PRESUPPOSITION AND FALSITY

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1. The sentences

(1) Henry admires every other philosopher.
~(1) Henry does not admire every other philosopher.

may be used to make statements both of which logically imply

(2) Henry is a philosopher.

This will occur, for example, in a context where the users of (1) and ~(1) are debating whether Henry admires dead as well as living philosophers. Statements made by using (1) and ~(1) need not behave in this way, however. For instance, consider a context in which (1)'s user defends his claim by asserting 'He *is* a philosopher and he admires everyone other than himself' and ~(1)'s user objects by saying 'He is not a philosopher since his name doesn't appear in the *Directory of Philosophers*'. In this case the statement made by (1) may be regarded as logically equivalent to a conjunction which has (2) and 'If x is a philosopher and x is not identical with Henry, then Henry admires x' as conjuncts. And the statement made by ~(1) may be regarded as the denial of this conjunction. Consequently, the statement made by (1) logically implies (henceforth simply 'implies') (2), but the statement made by ~(1) does not, since the latter is implied by ~(2) and ~(2) does not imply (2).

In future, reserve '(1)' and '~(1)' for making the statements made when the sentences 'Henry admires every other philosopher' and 'Henry does not admire every other philosopher' are used in the first of the two ways indicated here and '(1')' and '~(1')' to mark the statements made when the same sentences are used in the second indicated way. The two statement pairs are different to the extent that the identity of a statement is a function both of is logical relationships and of what can count as a negation of that statement. Thus, ~(1)

and ~(1') are different statements because ~(1) implies (2) and ~(1') does not. And (1) and (1') are different statements because ~(1) is a negation of (1) but not of (1') (see below, section 7).

One way of characterizing the difference between (1) and (1') is to say that (1) *presupposes* (2) whereas (1') merely implies (2). Although such a remark is true, it does provoke the question of what 'presupposes' means in such a context. This is the question I want to go some way toward answering in this paper and on the basis of this answer I shall try to cast some light on one use of 'false'.

2. One definition which is suggested by the way (1) and ~(1) are introduced in section 1 is

D1: p presupposes q ≡ both p and p's negation imply q.(1)

Among other things, D1 faces the difficulty of having to indicate how we are to tell which statement counts as *the* negation of p. In a sense both ~(1) and ~(1') are "negations" of (1) and the question arises of how we are to tell which is *the* negation of (1). If (1) presupposes (2) and if D1 is correct, then (1)'s negation cannot be ~(1'), since ~(1') does not imply (2). But if D1 is to be useful, we must be able to tell that (1)'s negation is not ~(1') *independently* of our knowing that (1) presupposes (2). D1 offers no formula for doing this. Indeed, it is doubtful that such a formula is available.

3. As an alternative to D1 consider

D2: p presupposes q ≡ p implies q, and p does not assert q, not even in part.

D2 provides a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, of presupposing. For example, the definiens, but not the definiendum, is satisfied for the following interpretations of p and q.

p	q
A is between B and C.	B is not between A and C.
The phone is square.	The phone is equilateral.
p	$p \vee q$
p	$q \supset q$
$p \cdot \sim p$	q

Even if 'implies' in this context can be given a non-strict analysis, the first three interpretations yield counter-examples to D2. Moreover, the first interpretation — though not the second — also shows that the following definition introduces nothing more than a necessary condition.

> D3: p presupposes q $\equiv$ p implies q, and p does not mean q, not even in part.

4. Consider

> D4: p presupposes q$\equiv$ if p is believed to be true, q is believed to be true.

D4 offers neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition. The only interpretation of p and q which would make the definiens necessarily true is one in which q is a mere synonym or partial synonym for p, and in that case the definiendum would not be true. On the other hand, if the definiens is merely contingently true, it introduces nothing more than a psychological connection and is inappropriate. For, although presupposing may not be an entirely logical connection, it is at least partly one.

5. Consider

> D5: p presupposes q $\equiv$ p assumes q.

D5 is intolerably vague as it stands and making it more specific would be to do the job which D5 is supposed to be doing. Moreover, D5 can upon specification easily turn out to be wrong. For, there is a use of 'assumes' such that the definiens indicates that p has the force of 'Assuming q to be true, such and such is the case'. In that case, the definiens is saying that q's truth value has no bearing on p's truth, i.e. that p's advocate is deliberately setting the question of q's truth value to one side in such a way that if q is false, then p can still be either true or not true (thus p is quite distinct from the material conditional '$q \supset r$'). Now, whatever p's presupposing q does involve, it does not mean that q's truth value has no bearing on p's truth. On the contrary, p does *imply* q in the sense that if p is true, then it necessarily follows that q is true.

6. Consider

> D6: p presupposes $q \equiv p$ implies q, and if q is false, then, although p is not true, p is not false either.

The problem here is that D6 uses 'false' and 'false' is customarily explained as

> p is false $\equiv$ p's negation is true.

which would mean that D6 in effect says

> p presupposes $q \equiv p$ implies q, and q's falsity implies the non-truth of both p and q's negation.

Consequently, D6 will come to grief over the same problem as D1, viz. that of indicating how *the* negation of p is to be identified, unless it can manufacture an alternative account of falsity. This is the problem I want to focus on now. Before doing so, however, it will first be necessary to have a closer look at the concept 'negation'.

7. In the absence of special restrictions on 'negation', (1) has at least two negations, viz. $\sim$(1) and $\sim$(1'). They are negations of (1) in the sense that they are logical contraries of (1) — the conjunction of each with (1) cannot be true — and they are typically employed specifically to reject just the truth of (1). Thus, (1) has *a* negation which along with (1) implies (2) and *a* negation which does not. Now, this is certainly part of the reason for our being able to say that (1) presupposes (2). But if that is the case, then why can we not equally say that (1') also has as negations $\sim$(1) and $\sim$(1') and then conclude that (1') also presupposes (2) ?

Both ~(1) and ~(1') are contraries of (1'), but they cannot both be typically used to reject the truth of (1'). Only ~(1') can perform this function. For, in order that ~p can be used to reject the truth of p, ~p must bring into issue at least the same matters as p, although of course ~p will not adopt the same stand on all those matters as p. Now, ~(1') succeeds in doing this with respect to (1') but ~(1) does not. Although ~(1) does imply (2), it does it in such a way that it does not bring (2)'s truth into question. On the other hand, ~(1') very much brings (2)'s truth into question, since it has the logical force of '~[(2). (If x is a philosopher and x ≠ Henry, then Henry admires x)]'. And since (1') has the force of '(2). (If x is a philosopher and x ≠ Henry, then Henry admires x)', (1') also brings (2)'s truth into question, although, unlike ~(1'), it answers the question in the affirmative. Thus, ~(1') can, but ~(1^{1}) cannot count as a negation of $(^{1})$. Both ~(1) and ~(1') count as negations of (1), however, since ~(1) brings *just* those matters into question which (1) brings, and ~(1') brings *more* matters into question than (1) (notably (2)'s truth).

Since ~(1) is a negation of (1) and not of (1'), we can safely say that (1) has a negation which implies (2) whereas $(^{1})$ does not. We might then generalize this point to get

> D7: p presupposes q≡p implies q, and p has a negation which equally implies q.

D7 also introduces nothing more than a necessary condition. According to it any tautology presupposes itself and self-presupposition is impossible unless it is made respectable just by fiat. Consequently, we must amplify D7's definiens, either by incorporating D2 (or D3) to get

> D8: p presupposes q≡p implies q, p has a negation which also implies q, and p does not mean q, not even in part (or p does not assert q, not even in part).

or by utilizing the notion of "bringing a matter into issue", introduced above, to get

D9: p presupposes q ≡ p implies q, p has a negation which also implies q, and p does not bring into issue the matter of q's truth.

D8 and D9 are adequate accounts of 'p presupposes q', or at least they bring us one step closer to achieving adequacy.

8. If D8 and D9 are adequate, what then can we say about D6 and the suggestion that p presupposes q only if q's falsity implies both the non-truth *and* the non-falsity of p ? Such a view can be salvaged, I think, by understanding falsity as

p is false ≡ either p has one or more negations which share an implication with p and every such negation is true, or p has no such negation but some negation of p is true.

The condition that *every* implication-sharing negation of p must be true is necessary to accommodate the following sort of case: Say that

(3) Henry admires all other Canadian philosophers.

implies both (2) and

(4) Henry is a Canadian.

Say also that (3) shares its implication of both (2) and (4) with one use of the sentence 'Henry does not admire all other Canadian philosophers', but shares only its implication of (4) with another use of the same sentence. Number the two uses of 'Henry does not admire all other Canadian philosophers' '∼(3)' and '∼(3')' respectively. Say that (4) is true and (2) is not. In this case we should want to say that (3) is not false and not true, because (2) is not true. But if (3)'s simply having one true implication-sharing negation were sufficient for (3)'s falsity, then (3) could well be false, since ∼(3') could well be true. Consequently, we must demand the truth of *both* ∼ (3) and ∼(3') for (3)'s falsity.

If 'false' has the above use, then p presupposes q if and only if q's non-truth implies both p's non-truth and p's non-falsity and D6 is sound. This does not mean that other uses of 'false' are not possible, of course, or that there are no other uses for which D6 would be mistaken. For example, if 'is false' means simply 'has a true negation', then D6 would be wrong. The important point is that there is a use of 'false' for which D6 holds true.

Now, someone might want to venture a more ambitious position than the one I've proposed thus far. In particular, he might want to make sense of the expression '*the* negation of p' by claiming

> $\sim$p is the negation of p $\equiv$ $\sim$p is that negation of p which is logically equivalent either to p's implication-sharing negation (in case it has only one) or to the conjunction of all of p's implication-sharing negations (in case it has more than one).

He can then say that p is false if and only if p's negation is true, advocate a correspondingly strong version of D6, and indeed resurrect a version of D1 by augmenting it in the way D8 and D9 augment D7. I should admire the ambition of anyone who ventured such a position, but I should have reservations about his prudence, until he either shows that it is impossible for a statement to lack an implication-sharing negation altogether or supplements his account to accomodate such a possibility without doing it an *ad hoc* way. At the moment, I cannot see how this can be done, and until things look differently, I prefer to follow a more modest course.

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NOTE

(1) See Bas VAN FRAASEN, "Presupposition, Implication and Self-Reference", *Journal of Philosophy*, LXV (1968), 136-52.