

UNITED WISDOM

Cause and coincidence: distinguishing explanation from a story

World and Consciousness

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Epigraph

> *but time and chance happeneth to them all.*

Ecclesiastes 9:11, exact eight-word concluding clause, King James Version. Lowercase and final period retained. The passage concerns limits to outcomes of speed, strength, wisdom, and skill; it establishes no useless effort or probability value.

What this article is about

A story readily connects two events: a sign appeared, then something welcome happened. Explanation needs another step—grounds for connecting them in that particular way. An invented book-return example lets us consider order, alternative accounts, shared conditions, comparison, and inconvenient cases. Limited passages by Hume, Mill, Bacon, Aristotle, and Ecclesiastes provide different perspectives, forming no single theory of coincidences. An unexpected meeting can retain personal meaning while its cause remains unknown. That meaning establishes no promised result for another person on its own. The article distinguishes description, explanation, and a choice for action. Its voluntary closing reflection concerns one ordinary account, without experiments on people, probability calculation, or settling a professional question.

I. One thing happened, then another

A card on a home reading group’s table says: Leave returned books here. The next day, a long-missing book appears. Someone declares that the card worked. The story’s beginning and ending are visible; the connection is still unknown. The person returning it may have read the note, planned the return beforehand, or received an independent message from the organizer. Observing the order of events does not reveal that person’s route. This invented example reports no behavioural study. It separates two claims: the book appeared after the card; the book appeared because of it. One describes a sequence, the other proposes an explanation. Moving between them needs a stated ground, beyond retelling the sequence more confidently.

The same sequence can carry a different emphasis: How remarkable that the book appeared just when we made a place for it. This expresses a relationship to the coincidence. It may matter to the speaker regardless of causal explanation. But a rule that preparing a place always

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returns what was lost makes another claim about how the world works. It needs grounds for extending beyond this story. We prohibit neither pleasure nor figurative description. A report of events, personal meaning, and a proposed explanation remain distinguishable even when they appear together in conversation. Sharing one memorable sentence does not make them the same kind of assertion or give them the same support.

Begin by describing only what is actually known. Avoid the book returned itself if somebody brought it. One returned volume establishes no understanding by everyone; an object appearing on a table establishes no changed relationship. Careful description does not impoverish life. It leaves room for what has not been seen. The card might genuinely have helped, merely identified a convenient location for a return already decided, or bear another relationship to the event. At this point, choosing the least ambitious or most impressive explanation in advance is unnecessary. The immediate task is to keep an unsupported connection out of the description, rather than treat it as an already observed part of what happened.

II. Hume: familiarity does not reveal a connection

Section IV of Hume’s Enquiry distinguishes relations of ideas from matters of fact, then asks how causal knowledge is acquired. In paragraphs 20–24, read here, he turns to experience: an unfamiliar object’s visible properties do not disclose its possible effects by themselves. Familiar repetition may hide that a connection has become expected rather than known beforehand through a concept. This is a historical philosophical argument in English, in Selby-Bigge’s 1902 edition. It makes causal reasoning neither pointless nor all explanations equally warranted. Our card example is the article’s comparison, rather than an illustration written by Hume. Hume, IV, Part I, paragraphs 20–24.

The card suggests an intelligible chain: someone read the text, learned the arrangement, and left the object. Yet several conditions are involved. The card must be noticed, understood, connected to the borrowed book, and followed by a chosen action fitting the circumstances. The arrangement may also have been known already. One book’s appearance reveals no completed chain by itself. If the returning person says the note prompted the return, that report supplies another piece of evidence about this episode. It still establishes neither everyone’s response nor the note’s frequency of success. A person’s account of intention matters at its particular scale. One intelligible account should not silently become a universal property of every card.

An expectation about future results also needs a scope. A card may sometimes remind people where to return a book is less striking than an assurance that it always retrieves what is missing, but fits the proposed function. The note identifies a table; it creates no opportunity to arrive, spare time, or removal of every source of delay. This establishes no uselessness. It also

leaves no grounds to blame a person when a book remains absent, since their circumstances are unknown. An explanation ignoring its means' limitations can become a hidden demand upon another. The means' failure then gets attributed to insufficient attention or gratitude, though that judgment would need grounds of its own.

III. An alternative and a shared condition

Offering an alternative does not establish it. They intended to come anyway may be a reasonable question, but remains a hypothesis without information. Its usefulness lies in showing that more than one route fits the story. We might find out whether the return was decided earlier, or honestly leave that part unknown. Inaccessible information authorizes no convenient guess as fact. Our example requires a distinction between observation, intention reported by a participant, and an observer's proposed account. They have different grounds. This demands neither suspicion of every statement nor a presumption of lying. It asks only that a statement not be assigned content it lacks and that a possible answer not become an answer already obtained.

Two events may depend on another condition. Suppose the organizer announced a meeting and requested book returns beforehand, then prepared the table card. The return and card now coincide because both relate to that meeting. The card may additionally help locate the table, but sequence alone establishes no such contribution. This is an invented shared-condition example, not a dismissal of every similar coincidence. We assume neither that a third condition always exists nor that it excludes the card's contribution. It identifies a needed question: what else changed alongside the noticed action? A short story naming two events does not establish that every other circumstance stayed the same. Stories select events; explanations must recognize that selection's limits.

Direction is another question. The card might have been written because a return was expected and a place needed preparation. An anticipated event then influenced the card, although the physical book appeared later. The order of objects does not reveal the order of decisions. Conversation may clarify this or leave it unresolved. People's choices need not always reduce to one causal arrow. Still, if a particular connection is asserted, planning and preparation bear on it. Our example might yield two modest findings: the place was prepared beforehand, and the returning person used it. These can coexist without becoming a broader legend in which the right inscription inevitably produced everything that followed.

IV. Mill: comparison requires conditions

Book III, chapter VIII, sections 1–2 of Mill's System of Logic examines agreement and difference. His difference method requires comparable cases differing in the relevant circumstance; surrounding text discusses the difficulty of knowing all material conditions. We read the historical eighth edition of 1882, not a current causal-analysis textbook. Two similar narratives are not thereby identical cases. Mill's schemes become no ready permission to experiment on people, and his older examples supply no present verification of science. Our short card story may suggest a comparison question. Placing two outcomes together does not fulfil every condition for a strict inference. Mill, III.VIII, sections 1–2.

If one group received a book after posting a card while another received none without it, schedules, agreements, and opportunities to attend may also differ. Such conditions easily disappear when the card is the story's focus. Comparison needs them restored to the question. Unmentioned differences do not become absent differences. Even two meetings of the same group may vary: attendance changed, or the card was visible once and covered next time. These possibilities are not established causes. They show work missing from the brief account. Sometimes consulting an appropriate available analysis or limiting ourselves to this episode is more suitable than claiming to have discovered a general law through our own comparison.

Name the outcome precisely. A book appeared on the table; the returning person found the location; participants began returning books more promptly. These are three different claims. The card might bear on the second without explaining the first or establishing the third. Moving from convenient location to general punctuality changes the question, even though both concern books. We can discuss a label's clarity without investigating all returns. A broader assertion needs other information and suitable inquiry. This requires no major study before every household note. It concerns what we call confirmed: the claim's scale should remain connected to the examination actually performed, rather than expand merely because a larger result sounds appealing.

V. An inconvenient instance must remain visible

In Novum Organum I.46, Bacon considers how an accepted proposition gathers support and treats contrary instances. We read the complete aphorism and neighbouring context earlier in this task, using the historical English Collier 1902 edition edited by Joseph Devey; its translator remains unidentified. Bacon's historical observation becomes no measured model of everyone's behaviour. It prompts a question about story selection: are cases that challenge the preferred explanation still visible? One such case does not automatically settle every complex theory. We need the actual claim and its conditions. Yet inconvenient material should not disappear merely because its absence makes a narrative more convincing. Bacon, I.46.

Perhaps the group remembers two returns after the card while overlooking earlier returns or books still missing afterwards. If such information is available, it bears on a general claim about the note. Inventing failures for an objection is unnecessary. We can ask and learn that no record was kept; a general comparison is then unavailable. No noticed failures differs from evidence that failures were absent. Nobody may have looked. Equally, missing records establish no ineffectiveness. Both boundaries remain: an observed success does not automatically expand, and an unknown becomes no demonstrated failure. We may appreciate a convenient note while leaving open whether it changes all returns or only particular acts.

An inconvenient case's force depends on the wording. One unreturned book challenges a claim that the card always ensures return, provided the relevant conditions were met. It need not undo separately established help in finding a location. A conclusion can narrow without concealing a case or declaring all work useless. The revision should be explicit: if always becomes sometimes after an objection, a reader deserves to see that change. The modest new conclusion may be reasonable, but is not unchanged confirmation of the original strong promise. Our conversation can preserve both use of the card and discussion at its actual scale. Keeping an attractive story intact should no longer determine which events are admitted into its explanation.

VI. Aristotle: chance in relation to purpose

In Physics II.5, Aristotle describes someone collecting subscriptions for a feast. The person visits a place for another purpose and incidentally receives the money. Chance concerns the outcome's relation to the visit's purpose; deliberately visiting to collect would be a different case. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye render a historical account of incidental causation within a purposive frame, not a modern probability theory. Chance therefore need not mean no causes whatsoever. This distinction supplies no ready answer for every present event, but draws attention to the question relative to which an occurrence is called chance. Aristotle, Physics II.5.

In our group, someone might come to discuss a text and remember the book already in their bag. Returning it was not the visit's purpose, yet the completed action has an intelligible account: the book was brought and placed on the table. Coinciding meeting, card, and discovery need no unidentified governing force. Still, this particular account cannot become fact without information. An intelligible possibility shows only that coincidence need not end examination. Intention, conditions, and events between the noticed moments can be considered. Details may also remain unknown when participants need no inquiry. Ordinary events require no investigation by default; proposing a general law makes the limits of known circumstances relevant again.

Chance can answer several different questions in conversation: no plan existed, an outcome was unexpected, a cause is unknown, or repetition cannot be promised. These meanings need distinction. Unplanned return establishes no impossibility of recurrence. An observer's unknown cause establishes no absence of a participant's intention. A rare result does not invalidate its personal meaning. We offer no universal replacement definition of chance; we clarify our own sentence. Calling a meeting unexpected for us need not claim knowledge of the world's complete arrangement. The clarification leaves room both for further explanation and for ordinary wonder, which requires no transformation into a universal causal theory.

VII. Meaning does not replace explanation

Ecclesiastes 9:11–12 places strength, speed, wisdom, and skill beside unpredictable time and chance. The complete short KJV passage retains the book's religious horizon and image of sudden misfortune. It establishes neither useless effort nor a predetermined message in every coincidence. Our question concerns limits to promising an outcome solely from a person's qualities. This comparison addresses meaning and unknowns, rather than calculating probability or determining causes. Contemporary attention to other people's conditions and restraint from blame are the article's reasoning, not presented as a literal continuation of the verse. Ecclesiastes 9:11–12, KJV.

A returned book may remind someone of an old friendship. They can call the meeting important and keep its story without proving that the card governed events. Using that meaning to predict other people's actions needs another step. It reminded me does not mean everyone should do this to obtain the same result. The first statement can remain substantial without requiring the second. Personal meaning needs no invented proof to defend it, as though an event would otherwise cease to matter. Nor should an account of a cherished event be dismissed for lacking causal investigation. Distinction lets us hear the kind of account actually offered, and clarify its kind when the proposal changes.

A spiritual interpretation deserves the same distinction. Someone may describe an event within their faith; this article settles no religious question for them. Such a description does not

automatically turn observed sequence into a demonstrated mechanism or authorize promising another person a result. A practical action offered for a particular effect needs grounds within that domain. An unknown cause confirms no chosen alternative. Equally, an unconfirmed account establishes no absence of meaning. Holding both boundaries allows respect for faith without concealing evidential limits, and attention to evidence without humiliating convictions or imposing a final answer about how someone must understand their life.

VIII. Learn more without turning a person into a means

If the card question matters to the group, an available clarification might begin by asking whether the returning person wishes to explain how they found the place. They may answer, decline, or not remember. Refusal confirms no account and warrants no pressure. Moving things secretly or hiding information to test someone’s response cannot be justified by interest in causality. Our example permits no research on people. We can consider our observations, propose a change openly, and agree participation. Reliable conclusions about many people require a different scale and suitable professional methods and conditions. A household question automatically grants neither competence nor authority, nor a claim on another person’s time or private information.

Leaving the card may be reasonable without a general efficacy demonstration: participants understand it, it obstructs nothing, and it marks an agreed place. The decision then rests on a shared arrangement rather than a confirmed law of book returns. That ground should be stated. Confusion or reproach directed at absent people changes the circumstances and may call for another format. An unestablished broad effect does not prohibit every reversible action; it limits the promise accompanying it. This example concerns only a simple agreed location label. It extends no advice to health, money, safety, or other consequential decisions with different costs and expertise needs. Keeping the card and claiming demonstrated effects on everyone are different acts.

A report should identify provenance. I saw the book on the table differs from a participant said they noticed the card and we suppose it reminded them. Each can be appropriate while retaining its status. Removing said or suppose for smoother writing strengthens the assertion without another check. Nor should a group discussion imply everyone’s agreement when some were absent. An account remains intelligible when observation, another person’s report, and a proposed explanation are visible. Readers can then continue the question without first undoing an impression that the earlier narrative had already established the entire route from its opening event to its final outcome.

IX. A story can remain a story

A final account can remain a few lines: the card was placed; the book arrived next day; the returning person did not report whether the note influenced their decision. A voluntary account can be added if available. An impressive causal ending is unnecessary. An open connection is a substantive limit rather than a failed story: it locates where information ends. Later evidence may alter the account; its absence still allows participants to use the table, remember the meeting, and appreciate the return. Incomplete causal knowledge cancels none of the whole episode. It only removes grounds for presenting an unchecked connection as established or extending it elsewhere without further support.

The sources retain different questions: Hume examines causal knowledge's experiential basis; Mill the conditions of comparison; Bacon inconvenient material; Aristotle chance within a purposive frame; Ecclesiastes limits to promises based on strength and skill. They form no common demonstrated theory of coincidences. Our comparison distinguishes sequence, explanation, meaning, and decision. These distinctions demand no cold relationship with life. They make accounts of delight or surprise more precise while retaining actual unknowns. An outcome remains real without a predetermined exclusive cause assigned to it. Its place in someone's life and the grounds for a general promise are different questions, both allowed to receive their own consideration.

Next time because seems to join two events, pause at the claim's scale. What is known about the connection, what admits another account, who reported a condition, and does the conclusion concern only this case? Examination may support a limited contribution, leave several possibilities, or acknowledge an unexplored detail. None of these outcomes cancels a meeting's personal meaning or demands universal scepticism. We can keep the story while giving explanation separate work. A useful note remains an offer, an unexpected return an event that occurred, and an open question a possibility for further understanding. Confidence in their connection belongs where a stated ground actually supports it and another reader can examine that ground.

What this means in practice

If you wish, choose an ordinary account calling one event the cause of another. The invented card and returned book are available. Avoid urgent decisions, health, safety, money, and someone else's private history. This voluntary examination of language tests nobody's capacity to understand the world.

Separate what was observed, what a participant reported, and what remains a proposed explanation. Retain possible and supposed where they apply. Identify the connection the

causal claim needs: producing an outcome, helping a particular action, or merely coming earlier. Do not extend the outcome to people’s entire behaviour.

Offer one alternative possibility and one condition that could have changed alongside the noticed action. Treat neither as fact and invent no failures for an objection. Leave a question where information is insufficient. Test no other person secretly and demand no account they do not wish to give.

Finally distinguish the event’s meaning for you from grounds for a general explanation. A cherished story can remain without a demonstrated mechanism. If a simple reversible action is chosen, name its actual grounds and agreement conditions without promising an unconfirmed effect. The record may end without action. This reflection guarantees no correct conclusion and replaces no suitable professional investigation.

Key quotation

> *causes and effects are discoverable, not by reason but by experience,*

Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, IV, Part I, paragraph 24. Exact eleven-word embedded clause from the English original; terminal comma retained. Its context distinguishes a priori reasoning from experience, rather than prohibiting causal reasoning.

Connections between traditions

Source	Article question	Boundary retained
Hume, IV, paragraphs 20–24	How is causal knowledge acquired?	Experiential grounds imply no useless reasoning
Mill, III.VIII, sections 1–2	Are cases actually comparable?	Historical scheme replaces neither present inquiry nor consent
Bacon, I.46	Is inconvenient material still visible?	One case does not automatically undo every complex account
Aristotle, Physics II.5	Chance relative to which purpose?	Purposive frame is no current probability theory
Ecclesiastes 9:11–12	What limits a promised outcome?	Religious text establishes neither useless effort nor a known sign
UW editorial frame	Description, explanation, meaning, and decision	Invented account and reflection demonstrate no efficacy

Primary sources

1. Hume, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, IV, Part I, paragraphs 20–24. English original; L. A. Selby-Bigge's second edition, 1902, based on the posthumous 1777 edition. Ideas/facts through experiential causation grounds, not the entire book. Russian key clause translated by UW via the original.

2. Mill, System of Logic, III.VIII, sections 1–2. English original, eighth edition, Harper & Brothers, 1882. Agreement/difference with preceding observation discussion and opening section 3; historical programme, not a present protocol.

3. Bacon, Novum Organum, I.46. Complete aphorism and neighbouring context; historical English Collier 1902 text edited by Joseph Devey, translator unidentified. Contrary instances, no measured model of every person.

4. Aristotle, Physics II.5. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye's English translation. Complete chance discussion with II.4 ending and II.6 opening; subscription collection for a feast. Purposive account, not present physics or probability theory.

5. Ecclesiastes 9:11–12. Complete short passage, King James Version. Religious limits of outcomes and time, not a probability or rejection of effort. Russian epigraph translated by UW via English, not Hebrew.

Tags

cause, coincidence, explanation, story, sequence, evidence, observation, experience, intention, condition, comparison, alternative, unknowns, outcome, checking, revision, context, personal meaning, faith, consent, decision, limits, choice, chance, purpose, book, Hume, Mill, Bacon, Aristotle, Ecclesiastes, philosophy

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