

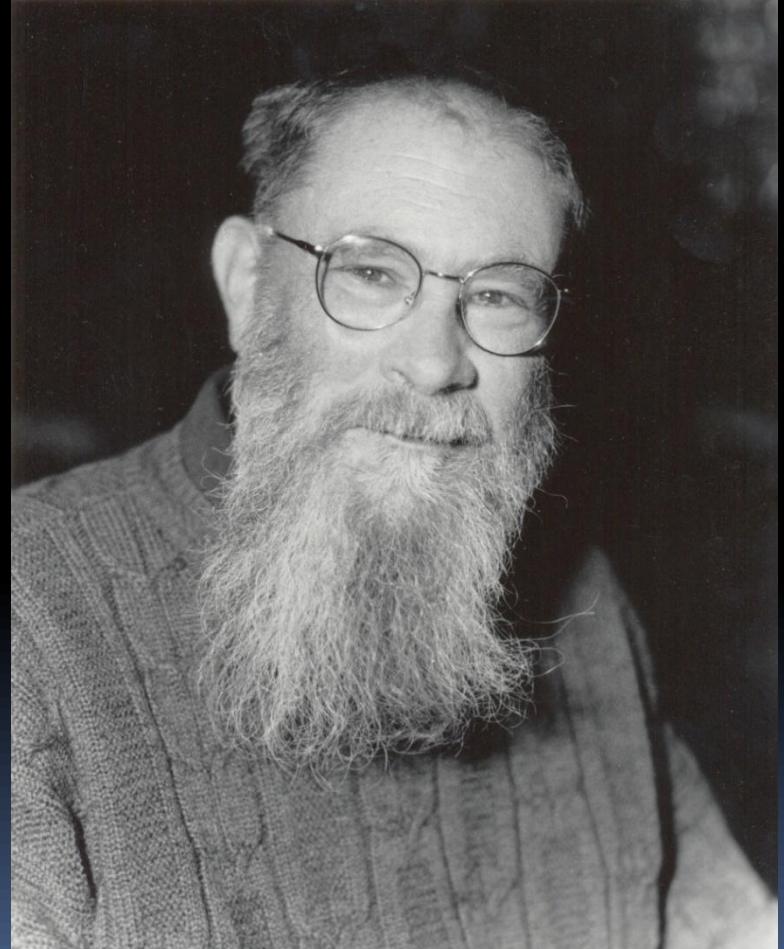
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Philosophy 355



# HUMEAN CAUSATION AND SUPERVENIENCE

# What is Humean Supervenience?

- A metaphysical view, which attempts to explain, in short, "what there is"
- According to David Lewis, HS: "...is the doctrine that all there is to the world is a vast mosaic of local matters of particular fact, just one little thing and then another"
- This is a very strong claim, what allows him to make it?
- The work of David Hume, an 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher who discussed (most famously) the nature of causation



# What Type of Ideas Do We Have?



- This is one of the first questions Hume asks
- Answer: relations of ideas and matters of fact
- R of I: geometry, algebra, arithmetic, things that are knowable a priori
- M of F: The sun will rise tomorrow; all ravens are black;  $F=MA$
- The contrary of any M of F is surely plausible, embodies no formal contradiction
- Raises question about definition of “contradiction”

# Where Do Our Ideas Come From?

- Slightly out of order
- Hume, who is somewhat of an empiricist (unclear because of R of I) thinks that: "all our ideas are nothing but copies of our impressions..."
- Therefore, according to Hume, I cannot conceive of something I have not experienced
- Tooth Fairy objection
- Distinction between simple and complex ideas
- Hume admits he has no proof of this assertion
- Creates something of a criterion: if we cannot trace an idea back to experience...?



# Matters of Fact



- Hume doesn't discuss in detail relations of ideas: presumably because he thinks they have no "problems"
- What makes us believe that certain matters of fact are true?
- Ex. Why do I think that Lucky Charms will taste delicious?
- Answer: Cause and Effect
- This conclusion is not reached a priori, but rather, through my experience, when I find two events ( a C and an E) closely conjoined, or correlated
- However, what allows to make that conclusion?
- Answer: Custom
- Because I have eaten thousands of bowls of Lucky Charms, and they have all been delicious, etc.
- So, our matters of fact are based on a C&E story, and our C&E story is based on our experience

# But, Will It Actually Be Delicious?

- Essentially, Hume is looking for answer to this question.
- “But does it follow, that the other bread must also nourish me at another time, and that like sensible qualities must always be attended with like secret powers?”
- “Thus is required a medium, which may enable the mind to draw such an inference...What that medium is, I must confess, passes my comprehension; and it is incumbent on those to produce it, who assert that it really exists...”
- In this manner, Hume, sounds quite skeptical
- He doesn't think that anyone has provided this answer
- “Trusting past experience” might be good enough for “an agent...but as a philosopher, who has some share of curiosity...”
- This inference is not demonstrative, not intuitive, not experimental (q-begging)
- What is it?
- I don't care, I'm hungry



# Necessary Connection



- We could say that our ideas about cause and effect are a bit stronger
- There is a “necessary connection” between them
- The ball *must* roll down the hill, etc.
- At this juncture, Hume applies his “criterion”
- From what sensory experience does this idea arise?
- Answer: none
- Therefore, we have the same problem as before
- Using our senses, we can never “get at” the cause of anything
- “In vain do you pretend to have learned the nature of bodies from past experiences. Their secret nature...may change with any change in their sensible qualities...What logic, what process or argument secures you against this supposition?”



# Where Does this Leave Us?

Humean Supervenience is based on this work  
by Hume, attempting to show that the world  
consists of separate events

Alexa?

