

# HUME

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Intro Philosophy

Knowledge of *external world* rests on...

*cause and effect*, which rests on...

*experience*.

In particular, experience of *correlations*.

But our beliefs about correlations can't be justified.

## 1. Knowledge of external world rests on knowledge of cause and effect

I think it's raining outside because I know that umbrellas and wet clothes are caused by rain. I know the external world exists because I know my sensations are caused by external objects.

## 2. Knowledge of cause and effect rests on experience

As opposed to what? Being known a priori.

**Relations of ideas** certain; discoverable by the mere operation of thought (*a priori*); can't be conceived to be false. Examples: geometry, arithmetic

**Matters of fact** not certain; knowable only through experience (*a posteriori*); can be conceived to be false. Examples: "the table is blue", "the sun will rise tomorrow"

...knowledge of [causation] is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings *a priori*, but arises entirely from experience, when we find that any particular objects are constantly conjoined with each other. Let an object be presented to a man of ever so strong natural reason and abilities—if that object be entirely new to him, he will not be able, by the most accurate examination of its sensible qualities, to discover any of its causes or effects. Adam, though his rational faculties be supposed, at the very first, entirely perfect, could not have inferred from the fluidity and transparency of water that it would suffocate him, or from the light and warmth of fire that it would consume him. (Hume, p. 297)

**Empiricism** All knowledge of matters of fact comes from experience. We do not know matters of fact *a priori*

**Rationalism** Some matters of fact can be known *a priori*

### 3. Knowledge of causation by experience rests on correlations

How do we know causal generalizations through experience?

- We don't perceive causation
- We don't perceive powers

Rather: we know by experience that *C* is always correlated with *E*, and then we infer that *C* must cause *E*. But how do we know by experience that *C* is always correlated with *E*?

1. In the past, *C*s have been accompanied by *E*
2. So, future *C*s will be accompanied by *E*s

But this inference isn't *a priori*. So it must be based on experience—we move from the premise “*C*s have never suddenly changed their behavior in the past” to the conclusion “they won't do that now”. This seems circular: it presupposes “the future will be like the past”, which is the very point in question.