

Phil 290: Conditionals and Conditional Attitudes

Berkeley, Fall 2020, M12-2pm. Syllabus 1.1

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Zoom office hour (just for this seminar): Tuesday 11-12

Course abstract

A graduate seminar on the meaning of conditionals, with an emphasis on their interactions with attitude verbs. There are a number of puzzles about what it is think conditional thoughts, or have conditional knowledge; we'll get into them by thinking about the corresponding language. We'll spend relatively more time on indicative conditionals, though we'll at least touch on counterfactuals. We will start out with some classic papers, but most of the seminar will engage work from the past decade or so in semantics, pragmatics, and formal epistemology.

Prerequisites

You should be a graduate student in philosophy or linguistics. It would help to be comfortable with formal semantic ideas.

Readings

All of the readings for the course will appear on bCourses. We'll read a lot of Stalnaker's book *Context*, so that might be worth getting a copy of.

Course requirements and grading

Here what to do if taking the course for credit:

1. **Post comments.** (25%) We will make use of the "discussion" feature of our bCourses site. A thread will open on each reading. Over the course of the semester, you'll be expected to post a minimum of five substantive comments, across five separate readings, in the discussion section of bCourses. These are opportunities to engage the readings with some reasonably well-thought-out question, comment, objection, etc. It should be a solid paragraph or two (or more). These won't be individually graded. Your post on a reading should appear at least 24 hours before the meeting at which we discuss that reading. (So, by Sunday at noon.)
(Auditors are welcome to post, too. As for students taking the course for credit, five posts is just the lower bound; feel free to post more, or even weekly. If you don't find yourself speaking up much in the seminar, this is a good way to get your voice into the conversation.)
2. **Give a 30 min presentation.** (25%) Talk us through one of the assigned readings, or some crucial part of an assigned reading, at the session we're scheduled to discuss it. You should have a handout and/or slides, and you should run the handout/slides by me in advance.
3. **Write a term paper.** (50%) Around 20 pages, on an issue that comes up in the course. This will be due December 15. Please send me an abstract of your paper by December 4. Ideally, come to office hours at some point before that so we can discuss what you're thinking about.

Very tentative schedule

Subject to change! If we get through 2/3 of this, I'll declare victory.

Week 1 (8/31)		Introductory meeting
Week 2 (9/7)		(Labor day, no class)
Week 3 (9/14)		Stalnaker semantics · the indicative/counterfactual divide · context-sensitivity of indicatives Stalnaker (1968) 'A theory of conditionals' Stalnaker (1975) 'Indicative conditionals' Stalnaker (2014) 'Three notions of context' (chapter 1 of <i>Context</i>)
Week 4 (9/21)		interactions: indicatives, attitude verbs, epistemic modals Yalcin (2007) 'Epistemic modals' Stalnaker (2014) 'May, might, if' (chapter 6 of <i>Context</i>)
Week 5 (9/21)		contextualist/pragmatic conceptions of local contexts Stalnaker (2014) 'Context and compositionality' (chapter 4 of <i>Context</i>) Dorr and Hawthorne (2013) 'Embedding epistemic modals'
Week 6 (10/5)		strict but dynamic theories Gillies (2004) 'Epistemic conditionals and conditional epistemics' Gillies (2009) 'On truth-conditions for <i>if</i> (but not quite only <i>if</i>)'
Week 7 (10/12)		CEM and interaction with negation Stalnaker (1981) 'A defense of conditional excluded middle' von Fintel and Iatridou (2002) 'If and when <i>if</i> -clauses can restrict quantifiers'
Week 8 (10/19)		:: take stock ::
Week 9 (10/26)		conditional belief and conditional belief ascription · triviality
Week 10 (11/2)		Gibbard (1981) 'Two recent theories of conditionals' Rothschild (2020) 'What it takes to believe' Khoo and Mandelkern (2019) 'Triviality results and the relationship between logical and natural languages'
Week 11 (11/9)		iffy knowledge
Week 12 (11/16)		Stalnaker (2014) 'Disagreement and Projection' (chapter 7 of <i>Context</i>) Moss (2018) 'Factivity' (chapter 6 of <i>Probabilistic Knowledge</i>) Perl (forthcoming) 'How to outfox Sly Pete'
Week 13 (11/23)		attitudes within conditionals
Week 14 (11/30)		Jerzak (2019) 'Two ways to want?' Blumberg and Holguín (2019) 'Embedded attitudes'