

Preface

The present book seeks to clarify the idea of what a conditional says by way of elucidating the information that is normally transmitted by its utterance. It was projected in March of 2001, drafted over the rest of that year, and polished during the next. Though a part of it—specifically that dealing with counterfactuals—goes back to ideas developed over many years, its treatment of conditionals in general represents a newly devised uniform approach to conditionals at large through their across-the-board reduction to logico-conceptual entailment (\vdash). As a result, what we have here is a unified treatment of conditionals based on epistemological principles rather than upon the semantical principles that have been in vogue over recent decades. As the book's deliberations will make manifest, such an approach makes it easier to understand how conditionals actually function in our thought and discourse.

As regards the book's treatment of counterfactuals, it should be stressed that the present treatment is in essence a revival of an epistemic approach adumbrated by F. P. Ramsey in the 1920s and developed by myself in the early 1960s. It was subsequently overshadowed by the popularity of a possible worlds approach incorporated by a 1968 paper by Robert Stalnaker. However, the liabilities of the semantical possible worlds strategy have become increasingly clear over the intervening years and the time now seems ripe to reappraise the promise and utility of this older epistemological and pragmatic mode of analysis.

I am grateful to Alex Pruss and Samuel Wheeler III for many constructive comments on an early version of the book, and I also want to acknowledge the excellent work of Estelle Burris in preparing the typescript.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
December 2002