

Hume's Unified Theory of Mental Representation

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November 28, 2011

Claims about mental representation play a central role in many of Hume's most famous arguments. When Hume asks whether we have an idea of necessary connection, he is in part asking whether we possess an idea that allows us to think of or represent necessary connections in some sense.¹ And when Hume argues that passions do not represent in the manner that ideas do, he is arguing against the claim that passions can serve as mental representations of other things in that manner.² But while claims about mental representation run through and support much of Hume's philosophy, the precise nature of Hume's understanding of mental representation raises a number of interpretive puzzles. For while Hume makes various claims about how and why various sorts of ideas represent what they do, it is not obvious that all these claims are compatible with one another. And even if these claims are consistent, Hume does little to explain how they may be combined into a unified account of mental representation in general. Thus, the reader may wonder whether Hume's comments about mental representation are based in any systematic understanding of how ideas represent what they do.

In fact, worries about Hume's account of mental representation have led many prominent Hume interpreters to conclude that it is one of the least promising elements of his philosophy. For example, in his *Hume*, Barry Stroud writes that Hume's "atomistic picture of distinct and separable perceptions, according to which having a certain thought or belief is a relatively discrete event or state isolated from the having of most other thoughts or beliefs ... leaves Hume without the resources for describing realistically what is actually involved in what he refers to as 'having' an idea or belief."³ Thus, Stroud concludes, Hume's

¹See especially T 1.3.14

²See especially T 2.3.3.5; SBN 415

³London: Routledge (1977), 255-6. For a similar reading, see Elijah Millgram's "Was Hume a Humean?"

philosophy is of interest today only to the degree to which it is possible to separate his arguments from his understanding of how and why ideas represent.⁴ But separating Hume's arguments from his theory of mental representation is no easy task. For, as noted above, many of these arguments appear to rely on controversial claims about what a particular idea may be an idea *of* in some sense.

In his *Learning from Six Philosophers*, Jonathan Bennett stresses the connections between Hume's claims about mental representation and his arguments.⁵ Bennett stresses that many of Hume's arguments rely on the Copy Principle, where this is understood not just as a claim about the *causal origins* of our ideas, but also as a claim about what these ideas *represent* in some sense. As I will discuss in more detail, this seems to me fundamentally correct. But Bennett believes that the Copy Principle is capable of doing the work Hume wants it to do only if we make three "radical revisions" to it. Thus, according to Bennett, we can save Hume's arguments only by making large-scale changes to his account of mental representation.

In fact, though, Hume's account of mental representation is not nearly as philosophically naive as Stroud suggests it is. And it is possible to understand this account in a manner that allows it to play the role Hume wishes it to without the dramatic revisions that Bennett suggests are necessary. But to see why this is the case, we need to first understand how Hume's comments about mental representation throughout the *Treatise* can be naturally combined so as to form a unified theory of mental representation. Only by doing so, will we recognize that Hume's understanding of mental representation is both plausible *and* philosophically powerful enough to do the work he asks it to do.⁶

1. Senses of "Representation" in Hume

Before moving on to discuss the basic elements within Hume's account of mental repre-

Hume Studies 21 (1995): 75-93. For a reading of Hume that is, if anything, even more dismissive of his theory of ideas, see Edward Craig's *The Mind of God and the Works of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

⁴If Hume's account of mental representation were as atomistic as Stroud believes, I would be sympathetic with this negative verdict. But, as I hope to show, this is far from the case.

⁵Chapter 32 of *Learning from Six Philosophers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁶The idea that Hume's theory of mental representation is worthy of serious philosophical attention has gained popularity in recent years. In addition to the work of Stroud and Bennett, an important discussion of Hume's ideas about mental representation is Jerry Fodor's *Hume Variations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), about which I will have more to say shortly.

sensation, I want to discuss an even more basic question of Hume interpretation: namely, what exactly Hume means when he speaks of an idea “representing” something else. Getting clear about this question is important not least because we do not want to *assume* that Hume’s discussion of ideas representing other things maps neatly onto our contemporary use of these terms. In the end, I will be arguing that at least certain central elements of Hume’s account of these issues do have close analogues in the contemporary discussion of mental representation, but I certainly do not want to begin by assuming that this is the case. So I will begin by discussing some general issues relating to Hume’s usage of these terms.⁷

The first thing to note about Hume’s use of “representation” in the *Treatise* and elsewhere is that while he often speaks of ideas representing other things, he is quite comfortable speaking of things other than ideas representing other things as well. For example, contrary to what some interpretations suggest, on a number of occasions Hume speaks of impressions of sensation representing things.⁸ And while Hume does deny that passions represent in the manner ideas do, he nowhere makes the same claim about impressions of sensation. Thus, it seems to me that there is very little textual reason to read Hume as claiming that there is no sense in which impressions of sensation, as such, represent.

This is a controversial claim. So to avoid confusion, let me stress here that while I do accept that impressions of sensation represent in some sense, for reasons that will become clearer, I also believe that they are not capable of the same sort of mental representation that Humean ideas are.⁹ Thus, although I believe that impressions of sensation are capable

⁷Thanks to Peter Loftson for pressing me on these issues, although I am certain he would not agree with everything I have to say about them here.

⁸E.g. T 1.2.3.15; SBN 38 and ECHU 12.9. For a somewhat different point of view about these passages, see Rachel Cohon and David Owen’s “Representation, Reason, and Motivation,” *Manuscripto* 20 (1997): 47-76.

⁹In short, the ability of impressions to represent will be restricted by the limits on our ability to freely associate them with other impressions in the manner we can associate ideas. Thus, there will be forms of mental representation that we can achieve only through our ideas, as opposed to our impressions. In particular, on this view, impressions will be limited to the sort of imagistic representation that is produced via copying. As a result, impressions will only be capable of representing things that they resemble in their intrinsic properties - or, to use an important phrase of Hume’s, they will only be capable of representing things that are not “specifically different” from them.

In saying this, it is important to note that I mean to remain agnostic about exactly which things are capable of resembling impressions in this way. On one reading of these passages, nothing non-mental can so resemble an impression. If this is correct, then impressions would be incapable of representing anything non-mental on the view I am developing here - something which would support a broadly idealist reading

of certain forms of representation, I will focus for the most part on the less controversial case of ideas in what follows.

That having been said, the claim that impressions of sensation represent other things in some sense gains support from the other ways in which Hume is willing to use the term “represent”. For Hume is willing to speak - not just of impressions of sensation representing other things - but also of many *non-mental* entities representing other things as well. For example, Hume discusses how the transfer of a key can represent the transfer of property. And he writes that children often “represent” the families from which they come.¹⁰ So the first question for us to consider here is how these sorts of “non-mental representation” relate to Hume’s discussion of representation in the case of ideas and, arguably, impressions.

What unifies all of these cases of representation, I take it, is that in every case we have something, whether it be an idea or a key, that stands in for something else as its *representative* in some process or activity. So, for example, when I give you the key to a piece of property as part of the legal transfer of this property, the key serves as the representative of the piece of property in question - and so, by giving the key to you, I am symbolically giving you the piece of property as well.

Something broadly similar, according to Hume, is also true of ideas when they represent something. For an idea to represent something is just for this idea to serve as this thing’s representative within the mental activities of reasoning, belief formation, and the like. Thus, we can see that mental representation, for Hume, is a special case of representation in the broader sense just laid out.¹¹ But it is a *special* case thereof. While mental representations do “stand in” for the things they represent in our reasoning, they

of Hume on these issues. But, on the other hand, there are passages in Hume that suggest that he does not believe that every impression (or impression-like thing) must be part of a mind. What makes room for this somewhat surprising claim is Hume’s understanding of the mind as a causally-connected bundle of ideas and impressions, plus his insistence that there are no (metaphysically) necessary connections between distinct existences. Given these two claims, it seems that we must allow for the possibility of impressions that are not causally connected with other impressions and ideas in the manner that is involved in Hume’s “true idea of the mind” - as Hume indicates during the discussion of T 1.4.2. If this is correct, then we should not assume that every impression or impression-like thing is part of a mind upon which it depends.

¹⁰See (T 2.1.9.13; SBN 308) and (T 3.2.4.2; SBN 515). For more examples of this sort, see Don Garrett’s excellent discussion of these issues in his “Hume’s Naturalistic Theory of Representation” (*Synthese* 152 : 301-319 (2006)).

¹¹Garrett makes this point nicely in his discussion of these issues. As will become clear below, while I agree with much of Garrett’s discussion of the general question of “representation” in Hume, I do not agree with his understanding of the relationship between the different elements within Hume’s account that I discuss below.

also thereby acquire representational content and, at least in some cases, become capable of truth and falsity - which of course is not the case (in the same way, at least) for a key or a child in the cases mentioned above. Therefore, one of the questions in understanding Hume's discussion of these issues is what accounts for these additional aspects of *mental* representation *in particular*.

This is an issue about which Hume says almost nothing, which has led some to question whether Hume thinks of ideas as truth-apt. But this is an overreaction to Hume's relative silence on this issue. After all, for Hume, a belief is simply a particularly lively idea.¹² Thus, if Hume denied that ideas could be true or false, he would have to say the same of beliefs - and there is no evidence that Hume had any desire to dispute the seemingly obvious truth that some of our beliefs are true and some false.¹³

Moreover, it is relatively clear how Hume conceives of the difference between truth and falsity in the case of ideas. Hume writes that, "Truth is of two kinds, consisting either in the discovery of the proportions of ideas, considered as such, or in the conformity of our ideas of objects to their real existence." (T 2.3.10.2; SBN 448-9)¹⁴ Here Hume claims that there are two main varieties of truths. First, there are truths that relate to the relations or "proportions" between ideas. And, second, there are truths that relate to the conformity or agreement of our ideas with the things they represent (their "objects").¹⁵

¹²See, in particular, the famous discussion of T 1.3.7.

¹³Moreover, Hume often speaks of truth and falsity in a manner that implies that ideas can be true or false. For example, there is the claim, to be discussed below, that "It is impossible, therefore, that this passion can be opposed by, or be contradictory to truth and reason; since this contradiction consists in the disagreement of ideas, considered as copies, with those objects which they represent." (T 2.3.3.5; SBN 415)

Or compare the following: "When the imagination, from any extraordinary ferment of the blood and spirits, acquires such a vivacity as disorders all its powers and faculties, there is no means of distinguishing betwixt truth and falsehood; but every loose fiction or idea, having the same influence as the impressions of the memory, or the conclusions of the judgment, is received on the same footing, and operates with equal force on the passions." (T 1.3.10.9; SBN 123)

¹⁴Compare: "Truth or falsehood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the real relations of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact." (T 3.1.1.9; SBN 458) Again, for the reasons noted above, it seems clear that among the things that may agree or disagree in the manner relevant to truth and falsity are ideas.

¹⁵As touched on above in the case of impressions, there is a good deal of controversy about which sorts of "objects" a Humean idea can represent. Some interpreters read Hume as claiming that the objects that Humean ideas represent are always mental perceptions. Others claim that Humean ideas can represent external objects, so long as these objects are not "specifically different" from the perceptions that exist in our mind. And still others claim that some Humean ideas can represent external objects that are specifically different from our perceptions - perhaps via the formation of a merely relative idea of such things.

The first of these kinds of truth raises difficult questions about exactly how Hume conceives of our awareness of relations between ideas.¹⁶ So I want to set this notion aside for the moment and focus on the second kind of truth, which is - in any case - of more immediate relevance to our present topic. In this sense, an idea will be true or false just in case it is a faithful representation of the thing that it represents. Thus, an idea will be true in this sense just in case it accurately represents its object.

To see what this might involve, it will be helpful to begin by noticing that any representative of any kind may be thought of as accurate or inaccurate to some degree. In particular, if X is serving as the representative of Y in some process or activity, then X will accurately represent Y in this process or activity just in case X's properties in this process or activity mirror the relevant properties of Y as it is in reality. For example, in the case discussed above, a particular key X will accurately represent a particular piece of property Y only if the transfer of the key X from me to you is accompanied by the transfer of the piece of property Y from me to you.

Given this, we may think of the truth or falsity of a Humean idea as a special case of this general sort of accuracy or inaccuracy. When I have a Humean idea of Y, this idea will be true if it serves as an accurate representative of Y in my mind. Thus, a Humean idea will be true just in case it serves as an accurate representative of its object in reasoning and belief formation.

But just which sorts of representations are capable of being accurate or inaccurate in the special way that is distinctive of truth or falsity? At least two properties seem relevant to this question. First, a representation X may be accurate or inaccurate in the manner distinctive of truth-aptness only if X can serve as the representative of something in a process of *reasoning*. And, second, a representation may be accurate or inaccurate in the manner required for truth-aptness only if X represents its object or objects as having or

The views being developed here do not, on their own, rule out any of these interpretative possibilities. In particular, as noted above in our discussion of impressions, this view is compatible with both the view that impressions never represent anything non-mental and the view that they may represent non-mental things, so long as these are not specifically different from the impressions in question. As a result the view of representation I will be defending here is equally compatible with the view that Humean ideas are incapable of representing anything non-mental and the view that they are capable of representing non-mental things insofar as these are not specifically different from our perceptions. And it is also compatible with the idea that there is a sort of "representation" (i.e. that involved in merely relative ideas) that does not require any sort of intrinsic resemblance.

¹⁶For a helpful discussion of this issue, see David Owen's *Hume's Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

lacking certain features. The first of these requirements poses no problems for Hume, since Humean ideas are involved in processes of reasoning or belief formation.¹⁷ The second of them, though, is potentially more problematic. For it is not at all obvious that Hume's understanding of mental representation allows him to speak intelligibly about an idea representing its object as having certain features. In other words, it is not at all obvious that Hume's theory of ideas gives him the resources he needs to give an account of judgment or predication. But if Hume's account of mental representation cannot deliver the result that an idea sometimes represents its object as having certain features, it is obvious that Humean ideas will only be capable of being true or false in a very weak sense.

Fortunately, as we will see later on, Hume's account of how ideas represent what they do provides him with at least the beginnings of an account of how an idea can represent a particular thing as falling within a general category. Thus, Humean ideas not only serve as the representatives of other things in reasoning, they also do so in a way that involves attributing to the things they represent certain features. So Humean ideas - unlike, say, keys - represent in a manner that makes it appropriate to evaluate their truth or falsity, and not simply their accuracy or inaccuracy.

With these distinctions in mind, I want to turn in a moment to the details of Hume's account of how and why ideas represent. But before I do so I want to briefly discuss one further possible source of confusion. Thus far and in what follows, I have focused and will focus on how ideas (and arguably impressions) represent. But this should not be confused with the broader question of how mental states acquire *intentional content* for Hume. For while Hume's account of intentional content builds upon his account of mental representation, it involves further complications that I will not discuss in detail here.

In particular, a mental state acquires intentional content for Hume *by being related to ideas that represent something*. But this can occur in a variety of ways. The simplest case is the case of belief. A Humean belief acquires its intentional content simply by being identical with a (lively) idea that represents certain things. But not every case is so simple. For example, many Humean passions, while not themselves representing anything, acquire intentional content by being causally connected to the ideas that represent their cause and their object.¹⁸ Thus, a Humean mental state may have intentional content (in this broad sense) while not *itself* representing anything, so long as it is related to an idea that does

¹⁷Here I put aside any further questions about whether Hume's account of reasoning is sufficient to capture the connections between the representational qualities of an idea and its role in reasoning.

¹⁸See, for example, the discussion of T 2.1.2.

represent. My focus in what follows, though, will be on the more basic issue of how mental representation functions for Hume.

2. Representation and Copying in Hume

It is not uncommon for interpreters of Hume to understand Hume's account of mental representation as resting upon the idea that representation is solely a matter of an idea "copying" the thing it represents. That is, Hume has often been thought to claim that what an idea represents is wholly determined by two factors: (i) what this idea is causally derived from, and (ii) what this idea resembles in its intrinsic qualities. Thus, we have the following constraint:

(COPY) What an idea represents is wholly determined by (i) its causal origins and (ii) its intrinsic qualitative character.

Different versions of this sort of account will make this claim precise in different ways. Some may give both of the two elements that COPY mentions a central role, while others will focus on one to the exclusion of the other.¹⁹ But the general outlines of how such an account is supposed to go seem fairly clear.

Consider first the case of simple ideas. In particular, suppose that we want to discover what an idea, call it Eddy, represents. One way of applying COPY to Eddy would be to claim that Eddy represents only the impression from which it is derived *and nothing else*. But this is not all that Hume has in mind when he speaks of a simple idea representing something via being a copy of it. For a Humean simple idea is capable of representing, not just the particular impression from which it is derived, but also any impression or object that exactly resembles this impression. Or, in other words:

(SIMPLE) A simple idea imagistically represents those impressions or objects that exactly resemble the impression from which this idea is derived.

If we accept a principle like COPY, SIMPLE provides the most plausible way of understanding Hume's discussion of what simple ideas represent. Of course, this leaves the representational features of complex ideas unexplained. But it is relatively easy to extend SIMPLE to cover this case as well. To do so, we need only say that a complex idea rep-

¹⁹For some examples of this direction of interpretation, see Fodor's *Hume Variations*, as well as Barry Stroud's *Hume* and the discussion of mental representation in Elijah Millgram's "Was Hume a Humean?".

resents any impression or object whose component parts exactly resemble the component parts of the complex idea. Or:

(SIMPLE AND COMPLEX) A simple idea imagistically represents those impressions or objects that exactly resemble the impression from which this idea is derived. A complex idea imagistically represents those impressions or objects whose component parts exactly resemble the impressions from which component parts of the complex idea are derived.

SIMPLE AND COMPLEX, then, determines the rough shape that a COPY-based understanding of Hume's discussion of representation should take. But is there any textual evidence for this way of reading Hume? In fact, it is not at all difficult to find passages in Hume that suggest a reading of this sort. For example, when discussing the nature of our idea of duration, Hume writes: "Ideas always represent the objects or impressions from which they are derived, and can never, without a fiction, represent or be applied to any other." (T 1.2.3.11; SBN 37) This, depending on how we read Hume's reference to "a fiction", does strongly suggest that there is at least a sense in which every idea represents *only* those objects and impressions of which it is a copy in the sense just defined.²⁰

Moreover, much of the use that Hume makes of notions of representation throughout the *Treatise* seems to presuppose something like this way of thinking about representation. So, for example, in discussing the nature of our alleged idea of power, Hume writes: "All ideas are derived from and represent impressions. We never have any impression that contains any power or efficacy. We never, therefore, have any idea of power." (T 1.3.14.11; SBN 160)²¹ Here Hume seems to accept something like the following line of argument:

²⁰Peter Loftson has suggested to me that the reference to what ideas "represent" in this passage and those like it should be understood simply to mean that ideas always mirror or correspond to the impressions from which they are derived - which need not have implications for what these ideas represent in anything like the contemporary sense of the term. But given Hume's reference here to what an idea can "be applied to", this reading seems to me rather implausible. What else, after all, is it to apply an idea to something but to use this idea to think about this thing?

²¹Arguments such as these are sometimes read as arguing for an conclusion concerning when we can form an *empirically warranted* idea of power. (Compare the first chapter of Galen Strawson's forthcoming *The Evident Connection*.) But I find it difficult to read passages like this one as *directly* concerned with questions of warrant. Rather, Hume here seems to me to be arguing that there is at least a sense in which it is impossible for us to form an idea (warranted or not) of power. That having been said, I agree with Strawson (and others) that this does not mean that there is *no* sense in which we can form such ideas - rather, as I discuss below, Hume's conclusion is only that it is impossible to form an idea of power with a certain sort of positive content. But once again, this is a claim about the content of such ideas, not their

(1) Any idea that represents power must be derived from an impression that it represents and that itself represents or resembles power.²²

(2) We never have any impression that represents or resembles power.

(3) Therefore, we have no idea that represents power.

Hume gives a number of arguments of this general shape. But the first premise of this argument will be true only if an idea can represent something only when the impression from which this idea is copied itself represents or resembles (i.e. “contains”) this thing. For otherwise we might have an idea of power that is derived from an impression that does not represent or resemble power. Thus, this argument seems require that the qualities that an idea shares with the impression from which it is copied - namely, (i) its causal origins and (ii) its qualitative feel - are decisive for what it represents.

For another similar example, consider Hume’s famous “representation argument” against rationalism concerning practical reason. There he writes: “It is impossible, therefore, that this passion can be opposed by, or be contradictory to truth and reason; since this contradiction consists in the disagreement of ideas, considered as copies, with those objects which they represent.” (T 2.3.3.5; SBN 415) Here Hume appears to equate the truth or falsity of an idea with its agreement or disagreement *considered as a copy* with those objects it represents.²³ And this seems to presuppose that mental representation (of at least a cognitive sort) is always a matter of copying. For if ideas could sometimes represent objects in virtue of standing in some relation other than copying to them, then ideas might also be true or false for reasons other than their agreement or disagreement *considered as copies* with the things they copy.

3. Going Beyond Copying: Abstract Ideas in Hume

Thus, there are some good *prima facie* reasons to read Hume as conceiving of mental representation in terms of copying and copying *alone*. But it is also quite clear that this does not exhaust Hume’s understanding of mental representation.

For evidence of this we might look to a number of passages in the *Treatise*. But nowhere warrant, as I would understand these terms.

²²In putting things in this way, I remain open-minded about precisely how we should read Hume’s references to an impression that “contains” power. Once again, this is an important issue, but one that lies outside the scope of this paper.

²³Once again, it is difficult to read this discussion as directly concerned with questions of empirical warrant as some interpreters have done.

is it as clear as in Hume’s discussion of the nature of abstract ideas, where he takes what he believes to have been a key insight of Berkeley’s and builds upon it.²⁴

For Hume, an abstract idea represents all of the things that fall within a broad category. And it does so, not in virtue of its intrinsic qualitative features alone, but rather because of the manner in which it has come to be associated by the mind with all of the other ideas that fall within the category it represents.²⁵ Or, as Hume writes:

“However this may be, it is certain that we form the idea of individuals whenever we use any general term; that we seldom or never can exhaust these individuals; and that those that remain, are only represented by means of that habit by which we recall them, whenever any present occasion requires it. This then is the nature of our abstract ideas and general terms; and it is after this manner we account for the foregoing paradox, that some ideas are particular in their nature, but general in their representation. A particular idea becomes general by being annexed to a general term; that is, to a term which, from a customary conjunction, has a relation to many other particular ideas, and readily recalls them in the imagination.” (T 1.1.7.10; SBN 22)

Thus, Hume’s understanding of abstract or general ideas involves the acceptance of the following principle:

(ABSTRACT) What an abstract idea represents is determined by the ideas we are disposed to associate with this idea through its connection with a general term. In particular, an abstract idea represents all of the things that are represented by the ideas that are associated with it and this general term (in the right way).²⁶

²⁴It is sometimes alleged that Hume denies that there are any abstract ideas at all. (E.g. by John Tienson in his “Hume on Universals and General Terms”, *Nous* Vol. 18, No. 2 (May, 1984).) In one sense of “abstract idea”, this is uncontroversial - for Hume does reject the sorts of abstract ideas belief in which he, following Berkeley, attributes to Locke. But as the passage quoted below makes clear, this is not the manner in which Hume generally uses “abstract idea”. Rather, for Hume an abstract idea is just an idea that has “become general in its representation”. And there is no doubt that Hume accepts the existence of abstract ideas in this sense. In what follows, I follow Hume in using “abstract idea” in this way.

²⁵Of course, these associations will be determined in part by what an idea resembles. Note that I here use “association” in the generic sense that covers both the associations that are based in what Hume calls “natural relations” (i.e. resemblance, contiguity, and causation) and those that are based in mere custom.

²⁶Obviously Hume will need something like a restriction to associations of the “right” sort - for any abstract idea will be associated in some sense with many ideas that are irrelevant to what it represents. Whether or not Hume has the materials for spelling out this restriction in non-circular terms is a difficult

The problem this poses for the above reading of Hume is that ABSTRACT is incompatible with a purely copying-based account of Hume's conception as represented by, say, COPY. In particular, ABSTRACT creates room for the possibility that there might be two ideas, which share the same intrinsic qualitative feel, and which are both copied from the same original impression, but which nonetheless represent different things in virtue of being associated with different sets of ideas. So, for example, I might take the impression of a white disk in front of me and copy two (qualitatively identical) ideas from this impression, but associate these two ideas with two different general terms, and so with two different sets of further ideas, so that one of them becomes a general idea of whiteness while the other becomes a general idea of circularity. In so far as this is possible, Humean mental representation cannot be determined solely by origins plus qualitative resemblance in the manner that COPY entails.²⁷

Moreover, the account of mental representation suggested by Hume's discussion of abstract ideas is quite different in character from any account in terms of copying. A particular abstract idea will, for Hume, represent what it does in virtue of the associations that exist between it and other ideas in thought. Thus, it will represent what it does in virtue of elements of what we would today regard as its computational or casual-functional role. In other words, it will represent what it does because the thinker is disposed to associate it with certain other ideas.²⁸

question - but, at the very least, it is plain that Hume himself does not give much consideration to it. Thus, any discussion of what Hume might have said about this worry remains primarily in the realm of conjecture.

It is possible, though, to note the resources available to Hume for dealing with this problem. These fall into three broad categories:

1. The difference between "natural" associations (based on resemblance, contiguity, and causality) and those associations between ideas that are purely customary.
2. The relative "facility" of different associations between ideas.
3. The role that the relevant general term plays in fixing the associations at work in a Humean abstract idea.

Whether these resources are sufficient is a difficult question, although the difficulties facing Hume do not seem to me deeper than the difficulties that face contemporary naturalistic accounts of mental representation. (For a contemporary account of these issues that seems to involve something like "facility" see Christopher Peacocke's discussion in *A Study of Concepts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).)

²⁷Compare Hume's related discussion of the globe of white marble at (T 1.1.7.18; SBN 25).

²⁸For a nice discussion of this aspect of Hume's account, see the early pages of Sonia Sedivy's "Hume, Images and Abstraction" in *Hume Studies* Vol. XXI, 1 (1995) 117-134 - although I do not agree with all of the details of Sedivy's account, which seems to me to create unnecessary difficulties for Hume's theory.

This aspect of Hume's thought about mental representation is clearest in his discussion of abstract ideas - where it is the associations between an idea and other ideas that resemble it that are crucial to what this idea represents.²⁹ But there are a number of other places where we can find Hume making use of the way an idea is associated with other ideas to explain what it represents - including cases in which other forms of association between ideas are central to his account. For example, when it comes time to explain the difference between ideas of substances and ideas of modes, Hume again appeals to differences in the causal-functional role of these ideas - differences that, much as in the case of abstract ideas, are connected with the associations we form between ideas and linguistic terms. In particular, an idea X will be an idea of a substance, according to Hume, just in case it is possible to add further qualities to the idea X without changing the linguistic term with which it is associated. On the other hand, an idea Y will be an idea of mode just in case the addition of any further quality to Y severs the association between it and its associated linguistic term.³⁰

Here again, we may have two ideas, which represent different things, but which are derived from the same impression. I may take the idea copied from my impression of a white disk, and by associating this idea with linguistic terms and other ideas in different ways, use this idea either to represent the mode of whiteness or a particular substance. So here too, the role that associations between ideas (and linguistic terms) play in Hume's account of representation is incompatible with what COPY claims about what a Humean idea represents.

Finally, consider Hume's discussion, in T 1.21, of the divisibility of space. There he

See also Janet Broughton's discussion of these issues in her "Explaining General Ideas" (*Hume Studies* Vol. XXVI, 2 (2000) 279-290), which avoids the main difficulties Sedivy's account imposes upon Hume. (Although I do disagree with some aspects of Broughton's reading - in particular, her understanding of what Hume means by a "distinction of reason" - the main point she makes about the non-circularity of Hume's account seems to me largely correct.)

²⁹There is a way of reading Hume such that he believes that only general terms and not abstract ideas (in the Humean sense) represent general classes of objects. Obviously the reading of Hume I am proposing here is opposed to this interpretation. Still, even this alternative interpretation would acknowledge that the representational content of general terms is not fixed by what they are copied from, which is sufficient to raise the general problem I am interested in.

³⁰T 1.1.6.2-3, SBN 16-17. In his discussion of these ideas Hume notes that the idea of substance sometimes involves the "fiction" of an unknown substratum in the manner familiar from Locke's discussion of this idea. But it is plain that he does not regard this fiction as essential to this idea. Rather, what is essential are the patterns of association just described, which may be achieved through this fiction or in other ways.

writes:

“When you tell me of the thousandth and ten thousandth part of a grain of sand, I have a distinct idea of these numbers and of their different proportions; but the images, which I form in my mind to represent the things themselves, are nothing different from each other, nor inferior to that image, by which I represent the grain of sand itself, which is suppos’d so vastly to exceed them.” (T 1.2.1.3; SBN 27)

In other words, according to Hume, the same idea (considered as an image) may be used to represent a grain of sand, a thousandth part of that grain, or a ten thousandth part thereof. Thus, the imagistic properties of this idea cannot be what explains this difference in what it represents. Once again, Hume appeals to differences in the causal role of these ideas to explain how these intrinsically identical ideas can represent different objects. That is, much as in the case of abstract ideas, what explains these differences in what these ideas represent are differences between the set of further ideas, inferences, and words we associate with them.³¹

These cases demonstrate that there are aspects of Hume’s understanding of mental representation that extend beyond the idea of representation as copying. But nonetheless there remain the reasons noted above for thinking that COPY does capture something like the core of Hume’s thinking about mental representation. For despite these various complications to his theory, Hume appears to continue to view himself as committed to the idea that all mental representation is explainable, either directly or indirectly, in terms of the basic kind of imagistic copying that is generally the focus of his explicit arguments concerning what this or that idea represents.

The question, then, is whether Hume can expand his account of representation in these ways, while maintaining the close connection between representation and copying that is central both to many of his arguments and to the basic picture of mental representation he seems to take for granted. For it is not immediately obvious that the extension of Hume’s account of representation that his discussion of abstract ideas, and the like, involves can be squared with the many places where his arguments seem to rely on a tight connection between mental representation and copying. Thus, there is a danger that Hume may turn out not to have any coherent understanding of mental representation available to him.

These problems might be resolved in any one of four different ways: First, we might

³¹See, in particular, T 1.1.7.12; SBN 22.

claim that Hume’s core account of mental representation really can be understood in terms of copying and copying *alone*. Second, we might claim that copying’s significance for Hume with respect to these issues is a consequence of a more general Humean account of mental representation in which an idea’s causal-functional role and its causal-functional role *alone* is decisive for what it represents. Third, we might throw up our hands and acknowledge that Hume, at least at the time of the *Treatise*, simply didn’t have any fully-worked out or unified account of mental representation. Or, finally, we might try to find in Hume a unified account of mental representation that combines both of these elements of Hume’s discussion.

In the end, I will argue that the last of these options provides the most satisfying interpretation of Hume’s position. But first I will consider the other options.

4. Privileging Copying

Taking up the first of the possibilities just mentioned, we might try to offer a reading of Hume that focuses on copying and copying alone by claiming that Hume doesn’t *really* regard the way in which abstract ideas become “general in their representation” to be a form of mental representation in the strict sense. One way to accomplish this, exemplified by Jerry Fodor’s recent work on Hume, would be to simply dismiss Hume’s discussion of abstract ideas as an unfortunate deviation from the central Humean account of representation in terms of causal derivation and/or imagistic resemblance.³² But this account (and Hume’s closely related accounts of our ideas of modes and substances, of identity, and so forth) is so central to Hume’s overall theory of mind that it is difficult for me to take this option seriously.

A better possibility in the same general direction is the following. Remember the quote I discussed when I first introduced the idea that Hume’s account of representation might be based on a principle like COPY: “Ideas always represent the objects or impressions from which they are derived, and can never, without a fiction, represent or be applied to any other.” On one reading, this suggests that whenever an idea represents an object from which it is not derived, as might seem to occur in the case of abstract ideas, this always

³²For example, Fodor writes: “On my reading, Hume (usually) takes concepts to be images. (The caveat is because what he says about ‘abstract ideas’ and ‘distinctions of reason’ is pretty clearly not compatible with a straightforward image theory of concepts. But Hume’s treatment of those topics is notoriously unsatisfactory, and I take it to be an uncharacteristic deviation from his canonical views.)” (*Hume Variations*, 10.)

involves a “fiction” of some sort. So perhaps Hume’s view is that COPY is true, but only of representations that do not involve a fiction in the intended sense. That is, perhaps an idea I represents some X *without a fiction* only if I is copied (or, at least, could be copied) from X.

This way of understanding Hume’s talk of “fictions” is close to the interpretation offered by Saul Traiger in his important “Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions”.³³ Traiger argues that for Hume, “all fictions are ideas applied to something from which the idea is not derived.” And this does seem to fit some of the cases of interest to Hume quite well. For example, Hume often uses the term “fiction” to refer to cases in which the imagination associates two distinct sorts of ideas so closely with one another that they tend to be conflated. In this way, the associative tendencies of the imagination lead us to think of one of these ideas as possessing qualities that, properly speaking, only belong to the other. Most importantly, in cases such as these, we come to view one of these ideas as falling under an abstract idea that properly speaking only applies to the other.³⁴

In these cases, then, Traiger seems quite correct to characterize a “fiction” as involving the misapplication of a Humean abstract idea to an object from which that abstract idea could not be derived. What is less clear is whether all of the cases Hume describes as “fictions” involve the misapplication of an abstract idea of this sort. For instance, Hume sometimes uses “fiction” to refer to an idea that represents something that does not exist - such as the Greek Gods or Sherlock Homes.³⁵ And, as Traiger himself notes, this does not appear to involve the misapplication of a Humean abstract idea of the sort just described.³⁶ And there are other, more philosophical cases in which Hume appears to use “fiction” in

³³*Hume Studies* Vol. XIII, 2 (1987) 381-399.

³⁴For example, the fictions of “perfect identity” and “duration” have this basic structure.

³⁵See, for example: “Poets have formed what they call a poetical system of things, which, though it be believed neither by themselves nor readers, is commonly esteemed a sufficient foundation for any fiction. We have been so much accustomed to the names of Mars, Jupiter, Venus, that in the same manner as education infixes any opinion, the constant repetition of these ideas makes them enter into the mind with facility, and prevail upon the fancy, without influencing the judgment.” (T 1.3.10.6, SBN 121-2)

Also see *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (ECPM), 3.1.15, ECPM, 8.6, *Essays - Moral, Political, and Literary*, 1.8.13, and so on.

³⁶It is true that this most ordinary use of “fiction” does involve an idea that is not derived from what it represents - albeit in a different sense. After all, whenever we have an idea that represents something that does not exist, this idea will certainly not be copied from the (non-existent) thing it represents. Thus, to a greater degree than Traiger himself seems to realize, these sort of “fictions” are compatible with the letter of his definition. Nonetheless, they involve a very different sense in which we might be said to apply an idea to something it is not derived from.

much this way - as, for example, when he talks about the fiction of an unknown substratum underlying a substance. So it is far from obvious that Traiger's account captures the essence of Hume's conception of a fiction across the full range of his use of this term.

Fortunately, we need not decide this issue here in order to see that this way of defending COPY should be rejected. After all, an appeal to Hume's conception of a fiction will only defend COPY in the face of the apparent counter-example posed by abstract ideas if *every* abstract idea involves the application of an idea to something from which it is not derived in the sense relevant to Traiger's interpretation of "fiction". But there is no evidence that Hume thought of every abstract idea as involving such a fiction. Rather, when Hume speaks of a fiction involving some abstract idea, this always seems to involve the *misapplication* of this idea in the manner described just above. In cases in which no such misapplication is present, an abstract idea does not appear to involve any Humean fiction. Hence, it will continue to represent a counter-example to the simple picture of mental representation that COPY provides.³⁷

5. Privileging Functional Role

What, then, of the opposite alternative? That is, what of the possibility of privileging the role that the causal-functional role of an idea plays in what it represents, as is suggested by Hume's discussion of abstract ideas? Such an account would claim that representation

³⁷Similar comments apply to case of our ideas of substances and modes. For while one way of conceiving of a substance certainly does involve a fiction - namely, the fiction of an underlying substratum - this is not true of the "deflated" conception of a substance that Hume recommends.

Moreover, even if we did decide to treat all of these cases as cases that involve a Humean fiction, this will not release us from the obligation to give an account of Hume's theory of mental representation that captures both the way particular ideas represent what they do and the way that abstract ideas represent what they do. The reason for this is something that Traiger himself stresses in his discussion - namely, that while Hume does generally want to suggest that there is *something* improper about an idea insofar as it involves a fiction, this does not mean that fictions are not an important variety of mental representation for Hume. In fact, according to Hume's account, much of the manner in which we represent the world is the product of various "fictions of the imagination". And while there may be something improper about most fictions, this does not mean that they are all false - as the term "fiction" might suggest. Rather, when Hume calls an idea a fiction, he means primarily to tell us something about how this idea was formed - something, that is, about its causal history - e.g., that it was not (and could not be) derived from the thing it represents. Thus, even if abstract ideas do involve a fiction in Hume's preferred sense, this does not answer the basic interpretative question that we are considering. For it gives us no understanding of how the purely copying-based (non-fictional) way ideas represent the things they are copied from connects together with the (fictional) manner abstract ideas represent what they do.

is (in every case) a matter of *functional similarities* between ideas and the things they represent. Thus, according to this account, whether or not some idea copies an impression or object is significant for that idea's representational properties only in so far as the answer to this question contributes in some way to determining the idea's functional role.

This reading of Hume has some obvious attractions.³⁸ It is plausible that copying is important for Hume's account of representation *in part* because of the contribution it can make to the functional role of an idea. But I do not think it is plausible to say that the significance of copying for Hume's theory of representation is *wholly* reducible to the manner in which it contributes to the functional role of an idea. One reason for this is purely textual: it simply does not seem to be true to the manner in which Hume discusses the connections between copying and representation to think of the former's contribution to the latter as mediated by its contribution to an idea's functional role. That is, it seems to me relatively clear that Hume conceives of copying as having a more direct relationship to representation (at least in some cases) than this theory suggests.³⁹

Given the context in which Hume were writing, it would be strange if this was not the case. After all, it is relatively plain that Hume means his account of mental representation to be an extension and improvement of the account of representation offered by Locke and Berkeley.⁴⁰ And Hume seems to read both Locke and Berkeley as claiming that the central way in which *ideas* come to represent things (at least in a positive as opposed to merely relative sense) is by being images of them.⁴¹ This is a central element in Hume's own understanding of the empiricist tradition, of which he takes himself to be a part. In fact,

³⁸For a nice discussion of this aspect of Hume's account, see Garrett's "Hume's Naturalistic Theory of Representation". Although Garrett's interpretation of Hume is a particularly impressive version of this line of interpretation, it still seems to me that Garrett's view does too little to explain the special role that copying plays in determining what an idea represents for Hume. For while Garrett does discuss the manner in which an idea might be a "reliable indicator" of something else, copying plays a role in Hume's account of representation that cannot be reduced to the manner in which it facilitates indication of this sort. Thus, it seems to me that Garrett does not go far enough in recognizing the need for the sort of hybrid account I offer below.

³⁹For example, see the passages discussed in Sections 2 and 6 of this essay.

⁴⁰See, in particular, Hume's reference to Berkeley at the beginning of his discussion of abstract ideas - where he describes Berkeley's account of such ideas as "one of the greatest and most valuable discoveries that has been made of late years in the republic of letters". (T 1.1.7.1; SBN 17)

⁴¹Of course, Berkeley also allows for another sort of mental representation - namely, the rather obscure sort involved in the representation of spirits by what he calls "notions". But this is a sort of representation that Hume plainly would have little patience for. In this respect, Hume appears to be *more* committed to the idea that all representation is somehow based in imagistic representation than Berkeley is.

a primary component of Hume's rejection of the sort of robust intellectual faculty that he finds in rationalists like Descartes lies in his rejection of a faculty for forming non-imagistic ideas. Thus, it would be strange indeed if the sort of imagistic representation that is the product of copying was not at least one of the basic elements in Hume's account of how ideas represent.

The same verdict on these issues is supported by a close study of the arguments noted above. For these arguments only make sense if copying plays a fundamental and ineliminable role in Hume's account of how ideas represent what they do. For example, Hume's representation argument against rationalism rests on an extremely tight connection between the truth or falsity of an idea and its agreement or disagreement *considered as a copy* with those objects it represents. And it is difficult to make sense of this connection unless copying plays an essential role in Hume's basic account of how ideas represent.

In this way, while Garrett's account of Humean mental representation in terms of similarity in functional role does capture something very important about Hume's account, it also appears not to do justice to the manner in which Hume understands his account of these issues as a natural development of the fundamentally imagistic accounts of the representational properties of ideas that he took his empiricist predecessors to endorse. As we will see in the next section, the aspects of Hume's account that Garrett focuses on are better understood in terms of an attempt to extend a fundamentally imagistic account of mental representation so as to account for the diverse forms such representation can take - while remaining true to the idea that *all* mental representation is (directly or indirectly) derivative of the sort of imagistic representation that copying produces.

6. A Unified Account

In this way, an account that focuses solely on functional role seems to leave something out of Hume's account of mental representation that Hume himself regarded as essential to it - namely, the special role Hume gives representation by copying. Given this, we might think that Hume's account of representation simply consists in a core account of representation via copying, plus a series of more or less piece-meal additions to this account that are aimed at dealing with several apparent counter-examples to it. And certainly the manner in which Hume discusses these issues can suggest just such a reading - so it is no surprise that something of this sort is the majority view among Hume scholars today. But if we read Hume in this manner, the worry remains that the manner in which his arguments appeal to his core understanding of representation in terms of copying may be not entirely

consistent with all of his additions to this core. And in any case, it would be far more satisfying if there was a more principled and unified picture of mental representation at work behind Hume's remarks on these issues.

This is just what I want to argue now is not just a possible reading of Hume, but in fact the most plausible such reading. In order to do so, we will have to attribute to Hume a coherent conception of mental representation, while privileging neither copying nor association as the unique basis of this account. And in order to do this, we must understand Hume's account of these issues so that *both* of these two elements make distinct and compatible contributions to what an idea represents.

The key to accomplishing this lies in the idea, common to many of us today and - I believe - to Hume, that both copying and causal-functional role are necessary elements in a complete account of the nature of mental representation, for the simple reason that each of these elements is responsible for a distinct but indispensable component of the sort of mental representation human beings are capable of. In this way, I believe that Hume provides us with a picture of mental representation, according to which our representation of the world arises through the co-operation of just these two elements. Thus, as will become clearer, while Hume's theory of mental representation is of course very different from Kant's, it shares certain general structural similarities with the Kantian account of cognition as arising through the co-operation of "sensibility" and "understanding".

If this is right, then the key question is how these different factors combine together to provide us with the sort of mental representations human beings possess. To consider this question, it will be helpful to begin by considering the features of representation that Hume thinks copying alone can account for. As we saw above, on a Humean account of the imagistic sort of representation associated with copying, it is natural to think of copying as determining the *particular* class of impressions or objects that an idea represents *exactly* as an image of them:

(SIMPLE AND COMPLEX) A simple idea imagistically represents those impressions or objects that exactly resemble the impression from which this idea is derived. A complex idea imagistically represents those impressions or objects whose component parts exactly resemble the impressions that component parts of the complex idea are derived from.

Given SIMPLE AND COMPLEX, any idea will imagistically represent a class of objects and impressions - namely, those objects and impressions that exactly resemble its compo-

ment parts.⁴² For example, consider the simple idea of a particular shade of red. Given SIMPLE AND COMPLEX, this idea will represent those objects or impressions that are this precise shade of red. Or consider the complex idea of a red disc of this shade of red. Once again, SIMPLE AND COMPLEX will determine a set of objects and impressions that this complex idea represents as an image. Crucially, when an idea represents some object in this way, it will represent this object - not in terms of its relations with other things - but in terms of what it is like *considered on its own*. In other words, this sort of exact imagistic representation generates a representation of an object's intrinsic qualities.

If this is right, the imagistic sort of representation that SIMPLE AND COMPLEX captures explains our ability to exactly represent the intrinsic qualities of objects and impressions. But, of course, as we have already discussed at length, this is only one component of Hume's overall account of mental representation. For there are also a range of cases in which Hume appeals - not to the imagistic features of an idea on their own - but also to the idea's causal role in order to explain what it represents. The question we need to consider now is how these additional elements of Hume's account relate to this core notion of imagistic representation. Are these additional elements simply welded onto this core account? Or do they combine with this account in some more unified and elegant way?

In order to answer this question, it is helpful to begin by considering what there is that unifies the various cases in which Hume extends his account of mental representation by appealing to the causal role of an idea. In particular, when Hume appeals to the causal role of an idea to explain what this idea represents, he always does so in order to capture something about the way this idea represents the relations between its object and other things. For example, when we use an idea of a particular triangle to form an abstract idea of triangles as such, we represent all of the particular triangles that fall within this category as resembling each other in certain respects. And thus, through our use of this abstract idea, we come to represent the world as organized around certain dimensions of similarity or resemblance. Similarly, when we use a bundle of particular ideas to represent a substance as opposed to a mode, we represent the qualities that these ideas represent as being "closely and inseparably connected by the relations of contiguity and causation" so that "whatever new simple quality we discover to be in the same connexion with the rest, we immediately comprehend it among them." (T 1.1.6.2; SBN 16) So once again, in doing

⁴²As we will see, when an idea exactly resembles an object or impression from which it is also derived, it is particularly well suited to serve as an image of this thing *in particular*.

so, we come to represent the objects of these ideas as having certain relations with each other and with certain further, yet-to-be-discovered things.

In this way, the causal role of an idea becomes important for Hume when we move from considering the intrinsic qualities that we represent the object of an idea as having to considering the manner in which this idea represents its object as being related to other things and qualities. Or in other words, the causal role of an idea becomes relevant to what this idea represents only insofar as this idea represents its object as playing a certain structural role in the world - as opposed to having certain qualities considered on its own.

Crucially, for Hume, the sort of mental representation that human beings are capable of is only possible through the co-operation of both these elements. For if we lack the ability to form an idea that represents some object in the first (imagistic) manner, then we will be unable to form any positive representation of this object's intrinsic qualities. In this case, we will at most be able form a merely "relative idea" of it - that is, an idea that captures the structural role that this object plays without saying anything about the intrinsic nature of the thing that plays this role.

It is plain that Hume views this as a very impoverished sort of representation - although just how impoverished it is remains the subject of much debate. At the very least, merely relative ideas never allow us to form a positive representation of nature of things we are representing, but rather will only allow us to represent them insofar as they are related to things we can form such an idea of.⁴³ But, on the other hand, imagistic forms of representation will only get us so far - for they allow us to represent the relations between things only insofar as these relations are a direct consequence of these things' intrinsic properties.

In particular, the contribution of the causal role of an idea to what it represents is

⁴³C.f. T 1.2.6.9; SBN 68. There is a fair amount of discussion in the literature concerning just how impoverished such merely relative ideas are for Hume, particularly with respect to the "New Hume" interpretation of Hume as a causal realist. For an interpretation of Humean relative ideas that is largely compatible with the implications of the account I am developing here, see section 2 of Kenneth Winkler's "The New Hume" (*The Philosophical Review* 100.4 (1991) 541-579). For an account that makes more of Hume's notion of a relative idea see, for example, Galen Strawson's *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)

Strawson sometimes glosses Hume's point here in terms of the idea that we can only form a "clear and distinct" representation of something via forming an idea of it that it intrinsically resembles. On one reading of "clear and distinct", this seems to me entirely correct - but only so long as we read these terms to refer to the content or representational features of an idea as opposed to, say, the degree to which it is empirically warranted, as Strawson sometimes does.

important here because it relates directly to the question of whether Hume has the materials to give a plausible account of judgment or predication. A purely imagistic account of representation has seemed to many to be inadequate to this task. But, given the additional resources just noted, Hume is much better placed to give such an account. For example, suppose we want to account for our ability to predicate a general quality of some particular substantial thing. In this case, we will, according to Hume, be thinking of a Humean substance as an instance of some general category. And in order to do this, according to Hume, we need only to form an idea that is a copy of the particular thing in question which is associated with two further linguistic terms: a name that refers to the particular substance we are thinking about and a term that refers to the general category that we are predicating of this thing. By doing so we will form an idea of this object that is associated with other ideas in two crucial ways. First, when we discover further qualities of this object, we will regard these qualities as also belonging to the object we are thinking about. And second, we will bring our idea of this object under an abstract idea of the general category in question and thereby come to associate it with all the other instances of this category. If we do this, we will - according to Hume - have formed an idea of this particular substance as an instance of this general category.

Of course, there are a number of issues about whether such an account is, in the end, satisfactory.⁴⁴ But it is only by moving away from a purely copying-based understanding of representation that we are in a position to recognize Hume's account of predication for what it is. For it is the causal associations between particular ideas (and linguistic terms) that allows Hume to have a story to tell about the manner in which a judgment like the one above involves thinking of a subject, a predicate, *and* the connection between them.

Still, while the contribution of the causal role of an idea is crucial here, on its own this feature will only allow us to represent these sorts of structural relationships between things. According to Hume, it is only possible to go beyond this - to actually think about the intrinsic nature of the particular things that *fill* these roles - insofar as we can form ideas that represent these things imagistically. Hence, the combination of these two features is crucial for Hume because it allows him to maintain his commitment to what he views as the basic Lockean idea that all meaningful mental or linguistic representation should be traceable, in some manner, to the broadly imagistic sort of representation that SIMPLE AND COMPLEX captures - while also allowing him to acknowledge the complexities involved in our

⁴⁴For example, we might doubt that any account that is spelled out purely in terms of such associative dispositions can do the work Hume intends it to.

representations of general classes, substances, modes, and the like.⁴⁵ In particular, while Hume's account of these additional elements goes beyond SIMPLE AND COMPLEX, it is also a natural extension of this principle. For example, when some idea represents a general class of things in the manner described above, this will be a product of the fact that this idea is associated with a class of particular ideas, each of which represents a member of the class of objects in the imagistic fashion laid out by SIMPLE AND COMPLEX. In this way, what comes first for Hume in any explanation of mental representation is always the ability of ideas to represent other things by being copies of them. Hume's appeals to the causal role of an idea are meant by him to extend this basic picture of how mental representation is possible, while remaining true to its basic commitments.

Once again, it is helpful to compare the interaction between these factors in Hume's account with the Kantian account of cognition as a product of the co-operation of sensibility and the understanding. In particular, like Hume, Kant believes that genuine human cognition requires a contribution from our faculties for sensible representation - faculties which involve a sort of broadly imagistic representation. But Kant, like Hume, also believes that full-fledged predicative cognition is only possible through the cooperation of these sensible faculties with a further set of abilities, which aim at connecting together these sensible representations according to certain general principles or rules.

Of course, for Hume these connections between imagistic representations will be the product of the associative tendencies of the imagination - while for Kant they will be the product of the sort of rule-guided synthesis that Kant takes to be the distinctive contribution of the understanding. As a result, Hume has a far more deflationary understanding than Kant of the sort of patterns of inference or association that human cognition requires. For Hume these connections are purely the product of associations between ideas that are ultimately themselves the product of these ideas imagistic properties - whereas for Kant they are the product of a spontaneous faculty, which operates on sensible matter of experience in a fundamentally non-imagistic manner. In this way, while both Kant and Hume view human cognition as dependent upon our faculties for sensible or imagistic representation, Kant is far more willing than Hume to acknowledge the presence of aspects of our representational capacities that cannot be traced back to this sort of representation. Moreover, while Hume takes the sort of imagistic representation involved in SIMPLE AND COMPLEX to be prior to and independent of the associative connections between distinct

⁴⁵Whether Hume's reading of Locke on this point is correct is, of course, a complicated issue. But it is safe to say that his reading of the Lockean program was an extremely common and natural one.

ideas that are involved in, say, his account of abstract ideas, Kant famously insists that sensible intuition is only intelligible insofar as we think of it as implicitly related to the understanding. In both these ways, Hume's account of mental representation is both more empiricist and more naturalistic than Kant's. But these differences, significant as they are, should not obscure the real structural similarities between Hume and Kant's views on these issues. In fact, Hume's account is in many ways a version of Kant's account that attempts to give an account of the features of representation, which Kant uses the understanding to explain, solely in terms of the associative tendencies of the imagination. Of course, there are any number of questions about the plausibility of such an account, but what is striking is the degree to which Hume's account of these issues reproduces (in empiricist terms) the structural elements that are central to Kant's. In this respect, Hume's sophisticated form of empiricism shares far more with Kant's synthesis of empiricism and rationalism than is often acknowledged.

In any case, given all this, we can characterize Hume's account of mental representation as follows:

(HYBRID) An idea will represent the intrinsic qualities of the particular objects it *exactly* represents in virtue of being an image or copy of them. But it will represent these objects (and others) as standing in further relations with each other in virtue of the manner in which it is associated with other ideas (which are images of other objects).

This view nicely combines SIMPLE AND COMPLEX, ABSTRACT, and the other cases of interest to us into a single, coherent account of how ideas represent. As such, it does much better than any of the accounts considered thus far in accounting for all of what Hume has to say about the nature of representation.

And the idea that copying is most important for determining the *particular* things that an idea refers to fits nicely with the details of what Hume actually says about these issues. For example, consider the way in which Hume glosses his account of the nature of abstract ideas: "Abstract ideas are, therefore, in themselves individual, however they may become general in their representation. The image in the mind is only that of a particular object, though the application of it in our reasoning be the same as if it were universal." (T 1.1.7.6; SBN 19) As this quote indicates, Hume believes that an investigation of the functional role of an idea is *not* required in order to determine what this idea represents as an image. For this is something we can understand solely by considering what an idea is copied from. Rather, for Hume, the need to consider the functional role of an idea arises only when we

move from considering what it represents as an image to considering the further relations that it represents its object as having to other things.

This, of course, is just what HYBRID would predict. And HYBIRD also explains why representation by copying plays such a large role in Hume's arguments throughout the *Treatise*. For example, consider Hume's argument concerning our idea of necessary connection. There Hume writes,

“...general or abstract ideas are nothing but individual ones taken in a certain light. If we be possest, therefore, of any idea of power in general, we must also be able to conceive some particular species of it; and as power cannot subsist alone, but is always regarded as an attribute of some being or existence, we must be able to place this power in some particular being, and conceive that being as endow'd with a real force and energy, by which such a particular effect necessarily results from its operation. ... This is the true manner of conceiving a particular power in a particular body: And a general idea being impossible without an individual, where the latter is impossible, 'tis certain the former can never exist.” (T 1.3.14.13; SBN 161)

Here Hume seems to endorse the following line of thought:⁴⁶

(1) An idea can (positively) represent some general feature of things only if it also (positively) represents a particular instance of this feature.⁴⁷

(2) An idea can (positively) represent a particular instance of this feature only by being an image of it.

(3) Thus an idea can (positively) represent some general feature of things only by being an image of a particular instance of this feature.

This is just the type of argument Hume would give if he accepted an account of mental representation that combined copying and functional role in the manner that HYBIRD does. So, unlike either an account that focuses on copying alone or an account that focuses on the casual-functional role of ideas alone, an account that combines both of these elements in the right way can do justice to both Hume's arguments concerning our idea of necessary

⁴⁶See also, “since we can never distinctly conceive how any particular power can possibly reside in any particular object, we deceive ourselves in imagining we can form any such general idea.” (T 1.3.14.13; SBN 161)

⁴⁷The qualification “positively” is included here to allow for the possibility of merely relative ideas as discussed above.

connection *and* his account of abstract ideas.

Moreover, thinking about the relationship between abstract ideas and copying in this way allows us to understand why Hume does not take every abstract idea to involve a fiction in his sense, despite insisting that, “Ideas always represent the objects or impressions from which they are derived, and can never, without a fiction, represent or be applied to any other.” (T 1.2.3.11; SBN 37) For an abstract idea (considered as such) represents a class of possible objects. And given HYBRID, any normal abstract idea must be derived from (some member of) the class of objects it represents. So there is a clear sense in which abstract ideas are in fact derived from the things they represent.

Similarly, consider Hume’s representation argument against rationalism. The crucial claim here, for our purposes, is that an idea can be true or false only if it represents something by being a copy of it.⁴⁸ This, given the fact that copying does not exhaust Hume’s account of mental representation, can seem a puzzling assertion for Hume to make. But if Hume accepts HYBRID, he will view all forms of mental representation as based upon the imagistic sort of mental representation that only copying can secure. And if he views things in this manner, it is entirely appropriate for him to claim that ideas can only be true or false insofar as they are images of something else.⁴⁹

⁴⁸T 2.3.3.5; SBN 415.

⁴⁹The interaction between these two elements of Hume’s account is particularly complex during his discussion of our ideas of space at T 1.2.1.3; SBN 27 where he (for example) writes:

“When you tell me of the thousandth and ten thousandth part of a grain of sand, I have a distinct idea of these numbers; but the images, which I form in my mind to represent the things themselves, are nothing different from each other, nor inferior to that image, by which I represent the grain of sand itself..”

Here Hume claims that we can form “distinct ideas” of these two numbers (one thousandth and one ten thousandth), but that the image we can form in our mind of an object corresponding to these two numbers is the same. What Hume means by this is that the image in question represents the smallest idea that our imaginative powers are capable of in this context. This, according to Hume, means that while we can in some sense conceive of an infinite series of ever smaller numbers, we cannot conceive of an infinite series of ever smaller objects corresponding to these numbers. Here again is a case in which Hume assumes that the limits on what an idea can represent are determined in some way by the limits on what this idea can be copied from. Hume’s point here is, in effect, that while we are capable of forming ever complex mathematical ideas via forming ever more complex customs for associating ideas together, the limits on our ability to form ever smaller *images* of objects constrain our ability to think of objects that correspond to these ever smaller numbers. For an excellent discussion of these issues, see Donald Ainslie’s “Adequate Ideas and Modest Scepticism in Hume’s Metaphysics of Space.” *Archiv für Geschichte Der Philosophie* 92 (1):39-67 (2010).

Thus, while the hybrid view agrees with the functionalist interpretation of Hume that Hume's conception of mental representation involves elements that depend on an idea's causal-functional role, it does not view these elements as sufficient for genuine truth-apt representation. Rather, according to the hybrid view, genuine truth-aptness can arise only through the combination of both copying *and* functional role.⁵⁰

Note that this also means that while impressions of sensation may be said to represent in some sense, they may not represent other things in the sense that makes beliefs and other ideas fully truth-apt. For if fully truth-apt representation requires both of these elements, it will in particular require that the perception doing the representation be associated with other perceptions in the manner described above. And while it is clear that Humean ideas are capable of these sorts of associations, it seems that Humean impressions of sensation are not, at least to the same degree. So, on this view, impressions of sensation will only be capable of representing in the minimal, imagistic fashion that is a product of copying alone - and, as a result, impressions of sensation will only be capable of representing something insofar as they resemble it in its intrinsic qualities.⁵¹

In closing, it is worth stressing that the hybrid view is actually quite close to contemporary accounts of mental representation which view the representational properties of a mental state or token as determined by its functional role *plus* its causal origins and phenomenology. Like these views, the hybrid view claims that functional role makes a necessary, but not sufficient, contribution to our ability to represent things. Instead these views understand mental representation to involve two elements: First, we represent things as standing in certain structural relationships by having "ideas" whose functional roles mirror these structural relationships. And, second, we represent particular things or classes of things as occupying these structural roles through ideas that have non-structural relations (i.e. relations of causation or resemblance) with these things. Thus, according to both these theories, while the functional role of our mental representations fixes a structural description of the world, this structural description is only "tied down" to particular things or objects by the features that Hume stresses in his account of copying.

Moreover, as noted above, the hybrid view does justice to the intuition that ideas may represent what they do in at least two different ways. First, ideas may represent certain

⁵⁰This is true, even in the case of merely relative ideas, because even there the merely relative idea only acquires determinate truth conditions insofar as it relates the thing so represented to other things that we can form positive ideas of.

⁵¹Again I leave to the side here the implications of this point for the question of whether we are capable of representing mind-independent objects for Hume.

things in virtue of being images of them in something like the sense involved in Hume's notion of copying. And, second, ideas may represent what they do in virtue of the role they play in thought - i.e. in virtue of their functional role. One of the great virtues of a principle like HYBRID is that it gives both of these sorts of representation a central role in determining what our ideas represent. So, in particular, it can explain why someone like Hume took imagistic representation to be essential to mental representation without attributing to him the implausible claim that imagistic representation is the only form thereof.

For those of us who are attracted to an account of mental representation with this general flavor, the opportunity to attribute to Hume an account of mental representation with this degree of sophistication will be a further advantage of the interpretation I have been proposing here. For if this interpretation is correct, far from having the rather simplistic view of these issues that is often attributed to him, Hume's account of mental representation had a richness and complexity that few theories prior to the second-half of the twentieth century possessed.