

Navigating the Labyrinth - a Critique of Hume's Bundle Theory of the Self

1 Introduction

This paper seeks to challenge the idea that Hume's *Bundle Theory* is an appropriate theory by which to make judgments or draw conclusions about the self (Hume, 1888, p251). Hume's dismissal, in the *Treatise*, of the self as 'absurd' and 'unintelligible' (1888, p254), is the occasion for him to present his ideas about personal identity and the self. The thesis which Hume presents as explaining both these issues, that is, how we construct personal identity, and how we 'erroneously' construct a self, is the *Bundle Theory* of perceptions.

The task of this paper is to show, that by presenting the Bundle Theory as an explanation of both personal identity and the self, Hume conflates two separate issues. The issue of *personal identity*, how it is constituted, how we ascribe it, what we understand by it is a considerably different issue to the question of what might or might not constitute a self, how we experience it, what we might or might not know about it, or how we might know about it.

It is the claim of this paper that the self is not reducible to personal identity, and that therefore, an analysis of personal identity is a mistaken format from which to draw any conclusions regarding the issue of *self*. Only by separating the two distinct issues is it possible to circumscribe the range of possibilities for either.

This paper aims to draw out the distinction between the issues of personal identity and the self, by examination, firstly of the coherence of Hume's thesis, and secondly, of the relevance of some issues related to language and meaning. It will proceed in the following way: firstly to outline Hume's strategy, both in Book 1 and Book 2 of the *Treatise*, in order to present two variants of Hume's position on personal identity and the self.

Secondly, I will offer some critical commentary from Stroud, Pears and Baier, to show that including the body in the account is crucial to the coherence of the Bundle Theory. Thirdly, I will present a summary of some established meanings of 'self' and 'personal identity' for the purpose of highlighting the difference between the two concepts.

Fourthly, I submit an account of Hume's investigation of 'substance' in order to show its pertinence to his ideas about the self.

Fifthly, I bring together the conclusions from all the above points to show their relevance to the topic of this paper. Finally, I suggest a brief consideration of some ideas on meaning from Thomas Reid and suggest that they may point to a way of negotiating the final steps out of the labyrinth.

Hume

2 Book 1 - Of The Understanding

In presenting this first section of Hume's thesis, I wish to draw attention to the parts of Hume's writing where he attempts to reduce the notion of *self* to that of *personal identity*.

Hume's Section V1, in Part 1V, Book 1, of the *Treatise*, entitled *Of Personal Identity* begins with reference to the fact that some philosophers imagine that they have an intimate consciousness of the self (Hume, 1888, p251). However, Hume denies that this is possible. There could not, he avers, be any experience of the self, as there is no impression of the self on which it could be based. Rather than being based on a single impression, the idea of self or person is in fact, based on several (1888, p251). Hume goes on to say that he himself fails to experience any impression of a self (1888, p252). His awareness of the self amounts to no more than the awareness that he is experiencing perceptions. He goes so far as to claim that he has no sense of himself unless he is perceiving.

Hence, when he is asleep, he claims that he could be 'truly be said not to exist' (1888, p252). Whilst others may 'perceive something simple and continu'd (1888, p252), he does not. Hume then takes the crucial step of generalising from his own experience by proposing that in fact, we are all constituted of perceptions:

'I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement' (1888, p252).

Further he says,

... nor is there any single power of the soul, which remains unalterably the same, perhaps for one moment ... there is properly no simplicity in the mind at one time, nor identity in different ... they are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind (1888, p253).

Thus, Hume has extrapolated from his own inexperience of a self, that all human beings are essentially constructed by their perceptions. Having presented his reasoning regarding the apparent 'self,' Hume then proceeds to consider how these perceptions are identified over time:

'What gives us so great a propension to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves possess of an invariable and uninterrupted existence thro' the whole course of our lives?' (1888, p253).

He answers by claiming that he needs to distinguish between personal identity which concerns our thoughts, and personal identity which concerns our passions:

'... we must distinguish between personal identity, as it regards our thought or imagination, and as it regards our passions or the concern we take in ourselves.' (1888, p253).

Concerning the first of these, Hume says that we are required to consider the identity of plants and animals, because there exists an analogy between it and the 'identity of a self or person' (1888, p253). He later states that the notion of 'self' emerges from an incorrect understanding of the nature of perceptions, in particular, they are mistakenly interpreted to maintain uninterrupted continuity:

'Thus we feign the continu'd existence of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption; and run into the notion of a soul, and self, and substance, to disguise the variation. But we may farther observe, that where we do not give rise to such a fiction, our propension to confound identity with relation is so great, that we are apt to imagine something unknown and mysterious... ' (1888, p254).

It seems then, that the main points of what Hume is claiming here is that there is no impression of the self on which an idea of it could be based, that there is no stable or unchanging self or soul, that he and all other humans are constituted of nothing but bundles of perceptions, and that it is our natural inclination to unite these perceptions into a single entity, this being both how we construct personal identity, and how we mistakenly feign the existence of a self or soul.

Thus the act of erroneously uniting perceptions, is the same act by which we both construct personal identity and produce the mistaken and 'fictitious' idea of the self (pp254-255). However, the later added Appendix to Hume's Treatise shows him to be dissatisfied with his account, finding it inadequate to explain how it is that personal identity arises, given the facts that perceptions are distinct and separate, and that he is unable to discern any real connecting principle between them.

The problem seems to be that, although the operation of memory shows the presence of connections of cause and effect between perceptions, neither the memory nor the causal principle themselves seem adequate to explain the presence of any already existing continuity in the self, nor the way in which one self may be individuated from another.

I wish to maintain that in Book 1 of the Treatise, Hume is mistaken in his reasoning regarding these two issues, and that they are not synonymous, and therefore not conducive to conflation, nor to a single explanation. The next task is to show the distinction between the account just given, and that of the self and personal identity as presented in Book 2.

3 Book 2 - Of The Passions

A more sympathetic account of the self is found in Hume's presentation: *Of The Passions*. The discussion extends beyond impressions and ideas to include secondary impressions of reflection, that is, the passions and emotions. These rise from sensory impressions, and are categorised into *calm* and *violent*, *direct* and *indirect*. We experience them as a secondary effect of an original impression, the cause of which may be either:

'... from the constitution of the body, from the animal spirits, or from the application of objects to the external organs' (1888, p275).

Reference to the body at the outset implies that the discussion will range wider than was restricted to the account of ideas in Book 1. The passions are presented in opposing pairs, such as beauty/ deformity, love/hatred and grief/joy. Special attention is given to pride and humility. Through the association of ideas, they are generated by a 'natural principle' (1888, p283), and are products of other passions, for example, beauty and deformity respectively (1888, p285).

The most significant claim that Hume makes for them and their relationship with other passions is their necessity for a self. Only by positing a self can the experience of passions make any sense. The self is required as the object of the passions,

'Tis evident, that pride and humility, tho' directly contrary have yet the same OBJECT. This object is self, or that succession of related ideas and impressions, of which we have an intimate memory and consciousness When the self enters not into the consideration, there is no room either for pride or humility ...' (1888, p277).

And again:

'Any thing, that gives a pleasant sensation, and is related to self, excites the passion of pride, which is also agreeable, and has self for its object ...' (1888, p 288).

And:

'... the subject to which the quality inheres, is related to self, the object of the passion' (1888, p289).

Hume does in fact, make numerous such references. Whilst necessarily implicated, the self does not *cause* the passions, as Hume states that it (the self) could not be both cause and object, as this would be contradictory; also, as the passions each have their opposite, it would also be contradictory for them to originate from a single source; thus for this reason also, they cannot be determined to come from the self (1888, p278). Other features of the passions are their implications for the body and other objects, in particular other selves. Discussing the relationship between pride and humility and beauty and deformity with reference to the body Hume says:

'If the beauty or deformity, therefore, be plac'd upon our own bodies, this pleasure or uneasiness must be converted into pride or humility ...' (1888, p298).

Objects other than the self are associated with pride and humility:

'But tho' pride and humility have the qualities of our mind and body, that is self, for their natural and more immediate causes, we find by experience, that there are many other objects, which produce these affections' (1888, p 303).

Finally, in relation to other selves, Hume says:

'But beside these original causes of pride and humility, there is a secondary one in the opinions of others, which has an equal influence on the affections. Our reputation, our character, our name are considerations of vast weight and importance; and even the other causes of pride; virtue, beauty and riches; have little influence, when not seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others' (1888, p316).

Hume's account of the self in Book 2 then, can be seen to include a number of dimensions lacking in Book 1. Not only is the presence of a self essential to the experience of secondary emotions, but the account given of it is not restricted to ideas in the mind. It is extended to include the body, and its relationship to other objects and to other selves. The following commentaries from Stroud, Pears and Baier claim that without reference to the body, Hume's account of personal identity lacks credibility as a coherent analysis.

4 Stroud

Stroud outlines a number of problems relating to Hume's theory of ideas on personal identity as presented in Book 1. I will refer briefly to five of these, namely those of *memory, resemblance, causation, subjectivity, and individuation*.

Firstly, the role of memory as presented by Hume is challenged by Stroud, who claims that Hume sees memory as actually being part of the bundle:

'To remember is for certain kinds of perceptions to occur in the mind, so remembering actually contributes to the bundle of perceptions ...' (Stroud, 1977, p123).

But Stroud wonders, what of the times when we do not remember events, such as, for example, in cases of mere forgetfulness, or the more severe condition of amnesia? Without the presence of the memory perception in the bundle, are we at those times no longer a self then, do we lose our identity? as Stroud puts it:

'But we do not remember all, or even most of our experiences. We do not conclude that we did not exist at those post-natal times we no longer remember, so there must be something else that enables us to think of those now forgotten perceptions as also belonging to our enduring self ...' (1977, p123).

According to Stroud then, the fact that memory is inconstant and unreliable makes it questionable as a defining characteristic of personal identity.

Secondly, resemblance is constantly referred to by Hume as binding the bundle together, giving the appearance, through smooth transition, of a single self or subject. But, asks Stroud, what if there were a group of perceptions which do resemble each other, occurring, for example, of the Eiffel Tower - are we to assume that they are all necessarily present in a single mind - could they not be occurring in several? for myself, the converse of this problem has perplexed me for some time - could there not be a multitude of different perceptions simultaneously present in a single mind?

This poses a problem if a person is to be identified on the basis of their perceptions. It does not seem realistic to say that I am me in virtue of the resemblance occurring between my perceptions, very few of them are of me, most of them are of other things and other people, with a variety of them occurring together on any one occasion. If I were myself in view of my perceptions, I would not only be myself, I would be several objects and several other people all at the same time!

Thirdly, I draw attention to Stroud's challenge to Hume's explanation of causal interaction occurring between perceptions (1977, p126). Stroud claims that whilst clearly some perceptions do cause others, it is not the case that there is a single causal link between any group of perceptions at any one time, as he states:

'When I am having an impression of a tree I might turn my head and get an impression of a building, but the first impression is not a cause of the second ...' (1977, p126)

The fact of succession then, does not of itself account for the presence of causal links. In addition, the notion of causation as a constituent of personal identity only makes sense if one observes constant conjunctions between perceptions in a single mind. However, Stroud claims that if, because there are such constant conjunctions, we then reason that there is a single identity, that this makes the account of causation circular. As he puts it:

'To explain the idea of causality, personal identity is appealed to; and to explain the idea of personal identity, causality is appealed to ...' (1977, p135).

One might also ask here, what gets the chain of causality going - we seem to be explaining links in a chain rather than saying anything about the chain itself?

The fourth problem Stroud delineates is that of the coherence of the bundle as a subject:

'How does it make sense for a bundle to make the mistake of thinking, (as Hume claims we do) that we are a self?' (1977, p129).

But if the mind is only a fiction, one might well ask what has mistakenly led a person to think that there is an individual, enduring self?

The leap from bundle to subject seems to be more than that of group to aggregate. Is it, in fact, asks Stroud, feasible to consider a bundle of perceptions as being capable of any mental activity? How could a mere bundle of perceptions perform any mental acts? A bundle will exist if its individual members exist, and that is all there is to it. It itself does not do anything (1977, p130).

The possible reply that any activity of the bundle amounts to saying that there is another perception in the bundle seems an inadequate response, amounting to no more than a re-iteration of the bundle theory, without producing any additional elucidation.

The final criticism chosen from Stroud concerns what he sees as an inherent defect in Hume's account of individuation, insofar that there is no satisfactory explanation of where the idea of a single mind or self actually arises. A paradigm by which to construct an explanation of identity would exist if there were only a single mind in the universe, but considering that we assume there to be many minds in existence, there is no explanation as to why data is presented in the way it actually is.

Stroud says that whereas a single mind could become reflexive from surveying past perceptions, the situation of many minds is different. As he puts it:

'But now suppose that, as is actually the case, there are many different minds independent of each other, and so not all the perceptions there are fall within the scope of a single mind's experience. Surveys of past perceptions would not extend to all the perceptions there had ever been. How then could there arise an idea of a single, continuous mind? That idea could not be derived from a survey of all the perceptions there are, since there are no such surveys. And even if there were, they would be to no avail, since the class of all the perceptions there are does not exhibit the appropriate regularities ...' (1977, p137).

The problem being posed here then, is: What actually is the origin of the very notion of *individuation*? On Hume's account, what generates the perception of oneself as a bundle? Without the existence of a prior notion of an individual self, how does the reflexive perception get started in the first place?

In summary then, for Stroud, due to its inability to provide adequate explanations of the operations of either *memory, resemblance, causation, subjectivity, or individuation*, the account of Hume's bundle theory is fatally flawed as a coherent analysis of personal identity ascription. The following comments from Pears and Baier suggest that it is the restriction of Hume's account to that of ideas only which is responsible for this deficiency.

5 Pears

Of the extensive criticism offered by Pears regarding Book 1, I will mention the four issues of *psychological unity, individuation, memory and causation*.

Firstly, Pears refers to Hume's concern with the psychological unity of a person (Pears, 1990, p122). Pears sees the bundle theory as unable to provide any principles which could explain psychological unity. The kind of account given by Hume gives rise to the problem of loose *'psychological integration ... like a group of buildings around a farmyard'* (1990, p122).

Without a persistent self, the mind of a person 'is a sequence of ever-changing impressions and ideas' (1990, p124). Pears argues that unless there are principles which bind them together psychologically, there seems to be no reason why particular ideas are unified in minds the way we normally experience them, or expect them to be.

Secondly, Pears claims that Hume's account does not properly justify what individuates one particular bundle from another. Pears uses the example of an outbuilding, which may be identifiable without knowing to what complex or other building it belongs. There is no evident principle or rule which determines which buildings belong to one group rather than to another. Pears maintains that Hume presents mental items as being like this, but that in reality they are not. It makes no sense, according to Pears, to talk of them without attributing ownership (1990, p122).

Thirdly, the role of memory in personal identity is said to be inaccurately represented. Merely remembering past actions from one's own perspective without independent verification could not, according to Pears, provide reliable criteria that one was the person who performed them. If one sought to establish the authenticity of a particular action, say leaving footprints on wet pavement, Pears maintains that one's own memory would be unable to do this:

'The reason why my evidence for that fact must be independent is this: it must leave the question of identity open. For an identity-question of this kind makes two references and then goes on to ask whether the persons picked out by them are identical or not. But if I relied on my memory for the past reference, I would be presupposing an affirmative answer to the question of identity ...' (1990, p133).

In other words, my own memory cannot be the source of its own verification.

Finally, Pears' criticises Hume's use of causation. Hume sees it as a relation between perceptions, but Pears points to the fact that although causation may well be a bond between particular events, this fact hardly legitimises it as being the cause of unity of the whole mind, as indeed Hume himself admitted when writing his Appendix (1990, p123). If causation were a relevant factor in personal identity, it would have to explain more than relationships between perceptions or even groups of perceptions, but would have to explain unity of the mind as a whole.

In seeking to address these and other problems, Pears claims that the common error is that, by confining his account to one of ideas only, Hume has omitted reference to the body, thus leaving out an essential component of personal identity (1990, pp133-134). Consideration of the above problems, according to Pears, shows that inclusion of the body would significantly alter any conclusions drawn. In the case of the first issue, psychological unity could be accounted for by identifying the body as the place of experience. Having a group of perceptions spatially located in the same body could explain how they come to be psychologically integrated with each other.

The second problem, that of individuation, could be overcome by designating the body as the boundary which separates one particular bundle from another. Thirdly, without reference to the body, there are no means by which one set of memories is isolated from another. Such separation is necessary in order that each set can be independently verified. Finally, declaring, as Hume does (1990, p260), that contiguity is not required in a causal description of mental processes, removes spatiality, hence the body, from the account. Omitting the body effectively eliminates reference to the brain, which Pears sees as necessary to explain causal links, such as is shown in this reference to the operation of the memory:

'If there were no causal link between the original thought and the later 'memory' of it, the so-called 'memory' would merely be a coincidental match, and only the brain is capable of carrying the required causal link ...' (1990, p131).

Without the body then, Pears believes Hume's account of the causal process is deficient.

I have mentioned four of the many problems which Pears maintains are inherent in Hume's account of personal identity. In all cases, namely, *psychological unity, individuation, memory and causation*, Pears maintains that unless reference to the body is made in the account, a coherent understanding of personal identity cannot be realised. The following commentary from Baier serves to show the difference made by such inclusion of the body in Hume's account in Book 2, as opposed to its neglect in Book 1.

6 Baier

Rather than referring to individual problems in Hume's account, my main concern in this section is Baier's acknowledgment of the relevance for personal identity implied by differences in the accounts of Book 1 and Book 2. Baier indicates that by confining the account to that of mental items in Book 1, the account is restrictive and singular, and does not provide adequate data by which personal identity can be coherently understood:

'... most of Part 1V has been a solo attempt of a single thinker, distrustful of education and testimony, and confined to the ideas he can get for himself. Despite many references to other persons, and occasional rhetorical appeals to the reader to confirm the first-person singular findings, no appeals were made at any point to any pooling of data or to any really cooperative procedures for error detection or error correction ...' (Baier, 1991, p3).

Further elaborating these claims, she notes how Hume refers in this section, to 'reasoning philosophers,' 'thoughts in another's breast,' 'members of a commonwealth' and so on, but as mental constructs, not as incarnate beings (1991, p122). However, Book 2, *Of The Passions* receives a more favourable assessment from Baier. She claims that whilst neither book is contradictory of the other in its explanation of personal identity or the self, she sees in the latter a 'supplementation and completion' (1991, p130).

Whereas Book 1 concentrated its focus on the mental life of a person but ignored the body, Book 2 refers to qualities in the body, the interdependence of the self, its emotional life, self-consciousness and self-evaluations (1991, pp130-131). In addition to Hume's need for a self as the necessary object of direct and indirect passions, Baier notes the heavy reliance on the presence of other selves.

Not only is it by means of them that the passions are able to operate, but acknowledgment of other selves is necessary for them even to be understood. It makes no sense to consider pride or humility being experienced by an isolated self, or as Baier puts it:

'The pride of place given to pride is not so much a case of egotism as it is of preoccupation with reflection and reflexivity ...' 1991, p134).

Baier goes so far as to say it is the solipsistic attitudes of Book 1, where such social references are absent, which bear the real responsibility for the labyrinth (1991, p138). While Hume may not have pointed to the link between his acknowledgment of the emotional and bodily life of a person as given in Book 2, and its implications for the problems of Book 1, it is not difficult to see how the embodied, reflexive social self of Baier's account would provide the missing elements from the isolated mental life of the earlier account.

It is the fact that human persons are essentially incarnate, that they are flesh and blood, generated, born of women, coming into the world complete with blood ties, and acquiring other social ties as they mature, grow and with others' help acquire self-consciousness, that banishes the ghost of Book 1 worry:

'Who am I or what? I am a living, more or less loved and more or less loving person among persons ...' (1991, p141).

For Baier then, because the account of the self in *The Passions* incorporates reference to a person's body and its place within a social context, it provides a comprehensive and thus coherent framework within which an empirical understanding of the self or person could be understood.

The three commentaries presented have referred to a number of problems claimed to emerge from Hume's account of personal identity in Book 1. Pears and Baier suggest that restricting the account to that of ideas in the mind renders the account incomplete, but that the problems of this limitation would be overcome if the body had been included, this, according to Baier, being the additional step taken in Book 2.

Whilst a full analysis cannot be given here, I propose that the application of the same principle, that is, supplementation of Hume's account of ideas with a reference to the body, would similarly overcome the deficiencies outlined by Stroud, thus yielding the plausible view that reference to the body is a required step for the Humean account of personal identity to be determined as coherent.

7 Summary of Hume and his Critics

In summary at this point then: Hume has attempted to explain the identity of self or person from an empirical standpoint. He has dismissed the notion of a substantial self, replacing it with the hypothesis that a person is identified by reference to a bundle of perceptions. The commentary from the above critics proposes that if this identification is restricted to mental properties, it incurs insurmountable problems, but many of these appear to be overcome if the body is included in the account.

However, I propose here, that recognition of embodiment as the criteria for conceptual coherence simultaneously throws doubt on the legitimacy of Hume's move of including of the self under the same concept as that of personal identity. In order to elucidate this point, I present from several different sources, a range of traditional definitions of the words *person* and *self*, the aim of which is to highlight the pertinent differences between the two concepts.

8 Definitions

A - Person

The various definitions (both academic and non-academic) below indicate that the traditional meaning accorded to the notion of a *person* is one which relates primarily to *appearance* and *construction*.

For example, *A Dictionary of Philosophy* states that for Locke person was a 'forensic term.' Locke was concerned with the legal implications of a person, and considered the term appropriate for '*intelligent agents capable of a law, and happiness and misery.*'

Kant's definition is presented as having similar overtones in that he is said to claim that '*A Person is the subject whose actions are capable of imputation,*' while Strawson is said to maintain that:

'... person is a logically primitive concept such that both predicates ascribing states of consciousness and predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics are equally applicable to a single individual of that type ...' (Flew, 1979, p265).

The *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* describes a person as '*an individual human or divine being, the latter explained as referring to the three persons of the Godhead, or, 'one's body or bodily presence' or 'character in play'* (p583).

A treatise on the history of the word 'person' was written by Adolf Trendelenburg, published in 1870 (Trendelenburg, 1870, pp336-363). Some of its key points are as follows:

A very early definition is presented from the works of the Roman, Gellius, written prior to the year AD180:

'By means of a mask covering the head and face on every side, the voice issues, strengthened and reinforced without being scattered or dissipated, through a single opening, and becomes clearer and more melodious. Since then this mask makes the voice resound clearly it is called persona for that reason, the letter 'o' being lengthened on account of the form of the substantive ...' (1870, p339).

The interpretation of the Greek persona, is given as:

'... a mask held before the face to indicate the role assumed ...' (1870, p338).

Early translations of the Bible show emphasis in Latin versions was on the legal aspect of a person, but in Greek, it was on the mask, such as when referring to racial or other appearance features (1870, p343). These two meanings are shown to predominate pre-modern history. Also mentioned is the fact that slaves were considered persons at some times, but not at others.

In referring to the psychological aspect of person, Trendelenburg says:

'This concept represents the power of man to be conscious himself of his identity in the various states of his existence ...' (1870, p357).

Leibniz and Wolff are presented as being concerned with self-consciousness and recollection, particularly insofar as it separated persons from animals. In his final word on the subject, Trendelenburg notes:

'We can see from the word "personality" and its parallel "individuality", which also has its history, that they have not developed among the masses. But such words coined by science have great value for the commonalty if they become current and are true to their significant content, for they may become standards in public judgment and even volitional impulses. Consequently, it is the duty of writers not to wear down and dull the definition ...' (1870, pp358-359).

If one is to recognise the conventions applicable to the word person, it would appear from the definitions presented above, that to consider an individual from the aspect of personhood is to consider them from the point of view of *appearance, empirically definable characteristics, attribution of qualities* and so forth, and thus necessarily from an **embodied** perspective. It could be claimed that, traditionally, to refer to someone as a person is to recognise facts about them as an *embodied individual*.

There is a strong parallel between this understanding, and the conclusions arrived at earlier regarding the coherence of Hume's thesis regarding personal identity. There is no apparent disagreement between traditional understandings of personhood, and Hume's notion in his account of personal identity.

In other words, to talk of a coherent interpretation of Humean personal identity is to embrace traditional concepts of personhood. I now submit some traditional understandings of the self.

B - Self

A range of definitions attributable to self are presented in order to consider the scope of possible meanings.

A Dictionary of Philosophy defines 'self' amongst other things as 'an obsolescent technical term for a person, but a person thought of as incorporeal and essentially conscious. Sometimes the self is simply identified with Plato's concept of "soul" (Flew, 1979, p323).

The same work claims that Descartes presents a substance theory of the self, whereas Hume gives a serial account. A second definition states that it is a synonym for 'ego.'

The *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* defines 'self' as 'person's or thing's own individuality or essence; one's own nature or state or interests or pleasure (p734).

The *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* says of the self:

'The term 'self' is often used interchangeable with person, though usually with more emphasis on the 'inner', or psychological, dimension of personality than on outward bodily form. Thus a self is conceived to be a subject of consciousness, a being capable of thought and experience and able to engage in deliberative action. More crucially, a self must have a capacity for self-consciousness, which partly explains the aptness of the term 'self'. Thus a self is a being that is able to entertain first-person thoughts Philosophers like Hume, who regarded the self as 'nothing but a bundle of different perceptions', effectively treat the self as belonging to the category of modes.' (p816-817).

A problem with the Humean approach is that perceptions - that is, thoughts and experiences,- seem to depend for their identity upon the identity of the selves who possess them, which implies that perceptions are modes of selves and hence that the latter have the status of substances, vis-a-vis their thoughts and experiences, rather than being reducible to them (Honderich, 1995, p817).

The foregoing definitions of self indicate that 'self' refers to the inner, psychological, reflective, first-person dimensions of an individual. It is not primarily a term that deals with appearance or characteristics such as might be defined by one person of another. There does not, in fact, appear to be any common thread between the definition, understanding, or concept of selfhood and personhood which makes them candidates for a unified understanding, or singular interpretation, as given by Hume.

We might question at this point, what has gone wrong with Hume's account? Why has he engaged in what seems to be an obvious mistake in his analysis? For some insight into the reasoning behind his conflation of concepts of self and personal identity, I refer to the chapter in the *Treatise* which appears immediately prior to that entitled *Of personal Identity*, namely that entitled: *Of the Immateriality of the Soul*.

9 Hume on Immaterial Substance

Hume's findings regarding substance inform his approach to the self. Hume discusses immaterial substance from a number of different aspects, but I will refer to only a few of his points. Hume's concern is with 'substance and inhesion,' in particular with what 'other philosophers' mean by it (1888, p232). He queries how we can have an idea of substance without first having a corresponding impression. He claims that an impression of substance would have to resemble the substance which causes it, but could not do so because the nature of impressions is such that they could not possess 'the peculiar qualities of characteristics of substance' (1888, p233).

It is not sufficient to dismiss the problems of impressions and ideas, with the simple definition that substance has independent existence, since for Hume, this could be said of anything, even perceptions. But, because perceptions and substance really are different things, we do not have an idea of substance. So, on the basis that we cannot understand or describe how perceptions and substance could relate, Hume draws the conclusion that the question of substance itself is meaningless.

His further investigation into the traditional arguments, such the relationship between substance and attributes, draws the same conclusion, but he is not prepared to go so far as to say categorically that it does not exist (1888, pp 232-251). In order to notice the two aspects to Hume's reasoning, I have separated his argument into two parts:

Part 1:

*We know about things from ideas in our minds
Our ideas are based on impressions
Impressions are based on sensations
We don't have ideas about substance
So we have no impressions of substance
Therefore questions about substance are meaningless.*

Part 2, as presented on pp 232-233

*Every idea is derived from a precedent impression
If we had any idea of substance in our minds, we must also have an impression of it
Impressions of substance must resemble substance
How can an impression resemble substance if an impression does not have the 'peculiar qualities or characteristics' of substance?
(Implied) We logically cannot have an impression of substance.*

Putting the two lines of reasoning together gives the following picture: On the one hand, because we do not have impressions, and hence Humean ideas of substance, substance becomes a meaningless notion, but on the other hand, substance is presented as something about which we could not have such ideas and impressions.

The problem at this stage seems to be this: On Hume's scheme we clearly cannot make any knowledge claims with regard to substance, in particular immaterial substance here, but, neither can we dismiss it, there is not the means of making any pronouncements either one way or the other. It is this inconclusive stance on substance which is inherited by Hume's discussion of the self and personal identity.

Because he has dismissed substance as a meaningless concept, Hume is unable to address the possibility of a substantial self. The subsequent restricted scope for analysis confronting Hume leads to his step of attempting to reduce the concept of the *self* to that of *personal identity*.

At this point then, according to Hume's theory, a person or self is identifiable by means of their perceptions. This endeavour is fraught with insoluble paradoxes unless the body is included in the account, along with other objects and other persons, and a person is understood as being a non-solitary, social creature. Such concept of personhood as an embodied human individual is compatible with the traditional understandings given earlier of the meaning of person or personhood. As was also shown, those meanings are not synonymous with those of the self, which in contrast, refer to the interior dimension of an individual. However, the route to Hume's Bundle Theory was by means of his rejection of immaterial substance, because it could only be interpreted as being meaningless. Its flaw was that it could not be accommodated within Hume's empiricist scheme.

Basing his investigation of the self on his rejection of immaterial substance resulted in Hume's incorporation of the concept of 'self' with that of 'person' when considering personal identity. It has been shown (above) that the traditional concepts of 'self' are not equivalent to those of 'person,' but, because of the limitations of empiricism, Hume has swept the two together under a single banner. Hume has conflated two radically different concepts. To analyse a human individual from the perspective of them as an embodied social creature, indirectly apprehended, is quite different from considering them from the directly apprehended inner, psychological view-point.

If I, like Hume's philosophers, introspect, aside from whether or not I am 'intimately conscious of what we call our SELF' (Hume, 1888, p251), my awareness from an interior perspective is not captured by any description of personal identity. What, for example, of when my thoughts and reflections are totally introverted and cannot be encapsulated by the symbols and descriptions attributable to personal identity, if I am then no longer a person, am I consequently no longer a self?

Hume acknowledged the inadequacy of his account of ideas to explain personal identity and the construction of self. The deficiencies caused him to refer to his entrapment in the labyrinth. I have presented a detailed account and critique of Hume's method of investigation, and suggested that the cause of its deficiencies is that Hume is attempting too much. He is trying to explain the intricacies of one concept by means of another, and of course, it does not work. Investigation has shown the *Bundle Theory* of the self to be the basis for Hume's thesis on personal identity.

But it might be now asked, if the *Bundle Theory* of explanation was an option taken because other options could not be addressed, is it a suitable theory to use for making pronouncements about the self? When we identify the personhood of an individual, are we considering the same issues as when we attempt to identify the self? In fact, can we even talk of identifying 'self'?

This step seems to be a category mistake, and further, if empiricism is unable to answer questions concerning the epistemological or ontological possibilities of either substance or the self, what is? Finally, unless we are aware of the confluence which has occurred, we are in danger of forgetting that questions about the issue of self remain unresolved. A brief consideration will now be given to some ideas from Thomas Reid, with a view to providing some answers to these questions, and perhaps negotiating a way out of Hume's labyrinth.

10 Reid

One of Hume's contemporaries, Reid, was critical of the 'Theory of Ideas,' which he attributes to Descartes, and which he sees as inevitably leading to the sceptical 'Ideal System' inherited by Locke, Berkeley and Hume (Reid, 1803, p 100). He claims that it led Berkeley to dismiss the material world (1803, p101), and Hume to dismiss the spiritual. What is missing in their theories is the presence of reason and common sense. Without going into his theory too deeply, one thing worth noticing is his reference to language and philosophy. Reid seems to be aware of the way in which language shapes and limits the range of philosophical insight:

'The language of philosophers, with regard to the original faculties of the mind, is so adapted to the prevailing system, that it cannot fit any other; like a coat that fits the man for whom it was made, and shews him to advantage, which yet will sit very awkward upon one of a different make, although perhaps as handsome and well proportioned.

It is hardly possible to make any innovation in our philosophy concerning the mind and its operations, without using new words and phrases, or giving a different meaning to those that are received - a liberty which, even when necessary, creates prejudice and misconstruction, and which must wait the sanction of time to authorize it; for innovations in language, like those in religion and government, are always suspected and disliked by the many, till use hath made them familiar, and prescription hath given them title ...' (1803, p 99).

The point that Reid is making is relevant here. What we can intelligibly talk about requires concepts under which it can be understood, or we are in danger of being accused of garbling. From a philosophical point of view, if there are no paradigms under which concepts can be discussed, we may well do, as Hume did, dismiss them as meaningless.

However, before we do so, we could place them in the realm of the transcendental, as did Kant. In the first of the *Paralogisms of Pure Reason* (Kemp-Smith, 1929, pp 330-332), Kant notes the dilemma regarding an understanding of self. He makes the point that we are not entitled to take for granted that the subjective 'I' is a substance:

'Since the proposition 'I think' (taken problematically) contains the form of each and every judgment of the understanding and accompanies all categories as their vehicle, it is evident that the inferences from it admit only of a transcendental employment of the understanding.

To go beyond the 'I think' then, is not necessarily a case for rejection as meaningless, but is a case for recognition that the coat does not fit, and needs replacing with one of a different kind. In the case at hand, Hume's Bundle Theory could be seen as an inappropriate response to questions concerning the self, as it was realised by default, that is, because his approach to self and substance was otherwise irresolvable.'

11 Conclusion

It seems then, that to relate what we mean is more than putting propositions into words. According to Reid, we are bound up in a prevailing system of language and interpretation. In the very act of thinking and talking, we enter the realm of concepts, which shape the boundaries of what we can mean and say. In Hume's case, his use of the bundle theory to jointly explain our construction of personal identity and self inherited its restrictions from Hume's 'prevailing system,' and proved inadequate to address questions which could not be empirically verified.

His attempts to discover a self yielded a person instead, and left the problem of self unresolved. However, the last word is reserved for Hume, who, in spite of his self-imposed limitations, may have been aware that his vision might have reached further, as he intimates in his *Introduction* to the *Treatise*:

'For if truth be at all within the reach of human capacity, 'tis certain it must lie very deep and abstruse; . . . 'Tis impossible to tell what changes and improvements we might make in these sciences were we thoroughly acquainted with the extent and force of human understanding, and cou'd explain the nature of the ideas we employ, and of the operations we perform in our reasonings.

And these improvements are the more to be hoped for in natural religion, as it is not content with instructing us in the nature of superior powers, but carries its views farther, to their disposition towards us, and our duties towards them; and consequently we ourselves are not only the beings, that reason, but also one of the objects, concerning which we reason ...' (1888, pp xviii-xix).

In conclusion, the limitations of Hume's epistemology caused him to dismiss as meaningless that which he could not address, but if the various analyses here presented have succeeded in showing that Hume did not succeed in reducing the question of self to that of personal identity, perhaps they also show that the old coat is 'very awkward' and should be replaced with a new one.

12 References

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(challenged by Stroud, who claims that Hume sees memory as actually being part of the bundle:
To remember is for certain kinds of perceptions to occur in the mind, so remembering actually contributes to the bundle of perception ...)

Conference Proceedings

Glenn Rutter

I wish to thank Dr John Colman, Dr. Edgar Sleinis, & Prof Garfield for their helpful and critical commentary on this paper.

At the time of writing this paper Pauline was engaged in the initial phase of research for a PhD at the University of Tasmania, Australia. It should be noted that the paper represents an early stage in identifying some of the problems of 'personal identity' and will not feature in this form in the completed thesis.

