

HUME, THE PROBLEM OF CONTENT, AND THE IDEA OF THE IDENTICAL SELF

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Abstract. After having presented his theory of personal identity in Book I, Part 4, Section 6 of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume famously expressed a cryptic concern about it in the Appendix. This paper engages in the interpretative effort of elucidating the causes and the scope of Hume's retraction of his views on personal identity. I will argue that Hume's dissatisfaction arises from "the problem of content". This problem points to the fact that, in Hume's account of the formation of our idea of the identical self, a necessary requirement for identity ascriptions is not met, and that such a requirement is the presence of the content of the successive perceptions that (according to the associative principles that he had presented throughout the *Treatise*) bring about the idea of identity.

Hume had applied such an identity-ascription method to external objects, noting that relations of resemblance and causation between our successive perceptions of objects give rise to our idea of their identity. In the case of the idea of the self, however, Hume's explanation does not work because he applies that same identity-ascription method to perceptions that do not share the same content, neither between them nor with the resulting idea. The different perceptions that, because of their rapid succession, make the imagination create the idea of the self, are not perceptions *of* selves. I will argue that the inadequacy of this analogy is Hume's source of discontent: how is a succession of ordinary perceptions of all sorts of other objects supposed to bring about the idea of an identical self? I have called this "Hume's gap". When putting forward a reading of Hume's concerns in the Appendix, it's worth keeping in mind that any interpretation must regard what *could* have worried Hume, and not what *should* have worried him.¹ I will show how my reading along the lines of a problem of content is faithful to the texts as well as context-sensitive.

Keywords: David Hume, personal identity, resemblance, causation

Introduction

After having presented his theory of personal identity in Book I, Part 4, Section 6 of *A Treatise of Human Nature*², Hume famously expressed a cryptic concern

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about it in the Appendix. This paper engages in the interpretative effort of elucidating the causes and the scope of Hume's alleged retraction of his views on personal identity, a retraction that, presumably, made him abandon the issue of personal identity altogether. This means that the aim of this paper is, in a way, solving a puzzle. Hume was notoriously ambiguous in stating the reason(s) for his retraction, and he left some clues (some more explicit than others) for understanding the problem and (hopefully) for generating a solution.

The part of the Appendix concerned with personal identity contains positive and negative remarks: aspects of the theory with which Hume is still clearly satisfied, and others that he considers defective. I will begin by examining the statements of the theory with which Hume is still satisfied in order to provide a working account of Hume's theory of personal identity (that is, an account of the theory constituted by the claims unaffected by his own critique). After that, I will focus on the features of the theory that he considers "defective"³ and, through this textual analysis, I will identify a problem in the theory: the inadequacy of the analogies between the identity of objects and the identity of the mind. This is the problem of content⁴ and I believe that it is what concerns Hume in his retraction.

The question of personal identity in Hume, however, needs to be further narrowed down. In Section 6, Hume makes an important distinction between personal identity "as it regards our thought or imagination and as it regards our passions or the concerns we take in ourselves".⁵ The former refers to the account of our belief in the identity of the self, and it is Hume's endeavour in Book I of the *Treatise*, devoted to the nature and scope of human understanding. The latter reflects the practical feature of personal identity, that is, the actual concern (despite any theoretical considerations about the identity of our self) about past and future stages of our life as the life of one and the same self. This is Hume's project in Book II of the *Treatise*, devoted to the passions. Both features are meant to collaborate with each other, just as Book I and II are meant to collaborate in bringing about the complete picture of human nature that Hume is aiming for.⁶ The focus of this paper will be the former, since Hume is explicitly dealing only with Section 6 in the Appendix, and Section 6 (hereafter S6) does not consider the practical feature at any length. The interpretation will account, then, for Hume's second thoughts about the theoretical features of personal identity.

Section 1. A working account of personal identity

The part of the Appendix concerned with personal identity, as well as S6, includes what has been called a positive and a negative phase. It is generally acknowledged that, throughout Book I of the *Treatise*, Hume applies the same pattern of reasoning when analysing some peculiar beliefs that we hold.⁷ These beliefs are peculiar because, even though Hume's Copy Principle states that the origin of every intelligible mental content can be traced back to experience, we nonetheless hold pervasive beliefs that cannot be justified by appealing straightforwardly either to the senses or to reason. Namely, the idea of necessary causal connection, the idea of the continuity and consistency of the external world, and the idea of the identical self.

This pattern of reasoning reflects the core of his empiricism: it begins with a negative phase in which Hume challenges a traditional philosophical view on the basis

of his empiricist principles (roughly, any view grounded on a robust metaphysical concept of substance). It continues with a positive phase in which he proposes an alternative explanation of the formation of the idea in terms of associations of ideas. The argument stems from the Copy Principle, stating that every idea that we have is either a copy from an impression or a composite of other ideas that are copies from impressions⁸. This means that in order to be considered as intelligible, every idea in our mind should be susceptible of being traced back to experience. Throughout the paper, I will call this process “genetic explanation” (meaning the description of the genesis, or origin of an idea in the mind).

Although Hume’s critique allows for quite a broad target, it is at least clearly directed to theories of personal identity in terms of a substance to which the diversity of perceptions belong and inhere in. That is, a *substratum* over and above perceptions that allows for the identity and simplicity of the self despite the changes over time (what in contemporary terms would be called synchronic and diachronic identity respectively). He argues throughout the negative phase that the experience of our mental life is a continued succession of different perceptions, and that there is no corresponding impression with the features that would give rise to such an idea of the self. He claims that, in observing the flux of his perceptions, he never finds the one corresponding to his own self: “For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other (...) I never can catch myself at any time without a perception...”⁹ Consequently, the idea of a simple and identical self is unintelligible. Crucially, these are statements that Hume still explicitly endorses in the Appendix:

When we talk of self or substance, we must have an idea *annex’d* to these terms, otherwise they are altogether unintelligible (...) When I turn my reflection on myself, I never can perceive this self without some one or more perceptions, nor can I ever perceive anything but the perceptions.¹⁰

This line of reasoning leads Hume to a positive phase in his account that takes up most of Section 6, but that is reduced to a single and brief sentence in the Appendix. In accordance with the Copy Principle, the only intelligible idea of the mind is that of a system of different perceptions¹¹ that follow each other in a fast and incessant flux.¹² All we can get acquainted with is a train of numerically distinct perceptions that exist independently from each other. Hume presents a theory of the self as a composite of parts, and, crucially, the parts do not *belong* to the self, but they *constitute* it instead: “They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind...”¹³ The agreement between Section 6 and the Appendix ends here with which is, comparatively, a very brief version of the positive phase: “*Tis* the composition of these [perceptions], therefore, which forms the self”.¹⁴

Following the development of S6, Hume presents the genetic explanation of the idea of the identical self. He faces the following question: if, as guided by experience, we clearly find that none of our perceptions remains invariable and uninterrupted, why do we nonetheless ascribe identity to them and believe that we

exist as the same self for the whole course of our lives? Hume’s objective is to explain our “great propension”¹⁵ to this belief by examining how it is formed in the mind. At this point, the discussion becomes about the concept of identity in general, of which personal identity seems to be just a species. Roughly, in our common way of thinking (*i.e.* not in philosophical reasoning) we operate a confusion between two ideas that are contemplated by the imagination in a very similar manner. One is the idea of identity - the idea of an object that remains invariable and uninterrupted through a period of time, and the other is the idea of diversity - the idea of successive different objects related in several ways.¹⁶

Hume regards such a tendency as intrinsic to the imagination, and while the “metaphysicians” that he attacks might attempt to account for it by fabricating empty entities like substance, his hypothesis involves perceptions united contingently by mechanisms of associations of ideas, namely resemblance and causation¹⁷. Such relations produce the easy passing of the imagination from one perception to another, and it *feels* like contemplating an identical object. There is no evidence of a further connection, presumably in the sense of an ontological or thick connection¹⁸ with which we can be acquainted. Hume calls this “imperfect identity”. It is important to note that we don’t just attribute imperfect identity to anything, but that certain conditions and regularities need to be present

Section 2. Ascribing identity to objects

In order to understand what changes significantly when this identity-ascription pattern is applied to the case of the belief in the identical self (and thus what Hume’s problem is in the Appendix) let’s now reconstruct the core of both arguments.

In T I.4.2 (“Of Scepticism with Regard to the Senses”), Hume is mainly dealing with the genetic explanation of our belief in the continued existence of external objects, which, in his terms, is ultimately equivalent to the question of our belief in the identity of those objects. The question presupposed in both cases is the same: why do we believe that we are presented with the same object despite of the interrupted nature of our perception of it?¹⁹ There, he introduces two notions within the genetic explanation: “constancy” and “coherence”. Both are qualities exhibited by our perceptions. The former is brought about by their resemblance, and the latter by their relations of cause and effect.²⁰ Consider the following example: I see a tree on my garden in the morning, I go to work and when I come back in the afternoon I see what I take to be the *same* tree. According to Hume, I’ve reached this conclusion because of an association of ideas involving resemblance: my perception of the tree in the morning resembles the perception of the tree in the afternoon (let us say that they are approximately the same height, their leaves are of the same green colour, their location in space is the same, *etc.*). In this sense, and given that resemblance makes the transition of the mind among perceptions so smooth, interrupted perceptions are said to be *consistent*.

Hume is aware, however, that sometimes the perceptions involved in our identity ascriptions do not resemble each other.²¹ Consider the same example but with a much longer period of time between the two perceptions, so the appearance of the tree has changed considerably. What is then making me ascribe identity to it?

According to Hume, there is a dependence among distinct perceptions in terms of causes and effects: the perception of the parts of the small plant that I acquired last year exhibits causal relations with the perceptions of the parts of the tree that I'm acquiring now. In this sense, different perceptions are nevertheless said to be *coherent*.

What is crucial in this description of the identity-ascription process in the case of external objects is the close relation that stands between the contents of the distinct perceptions considered (what the distinct perceptions are *of*) and the content of the resulting idea (what the idea of the temporally extended object is *of*²²). Following the previous example, the distinct perceptions considered are perceptions *of* trees, and the resulting idea is an idea *of* a temporally extended tree. I have a perception of a tree at time t_1 , and a distinct perception of a tree at time t_2 . The resemblance between the contents of the two perceptions (again, let's say that the trees are the same height, that they have leaves of the same green colour, that their location in space is the same, *etc.*) makes the passage of the mind so easy that we contemplate them *as if* they had one and the same content. Then, we form the idea of a temporally extended tree that continues to exist as the same tree in virtue of the occurrence of several distinct perceptions of trees associated together by relations of resemblance and causation.²³

In other words, (1) if the perceptions at times t_1 and t_2 were not perceptions *of* trees, the idea of a temporally extended tree would not be formed in the perceiver's mind. And (2) if the perception of a tree occurring at time t_1 did not resemble or cause in some way the perception of a tree occurring at time t_2 , the idea of the temporally extended tree would not be formed in the perceiver's mind. Using Hume's terms in T I.4.2, the attribution of 'imperfect identity' obtains only when the particular perceptions involved exhibit consistence and/or coherence, and that includes as well a further necessary condition for the ascription of identity: at least some of the perceptions involved and the resulting idea must exhibit the same content.

Before going any further, something should be said about the notion of "content" within Hume's philosophy. In the Humean literature, it is relatively commonplace to talk about the "content of perceptions", but this issue is not free of controversy. On one hand, Hume's epistemological principles can lead us to believe that, strictly speaking, only ideas (and not impressions) have representational content, given Hume's *imagistic* conception of such occurrent mental particulars. This seems to be at least partly supported by his characterisation of the difference between impressions and ideas as the difference between "feeling and thinking".²⁴ On the other hand, Hume did not make a clear-cut distinction between impressions and ideas in terms of content. What is more, he tells us at the beginning of the *Treatise* that the difference is one of "degree of force and liveliness".²⁵ According to this, either both or none of them have content. For the purposes of this project, which is to solve a particular interpretative puzzle, I will assume a working notion of representational content that can be read in Hume's descriptions of the relations of resemblance and causation, as well as in his depiction of the Copy Principle (what impressions and their corresponding ideas are *of*). The notion of content needs, certainly, further analysis, and might as well not be consistently presented throughout Hume's system, but it is, I believe, the source of his discontent in the Appendix.

Section 3. The problem of content

Going back to the analysis of identity-ascriptions, we can see that there is a problem in transferring the genetic explanation to the case of personal identity. Clearly, the contents of the particular perceptions involved (what the perceptions that we encounter through inner experience are of) differ from the content of the idea formed in the imagination (what the resulting idea of an identical self is *of*). Through introspection we encounter diverse perceptions that we have acquired through internal or external experience. They are of anything that we *can* experience. For the mind to produce an idea of a temporally extended self, there should be particular perceptions of selves associated through resemblance and causation in the first place. Our self, however, does not fall under this category, and Hume was very eloquent about it both in S6 and in the Appendix.

This is the problem of content in the formation of the idea of the identical self. In transferring his general genetic explanation to S6, Hume overlooks a “gap”²⁶ between the contents of perceptions and the content of the resulting idea of the self. The process has changed considerably: I have a perception of a tree at time t_1 , of a chair at time t_2 and of another tree at time t_3 . Those are the distinct perceptions that, according to Hume, I *can* find through introspection. However, the resulting idea of the process exhibits a content that none of the distinct perceptions had: the resulting idea is not an idea of a temporally extended tree, nor of a temporally extended chair. It’s an idea *of* a temporally extended self. And there’s presumably nothing standing in the relations of resemblance and causation in this case. In a nutshell, a genetic explanation of the idea of the self that parallels the genetic explanation of other non-empirically warranted beliefs²⁷ in the *Treatise* is not possible because a necessary condition for identity ascriptions is not met.

The immediate consequence of Hume’s gap is that, in the absence (or irrelevance) of the principles of association, an idea of the self as a system of perceptions cannot be spelled out explained.²⁸ At the same time, however, Hume believes that such an idea of the self as a system of perceptions is the only possible conclusion arising from his philosophy. I believe, therefore, that Hume sees himself as facing a sort of dilemma insofar as he is not able to account for a notion to which he’s led by his own system. He stands in the middle of the two positions, as he is unable either to withdraw his previous statements or to move forward in his argumentation (towards the positive phase, absent in the Appendix). In what follows, I will argue that this is, precisely, Hume’s worry in the Appendix when he claims that he finds himself “involved in such a labyrinth, that, I must confess, I neither know how to correct my former opinions nor how to render them consistent”.²⁹ In finding himself in such a quandary, he regards scepticism as the only way out: “If this be not a good general reason for scepticism, ’tis at least a sufficient one (if I were not already abundantly *supply’d*) for me to entertain a diffidence and modesty in all my decisions.”³⁰

Section 4. The problem of content in the Appendix

In the last section I will first show how the Appendix provides sufficient evidence for such an interpretation of Hume’s concern. For the sake of clarity, I will begin by dealing with the passages in which Hume shows more explicitly his concern

and I will later address his subtler statements. Such an exposition does not follow the chronological order of appearance of the passages, but I believe that it provides the clearest argumentation. To begin with, he declares that there are two principles within his philosophy that are inconsistent:

Passage 1

In short there are two principles, which I cannot render consistent; nor is it in my power to renounce to either of them, viz. that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences.³¹

First of all – as every commentator acknowledges, it is evident that the two principles are not inconsistent with each other.³² They are, on the contrary, fundamental principles of Hume’s understanding of the nature of perceptions and its association in the imagination as revealed by experience. They are at the core of his philosophy and, most importantly, they are restated as valid in the opening summary of the Appendix: “All perceptions are distinct. They are, therefore, distinguishable, and separable (...) no proposition can be intelligible or consistent with regard to objects, which is not so with regard to perceptions”.³³ Consequently, the only way of making sense of this passage is to suppose that Hume is assuming a third principle or group of principles with which the first two are inconsistent. I believe that an interpretation along the lines of the problem of content is able to spell out successfully this hidden third principle:

(P3) Personal identity ascriptions do not involve perceptions with shared content and therefore associations of ideas (resemblance and causation) do not apply.

Then, according to Hume, (P3) is incompatible with two crude facts about experience to which *he cannot renounce*:

(P1): All our distinct perceptions are distinct existences

This is incompatible with P3 because for such an idea of the self to be formed in the absence of mechanisms of association of ideas, more than distinct perceptions is needed. What is needed is either (a) a distinct perception whose content is self-awareness (which, for Hume, is not a concomitant content of any other mental act, opposite to other empiricists like Locke), or (b) a union, a sort of connection between distinct perceptions that could potentially bring about an idea with different content. Presumably, a thick, ontological connexion that, in uniting the perceptions in a necessary manner, would allow the mind to contemplate them as united in virtue of their *belonging* to the same, single stream. Such a description, however, deals with notions that are problematic for Hume’s empiricism. This leads to (P2).

(P2) The mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences.

This is incompatible with P3 and with a possible amendment of P1. We simply don’t get acquainted with *real* (ontological) connections and, therefore, the gap between the succession of perceptions and the resulting idea is still *there*. Hume’s own principles (that are not for him to renounce, since they are regarded as undeniable facts about experience) are the ones preventing him from explaining the formation of the idea of the identical self, also undeniably possessed by us.

Passage 2

Immediately after claiming that there are two principles that he cannot render consistent, Hume puts forward two potential solutions to the problem that, obviously, he cannot endorse in light of the principles of his philosophy. This adds further evidence to the view that Hume finds himself unable to progress in his argumentation because of his very own principles:

Did our perceptions inhere in something simple and individual, or did the mind perceive some real connexion among them, there *wou'd* be no difficulty in the case³⁴

Crucially, these two solutions parallel the two previous principles and could potentially solve the problem of content. First, if perceptions inhered in something, that is, if there was a simple entity over and above them, that would mean that they are not distinct existences. And if they were not distinct existences, they would be contemplated by the mind as genuinely united and belonging to the same stream. Therefore, the idea of the identical self could be formed. Second, if we could have a notion of a necessary connection other than relations of ideas felt in the imagination, the mind would also contemplate perceptions united in a genuine manner, and could derive from that the idea of the identical self. In both cases, the problem of content would be solved. Note that in this passage Hume is clearly demanding a thick connection between perceptions, a bond that his principles cannot provide. And if he is demanding that, it must be because he thinks that –in spite of himself, his account of personal identity collapses without it. At least, it clearly collapses if the genetic explanation provided is one that parallels the ascription of identity to changing things.

Passage 3

We are now in a position to make sense of one of the most ambiguous passages in the Appendix, in which Hume attempts to explicitly locate the source of his concern. He does that, however, in a vague manner:

But having thus *loosen'd* all our particular perceptions, when I proceed to explain the principle of connexion, which binds them together, and makes us attribute to them a real simplicity and identity; I am sensible, that my account is very defective [...] But all my hopes vanish, when I come to explain the principles, that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness.³⁵

We are told that something has collapsed within the account of the formation of the idea of the identical self in terms of associations of ideas between distinct perceptions. However, the passage is still too ambiguous in that it doesn't analyse the particular feature that is the target of the concern. Now, I believe, we are in a position to make sense of one of the most ambiguous passages in the Appendix.

I believe that the reflection that I singled out above as P3 operates as a tacit assumption throughout the entire Appendix, and that it is what makes Hume's "hopes vanish" in this very passage, when he is trying to explain *what* connects the perceptions. To rephrase Hume's last sentence, he is "hopeless" in explaining why -as a matter of fact- we possess an idea of an identical self (the perceptions are, therefore, somehow connected), but none of the *principles* of connection that his empiricism allows for are able to help in this case. Having *loosened* all perceptions in virtue of his empiricist principles, the problem is the gap between the content of perceptions and the content exhibited by the resulting idea. This is why he claims that he cannot explain the principles that "makes us attribute to them [perceptions] a real simplicity and identity."³⁶ Accordingly, the problem of content is able to deal with this passage as well.

Passages 4 and 5

So far I have examined the passages in which Hume is more explicit about his worries. Nevertheless, the Appendix includes subtler statements that are also important in putting forward a successful interpretation. Consider the following two:

I have not yet been so fortunate as to discover any very considerable mistakes in the reasonings deliver'd in the preceding volumes, except on one article.³⁷

But upon a more strict review of the section concerning *personal identity*, I find myself involv'd in such a labyrinth that, I must confess, I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent.³⁸

I believe that the interpretative requirement that these passages demand is that the problem in question should be confined only to the genetic explanation of the idea of the self in S6. This is a crucial contribution of the problem of content: it provides a local problem within Hume's philosophy. We have seen why Hume is concerned with the ascription of personal identity, and not with the ascription of identity to changing things or with the general role of the associative principles that he proudly presents throughout the *Treatise*. The problem of content arises only when bringing back the principles of association to the genetic explanation of the idea of the self. As far as the content of the relevant perceptions coincides with the content of the resulting idea, the principles of association are operative.

Moreover, I believe that the "labyrinth" to which he appeals in this passage illustrates the situation nicely. Hume does not deny the idea of the self as a composite of perceptions, since he regards it as the only possible conclusion of his philosophical principles. He finds himself in a labyrinth insofar as he is not able to apply his fundamental principles to an idea that is a natural outcome of his philosophy. Behind him, he has a system of philosophy that he considers successful. In front of him, he has an obstacle – the idea of the identical self- that he cannot overcome from within

such a system. Again, I think that the problem of content sheds light into Hume's concern: it only affects the genetic account of S6 and it clearly agrees with the textual evidence of the Appendix.

Concluding remarks

In this paper I have argued for an interpretation of Hume's second thoughts on personal identity along the lines of the problem of content. This problem points to the fact that, in Hume's description of the formation of the idea of the self, a necessary requirement for identity ascriptions is not met. His account of the identity-ascription pattern is supposed to apply in the same way to external objects and to the self: we only get acquainted with distinct perceptions, the imagination associates them through relations of resemblance and causation and ultimately brings about the idea of their identity. The difference is that in the case of objects, the content of the perceptions involved in the succession (what those perceptions are of) is the same as the content exhibited by the resulting idea. This is the necessary requirement for identity ascriptions. In the case of the self, however, the content differs: the perceptions are not of selves. I can only find distinct perceptions through introspection, and the self cannot be one of those.³⁹ This is the puzzle: what stands in the relations of resemblance and causation in this case? How is a succession of ordinary perceptions supposed to bring about the idea of an identical self?

I have described this situation as "Hume's gap" and I have argued that it is the target of his retraction. I have reached this conclusion based on a textual analysis of the Appendix. My strategy has been to spell out the 'third statement' that it is inconsistent with his previous principles and that works as the background assumption in the Appendix: if such a genetic explanation cannot apply to the case of personal identity, and thus resemblance and causation collapse, it seems that a real connection is needed to explain how the idea of the self is brought about. I have shown how this reading essential interpretative requirements: it explains the appeal to inconsistency, it matches with the (undesirable) potential solutions, it is not pervasive to the rest of the Treatise, and it specifies how the 'principles of connection' do not fulfil their role.

Certainly, the fact that Hume was notoriously ambiguous in his retraction perhaps renders the debate as ultimately inconclusive and as a matter of achieving internal consistency. I believe that the interpretation that I have presented along the lines of the problem of content exhibits the highest consistency and constitutes a difficulty that *could have* worried Hume.

References

¹Penelhum, T., *Themes in Hume. The Self, the Will, Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 115.

²For the purposes of this paper, Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* will be the only source referenced among his works. The edition used is Volume I of *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of David Hume*, by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, Oxford University Press, 2011. I will use the following abbreviations: "T" stands for *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

Followed by the Book, Part, Section and paragraph number. ‘T App.’ stands for the Appendix of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, followed by the paragraph number.

³T App. 20.

⁴See for instance, Ellis, J., “The Contents of Hume’s Appendix and the Source of his Despair”, *Hume Studies* 32/2 (2006), 195-232, as well as Patten, S.C., “Hume’s Bundles, Self-Consciousness and Kant”, *Hume Studies*, 2/2 (1976), 59-75.

⁵T I.4.6.5.

⁶“The subjects of the Understanding and Passions make a complete chain of reasoning by themselves...” T, *Advertisement*

⁷See, for instance, Swain, C.G., “Personal Identity and the Skeptical System of Philosophy”, in *The Blackwell Guide to Hume’s Treatise*, ed. S. Traiger (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 134, as well as McIntyre, J.L., “Hume and the Problem of Personal Identity”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, eds. D.F. Norton & J. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Second Edition 2005), 186.

⁸T I.1.1.7.

⁹T I.4.6.3.

¹⁰T App.11,15.

¹¹In what follows I will mainly use the expression ‘system of perceptions’, instead of the most common ‘bundle of perceptions’ when referring to Hume’s theory of personal identity. The choice has been inspired by Allison, H.A., *Custom and Reason in Hume: a Kantian Reading of the First Book of the Treatise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 296. Hume refers to the ‘bundle’ when merely describing what we encounter through introspection. The bundle is an experience, but not a theory. Then, he adds the associative mechanisms of imagination to the experience of the bundle. Most importantly, he explicitly claims that “[T]he true idea of the human mind, is to consider it as a system of different perceptions or different existences, which are *link’d* together by the relation of cause and effect...”, T I.4.6.19.

¹²T I.4.6.4,19.

¹³T I.4.6.4.

¹⁴T App.15 (my clarification).

¹⁵T I.4.6.5.

¹⁶T I.4.6.6.

¹⁷T I.4.6.7.

¹⁸Blackburn, S., “Hume and Thick Connexions”, in *The New Hume Debate*, eds. R. Read & K.A. Richman (London and New York: Routledge, 2000, Revised Edition 2007), 100.

¹⁹T I.4.2.25,32- 34.

²⁰T I.4.2.18.

²¹T I.4.2.19.

²²Ellis, J., (2006):198.

²³Ainslie, D., “Hume’s Reflections on the Identity and Simplicity of the Mind”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, LXII/3 (2001), 557-578.

²⁴T I.1.1.1.

²⁵T I.1.1.1.

²⁶Green, M.J., “The Idea of the Momentary Self and Hume’s Theory of Personal Identity”, *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 7/1 (1999), 103-122.

²⁷Strawson, G., *The Evident Connexion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Strawson makes use of this expression for arguing that Hume is primarily concerned with epistemology when analysing the belief in the identical self. Accordingly, Hume is not putting forward a theory about the nature of the mind (which would include ontological

claims), but rather a theory about what we can know about the mind. That is to say, about the empirically warranted idea of the mind. I am aware of the debate between ‘Old Hume’ and ‘New Hume’ interpretations, but this question is not relevant to the paper. I’ve borrowed Strawson’s expression simply to note an evident objective of Hume’s philosophy, which is to provide a genetic explanation of ideas that are not –at least directly- acquired by experience. I’m not going to discuss, however, whether that is all that Hume aims to do, or whether he is also endorsing a metaphysical position about the mind.

²⁸Patten, S.C., (1976):65.

²⁹T App. 10.

³⁰T App.10.

³¹T App.21.

³²See, for instance, McIntyre, J.L., (1993, 2005), Penelhum, T., (2000), and Strawson, G., (2011).

³³T App.12,14.

³⁴T App.21.

³⁵T App.20.

³⁶T App.20 (my clarification).

³⁷T App.1.

³⁸T App.10.

³⁹T I.4.6.3.