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0521445620 - Language in the World: A Philosophical Enquiry

M. J. Cresswell

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What makes the words we speak mean what they do? Possible-worlds semantics articulates the view that the meanings of words contribute to determining, for each sentence, which possible worlds would make the sentence true, and which would make it false. M. J. Cresswell argues that the non-semantic facts on which such semantic facts supervene are facts about the causal interactions between the linguistic behaviour of speakers and the facts in the world that they are speaking about, and that the kind of causation involved is best analysed using David Lewis's account of causation in terms of counterfactuals. Although philosophers have worked on the question of the connection between meaning and linguistic behaviour, it has mostly been without regard to the work done in possible-worlds semantics, and *Language in the world* is the first book-length examination of this problem.

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A PHILOSOPHICAL ENQUIRY

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Preface

This book was begun in January 1991, initially as a set of course notes for a graduate course in the philosophy of language which I taught in the fall semester of 1991 at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. In addition to my UMass students, Adriane, Bruce, Julie, David, and others, whose names appear in these pages, my lectures were attended by Lynne Baker, Ed Gettier, Phil Bricker and Barbara Partee, all of whom made valuable comments of which some even made it into the text.

A draft of the book was written up in the first three months of 1992 in the comfortable and welcome environment of the Centre for Cognitive Science at the University of Edinburgh, and some of the material was presented in a seminar there. Many people in Edinburgh made those months profitable. In particular regular sessions with Robin Cooper were especially helpful and encouraging. I would like to thank the Science and Engineering Research Council for financial support in Edinburgh.

In April of 1992 I moved to Cambridge and enjoyed the experience of living in college for the Easter term. I would express my heartfelt thanks to the Master and Fellows of St John's College for the Visiting Overseas Scholarship that I held that term. I am also grateful to Hugh Mellor and the other philosophers in Cambridge for the opportunity to give six lectures on the material in this book and for the willingness of my colleagues to engage in philosophical discussion.

Finally, to the Victoria University of Wellington for giving me 1992 as a sabbatical year, and to my department for doing without me for eighteen months, I express sincere thanks. I trust that the existence of

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this book demonstrates that I did not spend all my time riding trains. Our department secretary, Debbie Luyinda, put most of the material into the word processor so that I could spend my time playing with it. Thank you.

Cambridge

May 1992