Sungho Choi and the ‘actual events’ clause

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In order to keep matters brief, I shall assume knowledge of my *Mind* paper and Sungho Choi’s paper printed before this brief response (Noordhof 1999; Choi 2002). Sungho Choi claims that the example I gave to motivate my formulation of the ‘actual events’ clause fails to motivate it and that the formulation, in fact, contains a redundant element, namely my appeal to supersets. I think he is right that my example doesn’t work. However, I think he is wrong that the actual events clause contains a redundant element. The second case he discusses provides the motivation we need.

In his discussion of the second case, Sungho Choi makes two key claims. First that $e^*$ probabilistically $\Sigma$-depends on $p^*$ (the mereological sum of $g^*$ and $h^*$) where $\Sigma = \{ d^*, f^*, k^* \}$. Second, that there are no other $\Sigma$-sets for which $a^*$ comes out a cause of $e^*$. I concede the second point. However, I think that he is wrong about the first. If we consider what would happen if the mereological sum of $g^*$ and $h^*$ did not occur, it does not follow that neither $g^*$ nor $h^*$ occurred, only that one didn’t. In which case $e^*$ does not probabilistically $\Sigma$-depend on $p^*$. If $p^*$ did not occur, it is still possible that one of $g^*$ or $h^*$ did occur and hence that $e^*$ might have occurred. Although, for the reasons given by David Lewis and implied by the similarity metric I put forward in my response to Ramachandran, I don’t accept that ‘$x$ might occur’ entails ‘it is not the case that $x$ would not occur’, I think that, in the actual set-up he describes, it would be plausible that, if $e^*$ might occur, it is not the case that $e^*$ would not occur (Lewis 1986: 64–65; Noordhof 2000: 319–21). Certainly I would not want to rest a theory on insisting that the move from ‘$e^*$ might occur’ to ‘it is not the case that $e^*$ would not occur’ is implausible in this case. It would have better served Sungho Choi’s purposes to have appealed not to the mereological sum but to the disjunction of $g^*$ and $h^*$.

$e^*$ does probabilistically $\Sigma$-depend on the disjunctive event. But I still have a worry. Some might deny that there is a
disjunctive event in this case. I would not want my theory to rely upon the
claim that there are disjunctive events when necessary. Hence, I think that
one should stick with my formulation of the ‘actual events’ clause at
the risk of flirting with redundancy. It is certainly better than facing a
counter-example.¹

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References

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Sungho Choi for his acute discussion of my
theory.