

Hume

The Self



Imagine a Simple Self

- Hume directly addresses Reid and his notion of a simple self
- Reid's self is
 - intuitively known
 - consciously felt at all moments
 - simple and indivisible
 - known with certainty

Hume's Appeal to Experience

- Hume argues that experience conflicts with Reid's notion of the self
- "From what impression could this idea be derived?"
 - The only way to have a real idea of something is for it to arise from some impression
 - experience grounds thought and understanding
- Is there one impression that gives rise to the thought of Self?
 - What is this one impression?

Impressions of the Self

- Hume cannot find any one impression of the self
- In fact, the self is not one impression but several
 - "But self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are supposed to have a reference."

Why Is There No One Impression of the Self?

1. "If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, through the whole course of our lives; since self is supposed to exist after that manner.
 2. "But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensation succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time.
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3. "It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is derived; and consequently there is no such idea."

Hume's Reflections Upon the Self

- "After what manner, therefore do they [perceptions] belong to self; and how are they connected with it? 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 can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception."
- Hume finds in his experience no perception of the self as a simple, indivisible, unchanging perception

Self as a Bundle of Perceptions

- There is no person, whether our self or others, we perceive in the world which is anything but a collection of perceptions
 - Each person is a "bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement"
 - In the perceiving mind
 - there is nothing simple in our perceptions, and
 - there is no identity in our perceptions
- The mind is simply successive perceptions

Why Think Successive Perceptions Are Unified?

- The successive perceptions of an object seem both
 - **unified**, because each successive perception appears identical to the previous, and
 - **diverse**, because we have the idea of several objects existing in succession due to these successive perceptions
- The unified self is an illusion caused by the imagination's ability to connect successive perceptions together based on their resemblance
 - "This resemblance is the cause of the confusion and mistake, and makes us substitute the notion of identity, instead of that of related objects...."

Soul, Self, Substance

- The soul, self, and substance is nothing more than a disguise used to hide the variation and diversity of successive perceptions of the self:
 - we “run into the notion of a *soul*, and *self*, and *substance*, to disguise the variation....”
- In those cases where we don’t confound diverse perceptions into an identical self, then we create some mysterious or inexplicable thing connecting the parts:
 - “we are apt to imagine something unknown and mysterious, connecting the parts, beside their relation....”

Similarity of Cause Determines Identity

- An oak tree that grows from an acorn to a tree is still the same oak, even though it has changed every “particle of matter”
- An infant grows into a man without a change in his identity
 - These examples seem to point to numerical identity.
- But, there is no numerical identity, only the same causal history
 - “though ‘tis evident the sounds have only a specific identity or resemblance, and there is nothing numerically the same, but the cause, which produced them.”

Resemblance and Causation Joined By Memory

- The nature of personal identity resides in the mind’s recollection of resembling and causally connected ideas:
 - “identity...is merely a quality, which we attribute to... [different perceptions], because of the union of their ideas in the imagination....The only question, therefore, which remains, is, by what relations this uninterrupted progress of our thought is produced, when we consider the successive existence of a mind or thinking person. And here ‘tis evident we must confine ourselves to resemblance and causation....Also, as memory alone acquaints us with the continuance and extent of this succession of perceptions, ‘tis to be considered, upon that account chiefly, as the source of personal identity.”