Hume's Separability Principle, his Dictum, and their Implications

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Hsueh M. Qu has recently argued that Hume's famed "Separability Principle" from the Treatise entangles him in a contradiction. Qu offers a modified principle as a solution but also argues that the mature Hume would not have needed to avail himself of it, given that Hume's arguments in the first Enquiry do not depend on this principle in any form. To the contrary, I show that arguments in the first Enquiry depend on this principle, but I agree with Qu that Qu's solution to Hume's quandary frees him of the contradiction. Next, I compare Qu's solution to Hume's original position. By analyzing the divergent forms of Hume's "Dictum" that follow from them, I show that Qu's solution and Hume's original position have significantly different consequences in a range of domains, including Hume's modality. Generally, Qu's solution fits better with Hume's other commitments—even though Hume often fails to recognize it—thereby increasing its plausibility.

Hsueh M. Qu (2022) argues that Hume's "Separability Principle" (SP) entangles him in a contradiction, at least as he formulates it in the *Treatise*. By adjusting the principles that derive it, Qu develops a modified formulation of SP that avoids the contradiction, but Qu concludes by claiming that "Hume entirely drops [SP] from the first *Enquiry*, along with any arguments that depended on it" (Qu 2022, p. 533). Qu muses that it is always an option to interpret the mature Hume as avoiding the need to move to a modified version of SP by eschewing the principle entirely. In this paper, I argue that Hume does not drop SP from the first *Enquiry* in this sense, and then I turn to evaluate the resulting option space.

In §1, I explain Qu's resolution to the contradiction that entangles Hume. I clarify in §2 the nature of SP in connection with the principles that derive it, and I show that some of Hume's arguments and positions in the first *Enquiry* depend on these principles. Next, given that Hume is stuck with the principles that derive SP, I consider their other consequences. In §3, I show that these principles imply "Hume's Dictum," which is generally interpreted as the claim that "there are no metaphysically necessary connections between distinct […] entities" (Wilson 2010, p. 595), as Jessica Wilson puts it. I then show that Qu's modified formulations of the principles undergirding SP imply a correspondingly modified formulation of the Dictum. In §4, I show that these two formulations of the Dictum have very different consequences. I show how these consequences conform—or fail to conform—with some of Hume's views. The relative plausibility of these consequences bears a direct relationship to that of Qu's proposal to modify the principles undergirding SP. On the whole, Qu's solution fares better than Hume's original position.

1. Hume's Problem and Qu's Solution

In the *Treatise*, Hume deploys the following principle: "whatever objects are different are distinguishable, and […] whatever objects are distinguishable are separable by the thought and imagination" and "whatever objects are separable are also distinguishable, and […] whatever objects are distinguishable are also different" (THN 1.1.7.3). This principle—the "Mental Separability Principle"—is generally interpreted as follows:

> MSP: x is numerically distinct from y if, and only if, x is distinguishable from y, and x is distinguishable from y if, and only if, (i) it is possible to (clearly and distinctly) conceive x without conceiving y and (ii) it is possible to (clearly and distinctly) conceive y without conceiving x.[1]

Hume often combines MSP with his "Conceivability Principle," which asserts that if it is possible to (clearly and distinctly) conceive x, then x is metaphysically possible (n.b., henceforth I will express 'metaphysically possible' as 'possible', 'metaphysically necessary' as 'necessary', and '(clearly and distinctly) conceive' as 'conceive'). Qu claims that the result of this combination is the Separability Principle, which Hume derives from these two:

> SP: x is numerically distinct from y if, and only if, x is distinguishable from y, and x is distinguishable from y if, and only if, (i) it is possible that x exists and it is not the case that y exists and (ii) it is possible that y exists and it is not the case that x exists. (Qu 2022, pp. 520-521)

Since SP implies that perceptions can exist independently of other perceptions, Qu argues that this gets Hume into trouble. Some complex ideas are especially clear cases where Hume holds that complexes cannot exist independently of the simples they comprise, but complex ideas and their simple components are perceptions, so he is being inconsistent.

Qu's solution is for Hume to either modify SP or abandon it entirely. The modified version that Qu proposes is as follows:

> SP*: x is really different from y if, and only if, x is really distinguishable from y if, and only if, (i) it is possible that x exists and it is not the case that y exists and (ii) it is possible that y exists and it is not the case that x exists. (Qu 2022, pp. 532-533)

Since Hume's commitment to the Conceivability Principle is uncontested, SP* is generated via a change in MSP. Although the second constituent of SP is also modified to address other issues, the crucial thing—to avoid the contradiction and for my purposes—is that SP*'s first constituent asserts that x and y are "really different" from one another. This is achieved by changing MSP into MSP* by adjusting its first constituent in a parallel manner. Qu explains that x is really different from y if, and only if, each is neither a "proper" or an "improper" part of the other. In turn, x is a proper part of y just in case x is a part of y that is *not* numerically identical to y, and x is an improper part of y just in case they are numerically identical (Qu 2022, p. 531).

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[1] See Garrett 1997, chapter 3; Baxter 2011, pp. 161-162; and Qu 2022, pp. 518-520.

SP* enables Hume to avoid the contradiction because it does not imply that perceptions can exist independently of other perceptions. Instead, it implies that perceptions can exist independently of *really different* perceptions. As Qu puts it, it "allows for overlapping complexes having independent existence: ABC and CDE are really different, because neither is either a proper or an improper part of the other, and thus ABC and CDE are metaphysically separable (preserving the insight that each complex can exist without the other). Yet it correctly predicts that C is inseparable from both ABC and CDE because C is a proper part of both complexes" (Qu 2022, p. 532).

2. The Separability Principle, in general and in the first *Enquiry*

Qu is right that SP* is superior to SP. It resolves the contradiction Qu locates and parallel issues related to composition in other areas of Hume's thought, as I will discuss in section 4. Nonetheless, there are two points on which I disagree with Qu.

First, MSP and the Conceivability Principle do not imply SP as stated.[2] (On this point, Qu understandably follows the standard interpretation, which takes SP to follow from them or treats it as unobjectionable.[3]) Since the Conceivability Principle is not a biconditional, it does not license an inference from MSP to SP. MSP and the Conceivability Principle imply *only* the left-to-right direction of SP (call it 'SP$_{LR}$'): if x is numerically distinct from y, then x is distinguishable from y, and if x is distinguishable from y, then (i) it is possible that x exists and it is not the case that y exists and (ii) it is possible that y exists and it is not the case that x exists. The same reasoning applies to SP*, *mutatis mutandis*.

In his texts, Hume indicates *neither* that MSP and the Conceivability Principle imply SP *nor* that he holds SP.[4] Hume always expresses SP$_{LR}$, not SP. Furthermore, were Hume to hold MSP, the Conceivability Principle, and SP, then he must hold, contrary to the consensus of commentators, the converse of the Conceivability Principle (that possibility implies conceivability).[5]

Despite this, Qu's argumentation can be otherwise retained without any loss, so long as SP is replaced with SP$_{LR}$ and so long as SP* is replaced with SP*$_{LR}$. From here onward, I will make these replacements.

Second, contrary to Qu's contention, Hume's arguments in the first *Enquiry* depend on SP$_{LR}$, so he must retain it in some form. One of Hume's central concerns in this later text is with the nature of the connection between the perceptions that we use to represent distinct causes and effects. Before presenting his own position, Hume seeks to rule out alternatives. In section 4, Hume goes to great lengths to argue that we are not able to infer *a priori* effects from their causes, or vice versa.

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[2] If the operator 'it is necessary that' is added to SP, then they do—but then so does everything else.

[3] See, e.g., Garrett 1997, p. 71, and Baxter 2011, p. 163.

[4] For instance, THN 1.1.7.6 finds Hume using the Conceivability Principle after deploying MSP in THN 1.1.7.3, but SP does not appear.

[5] The only additional premise needed to derive the converse is that if it is possible to conceive x without conceiving y, then it is possible to conceive that x exists while y does not exist, which Hume assumes in his use of the Conceivability Principle (e.g., to derive SP$_{LR}$, which references existence despite MSP and the Conceivability Principle not referencing existence; see THN 1.3.6.1, THN 1.4.5.5, THN 1.4.6.3, THN App.12) and which follows from his views on existence (see THN 1.2.6). For discussion of the converse, see Lightner 1997 and Millican 2017, as well as section 4 below.

For instance, in EHU 4.9, Hume argues that if we were able to infer *a priori* a cause or effect from its complement, then we would be able to represent the first and "find" or "discover" the other in it without any "past observation". But since purported causes and effects are distinct ("the effect is totally different from the cause") and distinct things can be conceived without one another, purported causes and effects can be so conceived. As Hume states, we can conceive raising a stone into the air, releasing it, and it flying upward rather than downward. If we could "find" or "discover" effects in their causes, we could not conceive this. So, we are not able to infer *a priori* one from the other.

This argument is deployed by Hume for various interrelated purposes at junctures in section 4 and then again in section 12, so it is clearly central to his thinking in the first *Enquiry*.[6] But the crucial point for my purposes is that it depends on the truth of a component of MSP, namely its left-to-right direction (*sans* the distinguishability constituent):

> MSP_{LR}: if x is numerically distinct from y, then (i) it is possible to conceive x without conceiving y and (ii) it is possible to conceive y without conceiving x.

If this claim were false, then there would be numerically distinct things that cannot be conceived without one another, so Hume could not infer that, in virtue of their distinctness, causes and effects can be conceived without one another.[7]

In fact, one could plausibly read Hume's phrase "totally different" in EHU 4.9 as referring to a concept like Qu's real difference.[8] One could then run this interpretative argument, *mutatis mutandis*, as one for the dependence of Hume's argument on the truth of $MSP*_{LR}$. (The below interpretative argument could then be run, *mutatis mutandis*, as an argument for Hume's necessary reliance on the truth of $MSP*_{RL}$ in the first *Enquiry*.)

Even setting aside the fact that it does not contain the second constituent of MSP concerning distinguishability, MSP_{LR} is not MSP in its totality. The converse of MSP_{LR}—that conceivable separability implies numerical distinctness—is missing. Nevertheless, this claim, MSP_{RL}, can be derived from the Conceivability Principle and the necessity of numerical identity, so if it is false, then one of them is false. Thus, MSP_{RL}, and so, MSP.

While Hume does not explicitly state MSP in the first *Enquiry*, and while he drops its middle constituent concerning distinguishability, we can see that a central argument in that text depends on it being true. Given that he retains the Conceivability Principle in that text, Hume is implicated in retaining SP_{LR}. So, it is not the case, contra Qu, that "Hume entirely drops [SP] from the first *Enquiry*, along with any arguments that depended on it" (Qu 2022, p. 533).

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[6] See EHU 4.9-11, EHU 4.13, EHU 4.18, EHU 12.28-29.
[7] See Garrett 1997, pp. 72-73, for a streamlined but similar interpretative argument.
[8] For cases where Hume uses similar terminology, see THN 1.3.14.15, THN 3.1.1.27, EHU 7.14, EHU 12.11.

3. The links between the Separability Principle and Hume's Dictum

Since SP$_{LR}$ remains a principle of the Hume of the first *Enquiry*, we are left with Qu's first option: modify SP$_{LR}$ into SP*$_{LR}$ to avoid the contradiction. In what follows, my focus is on other consequences of MSP and MSP*. In this section, I show how two versions of Hume's Dictum can be derived from MSP, as well as how two can be derived from MSP*. In the next section, I will discuss some of their consequences.

This exploration is intended to be the groundwork of an evaluation of the philosophical and interpretative plausibility of Qu's proposal to shift to MSP* and thus SP*$_{LR}$. Qu's proposal to shift to MSP* solves the problematic contradiction that Qu identifies, but, once we are in the business of seeking to improve Hume's system via variations in his fundamental principles, we must continue to broaden the scope of our evaluation of the consequences of these variations.

Hume expresses his Dictum in the *Treatise* as the claim that "[t]here is no object, which implies the existence of any other if we consider these objects in themselves, and never look beyond the ideas which we form of them" (THN 1.3.6.1). This existential formulation of Hume's Dictum (call it 'HD$_E$') tightly parallels the conclusion of his arguments in the first *Enquiry* that seek to rule out necessary connections—and thus *a priori* inferences—between the perceptions that we represent distinct things with. However, there are two differences: first, HD$_E$ refers to the existence of *objects* and not just *perceptions*, and second, it uses the term 'implies' to describe what is ruled out. As I will discuss, this means that Hume treats implications as holding, in some cases, between non-propositional entities.

The reason for the first difference is that—like SP$_{LR}$ and as we will see below—HD$_E$ is derived from MSP$_{LR}$, along with the Conceivability Principle and the assumption that if it is possible to conceive x without conceiving y, then it is possible to conceive that x exists while y does not exist.[9] By contrast, the arguments in the first *Enquiry* depend on *only* MSP$_{LR}$. The reason for the second difference is that Hume holds that implications are necessary, as his uses of implication in the *Treatise* reveal. This matches the content and purpose of the conclusion of his negative arguments in the first *Enquiry*.

Hume is explicit that implications are necessary in some cases, as when he expresses his Conceivability Principle as the claim that "[w]hatever can be conceiv'd by a clear and distinct idea necessarily implies the possibility of existence" (THN 1.2.4.11). In other cases, we must attribute necessity to the implications Hume asserts in order to make sense of his inferences as valid.

For instance, in THN 1.2.5.3, Hume concludes "that the existence of one particle of matter, no more implies the existence of another" on the basis of the assumption that if, for any part of matter, it is possible that it fails to exist while the others exist, then it is not the case that the existence of any part of matter implies the existence of any other. The contrapositive of this claim is an instance of the view that if x's existence implies y's existence, then it is not the case that it is possible that x exists and it is not the case that y exists. This inference is valid only if, by 'x's existence implies y's existence', we interpret Hume to mean 'it is necessary that if x exists, then y exists'. Although this

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[9] For a case where Hume states this assumption, see THN 1.2.5.3, discussed below. See footnote 5.

implication holds between the *existence* of a given *x* and that of a given *y*, Hume must hold that it is necessary.[10]

Passages like THN 1.2.5.3 reveal why Hume's Dictum is generally understood, as Wilson puts it, as the claim that "there are no metaphysically necessary connections between distinct […] entities." HD as Hume expresses it in the *Treatise* (as HD_E) implies this claim only if 'implies' in his formulation is understood to refer to a necessity.

There is an analysis of implication according to which implications are necessary in precisely this sense—namely, "strict" implication, according to which '*x* strictly implies *y*' is logically equivalent to 'it is necessary that *x* materially implies *y*'. So, we can say that Hume is expressing strict implications in these cases.[11] And we can render the existential version of HD as follows:

> HD_E: It is not the case that both (*x*'s existence strictly implies *y*'s existence) and (*x* is numerically distinct from *y*).

With this background in hand, the tight link between MSP and Hume's Dictum becomes clearer. In fact, Hume recognizes the connection himself, as is evident from the way that he argues in THN 1.2.5.3 about parts of matter and from how he justifies HD_E in its general form in THN 1.3.6.1.[12] The logical structure of Hume's argument as he expresses it in THN 1.3.6.1 is as follows. Suppose that both (*x*'s existence strictly implies *y*'s existence) and (*x* is numerically distinct from *y*). It follows that it is not the case that it is possible that *x* exists and *y* does not exist. From the Conceivability Principle, it follows that it is not the case that it is possible to conceive that *x* exists and *y* does not exist. But the numerical distinctness of *x* and *y* was supposed at the outset, so, via MSP_{LR}, it is possible to conceive *x* without conceiving *y*. Since it is possible to conceive *x* without conceiving *y*, it is possible to conceive that *x* exists while *y* does not exist, and thus it is conceivable that *x* exists and *y* does not exist. From this contradiction, HD_E follows.

The only premises here are MSP_{LR}, the Conceivability Principle, and the assumption that if it is possible to conceive *x* without conceiving *y*, then it is possible to conceive that *x* exists while *y* does not exist. Since the mature Hume must hold these principles in the first *Enquiry*, he must hold HD_E, too.

Now, by changing one premise of this argument, we can derive the following more general form of Hume's Dictum, which is applicable to all of the strict implications that Hume asserts and maintains, even if they do not hold between the *existence* of a given *x* and that of a given *y*:

> HD: It is not the case that both (*x* strictly implies *y*) and (*x* is numerically distinct from *y*).

The argument for HD is the same as above, *mutatis mutandis*, except for the addition of this premise: if it is not the case that it is possible to conceive that *x* and ¬*y*, then it is necessary that if *x* is conceived, then *y* is conceived. This premise is an instance of the more general equivalence

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[10] For other cases, see THN 1.2.2.5, THN 1.3.14.10, and THN 2.3.1.16.

[11] A corroborating reason is that interpreting them as material implications would entangle Hume in necessitarianism, given his definition of possibility. The derivation parallels that of Shafiei 2017 (3, fn6).

[12] See also THN 2.3.1.16.

that it is not possible that x and $\neg y$ if, and only if, it is necessary that if x, then y. The premise follows from this equivalence as well as the assumption—which is already found in the standard expression of MSP, which is granted by Qu, and which I have relied upon previously—that conceivability is the possibility of being conceived. Thus, Hume must hold HD in the first *Enquiry*, too.

Yet, if we are to modify MSP into MSP* as Qu recommends, neither HD_E nor HD can be derived. Still, the structure of Hume's argument for HD_E can be mirrored in an argument for a modified version of HD_E:

> HD_E*: It is not the case that both (x's existence strictly implies y's existence) and (x and y are neither proper parts nor improper parts of each other).

The argument for HD_E* runs the same as above, *mutatis mutandis*. The only difference is MSP*$_{LR}$ in place of MSP$_{LR}$, so if Hume is on the hook for MSP* in the first *Enquiry*, the same goes for HD_E*. Likewise, by changing one premise as before, this argument can be converted into an argument for HD*:

> HD*: It is not the case that both (x implies y) and (x is really different from y).

4. The implications of Hume's Dictum in its various forms

Suppose that x's existence strictly implies y's existence. It follows from HD_E that it is not the case that x is numerically distinct from y, and therefore x is numerically identical to y. Likewise, if HD and if x strictly implies y, then x is numerically identical to y. Implications require a lack of numerical distinctness of their *implicantia* and *implacanda* if HD_E or HD are true, given MSP.

A parallel argument can be generated from the first supposition and HD_E*. It follows from them that it is not the case that x is really different from y, and therefore either x is a proper part of y, y is a proper part of x, or x is numerically identical to y. Likewise, if HD* and if x strictly implies y, then either x is a proper part of y, y is a proper part of x, or x is numerically identical to y. Implications require a lack of real difference if HD_E* or HD* are true, given MSP*.

I will now explore what follows from these divergent consequences of MSP and MSP* as I consider cases where Hume maintains that a given x's existence strictly implies a given y's existence or that a given x strictly implies a given y, as well as cases where he *must*. Hume is liable for the consequences of MSP and thus HD_E and HD, which reveals more about the contours of his system as he presented it, but we are partially liable for the consequences of MSP* and thus HD_E* and HD*, if we are to saddle Hume with them.

One straightforward case where Hume explicitly expresses a strict implication is when he asserts that "[s]ince therefore belief implies a conception, and yet is something more; and since it adds no new idea to the conception; it follows, that it is a different MANNER of conceiving an object" (A 21).

This case falls neatly under the scope of HD$_E$ and HD$_E$* since it involves the existence of things: beliefs and ideas ("conceptions"). If the existence of a given belief x strictly implies the existence of some idea y, and if HD$_E$, then Hume must hold that x is numerically identical to y. This is untenable for Hume, and he explicitly rejects it in holding that a given belief x is some idea y *and* "something more," namely a "different MANNER" of conceiving y's object (i.e., in an especially vivacious way or with a special type of vivacity). On the other hand, if HD$_E$*, then Hume can consistently hold that a given belief has an idea as a proper part. Advantage to HD$_E$*.[13]

A feature of this case is its asymmetry: it is a case where x's existence strictly implies y's existence and yet it is *not* the case that y's existence strictly implies x's existence. In such cases, if HD$_E$*, then y is a proper part of x, and the other two options are ruled out. By contrast, HD$_E$ fails to generate the correct result in these cases, and it entangles Hume in contradictions. It follows from HD$_E$ and x's existence strictly implying y's existence that x is numerically identical to y. But the lack of strict implication from y's existence to x's existence implies the possibility of y existing while x does not exist, which implies a contradiction. Qu's proposal to shift to MSP* and thus HD$_E$* enables Hume to avoid this sort of contradiction, thereby increasing its plausibility relative to MSP and HD$_E$.

The case of the Conceivability Principle is less straightforward. Hume sometimes explicitly expresses the Conceivability Principle as a strict implication, such as in THN 1.2.4.11, noted before. Furthermore, many of Hume's uses of this principle assume that it has the modal strength of a strict implication. Hume does not treat conceivability as a merely defeasible "guide" to possibility; rather it is an "undeniable argument" for possibility (THN 1.3.6.5). Yet, it is not obvious how we should understand the principle's *implicans* and *implicandum* because of the varying and ambiguous language Hume uses to express them. For the Conceivability Principle to interface with HD$_E$ and HD$_E$*, it must be interpreted to assert that the *existence* of *the possibility of an idea of* x strictly implies the *existence* of *the possibility of* x. This would seem to require the reification of *possibilia*. By contrast, HD and HD* allow the following formulation: *that an idea of* x *is possible* strictly implies *that* x *is possible*.

Despite these uncertainties, conclusions about the Conceivability Principle can still be drawn. Hume does not seem to recognize that if the Conceivability Principle expresses a strict implication, and if HD$_E$ or HD, then it must be a biconditional and conceivability is numerically identical to possibility, or else he contradicts himself, per the above discussion of asymmetrical cases. This is true regardless of what Hume should be interpreted as asserting when he asserts the *implicans* and *implicandum* of the Conceivability Principle.

Hume's metaphysics and epistemology of modality have been the subject of dispute due to the dearth of textual evidence that illuminates their precise contours. One prominent interpretation—that of Thomas Holden—comes close to the identity interpretation of the Conceivability Principle required by HD$_E$ and HD. On this view, "[w]hen we assert that a given proposition is absolutely necessary, we are expressing an attitude that is prompted and controlled by our sense that we could never successfully formulate the contrary combination of ideas" and that "when we assert that a proposition is absolutely possible we are expressing an attitude that is prompted by our sense that

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[13] Note that if HD$_E$*, then Hume must hold that the vivacity of a given belief is a proper part of it. This position, which comes with some costs, is still an advantage over a straightforward contradiction.

that proposition is in fact conceivable by the human mind" (Holden 2014, p. 383). Holden urges us to take seriously Hume's assertion that "the necessity, which makes two times two equal to four, or three angles of a triangle equal to two right ones, lies only in the act of the understanding, by which we consider and compare these ideas" (THN 1.3.14.23).

Indeed, if conceivability strictly implies possibility, and if HD_E or HD, then we must take it *literally*. If conceivability *just is* possibility, then the negation of possibility *just is* the negation of conceivability. Since the necessity of x is logically equivalent to the negation of the possibility of $\neg x$, it is numerically identical to it, and thus the necessity of x *just is* ("lies only in") the inconceivability of $\neg x$. The identity interpretation of the Conceivability Principle also fits with Hume's onetime assertion of the converse of the principle, noted by Holden but disregarded or explained away by many other commentators, that "[w]e can form no idea of a mountain without a valley, and therefore regard it as impossible" (THN 1.2.2.8). And it fits with Hume's claim, in the first *Enquiry*, that any non-contradiction can be conceived: "[w]hat never was seen, or heard of, may yet be conceived; nor is any thing beyond the power of thought, except what implies an absolute contradiction" (EHU 2.4). When combined with Hume's position that x is possible (or it is possible that x) if, and only if, it is not the case that x implies a contradiction, the converse of the Conceivability Principle follows.[14]

Thus, the preceding discussion of the consequences of HD_E and HD provides support for a view like Holden's, and it cuts against the purely realist interpretations that oppose that of Holden in holding that, for Hume, *what it is* to be necessary or possible is *not* a function of what we can conceive.[15] Still, as noted in section 2, many commentators maintain that Hume *in fact* rejects the converse of the Conceivability Principle. If they are correct, then it is untenable to identify conceivability with possibility, which is what HD_E and HD require. So, if Hume endorses HD_E and HD, as he *in fact* does and as he *must* (since he endorses MSP), then he contradicts himself.

HD_E* and HD* free Hume of this issue. Hume can maintain asymmetrical implication and is thereby required to hold that the conceivability of x has x's possibility as a proper part, and that there are possibilities that are not conceivable. That is, if Hume *ought* to reject the converse of the Conceivability Principle, then he ought to move to HD_E* and HD*, as Qu recommends.

5. Conclusion

Qu's solution to move Hume to MSP* has a wide range of philosophical and interpretative consequences. If we are in the business of making repairs to Hume's Mental Separability Principle, which Qu is correct that we *must* be, then we must consider the complete range of consequences. On the whole, Qu's solution to move to MSP* fares better than MSP, but it is not clear if *all* of the former's consequences are tenable. I have considered only a few of them here. In the end, if these consequences are sufficiently implausible, an alternative to MSP and MSP* must be sought.[16]

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[14] See, e.g., THN 1.3.6.1, THN 1.3.9.10, THN 1.4.5.7, EHU 4.2. Hume also identifies impossibility with implying a contradiction, per THN 1.2.3.14, A 11, DNR 2.12.

[15] See, e.g., Passmore 1952, Hausman 1975, and Kail 2007. For related discussion and a view unsympathetic to Holden's, see Millican 2021, section 4.

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Abbreviations

'THN'   book, part, section, paragraph from Hume's *Treatise* (Oxford, 2007).

'A'   paragraph from the *Abstract* to Hume's *Treatise* (Oxford, 2007).

'EHU'   section, paragraph from Hume's first *Enquiry* (Oxford, 2007).

'DNR'   part, paragraph from Hume's *Dialogues* (Cambridge, 2007).

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