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# The Self of Book 1 and the Selves of Book 2

*Terence Penelhum*

One of the more familiar problems of interpretation in Hume's *Treatise* is that of reducing the sense of shock that arises from the apparent differences between what he says about the self in book 1 and what he says about it in book 2. One way in which scholars have attempted to reduce it is to take him very seriously when he distinguishes, in the book 1 discussion, "betwixt personal identity, as it regards our thought or imagination, and as it regards our passions or the concern we take in ourselves."<sup>1</sup> If one does this, it becomes possible to see that what might seem to be inconsistent positions are compatible, and merely represent complementary aspects of an extended account of how human beings represent their natures and identities to themselves in thought and feeling and choice.

This, at least, is now widely believed. The belief has led to very illuminating accounts of Hume's analysis of the emotional life and its relationship to his more famous theories in epistemology.<sup>2</sup> In spite of these, I think there is an egregious gap in Hume's psychology which we should not be tempted to suppose he has filled. Unless I have misread them, two recent authors have yielded to this very temptation.

## I

Since I have said Hume's psychology has an important gap in it, I should begin by making clear what the gap is, and emphasize that I do not think I have uncovered an *inconsistency* in Hume's theories of the self. He has, of course, been accused of such inconsistencies.<sup>3</sup> His account in book 1 has itself been said to be inconsistent because he ascribes to the self there a tendency to confuse invariance and succession in telling us how we come to generate the fiction of continuing identity; such a story seems to ascribe a continuing reality to the mind in the very process of showing how the belief in it can come to exist when there are only successive perceptions to constitute it. This is a special application of a wider charge sometimes levelled against him, that although his associationism appears to reduce all explanation to relationships between perceptions, he is bound to depart from this restriction in ascribing tendencies and mistakes to the mind. Given the nature of the belief he is explaining when he discusses self-identity, the special application is troubling.<sup>4</sup> He has also been accused of

inconsistency in assuming at the outset of his discussion of the indirect passions in book 2 that we have an idea, or even an impression, of the self, when in book 1 he has appeared to deny this.

Many have argued (and I have been among them) that Hume can be acquitted of these charges. Mercer, for example, has made short work of the last one.<sup>5</sup> When Hume introduces the self in book 2, he says clearly that he is referring to "self, or that succession of related ideas and impressions, of which we have an intimate memory and consciousness" (T 277), not to the idea of the pure ego constructed by rationalist philosophers. The charge of confusion in the argument of *Treatise* 1.4.6 has been rebutted by several writers, beginning with Nelson Pike.<sup>6</sup> In the briefest summary: since the mind is nothing but a series of perceptions, Hume's question in book 1 is not a question about how it is that a mind he tacitly assumes to be more than this comes to think it *is* more than this, but a question about how the series that the mind actually is, comes to include within it from time to time perceptions of the series that represent it as having an identity that it (strictly) lacks. The actual relationship of the mind to its perceptions is one of inclusion, and Hume's puzzle is how certain perceptions of the mind come to be *in* the mind. This reading of Hume may well leave him with some unattractive problems, but it does not convict him of contradicting himself.

If something like this is accepted, we can see Hume in book 1 as combining scepticism about philosophical defences of a natural belief with the assumption of an obligation to give an account of how our nature generates the belief. The belief is one which he, as a human being, holds himself, and one which he regards as a "vain" philosophical exercise to question. He can therefore consistently leave it unquestioned throughout, and perhaps must do so. Instead of a neo-Cartesian attempt at justification, Hume offers us here, as he does in the case of our belief in outer objects and in natural necessities, an account of the belief's origin that gives it what we may call psychological intelligibility.

But the shock of transition from book 1 to books 2 and 3 does not go away when these considerations are recognized. In the latter two books, Hume deals with the whole range of human motives and feelings, and with the basic requirements of social life and morality. To do this, he has to draw on a far wider range of beliefs than those he considers in book 1. By the time we reach book 3, we find a Hume who is no longer examining how individuals confined to their perceptions<sup>7</sup> form the view of a world of causally-related objects and a unified mind in spite of this limitation, but a Hume who is examining the effects on individual conduct and choice of social convention, property rights, and promise-making. We have moved, as Nicholas Capaldi puts it, from

someone who starts from an "I think" (or Cartesian) perspective to someone who holds a "We do" (or social constructivist) perspective.<sup>8</sup> Many problems of Hume interpretation come from the fact that Hume has both of these perspectives; the link between them is Hume's science of man, which shows us how instinct saves us from the immobility that the "I think" perspective would impose on us if we were primarily rational beings as Descartes and his followers maintained. Instinct supplies us with the beliefs we have to have in order to think and act as members of society.

The science of man, to provide this link, has to begin as individual psychology, and can only develop gradually into the more clearly social science that we find in book 3 and again in the second *Enquiry*. It is natural to suppose, ever since Kemp Smith and Árdal,<sup>9</sup> that the place to look for the key linkages that hold the whole system together is book 2. Indeed it is.<sup>10</sup> But I want to suggest we need to be careful not to overestimate what we can find there.

## II

I referred earlier to the distinction Hume makes in *Treatise* 1.4.6 between personal identity "as it regards our thought or imagination," and personal identity "as it regards our passions or the concern we take in ourselves" (T 253). The context of this remark makes it clear that he is only to concern himself with the former ("The first is our present subject"), and that what he says later about the self and the passions will at most contribute incidentally to the understanding of how we come to attribute identity to the mind. He does mention it once more in section 6, when he tells us that "our identity with regard to the passions serves to corroborate that with regard to the imagination, by the making our distant perceptions influence each other, and by giving us a present concern for our past or future pains or pleasures" (T 261): that is, the life of the passions creates relationships among the perceptions that compose our inner life that reinforce our tendency to view them as part of one life.<sup>11</sup> But the key word in this sentence is "corroborate." The psychological work of establishing the belief in self-identity is primarily the work of the understanding and imagination, and the life of the passions only reinforces it.

In earlier work I have argued that although Hume offers us an account of how we come to believe in the unity of the self, he does not ever seem to address the question of how we come to believe in the reality of the distinction between oneself and others—what I referred to as the problem of individuation, as distinct from that of unity.<sup>12</sup> Hence, although Hume can be acquitted of inconsistency in his psychological account of how we come to believe in the unity of the self, there is still a large gap in his system: he tells us nothing about how

we come to have the essential distinction between the self whose unity (or rather the belief in whose unity) he does explain, and the existence of other selves with whom we have to do. This, again, does not show any inconsistency between books 1 and 2, but it does leave without explanation the acquisition of a fundamental distinction that is required for the emotional life he tells us about in the latter. I suggested one might speculatively construct some such account by combining what he says about our belief in external objects with what he says about the self's unity; but this would indeed be speculative construction, and it is not done for us by Hume himself.

I still think this is true. But a contrary view appears to be suggested by some comments of Capaldi, and Robert S. Henderson has explicitly claimed that Hume answers the problem of other selves in his account of the indirect passions.<sup>13</sup> I would like to look at how Hume does in fact make use of the idea of the self there, to see if perhaps there is any case for thinking that his earlier remark about distinguishing the two aspects of the idea of the self should be read in a way different from that I have accorded it here. Is there a case for thinking that Hume believes that the mechanisms that generate the passions explain how we come to recognize that we belong to a community of perceivers and agents?

### III

Hume says a great deal about the role played by the idea of the self in the mechanism that generates pride, humility, love and hatred. Self is said to be the *object* of the first two of these passions. Hume distinguishes carefully between the object of a passion and its cause. The cause, he says (T 278) is that which excites the passion, and the object is that to which the passions direct their view, when excited. He introduces this by saying that the self cannot be their cause "or be sufficient *alone* to excite them" (emphasis added). I think his phrasing here shows it to be a mistake to think that the idea of the self is not itself a condition (or cause) of pride or humility; it merely shows it cannot be the only condition, and that something else (what we may call the exciting cause) is needed also. But if we pursue the cause-object distinction in the text, it seems to suggest more.

For example:

The first idea, that is presented to the mind, is that of the cause or productive principle. This excites the passion, connected with it; and that passion, when excited, turns our view to another idea, which is that of self. Here then is a passion plac'd betwixt two ideas, of which the one produces it, and the other

is produc'd by it. The first idea, therefore, represents the *cause*, the second the *object* of the passion. (T 278)

This seems to say something strange: that the idea of the self is the *product* of the passion. (And it seems to do so in language that implies that the idea of another would be the product of the passion of love or hatred.)

Again, in *Treatise* 2.1.5, where Hume gives us the mechanics of pride in some detail, he describes the following sequence: (i) a perceived quality of a thing or person, or the thought of it; (ii) a pleasant sensation; (iii) the similarly agreeable impression of pride (via the association of impressions); and (iv) the idea of oneself, as the object of pride. This also seems to say clearly that the object of pride is something the passion produces.

But let us now look at another passage, where Hume explains the difference between pride and joy:

In order to excite pride, there are always two objects we must contemplate, *viz.* the *cause* or that object which produces pleasure; and self, which is the real object of the passion. But joy has only one [*sic*] object necessary to its production, *viz.* that which gives pleasure. (T 292)

This suggests a different relationship between the idea of the self and the passion, a relationship in which the contemplation of the self is something that helps to produce pride, and is not produced by it. How could we need to "contemplate" the self in order to feel pride if the idea of the self is something the pride produces?

There is an obvious reply to this difficulty. Both Hume's statements are true. When I feel proud, the emotion does indeed turn my thoughts to myself. And it does that because I am aware that what has made me feel proud is some quality or object that is connected with myself. I feel proud when I am struck by the beauty of *my* house, or am pleased by the charm or success of *my* daughter.

Yes. But the problem is that the two facts, both obvious, have to be accommodated into one sequential account, couched in the language of Hume's associationism. Perhaps this could have been done better if Hume had said something which he clearly implies and which looks true, namely that the object of pride is, after all, also one of its causes, and insert the appearance of the idea of the self *both* before *and* after that of the impression of pride. But the complexity and artificiality of this would have been very great, and it is not surprising that Hume has not done it.

Hume has to presuppose that someone who feels pride already knows that the phenomenon that generates it is something related to him or her self, as well as that he or she is turned toward a contemplation of the self by the stimulus of that phenomenon. As the statement at T 292 indicates, he is fully aware of this, even though he does not insert the fact as an item in the sequence (between [i] and [ii]?). But this shows that we have to read the account he does give in a way that makes it clear that although the idea of the self is “produced” by pride in the sense that it is *called up* by it, it has in every instance to be an idea that we have and use already. It needs to be *in our repertoire*. There is no way in which the mechanism of pride and humility could be the *origin* of our consciousness of the distinction between ourselves and others; for it requires us already to have that consciousness.

#### IV

I do not think that *Hume* makes any suggestion that he is accounting in these passages for the fact that we have the self-other distinction. He does, certainly, say (at T 280 and again at T 286) that the connection between pride and humility and the self is natural and original, but he seems merely to be telling us in these places that it is an ultimate fact that pride and humility direct our attention to the self (a fact that many would now be inclined to explain as a logical truth). He is not, as far as I can tell, saying that the presence of the idea of the self and others in our repertoire is an ultimate fact in the same way; and given his views about the origin of ideas in book 1, we might expect him to entertain some theory about this, since he is so forthcoming about other aspects of the idea of the self there. So I think that he merely holds it to be natural and original that pride calls up the idea of the self, not that the associative mechanism of pride is the origin of that idea’s existence in our minds.

Whether or not Hume’s treatment of the self in book 2 is compatible with what he says about it in book 1 (and I think it is), I see no reason for supposing that what he says about its role in the mechanism of the indirect passions is, or is intended to be, an explanation of how we *get* the idea of the self as distinct from others—of how we individuate. We have to be able to do this in order to feel pride or humility or love or hatred. These passions do not, either in fact or in Hume’s theory, create this capacity retroactively.<sup>14</sup>

I have not shown some hitherto unnoticed weakness in the argument of book 2. I have merely sought to show that that argument does not have a recently-suggested strength. There are indeed many respects in which it does build vital bridges between the epistemological quandaries of book 1 and the social theories of book 3. But it does not contain any answer to the psychological question of how

we come to recognize that our own perceptions are indeed our own only, and that there are a large number of other selves, too. It presupposes, from the outset, that we already know (or believe) this, and can make our discriminations accordingly.

In the course of his difficult but important discussion of the idea of the self in the *Treatise*, Capaldi makes the point that the idea of the self is not a simple idea but a complex one, because it represents a succession of related ideas and impressions, and is therefore not one which Hume denies we have when denying the reality of the idea of the pure ego. He then says there are two questions to consider with regard to the real-but-complex idea of the self, namely, how is the idea acquired? And what are the relationships among the impressions and ideas that compose the self? This is followed by the statement that “the answer to the first question is that the complex idea of the self emerges originally in action as the object of the indirect passions of pride and humility.” In a note he adds, “It is through others that we come to learn about ourselves.”<sup>15</sup> I do not deny either of these claims, or their importance. But although the idea of the self may *emerge* when Capaldi says it does, and although the ways we think of ourselves and take concern for ourselves are indeed largely formed through our interaction with others and our sympathetic resonance with their emotional lives, it does not seem to me that, even if we confine ourselves strictly to Hume’s own account of these matters, we can see, in either of these important facts, an explanation of how we come to discriminate between ourselves and others. Hume has given us no direct account of this, and therefore has not answered Capaldi’s first question.

## V

There are other important aspects of Hume’s comments on the nature of the self in books 2 and 3 that I must emphasize I am not denying, or even criticizing. Annette Baier<sup>16</sup> rightly stresses the importance of his remark that our minds are “mirrors to one another” (T 365), and makes clear in her comments on it how many profound dimensions there are to Hume’s conviction that only social life can cure the solipsistic sceptical melancholy of book 1. I would like to acknowledge and use this interpretive insight. The mechanism of sympathy is commonly treated by commentators as a way of accounting for my concern for others. This of course is true; but when Hume first introduces it in *Treatise* 2.1.11, he uses it as a “secondary” cause of the self-regarding passions of pride and humility. They emerge in part through the opinions of others. *I* share, through sympathy, in the admiration of *me* expressed by others. My pride in my own achievements is, at least secondarily, the doing of others (if “doing” is the word) as well as my own.<sup>17</sup> So the story of pride and humility, thus augmented by the

sympathetic mechanism, is an account of how our *concern* for ourselves is fed by our awareness of others and their passions. This story is naturally embellished when one attends to the fact that one is loved (that is, in Hume, admired and praised) *for* those qualities that Hume calls the causes of the passions others direct toward me as their object: I will ascribe to myself those qualities for which others admire (or despise) me.<sup>18</sup> Hence they create, partly or even wholly, aspects of the self that is the object of my concern. They are the sources of my own self-image. The self ("as it concerns the passions") is a social construction.

The self thus constructed will be physical and visible, as Baier points out.<sup>19</sup> It will often not come to have pride or humility in its qualities, until after others claim to perceive them and praise them or condemn their absence. It may not even *possess* them before then. I may, for example, simulate and cultivate a quality that others would praise in order to preclude their blaming me for not having it; I may, that is, internalize a social demand that reaches me through the praises and censures of other people. This is one account Hume gives of the origin of our sense of duty (T 479), thereby making conscience an artificial social product, and bringing the psychology of book 2 to the service of the ethics of book 3. So the concern we take in ourselves will affect the self's nature, and be the source of beliefs we have about it.<sup>20</sup>

## VI

Hume's arguments on the self have been severely criticized, and it is important, when considering the limited questions of interpretation I have raised here, that many of the criticisms raised against him be put aside. It may well be, for example, that the question about the unity of the mind which he raises in book 1 cannot be answered satisfactorily if one does not simultaneously answer the question of how it is that we can distinguish one person from another.<sup>21</sup> It may well be, further, that even though Hume is not inconsistent in his account of how a self that consists only of perceptions comes to think it is more, his account is radically defective in some other way—for example, in his explicit assumption that it is intelligible to suppose there could be perceptions that no one has.<sup>22</sup> A critic of Hume's philosophy may wonder whether his accounts of the origins of the natural beliefs, and of the function of our instinctual nature in the emotional life, provide adequately for our need to criticize and evaluate beliefs and emotions.<sup>23</sup> These are questions on which this paper has not touched. I have been trying to discern what limits there are to the enterprise of mining Hume's theory of the passions to reconstruct what his theory of the self is. And it seems clear to me that at some level that very theory depends repeatedly and fundamentally upon the subject's recognizing himself or herself as one

subject among others, each of whom has a private mental life, too; and that although, given that recognition, the theory of the passions tells us many profound things about how each of us comes to form a self-image through interaction with others, it cannot itself be the source of that recognition. And Hume has not included, in his account of human nature, any other explanation of where that recognition comes from.

It may be an easy matter to write this story, though I suspect there will be a number of versions of it if we try. It seems certain, however, that they will all be sympathetic reconstructions; for Hume himself has not supplied it.

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1. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2d ed., rev., ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1987), 253 (hereafter cited as "T").
2. The original version of this essay was read to the Canberra congress of the Hume society on July 1, 1990. At the same meeting, a number of Hume scholars presented important work on the role of the idea of the self in Hume's analysis of the passions. I think particularly of the presentations by Annette Baier (since published in *A Progress of Sentiments* [Harvard, 1991], chap. 6), Pauline Chazan ("Pride, Virtue and Selfhood: A Reconstruction of Hume," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 22 [1992]: 45-64), Genevieve Lloyd ("Hume's Labyrinth and the Painting of Modern Life"), and Jacqueline Taylor ("Sympathy, Self and Others"). Each is an exemplary instance of the value of taking Hume's distinction seriously. I am not publishing this essay because of any disagreement with their arguments, but because I do not feel that the insights they correctly claim to find in Hume fill the gap in his system to which I am drawing attention.
3. See, for example, J. A. Passmore, *Hume's Intentions* (Cambridge, 1952), 82-83; and D. G. C. MacNabb, *David Hume* (London, 1951), 251.
4. On this wider question see Robert Paul Wolff, "Hume's Theory of Mental Activity," in *Hume*, ed. V. C. Chappell (New York, 1966), 99-128; and Fred Wilson, "Hume's Theory of Mental Activity," in *McGill Hume Studies*, ed. D. F. Norton, N. Capaldi, and W. Robison (San Diego, 1979), 101-20.
5. Philip Mercer, *Sympathy and Ethics* (Oxford, 1972), 27-30.
6. Nelson Pike, "Hume's Bundle Theory of the Self: A Limited Defense," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 4 (1967): 159-65. See

- also Jane L. McIntyre, "Is Hume's Self Consistent?" in *McGill Hume Studies* (above, n. 4), 79-88.
7. See *Treatise* 1.2.6.
  8. Nicholas Capaldi, *Hume's Place in Moral Philosophy* (New York, 1989).
  9. Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (London, 1966); Páll S. Árdal, *Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise* (Edinburgh, 1966).
  10. See Baier (above, n. 2), *passim*.
  11. See on this theme Jane L. McIntyre, "Personal Identity and the Passions," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27 (1989): 545-57.
  12. Terence Penelhum, "Hume's Theory of the Self Revisited," *Dialogue* 14 (1975): 389-409; also "Self-Identity and Self-Regard," in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amélie Rorty (California, 1976), 253-80; and "The Self in Hume's Philosophy," in *David Hume: Many-Sided Genius*, ed. K. Merrill and R. Strachan (Oklahoma, 1976), 9-24.
  13. Robert S. Henderson, "David Hume on Personal Identity and the Indirect Passions," *Hume Studies* 16, no. 1 (April 1990): 33-44. The claim in question is made on p. 42. On Capaldi, see below.
  14. I take it to be self-evident that the passions of pride and humility require not merely the idea of the self itself, but the idea of the self as distinct from others. Hume, of course, assumes this when he tells us how in sympathy our pride is augmented by the attitudes others have toward us.
  15. Capaldi, *Hume's Place in Moral Philosophy* (above, n. 8), 170, 347 n. 40.
  16. Baier (above, n. 2), 136.
  17. This seems to imply that phenomenologically love and pride are the same, differing only in their objects.
  18. See Chazan (above, n. 2) for a reconstruction of the processes Hume's theory postulates.
  19. Baier (above, n. 2), 139ff. See T 302, for example.
  20. When we recognize this, questions present themselves that the text will not readily answer for us. For example: does the fact that the constructed self must be ascribed physical qualities to occasion pride or love imply that in Hume's view the passions are the source of our belief that we have physical bodies at all? Such a suggestion would surely stretch the evidence.
  21. I have said this myself. The classic statement of this view in our day is in P. F. Strawson, *Individuals* (London, 1959), chap. 3.
  22. "All these [perceptions] are different, and distinguishable, and separable from each other, and may be separately consider'd, and may exist separately, and have no need of any thing to support

their existence" (T 252). And earlier, "Now as every perception is distinguishable from another, and may be consider'd as separately existent; it evidently follows, that there is no absurdity in separating any particular perception from the mind; that is, in breaking off all its relations, with that connected mass of perceptions, which constitute a thinking being" (T 207).

23. I have wondered this elsewhere (see "Self-Identity and Self-Regard" [above, n. 12]), but see Chazan (above, n. 2) for an intriguing account of how Hume's analysis of pride permits such criticism.