

Philosophy 12: Introduction to Causal Reasoning

Answers to study questions for Lecture 1: “Event Causation”

1. Answer(s): (a), (c)

Remember, conditions are enduring states of affairs; events are things that change a state of affairs. The reason (b) is not correct is that “living in the U.S.” is an enduring feature. “Moving to the U.S.” would be an event, but living there is a condition. Choice (d) is incorrect because “Being Hispanic” is an enduring feature of a person, and so it isn’t an event. Finally, (e) is incorrect because “Liking rap music” is an enduring feature of a person, so we say it is a condition, not an event.

2. Answer(s): (a), (d)

Buying a computer is a change in the state of things, so we call it an event. *Owning* a computer is an enduring state, so we say it is a condition. Similarly, getting a raise is a change in the state of things, so we call it an event.

3. Answer(s): (c)

The reason (a) isn’t correct is that releasing the parking brake will not result in the car moving if the accelerator pedal isn’t depressed. Choice (b) isn’t correct because releasing the parking brake will result in the car moving if the accelerator pedal is depressed.

4. Answer(s): (b)

The reason (a) isn’t correct is that because no matter what the state of the accelerator or the parking brake, changing the state of the lights will never make the car move or make it stop moving. Choice (c) is not correct because you can tell that the lights are not a cause of the car moving, for the reason mentioned previously.

5. Answer(s): (a)

The reason (b) isn’t correct is that pulling the accelerator up will make the car stop moving forward. If you’ve ever driven a car, you know that pushing the accelerator down makes the car move forward (provided it isn’t in reverse).

6. Answer(s): (a), (b), (c), (d)

Had the woman’s building been made of stronger stuff, it might well have withstood the earthquake without collapsing. Thus, according to the counterfactual theory of causation, this *is* a cause of the building’s collapse. Had the woman’s building been constructed differently, it also might have withstood the earthquake without collapsing. Lastly, had the woman’s building been sitting on top of a different geological formation, it also might have withstood the earthquake without collapsing.

7. Answer(s): (c)

The sportscaster is identifying what he sees as an unusual routine—the corn exercise—as the cause of Ryan’s phenomenal endurance. But that does *not* mean that the other parts of Ryan’s regime were unimportant in prolonging his career.

8. Answer(s): (b), (c)

When (b) and (c) occur, the accident occurs as well. Another jointly sufficient set for the accident consists of just (a).

9. Answer(s): (a), (c)

The reason (b) is not correct is that a wet road, by itself, is not enough to cause an accident. See row #5 of the table. The reason (d) is not correct is that lacking antilock brakes isn’t sufficient to cause an accident (see row #8 of the table).

10. Answer(s): (a), (c)

Choice (b) isn't correct because, if no candidate receives a majority of votes in the electoral college, then it goes before the House of Representatives, who then elect a President (you weren't expected to know this). Option (d) isn't correct because, although we haven't elected a woman President yet, there's no reason why we shouldn't.

11. Answer(s): (a)

If the switch is off, then the state of the battery has no influence at all on the light. However, if the switch is on, then the state of the battery fully determines the state of the light.

12. Answer(s): (a)

If the battery is dead, then the switch has no influence on the light. However, if the battery is charged, then the switch fully determines the state of the light.

13. Answer(s): (a)

They do interact because the effect of each depends on the value of the other.

14. Answer(s): (a)

The door opening causes the switch to cease being depressed, at which point the light turns out. The door is the first part of a causal chain which terminates in the light turning on. We say that the door is a cause of the light being on, even though the door is not a "direct cause."

15. Answer(s): (a)

The switch is the direct cause of the light coming on.

16. Answer(s): (a)

17. Answer(s): (b)

Causes interact when the effect of one depends on the value of the other. These causes don't interact. The switch directly controls the light, and the state of the door is irrelevant to how the switch influences the light. The door can influence the state of the switch, but it doesn't change the effect the switch has on the light, unlike the flashlight example.