it, conditionals are assigned truth-conditions argues rather forcefully for the view that each contextual reading may determine different truth-conditions for a given conditional and therefore that the particular proposition each token conditional expresses depends on what the speaker’s intentions are — specifically, on which kind of antecedent-circumstances she intends to characterize as consequent-circumstances.

This, nevertheless, need not entail that conditionals like (9) or (10) are ambiguous, i.e. that the three kinds of reading are generated by their semantics alone. Rather, what seems to be happening is that the communicative intentions of utterers of, say, (9) determine, on the basis of one and the same semantic input, which kinds of states of affairs such that the antecedent holds in them are being characterized (in different contexts of utterance) as states of affairs in which the consequent also holds — thereby determining which statement is being made. In other words, the communicative intentions of speakers determine what is literally being said in each context in which a conditional is uttered. Thus, in the case of (9)/(10), if the speaker intends to assume the conspiracy theory on Kennedy’s assassination, she is referring to those (hypothetical) circumstances where the antecedent *holds and a conspiracy to kill Kennedy was on*; she is therefore actually saying (rather than implying) is that all hypothetical circumstances where Oswald did not kill Kennedy were ones where, as a consequence of that, a co-conspirator did it (C reading). In other words, under this reading the

⁹ See for instance Recanati (2001) and (2004).

actual fact of the murder is deemed irrelevant for the evaluation of the conditional as for correctness or truth. On the other hand, if she is asserting (9)/(10) on the basis of the fact that Kennedy was murdered, she is referring to circumstances where the antecedent holds *and Kennedy was murdered*; she is therefore literally saying that, under the hypothesis that the murderer was not Oswald, someone other than him must have been the one (E reading). Under this reading, it is the possibility of a conspiracy that is deemed irrelevant for the evaluating the conditional as true.

2. Hypothetical Syllogism

The pragmatic picture sketched above of the truth conditions of conditionals is borne out by a few striking features of their inferential behaviour, namely concerning the pattern of reasoning known as Hypothetical Syllogism (form now onwards HS for short)¹⁰. This has traditionally been classified as invalid, as illustrated by

(11) If Gore had been elected, Bush would (subsequently) have retired from politics.

If Bush had died before the election, Gore would have been elected.

Therefore, if Bush had died before the election, he would (subsequently) have retired from politics.

The two premises in (1) could be true in comparatively normal circumstances of evaluation, whereas the conclusion would only be true in possible worlds (if any) where dead people could make decisions. A similar verdict applies to the also famous

(12) If Hoover had been a communist, he would have been a traitor.

If Hoover had been born in the USSR, he would have been a communist.

Therefore, if Hoover had been born in the USSR, he would have been a traitor.

Clearly, even if we are not diehard anti-communists we should be able to acknowledge that the first premise is probably true — Hoover having been head of the CIA for a number of years. It is also possible that Hoover's putatively conformist personality makes the second premise true. But the truth of these two premises does not the truth of the conclusion; we first considered Hoover to be a traitor because we considered the possibility that he might have been a communist (with pro-soviet tendencies) and an American high official — not a communist and a soviet citizen.

Contrary to what some authors claim, the remark can also be made to apply to the indicative versions of (11) and (12), as

(11') If Gore was elected, Bush retired from politics.

If Bush died before the election, Gore would was elected.

Therefore, if Bush died before the election, he retired from politics.

(12') If Hoover was a communist, he was a traitor.

If Hoover was born in the USSR, he was a communist.

Therefore, if Hoover was born in the USSR, he was a traitor.¹¹

¹⁰ Given the logical similarities between Hypothetical Syllogism and Strengthening of the Antecedent, virtually all of the discussion on HS can be made to apply to SA, provided one makes the necessary adaptations.

¹¹ This and similar "translations" of counterfactual counter-examples to HS or SA typically result in what is sometimes claimed to be "odd" and unconvincing arguments, in particular because it is thought that the premises can hardly be taken as true in any admissible circumstances (the idea being that they are devoid of truth-value at best, due to something akin to a presupposition failure). Cases like (11') and (12') are therefore often dismissed as failing to be genuine counter-examples to HS. But this is, of course, a rather feeble reason for refusing them that status, because we could, with not too great an effort, conceive of someone who (for some reason, however exotic) did not know anything about the relevant facts to be legitimised in not assuming the falsity of the antecedents of the conditionals in question. Accordingly, virtually all of the discussion below deliberately ignores the distinction counterfactuals/indicatives; it assumes that all instances of a counterfactual HS argument which strikes us as invalid or valid have an indicative version to which the same verdict applies (or would apply in the adequate belief setting).

On the other hand, and somewhat problematically, a slightly modified version of (11) strikes us as *valid*:

(13) If Gore had been elected, Gore's wife would have become First Lady.

If Bush had died before the election, Gore would have been elected.

Therefore, if Bush had died before the election, Gore's wife would have become First Lady.

The same verdict can reasonably be given to cases like (14):

(14) If Miss Mauritius had not won the contest, John would be happy.

If Miss Venezuela had won the contest, then Miss Mauritius would not have won it.

Therefore, if Miss Venezuela had won the contest, John would be happy.

On the face of it, at least, we have no reason to deny credibility to the latter kind of verdict; (13) and (14) do strike us as arguments whose conclusion is well supported by their premises, and therefore as good candidates for the status of arguments whose conclusion *follows* from the premises — i.e. for the status of valid arguments.

We are therefore faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, if we claim that HS fails for conditionals (I will call this the invalidity route), then some explaining away of the (equally strong) pro-validity intuitions is called for. For if we accept the standard conception of what it is for an argument form to be valid, we have to say that, if an argument pattern has at least some invalid instances, then it is an *invalid form* and none of its instances can, *in virtue of instantiating it*, be valid (for, under that conception, if an argument instantiates an invalid form and no valid forms, then it is an invalid argument). So the invalidity theorist will have to explain why some apparently valid HS arguments turn out to be invalid after all (assuming, of course, that they do not instantiate other valid forms, which seems to be the case of (13) and (14)). By the same token, on the other hand, if the pro-validity intuitions are seen as evidence of the validity of HS for (13) and (14), they will have to be seen as establishing its validity for all instances of HS, since in that case one would have to say that these arguments are valid in virtue of instantiating a valid form — one, that is, with no invalid instances. And, of course, if we choose this route (I will call it the validity route), some explaining away of the pro-invalidity intuitions is called for. For the validity theorist cannot, on the face of it, endorse the idea that logically unsound arguments such as (11) and (12) are genuinely *invalid* HS arguments, as they are instances of the same form that seems to ensure validity for (13) and (14).

The two options discussed above have to deal, it must not be forgotten, with a phenomenon which can in as neutral a fashion as possible be described as follows: an HS argument is cogent if and only if the way the middle term is interpreted in the major premise is consistent with the way it is interpreted in the minor premise. In schematic terms, and assuming that the examples discussed above follow the schema [if A then C; if B then A; *ergo*, if B then C], they illustrate the principle that an HS argument is cogent if and only if the A-circumstances being taken into consideration when assessing the major premise include at least some B-circumstances¹².

Interestingly, the traditional way of accounting for this phenomenon stems from the possible-world approach to counterfactuals and is committed to the view (also widely held) that (at least counterfactual and, for people like Stalnaker, all) HS arguments are invalid. Given an HS argument, the approach predicts that it can be the case that all closest A-worlds are C-worlds and all closest B-worlds are A-worlds without it being the case that all closest B-worlds are C-worlds (Stalnaker has qualms about more than one world being the closest, but I will assume throughout

¹² Given that the phenomenon occurs both in the counterfactual and in the non-counterfactual cases, I deliberately construe these descriptions so as to cover both cases. I also avoid any theoretical bias as far as the choice between the validity and the invalidity routes is concerned; the description above does not exclude either: they are phrased in terms of "cogency" instead of validity, from which it follows that some of those arguments deemed acceptable may subsequently, on further reflection, turn out to be invalid, and vice-versa.

that world-selection functions yield possibly non-singular sets of closest worlds). For, as the story goes, we can have totally different sets of A-worlds in both premises — in particular the ones which are said to be C-worlds may not be the same ones which are B-worlds, from which it follows that the conclusion does not go through.

This traditional account (most typically, but not necessarily, applied to counterfactuals) illustrates the basic feature of the doctrine I have called the invalidity route: the one according to which the HS (and SA, although I will not discuss it here) argument forms are invalid (since they have invalid instances) and are therefore unable to logically substantiate any of their instances. Even if a HS argument strikes us as valid, there are reasons to say that the conclusion does not *follow* from them by virtue of instantiating the respective form. Acceptable instances of SA and SH which, like the examples discussed so far, do not instantiate other valid forms cannot therefore be seen as genuine cases of validity. If this is right, any evidence of acceptable HS arguments must therefore be tackled not in terms of validity — of truth-preservation — but rather in terms of assertibility-preservation or reasonableness, or some such pragmatic notion.

The conception of an assertibility-preserving argument is on a par with the idea that some reasonable arguments are invalid ones: it may well be the case that an argument (i) is contextually constrained in such a way that speakers with certain epistemic idiosyncrasies are committed to accepting the conclusion whenever they accept the premises (ii) is not truth-preserving, i.e. there are possible worlds where its conclusion is false although its premise(s) are (is) true. As Stalnaker points out, the two notions differ in extension because constraints on assertibility are distinct from truth-conditions; correspondingly, constraints on assertibility-preservation must differ from constraints on truth-preservation: the former concern “general rules governing the interaction between contexts of utterance and the contents of utterances”, while the latter concern the relation between propositions “independently of their being “asserted, supposed, or accepted”¹³.

An interesting implementation of this general idea is due to Sanford (cf. Sanford 1989). Sanford construes the obvious influence of epistemic context upon the acceptability of HS arguments as warranting a new kind of validity — the kind he calls “circumstantial validity”. He assumes that the acceptable HS arguments cannot be valid proper — i.e. he assumes that they cannot be instances of necessary truth-preservation — because they instantiate invalid forms. But he also claims that they deserve to be called valid “in context” or “under the circumstances”, so to speak, because contextual *grounds* for the truth of the premise ensure the truth of the conclusion, given compliance to the HS form. In other words, certain kinds of justification for accepting the premises as true warrant the acceptance of the conclusion as true, given the formal relation between premises and conclusion.

Sanford is careful to note that different grounds for the truth of premises and conclusions do not impinge on their propositional content; grounds for truth cannot be mistaken for truth-conditions. This is why the kind of contextual warranty he has in mind does not impinge on truth preservation - on validity properly so called. Ground-preserving arguments can fail to be truth-preserving ones. But it is clear that he construes compliance to the HS schemata as a necessary condition for instances of those schemata to be contextually acceptable, even if this contextual acceptability falls short of validity proper. Hence Sanford’s use of the “v” word: since form plays a role in making those instances acceptable, that seems a justifiable terminological move. From Sanford’s viewpoint, then, logical cogency of those instances is therefore explained away as a degenerate kind of validity.

But Sanford’s account still counts as a version of the invalidity route. He clearly holds acceptable instances of HS to be less than valid proper (even if they are classified as “circumstantially” valid) because for them to be valid the forms they instantiate they- would themselves have to be valid, i.e. would themselves have to lack invalid instances. As far as the question of choosing

¹³ Cf. Stalnaker (1975), pp. 139-140.

between the validity and the invalidity routes is concerned, Sanford's "quasi-validity" approach clearly amounts to classifying cogent cases of HS as *invalid* (although reasonable inferences given some contextual assumptions about what is the case, in line with Stalnaker's suggestion). In other words, in cases like (13) and (14), Sanford sets genuine validity apart from persuasiveness.

This is a drawback of his overall view, I think. On the face of it, there is no good reason why those instances of the schemata should be invalid entailments although contextually acceptable ones. Logic intuition tells us that those are valid instances of HS to the same extent that (11) and (12) are *invalid* instances of those forms. It must be acknowledged, of course, that logic intuitions may mislead us (for instance, both the truth-functional and anti-truth-functional view on non-counterfactuals are based on strong logical intuitions, from which it follows that at least one of the kinds of intuition must be misleading). It is also true that the overall theoretical elegance of whatever explanatory strategy is being used for dealing with the semantics and the pragmatics of conditionals may give us grounds to construe those intuitions as misleading — namely if taking them at face value undermines otherwise satisfactory accounts of contradictory intuitions. But that would, in any event, be intrinsically worse than taking them at face value; it would always be a price to pay for keeping a useful analysis in place. Furthermore, in this case, explaining away intuitions of validity about (13)/(14) would hardly be a justifiable move, given that the cases of intuitive invalidity *were* taken at face value, without discussion — HS was described as having counter-examples solely on the sole basis of the intuitive invalidity of those examples. If, therefore, an alternative overall strategy is available which allows us to take the pro-validity evidence at face value (while also taking the pro-invalidity evidence at face value), that would certainly yield a better account of the whole of (11)-(14).

The fact that the invalidity route does not really account for validity intuitions paves the way for putting the validity route to the test. Choosing to account for (13)/(14) in terms of validity commits us to the claim that cogent or acceptable instances of HS are genuine rather than illusory cases of validity, and so is tantamount to avoiding having to explain them away. However, as I have mentioned above, this is a less than problematic move. Anyone pursuing it must provide some account of the fact that there are instances of HS which strike us as unquestionably invalid. This is, as we have seen, the validity theorist's dilemma. The (seemingly genuine) cases of invalidity strongly argue for the invalidity of the respective forms. But if the forms are invalid, they are in principle unable to warrant the validity of any of their instances. It is worth pointing out that if we go along with our logical intuitions concerning (13) and (14), we must buy the complete package: once we take their validity seriously, we must accept that the fact that they are instances of HS is instrumental in making them valid. But how can then such arguments be genuinely valid, assuming they would owe their validity to the fact that they are instances of an invalid form? Some explanation must then be provided for this apparent contradiction: on the one hand the schema is invalid; on the other hand, it seems to enjoy sufficient logical cogency to ensure the validity of some of its instances.

It seems that if we are to classify the logically cogent instances of HS as cases of *validity*, we have to reject the idea that the validity of arguments (*qua* instances of that form) depends solely on their form. In other words, we must, on the one hand, take care of the fact that form is a factor in lending argumentative credence to particular instances of it, and, on the other hand, we must take care of the fact that the HS form does not, by itself, ensure full-fledged validity for any of its instances (as there are instances which are logically unwarranted arguments).

If we accept this (rather heterodox) idea, it becomes clear why Sanford's account cannot be endorsed. His analysis, according to which (13) and (14) are to be accounted for in terms of circumstantial validity rather than validity proper, is committed to the claim that whenever such argumentative sequences are uttered (and the reference of the proper names and indexical items has been consistently assigned, etc), we are before *one and the same argument* — an invalid one (given the possibility that the premise is true and the conclusion is false) although, in some contexts, a circumstantially valid one. If, on the contrary, we claim that form is but one factor in determining

the validity of an argumentative sequence, we predict that one and the same sequence can receive two different validity verdicts and therefore be used to put forward *two different arguments*.

Note that this hypothesis is independently motivated: it is a direct consequence of the pragmatic view on the truth conditions of conditionals I sketched in section 1. If we adopt that view, a HS sequence like (13) and (14) may naturally amount to different arguments when uttered under different assumptions as to what makes the premises true, and will accordingly give rise to different validity verdicts. For instance, whenever (13) is communicatively made use of in a setting where the premise means that Tipper (Gore's wife) will become First Lady *regardless of staying married to Gore* (one can imagine that the utterer of that premise intends to make the (exotic) point that Tipper will become First Lady even if, say, Gore dies before the presidential inauguration, because she is the kind of woman who would find a way of getting married to whoever takes over as president) that premise concerns a set of Gore-winning circumstances — and describes them as Tipper-First-Lady ones — which is totally different from the set of Gore-winning circumstances being envisaged when the premise is taken to mean that Tipper became First Lady *because she stayed married to Gore*. In the former case, some of the relevant Gore-winning circumstances are circumstances where Gore dies before becoming president; in the latter case, none of them are. Accordingly, under the first interpretation, but not under the second, the following version of on (13) counts as a valid argument:

(13') If Gore had been elected, Gore's wife would have become First Lady.

If Gore had died just before his presidential inauguration, he would have been elected.

Therefore, if Gore had died before the election, Gore's wife would have become First Lady.

Similarly, whenever (14) is made use of in a setting where the major premise means that Hoover is a traitor *regardless of his place of birth* (one could imagine that the argument is being put forward by a die-hard anticommunist who thinks that all communists are treacherous people), that premise concerns a set of Hoover-communist circumstances — and describes them as Hoover-traitor ones — which is totally different from the set of Hoover-communist circumstances being envisaged when the premise is taken to mean that Hoover was a traitor *because he was an American high official communist*. In the former case, some of the relevant Hoover-communist circumstances are circumstances where he was born in the USSR; in the latter case, none of them are. Again, this shift in the way the major premise is interpreted determines which particular argument is being put forward: the two interpretations give rise to the assignment of verdicts of, respectively, validity and invalidity to one and the same argumentative sequence, and therefore arguably give rise to two different arguments. Under the former interpretation, (14) counts as a valid argument, since it is impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false. In other words, if (14) concerns treachery as a defining feature of communists in general, the hypothesis that Hoover might have been born in the USSR leaves enables the conclusion that if he had been a communist, he would have been a traitor to go through – i.e. the conclusion goes through *under that interpretation of the major premise*. Only if (14) concerns the connection between being a communist American high official and being a traitor, is Hoover's place of birth central in assessing the way the conclusion is being supported by the premises. Under the latter interpretation, not all hypothetical circumstances where he was born in the USSR are also circumstances where he still is a traitor; the conclusion does not, therefore, go through under *that* interpretation of the major premise.

To sum up, then, and according to the general idea expanded in section 1, I take the different criteria used for selecting antecedent-circumstances in both premises to impinge on the truth-conditions and the propositional content of conditionals (again, I assume the point made about the counterfactual examples carries over to indicatives). It is not just that the epistemic weight of the conditionals varies according to the different grounds on which they are being asserted, as Sanford proposes. Arguably, it is their very truth-conditional content that shifts. In determining the way the antecedent selects sets of circumstances, the constraints associated to a given context of assertion

determine the conditional proposition being expressed, in that context, by the conditional. In general, given a conditional *If A then C*, choosing one of the possible ways of selecting A-circumstances is tantamount to choosing a criterion for giving a verdict on whether all A-circumstances are also C-circumstances and therefore on whether *If A then C* is true. And, of course, since argument identity supervenes on the propositional content of premises and conclusion, these different ways of selecting the relevant A-circumstances yield different arguments when the relevant conditionals occur in an argumentative sequence for those different contexts of utterance.

3. Concluding remarks

As mentioned above, the traditional view on the relationship between validity and form has it that a given instance of a (natural language) argument form F is valid only if F is itself valid. In other words, if an argument is invalid, no other argument instantiating the same form can be valid in virtue of instantiating F. The demise of the invalidity route, even in its Sanfordian mitigated version, clearly entails that this conception of validity must be wrong. If arguments such as (13) and (14) are valid, and there are genuine counter-examples to HS, then a validity test exclusively based of form must be unreliable in its role of telling valid arguments apart from invalid ones.

If form does not, on its own, determine validity of at least some arguments involving conditionals, validity must (at least in those cases) hinge on something more than the semantics of arguments plus contextual determination of referents of proper names and indexicals. It does not merely depend on the fact that (a) premises and conclusion share some semantic features — typically, some of each other's component clauses) (b) those component clauses are syntactically in a particular way (c) the relevant operators (e.g. sentential connectives) have a certain conventional meaning and hence a specific logical force. It seems that the propositions expressed by conditional statements and the arguments involving them are individuated by factors beyond a)-c). The combination of the semantic content of antecedent, consequent and "if" underdetermines the propositional content of conditionals, hence of any conditional premises and conclusions of a given argument, hence of the very argument. Clearly, then, explaining the behaviour of conditionals in inferential environments such as the ones discussed constitutes further motivation for adopting the "pragmatic" view on the truth-conditions of conditionals.

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