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Conditionals (MIT Press)



Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

Nicholas Rescher is University Professor of Philosophy and Chairman of the Center for Philosophy

of Science at the University of Pittsburgh. In the course of a long and distinguished academic career, he has published more than three hundred articles in scholarly journals, has contributed to many encyclopedias and reference works, and has written some hundred books in various areas of philosophy, including epistemology, metaphysics, value theory and social philosophy, logic, the philosophy of science, and the history of philosophy.

Pros* The selection of topics covered is fantastic.* The author knows extremely well his field. (NR is a world-class philosopher!)* The treatment of counterfactuals is extensive and illuminating.* The physical quality of the book is great
Cons* Book has no index!* The examples have the same font as the main text, so sometimes you don't realize that, you're now reading an example! (They typed it in LaTeX and took no advantages from it????!!)* Chapters 1 and 2 are trivially simple. I believe that they could be removed/skipped without any loss.* The nomenclature isn't defined explicitly. A table with all symbolgy used might be very helpful.* One gets the impression that some portions of the book were prepared for some class, and just pasted in the book without smoothing.

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