Choices, conditionals, and necessity

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Central to van Inwagen's (1983) Consequence Argument for the incompatibility of determinism and free will is the much discussed rule BETA, a transfer principle asserting that if there is no choice about whether a proposition p is true, and there is no choice about whether p implies q, then there is no choice about whether q is true, too. A decisive counter-example to BETA was given by McKay and Johnson (1996), but Widerker (1987) and Finch and Warfield (1998) suggested a stronger principle deemed BETA-2 which is not subject to McKay and Johnson's counter-example, and that allows an even simpler formulation of the consequence argument. Even so, the fact that BETA-2 was not immune to similar counter-examples was not enough to show that there was no possible counter-example to it. Yet, Pruss (2013) offered a proof of the validity of a formal rendering of BETA-2 against the background of the Lewisian semantics for counterfactuals and the modal logic **T**. Thus it might seem that the discussion surrounding the plausibility of BETA-2 is closed once and for all: the rule is valid with respect to the class of (reflexive and) relational models with the usual Lewisian ordering of possible worlds for a propositional modal language containing the counterfactual connective.

In this presentation, however, we claim that even though there is nothing wrong with Pruss's proof, BETA-2 is intuitively invalid: there are counter-examples to it that cannot be seen, as it were, by the formal apparatus, once the modal language is extended with an actuality operator — although we also argue that similar counter-examples can be generated with rigidified descriptions. In the interest of preserving the consequence argument though, we offer a novel and two-dimensional formulation of the Lewisian semantics for counterfactuals and prove the validity of a new transfer rule according to which a new version of the consequence argument can be formulated. This new transfer rule is immune to our counter-examples. However, we argue that similar counter-examples can still be generated, requiring a generalization of the Lewisian semantics to a higher dimension, which is in turn victimized by similar counter-examples, and so on, as we suggest, for any (finite) dimension. Ultimately, we think that having a choice about a proposition ought to be understood in a different, hyperintensional manner, which avoids the counter-examples in this paper altogether, although it is not clear whether a transfer principle that is sufficient for a consequence argument can be formulated in terms of it.

In §2 we explain the consequence argument in more detail, including Pruss's formal proof of BETA-2; in §3 we present counter-examples to BETA-2 formulated with the actuality operator (as well as with rigidified descriptions); in §4 we revise the Lewisian semantics for counterfactuals in a way that avoids our counter-examples, formulate a novel "no-choice-about"

principle that transfers across conditionals, and formulate a new consequence argument. Yet, we argue that counter-examples to this novel principle (and many others) can be generated in an interesting way. In the closing section of the paper we suggest a different manner of understanding the notion of having a choice about a proposition.

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