

SSNAP 2021

Metaphysics

Dave Robb
Davidson College

Agenda

Our question: What is causation? (mini-lecture)

Three theories of causation, each with:

- Brief introduction to the theory (mini-lecture)

- Proposed counterexamples (breakout rooms)

- Reconvene to compare notes (group discussion)

Open discussion / Q&A

Our question: What is causation?

An answer will present necessary and sufficient conditions for causation.

c causes e iff _____?

Further constraint: the answer should be *reductive*. We want to understand causation in non-causal terms.

A few *non*-reductive answers:

c causes e iff e is an effect of c .

c causes e iff e can be influenced by manipulating c .

c causes e iff e is a manifestation of c 's causal powers.

The counterfactual theory

Core intuition: causes make a difference to their effects.

c causes e iff if c hadn't occurred, e wouldn't have either.

The theory *looks* reductive. ✓

It explains many paradigmatic cases of causation. ✓

The lightning strike started the house fire.

My voice is causing your auditory experience.

My careless mowing destroyed my neighbor's flower garden.

First breakout

Proposed counterexamples to the
counterfactual theory

The process theory

Core intuition: causes are connected to their effects.

c causes e iff there is a process from c to e.

The theory *looks* reductive. ✓

It explains many paradigmatic cases of causation. ✓

The lightning strike started the house fire.

My voice is causing your auditory experience.

My careless mowing destroyed my neighbor's flower garden.

It handles the examples that made trouble for the counterfactual theory. ✓

Second breakout

Proposed counterexamples to the
process theory

The nomic sufficiency theory

Core intuition: causes make their effects happen.

c causes e iff in the circumstances, c is nomically sufficient for the effect.

The theory *looks* reductive. ✓

It explains many paradigmatic cases of causation. ✓

The lightning strike started the house fire.

My voice is causing your auditory experience.

My careless mowing destroyed my neighbor's flower garden.

It handles *some* of the examples that made trouble for the counterfactual or process theories. ✓

Third breakout

Proposed counterexamples to the
nomic sufficiency theory

Open discussion / Q&A