

Philosophy 4310: Conditionals Spring 2017

INSTRUCTOR	OFFICE	E-MAIL	OFFICE HOURS
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Any competent speaker of English can deploy and understand a bewildering variety of conditional statements. But what do they mean? This question belongs primarily to the philosophy of language and logic, but answering it also requires discussion of issues in metaphysics, philosophy of mind, epistemology, and probability theory.

Because conditionals are everywhere, they are intrinsically interesting. Their ubiquity in everyday life is mirrored in philosophy, so careful consideration of their nature has instrumental philosophical value as well. Here are a few philosophical topics where conditionals play an important role:

1. Metaphysics and philosophy of science: causation; dispositions; laws of nature; temporal asymmetry; free will
2. Epistemology: counterfactual and reliabilist accounts of knowledge and justification; safety and sensitivity; epistemic modality
3. Ethics and decision theory: deliberation; obligation; Newcomb's problem (and other puzzles)
4. Philosophy of religion: God's foreknowledge of free actions (the "middle knowledge" debate)

Readings: Much of the course will be structured around reading Jonathan Bennett's *A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals* and some of the primary literature he discusses.

Bennett follows many philosophers by dividing conditionals into two categories: "indicatives" and "subjunctives". The easiest way to distinguish them is by example; here is a famous pair from Ernest Adams:

(ind) If Oswald didn't kill Kennedy, then someone else did.

(sub) If Oswald hadn't killed Kennedy, then someone else would have.

While (ind) seems obviously correct, (sub) is tendentious. (sub) concerns an alternative possible history of the world, while (ind) is in some difficult-to-specify sense about the way things actually are.

In the first part of the course, we will examine two approaches to understanding indicatives: the material conditional analysis (according to which 'If A, then C' is true if and only if either A is false or C is true), and the no-truth-value approach, according to which indicative conditionals are do not (or at least not usually) have truth-values. The

deep chasm between these approaches is bridged by what Bennett calls “The Equation” (a very plausible claim equating the probability of ‘If A, then C’ with the conditional probability of C given A) and what Edgington calls “The Bombshell” (the result, first proved by David Lewis, that given The Equation, the probability of a conditional cannot be the probability of a truth-valued proposition).

In the second part of the course, we will study the dominant framework for understanding subjunctive conditionals: the possible worlds approach to counterfactuals developed by David Lewis and Robert Stalnaker. The framework starts with the idea that ‘If A were the case, C would be the case’ is true if and only if, at all the possible worlds “closest to” the actual world where A is true, C is true. Many fascinating and daunting questions arise when attempting to develop that framework into a theory.

Texts:

Jonathan Bennett (2003) *A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals*. Oxford University Press. All other texts will be made available on the course website.

Method of Assessment

- There will be (roughly) 6 homework assignments consisting of a combination of problems and short essays throughout the course. The sum of all of the homeworks is worth 50% of your final grade.
- There will be one paper essay due roughly half way through the term and one final paper due (in lieu of a final exam) each worth 25% of your grade.
- There is a blackboard site for the course so that you will be able to keep track of your grade up to any given point.

- **Rough Grading Scale:**

- 92—100% → A
- 90—92% → A-
- 88—90% → B+
- 82—88% → B
- 80—82% → B-
- 78—80% → C+
- 70—78% → C
- 65—70% → C-
- 50—65% → D
- 0—49% → F

Other Matters:

Academic Integrity: Cheating and plagiarism are, of course, prohibited in this class just as they are in all university classes. They will be taken particularly seriously in this class, and any cases that may arise will be treated in a manner consistent with University policy. These two violations of academic integrity are each defined in the section of the Texas Tech online official publications titled “Academic Integrity.” Plagiarism is there described as follows:

“‘Plagiarism’ includes, but is not limited to, the appropriation of, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any means material that is attributable in whole or in part to another source, including words, ideas, illustrations, structure, computer code, other expression and media, and presenting that material as one’s own academic work being offered for credit.” <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentconduct/academicinteg.php>

You can find excellent explanations of what specifically constitutes plagiarism as opposed to proper citation, and also tutorials on how to avoid plagiarism at the following websites: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/sources/>
<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>

Note: If, at any time, you are at all unclear about what counts as plagiarism, or about boundaries such as between working together in a group on homework (encouraged) and copying work from another person (prohibited), please just come by and ask me about it. You do not want to be confused or careless about this serious matter.

Students with Disabilities: Any student who, because of a disability, may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make any necessary arrangements. Students should present appropriate verification from Student Disability Services during the instructor’s office hours. Please note instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodations to a student until appropriate verification from Student Disability Services has been provided. For additional information, you may contact the Student Disability Services office in 335 West Hall or 806-742-2405.

Religious holy days: a student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known in writing to the instructor prior to the absence. A student who is absent for the observance of a religious holy day shall be allowed to take an exam or complete an assignment scheduled for that day within a reasonable time after the absence.

Rough Schedule: (not to be trusted – see the course website at <http://joelvelasco.net/teaching/4310>)

Week 0	Introduction	Review of Propositional Logic
Week 1	Review of Propositional Logic	Sections on Conditionals from various introductory logic textbooks
Week 2	Material Conditional Analyses	Bennett, A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals, Chs. 1-3
Week 3	The Equation (1)	Bennett, A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals, Ch. 4 Stalnaker, “Probability and Conditionals”
Week 4	The Equation (2)	Bennett, A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals, Ch. 5 Lewis, “Probability of Conditionals and Conditional Probabilities”
Week 5	The Subjectivity of Indicative Conditionals	Bennett, A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals, Ch. 6 Stalnaker, “Indicative Conditionals”
Week 6	Indicative Conditionals lack truth values	Bennett, A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals, Ch. 7 Bradley, “Indicative Conditionals”
Week 7	Responses to Arguments for NTV Views	Gillies, “Epistemic Conditionals and Conditional Epistemics” Gillies, “On Truth-Conditions for If (but Not Quite Only If)” Rothschild, “Do Indicative Conditionals Express Propositions?”
Week 8	Subjunctive Conditionals: First steps	Bennett, A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals, Ch. 10 Lewis, Counterfactuals, Chs. 1-2
Week 9	The Competition for Closest	Bennett, A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals, Ch. 11 Stalnaker, “A Defense of Conditional Excluded Middle”
Week 10	Forks and Miracles	Bennett, A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals, Chs. 12-15 Lewis, “Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow”
Week 11	Restrictor Analyses of Conditionals	Kratzer, “Conditionals” Kratzer, “The Notional Category of Modality” Lewis, “Adverbs of Quantification”
Week 12	Operators vs Restrictors	Gillies, “Iffiness” Khoo, “Operators or Restrictors? A Reply to Gillies”
Week 13	Modals and Conditionals: Iffy Oughts	Kolodny and MacFarlane, “Ifs and Oughts” Charlow, “What We Know and What To Do”

Week 14	Contrary-to-Duty Conditionals	Chisholm, "Contrary-to-Duty Imperatives and Deontic Logic" Forrester, "Gentle Murder, or the Adverbial Samaritan"
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