

Recent Scholarship on Hume's Theory of Mental Representation

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Abstract: In a recent paper, Karl Schafer argues that Hume's theory of mental representation has two distinct components, unified by their shared feature of having accuracy conditions. As Schafer sees it, simple and complex ideas represent the intrinsic imagistic features of their objects whereas abstract ideas represent the relations or structures in which multiple objects stand. This distinction, however, is untenable for at least two related reasons. Firstly, complex ideas represent the relations or structures in which the impressions that are the objects of their simple components stand. Secondly, abstract ideas are themselves instances of complex ideas. I draw two important conclusions from these facts. Firstly, *contra* Schafer and Garrett (to whom Schafer responds), the Copy Principle, properly emended, constitutes the entirety of Hume's theory of mental representation. Secondly, whereas paradigm examples of complex ideas, e.g. ideas of spatial and temporal complexes, are structured by relations of contiguity, abstract ideas are those complex ideas instead structured by relations of *resemblance*. As such, they represent their objects not as spatially or temporally contiguous but rather *as resembling*.

In a recent paper, 'Hume's Unified Theory of Mental Representation,' Karl Schafer argues that Hume's theory of mental representation has two distinct components, unified by their shared feature of having accuracy conditions. As Schafer sees it, simple and complex ideas represent the intrinsic imagistic features of their objects whereas abstract ideas represent the relations or structures in which multiple objects stand. This distinction, however, is untenable for at least two related reasons. Firstly, complex ideas represent the relations or structures in which the impressions that are the objects of their simple components stand. Secondly, abstract ideas are themselves instances of complex ideas. I draw two important conclusions from these facts. Firstly, *contra* Schafer and Garrett (to whom Schafer responds), the Copy Principle, properly emended, constitutes the entirety of Hume's theory of mental representation. Secondly, whereas paradigm examples of complex ideas, e.g. ideas of spatial and temporal complexes, are structured by relations of contiguity, abstract ideas are those complex ideas instead structured by relations of *resemblance*. As such, they represent their objects not as spatially or temporally contiguous, but rather *as resembling*.

My procedure will be as follows. As Schafer's paper is in large part a response to one by Garrett, which is itself in part a response to a paper by Cohon and Owen, I will begin by reviewing this dialectic, noting both the

objections that each successive paper raises to its predecessors, and also some new and important objections of my own. I will then detail and defend the above two objections to Schafer's account. Finally, I will conclude that for Hume any representation that represents its object *as* having some feature does so by being a picture of that object, although what is pictured will depend on both the intrinsic features of the simple ideas at hand and the associative relations that structure these.

The dialectic that I will trace through the recent literature on Hume's theory of mental representation begins with Cohon and Owen, 1997. The ultimate aim of that paper is to parse Hume's well-known argument from T 2.3.3.5; SBN 415 for the conclusion that the passions cannot be opposed by reason.¹ That conclusion is reached via the thesis that the passions do not represent, and so Cohon's and Owen's more proximate aim in the early sections of their paper is to make explicit Hume's argument for that thesis. As Cohon and Owen understand that argument, it proceeds via what they take to be Hume's most general theory of mental representation:

Representation_{CO}: a perception represents that of which it is a copy.

The key notion here is that of being a copy, and Hume is fairly clear about just what this entails. For x to be a copy of y requires that two conditions be met. These conditions are each necessary for, and together are jointly sufficient for x to be a copy of y . The first condition is that x must be caused by y . Of course, 'cause' must be construed in the proper Humean way here, so that for x to be caused by y is for x and y to be constantly conjoined and for y to always precede x . So, for example, when Hume sets out to prove the Copy Principle in the opening pages of the *Treatise*—the thesis that all simple ideas are copies of some simple impression—he observes that exactly these two parts of the causal condition are met.

I first make myself certain, by a new review, of what I have already asserted, that every simple impression is attended with a correspondent idea, and every simple idea with a correspondent impression. From this constant conjunction of resembling perceptions I immediately conclude, that there is a great connexion betwixt our correspondent impressions and ideas, and that the existence of one has a considerable influence upon that of the other. Such a constant conjunction, in such an infinite number of instances, can never arise from chance; but clearly proves a dependence of the impressions on the ideas, or of the ideas on the impressions. That I may know on which side this dependence lies, I consider the order of their *first appearance*; and find by constant experience, that the simple impressions always take the precedence of their correspondent ideas, but never appear in the contrary order. T 1.1.1.8; SBN 4.

Correspondent impressions and ideas are constantly conjoined, and the former always precede the latter. Thus, Hume can conclude that impressions are the cause of ideas (in the proper Humean sense of 'cause').

The second condition that must be met for x to be a copy of y is that x must exactly resemble y . Again, here is Hume in the opening pages of the *Treatise* offering evidence that this condition is met in the case of ideas and impressions.

The first circumstance, that strikes my eye, is the great resemblance betwixt our impressions and ideas in every other particular, except their degree of force and vivacity. T 1.1.1.3; SBN 2

Of course, Hume goes on to limit his resemblance thesis to *simple* ideas and impressions only and so correspondingly limits the Copy Principle to just these as well, which caveat will become important in a moment.

Back to Cohon and Owen. Their thesis, Representation_{CO}, is that a perception represents that of which it is a copy. Since impressions are original mental entities, they do not represent, and since passions are impressions of reflection neither do they.² As evidence for this understanding of Hume, Cohon and Owen cite Hume's use of the idiom of representation throughout his introduction and defense of the Copy Principle in the opening pages of the *Treatise*³ and the use to which he appears to put Representation_{CO} in his arguments thereafter.⁴

In fact, though, as it stands, Representation_{CO} cannot be right for reasons that Hume himself explicitly acknowledges, although a small change to it that preserves its spirit if not its letter will suffice to ameliorate the problem. As we just noted, Hume restricts the Copy Principle to simple impressions and ideas. The content of this claim from early on in the *Treatise* is only that every *simple* idea is copied from some *simple* impression. Correspondingly, then, if it is only simple ideas that are copied from simple impressions, Representation_{CO} must similarly apply only to simples. That is, since Representation_{CO} states that a perception represents that of which it is a copy, and only *simple* ideas are copies of anything, then it would seem to follow that only simple ideas represent anything. This, however, cannot be right.

First of all, any plausible theory of mental representation must to be able to account for the representational content of thoughts of complex items such as that of a dog, and a person kicking a ball. Hume clearly does so by casting such thoughts of complexes as themselves being complex ideas, and so he must have some account of how such ideas represent what they do. He certainly writes as if he does.

I can imagine myself such a city as the *New Jerusalem*, whose pavement is gold and walls are rubies, tho' I never saw any such. I have seen *Paris*; but shall I affirm I can form any such an idea of that city, as will perfectly represent all its streets and houses in their real and just proportions? T 1.1.1.5; SBN 3.

This is only one of a vast number of instances in which Hume indicates that he takes complex ideas to represent. This quotation also brings out a second problem with Representation_{CO}. If a perception represents that of which it is a copy, then no perception can ever *mis*represent. If a perception represents that of which it is a copy, then the object of any perception that represents at all is always guaranteed

to exist (since it had to be copied in order to be represented), and so such representations can never go wrong. As we saw in the above quotation, Hume is clearly aware of the phenomenon of misrepresentation: we can represent New Jerusalem even though it has never existed, and our representation of Paris does not correspond exactly to the details of the actual city.⁵

What is also indicated by the above quotation is that Hume takes these two problems to be connected: it is our ability to represent via complex ideas that leads to our making such errors. Recall the context in which Hume writes the above. He has just proposed for the first time that all of his ideas exactly resemble some impression. He then notices these two kinds of examples, and uses the distinction he has previously drawn between simple and complex ideas to restrict the scope of his claim to just simple ideas. The implication certainly seems to be that it is the fact that such ideas are complex that keeps them from exactly resembling some impression, and that this is not the case with simple ideas. Simple ideas cannot misrepresent; only complex ideas can.

Here, then, is a proposal for how to emend Representation_{CO} to account for complex and misrepresentation, while keeping copying at the core of Hume's account. A simple perception represents that of which it is a copy. Notice that a complex perception is nothing more than an arrangement of simple perceptions. So, take seriously the Humean slogan that a representation of a complex is nothing more than a complex of representations. That is, a complex perception represents the simple objects that are represented by its simple parts as being arranged in the way that those simple parts are arranged in it. Consider, for instance, Hume's account of the origin of our representations of spatial complexes.

The table in front of me is alone sufficient by its view to give me the idea of extension. This idea, then, is borrow'd from, and represents some impression, which this moment appears to the senses. But my senses convey to me only the impressions of colour'd points, dispos'd in a certain manner. If the eye is sensible of any thing farther, I desire it may be pointed out to me. But if it be impossible to show any thing farther, we may conclude with certainty, that *the idea of extension is nothing but a copy of these colour'd points, and of the manner of their appearance.* T 1.2.3.4; SBN 34, emphasis added.

Our complex idea of a spatial complex comes to represent the spatial complex that it does by being a collection of simple ideas of colored points arranged in a way that exactly resembles the arrangements of the spatial complex being represented. We represent the relation that some simple impressions stand in to one another by arranging simple representations of each of these impressions into *the same relation*. We represent *a* as being next to *b* by placing an idea of *a* next to an idea of *b*. The idea of a spatial complex is nothing more than a spatial complex of ideas.

Hume is clear that our representation of temporal complexes works in the same manner.

The idea of time being deriv'd from the succession of our perceptions of every kind, ideas as well as impressions, and impressions of reflection as well as of sensation, will afford us an instance of an abstract idea, which comprehends a still greater variety than that of space, and yet is represented in the fancy by some particular individual idea of a determinate quantity and quality. T 1.2.3.6; SBN 34.

Our idea of time is 'deriv'd from the succession of our perceptions'. Hume's thought is that we represent two items as being related, now temporally, by placing them in a temporal relation to one another. That is, for example, we represent one thing as happening before another by having a representation of the former followed by a representation of the latter. So, whereas we represent a spatially complex state of affairs by forming a kind of picture before our mind's eye, we represent a temporally complex state of affairs by forming a kind of movie there. In general, complex ideas represent the simple impressions that their component simple ideas represent as being arranged in the way that those component ideas are arranged in the complex. We can generalize this account of complex representation using the general schema:

' $x'R'y$ ' represents xRy .

A representation of x and y as related to one another in way R consists of a representation of x related in the same way to a representation of y .

Notice that since these component simple ideas will be copies of the simple impressions that they represent, when a complex idea *correctly* represents an arrangement of simple impressions, it too will be a copy of those impressions. That is, a complex idea is correct just in case it is caused by and exactly resembles the arrangement of simple impressions that it represents. An incorrect complex idea, on the other hand, such as Hume's ideas of Paris or New Jerusalem, will not be a copy of what it represents. Hume's idea of Paris does not exactly resemble it; his idea of New Jerusalem is not caused by any such city. Still, this necessary emendation to Representation_{CO} maintains its spirit, if not its letter. Simple ideas represent that of which they are copies. Complex ideas represent those impressions that their simple component represent as being arranged as those ideas are arranged in the complex. They are correct when copies, incorrect when not.⁶

We will return to this understanding of Hume's theory of mental representation when we examine Schafer's account, which takes something like it to be an essential *component* of that theory, if not its entirety. Schafer's account, however, is a response to Garrett's, which is a response to Cohon's and Owen's, so it is to Garrett that I will now turn. Garrett aims to show that both of Cohon's and Owen's conclusions about Hume's theory of mental representation are mistaken. He argues that Hume *does* take impressions to represent and that he does *not* therefore endorse Representation_{CO}. Thus, Garrett cites passages in which Hume appears to commit himself to an impression's being a representation and those in which Hume writes of one thing representing another where it is clear that the former

is not a copy of the latter at all. For example, Hume notes that the giving of a key can represent the transfer of ownership of a piece of property (T 3.2.4.2; SBN 515–516) and that a son can represent his family (T 2.1.9.13; SBN 309). To accommodate such texts, Garrett defends an account of Hume's theory of mental representation that casts each of these examples as an instance of a more general theory of representation (mental and otherwise) whereby,

Representation_G [A]ll representation consists, for Hume, of one thing playing, by means of the mental effects and mental dispositions it produces in particular circumstances, a significant part of the causal and/or functional role of what it represents' Garrett 2006: 310.

As Garrett sees it, what is essential to all representation is that there is a causal or functional isomorphism between that which represents and that which is represented. Giving a key can represent the transfer of property because the former is functionally isomorphic to the latter. A son can represent his family in court because the son does what the family would do, had they been in court. One way to put this is that a representation *stands in for*, or serves as a *proxy*, for that which it represents.

Such an interpretation displaces copying from the central role that it plays in Cohon's and Owen's account, which *prima facie* appears to conflict with the spirit of Hume's texts. As Garrett notes, however, he can recover much of what is lost in this displacement because Representation_{CO} turns out to be a particularly salient and important *instantiation* of Representation_G. Since Representation_{CO} requires that a representing perception exactly resemble that which it represents, this resemblance will make the representing perception well situated to play a causal or functional role similar to that which it represents. For example, because a blue-idea exactly resembles a blue-impression, it is thereby capable of standing in many of the same blueness-dependent causal and functional relations that the impression is. Any perception that is a copy of some other perception—both caused by and exactly resembling that perception—will be similarly well-placed to play the functional role of, or stand in for, that of which it is a copy. Thus, Garrett is able to cast an approximation of Representation_{CO}—and the textual and philosophical evidence that Cohon and Owen present in its favor—as an instance of this more general principle.

In addition to the exegetical advantage that Garrett claims in being able to account for those texts in which Hume writes about a form of representation that is not the result of copying, Garrett's account is also a substantial move away from the sort of imagistic theory of mental representation for which Hume has so often been criticized,⁷ and a move towards a more philosophically defensible and relevant account. It has long been recognized that while we represent the world as having certain imagistic features (at least 'at first'), the vehicle for such representations is not in fact images. For example, brain-states are not mental movies being projected in our mind's eye. Still, the notion of representation as

picturing has its advantages, and Garrett's causal-functional isomorphism is one way of retaining these, even in the face of abandoning imagism. If Garrett's interpretation of Hume is successful, we would therein have a version of Hume's theory of mental representation that would be all the more robust. So Garrett's account certainly does have both textual and philosophical benefits.

That said, Garrett's account does also have its disadvantages. For one, one of the benefits that Garrett claims is that he can give a univocal account of all of Hume's uses of the idiom of representation. This, however, is only an advantage of his account if those uses of 'representation' are best understood as univocal, and there is good reason to think that they are not. Recall that the examples that Garrett sites of Hume's mention of representations that are not copies are the giving of a key representing the transfer of property and a son representing his family. For Garrett's account to benefit from understanding these examples as of a piece with the more familiar copying examples, it must be the case that the former examples are, in fact, of the same kind as the latter. Consider, though, the difference between the sense in which a painting represents its object and the sense in which a lawyer represents his client. As Rosenberg, nicely puts it in discussing cognition and sensation in Kant's theoretical philosophy (Rosenberg, 1980) this is the difference between standing *for* and standing *in for*.⁸ A representation stands in for its object when it serves as a proxy for that object—when it plays the causal or functional role of that object in some system—whereas a representation stands for its object when it (additionally) represents that object *as* having some feature or another. Garrett's account seems to suggest that the former is sufficient for the latter, but there is good philosophical reason to think that it takes more than mere causal-functional isomorphism to represent something as something. It is easy enough to envision a line on Hume's text wherein this something more turns out to be the very copying relation that Garrett attempts to cast as an instance of his more general principle. That is, perhaps there is, as Garrett holds, a sense of representation as causal-functional isomorphism that is univocal across all of Hume's texts, but to make this sense of 'representation' robust enough to be adequate to account for representation *as*, or standing for, it must be supplemented with Hume's account of copying. To put it one more way, the question, 'When does a causal-functional isomorphism represent its object *as* something?' seems like a perfectly good one, and it is plausible to think that Hume's answer would be, 'When the idea playing that causal-functional role is also a *copy* of its object'. There may be a sense in which a key represents the transfer of property or a son represents his family, but neither of these represent their objects in the same way that a painting represents its object or an idea represents its corresponding impression. What is essential about the latter representations is that they are each copies of their objects (putting aside the necessary emendation of this principle regarding complex ideas). Furthermore, this difference is not that between a general principle and an instantiation of it but rather one between two different *kinds* of representations.

Schafer's criticism of Garrett's account also centers on Garrett's deemphasis of the role of copying in Hume's theory of mental representation. In particular,

Schafer argues that this deemphasis leaves Garrett unable to do justice to some of the arguments that Cohon and Owen had originally cited as evidence in favor of Representation_{CO}. Granting, though, that Garrett is correct that other features of Hume's philosophical system, specifically his theory of general representation, seem to require something very much like Representation_G, Schafer sets out to present a unified account of these two aspects of Hume's theory. His suggestion is that something like Representation_{CO} represents the *intrinsic* features of an object, whereas something like Representation_G represents the *relations* between objects. Each of these, however, is itself an instance of a more general feature of all representation: accuracy conditions. Schafer's 'unified' account of Hume's theory of mental representation is meant to incorporate both of these aspects.

Representation_S 'The intrinsic qualities that an idea represents its object as possessing are the product of the manner in which it is an image of that object. The further relational or structural features it represents its object as possessing are the product of the manner in which the idea is associated (often via linguistic customs or conventions) with other ideas that are themselves images of further objects'. Schafer 2015: 996

As Schafer sees it, then, both Cohon and Owen on the one hand and Garrett on the other have captured an aspect of Hume's theory of mental representation, but neither account is exhaustive on its own. Something very much like Representation_{CO} is needed to account for representations of intrinsic features, and something very much like Representation_G is needed to account for structural ones. It is the latter half of this claim that I now want to examine more closely. As Schafer presents it, Representation_S is, in fact, a composite of three principles:

(SIMPLE) A simple idea imagistically represents those impressions or objects that exactly resemble the impression from which this idea is derived. Schafer 2015: 983.

(COMPLEX) A complex idea imagistically represents those impressions or objects whose corresponding component parts exactly resemble the impressions from which component parts of the complex idea are derived. Schafer 2015: 983.

(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). Schafer 2015: 985.

(SIMPLE) is meant to capture the most fundamental form that Representation_{CO} takes. Simple ideas are all copies of (exactly resemble and are caused by) their corresponding impressions and so represent these impressions. As we noted earlier, complex ideas also represent but often are not copies of any other perception, and so (COMPLEX) is meant to extend the scope of Representation_{CO} to such ideas. As Schafer puts it here, though, (COMPLEX) stands in need of further clarification. While it tells us that complex ideas represent the simple impressions that their component ideas represent, it does not yet specify what it represents these impressions *as*. As we saw earlier, though, there is straightforward and natural way specifying just that, about which Hume is fairly explicit in a number of places. Recall the following passage.

The table in front of me is alone sufficient by its view to give me the idea of extension. This idea, then, is borrow'd from, and represents some impression, which this moment appears to the senses. But my senses convey to me only the impressions of colour'd points, dispos'd in a certain manner. If the eye is sensible of any thing farther, I desire it may be pointed out to me. But if it be impossible to show any thing farther, we may conclude with certainty, that the idea of extension is nothing but a copy of these colour'd points, and of the manner of their appearance.
T 1.2.3.4; SBN 34.

Here, we have a complex idea that consists of a number of colored points arranged in a certain way, which idea represents the impressions corresponding to these ideas of colored points *arranged in the same way*. That is, a complex idea represents the simple impressions that correspond to its simple component ideas as being arranged in the way that these simple ideas are arranged. We saw earlier that Hume leverages a similar account for the representation of temporal complexes as temporally complex. We represent a spatially complex state of affairs by forming a kind of picture before our mind's eye, we represent a temporally complex state of affairs by forming a kind of movie there. Finally, we there generalized this account of complex representation *as* using the schema:

'*x'R'y*' represents xRy .

A representation of x and y as related to one another in way R consists of a representation of x related in the same way to a representation of y . Again, two items are represented as next to each other by placing ideas of each of the items next to each other (painting a mental picture of them). Two items are represented as occurring after one another by placing a representation of the first before a representation of the second (running a mental movie of them). This seems a plausible enough way to understand both Hume's texts and Schafer's (COMPLEX).

If that is right, however, then Schafer's account runs into a problem. Specifically, a complex idea represents its object in virtue of *both* 'the manner in which it is an image of that object' *and* 'the manner in which [its component ideas are] associated

[...] with other ideas that are themselves images of further objects.' That is, on the one hand, a complex idea is, as Schafer takes it to be, an image of its complex object, and thereby represents the intrinsic features of that object. For example, the spatial relations of an arrangement of colored bits of paint are clearly imagistic and intrinsic features of a painting in virtue of which it represents the imagistic and intrinsic features of its object. As we saw Hume write, our representation of a table consists of a numbered of colored points arranged in a certain manner. That is, it is in virtue of the intrinsic features of our representation of the table (colored point arranged in that manner) that we represent the intrinsic features of the table (e.g. its color and shape). Consider that the very same colored points could be rearranged to form an entirely different image that would represent entirely different intrinsic features (of a different object).

On the other hand, though, a complex idea is *also* an idea composed of the association of other ideas (its simple components) and so represents the relational or structural features of these ideas (e.g. their spatial or temporal relations). In the case of the table, for example, the complex idea is composed of those colored points associated with one another via relations of contiguity.⁹ And that complex idea represents the relational and structural features of the impressions corresponding to those simple ideas, namely, that they are arranged table-wise. More generally, a complex idea represents the simple impressions that its component simple ideas represent as being related in a certain way, and the complex idea does this in virtue of itself being a complex of simple ideas.

So complex ideas appear to represent both the imagistic intrinsic features of their complex objects as well as the structural or relational features of the simple components of these objects. If that is right, however, then Schafer's line against Garrett—that there is a distinction in kind between representation via copying on the one hand, and representation via causal-functional isomorphism on the other, corresponding to the difference between representing intrinsic and extrinsic features of objects—cannot be right. Complex ideas straddle this supposed divide.

Now, one might be tempted to defend Schafer's account here using a line something like the following. Complex ideas, the thought would go, represent the specifically *imagistic* structural or relational features of an object, whereas what the second clause of Representation_s is meant to capture is the particular way that *general* ideas represent, which is as Garrett suggests via non-imagistic means. Since general ideas do not represent imagistically, the thinking goes, they do not represent via *picturing* in the way that complex ideas do. Rather, they represent the specifically *non-imagistic* structural or relational features of their objects. For example, a single idea can function as a general idea to represent not only just a dog but also the 'dogness' of the dog, or that about the dog that makes it a dog. So there is a difference in kind here, both in that which does the representing (complex ideas vs. general ideas) and that which is thereby represented (structural imagistic features vs. structural non-imagistic features).

The problem with this line of thinking is that it overlooks the significance of the fact that *general ideas are themselves complex ideas*. What one might normally think of when one thinks of complex ideas are those that are a complex of simple ideas

associated via relations of *contiguity*. That includes our ideas of spatial and temporal complexes. A general idea, however, is a complex idea composed of (simple or complex)¹⁰ ideas associated via relations of *resemblance*. If, however, Schafer's (ABSTRACT) turns out to be an instance of his (COMPLEX), then it will also turn out that Schafer's arguments against Garrett amount to a case for returning to something very much like our emended version of Representation_{CO}. That is, if general ideas are merely instances of complex ideas, and complex ideas can be accounted for by a sufficiently modified version of the Copy Principle, then a more sophisticated version of Representation_{CO} will have been vindicated after all. Before returning to that thesis, however, it will be worth spending some time making this case.

To show that Hume's account of general ideas is an instantiation of (COMPLEX)—that it too can be made to fit the schema that we have lately been using of representing xRy via a representation of the form ' $x'R'y'$ '—we need first to have Hume's account in front of us, and it is brief enough to quote in full.

When we have found a resemblance among several objects, that often occur to us, we apply the same name to all of them, whatever differences we may observe in the degrees of their quantity and quality, and whatever other differences may appear among them. After we have acquir'd a custom of this kind, the hearing of that name revives the idea of one of these objects, and makes the imagination conceive it with all its particular circumstances and proportions. But as the same word is suppos'd to have been frequently apply'd to other individuals, that are different in many respects from that idea, which is immediately present to the mind; the word not being able to revive the idea of all these individuals, only touches the soul, if I may be allow'd so to speak, and revives that custom, which we have acquir'd by surveying them. They are not really and in fact present to the mind, but only in power, nor do we draw them all out distinctly in the imagination, but keep ourselves in a readiness to survey any of them, as we may be prompted by a present design or necessity.
T 1.1.7.7; SBN 20–1.

When we encounter items that resemble one another in certain ways, we call them all by the same name. Because this name is frequently used in the presence of these items, our minds form an association between the two such that whenever that name is used we call to mind some one, or a few, ideas of these items. Furthermore, we stand disposed to call to mind more such ideas (ideas of the items between which this resemblance was found) upon further prompting. So we represent persons in general by forming certain associations between our ideas of particular persons. Namely, those ideas all *resemble* one another and are called to mind in the appropriate situations (primarily when the word 'person' is used, etc.) because of this resemblance.

One way to see that this account is an instance of (COMPLEX) is to ask what is represented by such general ideas. The obvious answer is that, for instance, the general idea 'personhood' represents personhood. That answer, however,

simply pushes the question back a step: we now need to ask what kind of thing personhood is. The obvious first candidate here is persons.¹¹ That is, perhaps Hume's theory is that the general idea 'personhood' is just a way of representing all particular persons. Thus, the mechanisms that Hume details here are merely that: mechanisms for calling to mind just the ideas needed to represent all and only persons. On this reading of his theory, that we rely on the resemblance of each of these ideas to one another is an incidental feature of the account. If it just so happened that persons didn't resemble one another at all but were encountered all standing next to one another, we would form the general idea personhood via associations of contiguous items rather than resembling ones.

This last point is implausible, though. Firstly, such an idea of persons would be indistinguishable from an idea of all persons standing next to one another. Secondly, it does not seem to be a mere accident that it is resemblance that is at work in general ideas. In fact, a more plausible suggestion of what is represented by a general idea is exactly persons *as* resembling each other. That is, according to Hume's account, what prompts us to form general ideas in the first place is that, 'we have found a resemblance among several objects.' Thus, another natural suggestion for what is represented by an idea prompted by such encounters is that it is these objects *as* resembling one another. So it is not just that our general idea 'personhood' represents persons, but more specifically, it represents persons as members of a set of objects among which we have found a resemblance. It represents persons *as* persons.

There is reason to think that Hume has just this kind of work in mind for general ideas. Here, he is later in that section of the *Treatise* writing about distinctions of reason.

Thus when a globe of white marble is presented, we receive only the impression of a white colour dispos'd in a certain form, nor are we able to separate and distinguish the colour from the form. But observing afterwards a globe of black marble and a cube of white, and comparing them with our former object, *we find two separate resemblances*, in what formerly seem'd, and really is, perfectly inseparable. After a little more practice of this kind, we begin to distinguish the figure from the colour by a distinction of reason; that is, we consider the figure and the colour together, since they are in effect the same and undistinguishable; but still view them in different aspects, *according to the resemblances, of which they are susceptible*. T 1.1.7.9; SBN 21–2, emphasis added.

Here, Hume outlines how it is that we represent an object as being white as opposed to also being a globe. What is represented is disambiguated by being represented *as* resembling some other object represented. This, however, is explicitly billed by Hume as being an instance of the use of general ideas. Thus, what is represented by a general idea is not just a group of particular objects but rather a group of particular objects as resembling one another (and, thereby, as having a specific relation to one another).

Now, we have not yet seen (COMPLEX) play an explicit role here. It is, however, playing a role nonetheless. What we have tentatively established is that a general idea represents the items it represents as resembling one another. It is clear from Hume's account of general ideas that these function via the association of ideas of these items. That association is the one formed in virtue of these ideas resembling one another. So what we have is that certain objects are represented as resembling one another in virtue of the fact that representations of these items are related to one another via their own relation of resembling each other. That is, 'x' resembling 'y' represents x resembling y. General ideas are, in the end, an instance of (COMPLEX). Objects represented are represented as resembling one another by placing representations of these objects into the same resemblance relations with each other. This is a surprising but very tidy result. Hume's theory of how general ideas represent turns out to be an instantiation of his theory of how complex ideas represent. Here, it is not spatial relations or temporal relations that are structuring the representations but that ought to be expected since it is not spatial or temporal relations that are being represented. Rather, since it is resemblance relations that are being represented (persons are represented as resembling each other), it is resemblance relations that provide the structure. General ideas represent objects as resembling one another by placing representations of those objects into the same relation as the objects are represented as being in resemblance relations. What this means for Schafer, however, is that Representation_S ends up reducing to just (COMPLEX), which in turn is a lot like our emended version of Representation_{CO}. So it turns out that following the textual and philosophical threads from Representation_{CO} through Representation_G and Representation_S, we end up right where we ought to have expected all along. Hume holds that all representation proceeds via a suitably sophisticated version of the Copy Principle.

'x'R'y' represents xRy.

Any representation that represents its object *as* having some feature does so by being a picture of that object, although what is pictured will depend on both the intrinsic features of the simple ideas at hand and the associative relations that structure these.¹²

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NOTES

¹ For citations from Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* I employ the standard convention of citing the book, chapter, section, and paragraph number from the Clarendon edition (Hume, 2000), followed by the page number from the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition (Hume, 1974).

² Things are not quite this straightforward, of course. At times, Hume expresses agnosticism about the non-mental causes of impressions, which would imply that we cannot *know* whether impressions represent, not that they do not, in fact, represent. At other times, he seems to express much stronger views—e.g. that we cannot so much as have the idea of a non-mental cause—which would imply that impressions could not be copies, and therefore can be known not to represent. Also note that while impressions of reflection have knowable mental causes, they do not resemble these causes, and so are not copies of them. (Thus, their status as *impressions*.)

³ Two prominent examples:

When I shut my eyes and think of my chamber, the ideas I form are exact *representations* of the impressions I felt; nor is there any circumstance of the one, which is not to be found in the other. In running over my other perceptions, I find still the same resemblance and *representation*. T 1.1.1.3; SBN 3, emphasis added

That all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly *represent*. T 1.1.1.7; SBN 4, emphasis added

⁴ For a detailed examination of the role of the Copy Principle in those arguments, see Landy 2012.

⁵ A more fine-grained gloss on these and other examples would include, at least, a distinction between *misrepresentation* and *imperfect* representation. While Hume might well have the resources for articulating such a distinction, for the sake of brevity, I will simply treat these as of a piece here.

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of this emendation, see Landy 2012.

⁷ For two such criticisms, and their historical development, see Landy 2015: chapter 2.

⁸ Rosenberg's distinction has been getting more attention in the recent literature on Kant. See Landy 2009, Jankowiak 2014, and Stephenson 2015.

⁹ Nb. by 'contiguity' here I do not mean our disposition to recall upon the experience of an object, *a*, the idea of another object, *b*, that has been experienced as contiguous with *a* in the past. Rather, what I mean is the particular associative unity that a complex spatial representation has in virtue of its component ideas all being contiguous with each other. My thanks to Schafer for pointing out this ambiguity.

¹⁰ Cf. 'Tis evident, that even different simple ideas may have a similarity or resemblance to each other; nor is it necessary, that the point or circumstance of resemblance shou'd be distinct or separable from that in which they differ. *Blue* and *green* are different simple ideas, but are more resembling than *blue* or *scarlet*; tho' their perfect simplicity excludes all possibility of separation or distinction. T 1.1.7.6n; SBN 635.

¹¹ At least for Hume, who writes that, 'every thing in nature is individual' (T 1.1.7.6; SBN 19). See Landy 2016 for a detailed account of how to understand this nominalist thesis.

¹² For a defense of this same thesis on grounds independent of those considered here, see Landy 2012.

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