

### The Premise That Even Hume Must Accept

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Legend has it that the way that Kant's Transcendental Deduction operates is by beginning with a premise that even the most ardent skeptic—Hume—would accept, and then showing that accepting this premise already commits one to a whole host of other robust philosophical theses: the validity of the Categories, immediately, that which comprises the rest of the first *Critique*, mediately. Just what this premise is, whether it must be accepted, and how it is that by accepting it one becomes committed to all of these other theses has long been the subject of much scholarly and philosophical debate.<sup>1</sup> Since at least the mid-nineteen-seventies Jay Rosenberg has championed a very particular answer to each of these questions.<sup>2</sup> In particular he has argued, perhaps more thoroughly than any other interpreter of Kant, that the Transcendental Deduction can be read as a *practical* argument.<sup>3</sup> According to Rosenberg's reading, the infamous Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied is not a *statement* about the way the world or the self is, but is rather the *expression of an intention* to conceive of oneself in a certain way. The kind of necessity that attaches to this intention is the necessity for a creature like us to have this intention. Rosenberg casts the remainder of the Deduction as a piece of means-end reasoning, which moves from this intention, through the claim that the only way to realize this intention is to employ the Pure Concepts of the Understanding, to the final adoption of a newly justified intention to so employ these Categories.

My purpose here will not be to evaluate Rosenberg's reading of the Deduction as a historically accurate reading of Kant's text. Rather, I will argue that this new reading, and the subsequent rendering of the Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied as the expression of an intention, while it addresses one worry that Hume might have

<sup>1</sup> One aspect of this debate has been a concern over exactly *how much* is to be included in such a premise. This is because, *prime facie*, Kant seems to run into the following obvious structural difficulty. The more robust this premise is, the more plausible it is that much follows from it, but also the less likely it is that the skeptic will be forced to accept it. Conversely, the *less* robust the premise is, the more likely that the skeptic will agree to it, but the less plausible it is that anything very interesting follows from it. So, various interpreters over the years have tried to strike a balance between these two competing approaches to the Deduction: some making the Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied more robust, and spending their time showing why skeptics are nonetheless committed to it, and others making it less robust and spending their time showing how accepting it still commits one to various of Kant's other philosophical theses. A clear and concise catalogue of many of the various possible positions here can be found in Van Cleve (1999): 79-84. Notable attempts to navigate the Deduction with an eye towards this particular difficulty can be found in Wolff (1963): 105-17, Strawson (1966): 85-117, Allison (1983): 137-40, and Engstrom (1994). Castañeda (1990) and Ameriks (1998) reject entirely the need to make any concessions intended to persuade the Humean skeptic at all. And, of course, there are those who deny the veracity of the legend entirely, who argue that Kant and Hume are actually on the same side after all. Cf. Wolff (1960), and Kuehn (1987).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Rosenberg (1975b), (1977), (1979) and (2005).

<sup>3</sup> Bill deVries argues that Rosenberg goes *too* far in this respect. See his essay in this volume. Rosenberg draws from Sellars (1998) here.

about the *structure* of the Deduction, does nothing to address the most fundamental point of resistance that Hume would have with the Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied in particular. That is, Rosenberg's specifically practical reading of the Deduction, and of the Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied, leaves untouched the problematic core of this premise: that it purports to represent a persistent self. I will further argue that it is this *semantic* issue, of what can and cannot be represented by the human mind, that is the real crux of the debate between Hume and Kant, and that Kant's first task in convincing Hume of the truth of this premise must be to convince him of the semantic *possibility* of it. After a brief discussion of how Kant's semantic theory applies specifically to the representation of the self, the final part of the paper will consist in an examination of Rosenberg's reasons for thinking that the Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied, is not only semantically *possible*, but necessary as well. I will begin, then, with Rosenberg's version of the Transcendental Deduction.

## I

The most important feature, for current purposes, of Rosenberg's reconstruction of the Transcendental Deduction is, of course, what he casts in the role of the Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied. To understand his rendering of this premise, however, we must first say a little about the *kind* of argument that Rosenberg argues the Transcendental Deduction is. Specifically, Rosenberg reads the Transcendental Deduction as a *practical* argument that employs an *embedding* strategy for justifying the use by creatures like us of pure a priori concepts. To see how all of these pieces operate together on Rosenberg's story, I will start from the end here, with pure a priori concepts, and work backwards.

The Transcendental Deduction is, as Kant tells us, an answer to a *quid juris*. It is an attempt to justify the use of pure a priori concepts by creatures like us. It will be helpful in understanding the justification of the use of such pure a priori concepts to contrast this with the justification of the use of their obvious counterparts: empirical a posteriori concepts. The latter are the kind of concepts with which Hume is most comfortable. They are concepts that are, in some sense, derived from experience. (Hume takes this derivation to be a more or less straightforward *copying*; Kant argues that the derivation is more complicated than this, although still comparatively straightforward.) In either case, experience is—again in *some* sense—ready at hand to justify the use of such concepts. Were the pedigree for such a concept ever to come under question, one could appeal to some *experience* to justify its use.<sup>4</sup> Just which concepts qualify for this kind of justification will depend on the details of the derivation involved. For Hume, concepts that seem to admit of purely phenomenal description like 'red' or 'spherical' are prime candidates. For Kant, such a derivation is available more broadly to concepts of phenom-

<sup>4</sup> To be a little more careful, an empirical a posteriori concept is one the use of which *presupposes* that it can be justified by appeal to experience. As Kant points out, the use of some such concepts will turn out to *fail* this justificatory test, and so ought to be abandoned. 'Fate' and 'fortune' are his examples. (A85/B117)

nal qualities and properties of objects alike.

In contrast to empirical a posteriori concepts, pure a priori concepts are the ones that make Hume squeamish, e.g., concepts pertaining to necessary connection, the external world, the subject of a manifold of experiences. As Rosenberg points out, each of these problematic concepts bears Kant's tell-tale mark of a priority: necessity and strict universality. They typically appear in such judgments as, 'All events *must* have a cause,' and 'Every experience *must* be someone's experience'. For these concepts it is clear, at least since Hume's *Treatise*, that experience *cannot* justify their use. The matter of experience, according to Hume, consists of discrete packets of sense-data, none of which either individually, or collectively, contain the materials for justifying the use of (or even explaining the possibility of) these concepts. Experience tells about what *is here and now*, not about what *must be always and everywhere*.

For this reason, if we are justified in using pure a priori concepts, the process by which this use is justified must be very different than that of empirical concepts. As Rosenberg points out, this seems to present Kant with an unhappy dilemma. As theories of the justification of concept use of Kant's time have it, there are essentially two kinds of such justification. There is justification by appeal to experience (of the kind that empirical concepts receive), and justification by appeal to the *logical* relations among ideas. As Kant holds that the above judgments involving pure a priori concepts are *synthetic*—ampliative rather than true merely in virtue of their logical form—he cannot, as his empiricist predecessors did, cast the justification of a priori concepts the latter way. As we have seen, he also cannot cast this justification the former way. It would seem, then, that Kant must propose some new, *third* kind of justification for such concepts, or become, as Rosenberg puts it, a tertium quid rationalist.<sup>5</sup> Lacking any independent motivation for introducing this third kind of justification, such a move by Kant would seem ad hoc and implausible.

Rosenberg's proposal is meant to extricate Kant from just this difficulty. The problem with this dilemma as Rosenberg understands it is that it presupposes that justification can only accrue to the use of a concept via an argument that has as its conclusion a judgment that *employs* such concepts. An argument, for example, that had as its conclusion, 'All events must have a cause,' or, 'Every experience must be someone's experience,' would fit this mold. What Rosenberg sees as Kant's great insight is that instead of having one of *these* judgments as its conclusion, a justificatory argument can have as its conclusion a judgment that *mentions* one of these concepts rather than one that uses it. This is Rosenberg's *embedding* strategy. Instead of casting the Deduction as an argument whose form includes having the conclusion, 'All events must have a cause,' he casts it as an argument that has as its conclusion something more like, 'The use of the concept 'causation' is justified,' or more generally, 'The use of a priori concepts is justified'.<sup>6</sup>

What we saw a moment ago was that we had good reason for thinking that Kant would be unable to justify the use of pure a priori concepts via an appeal to

<sup>5</sup> Rosenberg (2005): 48.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Rosenberg (2005): chapter 2.

logical relations or experience. That is, Kant would not be able to construct a deductively valid argument that took as its premises certain facts about either experience or relations of ideas and moved from these to a conclusion that employs pure a priori concepts. What Rosenberg's move does is change the kind of conclusion that is needed without changing the kinds of justification that the premises receive. What Kant needs now is a deductively valid argument that takes as its premises certain facts about either experience or relations of ideas and moves from these to a conclusion that states that the use of pure a priori concepts is justified. While reaching this conclusion may, *prima facie*, seem just as difficult, it is important to see why it is at least a crucially *different* task than reaching the previous conclusion. The difference that Rosenberg's reading of the Transcendental Deduction trades on is in the *kind* of argument that one gives for each conclusion. More particularly, he argues that one of Kant's insights in the Deduction is seeing that since justifying the *intention* to use a pure a priori concept—as opposed to justifying a *judgment* in which that concept is used—involves justifying a certain *action* or *behavior*, the kind of argument that is needed for doing this is a *practical* one.

As Rosenberg reads it, the Transcendental Deduction has the following form.

1. We shall achieve (a particular end) E\*.
2. A good way (the best way, the only way) to achieve E\* is to accept principles that have the significant characteristic  $\Phi$ .
3. The (candidate first) principle 'P' has significant characteristic  $\Phi$ .
4. So, we shall accept the principle 'P'.<sup>7</sup>

Here (1) and (4) should not be read as factual statements *about* intentions that we have, but rather as *expressions* of those intentions. So, (1) announces the intention to achieve some end E\*. (2) and (3) are claims about the best/only means to achieving that end. (4) announces the newly formed and freshly justified (via 1-3) intention to adopt the means suggested in (3). Hopefully, it is relatively clear from what we have been saying how (3) and (4) of this argument are to be filled out in the case of the Transcendental Deduction.

1. We shall achieve (a particular end) E\*.
2. A good way (the best way, the only way) to achieve E\* is to accept principles that have the significant characteristic  $\Phi$ .
3. *Judgments employing pure a priori concepts* have significant characteristic  $\Phi$ .
4. So, we shall accept *judgments employing pure a priori concepts*.

Of course, to complete our picture of the Transcendental Deduction, we must fill in (1), (2), and the remainder of (3), and doing so will bring us full circle to the question with which we began: what does Rosenberg cast in the role of The-Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied. Before we do this filling in, however, it is impor-

<sup>7</sup> Rosenberg (2005): 52.

tant to see how this argument *form* has the potential to extricate Kant from the dilemma we saw him facing a moment ago.

Rosenberg's thought is this. Suppose (1) were analytic; suppose, that is, that there is something about *us* that makes it necessarily the case that *we* have as an end E\*.<sup>8</sup> That makes the justification of (1) logically warranted. (2) and (3) are straightforward empirical claims. Thus, this argument is one that moves deductively from premises about relations of ideas and empirical facts to a conclusion that justifies the use of pure a priori concepts.<sup>9</sup> What Rosenberg's reading of the Transcendental Deduction will have achieved, if successful, is to provide exactly the kind of argument that Hume, for instance, supposed would be impossible to provide. Even if ultimately unsuccessful, uncovering the potential of this argument form alone is an important step forward in understanding how Kant might have taken himself to have circumvented the Humean worries we have lately been considering.

Of course, there is still work to be done. In particular, there is the very thorny issue of what could possibly fill the role we have recently assigned to (1): some end that is logically impossible for creatures like *us* *not* to have. Clearly, if Rosenberg can provide *this* he will have hit upon the Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied, and hit upon it in such a way that it will make it easy to see why it was overlooked for so long. What philosophers have been searching for since the publication of the first *Critique* is some *factual* premise that, for some reason, Hume would be forced to accept. What Rosenberg's reading suggests is that we have been searching for the wrong *kind* of premise. There is no factual premise in Kant's argument that Hume cannot deny; rather there is an intention that Hume cannot fail to have. The question now is: what can this intention possibly be?

As we alluded to a moment ago, if (1) is going to be *logically warranted*, if its justification is going to be solely a matter of the relations of ideas in it, the end E\* that appears in it must be some intention that is *logically required* of anybody that qualifies as *one of us*. That is, there must be something about the meaning of 'we' in (1) from which it follows, logically, that we have E\* as an end. The statuses of both the argument as a whole, and of the undeniability of premise (1) depend on (1)'s being such a logical truth. Rosenberg's suggestion is meant to ensure the proper status for both of these. His story begins with an explanation of what *we* are: sensorily passive, temporally discursive apperceptive intelligences.

What this means is that Rosenberg reads Kant as taking us to be creatures that *find ourselves* with various perceptual-experiences, which experiences *follow one another in time*, can take the form of experiencing one thing *as* being a certain way (e.g., brown, black, a bush, a bear, etc.), and which we can claim as being *our* experiences. Now, if this explanation of who *we* are is going to figure in the Pre-

<sup>8</sup> There is an issue here about the possibility of an *intention* (as opposed to a judgment) being analytic. We can, however, put this worry aside by remembering that all that Rosenberg really needs on Kant's behalf is that the justification of (1) appeals to a certain *relation of ideas* (a la Hume). As we will see in a moment, discovering how an intention can be so justified is one of the key insights that Rosenberg attributes to Kant.

<sup>9</sup> Supposing, that is, that we take as a deductive rule of practical inference that we are justified in taking the necessary means to our justified ends.

mise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied, it must be one that Hume could not possibly reject, and this is clearly already fairly controversial. For the time being, however, I want to put aside all Humean worries about this description until the next section. What we need now is to better understand how this description of who ‘we’ are is supposed to yield an end  $E^*$  that we cannot help but intend to realize. Here is Rosenberg on what this end is, and what the relation it bears to ‘us’ is.

[M]y being able to think of myself as the single subject of many thoughts and experiences is not one of my *optional* ends, i.e., one that I might freely choose either to adopt or to eschew. It is, so to speak, a *constitutive* end. My doing so is a condition of there *being* an “I”—*one* active agent—who is able to consider and choose *at all*, among many optional ends. (Rosenberg (2005): 59)

Rosenberg’s thought here, about which we will have a good deal more to say farther on, is that the end  $E^*$  that figures in the Transcendental Deduction is the end of thinking of oneself as the single subject of many thoughts. Presumably, this end is one that is logically required by my being the kind of creature I am in virtue of it being part of who I am that I am able to claim the various perceptual-experiences of things as being certain ways, which follow one another in time, as *my own*. To claim such experiences as my own *just is* to think of myself as the single subject of these many experiences. So, our argument above should now read,

1. We (sensorily passive, temporally discursive apperceptive intelligences) shall each think of ourselves as the single subject of many thoughts and experiences.
2. A good way (the best way, the only way) to think of ourselves as the single subject of many thoughts and experiences is to accept principles that have the significant characteristic  $\Phi$ .
3. Judgments employing pure a priori concepts have significant characteristic  $\Phi$ .
4. So, we shall accept judgments employing pure a priori concepts.

Although we will not discuss it here, it is worth noting that Rosenberg reads Kant as taking  $\Phi$  here to be the ability to allow us to represent a world of causally interacting objects existing in space and time. This is the thesis of the co-representation of self and world, the thesis that one can only represent each of these by representing the other. So the complete argument reads as follows.

1. We (sensorily passive, temporally discursive apperceptive intelligences) shall each think of ourselves as the single subject of many thoughts and experiences.
2. The only way to so think of ourselves is to make judgments that allow us to represent a world of causally interacting objects existing in and time.
3. Judgments employing pure a prior concepts enable us to do just this.
4. So, we shall make judgments employing pure a priori concepts.

We now have, at least in its general outline, Rosenberg's reconstruction of the Transcendental Deduction complete with Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied, and reason for thinking that this premise is undeniable. Our exegetical task having resolved itself, it is now time to turn to our critical one.

## II

The question before us now concerns the status of the eponymous Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied vis-à-vis its most notoriously resistant antagonist: Hume. Does Rosenberg present this premise in such a way that even our most ardent skeptic cannot deny it? What I will argue in this section is that Hume cannot *deny* Rosenberg's suggestion, not because it is so *compelling*, but rather because it is, on a strict Humean line, nonsensical. That is, I will argue that Hume's most powerful resistance to any potential Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied is a *semantic* one, one that rests on Hume's account of what can and cannot be represented by the human mind and that classifies this premise as an attempt to articulate something that cannot, in fact, be represented.

The thought here is this. In the *Treatise*, Hume presents a semantic theory according to which the content of any idea, what that idea is *about*, is just that of which the idea is a *copy*. At various crucial parts of the *Treatise* Hume employs this principle to show that certain ideas that past metaphysicians had taken to be perfectly coherent and straightforward, actually have surprisingly mundane and unproblematic content (rather than wild and enigmatic content that these metaphysicians took their ideas to have).<sup>10</sup> One of these crucial moments of diffusion is that concerning personal identity. Here Hume concludes that, to put it somewhat paradoxically, we have no idea of a subject of experience, and certainly no idea of a *persistent* subject of experience. Using the Humean way of speaking, what Hume concludes is that our idea of a self is just the idea of a bundle of associated mental items, perceptions.

What all of this means for the Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied is that insofar as that premise purports to have as part of its content an idea the content of which is a single subject of experience persisting through time, it is either very misleading or entirely and literally nonsensical. Prime facie, then, Rosenberg's recasting of this argument as a practical one makes no progress towards making this argument more palatable to Hume. Rosenberg presents his strategy as a way of using logical and empirical warrant to justify a conclusion in which pure a priori concepts are embedded. The key to the success of this strategy is finding a first premise that is *logically* warranted, i.e., warranted in virtue of relation of the ideas in it to one another. The problem with the premise that Rosenberg picks is that changing it from a factual premise to the expression of an intention does nothing to change the fact that the ideas in it, the ideas the relation of which to one another is supposed to justify the premise, are *empty*. What this recasting misses is that it is not the

<sup>10</sup> Now, how these metaphysicians *took* these ideas to have this wild and enigmatic content without having any ideas the content of which was wild or enigmatic is a good question.

*factuality* of the Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied that Hume resists, but rather the notion that this premise represents anything at all (or that what it represents is, in *our* terminology, a single subject of experience persisting through time). An *intention* to represent ourselves as single subjects of experience persisting through time is exactly semantically on par with a *claim* that we are such subjects; it is entirely bankrupt.

So, what I want to do in this section is walk through this argument of Hume's, noting the role of Hume's semantic theory, and the Copy Principle more specifically, in it. I will then return to Rosenberg's reading of the Transcendental Deduction to see how these semantic considerations of Hume's bear on it. We can begin, as does Hume, with the Copy Principle.

As Hume first introduces the Copy Principle, it is not obviously a semantic principle at all. In the opening pages of the *Treatise*, Hume reports *discovering* the (entirely contingent) fact about our simple impressions and simple ideas that the latter are all copies of the former. In these opening pages, Hume is fairly explicit about what it is for one thing to be a copy of another. The copy must both exactly resemble and be caused by (construed in the proper Humean way) the original.<sup>11</sup> So, Hume presents evidence in these sections of the *Treatise* for just these two aspects of the relation of impressions to ideas. He first cites the fact that all simple ideas exactly resemble some simple impression. He then goes on to notice that these resembling impressions and ideas are constantly conjoined in the mind, and that the impressions always appear just *before* the ideas. This is enough, given what Hume has to say later about causation, to warrant the conclusion that impressions are the causes of their correspondent ideas. Hume concludes that, since simple ideas exactly resemble and are caused by their correspondent impressions, they are copies of them. So far, no semantic work has been done.

The *semantic* role of the Copy Principle does not really come out until the sections later in the *Treatise* in which Hume *uses* this principle to show that ideas with various kinds of *content* are impossible: e.g., abstract ideas, ideas of necessary connection, ideas of the external world, and the idea of a single subject of experience persisting through time. (Or to put it another way, Hume uses the Copy Principle to show that these ideas have a more mundane content than had been traditionally supposed.) It is in these contexts that the Copy Principle gets amended. The Copy Principle is no longer *just* the claim that all simple ideas are copies of simple impressions, but also that what an idea is an idea *of* is determined entirely by what it is a *copy* of.<sup>12</sup> More specifically, Hume seems to claim that an idea is always *of* that of which it is a copy, and since all ideas are copies of impressions, that all ideas are *of* their correspondent impressions. Now, this is a controversial claim about

<sup>11</sup> The term 'Copy Principle', and its dual aspects are due to Garrett (1997).

<sup>12</sup> Of course, since all ideas are copies of impressions, it straightforwardly follows that all ideas are *of* impressions. It also follows, since impressions are not copies of anything, they are not impressions *of* anything. I would argue that Hume endorses both of these theses for just these reasons, although the matter is controversial. Given, however, what I take to be Hume's skepticism about the very idea of anything other than perceptions, it is unclear what so much as *could be* a candidate for the objects of impressions. However, cf. Bennett (1971).

Hume that I do not have the space to defend here. Presentation of a few examples will, therefore, have to suffice.

Consider firstly, then, Hume's third argument, in 1.1.7 'Of Abstract Ideas', against the suggestion that we account for ideas of indeterminate *objects* by supposing that we have indeterminate *ideas*.

'Tis a principle generally receiv'd in philosophy, that every thing in nature is individual, and that 'tis utterly absurd to suppose a triangle really existent, which has no precise proportion of sides and angles. If this therefore be absurd in *fact and reality*, it must also be absurd in *idea*; since nothing of which we can form a clear and distinct idea is absurd and impossible. But to form the idea of an object, and to form an idea simply is the same thing; the reference of the idea to an object being an extraneous denomination, of which in itself it bears no mark or character. Now as 'tis impossible to form an idea of an object, that is possess of quantity and quality, and yet is possess of no precise degree of either; it follows, that there is an equal impossibility of forming an idea, that is not limited and confin'd in both these particulars. (1.1.7.6; SBN 19)<sup>13</sup>

Two very telling moves get made in the course of this argument. The first is Hume's claim that "the reference of the idea to an object" is "an extraneous denomination, of which in itself it bears no mark or character." What Hume is saying here is that it is not the character of an idea alone that makes it an idea *of* its object. There is more to an idea's being an idea *of* its object than having certain intrinsic qualities. And yet, the second interesting move here is exactly one from the qualities of the object to the qualities of the idea. Notice that this paragraph ends with Hume concluding from the fact that we cannot have an idea *of* an indeterminate object that we cannot have an indeterminate *idea*. That inference is only valid if Hume is further supposing that an idea cannot have any qualities that its object does not: i.e., that an idea must *exactly resemble* that of which it is an idea.

Combining these two theses we arrive at the following. An idea must exactly resemble its object, but exact resemblance is not *sufficient* for that idea's being *of* that object. (If it was, we could tell from just the qualities of the idea, what it was an idea *of*.) One last point of interest from this passage is that Hume claims that "to form an idea of an object, and to form an idea simply is the same thing." In looking, then, for that in addition to resemblance which makes an idea an idea *of* an object, we need to look for some extrinsic feature that *all ideas have*. What I want to suggest is that we need look no further than the natural first candidate: causation. Ideas have as their object that which they exactly resemble, and which *causes* them.

Consider an incredibly life-like sculpture of a cat. Extending Hume's theory of representation to *objects*, the present suggestion would be that it is only under certain very specific conditions that we ought to say that this sculpture represents, or is *of*, a certain cat. If the sculpture was produced *by accident*, by, say, someone throwing all of their excess clay into a pile that just happens to exactly resemble a

<sup>13</sup> As is standard, quotations from Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* will be cited first by paragraph numbers from Hume (2000) and then by page number from Hume (1978).

certain cat, then according to the account I am presenting on Hume's behalf, we ought *not* to say that the sculpture is a sculpture *of* that cat. The cat does not figure in the proper causal way into the production of the sculpture. Additionally, if someone were to sit carefully studying a certain cat, and produced a sculpture that did not at all resemble that cat, similarly we would be forced to say that the sculpture is *not of* that cat.<sup>14</sup> Exact resemblance and causation are individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions not only for copying, but also, thereby, for representation (for Hume).

As I have already suggested, this thesis figures prominently in the arguments not only concerning abstract ideas, but also concerning the ideas of the external world and of necessary connection. Rather than walk through all the details of each of these arguments, I will instead point to what I take to be key passages in the argument concerning our idea of the external world, and leave the rest of this work as an exercise for the reader. This, combined with the above discussion of abstract ideas, should provide enough evidence to make plausible my claim that Hume employs the Copy Principle as a principle of semantic determination throughout the *Treatise*. We can then turn to how it is used this way more particularly in the section concerning personal identity.

Hume's argument concerning the idea of the external world is an argument from elimination. He first argues that this idea can only be a product of either the senses, reason, or the imagination. He then gives a two-part argument that this idea cannot originate with the senses, followed by an argument that it cannot originate with reason, and finally an explanation of how it *does* come from imagination, and how it is a very different idea from the one we might have expected. What is of interest to us here is the first of these stages. Here is Hume's argument for the conclusion that our idea of a being that *continues* to exist when it is no longer perceived cannot originate with the senses.

To begin with the senses, 'tis evident these faculties are incapable of giving rise to the notion of the *continu'd* existence of their objects, after they no longer appear to the senses. For that is a contradiction in terms, and supposes that the senses continue to operate, even after they have ceas'd all manner of operation. (T1.4.2.3; SBN 188)

The key to interpreting this quick argument is to decipher what the contradiction to which Hume appeals here is. The obvious candidate is something like, "The senses sense what they do not sense." This contradiction alone, however, is not enough to license the conclusion that the senses do not *produce an idea of* an object that continues to exist when it is not sensed. It is possible, that is, that although the senses do not *sense* what is unsensed, they still cause an idea to come into existence that itself is an idea of something unsensed. The conclusion that *this* is not possible does follow, though, given what I have been arguing is Hume's semantic employment of the Copy Principle: that the content of any idea is that of which it is a copy. This

<sup>14</sup> Of course, this particular account of representation has been fairly widely discredited both by philosophers and by artists in the three-hundred or so years since Hume first wrote the *Treatise*.

is because if the senses do not sense what is not sensed, then whatever ideas are *copied* from the data of the senses cannot have as their content anything that is unsensed. The only ideas that can be copied from the data of the senses will necessarily be ideas whose content is sensed. Thus, the senses cannot produce an idea whose content is an object that continues to exist when it is no longer perceived.<sup>15</sup>

The second part of Hume's argument regarding the senses is also of interest. That argument is for the conclusion that an idea of a being that exists *distinctly* from oneself also cannot originate with the senses. Here is that argument.

That our senses offer not their impressions as the images of something *distinct*, or *independent*, and *external*, is evident; because they convey to us nothing but a single perception, and never give us the least intimation of any thing beyond. A single perception can never produce the idea of a double existence, but by some further inference either of the reason or imagination. (T 1.4.2.4; SBN 189)

The argument here is fairly straightforward. Our senses produce single simple impressions. Any ideas that trace their roots to the senses, therefore, have as their content only such simple impressions, not "any thing beyond." Again, this conclusion does not follow directly, but does on the plausibly Humean supposition that the content of a given idea is constituted by that idea's being a copy of its object: the correspondent impression. Since the impression is singular, so must the idea be.

Having now seen two examples of arguments that can plausibly be reconstructed as centering on a semantic use of the Copy Principle we can now move on to the argument that concerns us most, and which plausibly *also* puts the Copy Principle to this use: the argument that we have no idea of a single subject of experience persisting through time. We can begin with a telling passage from the start of the section of the *Treatise* on personal identity. Speaking of the supposition that we do have an idea of such subject, Hume writes,

nor have we any idea of the *self*, after the manner it is here explain'd. For from what impression cou'd this idea be deriv'd? This question 'tis impossible to answer without a manifest contradiction and absurdity; and yet 'tis a question, which must be answer'd, if we wou'd have the idea of self pass for clear and intelligible. (T 1.4.6.2; SBN 251)

Notice that what threatens the philosopher who purports to have an idea of the self here is not having made a mere mistake, but the loss of all *intelligibility*. This phi-

<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting here that adding only the *non-semantic* version of the Copy Principle also would not be sufficient for reaching Hume's desired conclusion. That is, it might appear that combining Hume's thesis about the senses with his claim that all ideas are copies of impressions would be enough to warrant the conclusion that we can have no idea of anything unsensed. In fact, all that follows from this combination is that we can have no idea that exactly resembles and is caused by an impression of something unsensed. To win the conclusion that we have no idea of something unsensed, one still needs to add *exactly* the further premise that our ideas are all *of* that of which they are copies. Without this further premise, one *could* hold that while none of our ideas are *copies* of anything unsensed, they have something unsensed as their *content* nonetheless. Each of the arguments at which we will look here have similarly enthymematic interpretations.

philosopher must demonstrate that the idea of a self comes from some impression in order to show that this notion means anything at all. The test of whether there is any impression from which the idea of a self comes is not *just* a test of whether there *is* an idea that properly bears this description, but also a test of whether any idea that we *do* have could possibly have *this* as its content.

Of course, Hume famously denies that the “idea of the self” passes this test. That is, he denies that there is any impression from which such an idea originates, and therefore, that there *is* any such idea—that an idea with that content exists.

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. [...] The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different; whatever natural propensity we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. (T1.4.6.3-4; SBN 252)

When we talk of self or substance, we must have an idea annex'd to these terms, otherwise they are altogether unintelligible. Every idea is deriv'd from some preceding impressions; and we have no impression of self or substance, as something simple and individual. We have, therefore, no idea of them in that sense. (T App. 11; SBN 633)

When we introspect and form ideas of our various perceptions, all of these ideas are of this or that particular perception. We never form an idea the content of which is a *simple* subject of a single perception, nor an idea the content of which is an *identical* subject of all of these perceptions collectively. We can have no such ideas—no ideas with either of these contents—because the content of ideas is constituted by that of which ideas are copies, and there are no impressions from which to copy such content.

Hume's thesis, once again, is both an existential one and a *semantic* one. Hume's conclusion that we have no such idea is not based solely on the thesis that there is no impression to *cause* us to have such an idea, but also on the thesis that *since* the content of an idea is constituted by that idea's being a *copy*, if there is no original from which the idea of a self can be copied, then there can be no idea with 'self' as its content. It is worth noting here that this second conclusion is stronger and more disturbing, especially to Hume, than the first. Remember that Hume's official line on causation is that it is entirely possible for an event not to have a cause.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the existential thesis that there are no ideas of the self because there are no impressions from which these ideas are copied is only as strong as the prime facie, but defeasible, evidence that we have that all ideas have *some* cause.<sup>17</sup> If the semantic argument is right, however, its conclusion is much stronger. If the content

<sup>16</sup> T 1.3.3; SBN 80.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of how strong this evidence is, and the role of the existential use of the Copy Principle in the *Treatise*, cf. Landy (2006).

of any idea is constituted by its being a copy, and Hume can show that there is nothing of which any purported idea of the self is a copy, then it follows directly that there can be no such idea: end of story. Here the lack of a cause is more troubling than just the existence of a perception that has no cause; it is, instead, the root of the *impossibility* of a certain kind of perception. The same conclusion is reached via both arguments, but the evidence for the latter is, at least by Hume's lights, much stronger.<sup>18</sup>

Supposing that this is right, that Hume concludes that we cannot so much as make sense of the idea of a single self persisting through time, we must now examine how this affects Rosenberg's reconstruction of Kant's Transcendental Deduction, and the Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied in particular. Let's look at Rosenberg's rendering of that premise again.

(PTCBD): We (sensorily passive, temporally discursive apperceptive intelligences) shall each think of ourselves as the single subject of many thoughts and experiences.

A more perspicuous representation of this premise, which Rosenberg would undoubtedly endorse, employs Sellars' devise for representing intentions as having as their content *propositions*.<sup>19</sup> Thus, we can rewrite Rosenberg's premise as,

(PTCBD): We (sensorily passive, temporally discursive apperceptive intelligences) Shall /that each of us think of ourselves as the single subject of many thoughts and experiences/

As this presentation makes clear, an intention—as Rosenberg and Sellars see it—is best construed as an attitude or mental state that takes as its object a certain state of the world. One has as an intention to *bring about such-and-such circumstances*. In this case, we have as our intention to bring it about that each of us thinks of ourselves as the single subject of many thoughts and experiences. Our intention is to think of ourselves in this particular way.

The question now is what Hume makes of this intention. What our recent rendering of this premise brings out is that in order to answer this question we do not need to delve into any of the specifics of Hume's own account of intentions. This is because, as we will see in a moment, Hume's most salient quarrel with Rosenberg's Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied will be not with the theory of intention presupposed by this account, but rather with the *content* of the purported intention. That is, Hume will want to balk first and foremost at what appears *inside* the brackets of PTCBD, with the state of affairs that such an intention purports to represent (as a state of affairs to be brought about). As we have seen, Hume does not think that the idea of a single subject of experience persisting through time can possibly exist, or that any idea can have *this* as its content. So, any intention to *think*

<sup>18</sup> See also fn. 10 above.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Sellars (1969).

of ourselves in this way, is a fortiori also impossible. Whatever work Rosenberg's reconstruction of the Deduction does in other respects, it does nothing towards assuaging what I take to be Hume's most important and relevant concern here: that we cannot so much as think an idea whose content is 'the self'. If any headway is to be made here in shoring up the Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied, it will have to come by first addressing Hume's *semantic* thesis. It is to this work that I will turn in the next section.

### III

We have reached the following stage in our dialectic. Kant agrees with Hume that we have no *experience* of a single subject of experience persisting through time. What he must deny, then, is that we *need* such an experience in order to be able to *represent* ourselves as such a subject. Kant needs to deny Hume's claim that the Copy Principle is a principle of semantic determination. Turning now to an aspect of Rosenberg's reading of Kant *not* directly concerned with the Transcendental Deduction, we can see that Rosenberg has Kant doing exactly this. There are at least two important aspects of this denial for current purposes. According to Rosenberg, Kant denies this thesis *generally* insofar as Kant is an *inferentialist* about the content of what he calls cognitions, and he also denies it in a very specific way via his analysis of the notion of 'the self' as being purely *formal*. As I discuss the exegetical and philosophical grounds for the general claim elsewhere, my focus here will be on the specific analysis that Kant gives of the idea of the self.<sup>20</sup> It will be enough for current purposes if Kant can give a plausible analysis of this idea that circumvents Hume's semantic use of the Copy Principle.

To understand Kant's notion of a purely formal representation, we can look first at what such a representation is *not*. In particular, Kant's notion of a purely formal representation is one that is radically different from any kind of representation that appears in Hume. Hume sees representation as consisting in a *relation* of an idea to its object. As we have seen, Hume takes it that this relation is one of copying; an idea represents that object which causes it and which it exactly resembles. For there to be a representation two *things* are needed: the representation and the object represented. It is by placing these two things into the proper relation that the one comes to be *of* the other.<sup>21</sup>

Kant, on the other hand, denies exactly this underlying presupposition of Hume's semantic theory. As Rosenberg reads him, Kant holds that a representation has the content that it does not by standing in some relation *to its object*, but rather by standing in certain relations to *other representations*, more specifically, by standing in *inferential* relations to other representations. A brief passage from the Metaphysical Deduction will offer some insight into how Kant's semantic theory is supposed to work.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Landy (2009a), and Landy (2009b).

<sup>21</sup> Of course, maintaining this thesis requires Hume to account for certain prime facie counterexamples such as *complex* ideas, *abstract* ideas, etc.

So in the judgment, e.g., “All bodies are divisible,” the concept of the divisible is related to various other concepts; among these, however, it is here particularly related to the concept of body, and this in turn is related to certain appearances that come before us. (A68/B93)

Notice that even though only two concepts appear in the judgment, “All bodies are divisible,” Kant writes that in this very same judgment, the concept of “the divisible is related to *various* other concepts.” This is because, for Kant, a concept just is an inferential rule. So, whenever a concept appears in a judgment, the role that it plays in that judgment is to relate it to *other* judgments that, in turn, employ other concepts. Every concept is, by its very nature, a relation to other concepts.

The second noteworthy point in this passage is that Kant here delineates the basic difference between *empirical* concepts and *a priori*, or *formal* ones. ‘Divisible’ is here related to ‘body’ which “in turn is related to certain appearances that come before us.” Empirical concepts like ‘divisible’ and ‘body’ have as part of their content being inferentially related to certain *intuitions*. Intuitions provide crucial thought-entry moves via their link to perceptions that are essential to an empirical concept’s having the content that it does. Like Hume, Kant insists that for many concepts it is imperative that their origin be traceable to experience (although the derivation of concepts from experience is a very different matter in Hume and Kant).

A formal concept, however, will not have this link to perception. The content of a formal concept is constituted entirely by certain *formal* inferences: inferences that can be made purely in virtue of the form of some judgment, without any reference to its empirical content. As Rosenberg argues, the representation of the self with which we have been concerned is exactly such a formal representation.<sup>22</sup>

To put it in contemporary terms, they [propositions about the self] tell us only something about the “logical grammar” of the first-person pronoun ‘I’. (Rosenberg (2005): 263)

A formal representation represents solely in virtue of its “logical grammar” and represents only this grammar. According to Rosenberg’s reading of Kant, conceiving of ourselves as single subjects of experience persisting through time requires only that we assign ‘I’ certain formal inferential properties.

Roughly, that (1) it has no predicative use; (2) it is not analyzable or definable; and (3) it is univocal within a given user’s discourse. (Rosenberg (2005): 263, fn. 8)

Of course, assigning these properties to ‘I’ is a way of *conceiving* ourselves, it *represents* us as being a certain way. It does not, however, commit us to any claims about whether this representation is an *accurate* representation of anything, of any *object*. (It better not, since Kant rules out the possibility of a priori knowledge of

<sup>22</sup> For a less historical, and more straightforwardly philosophical, treatment of this issue, see Rosenberg (1986): chapters 1-3.

the noumenal self.) What Kant's purely formal notion of the self does is allow us, contra Hume, to represent ourselves as being a certain way. It does not, however, thereby commit us to the claim that we actually *are* this way.

Hume's crucial mistake in arguing that we cannot have a representation of a single subject of experience persisting through time is in thinking that in having such a representation we are purporting to represent a special kind of *object*. However, as Kant sees it,

the consciousness in itself [the 'I think'] is not even a representation distinguishing a particular object, but rather a form of representation in general. (A346/B404)

The 'I think' is not a representation of an *object*, rather it is a merely a *way* of representing our thoughts.<sup>23</sup> By placing these thoughts into certain non-empirical inferential relations, we represent them as all belonging to a single self, a self that is not itself any kind of object, but rather just *is* this *formal*, inferential unity. Again, as Kant puts it, "this unity is only the unity of a *thinking*, through which no object is ever given" (B421). By moving from an account of representation as a thought-world relation to an account of representation as a thought-thought relation, Kant makes room for the possibility that we can have representations that do not so much as purport to be *about* anything. Here is Rosenberg.

Rational psychology, in other words, mistakes a *form of representation*—the transcendental unity of apperception; the 'I think' that must be able to accompany every representing that is mine (B131)—for the *representation of an object*—the noumenal self—to which the categories could then be applied. (Rosenberg 2005: 263)

Rosenberg is here primarily thinking of *Descartes*, but the same can be said of Hume. Hume thinks that *if* there is to be a representation of the self, *then* it must be the representation of a kind of object. He is committed to this picture because of his account of mental representation, his semantic use of the Copy Principle. According to that account, a mental representation *by its very nature* is always about an object. It is about whatever object of which it is a copy. No object, no copying, no content. It is only by moving away from this *semantic* theory that Kant is able to make space for the possibility that we can represent ourselves as single subjects of experience persisting through time.

Of course, *this*, is not an argument in favor of Kant's semantic theory over Hume's. There is not space enough here to present such an argument.<sup>24</sup> What I have hoped to accomplish here is just to begin to bring out that this is the *kind* of argument—one concerning the proper *semantics* of mental representation—that Kant would have to give in order to make room for the possibility of so conceiving our-

<sup>23</sup> Most importantly for Kant this means that the Categories do not apply to the self, or to put it another way, our use of the concept 'I' does not conform to the rules for the use of *object*-concepts.

<sup>24</sup> For an argument for that conclusion stemming from the problem of the unity of the proposition, see Landy (2007). For one stemming from the nature of complex representation, see Landy (2009a). For one that retraces the steps here in more detail, see Landy (2009b).

selves. And, of course, it is by allowing for this possibility that he also allows for the possibility that doing this might, in some sense, be necessary. It is to this claim—the claim that representing in this way is an intention that we necessarily have—to which we will turn in our final section.

#### IV

What we have argued up to this point is that one of the key debates between Hume and Kant is a semantic one concerning the way that the content of our thoughts is determined. Supposing that Kant's efforts in this regard are successful, what Kant wins for his Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied is not that it is undeniable but only that it is meaningful. This final section will concern what arguments Rosenberg's reading of the Deduction make available in this regard. And, in fact, it is here that Rosenberg's construal of the Transcendental Deduction as a *practical* argument, and his subsequent reading of the Premise-That-Cannot-Be-Denied as the expression of an *intention*, do the most work. Remember that Rosenberg construed this premise as follows.

(PTCBD): We (sensorily passive, temporally discursive apperceptive intelligences)  
 Shall /that each think of ourselves as the single subject of many thoughts and  
 experiences/

Now that our concern has turned from what appears *inside* these brackets—the content of this intention—we must look more carefully at what appears *outside* of them. In particular we must concern ourselves with this “we” that Rosenberg is so careful to delineate. This is because, on Rosenberg's reading of Kant, it is this “we” that does the most work towards making the PTCBD undeniable. As Rosenberg sees it, this intention is one that creatures like “us” *necessarily* have; having this intention is, in fact, *constitutive* of being such a creature.

This, however, is not immediately obvious. Why should it be that a sensorily passive, temporally discursive apperceptive intelligence *must* have the intention to think of itself as the single subject of many thoughts and experiences? To answer this question we need to look a little more closely than we already have at the various aspects of who *we* are. Sensory passivity is easy enough. This just means that the content of our sense experience is not determined by us. Fair enough; Hume would agree. Intelligence is a little more complicated (especially given Hume's and Kant's radically different accounts of *concepts*), but can be put aside for present purposes. Hume and Kant can at least agree that we are able to think of objects *as* having qualities, despite their differing accounts of how this is done. Temporal discursivity and apperception, however, are a little more complicated. How is it that we come to apply concepts to *temporally extended* experiences and attribute such experiences to a *single self*? Certainly *Hume* would balk at such a description of “ourselves”. Putting Hume aside for a moment though, we should notice that we have already seen how *Kant* thinks we do both of these things. We do so *by having a certain formal representation of ourselves*.

To *be* temporally discursive and apperceptive, to be able to accompany each of the thoughts of a temporally extended manifold of such thoughts with an ‘I think’, is just to undertake certain inferential commitments. It is to undertake to use this ‘I think’, or ‘I’, in such a way that “(1) it has no predicative use; (2) it is not analyzable or definable; and (3) it is univocal within a given user’s discourse” (Rosenberg (2005): 263, fn. 8). It is these inferential commitments that not only comprise the *representation* of ourselves as single subjects of experience persisting through time, but also *constitute* us as such creatures. That is, to *be* temporally discursive and apperceptive *just is* to use the ‘I’ in this way.

Remember that Kant does not think of the self as an *object* with the *properties* of temporal discursivity and apperception. Rather, Kant thinks of the self only in terms of the inferences involved in using ‘I’. So, when Kant—or here Rosenberg—talks about the kinds of creatures that *we* are, he is talking about the kinds of creatures that use the ‘I’ as we do. It is creatures like *that* that Rosenberg contends must have the intention to represent themselves as the single subject of a manifold of thoughts and experiences. But now it should be obvious why *they* must do so. What this claim now amounts to is that any creature that uses ‘I’ as we do, that undertakes the formal inferential commitments that constitute this use, intends to do so. As intentions are, for Rosenberg, just the conceptual causal antecedents of intentional actions,<sup>25</sup> and as taking on a commitment is a paradigm of an intentional action, the claim is, as Rosenberg contends, analytic.

Before we settle for this answer, however, we must return to Hume’s resistance to the description of *us* being employed here. It is Hume’s declared intention in the *Treatise* to set out to discover *who we are*, and as such, it would seem inappropriate to ignore his results in favor of adopting as controversial a supposition about human nature as Kant’s. Given, that is, that Hume *concludes* that we are certainly *not* single subjects of experience persisting through time, it seems entirely out of place for Kant to use the opposite claim as the first premise in his argument in the Deduction. Would not Hume be more than adequately justified in rejecting *exactly* this premise?

We have already seen why Kant’s answer to this question is ‘No.’ When Hume sets out in the *Treatise* to discover who we are, to learn about human nature, he begins with a very particular *semantic* theory: all representations are about that of which they are copies. The section just before the Transcendental Deduction in the *Critique*, the Metaphysical Deduction, is Kant’s short but clear *rejection* of this semantic theory. He paves the way for his account of human nature, or who we are and how we think, by replacing the theory of representation that is at the heart of all of Hume’s arguments about this topic. By doing so, Kant robs Hume’s arguments of their force, and makes room to employ from the start the picture of *us* as single subjects of experience persisting through time. Without Hume’s *semantic* argument that we can represent no such thing, and *with* his own notion of a purely formal representation in hand, there is nothing stopping Kant from using exactly this conception of *creatures like us*—and, given what we said earlier, of thereby

<sup>25</sup> Rosenberg (1980): 148.

being one such creature.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> As, of course, Hume was too, despite himself.