

The Conditionals of Deliberation

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1. My Thesis: The Conditionals of Deliberation Are Indicatives
2. Examples of Conditionals in Deliberation, Divine and Human
3. Straightforward Vs. “Were”d-Up Future-Directed Conditionals
4. A Preliminary Look at the Relation between Straightforward and “Were”d-Up FDCs
5. Straightforward FDCs are Indicatives: Assertability Conditions
6. Straightforward FDCs are Indicatives: The Paradox of Indicative Conditionals
7. Sly Pete and the Problem of Bad Advice
8. Sly Pete and the Problem of Conflicting Advice
9. The Solution to the Problems: Deliberationally Useless Conditionals
10. When FDCs Are Deliberationally Useless: Dependence on Backtracking Grounds
11. Toward an Account of the Relation between Straightforward and “Were”d-Up FDCs: The Standard Position
12. A New Account of the Relation between the Two Types of FDCs: “Were”d-Up FDCs as Souped-Up Indicatives
13. Into the Swamp!

The Conditionals of Deliberation¹

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1. My Thesis: The Conditionals of Deliberation Are Indicatives

Everyone knows that the conditionals of deliberation are counterfactuals, right? Here, for example, is a very typical statement, by Allan Gibbard and William L. Harper, as they set up a paper, before we're supposed to have reached any controversial territory:

We begin with a rough theory of rational decision-making. In the first place, rational decision-making involves conditional propositions: when a person weighs a major decision, it is rational for him to ask, for each act he considers, what would happen if he performed that act. It is rational, then, for him to consider propositions of the form 'If I were to do a, then c would happen'. Such a proposition we shall call a counterfactual.²

That's from more than 28 years ago, but the widespread assumption it expresses remains in force today: The conditionals of deliberation are counterfactuals.³

¹ The ideas expressed in this paper, or at least ancestors of them, were tried out in talks I gave to philosophy departments at the University of Michigan; the University of Arizona; Massachusetts Institute of Technology; the University of Texas, Austin; the University of Glasgow; the University of Dundee; and Princeton University; and also at the 2006 Philosophy of Religion conference at the University of Missouri, Columbia. I thank the audiences at these talks for some very helpful discussion. Unfortunately, I've sat on this paper for far too long, and consequently most of those talks are too long ago for me to securely recall which individuals made particularly helpful comments.

² "Counterfactuals and Two Kinds of Expected Utility," in W.L. Harper, R. Stalnaker, and G. Pearce, ed., *Ifs* (D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980): pp. 153-190; p. 153.

³ Given only the passage I quote, Gibbard and Harper can be read there as simply stipulating that they will use "counterfactual" to label whatever class of conditionals those of the form "If I were to a, then c would happen" happen to fall in. In that case, since I agree conditionals of that form are conditionals of deliberation, I would agree that "counterfactuals" (so understood) can be conditionals of deliberation. But it's clear that in calling these conditionals "counterfactuals," Gibbard and Harper mean to be grouping them in with other conditionals that go by

Going against all that, my subversive thesis is that the conditionals of deliberation are on the other side of the great divide between the types of conditionals: they are indicative conditionals!

By “conditionals of deliberation,” I mean conditionals that play the role in deliberation that Gibbard and Harper describe above. We’ll look at some examples of conditionals playing that role in the following section.

But, first, the other matter that must be explained to understand my thesis is what’s meant by “indicative conditionals.” For our purposes (as for many philosophical purposes), the best way to use the classificatory scheme of “indicative” conditionals, on the one hand, versus “subjunctive” or “counterfactual” conditionals, on the other, is by reference to suitable paradigm examples of each. For that purpose, our paradigms will be E.W. Adams’s famous pair:

(A) If Oswald didn’t shoot Kennedy, someone else did

(B) If Oswald hadn’t shot Kennedy, someone else would have

We can all sense the marked difference in meaning between these two. (Which is shown by the fact that those who think that Oswald was acting alone, with no back-up, will typically accept (A) but reject (B).) (A) will serve as our paradigm “indicative” conditional; (B) as our paradigm “subjunctive.” To call a conditional “indicative” is to say that its meaning is such that it should be grouped with (A) for semantic treatment. To call a conditional “subjunctive” or “counterfactual” is to say its meaning is such as to be grouped with (B). Though (A) and (B) are our official paradigms, other conditionals are clearly similar enough to these paradigms in the relevant respects to be clearly subjunctive or indicative conditionals in our sense; I will that such a conditional is a “paradigmatic” subjunctive or indicative conditional, as the case may be.

One might naturally think that the way to test my thesis would be to look at the meaning of indicative conditionals, and then determine whether conditionals with such a meaning are or could be useful in the requisite way in deliberation. However, as wise students of indicative

that name – like the paradigmatic counterfactual, (B), that we’re about to encounter. I will argue that they are wrong to think that it’s conditionals semantically like (B) that are the conditionals of deliberation.

conditionals will tell you, we're in no position to follow that course, for the matter of the meaning of indicative conditionals is about as controversial as philosophical issues get.⁴

So we will instead follow the more promising strategy of looking at particular examples. Some conditionals are quite clearly useful in deliberation in the way in question, and we don't need a settled view on their semantics to discern that. And while all theories as to the truth-conditions, or lack thereof, of indicative conditionals are extremely controversial, paradigmatic indicative conditionals display certain types of "behavior" closely connected with their meaning (and which behavior forms some of the data which theories about their meaning try to explain), and by seeing that conditionals useful in deliberation display the same characteristic "behavior," we can build a good case that they should be grouped with the indicatives for semantic treatment.

2. Examples of Conditionals in Deliberation, Divine and Human

As promised, we now look at some examples of conditionals at work in contexts of deliberation. We start with an example from philosophy of religion — in fact, from one of the hottest topics in current analytic philosophy of religion, the issue of whether God possesses "middle knowledge."

So: Suppose you are God, and you want to create a primo world. After creating lots of great stuff, you discern in your infinite wisdom that what your world really needs, to top it all off, is a free creature performing just one good action with libertarian freedom. (Of course, it's more realistic to suppose that if one libertarian free action is good, then a really primo world would have many such actions, but we'll keep the issue simple by supposing that you desire only one such good action.) So you decide to create such a creature — let's call her Eve — and put her in one of the exactly right possible situations (we'll call this situation S1) where she's free to choose between two courses of action, one good and one bad, and where her performing the good action is exactly what's needed for the perfect completion of your world. If she performs the bad action, however, that ruins everything: You could have had a better world by not having any free creatures at all than you get with Eve messing up. Since Eve must exercise libertarian freedom for you to get the primo world you want, you cannot cause her to do the right action, nor

⁴ This will be discussed in section 13, below.

can you set off a series of causes that will causally determine her to do the right thing, since either of these two courses of action are inconsistent with Eve's exercising libertarian freedom. What's a God to do? Is there any way of getting the primo world you desire without taking any real risk that everything will get messed up?

Perhaps you can use your knowledge, your Divine omniscience, to avoid any real risk. It's fairly widely agreed that you cannot here utilize any simple foreknowledge you might have of such non-conditional propositions as Eve will sin (in S1). For suppose that Eve in fact will sin in S1, and you foreknow this. The supposition that you use this foreknowledge to avoid the trouble your world is headed for is itself headed for trouble. For if you then decide to put Eve in some other situation, say S2, where she may fare better, or to put some other, more favorably disposed, possible free creature into S1, or if you decide to skip the whole free creature idea and make do with a pretty good, though not primo, completely deterministic world, then, though it looks as if you've thereby avoided the trouble, it also looks like you didn't after all know that Eve would sin, since it turns out not to be true that Eve sins, and you cannot have known what wasn't true.

So, as it seems to most who study the issue, the knowledge that God at least arguably might have that could be used to avoid any real dice-throwing risks in an indeterministic world is not simple foreknowledge of such propositions as Eve will sin in S1, but is rather "middle knowledge" of certain conditionals. But which conditionals? Ignoring here how the participants in the middle knowledge debate would themselves respond,⁵ here is the natural answer to this

⁵ Strangely, the ur-examples put forward as potential objects of God's middle knowledge are Alvin Plantinga's
If Curley had been offered \$20,000, he would have accepted the bribe (Plantinga, The Nature of Necessity
(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 174)

and Robert Adams's

If President Kennedy had not been shot, he would have bombed North Viet Nam. (Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," American Philosophical Quarterly 14 (1977): 109-117; p. 109)
These seem strange examples because middle knowledge is clearly assumed also to be knowledge that would help God to exercise a kind of providential control over an indeterministic world which we'll here just cryptically call "Molinistic control," yet these conditionals are past-directed sentences that would be in place only after it was too late to control the relevant events: They appear to be useless examples of "Monday morning quarterbacking," as E.W. Adams aptly pointed out about similar past-directed conditionals, back in the days when quarterbacks at least sometimes called their own plays (Adams, The Logic of Conditionals (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1975), p. 133). Presumably, those involved in the middle knowledge debate thought that these ur-examples were somehow past tense versions of future-directed conditionals (perhaps the likes of our (C) and (D), but more likely conditionals like (Cw), which we'll encounter a bit later in this paper) such that the past-directed conditionals are true (and known to God) after the time the antecedent would have occurred if and only if the corresponding future-directed conditionals are true (and known to God) before the time of the antecedent. But since it is highly uncertain that any such relation

question: What would really help you in your Divine predicament is knowledge of something like

(C) If I put Eve into situation S1, she will sin,

or, less personally,

(D) If Eve is put into situation S1, she will sin.

Suppose you know those conditionals. Then you'll know not to put Eve into S1, and the supposition that you so use this "middle knowledge" to avoid trouble does not itself lead to the trouble that we hit when we assumed you used simple foreknowledge to the same effect. For if there is some other situation S2 that is such that you foresee that Eve will do the right thing if she's put into S2, and you therefore put her into S2 rather than S1 (or if you create some other possible free creature, or none at all), and you thereby avoid trouble, we can still consistently claim that you knew (C) and (D). If, on the other hand, what you know (with your usual divine certainty) is the happier complement⁶ of (C),

really holds, the question of whether God could have middle knowledge splits into two separate questions that those involved in the debates have wrongly thought to amount to the same thing:

1. Are the past directed counterfactuals that are put forward as the potential objects of middle knowledge true and known to God?
2. Are the conditionals the knowledge of which would enable God to exercise "Molinistic control" over an indeterminist world true and known to God?

The distinction between these two questions is particularly noticeable to me, since I give them different answers: Yes, those past-directed counterfactuals are often true and known to God – though this gets a bit complicated, due to the fact that the meaning of these counterfactuals is context-dependent and their meaning in context is not always such that either a "counter-factual of freedom" or its complement is always true. Still, it is often the case that one of these counterfactuals of freedom expresses a proposition that is true, and God can know that that proposition is true. But no, the conditionals the knowledge of which would enable God to exercise "Molinistic control" (FDCs of the types we'll be discussing in this paper) are not true and could not be known by God. Veterans of (both sides of) the Middle Knowledge Wars inform me that, given those answers, I'm best classified as being against middle knowledge. That seems right to me, since question 2, which I answer negatively, seems the one most important to the middle knowledge debate.

⁶ I will call (A) and (Ac), pairs of conditionals sharing the same antecedent but having opposite consequents -- conditionals of the forms $A \rightarrow C$ and $A \rightarrow \sim C$ -- "complements" of one another. In so doing, I am not assuming that they are contradictories of one another — that exactly one of them must be true. Nor am I even assuming that they are inconsistent — that at most one of them can be true. (Arguably, in some cases of indicative conditionals, both members of a pair of "complements" can be true.)

(Cc) If I put Eve into S1, she will not sin,

and (D)'s complement, then you know that you are free and clear to put Eve into S1, without worrying that she will mess everything up. Of course, in situations where the agent acts with libertarian freedom, it is very controversial whether even omniscient God can have knowledge of the relevant conditionals – indeed, that just is the hot controversy over whether God has “middle knowledge.”⁷ But at least these seem to be the conditionals that it would be helpful for you, as God, to know.

Like God, we lesser agents also use conditionals in deciding which courses of action to pursue. Indeed, it often is useful for us to know conditionals about what people will freely do if we do something:

(E) If I offer Eve \$5,000 for her car, she will accept.

Of course, not being God, Divinely Certain knowledge is certainly not in the cards for us (whether or not God might have it). Maybe even knowledge simpliciter is unattainable. Still, such a conditional seems like the kind of thing it would be helpful to know, and, failing that, to have beliefs about that are very likely to be correct. And such beliefs, whether or not they amount to knowledge, seem to actually guide our action: The reason (or at least part of the reason) why I might offer Eve \$5,000 for her car is that I believe that, or believe it is probable that, if I offer her that amount, she will accept. And, of course, beliefs about what others will freely do in various situations form only one kind — and perhaps a particularly problematic kind — of the conditional beliefs that so guide our action. In the relevant situations, it is helpful to know, or have probable beliefs, about the following:

(F) If I try to drive to work without first filling up the tank, I will run out of gas,

(G) If I start walking to my meeting only 5 minutes before it starts, I will be late,

(H) If the house is not painted, it will soon look quite shabby.

⁷ Or at least, this is half of the “middle knowledge” controversy: See note 5, above.

These all seem to be conditionals that would be useful in deliberation: To the extent that I have reason to believe one of them, then insofar as I desire its consequent to be true, I have reason to make (or to try to make, in cases where the truth of the antecedent isn't completely up to me) its antecedent true. And to the extent I believe one of these conditionals and want its consequent not to be true, I have reason to try to avoid the truth of its antecedent. So all these conditionals seem to be conditionals of deliberation, playing the role in deliberation that is described in the Gibbard and Harper quotation at the very opening of this paper.

What's more, all of (C) – (H) at least appear to be indicative conditionals, as I'm informed by many who think they can tell what camp a conditional falls in just by quickly looking at its quasi-grammatical features. More importantly, there are strong reasons for thinking this appearance is correct, and that the meaning of (C) – (H) is such that they should be grouped with (A), as we'll see below in sections 5-6. So it looks like we will soon have good reason to think that at least some conditionals of deliberation are indicatives.

3. Straightforward Vs. “Were”d-Up Future-Directed Conditionals

But wait! Though all of (C)–(H) are quite naturally used in deliberation in the way described by Gibbard and Harper, they are not of the form Gibbard and Harper specified as the conditionals that play that role. Recall that we were told that the conditionals it is rational for us to consider in deliberation are those of the form, “If I were to do a, then c would happen.” Thus, Gibbard and Harper (as well as many others) would probably counsel God to consider this “were”-d up version of (C), rather than (C) itself, in deliberation:

(Cw) If I were to put Eve into situation S1, she would sin.

And the “conditionals of deliberation” we humans should consider in deliberation would be identified not as the likes of (E)-(H) themselves, but rather their “were”-d up counterparts:

(Ew) If I were to offer Eve \$5,000 for her car, she would accept.

(Fw) If I were to try to drive to work without first filling up the tank, I would run out of gas,

(Gw) If I were to start walking to my meeting only 5 minutes before it starts, I would be late,

(Hw) If the house were not to be painted, it would soon look quite shabby.

These “were”-d up conditionals, the darlings of various decision theorists, are also evidently conditionals of deliberation: They can play the relevant role in deliberation. And what with all the “were”s and “would”s inserted in them here and there, they can seem somehow more subjunctive than what we’ll call their “straightforward” cousins, the likes of (C)–(H), and are likely to be classified as counterfactuals by those who think they can tell easily just by looking.

But, in part precisely because they are future-directed, neither of these types of future-directed conditionals (henceforth “FDCs”) – neither the “straightforward” nor the “were’d up” ones – are very similar to either of the paradigms of our two “camps” of conditionals. The paradigmatic indicatives and subjunctives are past-directed. Since none of our FDCs are paradigmatically in either camp, it will take some investigation to decide how to group them. And, despite the names given to the two camps – “indicative” vs. “subjunctive,” as the second camp is often titled – the question of how to classify our various FDCs is not ultimately a question about the “moods” of the verbs they contain, but about whether their meanings are such that they should be grouped with the paradigmatic indicatives (like (A)) or with the paradigmatic subjunctives (like (B)) – or perhaps whether they belong in neither of these two camps.

4. A Preliminary Look at the Relation between Straightforward and “Were”d-Up FDCs

It’s of course possible that the two types of FDCs we’re dealing with belong in different camps. Indeed, as I’ve noted, some who think they understand what “moods” of verbs amount to and think that these moods are a good indicator of which semantic “camp” conditionals belong might quickly classify our straightforward conditionals as indicatives and the “were”d-up conditionals

as subjunctives. Since conditionals of both types are “conditionals of deliberation” as we’re using that phrase, this would mean that conditionals of deliberation can be either indicatives or subjunctives.

However, the relation between one of these straightforward FDCs and the analogous “were”d-up FDC at least doesn’t seem to be much like the relation between (A) and (B). The difference between (A) and (B), as we noted, is quite sharp. By contrast, when we compare, for instance, these two conditionals that we’ve already considered:

(C) If I put Eve into situation S1, she will sin

(Cw) If I were to put Eve into situation S1, she would sin,

there seems to be nothing like the sharp contrast we sense between (A) and (B). As William Lycan has observed, there don’t seem to be “Adams pairs” of future-directed conditionals.⁸ What’s more, in at least many contexts, including many where the speaker is deliberating about whether to put Eve into situation S1, these two, so far from being sharply different, can at least seem to be something like equivalent. It can seem decidedly odd to conjoin an assertion of either with the assertion of the other’s complement:

(C + Cwc) If I put Eve into situation S1, she will sin; but if I were to put her into situation S1, she would not sin

and

(Cw + Cc) If I were to put Eve into situation S1, she would sin; but if I put her into situation S1, she won’t sin

both sound extremely awkward. Indeed, they produce something of the feeling of a contradiction. And it’s even odd to combine an assertion of either of these conditionals with a question about the acceptability of the other. It’s hard to make sense of either of the following,

⁸ See Lycan, Real Conditionals (Oxford UP, 2001), pp. 162-166, for discussion.

except perhaps to understand the speaker as, in the second half of each, thinking twice about and throwing into question what she has just asserted in the first half:

(C + Cw?) If I put Eve into situation S1, she will sin. But would she sin if I were to put her into situation S1?

(Cw + C?) If I were to put Eve into situation S1, she would sin. But will she sin if I put here into situation S1?

When one considers some straightforward FDC and the corresponding “were”d-up FDC, the preliminary hypothesis that can spring to mind as to their relation is that they mean the same thing, but for the fact that the “were”d-up version also somehow signals that its antecedent is improbable, where the type of signaling in question is such that the conditional isn’t rendered false or wrong if the antecedent is not actually improbable. This suggests itself because many of the situations where one would use the “were”d-up FDC are ones where one believes the antecedent is improbable. But when one more carefully considers the range of situations in which one might opt for the “were”d-up version, I think one will be led to postulate a somewhat more general hypothesis, and say instead that the function of “were”-ing an FDC up is to call attention to the possibility that the antecedent is (or will be) false, where one reason one might have for calling attention to the possibility that the antecedent is (or will be) false is that it’s quite likely that it is (or will be) false.

But so far this is all just a preliminary look. As we will see, the differences between a straightforward FDC and its “were”d-up analogue can importantly go beyond what is allowed for in the above paragraph.

What I do want to take from our preliminary look is that there is some close relation between straightforward FDCs and their “were”d-up counterparts. This close relation at least seems to be quite different from the sharp contrast between the likes of (A) and (B). A main desideratum of an account between the relation of these two types of FDCs is that it make sense of this sense of a very close relation between them. Ultimately, in section 12 of this paper, I will propose a hypothesis as to the relation between these two types of FDCs.

5. Straightforward FDCs are Indicatives: Assertability Conditions

Our first item of business, though, is to argue that straightforward FDCs are indicatives – that semantically, they belong with paradigmatic indicatives like (A). This will be done in this and in the following section.

Paradigmatic indicatives like (A) have certain remarkable assertability conditions. A powerful reason for thinking straightforward FDCs are indicatives is that they share these assertability conditions with the likes of (A). The problem is that there are different formulations, all roughly in the same ballpark, about what these assertability conditions for indicatives are. This will complicate our discussion a bit, but I hope that whatever formulation of the assertability conditions of the likes of (A) one prefers, one will be able to see that straightforward FDCs have the same assertability conditions as do the paradigmatic indicatives.

Frank Jackson formulates an account as follows:

The assertibility of an indicative conditional is the conditional probability of its consequent given its antecedent.⁹

In quickly citing supporting evidence for this account, a page later Jackson writes:

Or take a conditional with 0.5 assertibility, say, ‘If I toss this fair coin, it will land heads’; the probability of the coin landing heads given it is tossed is 0.5 also. (Conditionals, p. 12)

⁹ Jackson, Conditionals (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 11. Note that Jackson uses “assertibility” – a slight modification on the usual spelling of “assertability” – as a semi-technical term to denote those aspects of assertability that have to do with whether an assertion is “justified or warranted – in the epistemological sense, not in a purely pragmatic one” (p. 8). Thus, an assertion is assertible in this semi-technical sense where one is in a good enough epistemic position with respect to what one is asserting to be able to assert it. Thus, if I’m in a library where I am not supposed to talk at all, “I’m in a library” isn’t assertable for me (because I’m not allowed to assert anything by the library’s rules), but it is assertible (supposing I am in a good enough epistemic position with respect to my location to assert that). While I don’t employ Jackson’s device to mark it, my own use of the normally-spelled “assertable” and “assertability” is like Jackson’s use of “assertible”/“assertibility.”

Jackson does not argue that the conditional in the above quotation is assertable to degree 0.5. That is just an observation Jackson makes. I find this extremely puzzling. To the extent that I can just intuit the degree to which the conditional is assertable, I would give it a value much lower than 0.5. (Forced to assign a number, I'd go for something like 0.06.) After all, it's a fair coin. So I have no idea which of its two sides it will land on if I toss it. I would have to say that I'm in no position to assert either that it will land heads if I toss it, or that it will land tails if I toss it. And it doesn't seem a close call: Neither conditional seems close to being half-way assertable. It's tempting to say that I'm in no position at all to assert either conditional, which might tempt one to give them both a flat 0 on the assertability scale. But then, I suppose that when I compare Jackson's conditional with "If I toss this fair die, it will land 6," the latter seems even less assertable, suggesting the former shouldn't just be given a 0. Still, 0.5 seems way too high. Indeed, I suspect the only way someone would reach the conclusion that Jackson's conditional has an assertability of 0.5 is if one were already assuming that its assertability was equal to the relevant conditional probability, which we know to be 0.5. (But in that case of course one shouldn't be seeking to support Jackson's hypothesis by citing that assertability value as an observation that matches the theory's prediction.)

So I don't have much sympathy for Jackson's hypothesis. Still, if one is inclined to think that the assertability of paradigmatic indicatives like (A) are equal to the conditional probability of their consequents on their antecedents, then, hopefully, one will also think that the assertability of a straightforward FDC is equal to the conditional probability of its consequent, given its antecedent. And, indeed, Jackson himself thinks so: The example he uses in the above quotation is a straightforward FDC, which he takes to be in the indicative camp, and which he does explicitly say fits his hypothesis.

David Lewis has a closely related, but different and superior, account. Lewis claims that the assertability of an indicative conditional "goes. . . by the conditional subjective probability of the consequent, given the antecedent."¹⁰ Note that this motto could be adopted by Jackson as well; on both theories, the assertability of an indicative conditional "goes by" the relevant conditional probability. But Lewis posits a different, more plausible, connection. He does not claim that the degree to which the conditional is assertable is equal to the conditional probability

¹⁰ Lewis, "Probabilities of Conditionals and Conditional Probability," Philosophical Review 85 (1976): 297-315, at p. 297.

of its consequent on its antecedent. Rather, according to Lewis, an indicative conditional is assertable if the conditional probability of its consequent on its antecedent is very high – sufficiently close to 1.¹¹ Presumably, 0.5 is not sufficiently close to 1. Lewis’s hypothesis is quite plausible, and works for most examples. Note that his hypothesis seems to apply plausibly to our paradigm indicative, (A), but not at all plausibly to our paradigm subjunctive, (B). I trust that those who accept Lewis’s account, and hold that, say, (A), is assertable when the conditional probability of Someone else shot Kennedy given Oswald didn’t shoot Kennedy is sufficiently close to 1, will also find that straightforward FDCs are assertable when the conditional probability of their consequents on their antecedents is sufficiently close to 1.

But while Lewis’s hypothesis seems close to right, and gets most cases right, I think it gets some cases wrong.¹² My own favored account of the assertability conditions of indicative conditionals is a version of the Ramsey test.¹³ I’ll start with a standard description of the Ramsey test, by William Lycan, who is using ‘>’ as his sign for a conditional connective:

¹¹ Lewis writes:

The truthful speaker wants not to assert falsehoods, wherefore he is willing to assert only what he takes to be very probably true. He deems it permissible to assert that A only if P(A) is sufficiently close to 1, where P is the probability function that represents his system of belief at the time. Assertability goes by subjective probability.

At least, it does in most cases. But Ernest Adams has pointed out an apparent exception. In the case of ordinary indicative conditionals, it seems that assertability goes instead by the conditional subjective probability of the consequent, given the antecedent. (“Probabilities of Conditionals and Conditional Probability,” p. 297)

The best way to interpret Lewis here is as holding the thesis I ascribe to him. He ends the first paragraph of the above quotation by writing that in most cases, “Assertability goes by subjective probability,” where this summarizes the observation that propositions are assertable when their probability is sufficiently close to 1. Thus, when in the second paragraph he writes that in cases of indicative conditionals, assertability “goes by” conditional probability, it seems natural to give a similar “sufficiently close to 1” reading of “goes by.”

Both Jackson and Lewis take themselves to be following E.M. Adams in their hypotheses about the assertability conditions of indicative conditionals. But if I’m right that their accounts are significantly different from one another’s, then, unless Adams gives two very different accounts, they are not both following Adams exactly.

¹² I’m thinking primarily of lottery cases here. Note that lottery cases also provide plausible counter-examples to the simple high probability account of non-conditional assertions: No matter how many tickets there are in a standard lottery situation, and so no matter how close to 1 the probability of “I lost” is (suppose the drawing has already taken place, but the speaker hasn’t heard the results of the drawing), “I lost” still seems unassertable. Similarly, no matter how close to 1 is the conditional probability of “If the drawing has been held, I lost,” the speaker seems unable to properly assert that conditional.

¹³ F.P. Ramsey, “General Propositions and Causality,” in R.B. Braithwaite, ed., The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1931); reprinted in D.H. Mellor, ed., Foundations: Essays in Philosophy, Logic, Mathematics, and Economics (London: Humanities Press, 1978).

To evaluate $A > C$, add A hypothetically to your current belief set, make such revisions in your new total belief set as would be rationally required to preserve coherence while retaining A, and see whether C would be a member of the revised set. If it would, the conditional may be asserted; if not, not.¹⁴

While this seems on the right basic track as an account of the assertability conditions of indicative conditionals, it seems too permissive. Much depends here on what it is for a proposition to be in one's "belief set." But on my understanding of that, there seem to be many simple, non-conditional propositions that are in my belief set that I'm in no position to assert, because, though I do believe them, I'm just not well-enough positioned with respect to them to be in a position to flat-out assert them. If that is right, then this standard Ramsey test account of the assertability conditions of indicative conditionals seems too weak. Suppose that the result of adding A hypothetically to my belief set would result in C becoming part of my revised belief set alright, but only as one of the members of that set that I would not be in a position to assert. Then it seems that I'm not in a position to assert the conditional $A > C$.

If we knew what are the conditions of the assertability of regular, non-conditional propositions, that would guide us in working out a Ramsey test account of the assertability of indicative conditionals. The account Lycan articulates above – which can be called a "conditional belief set account" – seems plausible if, but only if, this "simple belief set" account holds of regular, non-conditional assertions: You are in a position to assert that P iff P is in your belief set. If instead, like Lewis, one accepts a probability account of simple assertion, on which one is positioned to assert that P iff P's probability for you is sufficiently close to 1, then you'll want to apply a Ramsey test, not by asking whether C would become part of one's belief set when one adds A to that set, but whether C's probability would then become sufficiently close to 1. Against both of those accounts of simple assertability, I am attracted by the knowledge account of assertion, on which one is positioned to assert what one knows.¹⁵ This suggests a version of the Ramsey test on which we ask whether adding A as a certainty to one's belief set would put one in a position to know that C.

¹⁴ Lycan, Real Conditionals, p. 48.

¹⁵ For discussion and defense, see my "Assertion, Knowledge, and Context," Philosophical Review 111 (2002): 167-203; especially sections 2.1-2.2, pp. 179-183.

But for our current purposes (and for many other purposes as well), we can bypass all this uncertainty about general assertability by simply accepting a “conditional assertability” account of indicative conditionals, on which one is positioned to assert $A \rightarrow C$ iff adding A as a certainty to one’s belief set would put one in a position to assert that C . If it would, then $A \rightarrow C$ is assertable for one; if not, not. We then leave open the further matter of what it takes generally to be in a position to assert some non-conditional proposition. That’s the version of the Ramsey test account that I here advocate. It seems to correctly articulate the assertability conditions of paradigmatic indicative conditionals, like (A), but not of subjunctives, like (B). And it seems just as plausible when applied to straightforward FDCs as it is when applied to paradigmatic indicatives – except for a strange but important sort of counter-example we will encounter and discuss in section 10. Ignoring those counter-examples for now, and supposing we have a way to handle the counter-examples, this impressive match in the assertability conditions of straightforward FDCs and paradigmatic indicative conditionals gives us good reason to think straightforward FDCs are indicatives.

6. Straightforward FDCs are Indicatives: The Paradox of Indicative Conditionals

“Indicative” conditionals like (A) display another remarkable property: They are subject to what Frank Jackson has dubbed¹⁶ the “Paradox of Indicative Conditionals.” While it’s widely recognized that indicatives like (A) have this property, I’m not aware of anyone using the presence of this property as a classifying device, but it seems a good device, and a nice complement to the test we used in the previous section.¹⁷ There we used the conditions under which the sentences in question seem assertable. Another genus of semantic classificatory guides is what inferences involving a sentence are — or at least seem to be — valid. Our new test is of this second variety.

¹⁶ See Jackson, Conditionals, pp. 4-8. I’m at least unaware of anyone using this terminology before Jackson.

¹⁷ I have some qualms about this test, which I will explain in the note 19, below. My problems involve indicatives that don’t clearly pass this test for being an indicative. But while a conditional’s not clearly passing this test isn’t a secure sign that it isn’t an indicative, a conditional’s passing this test still seems to be strong grounds for thinking it is an indicative, and that is what I’m relying on here.

Before Jackson gave it its name, the Paradox of Indicative Conditionals was nicely set up by Robert Stalnaker,¹⁸ using as his example the paradigmatically indicative conditional,

$(\sim I \rightarrow J)$ If the Butler didn't do it, the gardener did.

The Paradox consists in two apparent facts about $(\sim I \rightarrow J)$; it is a remarkable paradox in that these apparent facts are quite simple, and the intuitions that they are indeed facts are each intuitively quite powerful, yet the intuitions cannot both be correct. First, $(\sim I \rightarrow J)$ seems to be entailed by the disjunction,

$(I \vee J)$ Either the butler did it, or the gardener did it.

If someone were to reason,

$(I \vee J \therefore \sim I \rightarrow J)$ Either the butler did it or the gardener did it. Therefore, if the Butler didn't do it, the gardener did,

they would certainly seem to be performing a perfectly valid inference.¹⁹ However, the strong intuition that $(I \vee J \therefore \sim I \rightarrow J)$ is valid clashes with a second strong intuition, namely, that $(\sim I \rightarrow J)$ is not entailed by the opposite of its antecedent,

(I) The butler did it.

¹⁸ See the opening of Stalnaker's "Indicative Conditionals," from A. Kasher, ed., Language in Focus (Reidel, 1976), pp. 179-196; reprinted in Stalnaker, Context and Content (Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 63-77.

¹⁹ For some reason, this clear appearance of validity seems (at least to me) to largely vanish when the first disjunct of the premise contains a negative and the antecedent of the conclusion is positive. In contrast to $(I \vee J \therefore \sim I \rightarrow J)$, which clearly seems valid,

$(\sim I \vee J \therefore I \rightarrow J)$ Either the butler didn't do it or the gardener did it. Therefore, if the Butler did it, the gardener did it

does not produce a clear intuitive appearance of validity, at least to me. And this doesn't seem to be due to a feature of this particular example (like that we tend to assume that only one of these people could have "done it"). In general, $(\sim A \vee C \therefore A \rightarrow C)$, with the negative in the premise seems (at least to me) to fail to produce the clear appearance of validity that $(A \vee C \therefore \sim A \rightarrow C)$, with the negative in the conclusion, produces. Perhaps the way to apply this test to indicatives with positive antecedents, $A \rightarrow C$, is to test whether $\sim A \rightarrow C$ is subject to the Paradox of Indicative Conditionals, and if it is, take that as a sign that both $\sim A \rightarrow C$ and $A \rightarrow C$ are indicatives.

The reasoning,

(I \therefore $\sim I \rightarrow J$) The butler did it. Therefore, if the Butler didn't do it, the gardener did,

so far from being valid, appears to be just crazy. (Only a philosopher, dazed by over-exposure to \supset 's, would actually reason in that way.) But at least one of these strong intuitions — that $(I \vee J \therefore \sim I \rightarrow J)$ is valid or that $(I \therefore \sim I \rightarrow J)$ is invalid — must be wrong. Given that (I) entails $(I \vee J)$, and given the transitivity of entailment, it just can't be that $(\sim I \rightarrow J)$ is entailed by the “weaker” $(I \vee J)$ but fails to be entailed by the “stronger” (I).

This suggests a test: If a conditional, $\sim A \rightarrow C$, has the remarkable property of being subject to the “Paradox of Indicative Conditionals” — that is, if it seems to be entailed by $A \vee C$ but also seems not to be entailed by A — then it should be classified with the indicatives.²⁰ Note that we are using highly suspect intuitions in applying this test, but also that we are not in any way relying on our intuitions being correct. Indeed, whenever a conditional does elicit the two intuitions that by the current test indicate it should be classified with the indicatives, we know that at least one of those intuitions must be wrong.²¹ We are using how inferences involving conditionals strike us as a classifying device, even where we know that at least some of the intuitions are misleading.

Applying this test to the ur-examples of the types of conditionals, we find that the test works here. For the “indicative” (A) is subject to the Paradox, while the “subjunctive” (B) is not. (A) does indeed seem to be entailed by

($K \vee L$) Either Oswald shot Kennedy, or someone else did,

²⁰ See note 19, above, for remarks about testing a conditional with a positive antecedent.

²¹ Well, at least one must be wrong if validity is understood in the usual way — as the impossibility of the premise being true while the conclusion is false. Those who don't think indicative conditionals have truth conditions will often propose other relations between premises and conclusions to stand in for validity, as understood above, and some such relations may be such that they really do hold for $\sim A$ or $C \therefore A \rightarrow C$, but not for $\sim A \therefore A \rightarrow C$. On this way of proceeding, one has to move one's focus from validity/invalidity to some reasonable facsimile thereof, but, in return, one hopes to secure a reasonable division of the sheep from the goats among inferences.

but not by the “stronger”

(K) Oswald shot Kennedy.

That is, the reasoning,

($K \vee L \therefore A$) Either Oswald shot Kennedy, or someone else did. Therefore, if Oswald didn't shoot Kennedy, someone else did,

while not exciting, certainly gives a very strong appearance of being valid. But

($K \therefore A$) Oswald shot Kennedy. Therefore, if Oswald didn't shoot Kennedy, someone else did

intuitively seems about as crazy as does ($I \therefore \sim I \rightarrow J$).

On the other hand, as we would expect, the “subjunctive” conditional (B) is not subject to the paradox, for (B) does not seem to be entailed by ($K \vee L$); the inference,

($K \vee L \therefore B$) Either Oswald shot Kennedy, or someone else did. Therefore, if Oswald hadn't shot Kennedy, someone else would have,

in contrast to ($K \vee L \therefore A$), does not give the strong appearance of being valid, so the subjunctive, (B), is not subject to the Paradox.

When we apply this test to straightforward FDCs, we find that these are subject to the Paradox.

(H) If the house is not painted, it will soon look quite shabby

is subject to the paradox, for

$(M \vee N \therefore H)$ Either the house will be painted, or it will soon look quite shabby.
Therefore, if the house is not painted, it will soon look quite shabby

does seem unexciting but valid,²² while

$(M \therefore H)$ The house will be painted. Therefore, if the house is not painted, it will soon look quite shabby

intuitively seems invalid – to about the extent that $(I \therefore \sim I \rightarrow J)$ and $(K \therefore A)$ seem invalid.

On the basis of our two tests, we have good grounds for thinking straightforward FDCs are indicative conditionals. They should be classified as indicatives because they have the assertability conditions of indicative conditionals, as we saw in the previous section, and because they are subject to the Paradox of Indicative Conditionals, as we've just seen in this section.

That straightforward FDCs are indicatives in turn gives us reason to think that at least some conditionals of deliberation are indicatives, since, as we've already observed, it's clear, at least on the face of it, that straightforward FDCs can play the role in deliberation that would make them, in our terminology, "conditionals of deliberation."

"Were"-d-up FDCs also seem to be conditionals of deliberation. We will soon turn to the issue of how they should be classified.

7. Sly Pete and the Problem of Bad Advice

But first we will look at a couple of reasons some might cite for thinking that straightforward FDCs should not be used in the way in question in deliberation: first, that doing so can issue in bad advice for deliberators; second, that it can lead to conflicting advice. Answering these objections will shore up our case that straightforward FDCs are conditionals of deliberation, and will also help to set up our consideration of how to understand and classify "were"-d-up FDCs.

²² In connection with notes 17 and 19, above, note that

Either the house won't be painted, or it will look much better. Therefore, if the house is painted, it will look much better

does not seem to produce a clear appearance of validity.

Both problems are nicely illustrated by Allan Gibbard's tale of the riverboat gambler, Sly Pete, which we will modify for our current purposes.²³

Sly Pete is playing a new card game called *Risk It!* against Gullible Gus. Largely because your henchmen have been hovering about the game and helping him to cheat, the unscrupulous Pete has already won \$1,000 from Gus as they move into the final round of the game. The final round of this game is quite simple. A special deck of 101 cards, numbered 0-100, is brought out, shuffled, and one card is dealt to each of the two players. After each player gets a chance to view his own card, but not his opponent's, the player who is leading going into the final round — in this case, Pete — gets to decide whether he wants to “play” or “quit.” If he decides to “quit,” then he simply keeps the money he has won before this final round – in this case, \$1,000. If he instead decides to “play,” then his winnings are either doubled or cut to nothing depending on which player holds the higher card: Both players show their card, and if the leader's (Pete's) is the higher card, the leader's winnings are doubled – in this case, to \$2,000. But if the leader decides to play, and his card is the lower one, he walks away with nothing.

In our first version of the story, your henchman Sigmund (the signaler) has seen what card Gus is holding, has signaled to Pete that Gus's card is 83, and has received Pete's return sign confirming that Pete got the message, and knows that Gus is holding 83. Sigmund doesn't know what card Pete is holding, and so doesn't know which player holds the higher card, but because he knows that Pete knows what both cards are, and because he's certain that Pete is not stupid enough to “play” if his card is the lower one, it's clear that Sigmund knows that, and is in a position to report to you that:

(O) If Pete plays, he will win.

²³ Gibbard, “Two Recent Theories of Conditionals,” in W. Harper et al., eds., *Ifs: Conditionals, Beliefs, Decision, Chance, and Time* (D. Reidel, 1980), pp. 211-247; at pp. 226-229, 231-234. In Gibbard's story, Pete is playing Poker. Some readers, however, don't know much about Poker, and rather than explaining that game, I am using a simpler, made-up game, where the relevant rules are easier to explain. Also, in Gibbard's story, your two henchman each hand you a note, and you are unable to tell which note came from which person. I've changed that to accommodate the different philosophical lessons I'm looking to draw from the story.

Such information is helpful to you, because, we may suppose, you are making derivative bets on the results of Pete's game.

But though Sigmund seems to know that, and seems in a position to report to you that, Pete will win if he plays, Pete cannot use this conditional that Sigmund knows in Pete's deliberation about whether or not to play. If Pete overhears Sigmund reporting to you that "If Pete plays, he will win," it would be disastrous for Pete to reason as follows: "Well, Sigmund seems to know that I'll win if I play; so, I should play." And if Pete knows what Sigmund's grounds are for his claim, Pete will know not to reason in that disastrous way, if he's a competent consumer of indicative conditionals. This is a case where using a straightforward FDC as a conditional of deliberation leads to trouble: Where the conditional would constitute bad advice if used in deliberation.

There are other cases where it seems that indicatives constitute bad advice if used as conditionals of deliberation. I won't try to specify this range of cases exactly, but many of the cases are the types of situations which motivate what's known these days as "causal decision theory," a program I'm at least roughly on board with – at least to the extent that I tend to agree with the verdicts about various cases that motivate the program. So, for instance, if Sophie is deciding between going to seminary or joining the army, and knows that (even after she has heard about the connection between her career choice and the likelihood of her having the condition) her choosing to go to seminary would be very strong evidence that she has a certain genetic condition that, if she has it, will almost certainly also result in her dying before the age of 40, she has strong grounds to accept that, very probably,

(P) If I go to seminary, I will die before the age of 40.

Yet, as most can sense, this, plus her desire not to die young, provides her with no good reason to choose against the seminary, for she is either has the genetic condition in question or she doesn't, and her choice of career paths will not affect whether she has the condition.

It is worth mentioning one other example where using indicatives in deliberation seems to indicate a course of action that I at least accept as irrational – though I suppose that judgment is controversial: It can seem that letting indicatives be your guide would lead one to be a one-boxer in Newcomb's problem. As David Lewis writes:

Some think that in (a suitable version of) Newcomb's problem, it is rational to take only one box. These one-boxers think of the situation as a choice between a million and a thousand. They are convinced by indicative conditionals: if I take one box, I will be a millionaire, but if I take both boxes, I will not....

Others, and I for one, think it rational to take both boxes. We two-boxers think that whether the million already awaits us or not, we have no choice between taking it and leaving it. We are convinced by counterfactual conditionals: If I took only one box, I would be poorer by a thousand than I will be after taking both. (We distinguish normal from back-tracking counterfactuals, perhaps as in [Lewis, "Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow, *Noûs* 13 (1979)], and are persuaded only by the former.)²⁴

I am a committed two-boxer, like Lewis. So if, as Lewis seems to suppose, letting indicatives be our guide led to choosing one box in Newcomb's problem, I'd take that as a serious objection to letting indicatives be our guide in deliberation.

8. Sly Pete and the Problem of Conflicting Advice

Consider a second version of the Sly Pete story. Here, it's your henchman Snoopy (the snooper), rather than Sigmund, who is on the scene. Snoopy doesn't know the signals, so, though he was able to see Gus's card — which again is 83 — he was not able to report that to Pete. But Snoopy is able to help you, for he moves around so that he sees Pete's card as well as Gus's. Because Snoopy knows that Pete is holding the lower card — 75, let's say —, he knows that, and is able to report to you that:

(Oc) If Pete plays, he will not win.

Now, consider a third version of the story that combines the first two versions. Pete is indeed holding the lower card, as was specified in version 2, and as was left open in version 1.

²⁴ David Lewis, "Why Ain'cha Rich?", *Noûs* 15 (1981): 377-380, at p. 377.

Sigmund does his signaling and reporting of (O), as in version 1, and leaves the scene, and then Snoopy does his snooping and reporting of (Oc), as in 2, but each is unaware of what the other has done. As in version 1, Sigmund does know that Pete knows what Gus’s card is, and so, since he also knows that Pete won’t be stupid enough to play if his is the lower card, Sigmund seems to be speaking appropriately and truthfully when he reports to you that “If Pete plays, he will win” (O). And as in version 2, Snoopy knows that Pete holds the lower card, and so seems to be speaking appropriately and truthfully when he reports to you that “If Pete plays, he will not win” (Oc). Are we to suppose that both of these reports are true, and that you know both that Pete will win if he plays and also that Pete will not win if he plays? This would appear to be a violation of the “Law” of Conditional Non-Contradiction — the Law that $A \rightarrow C$ and $A \rightarrow \sim C$ can’t both be true.^{25,26}

There are excellent reasons, roughly of the type that Gibbard gives,²⁷ for thinking that both reports are true — or at least that neither is false. Because they are competent speakers using the relevant assertions in an appropriate manner, we shouldn’t charge either Sigmund’s or Snoopy’s claim with falsehood unless there’s some relevant fact which they are getting wrong, or are at least ignorant of, and their mistake about or ignorance of this relevant fact explains why they are making a false assertion. But, as Gibbard points out, neither henchman is making any mistake about any underlying matter. To be sure, each is ignorant about an important fact: Snoopy doesn’t realize that Pete knows what Gus’s card is, and Sigmund doesn’t know that Pete is holding the higher card. But in neither case does this ignorance on the speaker’s part make it plausible to suppose he is making a false claim.

²⁵ In our terminology of note 6, this is a “Law” to the effect that a conditional and its complement cannot both be true. I use scare-quotes because it is very controversial whether this “Law” is actually true of indicative conditionals. Those who hold that indicative conditionals are equivalent to material conditionals, for instance, will deny this “Law.”

²⁶ Why not just say that this would be a violation of the “Law”? Some would try to preserve the Law, while retaining the truth of both reports, by appealing to context-sensitivity: If Pete plays he will win is (somehow) Sigmund-true; If Pete plays he will not win is (somehow) Snoopy-true.

²⁷ See the bottom paragraph on p. 231 of Gibbard, “Two Recent Theories of Conditionals.” Gibbard is arguing for the non-falsehood of slightly different, past-directed indicative conditionals. He relies on the point that neither henchman is making any relevant mistake, but does not go on to explicitly argue, as he could have, and as I will, that the relevant facts of which they’re ignorant are incapable of rendering their statement false. However, I take Gibbard to be at least hinting at this additional argumentative maneuver when he makes sure to point out that not only is it the case that neither henchman has any false beliefs about relevant matters of fact, but that “both may well suspect the whole relevant truth.”

Since for most who hear the story, it's Sigmund's report of (O) that seems the more likely candidate for being false (though perhaps reasonable), let's work this out in his case. Pete in fact holds the lower card, and Sigmund is indeed unaware of that fact. And it seems a very relevant fact: Anyone (including Sigmund) who comes to know this fact will thereby become very reluctant to say what Sigmund says — that Pete will win if he plays. However, while Sigmund doesn't know that Pete holds the lower card, he does recognize the substantial possibility that that's the case. In fact, from Sigmund's point of view, the probability that Pete's card is lower than Gus's is quite high, .83. (Recall that Sigmund knows that Gus holds card 83, but doesn't know which of the remaining 100 cards Pete holds.) So, if this fact — that Pete holds the lower card — were enough to make Sigmund's claim false, then from Sigmund's own point of view, his claim had a very high probability of being false. But a speaker cannot appropriately make a claim that from his own of view is very probably false. But Sigmund does appropriately assert that Pete will win if he plays. So the fact that Pete holds the lower card must not render Sigmund's claim false. But, then, what does? Nothing — there are no good candidates.²⁸

Likewise for Snoopy and his ignorance of the fact that Pete knows what Gus's card is, for we may suppose that Snoopy thinks it quite likely (though not certain) that Pete knows what Gus's card is, and it will remain the case that Snoopy is in a position to assert (Oc). It's controversial whether indicative conditionals are truth-evaluable. But if your henchmen's conditional reports to you are the sort of things that can be true or false, we must conclude that they are both true.²⁹

And if indicative conditionals are not the sort of things that can be true or false, then we must conclude that both of your henchmen's reports have whatever nice property can be assigned to them in lieu of truth — assertable, as opposed to unassertable; assertable and not based on an underlying factual error, as opposed to unassertable or based on underlying error; probable, as opposed to improbable; acceptable, as opposed to unacceptable; or what not.

²⁸ There are of course other facts, very closely related to the fact we're focusing on (that Pete holds the lower card) and to each other, that, like the fact we're focusing on, are not known by Sigmund but are extremely relevant here: (1) Pete holds the losing hand, (2) By the rules of the game, given what cards each player is holding, Pete's winnings should be cut to nothing if he plays, etc. But these are also facts that, like the fact that Pete holds the lower card, Sigmund thinks are quite likely, and so the above argument should apply with equal force to these facts as well.

²⁹ Note that those who hold that indicative conditionals are equivalent to material conditionals will be quite happy with this story, as they reject the Law of Conditional Non-Contradiction anyway. In fact, the reasoning you will perform, if you're clever enough, upon receiving both henchmen's reports, is precisely what a material conditional reading of indicative conditionals would indicate: $A \rightarrow C$; $A \rightarrow \sim C$; therefore, $\sim A$ — Pete will not play!

Thus, indicatives seem not only to give what seems to be bad advice in some cases of deliberation, but can also give conflicting advice: Sigmund’s conditional would lead Pete to play; Snoopy’s conditional would counsel him not to; both claims are true (or at least “true-like”), and certainly neither is false.

Which should Pete heed?

9. The Solution to the Problems: Deliberationally Useless Conditionals

Actually, that’s not at all a hard question to answer: Of course, Pete should listen to Snoopy’s (Oc) and not play. (Oc), not (O), is, we will say, deliberationally useful — it is the one the agent involved should make use of in deliberating over whether to (try to) make the antecedent true as a way of promoting (or resisting) the consequent being made true. (O), by contrast, is deliberationally useless. Under what conditions is a straightforward FDC deliberationally useless? We will address that question in the next section.

But for now, what’s vital for us to observe is that, as normal, competent speakers, we demonstrate an awareness of the fact that some conditionals, while perhaps useful for other purposes, are not deliberationally useful, for we won’t inform a deliberating agent of such conditionals, even though we will so inform others. Note this crucial difference between Sigmund and Snoopy. Based on his knowledge of what both players’ cards are, Snoopy is not only in a position to knowingly inform you of (Oc), but could also assert (Oc) to the deliberating Pete: If Snoopy had a chance to quickly whisper a conditional to Pete as Pete deliberated over whether to play, he could change (Oc) to the second person and tell Pete, “If you play, you won’t win.” Sigmund, on the other hand, while he knows that (O), and is in a position to inform you of (O), cannot inform the deliberating Pete of (O). If Sigmund is a competent speaker, he knows not to tell the deliberating Pete that (O), for he knows that (O) is not deliberationally useful.

In saying that (O) is not “deliberationally useful,” I don’t mean to be saying that it is useless for all deliberations. In our story, (O) may be very useful to you as you decide — deliberate about — which derivative bets to place on Pete’s game, and, in keeping with that, Sigmund feels very well-positioned to inform you of (O). In saying that (O) is not

deliberationally useful, I mean more narrowly that it is not useful for someone involved in deciding whether to (try to) make the antecedent true in order to promote or resist the consequent being made true. (And when I write of a “deliberating agent,” or of someone considering a conditional “in the context of deliberation,” I will be using those phrases narrowly, to designate agents in contexts where they are deliberating about whether to make the antecedent of the relevant conditional true as a way of promoting or resisting the conditional’s consequent being made true. In this narrow, technical usage, Pete is a deliberating agent with respect to the conditionals (O)/(Oc) in our story, while you are not.) Because he can tell that (O) is not in our narrow understanding “deliberationally useful,” Sigmund can’t competently inform Pete, who is a deliberating agent with respect to (O), of (O), but can report (O) to you, who are not a deliberating agent with respect to that conditional.

Some might suspect that the crucial difference between you and Pete in this story that explains why (O) can be told to you, but not to Pete, is that Pete is the agent mentioned in the antecedent, while you are not. But that the real key difference is that Pete is considering whether to (try to) make the antecedent true in order to promote its consequent being made true can be shown by these new variants of our cases. Suppose now that, as you tell Sigmund, you’re considering calling Pete on his cell phone, to tell Pete whether or not to play, and it’s in that connection that you’re wondering whether Pete will win if he plays. (Gullible Gus, true to his name, doesn’t object at all to Pete taking phone calls during the game.) Once you have thereby made it clear that you are in our narrow sense a deliberating agent with respect to (O), then, even though you are still not the agent mentioned in (O), Sigmund can no longer inform you of (O), as we can all sense. On the other hand, suppose that in another new variant of our story, Sigmund doesn’t give Pete any signals, but rather hands Pete a note that says what Gus’s card is. Pete hasn’t read the note and so doesn’t yet know what Gus’s card is, but he does know that he will know Gus’s card, as well as his own, when he has to decide whether to play. Now, Pete, like Sigmund, has grounds sufficient for a (first-person version of) (O) that will enable him to use (O) for certain purposes: He knows he won’t play unless he has the higher card, so he knows that he’ll win if he plays. For instance, suppose Pete’s wife, who has heard that Pete has won \$1,000, but is worrying that he might lose that money in the final round, calls him. Pete can now assure her, by telling her he is certain that he will win if he plays. (After all, Pete is certain that he will

know what Gus's card before he decides whether to play.) So, here's a case where Pete, though he's the agent involved in (O), can assert the deliberationally useless (O). But of course, he can't use it in a context of deliberation, as we are narrowly using that phrase: In deciding whether to play, he can't reason to himself: "Well, as I already know full well, and as I just told my wife, I'll win if I play. So, I should play. I don't even have to read the note!"

The observation that it's a component of linguistic competence not to use a deliberationally useless conditional in the context of deliberation is vital because it provides the solution our problems of bad advice and of conflicting advice. Yes, some straightforward FDCs, like Sigmund's (O) in the story of Sly Pete, are deliberationally useless. How then can straightforward FDCs function as conditionals of deliberation without causing all kinds of trouble? Because competent speakers/users of these conditionals know not to, and won't, assert/use them in contexts of deliberation where they are deliberationally useless. We don't give or use the bad advice in the cases where an FDC constitutes bad advice. And in cases like our third version of the Sly Pete story, where straightforward FDCs would otherwise give conflicting advice, it's only the good advice of the deliberationally useful conditional that we give or take.

When we consider whether Sigmund can assert (O) to the deliberating Pete we have a case in which the assertability of a straightforward FDC diverges from what is predicted by the supposition that such conditionals have the distinctive assertability conditions of indicative conditionals: Even where those assertability conditions are met, a straightforward FDC is unassertable in a context of deliberation where it is deliberationally useless. But it seems clear that this divergence in assertability conditions shouldn't make us take back our judgment that straightforward FDCs are indicatives, for, even supposing that straightforward FDCs belong with the indicatives, it's the reverse of surprising that it would be wrong to assert them to deliberating agents in contexts of deliberation when they are deliberationally useless.

10. When FDCs are Deliberationally Useless: Dependence on Backtracking Grounds

When are FDCs deliberately useless? A consideration of a lot of cases, most of which I won't present in this paper, suggests this answer: FDCs are deliberately useless when they are based on backtracking grounds. We will make do with just three examples, revisiting cases that we've already discussed in section 8, starting with the Sly Pete story.

Compare the kind of grounds Snoopy has for the deliberately useful (Oc) with Sigmund's grounds for the useless (O). The reasoning that supports (Oc) for Snoopy involves his beliefs about how things are at and before the time at which the event reported in the antecedent of (Oc) would occur. He then adds to these beliefs the supposition of the antecedent of the conditional – he supposes that Pete will play – and then reasons forward in time and in the causal order, asking what will happen if the antecedent of the conditional is made true, given how he thinks the world is and will be at times prior to and at the time of the antecedent. (Since he knows Pete holds the lower card, adding the supposition that Pete plays leads to the conclusion that Pete loses.) By contrast, Sigmund's knowledge of (O) is based on backtracking grounds. His reasoning, as it would be naturally expounded, involves something like the “that would be because” locution, which, along with “that will mean that,” are good signs that backtracking reasoning is going on. His reasoning is something like this: “If Pete plays, that will be because he has the higher card; and then, of course, he will win.” Note that Sigmund doesn't actually believe that Pete has the higher card. In fact, from Sigmund's point of view, the probability that Pete has the higher card is quite low – .17. But after he provisionally supposes the antecedent of (O), he reasons backward in the temporal and causal order of things, and conditionally revises his view of what's happening before the time of the antecedent, and then reasons forward in time, using his conditionally revised view of the relevant state of affairs before the time of the antecedent, together with the supposition of the antecedent, to arrive at a conditional view of what will (probably) happen after the time of the antecedent.

Sophie's grounds for (P) – which we can sense is deliberately useless to her – likewise involve this backtracking pattern of reasoning. After provisionally making the supposition that she goes to seminary, she then reaches backward in the causal order to conditionally alter her view of what her genetic condition is (from agnostic to supposing that she

(probably) has the lethal condition), to explain how that antecedent (likely) would become true, and she then conditionally reasons forward to her untimely death.

And the one-boxer's reasoning for

(Q) If I take only one box, I will be a millionaire

at least seems to display that same backtracking pattern – though, again, much is controversial here. At least as it seems to me, his reasoning would have to go something like this: Having provisionally supposed he will take just one box, the one-boxer then reasons backward in the temporal and causal order to conditionally determine how much money was (probably) put in the box given that supposition, and then forward to his winning a fabulous fortune.

In our three cases, Sigmund's (O), Sophie's (P), and the one-boxer's (Q) are based on backtracking reasoning, and in each case the conditional is deliberately useless. (I take this to be pretty clear in all three cases, and uncontroversial in the first two.) What's more, I believe a look at many more cases shows that it's conditionals based on backtracking grounds that are blocked from being used in deliberation (in our narrow sense), though they can be asserted in non-deliberating contexts and can be used for various other purposes. A look at various examples will reveal that the mere presence of backtracking grounds does not render a conditional deliberately useless, so long as those backtracking grounds are not needed for the agent to know the conditional. It's dependence upon, and not the mere presence of, backtracking grounds that render a conditional deliberately useless. To the extent that your knowledge of a conditional depends on backtracking grounds, that conditional is deliberately useless to you. If your knowledge comes from someone informing you of the truth of a conditional, then you have sufficient non-backtracking grounds for the conditional only if your informant does. To the extent that you don't know the nature of your informant's grounds, you don't know whether the conditional can be properly used in deliberation.

There's much that needs to be – but, alas, won't be – worked out here. For instance: Is it just any old dependence on backtracking grounds that renders a conditional deliberately useless, or are the cases in which a conditional is deliberately useless some proper subset of the cases where the speaker's knowledge of it is dependent on backtracking grounds? And, of course, more than I've said here needs to be said about just what constitutes “backtracking

grounds” in the first place. Yes, it’s all a bit messy right now. But it’s worth noting that it doesn’t appear that you can avoid this messiness (or at least messiness very much like that which we face here) by supposing instead that counterfactual conditionals should be our guides. Here, it’s worth revisiting the quotation from Lewis that we looked at toward the end of section 7, above. Recall, in particular, this part:

We two-boxers . . . are convinced by counterfactual conditionals: If I took only one box, I would be poorer by a thousand than I will be after taking both. (We distinguish normal from back-tracking counterfactuals, perhaps as in [Lewis, “Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow, *Noûs* 13 (1979)], and are persuaded only by the former.)

Here, while expressing his conviction that counterfactuals should be our guide, Lewis is quick to point out that it’s only “normal,” as opposed to “back-tracking,” counterfactuals that should so guide us. It looks like, however messy the process might be, backtracking must somehow be excluded, whether you think it’s counterfactuals or indicatives that are the conditionals of deliberation. Now, there are differences between Lewis’s and my proposed exclusion of backtracking in deliberation that are apparent already at this early stage of working out a detailed account. Lewis writes of “back-tracking counterfactuals,” and seems to treat the difference between them and “normal” counterfactuals to be a difference in the meaning or content of the conditionals. (To take or intend a counterfactual as being of the “back-tracking” variety seems for Lewis to be a matter of taking or intending it to be governed by a particular non-standard type of ordering in the closeness of possible worlds.) By contrast, following what seems to me a more promising path, I focus on the grounds for, rather than the meaning of, the conditionals in question, identifying the problematic (for the purposes of deliberation) conditionals to be those the speaker’s or considerer’s possession of which is dependent on a certain type of grounds. But in both cases, some exclusion of backtracking needs to be worked out. I hope the beginnings of an account that I’ve given in this section will be helpful to others who might seek to work this out better.

11. Toward an Account of the Relation between Straightforward and “Were”d-Up FDCs: The Standard Position

Let’s return to our friend Sigmund from the Sly Pete story. Sigmund has signaled to Pete what Gus’s card is, and having received the confirmation signal from Pete, Sigmund knows that Pete knows what card Gus holds. Knowing that Pete will play only if Pete holds the higher card, in a non-deliberating context, Sigmund informed you, as we recall, that:

(O) If Pete plays, he will win.

Now Sigmund has left the scene, and is thinking things over to himself, or perhaps discussing matters with a friend. (To be able to keep our conditionals future-directed, we will suppose that we’ve not yet reached the time at which Pete is to announce whether he will play: Suppose that, to build suspense, there is mandatory ½-hour waiting period between when the cards are distributed in the final round of the game, and when the leader announces whether he will play, and that Sigmund’s thoughts and conversations that we are now considering take place during the waiting period.) So long as he’s not contemplating intervening in Pete’s decision, Sigmund can think and assert (O), and use it for deriving various conclusions, like, for instance, that Pete will leave the game with at least \$1,000.

But, in this non-deliberational context, does Sigmund similarly accept, and can he assert, the “were”d-up version of (O),

(Ow) If Pete were to play, he would win ?

Making only minor, non-substantial changes (explained in the attached note), here is Gibbard’s own treatment of (O) and (Ow) in Sigmund’s situation:

My informal polls on whether Sigmund accepts (O) have been inconclusive, but most people I have asked think he does. Thus (O) seems to be read as an epistemic conditional, and thus semantically like the future of an indicative rather than a subjunctive conditional. (Ow) is generally treated as a nearness

conditional: it is regarded as unlikely, given the information available to Sigmund, and as true if and only if Pete has a winning hand.³⁰

My own sense, and my own informal polling, match what Gibbard reports here: (Ow) seems wrong for Sigmund, while, as I've already mentioned, (O) seems fine (recalling that it's part of the situation as we're understanding it that Sigmund is not contemplating intervening further in Pete's situation).

Gibbard's response is to place (O) and (Ow) on opposite sides of the great semantic divide among conditionals. This I take it would be the standard way to treat the relation between such conditionals: whatever exactly one says about the meanings of the conditionals in each of the two camps, and whatever label one gives to the two camps, (O) and (Ow) are on opposite sides of the big division.

Going back to our observations in section 4, above, there are a couple of prima facie problems with such a treatment. First, though I agree with Gibbard that (O) seems right and (Ow) wrong for Sigmund, the difference between the two conditionals seems slight and subtle. They seem to mean at least approximately the same thing, which, together with the sense that one seems right and the other wrong here produces a bit of a sense of puzzlement about the situation. (Perhaps this puzzlement is reflected in the non-conclusive nature of Gibbard's polling results.) At any rate, the relation between (O) and (Ow) seems very different from the very sharp contrast we sense between the likes of (A) and (B). This makes it prima facie implausible to

³⁰ Gibbard, "Two Recent Theories of Conditionals," pp. 228-229. At p. 228, Gibbard presents this numbered proposition:

(29) If Pete calls, he'll win,

which is in philosophically important respects like our (O). In the key passage, Gibbard discusses his (29), and also two other sentences, the first of which is just like our (Ow), and the second of which I've omitted. Here is Gibbard's exact wording:

My informal polls on whether Zack accepts (29) have been inconclusive, but most people I have asked think he does. Thus (29) seems to be read as an epistemic conditional, and thus semantically like the future of an indicative rather than a subjunctive conditional.

If Pete were to call, he would win

If Pete called, he would win.

are generally treated as nearness conditionals: they are regarded as unlikely, given the information available to Zack at t_0 , and as true if and only if Pete has a winning hand.

place (O) and (Ow) on opposite sides of the great semantic divide among conditionals, the way (A) and (B) are.

Second, on such a view, which are the conditionals of deliberation? The standard answer to this seems to be that only the subjunctives, like (Ow), are conditionals of deliberation. And it would seem a bit surprising that conditionals from both of these very different camps would play this same role in deliberation. But, as we've observed, straightforward FDCs like (O) often seem quite clearly to play the role in deliberation that would make them conditionals of deliberation.

I present these only as *prima facie* problems. There are possible ways around them. One can hold that the semantics for one or the other, or both, of indicative and subjunctive conditionals are in some way or ways quite flexible, and that when they are flexed in certain ways, the meanings of conditionals from opposite camps can approach each other quite closely in meaning, while their meanings can also be flexed in other ways to produce sharp contrasts. Perhaps there's something about conditionals being future-directed that interacts with the machinery of the semantics of the conditionals involved to pretty consistently produce pairs of conditionals for the opposing camps that are nevertheless quite close to one another in meaning in the case of FDCs, which could explain both the lack of a sense of sharp contrast in pairs of future-directed conditionals and also the appearance (or to some extent, the reality) of straightforward FDCs' usefulness in deliberation: Since in future-directed cases indicative conditionals are somehow close in meaning to the corresponding subjunctives, which latter are conditionals of deliberation, one might not go far wrong in using the indicatives in deliberation. (Such a treatment might appeal to the occasional problems one can encounter in using indicatives in deliberation that we've looked at here for support: Because future-directed indicatives come close in meaning to the real conditionals of deliberation, you'll often do alright following the indicatives, but the problems show that they are only proxies, and you're better off sticking with the real thing.)

I don't find such an attempt to finesse these problems with the standard approach promising, but my purpose is not to conclusively close down such possibilities, but to present an alternative approach which has *prima facie* advantages over the standard treatment, and which I think will in the end provide a better understanding of the relation between straightforward and

“were”d-up FDCs, which, among other things, makes sense of the role both can play in deliberation.

12. A New Account of the Relation between the Two Types of FDCs: “Were”d-Up FDCs as Souped-Up Indicatives

Recall our discussion in section 5 of the assertability conditions of paradigmatic indicative conditionals like (A) and of straightforward FDCs. As you’ll recall, I opted for the “conditional assertability” account of the assertability conditions for paradigmatic ICs, on which one is positioned to assert $A \rightarrow C$ iff adding A, as a certainty, to one’s belief set would put one in a position to assert that C – though if you prefer one the cousins of this account, you can adjust what I’m about to say accordingly. You’ll recall that I then observed that straightforward FDCs have those same assertability conditions – except for a type of counter-example discussed in section 10. But what about “were”d-up FDCs? Checked against most cases, they too seem to have those tell-tale assertability conditions of indicative conditionals – which should strongly tempt us to conclude that they too should be semantically classified with the indicatives.

But the generalization that “were”d-up FDCs have the assertability conditions of indicative conditionals faces new counter-examples in addition to the type of counter-example already discussed for straightforward FDCs. Recall that even where the assertability conditions of indicative conditionals are met, straightforward FDCs go unassertable in contexts of deliberation when they are deliberationally useless. In the case of “were”d-up FDCs, it doesn’t matter whether the context is one of deliberation: Where a “were”d-up FDC is deliberationally useless (where one is relying on backtracking grounds to meet the assertability conditions of indicative conditionals with respect to a “were”d-up FDC), it is wrong to assert that “were”d-up FDC, even if the context is not one of deliberation. We have already considered such a case: Sigmund, having signaled to Pete what Gus’s card was and having received the confirmation sign from Pete, and then having left the scene, is not in a context of deliberation (recalling again that we’re supposing Sigmund is not contemplating intervening further in Pete’s game). Sigmund satisfies the distinctive assertability conditions of indicative conditionals with respect

to (O) and (Ow), but, as I've already agreed with Gibbard, (Ow) seems unassertable for Sigmund in this situation. More generally, where the assertability conditions characteristic of indicative conditionals are met with respect to a "were"-d-up FDC, but backtracking grounds are needed for those conditions to be met (so that conditional is deliberately useless), then that "were"-d-up FDC is unassertable. Otherwise, "were"-d-up FDCs seem to have the assertability conditions of indicative conditionals.

Why would this be? On the standard view, on which "were"-d-up FDCs are subjunctives, but straightforward FDCs are indicatives, it's very surprising that the assertability conditions of these two types of FDCs would be in this way so closely related to each other while these two types are on opposite sides of the great divide between conditionals. (One can imagine how a backer of the standard view might begin to strain to account for this fact, but it seems to me such an attempt would be quite strained indeed.)

What these observations instead suggest, and what I propose, is that "were"-d-up FDCs are souped-up indicative conditionals: they have the same meaning as their straightforward cousins, which we've already argued are indicative conditionals, except that "were"-d-up FDCs have a couple of additional components to their meaning. First, as we briefly discussed back in section 4, it seems that "were"-ing up a conditional can serve the function of calling attention to the possibility that its antecedent is (or will be) false. This, however, doesn't seem to have the status of a warranted assertability condition of "were"-d-up FDCs: If you were to assert a "were"-d-up FDC when there's no good reason to call attention to the possibility of the falsity of its antecedent, this doesn't make your assertion seem wrong or unwarranted. But the second, and more serious, additional component of these conditionals' meaning is a warranted assertability condition: (Whether or not the context is one of deliberation,) one is not in a position to assert a "were"-d-up FDC if it is deliberately useless, or, alternatively, if one is depending on backtracking grounds to meet the assertability conditions of indicative conditionals with respect to it. Thus, in cases of non-deliberation, a "were"-d-up FDC, $A_w \rightarrow C_w$ is unassertable, even where its straightforward FDC counterpart, $A \rightarrow C$, is assertable, if one is relying on backtracking grounds to be in a position to assert $A \rightarrow C$.

This account seems to me just right in capturing the closeness of "were"-d-up FDCs to their corresponding straightforward cousins. (No surprise there: I was led to this account

primarily as a way to capture just that.) Since backtracking grounds are usually not prominent in the situations in which we're evaluating conditionals, the difference between these two types of FDCs is usually unimportant. Where backtracking grounds are indispensable, this account explains why the "were"-d-up FDCs go unassertable, even in contexts on non-deliberation.

Why would we have a device for souping up FDCs in just that way? It seems that the role FDCs play in deliberation (even in our special, narrow use of "deliberation") is one their most important functions. We've observed how it's wrong to assert deliberationally useless straightforward FDCs in contexts of deliberation. But, especially as conditionals are passed as information from one speaker to another, it's easy to lose track of what kind of grounds they are based on, and thus whether they are deliberationally useful. Additionally, it's not always clear to speakers which hearers are deliberating agents (in our narrow sense of that term) with respect to which conditionals. Thus, it does not seem to me at all surprising that our language would develop a device for clearly marking out conditionals as based on the right sorts of grounds to be deliberationally useful.

Finally, while I hope it's clear why, on my views, straightforward and "were"-d-up FDCs can both function as conditionals of deliberation, it's worth quickly noting that the difference I posit between their meanings also makes it unsurprising that the "were"-d-up FDCs would have been the FDCs that philosophers would identify as the conditionals of deliberation: In more clearly and consistently screening out the situations in which conditionals become deliberationally useless, "were"-d-up FDCs are particularly well-suited to use in deliberation.

13. Into the Swamp!

In this paper I have remained neutral about the semantics of indicative conditionals. As I mentioned in section 1, this is largely because that is a controversial matter. I should emphasize that this is no ordinary, run-of-the-mill philosophical controversy. This is a swamp. The main theories of the meanings of these strange creatures are all over the map – indeed, they're about as far apart as accounts of the meanings of bits of natural language can get – with each of these vastly divergent alternatives claiming substantial allegiance. One can gather something of the

nature of this swamp from this very apt closing remark from an Encyclopedia article on “Indicative Conditionals,” written by one of the swamp’s most expert navigators, Frank Jackson:

Warning: almost everything about indicative conditionals is controversial, including whether they are well labelled by the term ‘indicative’, and some even deny the validity of modus ponens!³¹

While not wading through any of the swamp, I’ve argued that FDCs of the two varieties we’ve looked at belong in the swamp, addressed some general worries about things from that swamp playing a certain key role in deliberation, and tried to explain some of the key features of the behavior of our two types of FDCs by taking the behavior of paradigmatic indicatives as a starting point, and understanding the workings of our two types of FDCs as variations on that starting point: Starting with the knowledge that indicative conditionals mean something or other such that they display such-and-such behavior (most notably, that they have certain characteristic assertability conditions), we can best understand our two categories of FDCs as being indicative conditionals with added assertability conditions important to their being able to play a key role in deliberation. That seems the most promising way to explain the behavior of these FDCs – behavior which is in most cases eerily similar to that of paradigmatic indicatives.

Looking forward, the next thing to do would be to enter the swamp, and work out a general account of the meanings of indicative conditionals into which the conclusions of this paper could be smoothly plugged. Of course, much work has already been done on the meaning of indicative conditionals. I’ll close with a couple of brief remarks about the bearing of my conclusions here on that work.

First, of course, if my conclusions here are correct, there’s more for theories of indicative conditionals to account for than is usually thought. In particular, “were”d-up FDCs, though usually classified as subjunctive conditionals, would instead fall in the scope of conditionals covered by a theory of indicative conditionals. But I also place another burden on theories of

³¹ Jackson, “Indicative Conditionals,” in E. Craig, ed., Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (London: Routledge); retrieved February 11, 2007, from <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/X017SECT3>.

indicative conditionals: they must make sense of the use of indicative conditionals in deliberation. (But I have also addressed a couple of the worries one might have about indicatives playing that role that backers of various theories about indicative conditionals can adapt and make use of.) It is tempting to dip just a toe or two into the swamp, and take a quick glance at how this might play out within the contexts of a couple of the leading theories of indicative conditionals, but I find that the topic is too huge and complicated for me to provide a meaningful but compact peek at it here.

Second, if I am right that indicative conditionals are the conditionals of deliberation, that makes indicative conditionals, and the task of understanding them, far more important than they would otherwise seem to be.