

Conditionals

A unified treatment of conditionals based on epistemological principles rather than the semantical principles in vogue over recent decades. This book by distinguished philosopher Nicholas Rescher seeks to clarify the idea of what a conditional says by elucidating the information that is normally transmitted by its utterance. The result is a unified treatment of conditionals based on epistemological principles rather than the semantical principles in vogue over recent decades. This approach, argues Rescher, makes it easier to understand how conditionals actually function in our thought and discourse. In its concern with what language theorists call pragmatics—the study of the norms and principles governing our use of language in conveying information—Conditionals steps beyond the limits of logic as traditionally understood and moves into the realm claimed by theorists of artificial intelligence as they try to simulate our actual information-processing practices. The book's treatment of counterfactuals essentially revives an epistemological approach proposed by F. P. Ramsey in the 1920s and developed by Rescher himself in the 1960s but since overshadowed by the now-dominant possible-worlds approach. Rescher argues that the increasingly evident liabilities of the possible-worlds strategy make a reappraisal of the older style of analysis both timely and desirable. As the book makes clear, an epistemological approach demonstrates that counterfactual reasoning, unlike inductive inference, is not a matter of abstract reasoning alone but one of good judgment and common sense.

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