

Could Hume Save His Account of Personal Identity? On the Role of Contiguity in the Constitution of Our Idea of Personal Identity¹

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ABSTRACT: Why does my imagination form the idea that I have one diachronic identity? I argue that this is the question which Hume asks himself when he reflects on personal identity in the first book of his *Treatise on Human Nature*. I recite Hume's initial answer to this question, as well as the problem which he, in the *Treatise's* appendix, famously admitted to have with this answer. I demonstrate how Hume could save his account of the formation of our idea of personal identity, if he would refer to insights which he developed elsewhere and then choose not to apply to the case of personal identity, i.e. if he would consider the role of contiguity in the constitution of our idea of personal identity.

KEY WORDS: Bodily continuity, contiguity, Hume, imagination, personal identity, self-consciousness.

1. Introduction

Why does my imagination form the idea that I have one diachronic identity? I will argue that this is the question which Hume asks himself when he reflects on personal identity in the first book of his *Treatise on Human Nature*. Subsequently, I will recite Hume's initial answer to this question, as well as the problem he, in the *Treatise's* appendix, famously admitted

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to have with this answer. I will then explain how Hume could save his account of the formation of our idea of personal identity, if he would refer to insights which he developed elsewhere and then choose not to apply to the case of personal identity; i.e. if he would consider the role of contiguity in the constitution of our idea of personal identity.

2. A question about our imagination, rather than about the ontological features of personal identity

Hume's discussion of personal identity has been widely commented on and there is disagreement among philosophers about the kind of question which Hume here addresses. Some hold that Hume tries to determine what selves are and then finds out that there is a problem with his ontological description of these selves.² Others are convinced that Hume is more interested in the working of our imagination and cannot find out what gives someone the idea that he is both a synchronically unified and diachronically existing self.³

Although both Hume's section on personal identity and its appendix in his *Treatise* begin with some ontological claims about the self and the mind, his text validates the latter interpretation. Hume examines how, given certain ontological facts, the imagination still forms the idea that we are a self with a synchronic unity and a diachronic existence.

The ontological facts are that selves “**are** nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions” (I.iv.6 253),⁴ and that the mind “**is** a kind of theatre where several perceptions successively make their appearance” (I.iv.6 254), but that “[t]here **is** properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different; whatever natural propensity we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity” (I.iv.6 254).

The question which follows is: “What then 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?” (I.iv.6 253).

² See for example Don Garrett (1981) and Susan Mendus (1980).

³ See for example Galen Strawson (2011). Note that, even when one holds that Hume's problem concerns the working of the imagination, rather than the definition or description of selves, one can still claim that Hume's problem is ontological. Galen Strawson argues for example that Hume realizes that he has failed to identify one ontological principle that would explain the working of the imagination.

⁴ Page numbers refer to the edition of the *Treatise* edited by Selby-Bigge: Hume (1978). Italics are Hume's. I use bold to emphasize when Hume's language indicates whether he talks about ontological facts or about the imagination.

Hume initially answers that this inclination follows from our perception of resemblance and assumption of causality:

The only question, therefore, which remains, is, by what relations this uninterrupted **progress of our thought** is produc'd, when we **consider** the successive existence of a mind or thinking person. And here 'tis evident we must confine ourselves to resemblance and causation, and must drop contiguity, which has little or no influence in the present case. (I.iv.6 260)

It is to this answer, and thus to the question about imagination, that he comes back in his appendix.

In his appendix Hume again first addresses an ontological question: “**Is self** the same with *substance*?” (Appendix 635). He says that this question does not really make sense, because we have in any case no evidence of an existing self or substance distinct from the particular perceptions. Hume has no problem with this answer of his: “So far I seem to be attended with sufficient evidence” (ibid.). He only worries about how the *imagination* then forms the idea of a self:

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. (ibid.)

A little bit later he says “the **thought** alone finds personal identity” (ibid.) And again he explains what makes him despair: “But all my hopes vanish, when I come to explain the principles, that unite our successive perceptions in our **thought or consciousness**” (Appendix 635–636).

3. Hume's problem with his account of personal identity

With this question in view, let us further examine it. Why does our imagination form the idea that we have one diachronic identity? Two observations make Hume ask this question. First, Hume observes that some philosophers have the idea that we are each one self which persists through time (I.iv.6 251). Secondly, he assumes that all ideas are derived from impressions and he looks for the impression of such a persisting self. Yet, he cannot find any such impression (ibid.). From this Hume's question follows: if there is no such impression, where then does the idea of being a persisting self derive from?

Hume initially answers his own question by saying that there are different relations which are not themselves relations of identity, but the perception of which can make us think that there is one object (in

this case a self) which persists. These different relations make us assume that there must be an object which explains the occurrence of distinct impressions (in *casu*, one self which has distinct impressions) and which relates them to one another. Hume identifies the relations which make us think that there must be one such identical object as those of resemblance, causality and contiguity (I.iv.6 254–260), but he specifies that it is evident that contiguity does not have a part in the constitution of our idea of *personal* identity. According to Hume, the observation of resemblance and the assumption of causality suffice for this particular constitution (I.iv.6 260). We have memories of events which resemble the original experience of these events. This makes us assume that we must be one and the same subject who first experienced and now remembers these events. And it seems as if one perception (for example, the feeling of hunger) can cause another idea (for example, the will to get something to eat). This again makes us assume that we are one subject which has both of these thoughts and acts on them.

In his appendix to the *Treatise* Hume expresses to be dissatisfied with this answer, because it does not explain what motivates the imagination to connect certain impressions in such a way that this makes us assume that there is one persisting self (Appendix 635–636). The fact that we perceive resemblances or assume causality between different impressions does not really explain this, because, first, we also assume that all these impressions could occur without being related to one another (Appendix 634 and 636), and, second, we do not perceive any connections between these impressions which determine that they must be had by the same subject (Appendix 635 and 636). Hume holds that this gap in his explanation would be bridged if our perceptions would “either inhere in something simple and individual” (Appendix 636), or if the mind did “perceive some real connexion among them” (Appendix 636).

I suggest that Hume could find what he is looking for, if he would consider the role of contiguity in the constitution of our idea of personal identity. He would then save his analysis by appealing to a criterion constitutive of identity which he first identified but then left out.

In what follows I will first elaborate on the role of this contiguity in the constitution of our idea of personal identity. This section (section 4) is a reflection on what may constitute our idea of personal identity, more than it is a reflection on Hume. Subsequently (section 5), I will explicate how acknowledging this role of contiguity could save Hume’s account of the genesis of our idea of being a diachronic self.

4. The role of contiguity in the constitution of our idea of personal identity

4.1 An introductory sketch

In my description of the role of contiguity in the genesis of our idea of being a diachronically existing self I will assume that this idea is mostly an idea of a particular *mental* subject or mind, because this is Hume's starting point and I wish to offer a solution to his problem. Still, in the origination of an idea of a mental self, the observation of certain physical facts may have a part. I will argue that it does. Hume should be sympathetic to this possibility, since he noticed something analogous; i.e. that our idea of identity comes about through our perception of diversity. According to Hume we often get the idea of identity by associating resembling, yet diverse, non-identical perceptions.

In what follows I will point to different instances of contiguity which are constitutive of our idea of a self. I will argue that our experience of these contiguities makes us assume that all perceptions which are produced by the same body belong to the same self.

4.2 We assume that all perceptions produced by the same body belong to the same self

Before I trace which and how contiguities exactly constitute our idea of being one self, let me exemplify that their effect is real: we assume that all perceptions produced by the same body belong to the same self.

This is so in the case of other selves. In biographies (and autobiographies alike) we include as actions in the subject's life everything done in whatever consciousness which is produced by a body continuous to her current body; even, and often especially, that which is foreign to her general way of behaving. This does not change when the current subject can no longer identify herself with these actions, or no longer remembers them. For instance, even if we do not choose to imprison a German with Alzheimer's for the nazi-crimes which a German with a body continuous to his committed some fifty years earlier, on the grounds that the forgetting of this Alzheimer's patient prevents him from taking responsibility for these deeds, a biographer will still write about this German as being one and the same person. He will write that there was once a particular German who committed nazi-crime, yet remained unpunished because he got Alzheimer's. Also, when a prince suddenly does something unprincipally which is not in line with his character and which he later no longer identifies with, biographers will definitely mention that *he*, that is this particular prince, once did this.

Another illustration of the fact that we consider others to still be the same self as long as they have the same body is this. When we see a baby, we assume that if we at a later stage are able to physically trace this creature, we will see what kind of self he has become. Again, we do not track this self by his character traits or remaining memory, but merely by his physical continuity.

We think about ourselves in the same way. We recognize that we may have done things which we no longer remember, as well as that our physical presence at a certain event determines whether we were present at this event. Even when we say that we were not ourselves when we did something, we assume that we did this and just try to give a causal explanation of what may have prompted us to act in this unusual way. We can also recognize that there was a period in which *we* had a quite different character, say when we were a teenager. We can even tell that this was the case, when we do not remember how we were then. Someone else, who we believe, could have informed us about this. And we can continue to, perhaps shamefully, recognize that we were once such a teenager, even when the way in which we think now makes it impossible for us to understand what could ever have brought us to do what we did when we were this teenager. When we explain in such a case, as we might, that we have changed a lot over the years, this expresses that we assume that there is a sense in which we are still the same self as this teenager. If not, we would say that there was just one self then and another self now, instead of that there was someone who changed. Yet, there are no mental connections between us and this teenager: we do not remember what she did; we no longer think in the same way; and we cannot even conceive how our current thoughts could ever have evolved out of the way in which the teenager thought. Between us now and the teenager then there is only a physical connection: the body we have now is physically continuous with the body the teenager had. This body is the basis upon which others decided that there is a sense in which we are the same person as the teenager was and, since we here took the word of others, it also made us conclude that there must be a sense in which we are still the same self as this teenager.

4.3 Two self-constituting contiguities

The question is then: what makes us attribute all those perceptions to the same self which are produced by one and the same body? I hypothesize that we are brought to this through our observation of two kind of contiguities, i.e. the nearness of our mental experiences to where we physically situate ourselves, and the apparent continuity of our body.

4.3.1 *Contiguities of the mental and the physical*

I will first enumerate some examples of how experiences of the contiguity between the mental and the physical may have stimulated us to tie our personal history to that of whichever conscious being lives through one particular body.

(1) A first example is this. Reality and evolution may have taught us that if we are to survive mentally, we will also have to survive physically, and perhaps also that if we want to stay physically okay, we will have to be mindful. Thus, taking care of ourselves could have started to mean that we have to both be good to our mind and take care of our body. I here say “taking care of *ourselves* could have started to mean...”, which at first sight may seem to imply that we already have an idea of what it means to be a self, before we realize what it means to take care of ourselves. However, the contrary is also possible. We may have started to take care of ourselves through a series of instinctive, and possibly evolutionary determined acts, before our experience of this common practice gave us the idea that we have a substantial diachronic existence and that our fate is tied up with our physical and mental histories.

(2) Further, both the fact that we constantly locate our sensations on a particular body, i.e. that we feel them there, and the fact that others recognize our emotions by looking at what our body expresses, may have made us think that we are where our bodies are.

This thought of being where our bodies are gives us a sense of diachronicity (and so a particular sense of being a self) which purely mental experiences would not give us. Purely mental experiences appear to us as current or as just past. In addition they can make us assume that we must already live for a while. This for example happens when we experience that it is not a surprise for us to know that Brussels is the capital of Belgium, even if we do not remember when we learned this. Still these mental experiences do not give us the idea which we actually have, i.e. that we were always somewhere at one particular time. If we locate ourselves where our body is, we do get this idea. This is so, because we have the idea that one physical body does not disappear and regenerate, but has instead one continuous existence.

(3) A third example of how the closeness of the mental to the physical could constitute our idea of being a self is this. We notice that we are able to execute our plans with one particular body. Our capacity to form and execute plans gives us a sense of agency. Thus, the contiguity between our mental thoughts and a moving body gives us a sense of effectiveness and integrity, and so a sense of self. I have said “we notice that *we* are able to execute our plans with one particular body”. This again seems to imply

that we already have a sense of being a self before we find out that we are able to execute our plans with one particular body. This does not really matter. We may have a minimal sense of having a will and thus being a self with a will. As soon as we realize that we are systematically able to act on this will, that we do this through one body, and that this makes others recognize us as the same acting self, this gives us a fuller and different picture of ourselves. It helps to constitute our feeling that we are one and the same recognizable self. We realize that we are bound up with one specific body and that we can have effects on this world.

(4) Fourthly, we notice that our memories coincide with the physical history of the body we inhabit: we typically only remember those events at which our current body was present. This frequent coincidence of events in our mental history with those in a particular physical history may also be part of what motivates us to assume that our mental history completely coincides with the history of the body we inhabit: i.e. that we were the ones who thought whatever thoughts this body processed.

This would in any case explain something that Hume requires theorists of personal identity to explain,⁵ namely why we assume that events of our past may have caused a current thought, even when we no longer remember these events. Hume here wonders why we think that some previous event may have caused a current thought, even though we have no idea which previous event this could have been, because we have no memories of a specific previous event which could have caused this thought. We just assume that there could be a mental causation between a previous event and a current thought, without knowing more about the specifics of this mental causation or previous event. Hume argues that this assumption is a consequence of the fact that our memories have shown us how some thoughts we have are caused by previous thoughts. He holds that our acquaintance with this fact makes us assume that, even when there is no memory of some thought, this thought may have caused a thought we have now. Hume concludes that our memory allows us to go beyond memory and integrate experiences in our life which we do not remember. Yet, he leaves it to anyone who has a theory about how we form the idea that we have a personal identity, to explain how this happens.

When we show that and how we start associating our mental history with our physical history, we explain this. If we establish that and why we think that events in both histories coincide, we also explain why we still assume that there is one particular history in which events took place

⁵ Cfr. Hume (1978: Liv.6, p. 262): “ ‘Twill be incumbent on those, who affirm that memory produces entirely our personal identity, to give a reason why we can thus extend our identity beyond our memory.’”

which caused our current thoughts, even when we no longer have access to our mental history of that period. We may not be able to trace this mental history, because we have forgotten part of it. But the physical history of a human body is one and, in principle, always traceable. If we assume that this physical history coincides with our mental history, and so that whatever we thought once, we thought at one specific place at one specific moment, namely at the place where this body found itself, then we have a way of locating the one history in which a previous event can have caused a current thought, even though we no longer have access to the whole mental part of this previous history. Without still being conscious of everything we experienced, we can just assume that we have been conscious during major parts of the time that we physically existed and that there are thoughts we had during this time which shaped our thinking now, even though we may now have forgotten which these thoughts were. For example, if we now get the feeling of being at home when we smell something specific, then we may assume that we must have smelled this smell at home when we were a child and that this now makes us associate it with being home, even though we do not specifically remember the occasion at which we initially smelled this smell.

One might object to the idea that the coincidence of our remembered experiences with events in the physical history of the body through which we live motivates us to think that all the thoughts processed by this body are ours. One might say that we must first have memories and thus also an idea of a self who experienced the remembered experiences, before we can associate this history with a certain physical history. The objection would then be that we here do not deal with a contiguity between the mental and the physical which then initiates an idea of the self, but that we already have an idea of a self, before we start noticing this coincidence. To this I reply that our memories may never have come to our mind as they do, if our constant experience of being located while we experience things did not make us assume that we have a particular past which stretches back beyond any mental thought we might have of it. Our experience that we are always somewhere, as long as we are, may be what makes us experience certain representations as memories: it may make us situate them in the one real past which we must have – unlike some other fantasies we might have. It may also be what evokes memories: it may make us associate a current event with a past event, because it makes us assume that we have one real past which could help us make sense of our life and is thus interesting to return to.

It is then as it seems: we follow a self through something external to the self. Yet, this does not mean that this idea of the self would already

be there before we follow it through this externality. The latter makes our idea of the self possible.

(5) Lastly, we should consider the fact that others often recognize us by our outer appearance. They assume that someone with the same body will still be the same self, because this is time and again corroborated: every time they see the same creature physically speaking, this creature seems to have a similar character; it thinks and acts in a similar way. This coherent character does not seem to develop itself independently, before it is recognized by others. Part of what stimulates the development of coherent selves appears to be the very fact that others recognize these selves through their bodies. Everyone is aware of the fact that others have certain expectations of them, based on what they have seen of them before. What they have seen, is certain recurrent behaviour, exhibited by the conscious being connected to one body. These expectations of others often have an influence on what you do now. You will often feel you have to meet these expectations and this may inhibit you from acting in certain ways. Hence, the expectation of others, can make us develop a coherent character and incite us to try to remember a specific history. It can give us the idea that we are a particular self and so make us into one. In this scenario, the gaze of others makes us follow ourselves through a physical continuity.

4.3.2 The apparent continuity of the body

So far my description of the possible role of the contiguity between the mental and the physical in the constitution of our idea of the self. I will now elaborate on the other constituting contiguity which I have mentioned briefly: this is the apparent continuity of bodies. This apparent continuity makes it easy to follow a body through time. Hence, it reinforces our motivation to follow a particular person through a particular body. How does this happen?

You will forget that you had certain thoughts or feelings. In forgetting these, you also lose the connection to them through a feeling of mineness: when someone tells you that you had this thought, but you forgot it, you will not feel that it was yours, as you feel that your current experiences are yours. The feeling of mineness of experiences which connects you to some experiences in the past can thus not connect you to all the experiences you ever had.

There is also no other way for thoughts to be attributed to you (be it by yourself or by others) on the basis of thoughts alone. For there is nothing in the propositional content of thoughts which refers uniquely to you. In principle different persons can have the same thought propositionally

speaking. Neither do the different thoughts which you have in your life necessarily induce each other: one specific thought can lead to many different thoughts, or just not induce another thought at all. So there is no way here either for one thought to give you access to all the thoughts you ever had or will have.

Following yourself through your character alone is impossible for similar reasons. First, different persons can have the same character. Secondly, it is not possible to entirely predict how one character will develop and thus to derive from one or more character traits which past or future person you are numerically identical to. We are not cartoon figures who stick to a specific role. There are different possible ways for us to develop ourselves and we can suddenly do something unexpected.

A body, however, is less ephemeral than thoughts, memories and the feeling of mineness of particular experiences. It is continuous. At one particular time, it is always at one particular place and, if you trace it, there are no gaps between these places. Even if you are not always aware of this body or its place, you know that it is somewhere. A machine could track it constantly and tell you where it was at any one time.

This is not a coincidence. It belongs to the concept of a material body that it is really continuous, i.e. that all its parts are synchronically connected, and diachronically evolve out of one another. This makes it easy for the theoretical mind to think of this continuity when it sees something which looks like a body.

In addition we also visually perceive the contiguity of a body: we do not really see its continuity (in principle we could be confronted by different quick body flashes and just think that we perceive continuity), but we can follow an at least seemingly continuous body (when we keep our eyes open, we do not see it disappear and come back again and we see how it only displaces itself to an extent which we take such a body to be capable of in a particular time). Thus, apart from our theoretical mind, our impressions equally tempt our mind to follow a body.

All of this together explains why we might be motivated to follow our diachronic existence through our bodies. Even when it would be a feeling of mineness which originates the association between a particular body and a particular person, and even when character recognition reinforces this original association, the mind may at some moment be motivated to follow the particular person to which it belongs through a particular body rather than through a feeling of mineness or set of specific character traits, because the association between a particular person and a particular body is already there and because conceptual and visual facts make it so much easier to follow the body.

Note that the following of a person, is here the following of this person through time. Generally, we all have the feeling that our thoughts and sensations are ours at the moment at which we have them. Just like this, we are typically aware of the fact that we have a certain character. When we speak or react, we can for example know that we defend certain values and have certain sensitivities. I do not wish to deny that this synchronous feeling of mineness and awareness of one's character is crucial in the instantaneous shaping of a sense of self. All I have here wanted to point out is that when we follow ourselves through time we sometimes just assume that we were where our bodies were, because it can be easier to find out where these bodies were than it can be to know whether you could have evolved out of a specific character, or than it can be to still have a memory of something this person experienced and so also to still feel that you are the one who experienced this.

5. Could Hume save his account of personal identity?

If all of this is convincing, could Hume then save his account of the genesis of our idea of personal identity? I argue that he could. Let's look again at what he identified as his problem and what, according to him, could solve it.

Hume wonders why we assume that particular resembling impressions belong to one person and why we think that there should be a causal link between particular perceptions. This is unclear, because of the combination of the facts that (1) we do not perceive a real connection between these impressions and (2) we could have every one impression without a particular other. It will be explained, says Hume, if we appear to perceive a real connection between these impressions or if they belong to a real entity.

These references to something real may surprise one, if one understands that Hume's question is here not whether there really is a self, but instead how we get the idea that we are diachronic selves. It is not immediately evident why Hume expects that something real may have a part in the genesis of this idea. After all, he is the one who made us skeptical about whether our ideas correspond to something real. He argues that we cannot find out whether a particular idea corresponds to something real and that we can at most uncover whether a particular idea corresponds to a specific impression; and he shows, with the case of identity, that this does then not always prove to be so. According to Hume, some ideas, like those of identical objects and subjects, are clearly fictions to which no particular impression corresponds, but which originate after an association of differ-

ent perceptions. Something real is the last thing from which these ideas seem to originate.

Taking this into account, I argue that Hume's reference to the real could be explained as follows. Our mind might understand conceptually what it would mean for our perceptions to reside in something real or to have a real connection between them. This understanding could then make us associate specific perceptions with one another. Our associations of these perceptions would then neither be motivated by our perception of a real connection between these perceptions, nor by our observation of something ontologically real in which they reside. It would solely be prompted by our theoretical idea that there could be a specific real connection between such impressions, or that such impressions could reside in something ontologically real. To explain the origination of this specific assumption like this, in no way ignores Hume's skepticism. For it is still possible that when we get the impression that this real entity or connection is there, it is not there in fact. Our impressions might mislead us.

Say that the scenario I just sketched is a good depiction of the role which Hume could wish to attribute to the real in the constitution of our idea of being a diachronically existing self, how then could drawing renewed attention to this, help Hume to save his account of this constitution? To discover this, Hume would have to return to his observation that contiguity can make us think that something has a diachronic identity. He could then find the missing elements of his account in his own observations and demonstrate their role in the genesis of our idea of being a diachronic self by appealing to the explication he already gave about what would explain such a genesis.

What are these elements and how do they generate our idea of being a diachronically existing self? They are instances of contiguity. This contiguity either consists in a nearness in time and space of the mental and the physical or in the apparent continuity of the body. Specifically, we for example experience that we always sense through the same body, that we can act on our intentions through a particular body, that we survive (mentally) when we take well care of a particular body, and that the body with which we feel connected has a continuous existence. All of this gives us an experience of a contiguity which is real. The contiguity between the mental and the physical is real because it has an effect on the world. The apparent continuity of the body is real because it is there, regardless of our individual subjective experience of it. It can be registered by others or machines.

We do not just undergo these experiences of a real contiguity. These experiences also make us *think* that the perceptions of one self may reside in an ontological *reality*, i.e. in a body-mind connection which has

an effect on the world and persists. This understanding of what a self could be is not a neutral finding. After our *experience* of real contiguities generated our idea that we are a diachronically existing self, this *understanding* strengthens this idea. For when we have an idea of what it could mean to be such a self and we have experiences of something which seems to correspond to this idea, these experiences seem to provide evidence for the fact that the self of which we imagined that it could exist, really exists.

In this way, our idea of being a diachronically existing self could be generated by our observation of real contiguities (which are one form of connection) and the understanding that our perceptions reside in something ontologically real. This is exactly the kind of generation which Hume believed would account for the way in which our idea of being a diachronic self comes about, but which he did not discover the necessary elements for. I demonstrated how Hume could find these elements, if he would pay attention to the role of the observation of contiguity in the constitution of our idea of being a diachronic self. This is a relation of which Hume was the first to so famously describe how it could make us assume identity⁶.

⁶ I have now suggested a way for Hume to save his account of the genesis of our idea of being a diachronic self. In doing so, I paid special attention to two elements of Hume's account of personal identity, which have been further elaborated on in contemporary philosophy of mind, but whose importance for the contemporary debate on personal identity remained mostly unnoticed. I repeat them in this note, so as to highlight that Hume should in this debate not merely be remembered as the predecessor of Parfit's bundle theory of mind.

The first element is Hume's recognition that the specific functioning of our self-consciousness has a part in the genesis of our concepts. John Campbell (1994, 2002) is one of the contemporary philosophers who draws attention to this fact. The interesting point of Hume in this regard is his stress on the fact that the imagination may follow something like identity through something which we, upon reflection, do not value much in identity, or of which we even think that it does not constitute identity. This insight could alter the classical philosophical approach to the question of personal identity, according to which philosophers assume that what constitutes our idea of diachronic personal identity must be something of which it is immediately obvious to us that it is important for persons, such as psychological continuity which allows us to get in touch with our pasts, to feel guilty or proud about something, and to develop a character.

The second, yet interesting element in Hume for contemporary philosophy of mind is his explanation of how our perception of contiguity can make us think of identity. This idea returns in the work on personal identity of P.F. Strawson (1959), Gareth Evans (1982) and John McDowell (1997). They go even further than Hume and argue that the perception of this contiguity is necessary in the constitution of a diachronic self-consciousness. I have argued that this additional insight could help Hume save his account of personal identity. But it is because of Hume that we first started to comprehend in which way this element could be important in the constitution of our idea of any identity.

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