24.251 – Intro to the Philosophy of Language

Problem Set 11: Lewis on Convention

1. Which of the following is true, according to Lewis?

    (a) A convention in action and belief must prevail in order for a regularity in action to prevail.

    (b) There might be an accidental regularity whereby what a speaker utters depends on her mental states.

    (c) Within a population of speakers, every regularity can be explained as a convention.

    (d) Within a population of speakers, the purpose of a regularity is a convention.

2. According to Lewis's theory, which of the following would count as evidence that 'snow is white' means that grass is green.

    (a) there is a convention to believe that snow is white only if one utters 'grass is green'

    (b) there is a convention to utter 'grass is green' only if one believes that snow is white

    (c) there is a convention to believe that grass is green only if one utters 'snow is white'

    (d) there is a convention to utter 'snow is white' only if one believes that grass is green

3. According to Lewis, why is clause (4) in the definition of convention needed?

    (a) Otherwise the regularity of lowering prices in a price-war amongst rival businesses might count as a convention.

    (b) Otherwise the regularity of driving on the left might count as a convention.

    (c) Otherwise the regularity of studying for an exam might count as a convention.

    (d) Otherwise the regularity of driving on the right if a man and driving on the left if a woman might count as a convention.

4. According to Lewis's 'Thesis', what is a language?

    (a) A function that assigns a meaning to each set of possible worlds.

    (b) A function that assigns a set of possible worlds to each meaning.

(c) A function that assigns a meaning to each component of a sentence.

(d) A function that assigns a set of possible worlds to each sentence.

5. Which of the following is a case in which "some desired end may be reached by means of some sort of action in conformity to R, provided that the others also conform to R"?

(a) My end is to stand out at the party; R is the regularity of showing up riding on an elephant.

(b) My end is to jog at an empty beach; R is the regularity of going to the beach at 5:00 AM.

(c) My end is that you and I get together; R is the regularity of going to Joe's cafe.

(d) My end is that I get a higher score than anyone else; R is the regularity of studying hard for the exam.

6. According to Lewis, who is engaging in rational activity in a community of speakers, she who produces an utterance or she who responds to an utterance?

(a) The utterer

(b) The responder

(c) Both

(d) Neither