

# Hume philosophy

[Philosophy](#)



Hume believed that fundamental basis of all knowledge is impressions and ideas. Impressions being an immediate interpretation of an experience and ideas are a copy of a feeble original impression. We as human associated these impressions and thoughts together, connecting them in a way for us to interrupt. Naturally because this is all human interpretation, there leaves room for error and biases.

Hume further distinguished between two sorts of belief. Relations of ideas are beliefs formed through associations formed within the mind. Matters of fact are beliefs that claim to be the nature of existing things.

Mathematics and logical knowledge are relations of ideas that are uncontroversial, but also uninformative. The interesting but problematic propositions of natural science depends on matters of fact. Hume thought we as human beings live and function in the world, we should try to observe how we do so. The principle needed to be applied to the investigation cognitive capacities is an attempt to discover the causes of human belief.

Information rests upon our belief in matters of fact, Hume was concerned to explain their origin. Beliefs could reach beyond the present sense of impressions and memory, Hume thought only by appealing to presumed connections of cause and effect. Each idea is distinct and separate from every other, there is no self-evident relation that these connections can only be derived from our experience of similar cases. So the crucial question is to ask exactly how it is possible for us to learn from experience.

Hume supposed, the most obvious point is a negative one: causal reasoning can never be justified rationally. In order to learn, we have to suppose that

our past experiences have relevance to present and future cases. Even if we do indeed believe that the future will be like the past, the truth of that belief is not self-evident, it is always possible for nature to change. This inferences from past to future are never rationally certain. Thus, Hume viewed, all beliefs in matters of fact are fundamentally non-rational.

Hume uses the example that we believe that the sun will rise tomorrow. Clearly, this is a matter of fact because it rests on our conviction that each sunrise is an effect caused by the rotation of the earth. Yet our belief in that causal relation is based on past observations, and our confidence that it will continue tomorrow cannot be justified by reference to the past. So we have no rational basis for believing that the sun will rise tomorrow, yet we still do believe it will rise tomorrow.

Skepticism quite properly stops us to speculate beyond our own present experiences and memories, yet we find it entirely natural to believe much more than that. Hume found that these unjustifiable beliefs could be explained by reference to one's custom or habit; that's how we learn from experiences. When one observes constant conjunction of events, they experience growth and become accustomed to associating them with each other. Although many past cases of sunrise do not guarantee the future of nature, the experiences of past sunrises does build repetition to the idea and produces the expectation that the sun will rise again tomorrow.

The association of ideas is a natural process in which separate ideas come together in the mind. They can be associated with each other by rational means, as they are in the relations of ideas that constitute mathematical

knowledge, but even where this is possible, Hume argued, reason is a slow and inefficient guide. Habits acquired by a lot of repetition can produce a powerful conviction that is independent of reason.

Although the truth of " $7 \times 11 = 77$ " can be established rationally in principle, most learned it by reciting multiplication tables. What we call relative probability, Hume's views as nothing more than a measure of the conviction produced in us by our experience of regularity. Our beliefs in matters of fact arise from sentiment or feeling rather than from reason. Imagination and beliefs only differ in the degree of conviction with which their objects are anticipated. Hume believed that customs or habits is the great guide of life and the foundation of natural science.

Hume thought that beliefs are events that are related to habit acquired by experiences that were observed regularly. That these events of particular sorts occur together, forming associations that produces the habit of expecting the effect whenever we were to experience that particular cause. We also believe that the cause somehow produces the effect, even if this belief was unjustifiable. Hume offered some explanation for the fact that we do hold it, the technique needed is to search for the original impression from which our idea of the connection between cause and effect is copied. The idea does not arise from our objective experience of the events themselves.

All we observe is that events of the " cause" occurs and then shortly before the " effect", and that this recurs with a regularity that can be described as a " constant conjunction." The recurrence of experiences does encourage the habit of expecting the effect to follow the cause, but it includes no actual

impression of a necessary connection. Nor do we acquire this impression from our own capacity for voluntary motion. The objective element of constant conjunction is rarely experienced, since the actions of our minds and bodies do not submit to our voluntary control.

Even if we were to always produce the intended movement, that this would yield no notion of the connection between them, so there wouldn't be an impression of causal power here. Yet we do have an idea of a necessary connection and that it must come from somewhere. For a non justificatory explanation, Hume refers back to the formation of a custom or habit. The non rational expectation that the effect will follow the cause is accompanied by a strong feeling of conviction, and it is the impression of this feeling that is copied by the concept of a necessary connection between cause and effect. The force of causal necessity is just the strength of our sentiment in anticipating outcomes.

Hume thought that we do not have an actual impression of the self. No matter how closely one attends to their own experience, no matter how fully they notice the mental operations presently occurring in the mind, they are never directly aware of themselves. What they do experience is a succession of separate and individual ideas, associated with each other by relations of resemblance. Although these relations may be extended through time by memory, there is no evidence of any substantial ground for their coherence.

To suppose otherwise, Hume held, is to commit a category mistake that the self is just a bundle of perceptions. Just like railroad cars in a train, to look for a self beyond the ideas would be like looking for a train beyond the cars. Our

idea of a persistent self is simply a result of the human habit of attributing continued existence to any collection of associations. Like our idea of the necessary connection of cause with effect, our belief in our own reality as substantial selves is natural, yet also unjustifiable.

An ordinary feature of human cognition is our belief in the reality of the external world. As someone types a paper, they would readily suppose that their fingers are touching a keyboard. Hume noted, is that their senses that actually see, feel, hear, etc, the physical objects themselves. Modern science have persuaded us that this is not literally true, we are directly aware of ideas, which must in turn be produced in our minds by external objects.

The problem is that on this view we can never know that if there are really physical objects that produce our sensory ideas. We should not rely on causal reasoning to convince us that there are external objects. Since such reasoning arises from our observation of a constant conjunction between causes and effects.

If we know objects only by means of ideas, then we cannot use those ideas to establish a causal connection between the things and the objects they are supposed to represent. Hume would suppose, our belief in the reality of the external world is entirely non rational. It cannot be supported either as a relation of ideas or even as a matter of fact, but it is utterly unjustifiable. However belief in the external world is natural and unavoidable. We are in the habit that our ideas have external referents, even though we can have no real evidence for doing so.

According to Hume, knowledge of pure mathematics is secure; it rests only on the relations of ideas without presuming anything about the world. Experimental observations permit us to use experiences in forming useful habits. All other epistemological efforts, especially if it involves the achieving useful abstract knowledge is meaningless and unreliable. The most reasonable position is a mitigated skepticism that would humbly accept the limitations of human knowledge while pursuing the legitimate aims of math and sciences. Of course in our non philosophical moments, we will be thrown back upon the natural beliefs of everyday life, no matter how lacking in rational justification we know them to be.