



**How Not To Refute Hume's Theory of Causality: A Reply to Gray**

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## HOW NOT TO REFUTE HUME'S THEORY OF CAUSALITY:

## A REPLY TO GRAY

Mr. Robert Gray's alleged refutation of Hume's theory of causality does not strike me as being in reality conclusive.<sup>1</sup> The essential element in his alleged refutation, if I have understood it correctly, is that when two billiard balls strike one another and stop - a paradigm of cause and effect - the striking and the stopping constitute one event as opposed to two. They occupy, as a result, one and the same time, a state of affairs inconsistent with the Humean view that the cause immediately precedes the effect.

But, surely, they would, if they are the same event, occupy by parity of reasoning one and the same position. For Hume's theory of space and time, as Gray describes it, implies that there is a one-to-one mapping between positions and times. If, therefore, their being the same event implies that they occupy one and the same time, it would also imply that they occupy one and the same position. And if they occupy the same position, they are not spatially contiguous, a state of affairs inconsistent with the Humean view that the cause is spatially contiguous to the effect.

A Humean solution in both cases seems clear. It is to allow that the striking and stopping of the billiard balls are the same event and to seek its cause in their moving towards one another, *i.e.* to seek it in billiard ball A's being at  $A_1$  and billiard ball B's being at  $B_1$ , where both  $A_1$  and  $B_1$  are spatially contiguous with and immediately precede the striking and stopping of the respective billiard balls B and A.

Gray resists this solution, but only because he is implicitly committed to the anti-Humean view that one and the same event can occupy two different positions at one and the same time. As a result, where A designates the

position where billiard ball A strikes billiard ball B and stops it and B designates the position where billiard ball B strikes billiard ball A and stops it - this being simply a re-description in Gray's view of what happens in the single event of two billiard balls striking one another and stopping - he holds that A is different from B. If A is different from B, then by relocating the cause of billiard ball A's stopping at  $B_1$  we have sacrificed the spatial contiguity of cause and effect. For B will intervene between position  $B_1$ , that of the cause, and A, that of the effect. And the same will hold with obvious adjustments when we relocate the cause of billiard ball B's stopping at  $A_1$ . Fortunately, however, Hume need only reply that A is one and the same as B. Indeed, if he is to be consistent with his theory of space and time, this must be his reply. This reply, moreover, is necessary to Hume's explanation of how the reciprocal striking of billiard ball A and billiard ball B can exist in the first place. Such a phenomenon requires a point of contact, a point common to a part of both billiard balls. This point of contact, it should be clear, is provided by the point designated by both A and B.

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1. "A Refutation of Hume's Theory of Causality," Hume Studies, Vol. II (1976), pp. 76-85.