

The Future Perfect Conditional of Being: Temporality, Modality, and the Ontology of the Unrealized

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the concept of the future perfect conditional of Being as both a grammatical phenomenon and a metaphysical thesis. We argue that this tense embodies the paradox of human existence: the self as always suspended between actuality and unrealized possibility. Drawing from continental philosophy (Augustine's *distentio animi*, Heidegger's existential temporality, Sartre's nothingness, and Ricoeur's narrative identity) and analytic philosophy (Lewis's modal realism, Kripke's rigid designators, Stalnaker's nearest-world semantics, and Fine's essence beyond modality), we construct a hybrid ontology of conditional existence. The paper proceeds in three movements: (1) analysis of temporality as incompleteness, (2) analysis of counterfactual modality as structural to identity, and (3) synthesis into an ontology of the unrealized. We then engage rival traditions, including Quine's skepticism about modality, Derrida's *différance*, and Deleuze's virtuality, to defend the thesis against objections. Results demonstrate a fundamental convergence between continental and analytic approaches: both traditions reveal that existence is constituted not only by actuality but by unrealized conditional states. The analysis shows that the "would-have-been" functions as both a

phenomenological structure of lived experience and a logical operator in modal semantics, establishing conditionality as an ontological principle rather than merely a grammatical curiosity. Finally, we sketch ethical, theological, and political implications of conditional Being, revealing how responsibility extends beyond actual deeds to encompass foreclosed possibilities, how divine foreknowledge operates through counterfactuals, and how political consciousness is structured by unrealized futures.

Keywords: *temporality, modality, counterfactuals, conditional being, grammar.*

1.0 Introduction

Philosophy has long struggled with the paradoxical relation between *time and Being*. From Parmenides' declaration that "Being is" to Heidegger's re-opening of the question of the meaning of Being, temporality has never been a neutral backdrop but the very horizon of intelligibility. To speak of "*what is*" is always to imply, by contrast, what was and what *could be*. Yet there exists a particular temporal form that resists simple classification: the *future perfect conditional*, expressed in phrases such as "I would have been."

Grammatically, this tense is peculiar. It unites three temporal vectors at once: it *refers backward* to a past condition that failed, *projects forward* to a future that never arrives, and *remains suspended* in conditionality. Unlike the indicative future ("I will be"), which affirms what is to come, or the indicative past ("I was"), which recalls what has been, the future perfect conditional articulates *a future that was lost in advance*. It names not what happened, nor what will happen, but what *would have happened* had the world been otherwise.

This paper proposes that the *future perfect conditional* of Being is more than a linguistic curiosity. It is a *metaphysical insight* encoded in grammar. The tense gives voice to the paradox of existence itself: that human beings are defined not only by what they are, but also by what they *would have been*. The self is haunted by unrealized possibilities; its actuality is never exhaustive of its being.

The argument unfolds in three movements. First, drawing from *continental philosophy*, we show that temporality is essentially incomplete. Augustine, Heidegger, Sartre, and Ricoeur all reveal, in different ways, that existence is structured by absence as much as presence, and that the *would-have-been* belongs to the very texture of human time. Second, engaging with *analytic philosophy*, we examine how counterfactual semantics (Stalnaker, Lewis), modal metaphysics (Kripke), and accounts of essence (Fine) demonstrate that identity itself is constituted by unrealized conditional states. Finally, we attempt a *synthesis*, showing that the *future perfect conditional of Being* bridges the phenomenology of incompleteness with the logic of counterfactuals, revealing conditionality as an ontological structure.

Along the way, we address rival perspectives. From the analytic side, Quine's rejection of modality challenges the coherence of speaking of "possible worlds" at all. From the continental side, Derrida's *différance* and Deleuze's notion of the virtual offer alternative accounts of absence and potentiality. We argue, however, that these critiques not only fail to undermine but in fact reinforce the central claim: that Being is not exhausted by actuality but is defined through its relation to the unrealized.

The implications are far-reaching. Ethically, the future perfect conditional suggests that responsibility extends beyond actual deeds to encompass the modal space of foreclosed possibilities. Theologically, it resonates with debates on divine foreknowledge and counterfactuals of freedom (as in Molinism). Politically, it illuminates the counterfactual hauntings of history: revolutions that would have succeeded, tragedies that would have been avoided. Aesthetically, it underlies the structure of alternate history, *uchronia*, and the imagination of Borges.

The thesis of this paper can therefore be stated simply: *The future perfect conditional of Being reveals that existence is irreducibly conditional, constituted by what it "would have been" as much as by what it is.*

By investigating this thesis through both continental and analytic traditions, we aim to uncover a more comprehensive ontology of the unrealized — an ontology capable

of uniting lived temporality with modal logic, phenomenological absence with possible worlds semantics.

2. The Grammar of Conditional Temporality

2.1 Linguistic Background

Every natural language encodes not only relations of time but also relations of *possibility*. Tense and aspect are not mere technical devices for locating events on a temporal line; they are forms through which human beings experience themselves as temporal beings. Among these forms, the *future perfect conditional* holds a special place: it expresses a future event that depends on a past condition which failed to obtain.

Consider the example: *If I had studied, I would have succeeded.*

Here, the act of studying (past condition) did not occur, and therefore the succeeding (future event) is unrealized. The tense thus encodes *a double negation of actuality*: it refers back to a past that did not happen, and it projects forward to a future that, because of this, never came. The result is a temporal form that speaks in the voice of *absence*.

In formal terms, the structure is triadic:

1. Past counterfactual antecedent (*If p had obtained at t_1 ...*)
2. Future consequent (*...then q would have obtained at $t_2 > t_1$*)
3. Negation of actuality (p did not obtain; thus q did not obtain).

This is not merely grammatical ornament. It is a linguistic trace of the human experience of unrealized possibilities.

2.2 Grammar as a Philosophical Horizon

The philosophical importance of grammar has been recognized since antiquity. For Plato, the structure of language already mirrors the structure of thought. For Wittgenstein, “the limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (*Tractatus*,

5.6). Émile Benveniste, in the twentieth century, emphasized that pronouns and verb tenses reveal the very constitution of subjectivity: the “I” and the “now” are not empirical facts but grammatical positions that disclose the subject’s relation to time and world.

The future perfect conditional therefore functions as a *philosophical marker*: it points toward a dimension of Being that cannot be captured by the present, past, or future alone. It encodes what we might call the unrealized present: the “now” that would have existed but never did. In doing so, grammar does not simply report a thought but opens an ontology — it reveals how human beings are constituted as beings who live also in the space of the non-actual.

2.3 The Temporal Paradox

Philosophically, the paradox of the future perfect conditional can be described as follows:

1. *Futural orientation*: it describes what will (or would) happen.
2. *Retrospective anchoring*: it is dependent on what has (or had) happened.
3. *Conditional suspension*: it asserts neither actuality nor impossibility, but a suspended middle.

This paradox generates a temporality that is not linear but *counterfactual*. Whereas ordinary temporality moves from past → present → future, the conditional perfect moves along a broken line: unrealized past → suspended present → unrealized future.

We might say, borrowing from phenomenology, that the conditional perfect is a mode of *absence-presence*: something appears to consciousness not by being actual but by being conceivable as “what would have been.”

2.4 Toward Ontology

To stop at the linguistic level would be insufficient. If language encodes human experience, then the prevalence of this tense suggests something profound about our mode of existence. We do not live only in what is actual but constantly inhabit the shadows of what “would have been.” The grammar of the conditional perfect is thus the *linguistic crystallization of conditional Being itself*.

The next section develops this insight by turning to continental philosophy, where Augustine, Heidegger, Sartre, and Ricoeur describe the incompleteness of human temporality — a description that resonates directly with the paradox encoded in the conditional perfect.

3. Continental Philosophy: The Incompleteness of Time

If the grammar of the future perfect conditional reveals a paradoxical temporality, continental philosophy provides the conceptual resources to understand its existential significance. From Augustine to Ricoeur, a persistent theme runs through the tradition: *time is incomplete, fractured, and haunted by the unrealized*. The “would-have-been” is not an accidental byproduct of life but a structural feature of human existence.

3.1 Augustine: The Present of the Absent

In *Confessions* XI, Augustine wrestles with the paradox of time: past no longer exists, the future does not yet exist, and the present is but an instant that slips away. His solution is to redefine time not as external reality but as a *distension of the soul* (*distentio animi*). Memory holds the past, attention grasps the present, and expectation anticipates the future.

Yet Augustine’s tripartite model does not exhaust the lived experience of time. For the human being often confronts not only the past, present, and future, but also the *unrealized*: the regret of what never came to be, the anticipation of what was foreclosed. To recall “I would have been...” is to experience a *present of absence*. This unacknowledged fourth mode of time reveals that the soul is not only stretched between past and future but also haunted by what never existed.

The future perfect conditional thus names an Augustinian paradox: time is constituted not only by what occurs, but also by what fails to occur.

3.2 Heidegger: Projection and Thrownness

Heidegger radicalizes Augustine's insight in *Being and Time* (1927). For him, Dasein is essentially temporal, structured by three "ecstases" of time: facticity (past), existence (future projection), and fallenness (present absorption). The key is that Dasein is always *ahead-of-itself*: to be is to project possibilities.

However, this projection is never free-floating. It is conditioned by *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*), the brute facticity into which one is born. Here the future perfect conditional becomes the grammatical mirror of Heidegger's existential structure: what I "would have been" reveals the tension between projection and thrownness. I project myself into possibilities, yet those projections are constrained by conditions I did not choose.

The unrealized "would-have-been" is therefore not an external accident but the very mark of Dasein's finitude: existence is essentially conditional.

3.3 Sartre: Nothingness and Freedom

Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness* (1943), describes consciousness as "a being which is what it is not and is not what it is." Human freedom lies in the fact that we are not determined by essence but must constitute ourselves through projects. Yet this freedom comes at the cost of perpetual *incompleteness*: each choice forecloses other possible selves.

The future perfect conditional is the precise linguistic register of this incompleteness. To say "I would have been a musician" is not merely to state a fact about unrealized possibility; it is to confront the *nothingness* of consciousness — the recognition that my actual self exists only against the backdrop of selves that never were.

Thus, for Sartre, the "would-have-been" belongs not only to language but to ontology: the self is defined as much by its unrealized negations as by its realized affirmations.

3.4 Ricoeur: Narrative Identity and Counterfactual Lives

Paul Ricoeur, in *Time and Narrative* (1983), emphasizes that identity is not a fixed substance but a narrative construction. A life is understood as a story, and stories are built not only from actual events but also from counterfactual alternatives. Ricoeur calls this *emplotment*: the weaving together of disparate events into a coherent whole.

Yet narrative coherence is fragile. To narrate a life is always to leave open the possibility of another story — the path not taken. As Ricoeur notes, human time is marked by “aporia,” the tension between cosmological time (the objective succession of events) and phenomenological time (the lived meaning of events). The future perfect conditional articulates this aporia directly: it narrates the story that “would have been” but never was.

Ricoeur thus reveals that conditionality is woven into the very fabric of identity. Who I am cannot be separated from who I might have been. The self is narratively constituted by both actuality and counterfactuality.

3.5 Synthesis: Conditionality as Existential Structure

From Augustine to Ricoeur, continental philosophy converges on a central insight: *human temporality is incomplete and haunted by unrealized possibilities*. The “would-have-been” is not a secondary experience but a fundamental horizon of existence. The grammar of the future perfect conditional gives voice to this existential truth.

Where Augustine speaks of the distension of the soul, Heidegger of projection and thrownness, Sartre of nothingness, and Ricoeur of narrative identity, each points toward the same conclusion: *Being is conditional*. To exist is not merely to actualize but also to bear the weight of unrealized futures.

We shall now turn to the analytic perspective in order to examine the contribution it offers to this insight.

4. Analytic Philosophy: Counterfactual Semantics

If continental philosophy has illuminated the existential dimension of the “would-have-been,” analytic philosophy has provided a formal apparatus for understanding its logical structure. The development of *modal logic and possible worlds* semantics in the twentieth century offers a precise vocabulary for articulating the very conditionals that grammar and phenomenology expose. The future perfect conditional of Being thus finds in analytic philosophy not only a parallel but a conceptual clarification: existence itself is structured counterfactually.

4.1 Stalnaker: Conditionals and the Nearest World

Robert Stalnaker’s pioneering work in the late 1960s reframed conditionals in terms of possible worlds. A counterfactual of the form “If p had occurred, then q would have occurred” is evaluated not by actual truth but by *hypothetical truth in the nearest possible world where p is true*.

This model captures precisely the logic of the future perfect conditional:

1. “If I had studied (p), I would have succeeded (q).”
2. Evaluate the nearest world where p holds (I studied).
3. In that world, is q true (I succeeded)? If yes, then the counterfactual is true.

Stalnaker thus provides the formal skeleton for what continental thinkers describe phenomenologically. The “would-have-been” is not chaotic; it obeys rules of similarity and proximity between worlds.

4.2 Lewis: Modal Realism and Concrete Worlds

David Lewis radicalizes Stalnaker by claiming that possible worlds are not mere abstractions but concrete realities, as real as our own. The actual world is simply the one we inhabit. A counterfactual is true if in the closest possible world(s) the consequent follows the antecedent.

Applied ontologically, this means that the future perfect conditional of Being is grounded in a vast *pluriverse*. When one says “I would have been a musician,” this is

true if, in the nearest world where the relevant antecedents obtain (practice, training, opportunity), one is in fact a musician.

Lewis's modal realism makes explicit what is implicit in existential accounts: the unrealized is not a fiction but has *ontological weight*. Every "would-have-been" corresponds to a world in which it is actual. The human self is thus situated within a modal space, defined not only by actuality but by a network of neighboring possibilities.

4.3 Kripke: Rigidity and Modal Fragility

Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* (1980) reframes modal logic in terms of *rigid designators*. Proper names refer to the same individual across all possible worlds. However, while names are rigid, the properties of individuals are *contingent*. Socrates is Socrates in every world, but Socrates could have been a carpenter instead of a philosopher.

For identity, this means that the self is *modally fragile*. I remain "myself" across possible worlds, but what I am — my career, relationships, choices — varies radically. The future perfect conditional articulates this fragility: "I would have been X" presupposes a stable self, yet acknowledges radical variability of predicates.

Kripke thus shows that the structure of personal identity is inherently conditional: who I am cannot be reduced to actuality but must be thought across modal variation.

4.4 Fine: Essence Beyond Modality

Kit Fine (1994) challenges the reduction of essence to modality. For Fine, to say that something is essential to an object is not to say that it is true in all possible worlds, but to affirm that it belongs to the *very nature* of the thing, whether or not it is actualized.

This insight is crucial for the ontology of the future perfect conditional. When one says “I would have been compassionate,” this may reveal not merely a contingent possibility but a dimension of essence unrealized due to circumstance. Essence is thus not exhausted by actuality.

The “would-have-been” may belong to the deep structure of identity even if it never manifests in the actual world. In this way, Fine’s view allows us to regard conditional Being not merely as counterfactual but as *essentially constitutive* of the self.

4.5 Synthesis: The Analytic Contribution

Taken together, analytic accounts of counterfactuals, modality, and essence show that:

1. Conditional statements are structured by logical rules (Stalnaker).
2. Possible worlds ground the truth of counterfactuals (Lewis).
3. Identity persists but is modally fragile (Kripke).
4. Essence exceeds actuality and may remain unrealized (Fine).

Thus, the analytic tradition reveals what grammar and phenomenology already intimated: existence is not exhausted by actuality but constituted by a network of *unrealized conditional states*. The future perfect conditional of Being is not only an existential mood but a logical structure of reality.

Now we come to the heart of the paper, where we explicitly synthesize the two traditions into one coherent thesis.

5. Bridging Continental and Analytic

The foregoing analyses may appear, at first glance, to belong to two irreconcilable traditions. The continental tradition emphasizes lived experience, phenomenology, and existential temporality. The analytic tradition, by contrast, emphasizes logical form, semantic rigor, and modal metaphysics. Yet when viewed through the lens of the future perfect conditional of Being, their apparent divergence reveals itself as a

profound *convergence*. Both traditions, in their own idioms, arrive at the same ontological conclusion: *existence is conditional*.

5.1 The Continental Claim: Incompleteness of Existence

From Augustine to Ricoeur, the continental lineage insists that human life is characterized by absence as much as presence. Augustine's *distentio* animi reveals that time is not a self-contained sequence but a stretching toward what is no longer and not yet. Heidegger describes *Dasein* as always ahead-of-itself, projecting into possibilities that may never be realized, while simultaneously thrown into conditions beyond its control. Sartre shows that the self is perpetually defined against the background of what it is not, and Ricoeur demonstrates that narrative identity is incomplete without recognition of alternate trajectories — lives that “would have been.”

In all cases, *incompleteness* is the ontological mark of existence. The “would-have-been” is not peripheral but fundamental.

5.2 The Analytic Claim: Modal Structure of Identity

Analytic philosophy approaches from a different angle. By formalizing counterfactuals, Stalnaker demonstrates that the “would-have-been” has a rational structure governed by nearest-world semantics. Lewis gives this structure ontological heft by positing concrete possible worlds in which such counterfactuals are actualized. Kripke shows that identity is rigid across worlds but that properties are contingent, making the self modally fragile. Fine adds that essence is not reducible to modality, suggesting that certain unrealized possibilities belong to the very nature of an entity.

Here the claim is different in form but equivalent in content: *the modal fabric of reality* includes conditional structures that define what a thing is, even when those structures are not actualized.

5.3 Convergence: Conditional Being

When placed side by side, these two claims reveal a shared ontology:

- *Continental side*: Existence is lived as incomplete, stretched, haunted by the unrealized.
- *Analytic side*: Existence is logically and modally structured by counterfactuals and unrealized essences.

The synthesis is what we may call *Conditional Being*:

To be is not only to be actual, but to be conditional — defined by what one would have been as much as by what one is.

The future perfect conditional thus becomes the hinge where the two traditions meet. It is a phenomenological mood *and* a logical operator, a lived reality *and* a semantic structure.

5.4 Implications of the Bridge

This synthesis carries two key implications:

1. *Ontological Depth of the Unrealized*: The unrealized is not a shadow or fiction but constitutive of Being. My existence is not exhausted by the actuality of what I am but is shaped by the counterfactuals of what I could or would have been.
2. *Cross-Traditional Fertility*: The convergence suggests that the split between continental and analytic philosophy is not absolute. Each tradition articulates, in its own idiom, the same ontological truth. Phenomenology gives voice to the lived sense of incompleteness; modal logic gives form to the structural necessity of conditionality.

In this sense, the future perfect conditional of Being is not only a philosophical thesis but also a *methodological reconciliation*. It demonstrates that what is often perceived as an unbridgeable gap between traditions may be overcome when both are brought into dialogue around a shared existential-ontological insight.

Of course, any such bridging invites objections. From the analytic side, skeptics like Quine challenge the very coherence of modality. From the continental side, thinkers like Derrida and Deleuze offer alternative accounts of absence and potentiality that resist assimilation. The next section turns to these objections, showing that far from undermining Conditional Being, they deepen its significance.

6. Objections and Rival Traditions

No philosophical thesis can stand without facing objections. The claim that existence is essentially conditional — structured by the “would-have-been” — may appear compelling when examined within its own framework, but it must withstand the scrutiny of rival approaches. In what follows, we examine four major lines of critique: Quine’s skepticism toward modality, Derrida’s notion of *différance*, Deleuze’s concept of the virtual, and analytic concerns about the triviality of counterfactuals. Each objection, rather than undermining the thesis of Conditional Being, in fact sharpens and deepens its contours.

6.1 Quine’s Skepticism of Modality

W. V. O. Quine famously resisted the reification of modality. In his essay “Three Grades of Modal Involvement” (1953), Quine argued that talk of possible worlds or counterfactual states leads to ontological inflation and logical confusion. For Quine, the sentence “Aristotle might have been a fisherman” is either *trivially true* (a re-description of Aristotle in logical form) or *meaningless*, since it presupposes an essence beyond empirical identity. His slogan — “To be is to be the value of a variable” — reduces ontology to quantification over actual entities, leaving no room for conditional existence.

Response: Quine’s critique is a powerful reminder that not all uses of modality are legitimate. Yet it does not refute the experiential reality that human beings live counterfactually. One cannot explain regret, responsibility, or narrative identity without appeal to unrealized possibilities. The grammar of natural language itself resists Quine’s restriction: the prevalence of conditional tenses across languages

suggests that counterfactual reference is a basic human capacity. In short, Quine shows that modality is philosophically dangerous, but not that it is dispensable.

6.2 Derrida: *Différance* and the Deferral of Presence

From the continental side, Jacques Derrida critiques any ontology that presupposes a stable presence. In *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida introduces *différance*: the dual movement of differing and deferring by which meaning arises. There is no pure presence of meaning or Being; every presence is haunted by absence, by traces of what it is not.

At first glance, this seems to dissolve the thesis of Conditional Being into a broader deconstruction: the “would-have-been” is simply another instance of deferral.

Response: On the contrary, Derrida’s *différance* can be seen as a linguistic-philosophical confirmation of Conditional Being. The unrealized “would-have-been” is precisely the trace that accompanies every actuality. Rather than undermining the thesis, Derrida radicalizes it: not only is existence conditional, but even presence itself is conditional, deferred, marked by what it is not. The future perfect conditional becomes a grammatical crystallization of *différance*.

6.3 Deleuze: The Virtual as Real but Not Actual

Gilles Deleuze, particularly in *Difference and Repetition* (1968), distinguishes between the *actual* and the *virtual*. The virtual is not a mere possibility or absence but a fully real dimension of Being that does not coincide with actuality. For Deleuze, the virtual is productive, generative, constantly differentiating itself into actual forms.

This might seem at odds with the idea of the “would-have-been,” which carries a connotation of loss or impossibility. Deleuze does not mourn unrealized futures but affirms the creative abundance of the virtual.

Response: Yet the distance is smaller than it appears. Conditional Being can be reinterpreted in Deleuzian terms as the virtual *identity* of the self: the reservoir of potentialities that are constitutive of who one is, regardless of which are actualized.

To say “I would have been” is not merely to lament but to acknowledge the virtuality that grounds actuality. Deleuze thus provides a positive metaphysics of what the continental and analytic traditions describe in more tragic or logical terms.

6.4 Analytic Concerns: The Triviality of Counterfactuals

A different critique arises within the analytic tradition itself. Some philosophers argue that counterfactuals are mere logical fictions: they are useful heuristic tools but add nothing substantive to ontology. On this view, to say “If I had studied, I would have succeeded” is simply shorthand for a conditional embedded in actual laws of nature and facts about the past. No modal space or conditional Being is needed.

Response: This reductionism fails to capture the lived weight of counterfactuals. Human beings do not experience “If I had studied” as a mere logical shorthand but as a meaningful dimension of selfhood, shaping identity, responsibility, and emotion. The existential significance of the “would-have-been” cannot be dismissed as trivial without evacuating much of human life of its intelligibility. In this respect, phenomenology and narrative confirm what logic alone cannot explain.

6.5 Toward a Stronger Thesis

Far from undermining the claim that Being is conditional, these objections deepen its meaning. Quine reminds us to avoid ontological inflation, Derrida shows the structural deferral that underlies presence, Deleuze reframes conditionality as virtual productivity, and analytic reductionism highlights the contrast between logical economy and existential depth.

Together, they refine the central thesis:

Conditional Being is not an optional add-on to ontology but the very structure of existence, simultaneously linguistic, logical, phenomenological, and virtual.

7. Applications

The philosophical claim that Being is conditional might seem abstract. Yet its implications extend into nearly every sphere of human life: ethics, theology, politics,

and aesthetics. In each domain, the future perfect conditional reveals itself not as a grammatical curiosity but as a structuring principle.

7.1 Ethics: Responsibility Beyond the Actual

Ethical theory often presupposes that responsibility pertains only to actual deeds. I am accountable for what I did, not for what I did not do. Yet the logic of the conditional suggests otherwise. To say “I would have acted differently” is not idle; it carries moral weight.

- *Kantian ethics* emphasizes the universality of maxims: what one would have done under a universal law is part of the moral evaluation.
- *Aristotelian virtue ethics* sees character not as discrete acts but as dispositions — capacities that might or might not be actualized. Thus, the “would-have-been” compassionate act still reveals something about who one is.
- *Existentialist ethics* (Sartre, Levinas) underscore responsibility for unrealized possibilities: every choice defines me not only by what I did, but by what I thereby excluded.

Conditional Being therefore demands an *expanded notion of responsibility*: one is accountable not only for what one has done but for the unrealized futures one foreclosed.

7.2 Theology: Foreknowledge and Conditional Freedom

Theological debates about divine foreknowledge often turn on counterfactuals. In *Molinism*, for example, God’s “middle knowledge” consists of knowing what every creature *would have done* under any possible circumstance. This is a direct theological application of the future perfect conditional.

If God possesses knowledge of what I would have done under different circumstances, then the unrealized is not incidental to divine providence but an integral component of it. Conditional Being here illuminates the paradox of freedom and foreknowledge: our lives are defined not only by actual history but also by the counterfactual histories known to God.

In more secular terms, this theological frame underscores a universal intuition: the meaning of life exceeds the actual; it includes the conditional.

7.3 Politics: History and the Unlived Futures

Politics is haunted by unrealized revolutions, failed reforms, and foreclosed futures. Historical consciousness often dwells in the mode of “would-have-been”:

- “Had the revolution succeeded, society would have been transformed.”
- “If this policy had been enacted, suffering would have been avoided.”

Historians of counterfactuals, such as Niall Ferguson, argue that to understand history one must consider not only what occurred but also what might have occurred. Political life is structured by conditional Being.

Moreover, political responsibility itself often hinges on the “would-have-been.” Leaders are judged not only by outcomes but by the alternatives they failed to actualize. Thus, conditionality is not merely academic; it defines the space of collective memory and expectation.

7.4 Aesthetics: Literature and the Conditional Imagination

Nowhere is conditionality more evident than in aesthetics. Literature, film, and art often operate in the register of the unrealized.

- *Alternate history* (e.g., Philip K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle*) explores worlds that would have been had historical events diverged.
- *Borges* consistently writes in the conditional mode, as in “The Garden of Forking Paths,” where every unrealized possibility is real in some narrative strand.
- *Modernist and postmodernist art* plays with fragmentation, gaps, and ellipses, leaving the audience to imagine the unrealized.

Aesthetic experience thrives on the future perfect conditional. The beauty of a story is often not what happens but what *could have happened*. Art thus confirms the ontological claim: Being itself is narrative and counterfactual.

7.5 Everyday Life: Regret and Hope

Finally, Conditional Being pervades everyday life. Regret is the pain of the unrealized past: “I would have spoken differently.” Hope is the anticipation of an unrealized future: “If this occurs, life will have been better.” Both are conditional moods.

Far from being accidental emotions, regret and hope disclose the structure of existence. Human beings are not merely temporal creatures; they are *conditional creatures*, living in the space of what “would have been.”

By extending into ethics, theology, politics, and aesthetics, the thesis demonstrates its broad applicability. To affirm Conditional Being is to recognize that responsibility, meaning, and creativity all exceed the actual. The “would-have-been” is not a shadow but a constitutive dimension of life.

8. Conclusion

The inquiry into the future perfect conditional of Being has revealed that what first appears as a grammatical curiosity is, in fact, a window into ontology itself. Across languages, the tense “would have been” articulates an experience of existence that is neither reducible to actuality nor dismissible as mere fiction. It encodes the paradox that to be human is to live not only in what is but also in what is not — in the shadows of unrealized futures and foreclosed pasts.

The future perfect conditional is a linguistic reminder of an ontological condition: our existence is marked by a grammar of incompleteness. Human beings are narrative creatures, and every narrative includes not only what occurred but also what did not. To say “I would have been” is to confess the deepest truth of existence: that Being itself is never whole, always conditional, always stretching beyond itself into what remains unrealized.

Thus, the philosophy of Conditional Being is not a minor contribution to the philosophy of language or time but a comprehensive ontological insight. It tells us that the essence of existence is not stability but conditionality, not fullness but the openness of what could have been.

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