I have long argued for a kind of ‘counterfactual skepticism’: most counterfactuals are false. I maintain that the indeterminism and indeterminacy associated with most counterfactuals entail their falsehood. For example, I claim that these counterfactuals are both false:

(Indeterminism) If the chancy coin were tossed, it would land heads (not tails!).
(Indeterminacy) If I had a son, he would have an even number of hairs on his head at his birth (not odd!).

And I argue that most counterfactuals are relevantly similar to one or both of these, as far as their truth-values go. I also have arguments from the incompatibility of ‘would’ and ‘might not’ counterfactuals, and more.

However, counterfactuals play an important role in science, social science, and philosophy—for example, they feature in influential accounts of free will, rational decision-making, and moral responsibility. And ordinary speakers judge many counterfactuals that they utter to be true. A number of philosophers have defended our judgments against counterfactual skepticism. Some follow David Lewis in appealing to ‘quasi-miracles’; Robbie Williams appeals to ‘typicality’; John Hawthorne and H. Orri Stefánsson to primitive counterfactual facts (‘counterfacts’); Moritz Schulz to an arbitrary-selection semantics; Jonathan Bennett and Hannes Leitgeb to high conditional probabilities; Karen Lewis to contextually-sensitive ‘relevance’.

I argue against each of these proposals. A recurring theme is that they fail to respect certain valid inference patterns. I conclude that most counterfactuals are still false, but that is no cause for alarm.