

## DAVID HUME

**Explain fully and examine Hume's view of causality.**

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### **Theory of causation**

In the field of science one finds a constant effort to establish the relation of cause and effect between any two phenomena. Relations between facts are causal. According to scientists, such relations are only possibilities, but according to philosophers, the relation of causality is invariable. Hume criticizes this philosophical theory of causality.

In all studies related to facts we try to find out the actual relation of causality between any two phenomena. If, for example, a man discovers a watch in the middle of a desert, he immediately deduces that at some time men must have come to that spot, because the watch could not have arrived there without such agency. In our everyday life we presume the existence of the causal relation, and on that do we base much of our discussion of various things. How, it must be asked, do we arrive at knowledge of the causal relation? What is the validity of this knowledge? Put in other words, how do we know that the two things or occurrences that we are contemplating have a causal relation? The average individual accepts the working of causality as a matter of sound common sense and does not involve himself in any complicated discussion concerning it, but the philosopher must necessarily apply it as a rational criterion before accepting it.

### **Basis of the knowledge of causality**

David Hume tried to find out how we arrive at the knowledge of causality. He discovered the following possible alternatives:

1. *A-priori reasoning*- One method of arriving at the causal relation is by a-priori reasoning. But this alternative is not as sound as it may appear to be. Before actual experience a man would not have been able to deduce, from its light and its heat, that fire will have the capacity to burn him. No amount of argument can provide us with knowledge of the various functions of a thing. The relation of causality cannot be derived by deduction. It is

the subject of induction, and it is only on the basis of experience that we arrive at a causal relationship.

2. *Demonstration* – The relation of causality cannot be demonstrated. No person can demonstrate that food invariably provides nutrition or that fire will invariably burn something. Hume has demonstrated this by distinguishing between science and mathematics. It is only in the sphere of mathematics that different ideas are invariably related to each other. Facts themselves do not possess such relationship with each other, so that we cannot deduce one fact by having observed another even if we believe the two to be causally related. It is not possible to deduce the nature of the cause from the nature of its effect with as much facility as we can derive that the angles of a triangle total one hundred and eighty from the fact of the figure being a triangle. In mathematics the problem is of the relations of ideas while in science it is one of matters of fact. Mathematics, therefore, may be able to boast of invariable relations, but science cannot. The law of non-contradiction can function only in the sphere of mathematics, not in the domain of fact. There is no contradiction in saying that food may not give nutrition and fire may not burn, because this can happen, depending upon the circumstances.
3. *Observation and experience*- The notion of causality therefore, is derived from experience and observation. As part of our experience we note that certain things and incidents bear the relation of antecedent-consequent to each other. Fire, for example, provides heat, ice the opposite; one billiard ball imparts motion to another, and so on. We observe that there is some relation between the two things that occur in conjunction with each other. From this we deduce that one causes the other. And once this relation has been assumed, we expect that when one happens the other will follow. Hume states that thinking in terms of cause and effect is a matter of habit or custom. Our belief in causality is based simply on the observation that two things occur together. It follows; therefore, that the relation of causality is nothing more than a belief based on actual experience. Our experience of the apparent relation between two objects leads to a belief in some relationship between them. Once this belief has been formed, it later turns in custom and it becomes normal to say that this thing has been caused by that. What is this belief? It is not

argument and it does not involve any rational thinking. It is a natural instinct and is as natural as the emotion of love. This feeling of belief or faith is part of everyone's experience, yet cannot be analysed completely. Hume believes it is related to will, but his explanation of it is not satisfying. He is of the opinion that probably nature has not provided the reason with infinite capacity to understand mental functioning. The functions of the mind appear to be guided by instinct or by mechanical tendency. Hence the causal relation can be explained by saying that one thing follows another or precedes another, and when one is present it immediately completes thinking of the other, causality, therefore, is nothing more than probability. Hume stresses that in the field of science, the law of Causality indicates mere possibility, no certainty or invariability.

### **Philosophical conception of cause and effect**

Hence, Hume disproves the philosophical conception of causality. It is postulated that there is invariable and definite relation between cause and effect because a specific cause has the power of creating specific effect, and this power is concealed in it. Cause and effect are bound to each other in an invariable relationship. Hence if one of the two is observed some predication can be made concerning the other, basing such prediction on thought and argument. In other words, knowledge of the cause provides unquestionable knowledge of the effect. If we are aware of the relation of causality as it exists between two objects, we can make statements concerning the behavior of subjects.

### **Refutation of the philosophical conceptions**

Concerning the philosophical conception of causality, Hume asks this question: what right have we to make use of such ideas as force and invariable relation? In order to understand the philosophical conception Hume tries to analyse the invariable relationship that is implicit in it. He tries to discover the origin of the idea of force, that by which the cause creates the effect. He arrives at the following conclusion.

1. Sensory experience does not establish the invariability of causal relations- when we observe facts as they exist in the world we do not find any

evidence of a force in the cause, a force which has the capacity to invariably produce the effect. The cause exhibits no quality which should link it invariably with the effect. Experience shows nothing more than the fact that when one occurs the other also occurs. One billiard ball, for example, imparts motion to another ball when the first ball possesses of motion. Similarly, a piece of bread provides nutrition and fire gives heat. Our senses provide us with knowledge of nothing more than this relation to antecedent and consequent. When we observe an object for the first time it is impossible for us to say which particular cause it can give. If some object does possess the power to produce some effect, then this power is not evident to the senses. Even the tremendous force which guides the destiny of the world is hidden to us, and we have no means of knowledge of it. There can be a doubt that from experience we know that fire is accompanied by heat, but that there can be any relation between the two is not at all certain. It can be concluded that the element of invariability attributed to causality is not apparent to the senses.

2. Invariability of causality is proved by internal experience- On the other hand, even our internal experience does not prove to us that there is anything invariable about the causal relationship. When I turn my attention to the functioning or working of my own mind, I see nothing more than various ideas that arrive associated with others or become dissociated, but even among them there is no invariability. It is possible to contend that because the power of will or determination does cause motion or motor activity in various parts of the body, such power can be believed to be analogous to the power of cause to create an effect. Volition is the subject of our internal consciousness, and from it we derive our notion of force. Hume analyses this contention. He accepts that volition does cause motor activity in different part of the body but our awareness is limited to either the actual act of volition or to the actual movement in the body, and we do not in fact realize the presence of a force or even how volition causes such activity. It should be understood clearly that Hume does not question the fact of activity being caused by volition. He is aiming to prove only that there is no invariable relation between volition and activity and that even if there

were some such relationship we do not know it. Experience tells us no more than this that determination leads to activity. How this is actually brought about is something we do not know. The formula which ties volition and its activities in an invariable or unbreakable tie is not part of our experience.

The truth of the matter is that in fact the entire relation between mind and body is, at the present, an insoluble problem. Experience tells nothing very significant about it. How an activity of the mind is communicated to the body and causes parallel activity there, or how the functioning of a part of the body influences the mind are insoluble puzzles which taxed the reflection and philosophy of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Locke and Berkeley. Not one of them arrived at any very significant conclusion. Hume's thinking on the other hand, shows a complete refutation of idealistic thinking and highest achievement of empirical thought. He even denies the existence of a power which can impart to the cause the capacity of invariably producing the effect. His denial of it is not occasioned by his antagonism to the belief in causality but because such a force cannot be experienced. Being an empiricist he cannot accept any entity which he cannot prove to be so by experience. It is our experience that an act of volition is carried out and is followed by some motor activity in the body. We know only that one action has been followed or succeeded by another. Anything which may relate one to the other does not come in our observation. This is true not only of activities pertaining to the mind and the body but also of all natural phenomena which can be said to be causally related. That one activity is antecedent and another its consequent is something which we do experience. We see them together, but not tied or related to each other. Whatever it is that ties them together is never seen or experienced. Such a link does not impress itself upon our mind. Neither does our mind possess a concept of any force which may exist in the cause.

3. The basis of causality is habit and custom- How, then, do we ever gain knowledge of causal relation? It is no doubt accurate to state that one thing is connected to another and that this should be understood to mean only that on thinking of one thing one is reminded of the other. In other words, the mind has the habit of expecting another incident when one has occurred, or we believe that after a certain occurrence has taken place another will also

follow. The relation of causality, therefore, is based on habit, belief and custom. It has no logical force behind it, for no amount of reasoning can establish relation between two things. Belief in the causal relation is a psychological necessity since without it our experience could not be analysed, but the fact that it is necessity does not prove its existence.

### **Laws of association**

Apart from proving that the causal relation depends upon habit and custom, Hume also investigates how different ideas become attached to each other. He brings in the laws of association to explain this process. Like similarity and contiguity the laws of causation also are the result of associative process; the philosophical conception of causality therefore, is baseless. Causality is not inevitable, it is a probability. Since the sun is seen to rise in the east it has become customary to speak of the sun rising in the east, but there is nothing to indicate that the sun cannot rise in the west. One can say no more than that there is greater possibility of its rising in the east, since it has been seen to do this before today. Irrespective of the stretch of experience involved in the framing of general laws derived from experience such laws cannot be considered invariable since the experience does not comprehend the past, present and the future. Contradictions to such laws can always be expected in the field of field of facts, every element of knowledge is a probability. Inevitability or invariability can exist in the relations between thoughts. Hence while the scientific explanation of causality is true, its philosophical explanation is not because the latter treats the causal relation not only as real but also as inevitable.

### **Analytical judgments are not invariable**

All judgment of causality are synthetic. Such judgments have the external relationship of subject and predicate, they bear no internal relation to each other. In other words, the predicate is not invariably assimilated in the subject. This is true only of analytical judgments because in such cases the predicate is arrived at only after an analysis of the objective. Analytical judgments are found mainly in the fields of mathematics and logic. Besides, all judgments connected with the sciences relating to the real world are synthetic. Hence, in them, the effect is not inherent in the cause in such a manner that the effect could be deduced from the

cause. It follows that the nature of cause cannot be deduced by examining the effect alone, particularly when the cause is not experienced by the one who observes. Even if there is such experience it is part of the past and even if any judgment could be based on it, at best it could be related only to the present. No prediction of the future could be based upon it.

**VISION IAS**