Ramsey's counterfactuals

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Abstract

In the literature on conditionals, the name of Frank Ramsey is associated with the so-called Ramsey Test, a procedure that should tell us how to evaluate a conditional. This Ramsey Test is sketched in a footnote in *General Propositions and Causality* (1929), where the notion of "degree of belief" appears. Ramsey has been then considered an advocate of a no-truth-value account of conditionals, where the acceptability of a conditional is determined by the corresponding conditional probability of the consequent given the antecedent. Being counterfactuals out of the game for their zero-probability antecedents, scholars like Stalnaker (1968), Adams (1975), Bennett (2004), and Edgington (1995, 2014) agree that Ramsey covers only indicative conditionals. Contrary to this orthodox interpretation, we show that Ramsey's account of conditionals subsumes counterfactuals. Drawing on Ramsey's *The Meaning of Hypothetical Propositions* (1928) and parts of *General Propositions and Causality* (1929), we present Ramsey's counterfactuals, and we show their strict relation with Ramsey's analysis of general propositions. We conjecture that a rather unified account of conditionals is to be found in Ramsey's work.

Keywords: Frank Ramsey, Ramsey Test, counterfactuals, indicative and subjunctive conditionals

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