Conditionals: Philosophical and Linguistic Issues

Course Description

The course is organized around recent work on subjunctive and indicative conditionals. Participants will be expected to master the material in Jonathan Bennett's *A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals* and the course will mostly follow the order of discussion in this book. The course will cover i) an introduction to the main ideas needed for an understanding of recent work on conditionals including the basics of modal logic, probability theory, and linguistics; ii) the main accounts of the linguistics and semantics of indicative and subjunctive conditionals; iii) the connections between probability and conditionals; iv) connections between conditionals and other philosophical concepts including laws, causation, knowledge, the direction of time.

Key Questions

No linguistic construction has exorcised philosophers more than the conditional. There are many reasons for this. One reason is that many analyses of important notions are given in terms of subjunctive (counterfactual) conditionals. A second reason is that conditionals seem to be connected to a number of other notions of fundamental philosophical interest; for example, indicative conditionals seem to be conceptually connected to conditional probability. A third reason is that certain theories of meaning for conditionals seem to reflect what some philosophers think is the proper theory of meaning for sentences containing ethical terms. A fourth reason is that conditionals (specifically counterfactual conditionals) have figured centrally in recent metaphysics and philosophy of science. There are connections between conditionals and laws of nature, causation, dispositions, objective chances and properties. Finally, "if" is the natural language logical term whose meaning is most unyielding to analysis. Virtually no claim about conditionals has gone uncontested; indeed theorists disagree about such fundamental matters as for instance whether there is even a two-place operator on propositions expressed by "if…then", or whether, even if there is, it is a modal operator or a truth-function, or even whether conditionals express propositions at all. Because philosophers and linguists working on conditionals have used so many different resources in developing theories of them, working on conditionals requires having at one's fingertips a number of different formal resources, from frameworks in semantic theory for natural language to basic probability. Though we will be assuming basic familiarity with these frameworks, we will also be providing brief introductions to them as the course progresses. The first part of the summer school will be devoted to developing the basic problem space for the study of conditionals. Some central themes include: (1) Unitary versus non-unitary analysis of conditionals, i.e. does the indicative/subjunctive distinction mark a distinction in semantic kind? (2) Non-truth-conditional views of indicative conditionals (maybe subjunctives as well). What semantic and philosophical commitments does an NTV view about conditionals incur? How does this compare with e.g. the commitments of an expressivist about moral discourse? (3) The relation between conditionals and objective probability.

Course format

Student work and participation: Students will be asked a) to prepare questions for the discussion sessions and b) those students who arrange to obtain credit from their departments will be asked to write a research paper that is started during the course. The faculty will provide comments on these papers. c) There will be special sessions on Mondays and Tuesdays to go over introductory material for students who want to have a better understanding of background issues e.g. an elementary introduction to logic and semantics on the first Monday afternoon, etc.

The course will be structured so that on each day there will be a morning session (from 9.30-12) consisting of an hour and a half lecture (with some discussion on points of clarification) followed by an hour of discussion. Each afternoon (from 1.30-4.00 pm) will be similarly organized. In addition, there will be "background" sessions Mondays and Tuesdays for participants to fill in gaps in their background knowledge. On Wednesday and Thursday afternoons (4.30-6.30 pm) faculty members will deliver lectures on their recent work on conditionals and related topics.

Bibliography

Books:

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- Angelika Kratzer: *Conditionals.* Oxford University Press (forthcoming)
- William Lycan: *Real Conditionals*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2001
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Papers:

- Kent Bach, "The myth of conventional implicature". *Linguistics and Philosophy* 22.4. 327-366
- Dorothy Edgington, "Counterfactuals and the Benefit of Hindsight" in P. Dowe and P. Noordhof (eds.), *Chance and Cause*. Routledge, 2004, pp. 12-27.
- Dorothy Edgington, "Conditionals" in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/conditionals/
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- Anthony Gillies, "CIA Leaks" (with Kai von Fintel) *Philosophical Review*, 117(1): 77-98 [2008]
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- Alan Hajek, "Most Counterfactuals are False" http://philrsss.anu.edu.au/people-defaults/alanh/papers/MCF.pdf
- Alan Hajek, "Conditional Probability is the Very Guide of Life", in Probability is the Very Guide of Life: The Philosophical Uses of Chance, eds. Henry Kyburg, Jr. and Mariam Thalos, Open Court.
- Gilbert Harman, "'If' and Modus Ponens", *Theory and Decision*, 11:1
- Sabine Iatridou "The Grammatical Ingredients of Counterfactuality", *Linguistic Inquiry* 31.2, 2000
- Frank Jackson, "On Assertion and Indicative Conditionals" *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 88, No. 4 (Oct., 1979), pp. 565-589
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- David Lewis, "Adverbs of Quantification", In Edward L. Keenan [ed.] Formal Semantics of Natural Language (1975; Cambridge U.P.)
- David Lewis, "Probabilities of Conditionals and Conditional Probabilities", *Philosophical Papers* Volume II, June 1987, pp. 133-157(25)
- David Lewis, "Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow", *Philosophical Papers* Volume II, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 32-52.
- Barry Loewer, "Cotenability and Counterfactual Logics", *Journal of Philosophical Logic,* 1979, 99–115.
- Barry Loewer, "Counterfactuals with Disjunctive Antecedents", *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 73, No. 16, 531-537. Sep. 16, 1976, 531-537
- Barry Loewer, "Counterfactuals and the Second Law". In "Causal Republicanism", ed. by Huw Price

- Adam Rieger, "A Simple Theory of Conditionals", *Analysis*, Volume 66, Number 291, July 2006, pp. 233-240(8).
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