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TODD RYAN

In a section entitled “Of Probability; and of the idea of cause and effect,” Hume embarks on a search for the conceptual components of our idea of causation. Rejecting the possibility of analyzing the idea in terms of the qualities of objects, Hume claims to discover two constituent relations. First, a cause and effect must be contiguous in space and time because “nothing can operate in a time or place, which is ever so little remov'd from those of its existence” (T 1.3.2.6; SBN 75).¹ Second, a cause must be temporally prior to its effect. Although experience is said to confirm this latter requirement “in most instances,” Hume goes on to present an argument purporting to demonstrate that the temporal priority of a cause is an essential feature of every instance of causation.² Despite the extensive treatment that his analysis of causation has occasioned, Hume's argument for the temporal priority of causes has received comparatively little attention. In this paper I hope to remedy this neglect by providing a more accurate explication of the argument than has previously been offered.

Hume does not argue directly for the claim that a cause must be temporally prior to its effect. Rather he offers an alleged *reductio ad absurdum* of the opposing view that “'tis not absolutely necessary a cause shou'd precede its effect; but that any object or action, in the very first moment of its existence, may exert its productive quality, and give rise to another object or action, perfectly co-temporary with itself (T 1.3.2.7; SBN 76).” This careful summary

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of the opposing view provides a clear statement of what Hume takes to be at issue, namely whether it is “absolutely necessary” that a cause be temporally prior to its effect. From this it can readily be inferred precisely what would count as a refutation of his own view. Specifically, if it could be shown that some objects can produce their effect perfectly contemporaneously with themselves, then his position would have to be abandoned.³ It is against this latter possibility that Hume directs his argument. He writes:

’Tis an establish’d maxim both in natural and moral philosophy, that an object, which exists for any time in its full perfection without producing another, is not its sole cause; but is assisted by some other principle, which pushes it from its state of inactivity, and makes it exert that energy, of which it was secretly possess. Now if any cause may be perfectly co-temporary with its effect, ’tis certain, according to this maxim, that they must all of them be so; since any one of them, which retards its operation for a single moment, exerts not itself at that very individual time, in which it might have operated; and therefore is no proper cause. The consequence of this wou’d be no less than the destruction of that succession of causes, which we observe in the world; and indeed, the utter annihilation of time. For if one cause were co-temporary with its effect, and this effect with *its* effect, and so on, ’tis plain there wou’d be no such thing as succession, and all objects must be co-existent (T 1.3.2.7; SBN 76).

The general structure of the argument is reasonably clear. According to the “establish’d maxim” (hereafter EM) any object that does not produce an effect as soon as possible is not the “sole cause” of that effect. Assuming then that causes might occur simultaneously with their effects, it follows that every proper cause must be contemporaneous with its effect. But if every effect occurs simultaneously with its cause, then we arrive at the absurd conclusion that there can be no causal (or indeed temporal) succession in the world. Therefore, the original assumption that a cause may be perfectly co-temporary with its effect must be false.

Yet if its outline is clear enough, the details of the argument are somewhat more difficult to grasp. Tom Beauchamp, one of the few commentators to engage in an extended discussion of these passages, has offered a detailed interpretation of the argument as well as a number of criticisms of it.⁴ However, I shall argue that his interpretation rests on a misunderstanding of the nature of Hume’s argument, and that to a large extent this misunderstanding engenders the very objections with which he goes on to confront it. As

Beauchamp recognizes, Hume's *reductio* works by assuming that it is possible for an effect to occur simultaneously with its cause, and then showing that this assumption leads to the absurd conclusion that causal succession is impossible. Beauchamp begins his reconstruction of the argument by drawing a distinction between perfect and non-perfect contemporaneity of cause and effect. A cause is non-perfectly contemporaneous with its effect if it "is prior to but [temporally] overlaps its effect."⁵ Perfect contemporaneity obtains when "a cause . . . exerts itself only at the same instant it is actually producing the effect; i.e. it brings its effect into existence non-successively."⁶ In other words, a cause that is perfectly contemporaneous with its effect is one that produces its effect simultaneously with itself.

With this distinction in hand, Beauchamp recasts the argument in two stages. First, he invites us to consider an instance of non-perfectly contemporaneous causation. Suppose, for example, that some cause c_1 exists during the interval t_1 to t_4 , but that no effect appears until t_4 . According to the established maxim, any cause that does not act as soon as possible is not a "sole" or "proper" cause. Now, as Beauchamp understands it, to say that an object or event is not a sole or proper cause of a given effect is to say that it is not a *genuine* cause—that is, it is not a cause of the effect at all. So if proper causes can act simultaneously with their effects, it follows that during the period that c_1 existed prior to the occurrence of e_1 (i.e. during the interval t_1 to t_3), it was not a proper cause of that effect, and therefore not a genuine cause. The upshot of this initial stage of the argument is that, strictly speaking, a cause cannot be non-perfectly contemporaneous with its effect. As Beauchamp puts the point, "if causes are contemporaneous with their effect, they are *qua* causes, *perfectly* contemporaneous."⁷ However, according to the second stage of the argument, if all genuine causation is perfectly contemporaneous, then causal succession is impossible. For if all causes act simultaneously with their effects, then "all events linked in a whole causal chain are perfectly instantaneous, for all possibility of succession has been cancelled by their perfect contemporaneity."⁸ Thus, given the established maxim and the assumption that causes can be simultaneous with their effects, it follows that all causal succession is destroyed.

Beauchamp proceeds to criticize Hume's argument on three counts. First he complains that the alleged *reductio* amounts to little more than a reassertion of Hume's preceding argument that a cause must be temporally contiguous with its effect—an argument that Beauchamp criticizes on independent grounds. The two arguments are "virtually" equivalent, because Hume's justification for declaring that all "causes" during the interval prior to the actual production of an effect are strictly speaking non-causal is simply that if these

purported causes were genuine instances of causation, there would exist in the causal chain a temporal gap between cause and effect. But according to Hume's contiguity requirement "the non-contiguously related, only distantly-linked members [of a causal chain] are *eo ipso* non-causally related."⁹ Second, even if one were to grant the principle that all proper causes produce their effects as soon as possible, it would not follow that every effect must occur simultaneously with its cause. That is, the argument assumes without warrant that all causes are capable of producing their effects with the same promptness. As Beauchamp puts the point, "it could plausibly be argued . . . that a non-contemporaneous cause would not be a *sole* cause, but it does not follow that such items are not, *properly* speaking, causes," since some causes that fail to produce their effects contemporaneously may nevertheless be acting "as promptly as is possible *for them*."¹⁰ Finally, Beauchamp argues that Hume's reasoning is simply invalid. For even if he has succeeded in establishing the falsity of the claim that "All causes are simultaneous with their effects," it hardly follows that "No causes are simultaneous with their effects."¹¹

In light of his interpretation of a proper cause as a genuine or real cause it is not surprising that Beauchamp should find Hume's argument for temporal priority to be "virtually reducible to" his argument for contiguity. For Hume states the established maxim in terms of sole causes—an object that does not produce an effect as soon as possible is not the sole cause of that effect. Yet, the conclusion he draws from this is expressed in terms of proper causes. But, of course, it would hardly follow from the fact that a cause is not a sole cause that it is not a cause *tout court* unless some additional premise were invoked. And the additional premise that Beauchamp supplies on Hume's behalf is precisely the requirement that a cause be temporally contiguous with its effect. Given that assumption, any putative cause that fails to produce an effect as soon as possible is not temporally contiguous with that effect and therefore is not a genuine or "proper" cause of it.

Beauchamp's need to appeal to the premise concerning temporal contiguity along with his subsequent inability to distinguish the two arguments are, I think, symptomatic of a deeper misunderstanding of Hume's position. For Hume nowhere appeals to contiguity in his argument for temporal priority. Further Hume's characterization of the opposing view as the claim that an object may produce its effect "in the very first moment of its existence" suggests that Hume's argument does not rest on an appeal to the distinction between perfect and non-perfect contemporaneity as Beauchamp suggests. These considerations in conjunction with the difficulties that plague the argument as formulated by Beauchamp suggest that we would do well to seek a plausible alternative. I believe that such an alternative is available. As I have

emphasized, Hume expresses the established maxim as a claim about sole causes. Now, to say that an object that has existed for some time without producing a given effect is not a sole cause of the effect is to say that it alone is not sufficient for producing that effect; it requires the assistance of some additional, complimentary cause for the effect to occur. Of course such a cause might be a necessary condition for producing the effect, but it could not itself be a sufficient (or sole) condition. On this reading Hume is not asserting that the mere existence of a temporal gap between an object and its purported effect renders that object non-causal. Rather his claim is that according to EM if a cause does not produce its effect at the first possible moment, then it is not a sufficient cause of that effect.

Given these competing interpretations of EM how are we to adjudicate between them? One promising approach is to identify Hume's own sources for the principle. For if EM was commonly accepted, as Hume's characterization of the principle as an "establish'd maxim" suggests, then we would expect it to figure in other contemporary discussions of causation. And indeed not only is this expectation fulfilled, but the formulations of EM articulated by Hume's predecessors help to confirm the interpretation presently under consideration. Consider Hobbes's discussion of the principle:

An entire cause is always sufficient for the production of its effect, if the effect be at all possible. For let any effect whatsoever be propounded to be produced; if the same be produced, it is manifest that the cause which produced it was a sufficient cause; but if it be not produced, and yet be possible, it is evident that something was wanting either in some agent, or in the patient without which it could not be produced; and therefore that cause was not *entire*, which is contrary to what was supposed. It follows also from hence, that in whatsoever instant the cause is entire, in the same instant the effect is produced. For if it be not produced, something is still wanting, which is requisite for the production of it; and therefore the cause was not entire, as was supposed.¹²

The final sentences of this passage are striking for two reasons. First, Hobbes argues that an effect must be produced at the same moment that its cause becomes "entire." And the reason he cites is precisely a version of EM: if the effect were not produced simultaneously with the cause then the cause would be missing some necessary component and therefore would not be entire. Thus, Hobbes at once formulates a clear version of EM and asserts that all entire causes must produce their effects instantaneously, that is simultaneously with their

becoming entire causes. In so doing he firmly identifies himself with those philosophers against whom Hume is arguing.¹³

Of course, implicit in Hobbes's line of argument is the premise that an effect *can* occur simultaneously with its entire cause. And it is precisely this assumption that Hume wishes to deny. This disagreement leads to differences in their respective uses of EM. Whereas Hobbes directly infers from his version of the principle that an effect must be simultaneous with its entire cause, Hume is careful to suggest that EM implies only that a cause must act as soon as possible. It is for this reason that Hume states his argument in terms of the time at which a cause might have acted: "any one of them [i.e. causes], which retards its operation for a single moment, exerts not itself *at that very individual time, in which it might have operated*; and therefore is no proper cause (T 1.3.2.7; SBN 76; emphasis added). Therefore, as Hume sees it, Hobbes's conclusion follows from EM only if it is possible for an effect to occur simultaneously with its complete cause, and it is precisely this possibility that Hume denies.

Failure to observe this distinction has led a number of recent commentators to misunderstand the nature of Hume's argument. For if one takes seriously the idea that EM logically entails that all effects must be simultaneous with their causes, then given Hume's contention that a cause must be temporally prior to its effect, one is forced to conclude either that Hume's argument is an attempted *reductio ad absurdum* of EM itself (as does Jenkins), or that Hume is inexplicably employing a maxim that flatly contradicts his own stated position (as Stroud suggests).¹⁴ Thus Stroud may have something like Hobbes' argument in mind when he worries that EM entails "that no cause can exist 'in its full perfection' at any time before its effect exists, which contradicts the desired conclusion."¹⁵

The second important feature of Hobbes' argument is that he formulates his version of EM in terms of an entire cause, understood as a cause that is sufficient for producing its effect. Now this is precisely the interpretation of the principle I have attributed to Hume. This reading is confirmed by a passage in *Treatise* 1.3.15 where Hume enumerates certain rules governing the correct identification of causes and effects. The eighth rule promulgated by Hume is precisely the "establish'd maxim."¹⁶ He writes:

The eighth and last rule I shall take notice of is, that an object, which exists for any time in its full perfection without any effect, is not the sole cause of that effect, but requires to be assisted by some other principle, which may forward its influence and operation. For as like effects necessarily follow from like causes, and in a contiguous time

and place, their separation for a moment shows, that these causes are not compleat ones. (T 1.3.15.10; SBN 174–5)¹⁷

Hume's gloss of "sole cause" in terms of a "compleat cause" in the final sentence echoes Hobbes' language of "entire" causes; a cause that is complete is one that lacks nothing that is required for producing its effect. In a word, it is a sufficient cause. Thus, far from maintaining that any object that fails to act at the first possible moment is not a genuine cause, Hume's argument relies on the intuitively plausible claim that once a group of causes that is jointly sufficient for producing an effect has occurred, the correlative effect must be produced as soon as possible. In such a case there is nothing lacking for the production of the effect, so how could its occurrence be delayed? Notice that it is not the case, as Beauchamp's first objection alleges, that by itself EM rules out the possibility that one or more component causes might act at some time prior to the production of the effect.¹⁸ It asserts only that no effect can occur until all of the causes necessary for its production are in place.

With this interpretation of EM (as the claim that all sufficient causes act as soon as possible) in hand, we are now in a position to provide a detailed reconstruction of Hume's *reductio*. The argument occurs in two stages. The first stage takes the form of a conditional proof issuing in the conclusion that "if any cause may be perfectly co-temporary with its effect, they must all of them be so" (T 1.3.2.7; SBN 76). Unfortunately, Hume's formulation of the conditional is ambiguous in that it is unclear whether its antecedent is best understood as a universal or particular statement. That is, Hume could be attempting to establish either that if all sufficient causes may be simultaneous with their effects, then they must all be simultaneous, or that if even one cause is simultaneous with its effect, they must all be so. In other words, should "any" here be treated as a universal or existential quantifier? Given that the goal of Hume's argument is to reject his opponents' view that "tis not absolutely necessary a cause shou'd precede its effect", it seems best to interpret the antecedent as the formal negation of this claim.¹⁹ So understood, the first stage of the argument attempts to establish:

(C1) If at least one sufficient cause is possibly simultaneous with its effect, then all sufficient causes are in fact simultaneous with their effect.

In the second stage Hume argues that

(C2) If all sufficient causes are in fact simultaneous with their effect, then causal and temporal succession are impossible.

However, causal and temporal succession clearly are possible, and so by successive applications of *modus tollens*, Hume concludes that

(C3) It is false that at least one sufficient cause is possibly simultaneous with its effect.

And therefore

(C4) All causes must be temporally prior to their effect.

Such is the schematic form of Hume's argument. Let us now look at the first stage in more detail.

The argument for (C1) begins by assuming the antecedent and attempting to derive the consequent:

- (1) At least one sufficient cause is possibly simultaneous with its effect (assumption for conditional proof).
- (2) All sufficient causes act as soon as possible (EM).
- (3) If a sufficient cause is possibly simultaneous with its effect, then it is in fact simultaneous with its effect (from 2).

At this stage Hume is entitled to infer

- (4) At least one sufficient cause is in fact simultaneous with its effect (from 1 and 3).

However, to secure his desired conclusion, he needs to show that *all* sufficient causes are simultaneous with their effects. And this cannot be secured by EM alone. So it would seem that Hume is relying on the following enthymematic premise:

- (5) If at least one sufficient cause is possibly simultaneous with its effect, then all sufficient causes are possibly simultaneous with their effect.

Given this assumption it follows that

- (6) All sufficient causes are possibly simultaneous with their effect (from 1 and 5).
- (7) All sufficient causes are in fact simultaneous with their effect (from 3 and 6).

And thus Hume concludes:

(C1) If at least one sufficient cause is possibly simultaneous with its effect, then all sufficient causes are in fact simultaneous with their effect.

Before continuing on to the second stage of the argument, it is worth pausing to consider Beauchamp's remaining objections, both of which pertain to the first stage of Hume's argument as I have reconstructed it. Recall that according to Beauchamp's second objection, Hume relies on the unwarranted assumption that all causes act with the same promptness. His third objection is that the argument rests on an invalid inference from the premise

that it is not the case that “All causes are simultaneous with their effects,” to the conclusion that “No causes are simultaneous with their effects.” We are now in a position to deal more fully with both objections, since it should be clear that they share a common root. Specifically, both concern the enthymematic premise

- (5) If at least one sufficient cause is possibly simultaneous with its effect, then all sufficient causes are possibly simultaneous with their effect.

How might Hume justify (5)? First, it must be borne in mind that Hobbes is attempting to establish more than the mere possibility that some sufficient causes may be simultaneous with their effect. Rather, he is arguing that all causes must be simultaneous with their effect. Hume is well aware of this. This is why he opens his discussion by ascribing two views to his opponents. According to them “tis not absolutely necessary a cause shou’d precede its effect; but that any object or action, in the very first moment of its existence, may exert its productive quality, and give rise to another object or action, perfectly co-temporary with itself” (T 1.3.2.7; SBN 76). These two positions are certainly not logically equivalent.²⁰ Nor is there any reason to think that Hume is making so elementary a blunder as to consider the second as a mere restatement of the first. Now given that Hobbes is attempting to establish that all sufficient causes must be simultaneous with their effect, he could not plausibly deny the truth of (5), since his own argument rests on a similar assumption. So minimally Hume could defend (5) by means of an *ad hominem* argument against his philosophical opponents.

Moreover, the interpretation of EM that I am proposing can be seen as providing more direct support for (5). Earlier I argued that interpreting EM in terms of sufficient causes provides a solid response to Beauchamp’s first complaint that Hume’s argument amounts to no more than a reassertion of his (unwarranted) claim that all causes must be temporally prior to their effect. Now, I would argue that this interpretation goes a long way toward answering Beauchamp’s second objection as well, since his charge that some causes might not be capable of acting as promptly as others loses much of its plausibility when discussing sufficient conditions for bringing about an effect. For, again, if all of the required conditions for producing an effect are in place, how could its appearance be delayed? To say that there is some delay suggests (as Hobbes himself points out) that the complete cause was not in existence after all.²¹

More generally, one might argue that Hume’s assumption amounts to the claim that all causes are on the same metaphysical footing. That is, if some causes must be temporally prior to their effects, then all of them must

be so. Nor is this a particularly implausible assumption. In every metaphysical debate there exists a presupposition that all of the entities in a particular class possess the same metaphysical status. It would be strange to say the least, if one were to maintain without compelling reasons that all colors are universals except, say, orange which is an abstract particular or trope. Of course, such presuppositions in favor of metaphysical uniformity are defeasable, but they should be abandoned only when no other alternative is available. Therefore, in the present debate, the burden of proof ought clearly to lie with any philosopher who wishes to maintain that some sufficient causes are capable of acting instantaneously whereas others are not.

It remains only to be shown that if we interpret a "sole cause" as a complete or sufficient cause, then assuming that all effects must be produced simultaneously with their complete causes, it follows that there can be no causal succession, indeed no time at all. To see that the possibility of causal succession is in fact ruled out, notice that because every effect requires a sufficient cause for its production, they must all be produced at the same moment as their sufficient causes. Consider then some time t_1 . For any potential effect, e_1 , either the complete cause of e_1 exists at t_1 or it does not. If it does exist at t_1 , then the effect will occur at that moment (as will all of the effects for which e_1 is itself a complete cause) and no causal succession will result. If the complete cause of e_1 does not exist at t_1 , then there is some missing causal component (call it c_1) that must occur in order for e_1 to be produced. Obviously, this missing component could not have occurred at t_1 because then e_1 would have been produced at t_1 contrary to the assumption. Could it occur at some subsequent moment, say t_2 ? Notice that c_1 itself requires a complete cause, c_2 . Now if all effects are produced simultaneously with their complete causes, c_2 could not have occurred at a previous time; it must occur at t_2 . But to do so would require that its complete cause, c_3 , be in place. And it cannot have occurred previously, but must occur at t_2 , which would require another simultaneous cause, and so on to infinity. Therefore we can conclude that any effect whose component cause does not occur at t_1 will never be produced.²² So, by interpreting EM in terms of sufficient conditions for producing an effect, we do indeed arrive at the conclusion that if some effect could be produced simultaneously with its sufficient cause, then the causal (and temporal) sequence of events would be destroyed.²³ Thus, interpreting EM as the claim that all sufficient causes act as soon as possible is both consonant with the views of Hume's philosophical predecessors and affords a more plausible reading of what has otherwise struck commentators as a very obscure argument indeed.

NOTES

I would like to thank Phillip Cummins, Richard Fumerton and the editors of this journal for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this paper.

1 References in the text prefaced by “T” are to David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000). References prefaced by “SBN” are to David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978). Hume later drops the requirement that a cause must be spatially contiguous with its effect on the grounds that many objects are incapable of entering into spatial relations and yet may occur either as causes or effects; see T 1.4.5.12; SBN 237.

2 Hume frequently asserts that because every complex idea is ultimately composed of simple ideas that exactly resemble their corresponding impressions, the proper method of analyzing an idea is an essentially empirical investigation, namely to examine the impression from which it is derived. However, Hume’s willingness to provide an argument for the claim that the temporal priority of the cause is an essential feature of our idea of causation suggests a philosophical methodology that is more complex than one might otherwise have thought.

3 Hume further attributes to his opponents the claim that every cause can produce its effect simultaneously with itself. Obviously, these two claims are not logically equivalent. I shall return to this issue below.

4 Tom L. Beauchamp, “Hume on Causal Contiguity and Succession” *Dialogue* 13 (1974): 271–82. Beauchamp’s discussion of Hume’s argument is substantially reproduced in Tom L. Beauchamp and Alexander Rosenberg, *Hume and the Problem of Causation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 189–200. However, as his earlier treatment of the argument is more complete, I shall confine my discussion to the original article.

5 Beauchamp, 279.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 280.

10 Ibid., 281 (Beauchamp’s emphasis).

11 Ibid., 281–2.

12 Thomas Hobbes, *English Works*, ed. William Molesworth, 11 vols. (London, 1839–45), 1: 122–3.

13 As is his custom Hume does not explicitly cite Hobbes as his opponent. However, we know that Hume was familiar with Hobbes’ treatment of causation since he explicitly refers to it in his discussion of the causal maxim. See T 1.3.3.4; SBN 80.

14 See John J. Jenkins, *Understanding Hume* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 1992, 46–7; and Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1977), 253–4, note 2.

15 Stroud, 254. If I read him correctly, Thomas Lennon also endorses an interpretation of EM in terms of sufficient conditions for producing an effect. However, like Stroud, Lennon fails to recognize that Hume’s formulation of the established maxim implies only that once the sufficient conditions for producing an effect are in place, that effect must occur as soon as possible, and that therefore precisely what is at issue between Hume and his opponents is whether “as soon as possible” means simultaneously with its cause or at some subsequent moment. As a result, Lennon claims to find a fundamental “ambiguity” in Hume’s argument in that, on the one hand, Hume wants to maintain that it is the nature of a sufficient condition that if c_i is sufficient for the production of e_i , then e_i must occur simultaneously with c_i , while on the other hand, asserting that the established maxim “regards the . . . producer as occurring at the exact previous moment [from the effect].” See Thomas Lennon, “Veritas Filia Temporis: Hume on Time and Causation,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2 (1985): 279–80.

16 Hume’s explicit endorsement of the established maxim provides further evidence that Jenkins’s construal of the argument as a *reductio ad absurdum* of EM itself cannot be correct.

17 Lennon considers whether for Hume EM represents an a priori criterion that all genuine instances of causation must satisfy or an empirical generalization that Hume recommends as a methodological principle for investigating the natural world. Lennon seems to endorse the latter interpretation on the grounds that an a priori restriction of this type would be “inconsistent with all Hume’s arguments that causal claims are founded only in experience.” (Lennon, 279). However, Lennon’s interpretation seems problematic given Hume’s willingness to invoke the principle as part of an a priori argument about the necessary components of the relation of cause and effect.

18 Of course, Hume *does* think that causes must be temporally contiguous with their effects. My point is that, *pace* Beauchamp, this claim is logically independent of his argument for the temporal priority of causes.

19 For similar reasons I have chosen to interpret the equally ambiguous “may” as the expression of a modal claim. I would like to thank the editors of this journal for emphasizing both of these potential ambiguities in Hume’s statement.

20 I am here taking “any” to indicate a universal quantifier. Therefore, I read the second view that Hume ascribes to his opponents to be the claim that all sufficient causes are possibly simultaneous with their effect.

21 Understanding EM as a claim about the sufficient conditions for producing an effect also helps to explain why Hume presents his argument in terms of the contemporaneity of cause and effect, since as long as the jointly sufficient conditions for producing a particular effect are present, that effect must be produced.

22 It might be objected that this argument fails to establish the absolute impossibility of causal succession, since it does not rule out the possibility of an infinite chain of instantaneous causes at each moment. I grant that Hume's argument fails to eliminate this possibility, but I take it that Hume would simply consider it too absurd to be taken seriously.

23 The inference from the destruction of the causal sequence of events in the world to that of the temporal sequence requires the unstated premise that every event has a cause, a premise to which Hobbes explicitly subscribes. Additionally, Hume's implicit appeal to the premise provides further evidence that despite his denial that the so-called causal maxim is a necessary truth, nevertheless it is a truth. See T 1.3.3.

