

David Hume's "The Self"



David Kriegsmann

The Self

- The self is defined as the essential qualities that make one person distinct from all others
- Hume cites impressions to be emotions, any physical sensation, and any discernible perception

“For from what impression could [the self] be derived? This question ‘tis impossible to answer without a manifest contradiction and absurdity; and yet ‘tis a question, which must necessarily be answered, if we would have the idea of self pass for clear and intelligible” ~Hume

The Self

- In order for impression to give rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue consistently over time
- Hume also remarks that there are many different sensations that we feel which change over time.
- It would be impossible to feel every emotion consistently throughout life thus it cannot be from these impressions that the idea of self is derived



The Self

- Hume remarks that in reflecting on experiences, we never observe anything beyond impressions

“I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception” ~Hume

- All experience involves impression and there is no moment where impression is absent, so self cannot be achieved



Bundle Theory

- Hume asks us to consider what impression gives us our concept of self. We tend to think of ourselves as stable beings that exist over time
- We cannot observe ourselves as self because there is no impression of self that ties together our impressions over time.



Bundle Theory

- We can never be directly aware of ourselves, only what a being is experiencing at a given moment
- Further removed than Locke's theory
- Thus, since he believes self must be ubiquitous, Hume develops the 'no-theory' theory of self



Concluding The Self

- To conclude with the Bundle theory, Hume says the concept of 'you' as a being is an illusion and that beings just experience different impressions throughout their lifetimes, there is nothing else
- The concept of self does not exist because who we are changes over time
- Each being has no true identity

