

# Causation and correlation

## I

After the battle of Pharsalia, Cato and Scipio fled into Africa, and there, with the assistance of King Juba, got together a considerable force, which Caesar resolved to engage. ... he was informed that the enemies relied much upon an ancient oracle, that the family of the Scipios should be always victorious in Africa. There was in his army a man, otherwise mean and contemptible, but of the house of the Africani, and his name Scipio Sallutio. This man Caesar (whether in raillery to ridicule Scipio, who commanded the enemy, or seriously to bring over the omen to his side, it were hard to say), put at the head of his troops, as if he were general, in all the frequent battles which he was compelled to fight.<sup>1</sup>

## 2

Having passed the winter in Africa, Cato drew out his army, which amounted to little less than ten thousand. ... All the troops desired him to be their leader; Scipio, likewise, and Varus gave way to it, and offered him the command; but he said he would not break those laws which he sought to defend, and he, being but *propraetor*, ought not to command in the presence of a *proconsul* (for Scipio had been created *proconsul*), besides that people took it as a good omen to see a Scipio command in Africa, and the very name inspired the soldiers with hopes of success. ...

He advised Scipio ... by no means to hazard a battle against a man experienced in war, and formidable in the field, but to use delay; for time would gradually abate the violence of the crisis, which is the strength of usurpation. But Scipio out of pride rejected this counsel, and wrote a letter to Cato, in which he reproached him with cowardice ... Then Cato openly let it be seen that he was sorry he had yielded the command to Scipio, who he saw would not carry on the war with any wisdom, and if, contrary to all appearance, he should succeed, he would use his success as unjustly at home. ...

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<sup>1</sup>Plutarch, "Caesar" in *Parallel Lives* (circa 100 A.D.), edited by A.H. Clough (1884).

But what Cato had looked for, fell out sooner than he expected. Late in the evening came one from the army, whence he had been three days coming, who brought word there had been a great battle near Thapsus; that all was utterly lost; Caesar had taken the camps, Scipio and Juba were fled with a few only, and all the rest of the army were lost.<sup>2</sup>

## 3

... men that know not what it is that we call *causing*, (that is, almost all men) have no other rule to guess by, but by observing, and remembering what they have seen to precede the like effect at some other time, or times before, without seeing between the antecedent and subsequent event, any dependence or connexion at all: and therefore from the like things past, they expect the like things to come; and hope for good or evil luck, superstitiously, from things that have no part at all in the causing of it: as the Athenians did for their war at *Lepanto*, demand another *Phormio*; the Pompeian faction for their war in *Africa*, another *Scipio*; and others have done in divers other occasions since. In like manner they attribute their fortune to a stander by, to a lucky or unlucky place, to words spoken, especially if the name of God be amongst them; as charming and conjuring (the liturgy of witches;) insomuch as to believe, they have power to turn a stone into bread, bread into a man, or any thing into any thing.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Plutarch, "Cato the Younger" in *Parallel Lives* (circa 100 A.D.), edited by A.H. Clough (1884).

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651) ch. 12, ¶8.