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6 December, 2006



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Today

Finish Lewis

Final thoughts

Three kinds of theories

1. Regularity
2. Realist
3. Counterfactual

Lewis' 1973 counterfactual theory

c is a cause of e

if and only if

if c had not occurred then e would not have occurred

Lewis' counterfactual theory

Example:

her receiving the gift is a cause of her being surprised

Lewis' counterfactual theory

Example:

her receiving the gift is a cause of her being surprised

if and only if

if she had not received the gift then she would not have been surprised

Counterfactual

A counterfactual is a certain kind of conditional.

A conditional is a sentence “If ... then ...”

Counterfactual

If Kerry had won the election then we would not be in this mess.

If you had added enough salt then the food would have tasted better.

If c had not occurred then e would not have occurred.

Counterfactual

If Kerry had won the election then we would not be in this mess.

What makes this sentence true? What must the world be like?

Counterfactual

If Kerry had won the election then we would not be in this mess.

What makes this sentence true? What must the world be like?

In the closest possible world where Kerry won the election, we are not in this mess.

Possible worlds

Possible world: a complete way things might have been

Actual world: the way things are

Possible worlds

Possible world: a complete way things might have been

Actual world: the way things are

Similarity: possible worlds are ordered by closeness to the actual world

Counterfactual

If Kerry had won the election then we would not be in this mess.

What makes this sentence true? What must the world be like?

In the closest possible world where Kerry wins the election, we are not in this mess.

Counterfactual

if c had not occurred then e would not have occurred

in the closest possible world where c occurs, e does not occur.

No backtracking

If Julius Caesar had been in charge in the Korean war, then he would have used nuclear weapons.

If Julius Caesar had been in charge in the Korean war, then he would have used catapults.

Backtracking and similarity

Small difference in law (small “miracles”)

Great differences in fact

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Positive features

clear

simple

other theories worse

Negative features

Problem of relata

My speaking this sentence causes my speaking this sentence. [Lewis, 2000]

Problem of relata

My speaking this sentence causes my speaking this sentence.

If my speaking this sentence had not occurred, then my speaking this sentence would not have occurred.

So, according to Lewis' theory, my speaking this sentence is a cause of my speaking this sentence.

3 problems

epiphenomena

preempted potential causes

distinguishing genuine causes from effects

Preemption

preempted potential causes
(p did not cause e, but would have caused e if c
had not occurred)

Jack's throw caused the window to break.

Bill threw one moment after Jack did.

Bill's stone throw did not cause the window to
break.

Preemption

Did Jack's throw cause the window to break according to Lewis' theory?

If Jack had not thrown the stone the window would not have broken(?)

Preemption

Did Jack's throw cause the window to break according to Lewis' theory?

If Jack had not thrown the stone the window would have broken.

For Bill's stone would have broken the window, if Jack hadn't thrown!

Preemption

Did Jack's throw cause the window to break according to Lewis' theory?

If Jack had not thrown the stone the window would have broken.

For Bill's stone would have broken the window, if Jack hadn't thrown!

According to Lewis' theory, Jack's throw is not a cause.

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Causes and effects

distinguishing genuine causes from effects

Causes and effects

distinguishing genuine causes from effects

The barometer rose.

The air pressure increased.

Air pressure increase caused barometer rise.

Barometer rise caused air pressure increase.

Causes and effects

If the air pressure had not increased the barometer would not have risen.

If the barometer had not risen, the air pressure would not have increased.

epiphenomena

epiphenomena

(c causes f and c causes e but f not a cause of e)

The burning wood caused smoke to get in my eyes.

The burning wood caused the room to get hot.

The smoke in my eyes is not a cause of the room getting hot.

epiphenomena

The smoke in my eyes is not a cause of the room getting hot.

If the smoke had not gone in my eyes, then the room would not have gotten hot.

No backtracking

If Julius Caesar had been in charge in the Korean war, then he would have used nuclear weapons.

If Julius Caesar had been in charge in the Korean war, then he would have used catapults.

No backtracking

The smoke in my eyes is not a cause of the room getting hot.

If the smoke had not gone in my eyes, then the room would not have gotten hot.

3 problems

epiphenomena

preempted potential causes

distinguishing genuine causes from effects

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Final thoughts

What was this course about?

Current "hot" questions

skepticism, truth, vagueness, causation

What is analytic philosophy?

“... analytic philosophy is neither a fixed body of substantive doctrine, a precise methodology, nor a radical break with most traditional philosophy of the past... Instead, it is a discrete historical tradition stemming from Frege, Moore, Russell, Wittgenstein, and the logical positivists, characterized by respect for science and common sense, belief in the relevance of logic and language for philosophy,

What is analytic philosophy?

emphasis on precision and clarity of argumentation, suspicion of apriori metaphysics, and elevation of the goals of truth and knowledge over inspiration, moral uplift, and spiritual comfort..."

(Soames, "Analytic Philosophy in America", 2006)

Respect for science

Russell: if science does not need talk about causes then we don't either.

Precision and clarity

Russell

Moore

Wittgenstein

Stroud

Lewis

Sainsbury

Williamson

“elevation of the goals of truth and knowledge over inspiration, moral uplift, and spiritual comfort.”