#### Free Choice and Two Views of Semantics Dynamic Preference Semantics References

# Outline

# Expressing May and Must

Dynamic Semantics at Work

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# The Role of Information In Inquiry and Conversation

- Informational contents (*propositions*) are sets of possible worlds
  - These sets distinguish ways world might be (worlds in the set) from ways it isn't (worlds excluded from set)
- One informational content is particularly useful for understanding how linguistic interactions unfold:

# Contextual Possibilities (c)

As communication and inquiry unfold, a body of information accumulates. Think of this information as what the agents are mutually taking for granted in some way. I call the set of worlds embodying this information c, short for *contextual possibilities*. (Stalnaker 1978; Lewis 1979)

# 1 Free Choice and Two Views of Semantics

**2** Dynamic Preference Semantics

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Gaining Information And Eliminating Possibilities



#### Figure: Accepting the information that A

- Inquiry progresses by using information to eliminate uncertainty, i.e. the elimination of worlds.
- $\{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}}, w_{\mathsf{aB}}, w_{\mathsf{ab}}\} \Rightarrow \{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}}\}$

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# Question

How are Semantics and Information Change Related?

# **Classical Picture**

- **1** Semantics: pair sentences w/propositions
  - $\llbracket \phi \rrbracket$  is a set of worlds
- **2 Pragmatics**: rules for rational agents
  - When presented with information, rational agents use it to eliminate possibilities (update using intersection)
- The Point Semantics specifies informational content of a sentence, but nothing in particular about how sentence changes contextual information (c)
  - Instead, pragmatics says how the sentence's content impacts  $c: c \cap \llbracket \phi \rrbracket$

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Two Important Consequences Of the Classical Approach

# Fact 1: $\diamondsuit A \vDash \diamondsuit A \lor \diamondsuit B$

- Consequence is content inclusion:
  - $[\diamond A] \subseteq [\diamond A \lor \diamond B]$
- Disjunction is union:
  - $\bullet \ \llbracket \diamondsuit A \rrbracket \subseteq \llbracket \diamondsuit A \rrbracket \cup \llbracket \diamondsuit B \rrbracket$

# Fact 2: $\diamond A \lor \diamond B \nvDash \diamond A$

- This would require:
  - $[\![\diamondsuit A]\!] \cup [\![\diamondsuit B]\!] \subseteq [\![\diamondsuit A]\!]$
  - But this only holds when  $[\![\diamondsuit \mathsf{B}]\!] = \emptyset$

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# The Classical Picture

# **Classical Possible Worlds Semantics**

- $\blacksquare \ [[A]] = \{ w \mid w(A) = 1 \}$
- $\left[ \neg \phi \right] = W \left[ \phi \right]$

- - Acc(w) is the set of worlds accessible from w

# Classical Truth and Consequence

Truth  $w \models \phi \iff w \in \llbracket \phi \rrbracket$ Consequence  $\phi \models \psi \iff \llbracket \phi \rrbracket \subseteq \llbracket \psi \rrbracket$ 

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# Free Choice and Two Views of Semantics Dynamic Preference Semantics References The First Problem of Free Choice Kamp (1973) and Ross (1941)

- (1) Billy may go to the beach
  - Best classical approximation of May: some species of  $\diamondsuit$
  - May B <sup>?</sup> = ◇B

# Problem: May B does not entail May B ∨ May C

- X: Billy may go to the beach
- Y: Ah, so Billy may go to the beach, or Billy may go the cinema  $\times \times$

# Why is this a problem?

• Fact 1:  $\diamondsuit B \vDash \diamondsuit B \lor \diamondsuit C$ 

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# The Second Problem of Free Choice Kamp (1973)

(2) Billy may go to the beach or he may go to the cinema

# Problem: May B v May C **does** entail May B

- X: Billy may go to the beach or he may go to the cinema
- Y: Ah, so Billy may go to the beach  $\checkmark$
- Indeed:  $May B \lor May C$  entails  $May B \land May C$

# Why is this a problem?

- Fact 2:  $\diamond A \lor \diamond B \neq \diamond A$
- So there are at least two problems for classical approach to *may*

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# Question

How are Semantics and Information Change Related?

# **Classical Picture**

- **1** Semantics: pair sentences w/propositions
  - $[\![\phi]\!]$  is a set of worlds
- **2 Pragmatics**: rules for rational agents
  - When presented with information, rational agents use it to eliminate possibilities (update using intersection)

# Dynamic Picture (Veltman, Heim)

- **1** Semantics: pair sentences with ways of changing contexts
  - $\phi$  eliminates worlds from c
- **2 Pragmatics**: mechanisms for additional changes
  - General rationality, theory of mind, etc.

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# Tentative Diagnosis The Performative Function of May

- A pragmatic approach...
  - Competence with a word is involved, so a semantic approach is preferable
  - Also, classical pragmatics assumes (declarative) sentences denote propositions
    - $\bullet\,$  Proposition gets intersected with c
  - May A shouldn't change c, but rather Acc
  - This operation can't be intersection (sphere of accessibility should grow w/permission)
  - $\bullet\,$  This would also require  $\mathsf{May}\,\mathsf{A}$  to denote an accessibility relation
    - So many problems w/this
- Alternative: approach to semantics that can directly encode (features of) communicative function of a word

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# The Dynamic Picture In More Detail

# The Basic Idea

Assign each  $\phi$  a function  $[\phi]$  encoding how it changes c:  $c[\phi] = c'$  (Better notation:  $[\phi](c) = c'$ )

# Dynamic Informational Semantics

- **1**  $c[A] = \{w \in c \mid w(A) = 1\}$
- **2**  $c[\neg \phi] = c c[\phi]$
- **3**  $c[\phi \land \psi] = (c[\phi])[\psi]$
- $c[\phi \lor \psi] = c[\phi] \cup c[\psi]$
- **5**  $c[\diamondsuit \phi] = \{w \mid \exists w' : w' \in Acc(w) \& w' \in c[\phi]\}$ 
  - Veltman (1996): for epistemic might, Acc(w) is c

Support, Consequence (Veltman)
• $c \models \phi \iff c[\phi] = c$
• $\phi_1, \ldots, \phi_n \models \psi \iff \forall c : c[\phi_1] \cdots [\phi_n] \models \psi$

# Truth, Propositions (Starr)

 $w \vDash \phi \iff \{w\} [\phi] = \{w\} \qquad \llbracket \phi \rrbracket = \{w \mid w \vDash \phi\}$ 

# Classical Consequence (Starr)

 $\phi_1,\ldots,\phi_n\vDash\psi\iff\forall w:\{w\}[\phi_1]\cdots[\phi_n]\vDash\psi$ 

- Classical logic is the logic of perfect information
- Equivalent to standard  $\models$  for modal free fragment

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# Free Choice and Two Views of Semantics Dynamic Preference Semantics Reference Illustrating Our Surprise

 $\diamond A$  is false unless A is true and  $Acc(w) = \{w\}$ 

- Recall  $w \in [A] \iff \{w\}[A] = \{w\}$
- Consider whether  $w_{\mathsf{A}} \in \llbracket \diamondsuit \mathsf{A} \rrbracket$ :

$$\{w_{\mathsf{A}}\}[\diamondsuit\mathsf{A}] = \{w \mid \exists w' : w' \in Acc(w) \& w' \in \{w_{\mathsf{A}}\}[\mathsf{A}]\}$$
$$= \{w \mid w_{\mathsf{A}} \in Acc(w)\}$$

- Unless  $Acc(w_A) = \{w_A\}, \{w_A\}[\diamondsuit A] \neq \{w_A\}$
- Consider whether  $w_a \in [\![\diamondsuit A]\!]$

$$\{w_{\mathsf{a}}\}[\diamondsuit\mathsf{A}] = \{w \mid \exists w' : w' \in Acc(w) \& w' \in \{w_{\mathsf{a}}\}[\mathsf{A}]\}$$
$$= \{w \mid \exists w' : w' \in Acc(w) \& w' \in \emptyset\}$$
$$= \emptyset$$

• Nope! So  $[\diamond A] \subseteq [A]$ 

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Dynamic Informational Semantics Understanding Classical vs. Dynamic Semantics

# Corollary (Boolean Equivalence)

- **1**  $[[A]] = \{w \mid w(A) = 1\}$
- $\left[ \left[ \neg \phi \right] \right] = W \left[ \left[ \phi \right] \right]$

- Booleans behave classically
- Boolean fragment:  $\vDash$  and  $\vDash$  are identical
  - It's only with modals that  $\vDash$  and  $\vDash$  come apart
- Surprise:  $w \notin [ \diamondsuit \phi ]$  unless  $Acc(w) = \{w\}$  and  $w \in [ \phi ]$
- Then  $[\![\diamondsuit\phi]\!]\subseteq [\![\phi]\!]$  and so  $\diamondsuit\phi\vDash\phi$ 
  - Yet  $\Diamond \phi \models \phi$

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Classical Logic as Logic of Omniscience A Logic of Omniscience is Not Suited for Modality

# d'Alembert (1751) on Truth

"The universe... would only be one fact and one great truth for whoever knew how to embrace it from a single point of view." (d'Alembert 1995: 29)

- A sentence is true iff it corresponds w/'the great truth'
  - Correspond: cohere w/the great truth,  $\{w\}[\phi] = \{w\}$
- But modal sentences are indexical to **uncertainty** or **utilities** of agent(s) evaluating them
- Whether they cohere with the great truth is irrelevant
- We want an evaluative concept that targets how they cohere with partial information: c[φ] = c (support)

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# Dynamic Informational Semantics Back to Free Choice

- This system is quite useful for epistemic modals
  - $A \land \Diamond \neg A$  is inconsistent (cf. Veltman and Yalcin)
  - $\diamond \phi$  can add possibilities to c
    - Not possible to get with  $c \cap \llbracket \diamondsuit \phi \rrbracket$
- But it does not solve the problem of free choice:
  - $\bullet ~ \diamondsuit \phi \Vdash \diamondsuit \phi \lor \diamondsuit \psi$
  - $\bullet ~ \diamondsuit \phi \lor \diamondsuit \psi \Vdash \diamondsuit \phi$
- However, it is the backbone of a system that does:
  - may's meaning resides in how it changes context
  - Use of  $\models$  rather than  $\models$

# Basic Idea

Capture the non-informational impact of may by sophisticating the contexts sentences operate on

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- It's not just information that accumulates in communication and inquiry (Bromberger 1966)
- There are issues (e.g. Hamblin 1958; Roberts 1996).
- They can be thought of as ways of grouping worlds in *c* into competing alternative propositions.

# Alternatives $(\overline{C})$ (e.g. Groenendijk 1999)

Alternatives represent open, competing propositions the agents are concerned with deciding between; their **issues**. Formally, this grouping of c may be identified with a set of sets of worlds; call it C. There is no need to also keep track of c: it is just the union of all the alternatives in C.

# Free Choice and Two Views of Semantics Dynamic Preference Semantics References

# Preference, Rationality & Context Information and the Process of Inquiry



Figure: Accepting the information that A

- Inquiry progresses by gaining information, i.e. the elimination of worlds.
- $\{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}}, w_{\mathsf{aB}}, w_{\mathsf{ab}}\} \Rightarrow \{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}}\}$

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# Free Choice and Two Views of Semantics Dynamic Preference Semantics References Preference, Rationality & Context Issues and Inquiry



# Figure: Recognizing the issue whether A

- Inquiry also progresses by recognizing issues, i.e. introducing alternatives
- $\{\{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}}, w_{\mathsf{aB}}, w_{\mathsf{ab}}\}\} \Rightarrow \{\{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}}\}, \{w_{\mathsf{aB}}, w_{\mathsf{ab}}\}\}$

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# Preference, Rationality & Context

- Agents not only gather information and identify competing alternatives, they form **preferences** regarding those alternatives
- Central to **decision theoretic** approaches to rational choice, as applied in philosophy, AI and economics (e.g. Ramsey 1931; Newell 1992)
- Of relevance here: the preferences being mutually taken for granted for the purposes of an interaction
  - Parallel to Stalnaker's common ground

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# Preference, Rationality & Context Preferences

- A body of preferences can be represented as a binary **preference relation** on the alternatives
- I.e. a set of pairs of propositions constructed from c

# Preference State (R)

- R: binary relation on alternatives (open propositions)
- R(a, a'): a is preferred to a'
- Each pair in R is called a *preference*
- Set of (non-empty) alternatives over which R is defined: issues at stake in R,  $C_R$
- Set of worlds among those alternatives: the contextual possibilities written  $c_R$

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Figure: Accepting the information that A

- $\{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}}, w_{\mathsf{aB}}, w_{\mathsf{b}}\} \Rightarrow \{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}}\}$
- {  $\langle \{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}}, w_{\mathsf{aB}}, w_{\mathsf{b}} \}, \emptyset \rangle \} \Rightarrow \{ \langle \{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}} \}, \emptyset \rangle \}$

# Free Choice and Two Views of Semantics Dynamic Preference Semantics References Preference, Rationality & Context Issues in a Preference State



Figure: Recognizing the issue whether A

- $\{\{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}}, w_{\mathsf{aB}}, w_{\mathsf{ab}}\}\} \Rightarrow \{\{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}}\}, \{w_{\mathsf{aB}}, w_{\mathsf{ab}}\}\}$
- $\{\langle \{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}}, w_{\mathsf{aB}}, w_{\mathsf{ab}} \}, \emptyset \rangle \}$ 
  - $\Rightarrow \{ \langle \{ w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}} \}, \varnothing \rangle, \langle \{ w_{\mathsf{aB}}, w_{\mathsf{ab}} \}, \varnothing \rangle \}$

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# Preference, Rationality & Context



Figure: Coming to prefer A (to  $\neg$ A)

• {  $\langle \{w_{AB}, w_{Ab}, w_{aB}, w_{ab}\}, \emptyset \rangle$  }  $\Rightarrow \{ \langle \{w_{AB}, w_{Ab}\}, \{w_{aB}, w_{ab}\} \rangle$  }

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Preference, Rationality & Context Using Preference to Make Rational Choices

- Given preference relation, which alternatives are best?
- How do you use preferences to decide what to do?
- In decision theory, this takes the form of defining a choice function (Hansson & Grüne-Yanoff 2009)
- A choice function Ch maps a preference state R to the set of best alternatives according to R

# Proposal: Choice, Permission, Requirement

- **1** Ch(R) are the alternatives permissible according to R
- **2** Required by R: unique alternative permitted by R
  - Not always the case!

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# Preference, Rationality & Context Preference and Inquiry



Figure: A more complex preference involving  $\mathsf{A}$  and  $\mathsf{B}$ 

 $\{ \langle \{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}} \}, \{w_{\mathsf{aB}}, w_{\mathsf{ab}} \} \rangle, \langle \{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{aB}} \}, \{w_{\mathsf{Ab}}, w_{\mathsf{ab}} \} \rangle \}$ 

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Preference, Rationality & Context The Choice Function: Logical Weak Dominance

## Which Alternatives are Best?

- **1** Competition between **preferred alternatives** P(R)
  - Left member in some pair
- 2 If preferred alternative *a* is entailed another preferred one, then *a* is out
- $\$  If a entails a dispreferred alternative, a is out

## Choice: Formally

 $Ch(R) = \{a \in P(R) \mid \nexists a' \in P(R) : a' \subset a$ 

 $\& \ \nexists a' \in D(R) : a \subseteq a' \}$ 

[D(R): dispreferred alternatives]

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# Preference, Rationality & Context How Choice Works: An Example



Figure: Preference for A with (separate) preference for  $\mathsf{B}$ 

- { ({ $w_{AB}, w_{Ab}$ }, { $w_{aB}, w_{ab}$ }), ({ $w_{AB}, w_{aB}$ }, { $w_{Ab}, w_{ab}$ })
- Two **preferred** (warm) alternatives, orange and yellow
- Neither entails the other nor dispreferred (cold) alt.
- So  $Ch(R) = \{\{w_{AB}, w_{Ab}\}, \{w_{AB}, w_{aB}\}\}$

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The Semantics: in brief

- Dynamic Meaning: function from contents to contents
  - Now contents are preference states
- $R[\phi] = R'$ : R' is the result of applying  $\phi$  to R

# The Basics

- **1** May  $\phi$  tests that  $\phi$  is consistent w/some  $a \in Ch(R)$ 
  - If so, a preference for  $\phi$  is added to R
    - This doesn't guarantee that  $\phi$  will become Ch(R)
  - Otherwise: fail, i.e. return  $\{\langle \emptyset, \emptyset \rangle\}$
- **2** Disjunction unions separate updates
- **3** Conjunction sequences updates

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# Preference, Rationality & Context How Choice Works: A More Complex Example



- 4 pref. alt's: yellow, orange, reds
- Yellow is out: reds entail it
- Orange is out: top red entails it
- Bottom red is out: it entails blue, which is a dispreferred alt
- Unique best alternative: top red
- $A \land B$  is required

Figure: Pref A and B

$$\begin{split} \{ \langle \{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}}, w_{\mathsf{aB}}, w_{\mathsf{ab}} \}, \emptyset \rangle, \langle \{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{Ab}} \}, \{w_{\mathsf{aB}}, w_{\mathsf{ab}} \} \rangle, \\ \langle \{w_{\mathsf{AB}} \}, \{w_{\mathsf{Ab}} \} \rangle, \langle \{w_{\mathsf{aB}} \}, \{w_{\mathsf{ab}} \} \rangle, \\ \langle \{w_{\mathsf{AB}}, w_{\mathsf{aB}} \}, \{w_{\mathsf{Ab}}, w_{\mathsf{ab}} \} \rangle \} \end{split}$$

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The Semantics Applied How May Works: An Example



# Figure: $R_0$ to $R_0$ [May B]

- $\bullet\,$  The best alternative (orange) is consistent w/B
- $\bullet\,$  A preference and permission for  ${\sf B}$  are introduced
- But a requirement for B is not



Modal Disjunction Intro is Invalid!



- Figure:  $R_0$  to  $R_0$ [May B] =  $R_0$ [May A  $\lor$  May B] • May  $A \models May A \lor May B$  means:
- $Ch(R_0[May A]) = Ch(R_0[May A][May A \lor May B])$  $Ch(R_0) = Ch(R_0[Mav B])$
- But yellow is in  $Ch(R_0[May B])$ , and not  $Ch(R_0)$
- So May A  $\models$  May A  $\lor$  May B!

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# Support, Consequence (Veltman)

- $c \models \phi \iff c[\phi] = c$
- $\phi_1, \ldots, \phi_n \models \psi \iff \forall c : c[\phi_1] \cdots [\phi_n] \models \psi$

# Preferential Support, Consequence (Starr)

- $R \models \phi \iff Ch(R) = Ch(R[\phi])$
- $\phi_1, \ldots, \phi_n \models \psi \iff \forall R : R[\phi_1] \cdots [\phi_n] \models \psi$
- Both kinds of consequence and support are useful
- The first when tracking information
- The second when tracking the best alternatives

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The Second Problem of Free Choice From Disjunction to Conjunction

• Disjunctions are felicitous only when each disjunct compatible w/context (Stalnaker 1975: §III)

• If  $\phi \lor \psi$  is appropriate:  $R[\phi] \neq \{\langle \emptyset, \emptyset \rangle\} \neq R[\psi]$ 

- What happens when  $\phi$  is May A?
- If May A is compatible w/context then context passes its test and may adds preference for A
  - So R[May A] will be R plus a preference for A
- Same holds if  $\psi$  is May B
- Since  $R[May A \lor May B] = R[May A] \cup R[May B]$ :
  - Resulting state will have pref for A and for B and both will be consistent with best alternatives
- So after updating with  $May A \lor May B$ , May A will not change the best alternatives

# The Second Problem of Free Choice From Disjunction to Conjunction

#### Important Observation

After updating with  $\mathsf{May}\,\mathsf{A}\lor\mathsf{May}\,\mathsf{B},\,\mathsf{May}\,\mathsf{A}$  will not change the best alternatives

- The same holds for May B
- But that is just to say:
  - May  $A \lor May B \models May A$
  - May  $A \lor May B \models May B$
  - May  $A \lor May B \models May A \land May B$
- Yet in the modal free fragment, ∨ and ∧ behave exactly as the Boolean operators of classical semantics!
- **Proviso**: Stalnaker's observation treated as presupposition of ∨ and ⊨ is Strawsonian

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# The Semantics

And Strawsonian Consequence

# Modal Semantics $R[May \phi] = \begin{cases} R \cup \{\langle c_R[\phi], c_R - c_R[\phi] \}\} & \text{if } \exists a \in Ch(R) : a[\phi] \neq \emptyset \\ \{\langle \emptyset, \emptyset \rangle\} & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$ $R[Must \phi] = \begin{cases} R \cup \{\langle c_R[\phi], c_R - c_R[\phi] \}\} & \text{if } \forall a \in Ch(R) : a[\phi] = a \\ \{\langle \emptyset, \emptyset \rangle\} & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$

Strawsonian Preferential Support, Consequence

- $R \models \phi \iff R[\phi]$  is defined &  $Ch(R) = Ch(R[\phi])$
- $\phi_1, \ldots, \phi_n \models \psi \iff \forall R : R[\phi_1] \cdots [\phi_n] \models \psi$  if  $R[\phi_1] \cdots [\phi_n][\psi]$  is defined

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The Semantics In Full Detail

#### **Atomic Semantics**

• Where 
$$R = \{\langle a_0, a_1 \rangle, \dots, \langle a_n, a_{n+1} \rangle\}$$
:  
 $R[\mathsf{A}] = \{\langle a_0[\mathsf{A}], a_1[\mathsf{A}] \rangle, \dots, \langle a_n[\mathsf{A}], a_{n+1}[\mathsf{A}] \rangle\}$ 

#### Connective Semantics

• 
$$R[\phi \land \psi] = (R[\phi])[\psi]$$
  
=  $\left( \begin{array}{c} R[\phi] \cup R[\psi] & \text{if } R[\phi] \neq \{\langle \emptyset, \emptyset \rangle\} \neq R[\psi] \end{array} \right)$ 

• 
$$R[\phi \lor \psi] = \begin{cases} R[\phi] \lor R[\phi] : R[\phi] \lor R[\phi] : R[\phi] :$$

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# Free Choice and Two Views of Semantics Dynamic Preference Semantics References In Related Work Imperatives

- Free choice behavior of *might*?
  - Veltman's semantics + this implementation of Stalnaker's observation
- Why not just use Veltman's semantics for may?
  - *might* has no 'deontic reading'
  - Preference semantics captures deontic reading of may
  - Epistemic reading of *may*?
- In other work I use dynamic preference semantics to analyze imperatives
  - Having an analysis of deontic modals allows me to chart their connections
  - E.g. !A ⊫ May A

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# Conclusions

About Dynamic Semantics

#### Summary

- 1 Classical semantics is a fragment of dynamic semantics
- 2 But expanding into the resources afforded only by dynamic semantics is fruitful
  - Here: free choice
- **3** These provide something like an expressivist semantics
  - Truth is not the only useful evaluative concept
  - Consequence is not always about truth
- **4** But avoids typical pitfalls
  - How do you blend the truth-conditional and the non-truth-conditional? (Frege-Geach)
  - DS: truth-conditional behavior emerges for limited fragment from more basic semantic constraints

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# Thank you!

(Slides available at http://williamstarr.net/research)

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