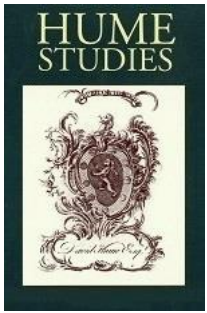


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# Hume's (Berkeleyan) Language of Representation

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*Abstract:* Although Hume appeals to the representational features of perceptions in many arguments in the *Treatise*, his theory of representation has traditionally been regarded as a weak link in his epistemology. In particular, it has proven difficult to reconcile Hume's use of representation as causal derivation and resemblance (the Copy Principle) with his use of representation in the context of impressions and abstract ideas. This paper offers a unified interpretation of representation in Hume that draws on the resources of Berkeley's doctrine of signs. On this account, while the Copy Principle still occupies the core of Hume's "content empiricism," the manner in which any perception represents is understood as involving a relation of sign to thing signified. A sign/signified interpretation has the virtue of allowing Hume to remain within the strictures of his empiricism, while underwriting the various senses in which an impression or idea could possess content. Such an interpretation is not only adequate to account for the role that mental representations play in everyday behavior, but also for the purposes of elaborating the foundations of civil society that are Hume's concern in Book 3 of the *Treatise*.

## 1. Introduction

Consider the following uses of the language of "representation" in Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*:

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1. Some ideas are particular in their nature, but general in their representation. (T 1.1.7.10; SBN 22)[1]
2. Our ideas are copy'd from our impressions, and represent them in all their parts. (T 1.3.7.5; SBN 96)
3. [T]hat compound impression, which represents extension, consists of several lesser impressions, that are indivisible to the eye or feeling. (T 1.2.3.15; SBN 38)
4. [R]iches represent the goods of life. (T 2.2.5.6; SBN 359)
5. A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification. (T 2.3.3.5; SBN 415)
6. The giving of stone and earth represents the delivery of a mannor. (T 3.2.4.2; SBN 515)

This small sample illustrates the broad range of meanings Hume attaches to the representation relation. The first three instances are unambiguously mental or psychological, whereas the fourth and sixth are not. The first two further indicate that an item can be either general or particular in its representation. The second suggests the involvement of a causal relation, whereas that condition is not so clear in the first or third. The third indicates that impressions as well as ideas—the two species of perception in Hume's system—can represent. The fourth and sixth, meanwhile, invite an interpretation of representation in a very general sense of one thing symbolizing, or meaning, or standing in, for another. Finally, the fifth instance denies representational capacity to a class of mental item.

Must there be a common core to these various uses? At first blush, one might be tempted to set aside the fourth and sixth in the list as cases of non-mental representation, as opposed to the other four, which are proper to mental representation. However, on the reasonable assumption that Hume construes the mind as part of nature, the difference between the various senses of representation cannot lie simply in a metaphysical distinction between mental and non-mental beings. Hume's naturalistic ambitions in his new science of human nature lead him to erase essential distinctions between imagistic and non-imagistic intellectual perceptions.[2] Nor can the textual case be brushed aside as mere linguistic idiosyncrasy, for claims about representation play a central role in some of Hume's most celebrated arguments. For instance, Hume's objection to rationalist accounts of moral motivation relies on the claim that passions do not represent anything because they are not copies of other perceptions (T 2.3.3.5; SBN 415). His skeptical attack on the epistemic warrant for ideas such as "immaterial substance" and "power" likewise turns on what can and cannot constitute the content of an idea.

Yet, the judgment of many of Hume's interpreters on the prospects of extracting from his texts a coherent account of the scope and manner of representation has been negative.[3] Much of the pessimism emerges from the dominant approach that restricts Humean representation—for sound textual reasons—to the resources afforded by his Copy Principle: that simple ideas are causally derived from and resemble corresponding impressions.[4] In more recent times, perceived limitations to the imagistic theory of copying in accounting for predication and logical inference has led to the development of an alternative to the orthodoxy, which attempts to combine copying with a distinct sense of representation as one thing occupying the causal or functional role of another. These latter approaches, however, achieve their explanatory ends at the cost either of dislodging the Copy Principle from its privileged place in Hume's epistemology,[5] or of focusing on the manner in which ideas represent in a way that allows for predication and logical thought.[6]

The traditional emphasis on copying as the centerpiece of Hume's empiricist theory of mental content, I shall argue, is essentially correct. Copying earns its centrality through its role in, for example, Hume's famous anti-rationalist argument for the motivational autonomy of the passions, or in his deflationary arguments against the concepts of "force," "power," or "immaterial soul." At the same time, the diversity of uses to which he puts the representation relation are all accounted for once we interpret it as a relation of signification. Accordingly, the main task of this paper is to develop a unified theory of Humean representation as a relation of a sign to a thing signified. Briefly, a sign is a mark that designates, or stands for, something else. The word "apple" designates a particular object or class of objects. An image of skull and crossbones may stand for danger. In general, "x represents y" means roughly that x is a sign that calls to mind an associated idea of y, as when a STOP sign suggests the idea of hitting the brakes. In Hume's system, concrete ideas signify corresponding impressions trivially in virtue of resemblance and causal connection. Hume's Copy Principle, in other words, underwrites an especially important and ubiquitous case of signification involved in reasoning from ideas. Abstract ideas, meanwhile, signify through symbolic or linguistic convention. Finally, impressions of sense and reflection signify natural meanings whose ultimate causal ground remains inaccessible to us. As I hope to show, a theory of signification underlies the manifold ways in which Humean perceptions acquire content and intentionality. The tasks of reliable indication, modeling, resemblance, or the occupation of causal roles are preceded by a relation of signification established through the natural association of impressions and ideas.

The model for the interpretation elaborated here emerges from Berkeley's theory of signs and, more generally, the semiotic tradition in early modern British philosophy. While Berkeley is the most proximate source for Hume and favorably cited in the *Treatise*, semiotic theories of perception are not original with him.

In fact, Locke is credited with coining the term "semeiotike," from the Greek, to refer to

> *the Doctrine of Signs*, the most usual whereof being Words, it is aptly enough termed also *logike*, Logick: the business whereof, is to consider the Nature of Signs, the Mind makes use of for the understanding of Things, or conveying its Knowledge to others. For, since the Things, the Mind contemplates, are none of them, besides it self, present to the Understanding, 'tis necessary that something else, as a Sign or Representation of the thing it considers, should be present to it: and these are *Ideas*. (ECHU 4.21.4)[7]

We can go still further back to Hobbes, with whom already the doctrine of signs finds an explicitly mentalistic context of employment: "names ordered in speech are signs of conceptions, it is obvious that they are not signs of things themselves" (De Corp. 1.2.5).[8] Looking beyond Hume, meanwhile, Reid embraces both a sign theory of perception and Hume's new analysis of causation as constant conjunction to identify signs with causes, in his account of the tactile sensation that underlies the conception of, and belief in, the primary quality of hardness:

> What we commonly call natural *causes* might, with more propriety, be called natural *signs*, and what we call *effects*, the things signified. The causes have no proper efficiency or causality, as far as we know; and all we can certainly affirm is, that nature hath established a constant conjunction between them and the things called their effects; and hath given to mankind a disposition to observe those connections, to confide in their continuance, and to make use of them for the improvement of our knowledge, and increase of our power. (IHM 5.3)[9]

Indeed, Reid declares the "whole of genuine philosophy" to consist in ordering under general rules the naturally instituted connections of perceptual signs discovered in experience—as much a program to found the science of man upon Newtonian principles of experiment and observation as the one envisioned by Hume.

My strategy is as follows. In section 2, I argue for the centrality of the Copy Principle in Hume's argumentation generally. Section 3 then considers the limitations of Hume's imagistic theory of mental content in accounting for predicative thought, and of the impossibility of copying to explain the meaning and content of impressions, which motivates revisionist interpretations of Hume's theory of representation. Thus, section 4 draws on Berkeley's theory of perception as a system of signs constituting a language of nature to understand Hume's use of representation in the *Treatise*. This account not only encompasses the mental products of

copying, but also underlies the conventional meanings of abstract ideas, and the natural meanings of impressions.

## 2. The Copy Principle

It has been common to begin, and often end, investigation into Hume's account of representation with his Copy Principle: that ideas *represent* the impressions from which they are derived. Indeed, the very first section of the *Treatise* is devoted to establishing a general principle for the investigation of human nature, "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). Hume invokes this principle on numerous occasions subsequently,[10] and the directive forms a cornerstone of what might be called his "content empiricism"—the view that all legitimate mental content must be traceable to impressions, and thus grounded in experience.

While the exact meaning of the Copy Principle has long been disputed among Hume scholars, it is plausibly understood as an empirical generalization, albeit a very well confirmed one.[11] It is also uncontroversial that the principle consists of two theses: that of the causal origin of simple ideas from simple impressions, and of the resemblance of simple ideas to corresponding simple impressions:

> 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 the 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 4–5)

First, impressions always precede ideas, and are their causes, where causation is understood as constant conjunction. And second, the conjunction is responsible for the qualitative resemblance between the conjoined impressions and ideas. Taking the resemblance thesis first: in Hume's imagistic theory of ideas and impressions, the former are, as it were, duller replicas of the latter. Ideas resulting from copying are images that conform exactly to the patterns of colors, sounds and other qualities that are present in the original impressions. The conformity of intrinsic qualities of the two perceptions, what one might call their imagistic

content, is exact (T 1.1.1.3; SBN 2–3). Where ideas and impressions differ is in their phenomenological force or vivacity (T 1.1.1.1, 1.3.7.5; SBN 1, 96).[12] As Hume reminds us later, any change in an idea that is not a change in its vivacity would yield an idea of a different object or impression, hence a different idea (T 1.3.7.5; SBN 96). The imagistic or pictorial content[13] of an idea, thus, is a consequence of its resemblance to preceding impressions.

Whereas the resemblance thesis is necessary for a representation relation between ideas and impressions, it is less clear that the causal thesis is as well. After all, Hume's use of the Copy Principle in his deflationary arguments against philosophical notions of "power," "self," or "substance" appears to require only the resemblance thesis. Each of those arguments has the following general form (for example, T 1.3.14.11; SBN 161):

1) All ideas are derived from and resemble impressions.

2) We never have any impression that contains X.

3) Therefore, we never have an idea of X.

For the inference to go through, it appears sufficient for Hume to compare the qualities contained in the idea and the impression, establish that the required resemblance does not obtain, and draw the inference. On the face of it, causal derivation does no philosophical work in this central application of the Copy Principle.

Yet, the causal thesis is crucial in the first place for delimiting the range of possible *representata* of ideas. The qualities of its corresponding impression fix the content of the idea, thus its degree of truth, understood as the "conformity of our ideas of objects to their real existence" (T 2.3.10.2; SBN 448). In reasoning about ideas, we discover truth or falsehood by evaluating this conformity of ideas to impressions, or matters of fact (T 3.1.1.9; SBN 458).[14] Hume's claim, that ideas of "power," "force," and "immaterial soul" do not denote real objects, requires the premise that the imagistic content of an idea constrain the range of meanings that can properly be attributed to the idea, that is, without the idea being a "fiction."[15] While Hume's arguments explicitly invoke only the resemblance thesis, we have good reason to think that the causal derivation thesis is a tacit assumption.[16] Moreover, Hume would be burdened with other epistemological troubles were resemblance the only factor informing the representation relation between ideas and impressions. Consider, for instance, a case of identical twins such as Castor and Pollux. Hume should not want to claim that the idea of Castor defeating Amycus in a boxing contest equally represents Pollux defeating Amycus. The victory cannot be attributed to Pollux in virtue of his strong resemblance to his twin brother. Such a judgment would constitute an affirmation of a false proposition, hence an instance of error, insofar as the idea does not agree with the "real existence or matter of fact" (T 3.1.1.9; SBN 458). Both the causal derivation and

resemblance components of the Copy Principle are essential to this centerpiece of Hume's epistemology.

Furthermore, Hume invokes the principle in his deflationary arguments about concepts such as "substance" and "power" in a way that depends on ideas acquiring their content through being caused by and resembling impressions.[17] Hume argues against the attribution of power to matter as follows: "All ideas are deriv'd from, and represent impressions. We never have any impression, that contains any power or efficacy. We never therefore have any idea of power" (T 1.3.14.11; SBN 161). For the argument to succeed, Hume needs ideas to be imagistic copies of impressions. If the notion of "represent" in the first premise is replaced by a non-imagistic sense of representation—as the word "key" stands for property—the inference to the conclusion fails. For it could then be the case that, while no idea contains power or efficacy in virtue of being copied from an impression, an idea could nevertheless represent power in virtue of being part of a set of ideas comprehended by a general term connoting power. Two paragraphs on, in fact, Hume explicitly rules out interpreting "represents" in the first premise as abstraction. For abstract ideas, he reminds us, are nevertheless ideas of individuals. An abstract idea of power must represent "a particular power in a particular body." Since particular ideas are always copied from impressions, where an impression of a particular power-bearing individual is lacking, a general idea of power will be lacking as well (T 1.3.14.13; SBN 161).

Similarly, Hume's argument against rationalism about motivation depends on a conception of truth and falsehood of ideas based on the Copy Principle. Hume writes:

> A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification. When I am angry, I am actually possest with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high. 'Tis impossible, therefore, that this passion can be oppos'd by, or be contradictory to truth and reason, since this contradiction consists in the disagreement of ideas, consider'd as copies, with those objects, which they represent. (T 2.3.3.5; SBN 415)

Reason, Hume writes elsewhere, is the "discovery of truth or falsehood," and consists in the agreement or disagreement among relations of ideas, or of ideas to existence and matter of fact (T 3.1.1.9; SBN 458). Here, Hume emphasizes that such agreement or disagreement obtains only *insofar as ideas are copies* of what they represent, namely, impressions. Since passions do not represent anything in virtue of being copies of other perceptions, they cannot contradict ideas.

Thus, copying occupies a privileged status in Hume's account of representation. Yet, there are grounds to suspect that imagistic copying can only be part of the story.

## 3. Limits to the Copy Principle

While concrete ideas signify corresponding impressions in virtue of being copies, it is less clear how abstract ideas such as "riches," or sense impressions of extended bodies represent their objects. The latter, at least, fall outside the purview of the Copy Principle. Hume tells us that sense impressions are presentations that arise "in the soul originally, from unknown causes" (T 1.1.2.1; SBN 7), and are re-presented via copying in the memory or imagination.[18] In the opening section of the *Treatise*, Hume establishes that the causal order between perceptions goes from impressions to ideas, and not the other way around (T 1.1.1.8; SBN 5). Ideas are caused by and resemble impressions. Impressions, meanwhile, arise from unknown causes, which is just to say that impressions are not preceded by any other perceptions.[19] Nor can we say what, if anything, they resemble, other than the ideas to which they give rise (T 1.4.2.11; SBN 191–92). Ideas, clearly, cannot give rise to impressions of sensation. The only other option would be to claim that impressions are caused by and resemble mind-independent objects. Even on the controversial supposition that impressions of sensation are produced by causally efficacious, mind-independent objects, but whose exact nature remains inaccessible to us,[20] it would need to be established that impressions qualitatively resemble those objects. But resemblance can only be established among perceptions, never between perceptions and non-perceptions.[21] Thus, despite suggesting in several passages that at least some impressions also represent (for example, T 1.2.1.5, 1.2.3.15; SBN 28, 38), with his insistence that we can establish neither the causal origins of sense impressions nor their resemblance to external things, Hume effectively rules out copying as the manner in which these represent.[22]

Similarly, among impressions of reflection, at least the passions do not represent in virtue of being copies (T 2.3.3.5; SBN 415). Nevertheless, Hume widely employs passions as content-bearing states. Pride and humility, for instance, are constituted by sensations of pleasure and pain, and are directed to the self as their object by an original instinct (T 2.1.2.3–4; SBN 278). As scholars have insisted, Hume's declaration that a passion "contains not any representative quality" should not amount to an outright denial of intentional content to episodes of pride or humility, or grief or joy, such that emotions could be assimilated to bare feelings of pleasure or pain. What Hume denies, rather, is the limited claim that passions represent in virtue of containing ingredient qualities copied from other perceptions. Hume's argument leaves open, and exploits, the possibility that an episode of pride can be a contentful state in virtue of its association with other ideas, such

as the sensory impression of one's fine property that occasions it, the attendant feeling of pleasure, and the idea of one's self toward which it is directed.[23]

Abstract ideas, meanwhile, present a separate challenge to accounts of representation based on the Copy Principle alone. Hume defends the Berkeleyan thesis that abstract ideas are concrete ideas with determinate qualities and quantities, which represent generally by convention. An idea of a line, for instance, is only an idea of a line of a determinate length, color, and thickness, but it can represent all lines indifferently through the application of a name to a collection of many ideas that resemble one another with respect to their line-like shape. Based on an imperfect resemblance, a single idea applies to many distinct ideas regardless of their particular differences (T 1.1.7.7; SBN 20).[24] But this account of abstraction raises the possibility that one and the same particular idea could become associated with different sets of perceptions. My idea of "strawberry," for instance, represents a particular strawberry in virtue of having been copied from an impression of a particular piece of fruit. Yet, since even imperfect resemblance suffices for an idea to designate abstractly, the same idea could also serve as an abstract idea of redness. What's more, abstraction is possible not only on the basis of imperfect qualitative similarity to a particular impression, but also without resemblance and causation taken together, as when the idea of "key" abstractly represents property, or the image of a gavel represents authority.[25]

Consequently, some commentators have sought to supplement copying with other kinds of relation to secure the structural and functional aspects of representation in Hume's theory. Garrett argues that "all 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" ("Hume's Naturalistic Theory," 310). On Garrett's account, the core sense of representation for Hume turns out not to be due to the Copy Principle at all, but instead rests in the ability of a thing to reliably indicate or model the relations among other things by evoking certain mental states or dispositions. Objecting to Garrett's privileging of causal or functional role over copying, Schafer proposes a hybrid solution that extends a fundamentally imagistic account of representation with the resources afforded by a causal role model ("Hume's Naturalistic Theory," 13). Schafer finds a division of labor between copying and the occupation of causal role: whereas copying explains the intrinsic, qualitative content of any idea, its causal role accounts for its relations to other ideas, whether to simpler ones in the same complex of ideas, or to other members in a set of ideas ("Hume's Naturalistic Theory," 19). Schafer's model adequately explicates a means with which Hume's imagistic theory of ideas could support predicative thought and logical structure generally.

Schafer's unified solution, however, comes at the cost of explicitly setting aside the question of whether and how impressions represent ("Hume's Naturalistic

Theory," 3). Explaining the possibility of conceptual thought is the central concern of Schafer's account ("Hume's Naturalistic Theory," 5, 17). But perception considered broadly suggests a more primitive sense of representation at work in the *Treatise*. On the assumption that Hume's naturalizing project in his new science of human nature erases essential distinctions between the kind of content found in sensory impressions and ideas of memory and imagination, the search for a basic relation underlying the meaningfulness of perceptions is well motivated. In the next section, I draw on the resources of Berkeley's theory of signs to articulate such a relation.

## 4. Representation as Signification

A relation of signification applies trivially in the case of ideas that represent corresponding impressions: as copies, ideas represent impressions in virtue of being marks that designate the entities from which they arose. Indeed, that ideas signify particular data of sense experience is all that is required for Hume's experimental inquiry into the mind to get off the ground, for Hume's new science seeks to sort mental items into causes and effects without ascribing to them any intrinsic powers or qualities (T Intro 8; SBN xvii). Ideas are conjoined with impressions, and are subsequent to them. The conjunction makes it the case that, whatever else such ideas may stand for, they invariably designate their corresponding impressions.

But it is in accounting for the meaningfulness of abstract ideas and impressions of sensation and reflection while remaining within the bounds of Hume's ontological scruples that a treatment of Humean representation as signification pays off. Briefly, abstract ideas and impressions represent their objects in virtue of being signs that stand for arbitrarily designated conventional and natural meanings, respectively.

### *4.1. Abstract Ideas*

As with his use of "representation," Hume does not employ "signification" in a neatly technical manner. Yet, one of its instances occurs in the opening paragraph of the section, "Of abstract ideas," in which Hume lends enthusiastic support to Berkeley's views on the subject: "A great philosopher has disputed the receiv'd opinion in this particular, and has asserted, that all general ideas are nothing but particular ones, annex'd to a certain term, which gives them a more extensive signification, and makes them recal upon occasion other individuals, which are similar to them." Hume declares Berkeley's theory to be "one of the greatest and most valuable discoveries," and frames his own treatment as a defense of his predecessor's (T 1.1.7.1; SBN 17). To understand the position Hume endorses requires understanding Berkeley's notion of a sign.[26]

A Berkeleyan sign, in general, can be regarded as a mark or character that designates something else. In this broad sense, the word "chair" is a sign that stands for a particular object, or kind of object. A drawing of a chair may also stand for the same. A stick figure can stand for a person, and money for influence in society. The relation of signification depends on two other relations: suggestion (e.g., IP 11; PHK 43; NTV 26; NTV 140),[27] and resemblance. These two relations underwrite the ways in which words signify ideas, and ideas of the imagination signify real things,[28] respectively.

To take resemblance first, Berkeley writes that ideas of imagination, which are "more properly termed *ideas*, or *images of things*," signify what they do in virtue of being faint copies in the imagination of ideas imprinted on the senses, which he calls "real things" (PHK 33).[29] The imagination is the faculty of re-presenting particular things experienced in sense perception (IP 10; PHK 1). As a receptive faculty the imagination contains images of sensed objects, which themselves are passive and inert: "it is impossible for an idea to do anything, or, strictly speaking, to be the cause of anything"; and "there is nothing in them [i.e., ideas] but what is perceived" (PHK 25). There is, to be sure, an active faculty as well for producing ideas such as loving, hating, or willing, namely, the will (PHK 27–28). Ideas of the imagination, however, are not under the control of the active faculty: "When in broad day-light I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or no, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view; and so likewise as to the hearing and other senses, the ideas imprinted on them are not creatures of my will" (PHK 29). Just as the images received by the senses are not under the control of the will, neither are the ideas in the imagination that are copied from those images. As a consequence of being by their nature passive, inert, and inalterable, ideas of the imagination signify non-arbitrarily. Their signification could not be anything other than the sensory episodes from which they were copied. When I recall my idea of my childhood home, my idea signifies non-arbitrarily nothing but the conglomeration of sights, sounds, and smells I experienced there. In other words, the non-arbitrariness of ideas of imagination follows from their resemblance to, in virtue of being copied from, sensed originals. As should be clear, non-arbitrary signification draws strikingly close to Hume's copy theory of how particular ideas represent. Particular ideas signify impressions from which they are derived and which they resemble.

Arbitrary signification belongs, by contrast, paradigmatically to words. The relation that explains the capacity of words to signify ideas is what Berkeley calls suggestion. Words signify by evoking, or calling forth the passive ideas already present in the imagination or memory, or moving the mind to produce passions and volitions.[30] The word "cat" suggests to a speaker of English the image of a certain furry, four-legged animal. The name "Nelson Mandela" may suggest to many the idea of integrity. The word "fire" may suggest the presence of danger.

As these examples illustrate, and as Berkeley emphasizes, the connection between words in human languages and their signification is wholly a matter of convention. Nothing in the nature of a particular sequence of sounds, or unique inscriptions determines the signification of "cat," "Nelson Mandela," or "fire." Whereas ideas of the imagination signify non-arbitrarily in virtue of resembling perceived objects, words signify ideas indifferently due to a tacit or explicit human convention: "the words of any language are in their own nature indifferent to signify this or that thing or nothing at all" (NTV 62; also IP 11, 12, 18). Words in English or Urdu are "Signs of Human Appointment, which do not suggest the things signified by any likeness or identity of nature, but only by an habitual connexion that experience has made us to observe between them" (NTV 147). We may label words "arbitrary conventional signs."

Hume's debt to Berkeley on the matter of abstract ideas is evident. The way that a particular idea can become a general representation is by being attached to a word. The word is an arbitrary sign instituted for the purpose of facilitating communication, whose habitual connection to multiple unique instances depends on a convention of usage. Once the connection is entrenched, however, the use of the word "line," say, is applied confidently to lines of any length or thickness, with the expectation that the intended meaning will be communicated. But the designation "line" does not pick out an idea of a line of indeterminate dimensions in anyone's mind—that, for both Berkeley and Hume, is an absurdity (IP 7; T 1.1.7.3; SBN 18). A name attached to an idea of a determinate line designates indifferently all the particular ideas gathered under its signification, and in every instance, save one, the designation is imperfect (IP 13; T 1.1.7.7; SBN 20). While the name signifies each of the ideas in its extension, the idea to which it is annexed does not correspond exactly to any other idea, for each idea is uniquely copied from a distinct impression. Such imperfect abstract ideas, by means of the arbitrary, conventional signifying power of names, serve, for Berkeley, "conveniency of communication and enlargement of knowledge" (IP 13), just as they serve, for Hume, "the purposes of reflection and conversation" (T 1.1.7.2; SBN 18).[31]

Hume's use of representation in the context of abstract ideas fits nicely with this analysis. Hume, as we have seen, is loathe to admit the intelligibility of abstract notions insofar as they are referred to experience, and many of his most important arguments in the *Treatise* depend on pulling the empirical rug from under the feet of philosophical fictions such as "substance," "power," and "necessary connection." Hume's strategy in such arguments is to show that claims on behalf of the existence of the objects of such ideas rest on invalid causal inferences. For Hume, in one sense of truth, there can only be as much truth in an idea as there is resemblance to a copied impression in it. One's access to the truth of an idea, consequently, resolves into the degree of clarity to which an idea can be brought through careful introspection. Indeed, for Hume, not only is it in our

power to make ideas clear, it is an essential propaedeutic to reasoning: "If its [i.e., the idea's] weakness render it obscure, 'tis our business to remedy that defect, as much as possible, by keeping the idea steady and precise; and till we have done so, 'tis in vain to pretend to reasoning and philosophy" (T 1.3.1.7; SBN 73). But no amount of analysis of ideas considered as copies of impressions reveals any qualities resembling the philosophical notions of "power" or "necessary connection." Nevertheless, insofar as abstract ideas of identity, substance, and causality do have utility in Hume's new science of human nature, he needs an account of how they serve their purposes. Hume's solution is to rehabilitate such ideas on the basis of their ability to signify by naming subjective determinations in the mind, instead of tying their legitimacy to suspect claims of objective existence. For example, the idea of necessary connection is either unintelligible, if considered a property of distinct objects, or it amounts to "the thought, acquir'd by habit, to pass from the cause to its usual effect" (T Abstract 26; SBN 657; cf. T 1.3.14.22; SBN 166). In the same way, instead of treating the idea of substance as a real substratum of things, Hume conceives it as a collection of highly correlated simple ideas that are signified by a name, to which new ones can be added (and from which old ones can be removed) as experience informs that idea. For example, "our idea of gold may at first be a yellow colour, weight, malleableness, fusibility; but upon the discovery of its dissolubility in *aqua regia*, we join that to the other qualities" (T 1.1.6.2; SBN 16). The meaningfulness of "necessary connection" or "substance" is grounded in the fact that such ideas designate subjective propensities based on personal histories of constant conjunctions of perceptions, rather than in their resemblance to and derivation from any objective features of existences, mental or otherwise. Berkeley's theory of signs, appropriately, offers Hume a less ontologically committing theory of the meaning and application of abstract ideas.[32]

### *4.2. Impressions*

Berkeley also recognizes a further class of arbitrary signs. These are the ideas that are "imprinted on the senses by the Author of Nature" (PHK 33). The primary objects of sense perception—color and light for vision, for instance—are signs instituted by God. They are arbitrary insofar as they are a result of God's free decree. And they are natural, rather than artificial, insofar as it is God, and not humans, who has instituted them. Call these, "arbitrary natural signs." Berkeley's view is that the proper objects of vision, and of each sensory modality, constitute "an universal language of the Author of Nature, whereby we are instructed how to regulate our actions in order to attain those things that are necessary to the preservation and well-being of our bodies" (NTV 147; TVV 8).[33] The objects of sense are part of the language in which God communicates to us and provides us with a kind of foresight that allows us to navigate the world effectively (PHK 31). The faint image of a goat,

for instance, is a natural sign that suggests a considerable distance to the animal. However, just as isolated utterances in a language do not constitute meaningful sentences, the proper objects of each sense modality[34] require coordination in order to be informative (NTV 46). Such association takes place in experience, in which the meanings of signs are uncovered. The primary objects of vision are merely the arrangements of color and light (NTV 77) and it is only their coordination with objects of the tactile modality that enables a distant, solid body to be perceived. The secondary objects of vision—distance, solidity, and situation—are, on Berkeley's theory, the *primary* objects, and natural signs, of touch. The coordination of visual and tactile signs yields a rich perceptual experience in which the sight of the goat is quite literally associated with the haptic feeling of the distance between it and oneself, as well as of the solidity of its body (NTV 45).[35]

As with words, sensory signs do not suggest their associated ideas through any likeness or resemblance to their objects. Nothing of the geometry of vision—the sight lines, the visual angles—by which distance might be calculated, is present in the visual image. To that extent, sensory signs are conventional. However, as with human languages whose employment in ordinary communication is regular once the conventions have been settled (NTV 143), the language of natural signs also exhibits regularity and predictability. Indeed, the language of nature is more robust since it "doth not vary in different ages or nations, hence it is that in all times and places visible figures are called the same names as the respective tangible figures suggested by them, and not because they are alike or of the same sort with them" (NTV 140). Whereas the meanings of words in human languages undergo subtle shifts in connotations over time, and signs in one language are unintelligible in another, the language of perceptual signs is constant. In all cultures and ages, the perception of distance, of common shapes, of slow and rapid motion, of lightness and heaviness, remains invariant, even though the words used to name them change. For Berkeley, in fact, regularities in perceptual experience just are the Laws of Nature instituted through God's will (PHK 30–31). The uniformity of the language of nature and our effortless acquisition of it through experience is evidence of God's wisdom and benevolence, and of his wish to disclose his attributes to us through his works (PHK 33, 63).

While the theological underpinnings driving Berkeley's theory of perception could not be farther from Hume's irreligious and naturalistic program in moral philosophy, what makes Berkeley's theory of signs an attractive model for Hume has to do with the fact that, on this view, to understand a sign is *not* to make a causal inference, conscious or otherwise. Berkeley's innovation in this regard is to substitute signification for causation as the primary relation among phenomena: the "connexion of ideas does not imply the relation of *cause* and *effect*, but only of a mark or *sign* with the thing *signified*" (PHK 65). Just as to read a book in a language in which one is fluent does not require a series of inferences from the words

on the page to their meanings as causes, interpreting the sensory signs presented in experience does not require inferring any causes, whether mind-independent material objects, or perceptions in God's mind, or anything else for that matter. Accordingly, since, for Hume, only ideas but not impressions are associated by a relation of causation (e.g., T 2.1.4.3; SBN 283), he freely declares that the question of the origins of sense impressions, "whether they arise immediately from the object, or are produc'd by the creative power of the mind, or are deriv'd from the author of our being" is not in "any way material to our present purpose" (T 1.3.5.2; SBN 84).[36]

The key difference between signs and causes is that the former, unlike the latter, operate on the mind by suggesting their *significata*, rather than by supporting an inference. Berkeley distinguishes between the two kinds of relation by drawing attention to this feature: "To perceive is one thing; to judge is another. So likewise, to be suggested is one thing, and to be inferred is another. Things are suggested and perceived by sense. We make judgments and inferences by the understanding" (TVV 42). Signs operate by effecting an immediate transition in the mind to the things signified. In this sense, signs are, or rather, become transparent.[37] Once a child becomes fluent in her mother tongue, she no longer pays attention to the sounds or inscriptions with which she communicates. Berkeley writes: "No sooner do we hear the words of a familiar language pronounced in our ears, but the ideas corresponding thereto present themselves to our minds: in the very same instant the sound and the meaning enter the understanding" (NTV 51). In the same way, human perceivers in their development acquire proficiency in interpreting sensory signs, so that they no longer have to attend to the signs themselves, and instead pass directly to their significations. The transparency of signs is a psychological claim that mental signs come to pass unnoticed as a result of habituation, even as they continue to call up their usual associations. For Berkeley, the phenomenon of the transparency of signs explains why people ordinarily think that they perceive distance immediately by sight alone, even though, as he has shown, distance perception requires the involvement of touch.[38]

But just what is it that impressions of sensation signify? For Berkeley, the answer is clear: the signification of sensory signs is appointed by God, who has arranged the language of nature with wisdom and benevolence so as to guide us effectively in life. Berkeley, needless to say, is not chary about incurring a considerable theological debt to support his doctrine. Hume, conversely, is concerned not to have his philosophy rest on an act of divine will. Indeed, his ambition to found a respectable science of human nature on naturalistic rather than transcendent grounds is a central motivation of the *Treatise*.[39] What becomes, then, of Berkeley's theory of perception once stripped of the ontological guarantee provided by God?

In fact, a Berkeleyan theory of Humean impressions serves adequately the positive function in Hume's associationist psychology of explaining the natural

mechanisms by which we form action-guiding beliefs about the future on the basis of past regularities. Sense impressions are signs of possible future impressions given one's past experiences. The designations are arbitrary, insofar as they do not rest on causal necessity. Yet, sensory signs are not thereby meaningless, for they acquire signification through a process of inductive generalization over the data of perceptual experience.[40] The meanings of sensory signs, moreover, are natural, inasmuch as they are not stipulated by human convention. Instead, they are grounded in natural dispositions of perceptual mechanisms. Impressions acquire signification in development by giving rise to ideas and other sense impressions, both of which, in turn, produce passions. In particular, sensations of pleasure and pain "most naturally, and with the least preparation" (T 2.3.9.2; SBN 438) give rise to passions of desire and aversion, as well as volitions to act upon them. Desire, Hume writes, "arises from good consider'd simply, and aversion is deriv'd from evil," and the experience of either induces the will to exert itself in the instance that the desired outcome can be attained by a volitional action (T 2.3.9.7; SBN 439). For example, hot, flickery impressions have in the past been followed by experiences of heat or discomfort (to use Hume's example at T 1.3.6.2; SBN 87), which in turn are more widely associated with a desire to withdraw. The signification of the impression of fire regulates behavior, in this case by leading one to move away from the perceived source of the painful sensation. Similarly, one's habits may have made it the case that a certain rich, complex aroma in the morning signifies the taste and effects of coffee. The impression, through its signification of a desirable, expected future occurrence, guides behavior by inducing one to get out of bed. Thus, the utility of sense impressions, as of abstract ideas, for guiding conduct does not depend on any judgments about causal relations, but proceeds adequately on the basis of beliefs suggested naturally to the mind through its "*original* instinct" to "unite itself with the good, and to avoid evil" (T 2.3.9.2; SBN 438). The natural significations of sensations and passions established in experience suffice to accord impressions not only an important regulatory role in the conduct of life, but also to serve as the final tribunal for reasoning (T 1.3.4.1; SBN 83).

### *4.3 Space and Extension*

To reiterate, for Hume, as for Berkeley, the upshot of treating vision as a language of nature is that we need not consider judgments of size or distance as founded upon inferential chains from which an external world containing trees and cats is known. The task of vision, in fact, is not to represent external objects at all. Rather, it has the more limited function of denoting visual qualities that further suggest tactile qualities such as solidity. Atherton's assessment of Berkeley's theory that, "when we take vision to function as a language, we will understand it does not misrepresent the world it stands for, but is a successful vehicle for tangible meanings"

(Atherton, "Berkeley's Theory of Vision," 102) serves a clue for understanding Hume's notoriously puzzling treatment of perceptions of spatiality.

One of the rare uses of "represents" in the context of impressions, rather than ideas, occurs in Part 2 of the *Treatise*, where Hume writes that, "that compound impression, which represents extension, consists of several lesser impressions, that are indivisible to the eye or feeling" (T 1.2.3.15; SBN 38).[41] An example of such an impression is one with which Hume begins this section of the *Treatise*, namely, the impression of a table that is to "decide without appeal concerning the nature of the idea [of extension, or space in general]" (T 1.2.3.4; SBN 34). Without identifying "extension" with "space" just yet, we can provisionally treat this impression of a table as being distinct in its significance from an impression of space, even if ultimately space and extension turn out to coincide.[42] Space, for Hume, is an idea of an extended surface, such as a tabletop of largely uniform color, which, through the use of a term, comes to represent generally only the "disposition" or "manner of appearance" of minimal sensible points that compose any such surface.[43] Multiple ideas of differently colored expanses, copied from many different compound impressions of extension need to be received in the imagination before the general idea of space, from which we "omit the peculiarities of colour," is generated (T 1.2.3.5; SBN 34). Yet, only a single impression, Hume claims, is sufficient to produce an idea of extension, or a particular copy of a compound impression of "colour'd points, and of the manner of their appearance" (T 1.2.3.4; SBN 34). One of the tasks of T 1.2.3, "Of the other qualities of our ideas of space and time," accordingly, is to explain how a particular impression of extensity—a single, solid, colored expanse—leads to the abstract idea of space. The conclusion of Hume's investigation is that space is simply extension in general and, as Baxter explains, "regions of space have the structure of extended objects" ("Hume on Infinite Divisibility," 133). Space is inconceivable without the presentation of solid, colored objects that exemplify a certain kind of structure among their parts. The structure of extended objects provides, to Hume, the model for the idea of space.

The significations of perceptions of extension and space may be divided, then, into the significations of the following: impressions of extension, particular ideas of extension, and the idea of space (or extension in general).

Impressions of extension acquire signification in the same manner as other sense impressions, namely, by association in the course of experience with further impressions, ideas, and feelings. Their associations are, however, ubiquitous, insofar as an impression of extension is simply the impression of a solid, colored object. Thus, impressions of lions, tables, oaks, and water bottles, with their associated perceptions of fear, supportability, sturdiness, or containment, are all at the same time impressions of extensity. Different configurations of extensity, through inductive generalization, come to be associated with different ideas and intensities of feeling. The feeling of resistance associated with impressions of tables may

become associated with the idea of a surface capable of bearing other objects.[44] The solidity or impenetrability of a bottle-shaped object, together with the uses for which such objects have been employed in the past, and a present need to store a liquid, might signify that the object is suitable for containing liquid. Impressions of extension, in sum, simply designate objects, which take on further meanings through associations with other perceptions in service of the mind's instinct to pursue the good and avoid evil.

A particular idea of extension, accordingly, conveys nothing but the same composition of colored solid points ordered in a certain manner. An idea of extension—say of this particular brown, circular, solid expanse—represents the impression of the tabletop from which it was copied; it stands for the impression in virtue of its resemblance and causal connection to it. But it is also associated through custom and language with other perceptions. In particular, a single idea of extension comes to represent generally the manner or order in which colored and solid points are arranged in any idea of visual or tactile qualities. Of course, an idea of the order of positions is not separate from the idea of the brown tabletop; the removal of the sensible quality, for Hume, would amount to the idea being "utterly annihilated to the thought or imagination" (T 1.2.3.15; SBN 39).[45] A particular idea of extension, rather, comes to signify, via association with a word, a means of thinking of arranged points in general, so that the idea itself and the particular qualities it exemplifies can be omitted in reasoning. As a sign for spatiality, the idea allows us to pass directly to its associations, rather than using the idea or its qualities as a basis for inferences.[46] In fact, by its inexorable application to any tactile or visual impression, the general idea of space becomes strongly associated with any space-filling, or extensive presentation, with the result that every complex visual and tactile impression also signifies spatiality.[47] Yet, tactile and visual impressions do not thereby represent a self-subsistent container for receiving sense data, nor objective relations among perceptions. Rather, colors simply suggest tangible qualities, and the resulting impressions of spatiality or extension signify regular compositions of such qualities that, through further associations in experience, designate objects conventionally called oaks, cats, tables, or apples. An impression of space just is the recognition of an object taking up space, or extent, in the visual or tactile field. An idea of space, likewise, is nothing but a complex image designating its corresponding impression of a space-filling object. The general idea of space, meanwhile, is the thought of an order of positions regardless of their sensible qualities, such as is employed in the science of geometry.

Thus, despite his avowed agnosticism about, and apparent lack of interest in, the causal origins of impressions, Hume does not wish to deny that sense impressions are meaningful. In the opening paragraph of section T 1.4.2, "Of scepticism with regard to the senses," before embarking upon his sustained attack on the fal-

lacy of taking impressions to be enduring, external existences, Hume writes that the skeptic cannot suspend by any philosophical argument the belief in the external world, for "Nature has not left this to his choice, and has doubtless esteem'd it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations" (T 1.4.2.1; SBN 187). Nature appears here as a provident principle that fixes the ordinary meanings of sense impressions. It is psychologically impossible for me not to believe in the existence of the furniture in this room, or of the car passing in the street; at the very least, disbelief in such matters requires a considerable effort of disinterpretation. What's more, given such psychological determination, it is equally impossible not to regard sense impressions in ordinary life as being caused by enduring, external objects, though philosophical scrutiny problematizes the vulgar view. Since human psychology, just as much as the physical atoms and corpuscles of the natural philosophers, is subject to the contrivances of nature, it is in vain to seek the ultimate referents of the signs of ordinary perceptual experience. Nevertheless, their significations, adequate for the purposes of life, are, for Hume as for Berkeley, simply the meanings immediately and ineluctably suggested by them.[48]

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper I have offered an interpretation of Hume's use of the representation relation using the resources of Berkeley's theory of perception as a language of nature. If correct, it offers much philosophical and interpretive payoff. For one thing, a signification account of representation opens the possibility of situating Hume alongside Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, and Reid in the rich linguistic and psychological tradition in early modern British theories of perception.[49] At the same time, it retains the centrality of Hume's Copy Principle as an especially important mechanism for providing the matter for conceptual thinking, and thus as crucial for securing his destructive arguments against traditional metaphysics. A sign theory also offers greater scope by reaching beyond the ideas of memory and imagination to cover all species of perception to which Hume attributes content and intentionality. It not only preserves Hume's conventionalist view of abstraction and linguistic meaning, but also accounts for the practical role of impressions of sensation and reflection as vehicles of non-causal natural meaning in guiding behavior. In this way, a Berkeleyan position allows Hume to maintain his steadfast agnosticism about the causes of impressions, while nevertheless securing an intelligibility of mental content adequate both for the conduct of everyday life and for his influential account of the foundations of civil society in Book 3 of the *Treatise*.

## NOTES

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1 References to Hume's texts are as follows. [T]: *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Norton and Norton, with Book, part, section, and paragraph numbers; [SBN]: *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Selby-Bigge, rev. by Nidditch, followed by page numbers; [EHU]: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Beauchamp, with section and paragraph numbers, and [SBN]: *Enquiries Concerning the Principles of Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Selby-Bigge, rev. by Nidditch, followed by page numbers.

2 Unlike some of his most important predecessors, Hume denies a distinction between two kinds of reality, such as the Cartesian and Scholastic division of objective and formal reality. Hume countenances only one notion of existence, namely, that of ideas, and diverges from Descartes, Leibniz, and, arguably, Locke, in that he is unwilling to attribute any intrinsic or primitive representational capacity to ideas in virtue of which they would refer to mind-independent objects. Indeed, Hume is explicit that "the reference of an idea to an object [is] an extraneous denomination, of which in itself it bears no mark or character" (T 1.1.7.6; SBN 20). Representation, for Hume, is not an irreducible property of ideas, things, or anything else. See also Garrett, *Hume*, 68–71.

3 Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume*, 225–34, criticizes Hume's arguments for his copy theory of the content of ideas on the grounds that he offers an empirical theory but employs it as if it were *a priori*. His diagnosis of the problem is that Hume's theory is genetic rather than analytic, and proceeds to offer a suitably revised version. Stroud, *Hume*, chap.2, meanwhile, concludes that Hume's picture of the mind as constituted by discrete perceptions is simply inadequate as an account of the content of ideas and of meaning. In recent years, Garrett, "Hume's Naturalistic Theory," Schafer, "Hume's Naturalistic Theory," and Landy, "Hume's Theory," have offered more charitable interpretations of Hume on representation, and this paper builds on their work.

4 For example, Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume*; Stroud, *Hume*; Landy, "Hume's Theory"; Owen and Cohon, "Representation, Reason, and Motivation"; Owen, "Hume and the Mechanics of Mind."

5 As with Garrett, "Hume's Naturalistic Theory."

6 As with Schafer, "Hume's Naturalistic Theory," 3, who explicitly sets aside the question of how impressions represent.

7 [ECHU] refers to Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Nidditch, with book, chapter, and paragraph numbers. Ott, *Locke's Philosophy*, labels Locke's epistemology "semiotic empiricism" (98).

8 [De Corp.] refers to Hobbes, *Part I of De Corpore*, by part, chapter, and paragraph. Duncan, "Hobbes," disentangles the various uses of sign theory in Hobbes.

9 [IHM]: Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, ed. Brookes, chap. 5, section 3. For a recent survey of the eighteenth-century tradition beginning with Berkeley, which also includes David Hartley, Dugald Stewart, and Adam Smith, but places Hume outside it, see Copenhaver, "Perception and the Language of Nature."

10 For example, T 1.1.7.5, 1.2.3.11, 1.2.3.4, 1.3.1.7, 1.3.7.5, 1.4.5.21; SBN 19, 37, 34, 72, 96, 243.

11 For a general introduction to the debate, see Noonan, *Hume on Knowledge*, chap. 2. Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume*, chap. 9, offers a negative assessment of Hume's arguments for the Copy Principle, but attempts to salvage the principle by "translating" it into "analytic truths about meaningfulness in relation to empirical cashability" (231). Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, chap.2, presents an influential articulation of the interpretation of the Copy Principle as an empirical generalization. Garrett emphasizes that Hume takes the high degree of confirmation of the principle as justifying reliance on it as a premise in his arguments against his predecessors' ideas of "power," "self," "substance," and so on. Pears, *Hume's System*, chap. 1 and 2, represents a middle ground between positivistic and naturalistic readings. Some recent interpreters find two principles rather than one. Weintraub, "A Humean Conundrum," calls one the "genetic principle," which defines the set of ideas that human cognizers can come to possess, while the other, which she calls the "semantic principle," pertains to their meaningfulness. Landy, "Hume's Theory," similarly finds that, whereas the Copy Principle is merely a causal thesis, Hume's arguments require a semantic claim about what ideas are *of*, and attributes to Hume a necessary and a priori "semantic copy principle," which states that a perception is *of* that of which it is a copy.

12 To be sure, whether phenomenal strength is merely a distinguishing mark between impressions and ideas, or whether it is a true criterion that divides two species of Humean perception, is a matter of some debate. Stroud, *Hume*, Noonan, *Hume on Knowledge*, and Garrett, *Hume*, interpret force and vivacity as the defining difference between impressions and ideas. Landy, "Hume's Impression/Idea Distinction," challenges the standard interpretation to argue that force and vivacity are mere symptoms rather than constitutive of what it is for a perception to be an impression or an idea. He points, for instance, to Hume's discussion in the *Enquiry* of the condition of a diseased mind in which ideas may approach impressions in their degree of force and vivacity (EHU 2.1; SBN 17). Garrett, *Hume*, 39–40, addresses the passage in question to deflect the purported equality of impressions and ideas with respect to force and vivacity. I follow Stroud, Noonan, and Garrett in taking force and vivacity to be a phenomenological criterion that differentiates perceptions truly into impressions and ideas. Indeed, as Hume tells us, "[a]n idea is by its very nature weaker and fainter than an impression; but being in every other respect the same" (T 1.3.2.7; SBN 73).

13 I want to keep distinct here the content of Humean ideas from what, in today's parlance, is called "intentional content." The intentional content of a state includes what that state is *about*. What I am calling "imagistic" or "pictorial" content indicates simply the arrangement of qualities registered on a mental analog of a "surface." The imagistic content of the map hanging on the wall consists in the lines forming a grid,

the lines enclosing the colored patches, and so on. The (Humean) imagistic content does not represent the political configuration of the world. In making this distinction I am in agreement with Landy, "Hume's Theory," 26–27, and Schafer, "Hume's Naturalistic Theory," 9–10.

14 To be sure, Hume recognizes another species of truth, namely, the proportions among ideas, or the relations of ideas. But that is not the relevant notion of truth in the arguments under consideration.

15 Cf.: "Ideas always represent the objects or impressions, from which they are deriv'd, and can never without a fiction represent or be apply'd to any other" (T 1.2.3.11; SBN 37). To be sure, Hume's notion of a "fiction" is more nuanced than everyday fictions such as Harry Potter or unicorns. As Traiger, in "Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions," explains, "a fiction is an idea applied to something from which it cannot be derived" (386). Fictions are not the same as illusions, or cognitive errors. Rather, fictions require some degree of concession to inexactitude. So, we can apply the idea of a particular line *L* to an idea of line *M*, but not without inexactness, since the idea of *L* cannot be derived from the idea of *M*. In the same way, the idea of an immaterial soul cannot be applied without imprecision, since there is no impression from which the idea can be derived. In fact, the latter idea is a case of an idea that bears *no* qualitative resemblance at all to any impression, thus is inexact in the extreme.

16 The foregoing discussion of the causal derivation and resemblance theses of the Copy Principle covers familiar territory. For similar discussions see, for example, Owen and Cohon, "Representation, Reason, and Motivation"; Landy, "Hume's Theory," 25–26; and Schafer, "Hume's Naturalistic Theory," 6–7.

17 Indeed, the division of perceptions into impressions and ideas, with which Hume, in the opening section of the *Treatise* (T 1.1.1.1; SBN 2), claims to restore the original meaning of "idea" from its perversion in the naïve hands of Locke, would be philosophically useless for Hume without the Copy Principle.

18 And again: "Original impressions or impressions of sensation are such as without any antecedent perception arise in the soul, from the constitution of the body, from the animal spirits, or from the application of objects to the external organs" (T 2.1.1.1; SBN 275). On Hume's view, sense impressions result from physiological events, though the mechanisms or powers by which such events give rise to sensations are inexplicable by human reason (T 1.3.5.2; SBN 84; EHU 12.12; SBN 153).

19 In the *Enquiry*, Hume calls this sense of originality of impressions their "innateness" (EHU 2.9n1; SBN 22). However, that should not be taken to mean "inborn." Rather, Hume draws the distinction between innate and non-innate within the sphere of perceptions, insofar as the former are not derived from other perceptions, whereas the latter are. Hume dismisses as frivolous the notion of "innateness" as "cotemporary to our birth."

20 As various "New Hume" views maintain, for instance, Wright, *Sceptical Realism*; Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy*; and Strawson, *Secret Connexion*. Winkler, "New Hume," offers a sustained criticism of causal realist interpretations of Hume, as defended by Wright and Strawson most prominently. On Strawson's "sceptical realist" version that has gained wide acceptance, Hume affirms the existence of objective causal powers, though his skeptical modesty leads him to maintain agnosticism about the nature of

the power—whether causality in objects is identical to Hume's own regularity theory of cause and effect, or causal power produces its effects of necessity, or any other notion of causality. Other varieties of realism attributed to Hume include Blackburn, "Hume and Thick Connexions," whose "quasi-realist" Hume remains agnostic about even the existence of objective causal powers in bodies, though he does not take our projection of such powers in reasoning to be a mistake. Meanwhile, a recent position on the skeptical end of the spectrum comes from Stanford, "Manifest Connection," who attributes to Hume a positive *rejection* of objective causal power. My exclusion of the Copy Principle as the manner in which impressions represent, however, is not directly affected by this debate on the origins of impressions, so long as one accepts a division of the Copy Principle's philosophical labor between the causal thesis and the resemblance thesis. For what it is worth, I am of the opinion that Hume maintains steadfast agnosticism about our capacity to know even of the existence of causal powers in objects. I am persuaded in large part by Hume's discussion of existence and external existence in T 1.2.6 (SBN 66–68), but a full treatment of the issue is beyond the scope of this paper.

21 In fact, Hume offers arguments to deny that impressions represent any mind-independent qualities, for example, for why impressions of touch cannot represent solidity (T 1.4.4.10–14; SBN 229–31) and, more generally, for the conclusion that primary qualities must be excluded as mind-independent determinations of objects for the same reasons that secondary qualities have been by many of his seventeenth-century predecessors such as Descartes and Locke. For with the Lockean account, for instance, that tries to explain the "operations of external objects by its [i.e., primary qualities'] means, we utterly annihilate all these objects" (T 1.4.4.6; SBN 227–28). For an extreme interpretation on which Humean impressions of sensation represent nothing at all, see Owen, "Mechanics of Mind," 92–94.

22 The question of the causal origins of impressions is independent of whether we ought to believe the deliverances of impressions. The latter question is idle, Hume thinks, since we cannot *help* but believe the presentations, and that it is *good* that Nature has arranged our psychology so that we act upon impressions of approaching cars or pangs of hunger (for example, T 1.4.2.1; SBN 187). However, that impressions as of external bodies are intelligible does not, for Hume, constitute *justification* for either the vulgar or the philosophical belief in the continued and distinct existence of impressions, or the existence of a second set of objects that underlie the impressions, respectively.

23 Hume's denial of representationality to the passions has been controversial with commentators. Some attempt to make sense of the fact that the passions—anger, fear, pride, and so on—do seem to be about other things or people most of the time. Weller, "Myth of Original Existence," maintains that, while passions do not have any intrinsic representational quality, it is constitutive of an episode of passion to be annexed to the belief from which it arose, and from which it inherits its intentional object. Baier, *Progress of Sentiments*, meanwhile, dismisses the passage as "one very silly paragraph" and inconsistent with the way Hume uses the passions as content-bearing states in the rest of the *Treatise* (160). On Baier's reading, passions are richly cognitive states and thoroughly intertwined with reason, which is *why* Hume thinks passions and reason cannot be opposed to one another. Commenting on Baier's book, Cohon,

"Unorthodox Account," proposes that a passion need not contain its associated idea with its qualitative content, but instead, could stand in a causal relation to it (190).

24 Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, 104–106, and Schafer, "Hume's Naturalistic Theory," 15, use the notion of a "revival set" to refer to the set of ideas of particulars that could be called up through the use of a definition of a term. Although I do not employ the term "revival set" here, my understanding of the formation in the course of experience of a set of resembling particulars that are collected under a term accords with theirs.

25 See also Garrett, "Hume's Naturalistic Theory," 309, and Schafer, "Hume's Naturalistic Theory," 7–10, for similar discussions. Pappas, "Abstract General Ideas," defends the stronger claims that, "[i]f there are abstract ideas, then the CT [Copy Thesis] is false" (348) and, conversely, "[i]f there are no abstract ideas, then the CT is true" (349). More generally, Pappas argues that the rejection of abstract general ideas plays the same role in Hume's system that it does in Berkeley's, namely, the rejection of traditional philosophical claims to knowledge of the existence of immaterial substances, real qualities, and causal powers, to which end both deploy a version of the copy thesis to preclude an account of abstraction via resemblance and causation. While I am (unsurprisingly) inclined toward Pappas's Berkeleyan reading of the role of the critique of abstraction in Hume, the positive account to be developed in the next section does not depend on its correctness.

26 For an overview of Berkeley's theory of signs, see Armstrong, "Berkeley's Theory"; Winkler, "Berkeley and the Doctrine of Signs."

27 References to Berkeley's texts are as follows. [IP]: *Introduction* to the *Principles of Human Knowledge*, with paragraph number, and [PHK]: *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. with paragraph number; [NTV]: *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, with paragraph number; and [TVV]: *The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*, with paragraph number.

28 "The Ideas imprinted on the Senses by the Author of Nature are called *real Things*" (PHK 33). Berkeley appears to endorse several criteria for a perception to be of a "real thing," such as that the perception have no "Dependence on my Will" (PHK 29), and that it be "affecting, orderly, and distinct" (PHK 36), and "vivid," "distinct," and more "coherent" than the "Creatures of the Mind" (PHK 33). He takes none of this, of course, to imply that "real things" are mind-independent.

29 Or, what Hume would call sense impressions.

30 It should be borne in mind that words, for Berkeley, must themselves be *ideas*. Thus, the signification of a word amounts to one idea signifying another idea, or set of ideas.

31 To be clear, both Berkeley and Hume are in agreement that words do not resemble the ideas they signify, and therefore denote arbitrarily. There is nothing about the qualities in the sequence of sounds or the letters on the page in the English word "line" that explains why they designate what they do. But, in addition, both thinkers are equally committed to the ineliminability of resemblance or similarity for explaining why certain ideas and not others are collected together, and why resembling ideas get called up by the name that designates the set to which they belong. Neither Berkeley's, nor

Hume's position is entirely without problems, for each is faced with a bootstrapping problem of how similarity or resemblance gets started without some prior means (a genuinely abstract notion or idea that neither is willing to countenance) of distinguishing relevant from irrelevant similarities among particular ideas. For a discussion of the internal tensions in Berkeley in this regard, see Armstrong, "Berkeley's Theory," 166–67. For a parallel tension in Hume, see Gamboa, "Hume on Resemblance," 29–31.

32 Consistent with his view that "beasts are endow'd with thought and reason as well as men" (T 1.3.16.1; SBN 176), Hume's account of abstraction extends to animal cognition also, albeit to a limited degree. Dogs, for instance, can learn to associate arbitrary sequences of sounds with actions or objects. In such cases, the dog associates one idea (the word) to designate indifferently multiple other ideas to which the word neither bears resemblance nor stands in a relation of causal derivation. In general, Hume's account of abstraction as simply the use of a particular idea to stand in for a collection of ideas leaves open the possibility that at least some animals engage in symbolic cognition, minimally in cases where the association is based on partial qualitative resemblance. But it is unclear, and probably unlikely, that Hume would attribute to animals a full-blown capacity for language. What is important to note, however, is that Hume regards "reason" as simply a kind of instinct for inferring future occurrences from past experience that happens to be developed to various degrees in different species. Thus, "[f]rom the tone of voice the dog infers his mater's anger, and foresees punishment" (T 1.3.16.6; SBN 178), just as in humans, "reason is nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct in our souls, which carries us along a certain train of ideas" (T 1.3.16.9; SBN 179). The capacity for more complex reasoning about justice, for instance, which seems to depend on the capacity for language, ultimately marks only a difference in degree of a general capacity shared with animals.

33 For further discussion of the background and details of Berkeley's theory of vision, see Hatfield, "Perception as Unconscious Inference" and Copenhaver, "Berkeley on the Language of Nature." Atherton, *Berkeley's Revolution in Vision* offers a monograph-length treatment of Berkeley's theory of vision, and a summary version along with a history of its reception in Atherton, "Berkeley's Theory of Vision."

34 In the so-called Heterogeneity Thesis, Berkeley takes the proper objects of each sense modality to be isolated from one another; at TVV 41, he calls the thesis "the main part and pillar" of his theory of vision (TVV 41).

35 Berkeley, in other words, proposes the theory that "touch educates vision." On the eighteenth-century history of the theory, see Hatfield, *The Natural and the Normative*, chap.2.

36 The text continues: "We may draw inferences from the coherence of our perceptions, whether they be true or false; whether they represent nature justly, or be mere illusions of the sense" (T 1.3.5.2; SBN 84). One might object that Hume leaves it an open question, perhaps even an empirical question, whether impressions represent external objects. However, it is just as easily read, especially in the context of the preceding sentence, that the question is of no importance to Hume's project. As to whether this might be an empirical question, the following remark from the *Enquiry*, by which time Hume's skepticism had in fact become more moderate, should settle the matter: "It is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects, resembling them: how shall this question be determined? By experience surely; as all

other questions of a like nature. But here experience is, and must be entirely silent" (EHU 12.12; SBN 153).

37 The transparency of signs, in this context, does not mean anything like the thesis in contemporary philosophy of mind that the mind has incorrigible knowledge of its own states.

38 For more on Berkeley's account of suggestion as distinct from judgment, see Hatfield and Epstein, "Sensory Core," 134–35; Copenhaver, "Perception," 114–15; Copenhaver, "Objects of Vision," 33–34; Winkler, "Doctrine of Signs," 138–41.

39 I refer the reader to Russell, *Riddle of Hume's* Treatise, for a thorough examination of the role of irreligious motives behind Hume's skeptical methods and naturalistic goals in the *Treatise*.

40 The degree of certitude of the inductions is a matter of the feeling of necessity or determination that accompanies constant conjunction. Ultimately, an account of subjective and intersubjective probabilities established by the strength of perceptual associations underwrites the justification of empirical judgments. See Garrett, *Hume*, 159–64, for an elucidation of Hume's thought regarding "probabilities, and those other measures of evidence on which life and action intirely depend" (T Abstract 4; SBN 647).

41 Garrett, "Hume's Naturalistic Theory," 304, points to this passage (and one other: "our senses . . . represent as minute and uncompounded what is really great and compos'd of a vast number of parts" [T 1.2.1.5; SBN 28]) in order to note that Hume does not deny that impressions of sensation represent. But Garrett does not elaborate how sense impressions represent extension under the causal role account.

42 Mijuskovic, "Hume on Space (and Time)," rightly stresses the point that Hume always characterizes space as an idea, never as an impression (390). But I will grant, in line with Hume's more recent interpreters, that space and extension in the end turn out to be (extensionally) equivalent terms for Hume, so impressions of extension may be interpreted as impressions of space. So, Hume writes that "the idea of *space or extension* is nothing but the idea of visible or tangible points distributed in a certain order" (T 1.2.5.1; SBN 62; my emphasis). See also Baxter, "Hume on Space and Time"; Garrett, *Hume*, 65; Frasca-Spada, *Space and the Self*, 70; Newman, "Hume on Space and Geometry."

43 Hume's conception of space as the manner in which visible and tangible points are presented depends on his arguments against the infinite divisibility of visual space, and for the existence of *minima sensibilia*, or sensible, extensionless points, which compose extended objects, as well as regions of space occupied by those extended objects, by being located next to one another. Apparent space, in other words, reduces to apparent (visible or tangible) distance that results from at least two unextended points being situated next to each other. For a defense of Hume's arguments in these matters, see Baxter, "Hume on Space and Time"; and Jacquette, *Hume's Critique of Infinity*. Hume inherits from Berkeley, in broad respects, both the critique of infinite divisibility, and the doctrine of minimal sensibles. For Berkeley's account, see Gray, "Berkeley's Theory of Space." See Jacquette, *Hume's Critique of Infinity*, 28–36, for the Berkeleyan influence on Hume's account in T 1.2. Negative assessments of Hume's critique of infinite divisibility have predominated in the literature. Broad, "Hume's Doctrine of Space" deems Hume's account of infinite divisibility as "rubbish" (171) and "nonsense" (176). Fogelin,

"Hume and Berkeley," is typical in rejecting Hume's (but not entirely Berkeley's) arguments as ineffective due to "errors of reasoning" and their reliance on "philosophical commitments that are themselves dubious" (48). Flew, "Infinite Divisibility," is similarly dismissive of Hume's critique in T 1.2 and the theory of space that results from it.

44 For a different creature, such as a cat, the signification of a similar arrangement of solid, colored perceptual atoms might be that of a safe landing surface.

45 See, as well, Falkenstein, "Manners of Disposition."

46 Cf. T 1.4.3.10 (SBN 224): "For it being usual, after the frequent use of terms, which are really significant and intelligible, to omit the idea, which we wou'd express by them, and to preserve only the custom, by which we recal the idea at pleasure."

47 Accordingly, Garrett states: "In his [Hume's] view, *every* complex impression composed of spatially or temporally arranged impressions is thereby also *an* impression of space or time, respectively" (*Hume*, 65).

48 One might raise the common charge here that Hume confuses psychology with epistemology. I respond that rather than thinking of it as confusion, we should instead inquire into the ways in which Hume's psychology supports his epistemology. For a sustained treatment of Hume's epistemology rooted in a similar, psychologistic interpretive stance, see Loeb, *Stability and Justification*.

49 These elements have been relatively neglected in treatments of Hume's epistemology. Some notable exceptions include Price, *Thinking and Experience*, 110ff; Loeb, *Stability and Justification*; and Ott, "Hume on Meaning."

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