

Boundaries of Impossibility

Regardless of its undeniable theoretical success, possible worlds semantics (PWS) faces some important obstacles. Many of them relate to the problem of hyperintensionality, i.e., the problem of the granularity of meaning or content of necessarily true (or false) expressions. While the problem is not a new one, in recent years we have witnessed a ‘hyperintensional revolution’ (Nolan, 2014). The goal of this revolution is to provide tools for a more fine-grained analysis of propositions. Accordingly, some recommend modifying the standard PWS. The modification is based on an extension of the domain of worlds by introducing *impossible* worlds to it, i.e., worlds where what is actually necessarily false is true in them.

As in the case of any other revolution, including the hyperintensional one, there is always a risk of it failing. Thus, if this revolution resulted in implausible consequences, there would be good reason for abandoning it and either accepting the pre-revolutionary state of semantics or looking for an alternative way of changing that state. What is often considered to be such an implausible consequence is the very belief in impossible worlds, which for many are questionable entities. Therefore, the question of whether the goal of the revolution is achievable depends upon how the extension of the domain of worlds affects the fundamental concepts of PWS.

The common view has it that there are two families of approaches towards the structure of impossible worlds – Australasian and North American. According to the first, impossible worlds are closed under the relation of logical consequence of one of the non-classical logics. The North American approach is more liberal and allows for impossible worlds where no logic holds. After indicating the questionable consequences of each view, I propose a third one. The proposed view strikes a balance between the two – one that is not as restrictive as the Australasian approach and not as liberal as the North American approach.

Nolan, D. (2014). Hyperintensional metaphysics. *Philosophical Studies* 171 (1):149–60.