

## Conditionals Seminar: Day 1

- Administrative:
  - Course Website has all the details (see, mainly, the syllabus)  
<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~fitelson/conditionals/>
- Introductory Remarks: Chapter 1 of Bennett
  - Some Questions
  - Defining ‘Conditional’
  - Challenging the Ternary Structure
  - Two Types of Conditional
  - Labels for the Two Types [skipped]
  - The Relocation Thesis
  - Independent Conditionals
  - Idioms [skipped]

## Administrative

- All details about the course are on the course website. The website will be updated regularly. The syllabus will tell you what you need to read in the text (and it will have links to some salient further readings).
- Basically, we will be working our way through (at least most of) Bennett's book *A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals* (OUP 2003).
- Prerequisites: At least two courses in philosophy, one of which should be logic (the equivalent of our 12A). Ideally, this course is for graduate students or junior/senior majors in philosophy. Readings are not trivial.
- Requirements: (1) presentation (writing and presenting a 4–6-page paper on readings: 30%), (2) term paper (12–15 pages: 70%).
- Schedule: see syllabus page as course evolves. I will present for the first 3–4 weeks, then student presentations (scheduled soon). Usually, we read 1–2 chapters of Bennett per week. We may not cover the whole book. Re-read passages, and come armed with questions!

## Bennett Chapter 1.1: Some Questions

- He begins with some examples of *subjunctive* conditional statements:
  - “If the American Ambassador had understood her instructions, Iraq would not have invaded Kuwait.”
  - “If rabbits had not been introduced into New Zealand, there would be none there today.”
- He says that many informed people believe these statements are true, even though their “If” clauses are *contrary to fact* (i.e., *false*).
- A long-standing puzzle in philosophy concerns the epistemology of such claims. How can we come to know such statements are true?
- In order to answer this question, it helps to have an account of the *conditions* under which such conditionals are true (more below).
- Other conditionals do not involve what *would have been*, only what *is*. Bennett will ultimately call such statements *indicative* conditionals:

- “If they have chains on their tires, then there is snow in the pass.”
- “If he learned about that from Alice, then she broke her promise.”
- These also raise epistemic problems, since we seem to learn *unconditional*  $P$ 's and  $Q$ 's. And, it is unclear why *that* should be useful for coming to know that a conditional like “if  $S$ , then  $T$ ” is true.
- Again, to answer this question we need to get clear on what such statements mean. That's (basically) Part One of Bennett's book.
- Almost everyone agrees on the following about *indicatives*  $\rightarrow$ :
  - $\sim(p \ \& \ \sim q)$  is *necessary* for  $p \rightarrow q$ . [what does *that* mean?!]
- But, it is controversial as to whether  $\sim(p \ \& \ \sim q)$  is *sufficient* for  $p \rightarrow q$ . That is, to use our example above, it is controversial as to whether:
  - If he learned about that from Alice, then she broke her promise.
 means *nothing more than*:
  - It is not the case that: he learned about that from Alice and she did not break her promise.

- In Chapters 2 and 3 (next week), we'll discuss arguments of Grice and Jackson *in favor of* the sufficiency of  $\sim(p \ \& \ \sim q)$  for  $p \rightarrow q$ .
- And, chapters 2–10 are about various aspects of indicatives. Mainly, these will be pragmatic, semantic, logical, and epistemic aspects.
- At the end of 1.1, Bennett points out that it is *important* to understand conditionals, because they appear ubiquitously in various theories we hold dear. He also stresses that it is *not easy*, but very rewarding.
- I think he's right. But, this means we must do the readings carefully, with an emphasis on understanding the arguments and examples.
- By thinking hard about conditionals, we will be led in this course into consideration of various philosophical problems and areas, including:
  - metaphysics of modality, possible worlds, facts, events
  - probability and belief change, probability and logic
  - pragmatics of conversation
  - determinism, ambiguity, vagueness, the law of the excluded middle

## Bennett Chapter 1.2: Defining 'Conditional'

- In this section, Bennett considers various proposals for what a conditional is. He begins with a rather naive, superficial criterion:  
S: An item is a conditional if it is expressed by an English sentence consisting of 'If' followed by an English sentence followed by 'then' followed by an English sentence.
- But, this is *too weak*, as it does not imply that "had the civil war not been fought, American slavery would have continued into the twentieth century" is a conditional. So, Bennett considers a slight modification:  
S\*: An item is a conditional if it is *expressible* ...
- But, even this is too weak, since some true conditionals have 'If' but not 'then', and become false when 'then' is added. Davis' example:
  - If war breaks out tomorrow, the tides will continue to rise and fall.
  - If war breaks out tomorrow, *then* the tides will continue to ...

- Moreover, both  $S$  and  $S^*$  are *too strong*, as Cargile's example shows:  
If (only Joe would come to the party bringing his wife who always says at first that she won't come) then (she does come).
- This is an *optative* like "If only she would let me kiss her!".
- To see why this is not a conditional, Bennett says we must go "further down". He says that conditionals are binary conditional operators applied to pairs of propositions  $O_2(A, C)$  whereas "If only ..." is a unary operator applied to a single proposition  $O_1(P)$ . He suggests:  
 $S^{**}$ : An item is a conditional if it is expressible in a sentence of the form "If [sentence  $A$ ], then [sentence  $C$ ]", the effect of the whole being to apply some binary operator  $O_2$  to the pair of propositions  $\langle A, C \rangle$  expressed by these two contained sentences (in isolation).
- Bennett laments that this definition is *language-bound*, because it requires that there be a translation into English "If... then..." form of any would-be conditional (say, expressed in a strange language).
- But, it serves as a rough guide. Later accounts will *implicitly* define  $\rightarrow$ .

- However, it does seem *too strong*, as it counts this as a conditionals:  
 “She was always home before midnight: *if she missed the bus, then she would walk*” [here, ‘if’ means ‘whenever’]
- Moreover, it also seems *too weak*, owing to Gibbard’s example:  
 A: The British had not attacked Suez.  
 C: The Soviets would not have entered Hungary a few weeks later.
- “If A then C” is a conditional, but it does not (intuitively) apply a binary operator to the pair of propositions expressed by A and C in isolation. First, C does not seem to *have* a stand-alone meaning. Second, A has a *different* stand-alone meaning than it has in “If A then C”.
- Lesson: in conditionals  $O_2(A, C)$ , the A and C may not be the same A and C that appear in the English sentence expressing the conditional.  
 $O_2(\text{The British did not } \dots, \text{The Soviets did not } \dots)$
- For Bennett “antecedent” and “consequent” mean A and C in  $O_2(A, C)$ , not in the English sentence expressing the conditional.

## Bennett Chapter 1.3: Challenging the Ternary Structure

- Bennett mentions a few people that reject the  $O_2(A, C)$  approach to conditionals, which takes conditionals to be operators applied to pairs.
- Harman argues that 'if' never stands for an operator applied to a pair of propositions. He wants a unified account of 'if' which applies both to conditionals, and uses like "He asked her if she would marry him."
- Dudman thinks that the conditional is a two-part entity, with an "if-string" (and then the rest is the other part). Examples like these:  
... the moment for such frivolities, if it had ever existed, was now past ...
- According to Dudman, the ternary view cannot account for the integrity of if-strings in such sentences. Bennett does not deny that *some* transformations don't break-up "if-strings".
- But, he thinks Dudman exaggerates their "integrity". And, he concedes that much of his book is wrong, if Dudman is right.

## Bennett Chapter 1.4: Two Types of Conditionals

- Bennett thinks both of these conditionals have  $O_2(A, C)$  structure:

Did–Did: If Shakespeare did not write *Hamlet*, then some aristocrat did.

Had–Would: If Shakespeare had not written *Hamlet*, then some aristocrat would have.

*A*: Shakespeare did not write *Hamlet*, *C*: Some aristocrat wrote *Hamlet*.

- But, Bennett thinks that Did-Did is true, while Had–Would is false. It follows that Bennett is committed to there being two non-equivalent conditional operators here. Hence, Two Types of Conditionals.
- He seeks a “Y-shaped analysis” of the two types of conditionals – one that identifies what they have in common, and then bifurcates.
- Later, Bennett will argue that the two conditionals both involve binary operators on propositions, and that they also have very similar logics.
- Davis and Stalnaker offer alternative “Y-shaped analyses” of the two.

- Gibbard denies a “Y-shaped analysis” can be given because the two types of conditionals differ so much (despite having such strong logical similarities, which he writes off as “little more than a coincidence”).
- Stalnaker has compelling criticisms of Gibbard’s view, which Bennett will discuss approvingly later on in the text.
- Chapters 2–9 are about the Did–Did type conditionals (Part One), and chapters 10–21 are about the Had–Would type (Part Two).
- The project Bennett embarks on is as follows:
  1. Develop criteria for sorting conditionals into two groups.
  2. Sort them on the basis of those criteria.
  3. Analyse the two sorts of conditionals.
- But, (2) cannot merely look back at (1) – it must also look ahead to (3).
- Process: start with what we hopefully take to be paradigm members of the two classes, get analytic ideas about how they work, and then find out how far each analysis extends – *i.e.*, which other conditionals it fits.

- Bennett begins with the (superficial) did–did/had–would classification as a rough guide. The opening slogan is something like:

In every conditional of one group, and in no conditional of the other, the sentence expressing the consequent has ‘would’ as the auxiliary of its main verb.
- Note: the ‘had’ in the antecedent has dropped out. Sometimes it is ‘were’ instead, and sometimes neither appears, as in ‘If the Palestinians declared statehood now, the Israelis would retaliate.’
- What seems to be crucial is the “would” in the expression of the consequent. “This is not purely verbal, as it requires recognizing an operator on two propositions, the antecedent and consequent.”
- Of course, this is merely a “gesture toward demarcation”. Anomalies:
  - Desires: “If you will come with me, I would like to go for a swim.”
  - Past-futures: “If he was jauntily setting off for Mexico intending to spy on Poncho Villa, then he would die in the next two months.”

## Bennett Chapter 1.6: The Relocation Thesis [1.5 skipped]

- Some deny that ‘would’ helps to draw the principal (initial) demarcation. For instance, some are relocators, who place Does–Will conditionals in the “subjunctive” camp and not the “indicative” camp:

Does–Will: If you swim in the sea today, your cold will get worse.

- Bennett used to be a relocater. Why? Two arguments. Here’s one:
  1. Suppose I am right when I tell you (Does–Will). And, Suppose you do not swim in the sea today, and that tomorrow I will tell you:

Had–Would: If you had swum in the sea yesterday, your cold would have got worse.

It seems that Does–Will is acceptable at the earlier time if and only if Had–Would is true at the later time. They seem to stand or fall together. So, perhaps they are two wordings for the same conditional, differing only in tense, in which case the Does–Will belongs with the subjunctives, despite its not containing ‘would’.

## Bennett Chapter 1.7: Independent Conditionals [1.8 skipped]

- Some conditionals are s.t. their consequents “are reachable from their antecedents only with help from unstated particular matters of fact”:
  1. If the river were to rise another two feet, the subway system would be flooded.
- On the other hand, one can get from the antecedent to the consequent of some conditionals without input from any matters of particular fact:
  2. If the river were to rise another 2 feet, it would be 2 feet higher than it is now.
- Bennett calls conditionals like (2) *independent*, and (1) dependent.
- Kinds of independent conditionals: logical – like (2), causal, like (3):
  3. If that particle had been 2 light years away last month it wouldn't be here now.moral, like “If she had tortured a child, she'd have acted immorally”.
- Bennett ignores independent conditionals in this book. He thinks dependent conditionals are the only interesting ones *qua conditional*, as independent conditionals can be replaced by non-conditionals.