

Philosophy 20724

Counterfactuals

Autumn 2016

TR 1:30-2:50

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Office: Stuart 231-D

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Counterfactual (or subjunctive) conditionals play a prominent role in everyday discourse and reasoning as well as in many proposed analyses of key philosophical concepts such as causation and dispositional features. This course will provide a general introduction to the most widely discussed proposals for how to analyze counterfactual conditional claims, such as “If Oswald had not shot Kennedy, then someone else would have.” We will focus on the standard possible worlds semantics for counterfactuals from Lewis and Stalnaker, but also examine alternative attempts to analyze counterfactuals in terms of various epistemic and causal notions. Throughout, we will try to arrive at a better understanding of the formal criteria that any successful theory of conditionals must fulfill, and relate these criteria to what is philosophically at stake in the analysis of natural language more generally.

BOOKS

The following text is required for the course:

— Lewis, *Counterfactuals*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1973)

A new edition of the book was published in 2001 by Wiley-Blackwell and is available for purchase at the Seminary Coop Bookstore (5751 S Woodlawn Avenue).

The following book offers a very useful introduction to the philosophical literature on counterfactuals and conditionals more generally:

— Bennett, *A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals*, New York: Oxford University Press (2003)

All of the above books as well as some other useful material are on reserve at Regenstein.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are required to write two short paper assignments (4-5 pages each) and one final paper (7-8 pages). The first two papers are due in class on the assigned day; the final paper is due by 5pm on the assigned day in Professor Willer’s mailbox in Stuart 202.

First paper	due October 18 th	worth 20%
Second paper	due November 15 rd	worth 30%
Final Paper	due December 6 th	worth 35%

In addition, there will be short homework assignments (worth 15 % total).

Paper topics will be uploaded to the Chalk site in advance of the due dates. Students may, if they wish, design their own paper topics after consultation with the instructor. Late papers will be docked a grade per day (e.g., B+ to B) unless you have received approval ahead of time (late homeworks will be docked 5 points per day late). There will be no final exam.

Attendance of lectures and discussion sections is expected. Class participation will play a decisive role in determining the final grade of borderline cases.

ROADMAP

The following schedule provides an overview over the topics that we will address during this semester as well as the assigned readings. Additional recommended readings will be announced in class. Readings may change as the semester goes on. Updated versions of this syllabus will be posted on Chalk as changes are made.

Date	Topic	Readings
Week 1	The Problem of Counterfactuals	Goodman, "The Problem of Counterfactuals"
Week 2	The Support Theory	Chisholm, "The Contrary-to-Fact Conditional" Chisholm "Law Statements and Counterfactual Inference"
Week 3	Stalnaker on Counterfactuals	Stalnaker, "A Theory of Conditionals"
Week 4	Lewis on Counterfactuals I	Lewis, <i>Counterfactuals</i> , §1
Week 5	Lewis on Counterfactuals II	Lewis, <i>Counterfactuals</i> , §2, §4
Week 6	Comparisons	Lewis, <i>Counterfactuals</i> , §3 Stalnaker, "A Defense of Excluded Middle"
Week 7	Objections and Replies	Fine, "Critical Notice" Bennett, "Counterfactuals and Possible Worlds" Lewis, "Possible-Worlds Semantics for Counterfactual Logics: A Rejoinder" Lewis, "Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow"
Week 8	Kratzer on Counterfactuals	Kratzer, "Partition and Revision: The Semantics of Counterfactuals"
Week 9	The Suppositional View	Edgington, "Counterfactuals and the Benefit of Hindsight"
Week 10	Conclusion & Outlook	(no reading)