

HUME AND HUSSERL:
PHILOSOPHY OF THE SELF

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	v
Chapter 1: Two Presumptions of Hume's Bundle Theory	1
Chapter 2: Husserl's Theory of the Self	39
Conclusion	70
Bibliography of Works Cited	80

ABSTRACT

Philosophical theories of the self differ about exactly which concerns, aims and insights best promote the discovery of their object. One unambiguous and effective criterion with which to evaluate any such theory, regardless of whatever other first principles or final commitments the theory may possess, is to consider its treatment of (and its constraints, if any, upon) how and to what extent the self can know itself. In this thesis, I aim to uncover the reasons why David Hume (1711-1776) and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), for sometimes differing and sometimes similar reasons, limit the self's ability to reflect upon and to know itself. I argue that the theories advanced by Hume and Husserl are best understood in combination with a model of self-perception that is compatible and complementary with the letter and spirit of their general philosophies and is also already implied in Hume's bundle theory of the self.

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INTRODUCTION

The general aim of this thesis is to determine the route by which, the means with which and the extent to which the self, in the theories advanced by Hume and Husserl, can come to know itself. In this Introduction, I shall indicate the central arguments and conclusions of the thesis. First, I shall discuss Chapter 1 in which I examine Hume's bundle theory. Secondly, I shall discuss Chapter 2 in which I consider Husserl's theory of the self. Finally, I shall summarize the Conclusion in which I compare both theories.

In Chapter 1, I present Hume's bundle theory as a reply to substantivism or to the theory that the self is a simple and *identical* or, in Hume's usage, *changeless* substance. Although Hume adeptly exposes many unexamined presumptions upon which substantivist claims rest, he remains curiously silent about two fundamental presumptions upon which his own bundle theory is founded. My primary aim in Chapter 1 is to analyse the nature of these presumptions and clarify their connections with the bundle theory's more explicit commitments.

Hume's first presumption is that the self is what I shall call a *discrete entity*.¹ His second presumption is that the self has both an active and a passive aspect, i.e., that it is at once both the active bundling cause and the passive bundled effect of a succession of perceptions. In Book One of the *Treatise*, Hume aims to illuminate the passive aspect of the self and to emphasize the self's radical particularity as a passive heap of bundled perceptions. I argue, however, that Hume can be shown to appeal, both in Book One and indeed throughout the *Treatise*, to a conception of the self as an active entity, i.e., as a *bundler* of perceptions.²

My second aim in Chapter 1 is to examine Hume's claim that the self cannot perceive itself. I argue that in his denial of the self's ability to perceive itself, i.e., to

¹ I shall use 'discrete entity' to refer to an entity that is (i) finite in the quantity of its properties or parts, (ii) open to being both subdivided and fused together with other discrete entities, (iii) always incapable of knowing the nature or existence of other discrete entities and of knowing its relations with such entities (if indeed such entities exist), and (iv) separable in thought. I further develop this definition on pp. 3-4.

² Hume's appeal to the self's active aspect in Book One of the *Treatise* is to be found, primarily, in his analysis of the habits of association that produce connections between the self's perceptions. But Hume overlooks the way in which his associationist theory of how connections develop already presupposes the self to be *active*, i.e., as the associating center of all such connections. Further, this conception of the self as active appears antithetical to Hume's preferred and explicitly avowed conception of the self as a mere passive, atomistic bundle. Hume's tendency to emphasize the self's passive aspect obscures the full extent to which the boundaries and connections between the self's perceptive parts are, in Hume's theory, structured by the binary economy of atomism *and* associationism.

It should be noted that Hume's treatment of the passions and the imagination in Book II appeals to the self's active aspect as well. But it is his theory of associationism which raises the stronger appeal and has the greater and more transformative impact on his bundle theory. Although the passions and the imagination play a key role in situating the self in a sphere of social and moral exchange, they do not, as Deleuze puts it, "determine the mind, do not impart a nature to the mind in the same way the principles of association do" (Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts: 1953-1974*, trans. Christopher Bush, et al. (Paris: Semiotext(e), 2004) 166). A survey of Book One alone, therefore, furnishes a discussion of Hume's appeal to the self's active aspect. Moreover, Hume does little in Books Two and Three to counter the charge that this appeal always remains implicit or less than forthright.

While this thesis is intended to clarify Hume's appeal to both an active and a passive aspect of the self, it has as its more fundamental aim to uncover the nature of the *relation* between these aspects. In the Conclusion (see, especially, p. 79), I suggest that the nature of this relation is one of pre-established and ongoing co-dependency and co-determination such that neither the active nor the passive aspect of the self can, at any time, be fully separated or isolated from the other. For this reason, and others presented in the thesis, the two aspects are best understood as forming a discrete and inseparable unity.

perceive either the whole of itself or some identifiable part of itself, Hume appeals to some preconception about that which is entailed by self-perception, i.e., by the perception with which the self perceives itself. I analyse Hume's overall position to show how a model of self-perception, based upon the self's ability to perceive any one of its parts, is implied by and consistent with the bundle theory. I argue that this model sheds light on the connection between Hume's two presumptions, i.e., that the self is a discrete entity and that the self has both an active and a passive aspect. The model suggests that the self's aspects are not themselves two discrete entities with no ability to introspect one another. Instead, the aspects are constitutive of one and the same discrete self.

In Part I of Chapter 1, I examine Hume's critique of substantivism and refutation of eight substantivist claims. The claims are that the self is (i) simple, (ii) unified, (iii) identical, (iv) a substance, (v) an *a priori* form that is necessary for perception, (vi) an innate idea in the mind, (vii) self-evident and (viii) apodictic. In reply to (i) and (ii), Hume argues that while the self is finite it is neither simple nor indivisible. Rather, the self is a composite for which continual change is a reality and mereological division is a constant possibility. In reply to (iii), he claims that a succession of perceptions is constitutive of the self and that the self always undergoes change as a result of this succession among its perceptive parts. While Hume regards the illusory notion of the simple and identical self to be a fiction of the imagination, he holds that this notion is not arbitrary because the self is led by strong natural propensities to imagine and to believe in it, i.e., to form and to fix the notion in the mind. In response to (iv), he claims that various conceptions of a substance (i.e., substance *qua* a substratum, *qua* an ontologically

independent entity, and *qua* an entity in which parts inhere) all fail to correspond to the self's nature. In response to (v), he argues that the self is not necessary for perception but that perceptions are instead necessary for the self as a bundle thereof. In reply to (vi), he denies the existence of innate ideas, claiming that all ideas derive from experience. In reply to (vii), he argues that the experience of a simple impression, i.e., the most basic form of perception, never warrants any claim which implicates a subject as the impression's percipient. Hume does not offer an explicit reply to (viii), but he would argue that since the self cannot be perceived (his own attempts to perceive it having apparently ended in failure³) the self can only be understood by observation and inference and not, therefore, by any means that can be plausibly viewed as 'apodictic.' Finally, at the end of Part I of Chapter 1, I analyse Hume's account of the nature of the self's parts and their coming to be in the self.⁴

In analysing the self, Hume forwards both an explicit and an implicit doctrine and it is between these two that various points of contention emerge. For example, although Hume claims that the self is constituted solely by the perceptions it encounters, he also

³ The issue of whether Hume actually fails to perceive himself is controversial. Hume's claim that he cannot perceive himself is premised upon a preconception about what perceiving the self entails. But, this preconception, i.e., that perceiving the self entails perceiving an unusual or rarefied object (instead of entailing the perception of *any* object whatever) is, I will argue, incongruous with the remainder of Hume's position. See pp. 32-36.

⁴ Hume and Husserl's theories of the self are, in general, premised upon some conception of parthood relations. While different passages of their theories stress different mereological commitments, it is always a broad conception of parts and of wholes that prevails in their analyses. In the theories of the self advanced by Hume and Husserl, a 'part' may refer to anything which enters into the self's constitution (e.g., a perceived object, a perceptive act, a remembered or imagined event, a structure of human nature, etc.) and a 'whole' may refer to either a mereologically-divisible structure in the self (e.g., a complex idea, a faculty, a law, etc.) or, alternatively, to the whole self as a comprehensive bundle (Hume) or absolute monad (Husserl). In accordance with this broad conception, I shall use the terms 'part' and 'whole' to indicate a constitutive relation where 'whole' refers to the constituted entity and 'part' refers to the constituting or, with other entities of its kind, the co-constituting entity. I shall use 'aspect' to refer to a mereologically-divisible entity that is identifiable both in terms of (i) the parts with which it is composed and (ii) the more extensive whole (e.g., discrete self) to which it is enjoined as a constitutive part.

implies that the self contains not only perceptions but also associations and, perhaps, various faculties (such as the imagination and the memory) and innate propensities.⁵ Another point of contention is to be found in the conflict between, on the one hand, Hume's near exclusive emphasis on the conception of the self as a passive, bundled entity and, on the other hand, his analysis of dreamless sleep and death in which he suggests that the self's ongoing existence depends no less upon the self's active or bundling aspect than upon its passive or bundled aspect. In the brief passage in which he touches upon this issue, Hume focuses on the presence or absence of the self's ongoing bundling activity as the sole criterion by which the succession of perceptions in ordinary experience can be distinguished from dreamless sleep or death. In many of the instances in which it arises, the bundle theory's implicit doctrine takes on a foundational role as that upon which the theory's explicit doctrine rests.

In Part II of Chapter 1, I examine some key objections against the bundle theory. I discuss Hume's use of the first person singular pronoun, 'I,' in the *Treatise* and examine the issue of whether Hume's analysis is self-contradictory. I consider two charges of self-contradiction: (i) that Hume denies but also affirms that at least some parts of the self inhere in the self, and (ii) that Hume denies but also affirms that at least some parts of the self endure for at least some time. I argue that Hume can be defended against both charges. In response to (i), I point out that it is Hume's position that the self cannot know whether its parts exist only within itself or within other selves as well. As such, the self cannot decide whether its parts *inhere* solely in itself, in itself and in others, or in itself

⁵ For Deleuze's view on why the faculties and propensities ought to be understood as bundles or sets of perceptions, see footnote on p. 19.

and in all other selves (i.e., in the case that all selves are copies of one another).⁶ In response to (ii), I argue that while Hume appeals to the endurance of at least some of the self's parts, he does so without ever committing himself to the view that either the whole of the self or any number of the self's parts are at all times changeless or identical. Drawing upon Hume's theatre analogy, I offer an analysis of how the self's apparent endurance as a whole may be constituted out of a patchwork of short-lived and relative endurances, or perdurances,⁷ that occur within and among the self's parts.

In Part III of Chapter 1, I argue that Hume's claim that he has failed to perceive himself presupposes a belief, on his part, about that in which not failing to perceive himself would consist. I explain how Hume's philosophy is consistent and compatible with a model that presents self-perception to be an act that is simple in content. If the self is discrete and, as a consequence, finite then both of the self's aspects must also be finite or limited in the quantity of parts that they contain. The self-perception in which these two finite aspects are linked need not entail the inclusion of either the full spectrum of the self's active bundling or the full collection of the self's passively bundled perceptions. I advance a case for why, according to the bundle theory, self-perception may best be understood to occur whenever the self perceives any one of its parts. In Hume's view, perceptions become parts of a self's constitution simply by being encountered by that self. To the extent that all real or encountered perceptions are parts of the self, all perceptions are self-perceptions. Further, according to this model, a self-perception can become thematic, i.e., known by the self to be an instance of self-perception, if the self

⁶ For an analysis of what it is to inhere, see p. 14.

⁷ See footnote on p. 26.

additionally perceives that the epistemic access of that which perceives (i.e., the self's active aspect) to that which is perceived (i.e., the self's passive aspect) implies that the perceiving thing and the perceived thing (i.e., the two aspects) cannot themselves be discrete entities with no epistemic access to one another. Instead, the two are shown to be aspects of one and the same discrete entity. Finally, I explain why self-perception, conceived in this way, is a plausible criterion for selfhood and point out how the definition suggested by this analysis, i.e., the definition of the self as 'anything that perceives itself,' is consistent with the bundle theory's explicit commitments.

I begin Chapter 2 with an analysis of the route by which Husserl's phenomenology proposes to discover a rigorous, universal foundation for the sciences. I analyse his phenomenological method and his discovery of the self (or, more precisely, of the project of explicating the intentional exchange between the ego and its objects and the structures, situated in both, that facilitate this exchange) as this foundation. I examine his reasons for claiming that the self is solely responsible for the sense and constitution of objects. In Husserl's view, the meanings that objects have for the self are only those meanings that the self has already intended or imposed upon them. Husserl, like Hume, seeks to understand objects simply as they are for the self that encounters them and not as they might be in themselves or in a mind-independent realm. Husserl claims that the self can be unfolded *ad infinitum* but, again like Hume, he limits the self's ability to reflect upon its own innermost nature and thus to gain a comprehensive understanding of itself.

Husserl holds that this epistemic limitation, by which the self cannot ever fully know itself, follows from two key phenomenological observations. First, he claims that

whenever an object is reflected upon, the object is presented within a structure called a horizon. This horizon precludes the reflective act from ever realizing more than a partial or incomplete presentation of the reflective object. Thus, according to Husserl, an immediate comprehensive understanding of any horizoned object, e.g., the self as a reflective object, is impossible. Second, Husserl claims that the innermost core of the self, i.e., the principle of functioning consciousness, is pre-temporal in nature and cannot be reified or reflected upon in any momentary act of thinking. As a result, Husserl presents the self's understanding of itself as being always inadequate or incomplete. Although it aims for knowledge of the self, Husserl's phenomenology never culminates in having fully achieved this goal. And as the prospect for a complete and comprehensive understanding of the self fades, the grounds upon which Husserl can base his claim that the self is the sole foundation of philosophy and the sciences (i.e., rather than being merely one of the many objects of these pursuits) become dubious if not untenable.

In Part I of Chapter 2, I discuss Husserl's acceptance of the Cartesian meditating ego as the precondition and starting place of transcendental phenomenology. I examine the role of this ego in executing the *epoché*, i.e., the method through which the naïve realism of the natural attitude is suspended or bracketed and the self's transcendental character is revealed. Finally, I evaluate the way in which the epoché enables Husserl to approach objects as the correlates, clues and direct outcomes of the self's sense-giving processes. I argue that the self, as the foundation of Husserl's phenomenology, has no foundation of its own, that it is, instead, a principle 'behind which one cannot go back any further.'

In Part II of Chapter 2, I analyse Husserl's theory of intentionality and in Part III of Chapter 2, I examine Husserl's conceptions of the self as an ego pole, life-stream, *eidos* ego and monad. I evaluate his view of the self as a changeless identical principle in contrast to the changing acts and objects of consciousness. I explicate his conception of the self as a life-stream or temporal flow of experience that confronts the self and enters into its constitution. I examine Husserl's notion of the *eidos* ego or the view of the self that is achieved through a process of abstracting from the particularities of the *de facto* ego in order to grasp the elements that are necessary for the constitution of any conceivable ego. Finally, I address Husserl's conception of the self as a monad, i.e., as the absolute constitutor and the absolute concretum of all reality and as the origin and end of all intentional exchange.

In Part IV of Chapter 2, I examine Husserl's theory of inner time consciousness and focus specifically upon his claim that the self is unable to reflect adequately upon itself due to the fact that functioning consciousness is situated in a pre-temporal realm. I argue that Husserl's view of functioning consciousness as the foundational core of the self prevents him from ever presenting functioning consciousness as a proper object which can in turn be analysed into still more fundamental parts (i.e., into pre-functioning or pre-conscious parts). He forecloses such an examination by limiting the self's ability to perceive functioning consciousness and, thus, to perceive itself in general. I examine the two routes by which the self, according to Husserl, either already is or can become aware of itself. I argue that, in Husserl's account, neither pre-reflective self-awareness nor reflective self-awareness reveals the functioning core of the self. Thus, a comprehensive

understanding of the self is jeopardized if not foreclosed in his analysis.

In the Conclusion of the thesis, I analyse the many similarities that obtain between the theories of the self forwarded by Hume and Husserl. I consider the extent to which each theory offers a reply to the dilemmas faced by the other and I offer a recapitulation of both theories in light of the specific model of self-perception that is implied, although denied in general terms, in Hume's bundle theory. According to this model, the self realizes the most comprehensive perception that it can have of its own form or structure when it perceives that it can never perceive anything but itself or a part of itself, i.e., when it perceives itself to be a discrete and exclusively self-perceiving entity. Finally, I point out how Hume's analysis of the mind as a theatre of perceptions suggests the way in which the passive and active aspects are constitutive of a unified self: i.e., each aspect, like each actor in Hume's theatre of the mind, is what it is only in relation to the changes, endurances and other properties exhibited by the other aspect. Thus any distinction between the two aspects is founded in abstraction.

A mark of any well-managed philosophical research undertaken at the Master's level must surely be some diligence, on the part of the author, to clarify the very few problems that his or her research will confront directly and to specify the great many problems that are related to this research but must, both as a matter of good sense and necessity, be set aside as topics of future work. In the remainder of this Introduction, I offer two caveats about topics that will not be addressed.

In this thesis, I shall set aside both the philosophies that inspired Hume and Husserl as well as the reception and legacy that the two enjoy among later thinkers. So

far as possible, I analyse their theories of the self within the context of their general philosophies and avoid the many disputes of interpretation arising in subsequent scholarship. Their theories contain deep complexities the analysis of which will not, I hope, leave the reader dissatisfied that commentators such as Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Deleuze, etc., have been given little or no voice here. The powerful insights offered by these commentators are very often infused with (and difficult, if not controversial, to separate from) equally powerful efforts to forward philosophical projects which, for the most part, are extraneous to the focus of this thesis, i.e., to the theories of the self set out in Hume and in Husserl. As such, their inclusion in a thesis of this scope cannot but be a matter of compromise. The path I have opted for in largely withholding these voices, except where literal but ingenious insights prevail, will, I hope, cast the theories before us in a clearer and more concentrated light.

A second caveat concerns the extent to which I shall focus in this thesis on the reflections that the self can independently gather about itself. Far less emphasis will be placed on the sections in Hume and Husserl which attend to other selves and to the secondary features of the self that are illuminated through its encounter with the intersubjective realm. Instead, the present thesis will pursue a prior and more fundamental course. There is ample textual evidence in both Hume and Husserl to support the view that their theories of the self take flight long before their critiques of self-other relations begin to surface. Their theories begin in a strikingly Cartesian fashion with the aim of analysing the self exclusively in terms of the resources already present within and internally available to it. In particular, the self's private experience holds a

privileged position in their analyses as the sole means with which to uncover both the self's general structure and its expansive content. Further, it is only in light of this prior and necessary first investigation of the self's *understanding of itself through itself* that concerns about the self's distinction from and possible relations with others emerge as well-defined problems open for subsequent research. In short, the investigation of the other and of the intersubjective realm in Hume and Husserl is premised on their prior investigation of the single self or ego. As such, their theories admit of a natural distinction between the portions that concern the self alone and those that concern the self's relations with others. It is perhaps for this reason that Hume and Husserl thought to place their theories of self-other relations under removed and separate headings.⁸ In this thesis, I shall set aside the relations between the self, the other and the intersubjective realm as a topic for future research except in the infrequent case where touching upon these relations proves useful, or perhaps necessary, in illuminating the strictly ego-centered or self-based approach to self-knowledge. If it is charged that I have analysed only a portion of the theories advanced by Hume and Husserl, I shall console myself with the fact that it will have been better to have analysed a portion than to have glossed over the whole.

⁸ There is, however, one key respect in which the passages of Hume and Husserl considered in this thesis constrain their later claims upon self-other relations. Since the self only ever encounters perceptions (i.e., mental events) and since all encountered perceptions are, for Hume and Husserl, constitutive of that self which encounters them, it follows that the self only ever encounters others when (and to the extent that) it encounters its own parts. It is implied in the anti-realist tendency of Hume's empiricism and the transcendental character of Husserl's phenomenology that the self can only, and at best, infer or imagine what other selves might be like on the basis of its own constitution. See footnote on p. 73.

CHAPTER 1

TWO PRESUMPTIONS OF HUME'S BUNDLE THEORY

INTRODUCTION

During the years 1734-1737, while living in France and crafting his masterpiece, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, British empiricist David Hume (1711-1776) developed a reply to the question, 'What is the self?' In his answer, which is usually referred to as the bundle theory of the self, Hume challenges the western metaphysical tradition of substantivism and, in particular, the substance theory of the self or the view of the self as a simple substance. Hume's analysis centers upon a substantivist argument concerning the way in which the self's changelessness (or, in Hume's usage, its *identity* or identical endurance through time) follows from its simplicity. The argument holds that if the self is entirely simple in the special sense of being purely actual in disposition, then the self also lacks any potency for change and is changeless or identical. Rather than to dispute this argument, Hume rejects substantivism by denying that the self is in any way simple or identical. He argues that the real self revealed by empirical investigation is nothing but a bundle of different perceptions, i.e., a complex and free-floating or substrate-less collection that is non-identical or mutable both when viewed as a whole as well as when one ventures to examine each of its parts individually.

Hume's analysis is groundbreaking in two key respects. First, Hume observes no distinction between the conscious percipient self and the perceptions that the self is commonly said to have or perceive. His tendency is to deny the self any existence beyond that of the successive perceptions 'it' encounters. Second, Hume imposes rigorous anti-

realist constraints upon his bundle theory. For Hume, the self cannot be understood or identified in terms of its relations with other real, external and independent entities. Instead, the self must be self-referentially defined in terms of its internal properties (such as the parts that are constitutive of the self and the relations that obtain between these parts). The aim of this chapter is to explicate two key presumptions upon which Hume's anti-substantivist bundle theory rests. The first of these presumptions is that the self is what I shall call a *discrete entity*. An entity is discrete if it fulfills the following four criteria:

- (i) The entity must be *ontologically finite*, i.e., it must never possess more or less than a proper subset of all possible properties (i.e., parts) at any one time;
- (ii) The entity must have a *homogenous distribution of parts* such that it is always conceivable that at some time the entity could be divided to produce two or more discrete entities or combined with one or more other discrete entities to produce a more extensive discrete entity;¹
- (iii) The entity must be epistemically closed or, to use Leibniz's term, *windowless* in two senses:
 - i. The entity must have *no internally situated clues* from which facts about any other discrete entities can be derived (such as

¹ For further analysis of the self's capacity to split into, and to be recombined with, autonomous self-conscious sections, see Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 245-274.

the facts of whether any or all other discrete entities contain none, some or all the same parts as it does);²

- ii. The entity must have *no outward epistemic access* to other discrete entities or to the relations which obtain between itself and other discrete entities (if indeed such ‘discrete entity-discrete entity’ relations exist);

- (iv) The entity must be *separable in thought* from other discrete entities, i.e., thinking of the entity must not require any antecedent, simultaneous or subsequent thought of any other discrete entity;

Hume’s second presumption is that the self is possessed with both a passive and an active aspect, i.e., that the self is both an object in which changes upon changes are compounded *and* an activity that is responsible for those changes. This second presumption implies that the self as ‘a bundle of different perceptions’ is neither merely (i) a changing heap of bundled perceptions; nor (ii) a relatively changeless perception-bundling activity (or a set of such perceptive activities). Rather, the self must be (iii) some combination of (i) and (ii). The self must be both the *bundled* concretum and the active *bundler* of all perceptions. Or, to put the matter in Cartesian terms, the self must be both the thoughts themselves and the thinking thing. Hume, however, never explicates the relation between these two aspects. In this chapter, I argue that it is in self-perception,

² According to Sorabji, Porphyry forwarded a conception of the self as a “bundle of qualities that cannot be shared by any other individual” (Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life and Death* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 45). Hume does not foreclose the possibility that different selves or bundles can share the same parts. He denies, however, that the self can gain any knowledge on this matter.

i.e., the perception in which the self perceives itself, that the two aspects are revealed to be *not* two discrete entities with no epistemic access to one another but, rather, to be aspects that subsist in and arise out of one and the same discrete entity.

In Part I, I analyse Hume's theory of perception and seek out the sceptical, empiricist and anti-realist constraints that inform the bundle theory. In Part II, I evaluate objections against the bundle theory and focus upon the issue of whether the bundle theory is self-contradictory. In Part III, I examine Hume's denial of self-perception or his "failure to introspect the self"³ as avowed the following claim:

When I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, - light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.⁴

I argue that Hume cannot meaningfully deny his own ability to perceive himself without holding some model of self-perception, i.e., without adopting some view of that in which self-perception consists. Finally, I argue that the bundle theory supports a model according to which the self perceives itself whenever the self perceives any of its parts.

For Hume, the question, 'What is the self?' is a question of human nature. He understands human nature to be an empirical science, a science which was only

³ A. E. Pitson, *Hume's Philosophy of The Self* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 19

⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P.H. Nidditch, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1978), 252. Cited hereafter as "T."

beginning to emerge at the time of his writing and which, he suspects, “will [in time] be much superior in utility to any other [presently existing science]” (T xix). In his view, knowledge of human nature is primary insofar as it forms a class of knowledge upon which all other knowledge depends (T xv). Although he prohibits metaphysical speculation about its foundations,⁵ he holds human nature to be open to legitimate empirical inquiry and suggests that the question of the self requires an inquiry into the deepest empirically examinable structures of human nature.⁶

In the *Treatise*, Hume presents the question of the self as the cardinal question of human nature. In Book One, Hume’s goal is to uncover the ontological structure of the self as a bundle of perceptions and to address the epistemological grounds for the self’s claim to knowledge of itself. In Book Two, he investigates the self’s role in feeling and, in Book Three, its role in moral action.⁷ Hume holds Book One, i.e., its exegesis of the self’s causes, coming to be, constitution, capacities, etc., to be the standard against which the claims of Books Two and Three must be understood. In what follows, I focus on Book One of the *Treatise* (first published in 1739), and specifically on the section therein entitled, ‘Of Personal Identity,’ and the relevant final passages of Hume’s Appendix to the *Treatise* (first published in 1740).

⁵ He claims, “any hypothesis [which] pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical” (T xvii).

⁶ He argues that, “there is no question in philosophy more abstruse than that concerning identity, and the nature of the uniting principle, which constitutes a person” (T 189). The term ‘abstruse’ must not be read as a pejorative or a forewarning that any inquiry into the question will be futile because Hume also claims that, “if truth be at all within the reach of human capacity [it is] certain it must lie very deep and abstruse” (T xiv). As the most abstruse of objects, knowledge of the self can be plausibly viewed as the foremost goal of Hume’s philosophy.

⁷ Hume distinguishes (i) the self *qua* thought, imagination and the understanding (Book One); and (ii) the self *qua* passions, sentiment and self-concern (Books Two and Three). Pitson calls (i) and (ii) the ‘mental aspect’ and the ‘agency aspect’ of the bundle theory, respectively. (A. E. Pitson, *Hume’s Philosophy of The Self* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1). In this Chapter, I focus on the mental aspect of the theory.

According to the bundle theory that Hume espouses, the apparent simplicity and identity of the self is strictly fictional, this fiction is a product of the real self's imagination, and the real self, or *mind*,⁸ is an ephemeral "bundle or collection of different perceptions" (T 252). But the bundle theory is founded on two presumptions, i.e., that the self is discrete and that the self possesses two related but apparently distinct aspects as both an active bundler and a passive bundled heap of perceptions. These presumptions first take root in the preamble to the bundle theory, i.e., in Hume's critique of substantivism.

PART I. THE ORIGIN AND AIMS OF THE BUNDLE THEORY

Although the tradition connecting selfhood with substance is prefigured to some extent in the ancient Greek concept of the soul (*ψυχή*), an early and seminal figure in the modern substance theory of the self is Boethius (480-524) with his definition of the self as an "individual substance of a rational nature."⁹ René Descartes (1596-1650) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) continue in this tradition with their claims that the self is a thinking substance (Descartes) and that the self is an indivisible, enduring and

⁸ In Book One of the *Treatise*, "Hume uses person, self, soul, and mind as practically interchangeable" (Kenneth R. Merrill, *Historical Dictionary of Hume's Philosophy* (USA: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 213).

⁹ Leonard Geddes, "Person," *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 11 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911).

simple monad (Leibniz). In the *Treatise*, Hume identifies (T 251) and aims to undercut the following eight substantivist claims about the self:

- (i) The self is simple, indivisible and partless;
- (ii) The self is a unity or one in number;
- (iii) The self has a continuous or unbroken and identical or changeless endurance through time;
- (iv) The self is a substance in which non-independent parts inhere;
- (v) The self is an *a priori* form and condition for the possibility of perception;¹⁰
- (vi) There is an innate idea of the self in the mind;
- (vii) The existence of a simple identical self is self-evident and given as such in the structure and content of ordinary sense experience;
- (viii) Knowledge of one's own self is uniquely apodictic, certain or indubitable.

Whereas claims (i) through (v) of this list are canonical for substantivism and concern the self's ontology, claims (vi) through (viii) are secondary and concern its epistemological status. I shall address claims (i) through (vii) here and claim (viii), in relation to Hume's denial of self-perception, in Part III. Hume's general and explicit reply to the substantivists is that the self is neither a simple identical unity nor a necessary, *a priori* condition for the possibility of perception. Instead the self is a

¹⁰ The weaker version of this claim is that some perceptions do not require a self (e.g., perception in animals and human infants). The stronger claim is that all perception requires a self. Hume's goal is to undermine claims of both varieties.

complex, non-identical and separable entity that is wholly constituted (*a posteriori*) by perceptions.

Against the substantivist claim for the self's simplicity, a claim which is argued, for example, on the basis of the self's possession of only a strictly limited set of qualities which are themselves impenetrable to outside influence (c.f., the Leibnizian simple monad) or on the basis of the self's role as a content-less form of transcendental apperception (c.f., the Kantian '*I-think*'), Hume argues that the self is a vastly complex entity that is loose in constitution and can thus be separated, at least to some extent, into its constituent parts.

It will be useful to consider Hume's account of perception in evaluating the nature of these parts. But before turning to this account, I wish to clarify a point of interpretation. In this thesis, I shall accept an interpretation of Hume's philosophy as one which forwards a type of moderate anti-realism that is based upon epistemological considerations about what the self can and cannot know. Hume's anti-realism is 'moderate' in the sense that his deep and abiding scepticism constrains his anti-realist tendencies and prevents him from ever raising any clear and unequivocal claim for or against the existence of independent entities. While there is an extensive tradition of interpreting Hume as a naturalist philosopher,¹¹ this tradition has a tendency to understate a central claim of Hume's system, i.e., the claim that realism, or the doctrine which holds mind-independent entities to exist, is an "absurdity" (T 188). This charge of absurdity is avowedly a one-blow critique of realism, but I take it to indicate Hume's consistent and

¹¹ For a leading account of this the naturalist interpretation, see Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

fundamental position on the matter. For Hume, the self is incapable of knowing the existence or nature of any external or independent entities. While it is outside the scope of this thesis adequately to ground the anti-realist interpretation, the aim of the thesis requires that at least some such interpretation of Hume's philosophy be explored. While failing to accept any interpretation precludes any positive resolution of Hume's views on the self, accepting an interpretation (e.g., a naturalist or anti-realist interpretation) casts the bundle theory in a set of definite boundaries and contours that can be clarified and explicated. For example, the anti-realist interpretation suggests that the self is, as Merrill puts it, "never directly or immediately aware of independent, external objects."¹² All experience is thus experience of perceptions, i.e., of immediate internal mental events. Hume appears to accept this conclusion and claims that perception is the "narrow compass" (T 68) of the mind. In his view, perception is the matter with which the self is constituted and the form of all the self's conscious acts. Proceeding with this anti-realist interpretation, I shall now analyse Hume's theory of perception and, thereby, further clarify his view of the self as a bundle of perceptions.

Hume distinguishes two types of perception, i.e., impressions and ideas, and divides these into simple and complex varieties. Simple impressions are the distinct, independent, lively, fleeting and irreducible or fully separate atoms of sensory experience. They are the first perceptions to be encountered by the self in its genesis and formation. Each simple impression is a partless unity that contains no subject-affirming content. As such, simple impressions, e.g., a patch of blue, never warrant a claim for the

¹² Kenneth R. Merrill, *Historical Dictionary of Hume's Philosophy* (USA: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 146.

existence of a percipient, e.g., 'the patch of blue is a patch of blue for *me*,' 'I have the patch of blue,' 'the patch of blue is *mine*,' etc. The patch of blue is subjectless, an absolute simplicity out of which no further content can be factored.

Simple ideas are the less-lively copies that derive from, depend upon and 'exactly represent' antecedent simple impressions. Impressions of reflection are complex, generated through the mind's activity upon antecedent ideas and separable into simple impressions. Complex ideas are produced by the associating activity of the mind and are separable into distinct simple ideas. It is Hume's general view that ideas are never innate.¹³ Barring a few exceptional cases, ideas are always (i) the product of *a posteriori* simple impressions, and (ii) either simple and fully separate or complex and further separable.

Hume claims that in the course of our ordinary experience subsequent perceptions succeed upon antecedent ones "with an inconceivable rapidity" (T 252). Emphasizing the self's passive aspect as a heap of bundled perceptions, he claims that the self is constituted by "successive perceptions only" (T 253). The succession of antecedent to subsequent perceptions implies that the self is always undergoing "incessant changes of its parts" (T 261).¹⁴ While our experience is characterized by a succession among our perceptions, Hume is careful to specify that no underlying self or percipient can be derived from this succession. The succession is, as Deleuze puts it, "not the affection of

¹³ Hume claims that "every idea is derived from preceding impressions" (T 633).

¹⁴ Hume's analysis raises a central question: 'Does each change in perception entail that an enduring self is in part *changed* or, alternatively, that an anterior self is *replaced* by a subsequent one?' He appears to support the view that change entails replacement, i.e., that a thing cannot both change and continue to be what it had been prior to the change. I return to Hume's views on this matter, which are more complicated than they appear, on pp. 25-26.

an implicated subject, nor the modification or mode of a substance.”¹⁵ The self does not exist prior to but only in synchronicity with the succession and it neither underlies nor exists apart or “distinct from its perceptions.”¹⁶ Essentially, the distinction between the self and its perceptions is specious: the self *is* perceptions.¹⁷ Hume’s use of the term ‘perception,’ however, implicates both a process of perceiving and a thing perceived and it is in light of both of these senses that Hume’s theory of the self as a bundle of perceptions must be understood.

In Hume’s view, the self is not an *a priori* form that is necessary for some or all types of perception. Rather, it is *a posteriori* perceptions that are necessary for the coming to be of the self. But a key distinction obtains between that which may constitute the self generally and that which actually constitutes a *de facto* self. The bundle theory implies that a particular self is not a bundle of just *any* perceptions but of only those particular perceptions the self has encountered in the past and now encounters in the present. These past and present perceptions and their realized modifications in the self are both sufficient and necessary for the self’s present constitution. But since Hume holds the self to be nothing but the perceptions it encounters, the self’s contingency on its perceptions is *trivial* (just as the existence of a thing is trivially contingent upon that same thing’s existence). The relevant non-trivial necessity implied by Hume is that each self

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: an Essay on Hume’s Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 88.

¹⁶ A. E. Pitson, *Hume’s Philosophy of The Self* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 21.

¹⁷ Deleuze claims, “the given is no longer given to a subject, rather, the subject constitutes itself in the given” (Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: an Essay on Hume’s Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 87).

must have *some* perceptions, not that each must have such-and-such perceptions in particular.

Hume claims that the self fails to conform to any of the following three notions of a substance: substance, (i) as a hidden substratum, (ii) as an ontologically independent entity (i.e., an entity the existence of which does not depend upon the existence of any other entity), and (iii) as an entity in which parts inhere. First, following Locke, Hume doubts the clarity and empirical grounds of the notion of a hidden substratum, i.e., of a bearer of properties which does not itself appear anywhere among the properties it bears. A genuine idea of a hidden or impression-*less* thing is impossible, Hume argues, because ideas are always derived from impressions and it is inconceivable that an impression could ever give rise to the idea of an impressionless entity. Thus we have no idea of a substratum for such an idea would be “very difficult, if not impossible, to be conceiv’d” (T 232-233). We have, rather, only the illusory, unclear and empirically unfounded *notion* of it. The self, as a real object of empirical research, is not a substance *qua* substratum.

Secondly, Hume disputes the conception of the self as an ontologically independent substance. He claims, “all our perceptions [...] may exist separately, and have no need of any thing else to support their existence. They are, therefore, substances, as far as this definition explains a substance” (T 233). In Hume’s view, perceptions do not depend upon the self for their existence. However, he suggests that the self, like all other composite entities, does depend upon the distinct and fully separate parts out of which it is constituted. Thus the self is not ontologically independent but contingent upon

its particular perceptions. But, as noted above, this contingency is trivial because the distinction between the self and such perceptions is specious. Hume is content to argue that the self is not, as traditionally conceived, ontologically independent in relation to perceptions which ontologically depend upon it. The self is not an ontologically independent substance.

Finally, Hume denies that the self is a substance *qua* ground in which particular parts inhere. Inherence or inhesion is the relation typically held to obtain between 'substance' and 'accident' but also between 'whole' and 'part', 'subject' and 'predicate', 'time' and 'event', 'form' and 'instance', 'type' and 'token', etc. In each case, the latter is held to inhere in the former of the pair. I would analyse the concept of inhesion as follows. The claim '*x* inheres in *y*' means that:

- (i) *x* is ontologically dependent upon *y*, i.e., the existence of *y* is a necessary condition for the existence of another entity, *x*;
- (ii) *x* belongs to *y* (i.e., *x* is *y*'s own, or *x* is *y*'s possession);
- (iii) *x* fulfils (i) and (ii) in precisely the same way as anything else that inheres in *y*.¹⁸

According to one formulation of substantivism, perceptions inhere in the self. Hume dismisses the notion of inhesion as impressionless and claims that perceptions, as ontologically independent entities, must be explained without appeal to some further thing in which they inhere. Thus the notion of inhesion performs no work in the exegesis

¹⁸ Applied to the context of the self, a particular perception, *p*, inheres in the self if *p* is ontologically dependent on the self, *p* is the self's own, and *p* is ontologically dependent on the self and is the self's own in precisely the same way (univocally) as anything else that inheres in the self.

of the real self or, indeed, in that of any empirical phenomenon. The self does not inhere in perceptions and perceptions do not inhere in it: the self and its perceptions are one and the same. Therefore, the self is not a substance in which perceptions inhere.

Hume accepts that we commonly presume ourselves to be essentially the same or identical through time. Arguing that this conception of the self is illusory, Hume attempts to uncover the original impression(s) from which the conception is derived. But this reduction ends empty-handed: no impression(s) can be found of which the simple identical self is a copy. Hume concludes that “there is no such idea” of the self as a simple identical entity (T 252). Rather, there is only an impressionless notion “to which our several impressions and ideas are suppos’d to have a reference” (T 251). But if the notion of a simple identical self neither derives from any *a posteriori* impression nor exists innate or *a priori* in the mind, then from whence does it arise? Hume argues that the innate propensities of human nature are responsible for the formation and presence of the notion in the mind.

Hume claims that whenever it surveys a series of diverse but related objects, the self has a natural propensity to “substitute the notion of identity” (T 254) and thereby to mistake a genuine diversity of objects to be the continuous parts or convertible aspects of one and the same entity. The imagination then “feign[s] some new and unintelligible principle, that connects the objects together, and prevents their interruption or variation” (T 254). Ultimately, “all objects, to which we ascribe identity [...] consist of a succession of related [but distinct] objects” (T 255). While all identity claims are thus groundless, our belief in the identity of objects is not. The mind has a propensity, (i) to draw

connections or associations (of resemblance, contiguity in space and time, and cause and effect) between distinct perceptions, and (ii) to affirm that these mind-generated associations are in fact necessary, law governed relations that obtain in an ontologically independent and external world. While these propensities neither clarify our reasoning nor accurately represent our experience, they are too powerful to be at all times dispelled by reason. Hume admits to believing in his own simplicity and identity except when fixed upon philosophical concerns. The peculiar belief in one's simplicity and identity is common and pervasive, in Hume's view, because it is encouraged by strong natural propensities and not, as substantivists allege, because the self's simplicity and identity are in some way self-evident and would be recognized as such by any disinterested rational observer. Hume thus undermines the illusory notion of the simple identical self.

Hume offers two key metaphors of the bundled, complex, changing and real self. First, he compares the self to "a kind of theatre," and denies that we have any "notion of the place, where these scenes [i.e., parts of the play] are represented" (T 253). The suggestion here is that each self has some conception of the succession of its own perceptions but no clear conception of the self as a fixed and independent structure that contains or facilitates this succession. The self, so far as we know, contains no constant structure against which the change within and among its parts can be rigorously and objectively measured. Second, Hume compares the self to a commonwealth, claiming that, "the same individual republic may not only change its members, but also its laws and constitutions; in like manner the same person may vary his character and disposition, as well as his impressions and ideas, without losing his identity" (T 261). Although

Hume's aim in presenting this metaphor is to discredit the substantivist claim for the self's unbroken identity, the commonwealth metaphor also suggests that the self is something into which and out of which parts both can and do pass. Although we have no notion of the self as a fixed container, we entertain a conception of the self as both a finite, or limited in its parts, and open entity for which the introduction of new parts, e.g., novel perceptions, is always possible.

Although these metaphors are somewhat illuminating, Hume provides a more direct answer to the question of how, i.e., by what parts and processes, the self is constituted. He claims that the self is a "system or train of *different* perceptions [...] all *united* together but without any perfect simplicity or identity" (T 657).¹⁹ But are we here to understand that the parts of the self are (i) different from one another, or (ii) unified with one another, or (iii) somehow fixed between difference and unity? Mereological questions, such as the following, shed some light on Hume's account:

- (i) Do I have any unchanging parts which establish and preserve my identity;
- (ii) Can I exist without my present parts;
- (iii) Can I exist without any parts;
- (iv) Can my present parts exist independent of me;
- (v) Can my present parts exist independent of all bundles;
- (vi) Do parts exist independent of me, i.e., am I a mere collection of some parts; and
- (vii) Do parts only exist in me, i.e., am I a complete collection of all parts?

¹⁹ The emphasis is mine.

If 'parts' are defined as 'perceptions,' then Hume's explicit reply to (i) through (iii) is negative, (iv) through (v) is affirmative and he claims to be agnostic *vis-à-vis* (vi) and (vii). But perhaps the self of Hume's system contains more than perceptions alone, i.e., it contains parts of more than one type. It seems reasonable to expect that associations should count as parts of the self because, for Hume, associations are products of the self's activity upon perceptions.²⁰ The parts of the self may also include the natural propensities that Hume invokes in his account of how the self comes to believe itself to be simple and identical.

Hume faces additional mereological questions over the temporality of the self's parts. Deleuze argues that the self's gathering of parts over time undercuts any conception of the self as a mere "sum of its parts [because] the parts, considered together, are defined, rather, according to their mode of temporal, and sometimes spatial, appearance."²¹ But, even if the self's perceptions conform to a temporal order or *de facto* sequence, we have no greater reason to count than to discount this temporal order as but another type of part which comes to be within the self. If the temporal order of perceptions is such a part, our conception of the self as the sum of its parts remains tenable. Another key mereological question centers on the extent to which the self

²⁰ There is, however, some controversy over the extent to which Hume allows for a distinction between perceptions and associations. Associations can be viewed as complex ideas (i.e., as a species of perception) or, alternatively, as non-perceptive relations between perceptions. But, a distinction between perceptions and associations is warranted insofar as Hume claims that simple impressions (i.e., the genealogical ancestors of all other perceptions) are unknowable in causal origin. Associations, on the other hand, are always the product of the self's power to effect relations between its parts.

²¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts: 1953-1974*, trans. Christopher Bush, et al. (Paris: Semiotext(e), 2004), 94.

“transposes and changes” (T 10) its parts over time, i.e., on whether the self’s parts remain separable, like a mixture of coarse minerals, or whether they ever become synthesized in the self into an inseparable, solution-like unity.

Hume goes some way toward deciding these disputes but compromises all such efforts in the Appendix of his *Treatise* where he casts formidable doubt upon the bundle theory.²² According to the analysis presented in Book One at least, the self’s parts are never synthesized into a homogeneous unity. Although “never very fixed nor determinate” (T 189-190) the self’s ever-changing constitution remains divisible, at least to some extent, into its parts. In addition to perceptions, associations, natural propensities and the temporal order with which each arise in the mind, we may also have to count the various faculties such as the imagination and the memory as parts of the self.²³ We may continue to accept that the self is a bundle, but we cannot, without further argument and interpretation, maintain that the self is a bundle of perceptions alone.

Of all the parts that the self contains, Hume holds the memory, or the “faculty by which we raise up the images of past perceptions” (T 260), to play a key role in the self’s coming to be. In his account of perception, the memory is responsible for retaining each impression as it comes to be a simple idea and each simple idea as it comes to be a

²² In the Appendix, Hume largely retracts the bundle theory’s positive claims and reappropriates a kind of agnosticism about the self’s nature that is reminiscent of the hopeful but epistemically-sober mood of the *Treatise*’s Introduction. This ascetic retreat is exemplary of Hume’s scepticism and his readiness to reform, censure or abandon any claim that steps beyond his empirical analysis of the tendencies and exceptions that inform his own experience.

²³ According to Deleuze, however, the propensities and faculties should be viewed not as real wholes but as sets of perceptions. Under this conception, the propensities and the faculties are analogous to the self as a loose bundle of perceptions. He claims, “we use the terms ‘imagination’ and ‘mind’ not to designate a faculty or a principle of organization, but rather a particular set or a particular collection [i.e., of perceptions]” (Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: an Essay on Hume’s Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 87).

complex one.²⁴ But the memory is, in Hume's view, fallible, full of gaps and complicit in the dubious inventions issuing from the imagination. For example, he claims that in our mistaken claim to an unchanging personal identity we often overstep the resources of memory and imagine ourselves to have endured at times and in places the details of which we are presently unable to recall. The gaps and imperfections of memory are concealed by the causal associations that link the retrievable sections of memory together. Thus, as Merrill puts it, causal associations are the only source "of objects and events lying beyond immediate perception or memory."²⁵ Hume claims:

Had we no memory, we never should have any notion of causation, nor consequently of that chain of causes and effects, which constitute our self or person. But having once acquired this notion of causation from the memory, we can extend the same chain of causes, and consequently the identity of our persons beyond our memory, and can comprehend times, and circumstances, and actions, which we have entirely forgot, but suppose in general to have existed (T 262)

Memory is thus necessary but not sufficient for the illusion of the simple self. The illusion is sustained "by the relation of cause and effect" (T 261). We should not, however, conclude that Hume invokes causal relations only in the coming to be of the illusory notion of the self as a simple and identical entity.

²⁴ On the formation of ideas, Hume claims, "ideas are derived from something antecedently present to the mind" (T 67).

²⁵ Kenneth R. Merrill, *Historical Dictionary of Hume's Philosophy* (USA: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 69.

Hume's analysis of causality illuminates two types of causal relations in the mind. The first are the dubitable associations which are produced by the mind (e.g., the first billiard ball collides with and causes a second, previously stationary, billiard ball to move). Hume famously doubts whether such associations correspond to any mind independent causal relations between objects in the world. The second type of causal relations which must, by contrast, be held to be real and true as a result of the existence of the first type, is the causal relation that obtains between the mind and the associations it produces (e.g., the mind generates or causes itself to have the association according to which the billiard balls are causally related). Thus Hume does not deny causal relations in the mind. He denies, rather, any epistemic grounds upon which to decide whether any external, mind-independent causal relations exist.

There are two ways in which the self, in Hume's analysis, acts as a cause: it acts, (i) as a cause of the nature of its ongoing perceptions, and (ii) as the cause of itself. Although Hume claims that we do not know the origin of simple impressions (i.e., whether they arise from the mind, the sense organs or some other cause), he claims that we *do* know that simple impressions are followed by simple ideas, complex impressions and complex ideas. We also know that the particular instances of the latter three species of perception are in some way caused by the very self that encounters them. The higher forms of perception are only possible for a self that is active in retaining and transforming its impressions into ideas and in drawing these elements together into complex ideas and complex impressions. The self is a cause, therefore, insofar as it determines the ideality and complexity of its own subsequent higher perceptions.

Second, the self acts as a cause of itself, i.e., as the *fait accompli* of its own activity, and as “that which develops itself”²⁶ without any premeditated plan to do so. The self acts as the cause of itself in two ways. First, the self acts as the *de facto* cause of itself by determining the ideality and complexity of its own perceptions, as noted above. Second, the self acts as the *de jure* cause of itself insofar as all other self-independent causes are excluded in advance as ‘absurd.’ If, as Hume maintains, the realist claim for external, independent entities is absurd then so too must be the claims that (i) external, independent causes can bring about effects (including effects in the self); and that, (ii) the self can bring about effects in external, independent objects. Thus, in every causal association, the terms ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ will either refer to the self or to a part of the self, such as one of the self’s perceptions, or else Hume will have to hold that the causal association in question is absurd or untenable. If pressed on the issue of what causes the self, however, Hume would likely claim that perhaps there are absurd external causes and effects of the self. But, in the same sceptical key, he would likely add that he, or broadly speaking, the self, could not know anything about such entities even if, by some absurd power, they happen to exist.

²⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: an Essay on Hume’s Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 85.

PART II. CRITICISMS AND DEFENCE OF THE BUNDLE THEORY

In this Part, I shall examine the role of Hume's use of the first person singular pronoun, 'I,' in the *Treatise*. Second, I shall analyse the way in which he appears to be exposed to two counts of self-contradiction. First, Hume seems to deny but also implicitly to affirm that at least some of the self's parts, (e.g., the higher perceptions, all associations, the imagination, the memory, natural propensities, etc.) inhere in the self. Second, he seems to deny but implicitly to affirm that at least some part(s) of the self endures through time. I argue that the bundle theory can be defended against both charges.

Hume's arguments, including those he offers against the simple enduring self, are sceptical in spirit. But, as Chisholm has argued,²⁷ Hume's scepticism wholly depends upon an appeal to some conception of the pronoun, 'I.' Chisholm draws a logical distinction between that which follows from, (i) finding a proposition to be true; and (ii) failing to find whether a proposition is true or false. He claims:

²⁷ See Roderick M. Chisholm, "On the Observability of the Self," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Sep., 1969): 7-21.

The fact that a man finds a certain proposition *p* to be true does warrant a subjectless report to the effect that *p* is true. For finding that *p* is true entails that *p* is true. [But, conversely,] one's failure to find that *q* is true entails nothing about the truth of *q*. The fact that a man fails to find that *q* is true entitles him to say only that he, at least, does not find that *q* is true.²⁸

To apply Chisholm's distinction to Hume's case, consider Hume's following claim: (i) "I do not think there are any two distinct impressions, which are inseparably conjoin'd" (T 66). If the pronoun, 'I,' were removed, (i) may be rephrased as follows: (ii), 'there are no two distinct impressions which are inseparably conjoined.' The difference between (i) and (ii) is that (i) addresses Hume's beliefs about impressions, and only indirectly addresses impressions themselves, whereas (ii) addresses impressions themselves (quite apart from Hume's beliefs about them). The first of these, (i), is sceptical in a way that the second, (ii), is not. Although Chisholm's analysis does not take the form of an objection, it presses a central question. The question is not whether Hume appeals to a conception of the 'I' or self, but to what conception he appeals.²⁹ Most importantly, does Hume commit himself to a view of the self as a simple and identical entity? It is clear that Hume rejects the view of the self as simple: the self, for Hume, is

²⁸ Ibid., 11.

²⁹ I am supposing that by 'I' Hume refers to some conception of himself. It would be absurd to suppose that Hume used 'I' throughout the *Treatise* to refer to something other than himself, e.g., to refer to Newton's concept of gravity. If Hume uses 'I' to refer to himself, and appeals to some conception of himself in doing so, then it seems that there are three key possibilities. First, if Hume's argument *against* the simple enduring self appeals to a simple enduring self, his argument is self-contradictory. Second, if Hume's argument against the simple enduring self appeals to some other conception of the self, his argument is not self-contradictory. But if, third, his argument *for* a complex discontinuous self appeals to a complex discontinuous self argument, then his argument is circular.

nothing if not a complex of parts. However, the question of whether he appeals to a conception of the self as an identical or changeless entity requires further consideration.

It remains to be determined whether Hume conceives the self to be (i) identical, or (ii) ever-changing (not identical but in some sense *enduring*), or (iii) ever-replaced (neither identical nor enduring). Throughout the *Treatise*, Hume appeals to a conception of the self as an enduring entity. For example, Hume's account of the transformation of perceptions of one species into another (e.g. of simple impressions into simple ideas) presupposes that something in the self endures at least while this transformation is realized and to the extent that it is realized. Another example is Hume's claim that, "when I am convinced of any principle, it is only an idea, which strikes more strongly upon me. When I give the preference to one set of arguments above another, I do nothing but decide from my feeling concerning the superiority of their influence" (T 103). In claiming to decide on the basis of antecedent feelings, Hume appeals to a self which possesses at least some modicum of enduring parts. This appeal, however, appears incompatible with his claim that there is no "single power of the soul, which remains unalterably the same, *perhaps* for one moment" (T 253).³⁰ But if the self never remains unchanged in whole or in part, if none of its properties are fixed even for a moment, why is it that all new associations seem to be invariably cast in the form of being an association of resemblance, contiguity or causality? If the self is in continual and all-encompassing flux, how does the faculty of memory retain any portion of its memory-

³⁰ The emphasis is mine.

contents over time? The constancy of such powers seems to imply a real endurance in the self.

Hume's claim, however, is not that the self always changes but that it *perhaps* always does. The self experiences change; but, for reasons which I shall discuss in Part III,³¹ the self cannot survey all its parts at once in an effort to determine whether all its parts have changed or whether some of its parts remain unchanged (if only momentarily). Further complicating the self's ability to perceive change within its parts, Hume's theatre metaphor suggests that the parts of the self exhibit change not in isolation of one another but only in relation to one another, i.e., that the change taking place within one part is appreciable and measurable only in comparison to the stability or endurance taking place within some other part. As such, change and endurance appear to be, in Hume's analysis, relative phenomena. Although Hume does not fully explore the possibility, the self's endurance through time, rather than being based upon the existence of changeless parts in the self, might instead be based upon the self's bundling of all the momentary relative endurances which occur among its parts. The self's conflicting feelings about, on the one hand, its endless dynamism and, on the other hand, its unbroken identity might be an effect of the fact that the self's endurance, or perhaps its perdurance,³² is like a long rope composed of only short threads such that the absolute changeless identity of the whole

³¹ See pp. 34-35.

³² Blackburn defines perdurance as follows: "something perdures if and only if it persists by having different temporal parts, or stages, at different times, though no one part of it is wholly present at more than one time [...] perdurance corresponds to the way a play is extended in time: Act I is not present when Act II is" (Simon Blackburn, "Perdurance," *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)).

self is indeed illusory and fictitious but the concrete endurance of the whole, as a temporal patchwork of shorter relative endurances, is real.

It has been argued that the ability of the self, in Hume's account, to perceive a change among its perceptions, i.e., its experience of a "real perceptual succession,"³³ implies an identical percipient, at least while the perceived change is ongoing. The idea here is that change can only be measured by or in relation to something that is fixed or changeless.³⁴ As Campbell puts it, "if event *B* is cognized as sequent upon event *A*, clearly *A* must in some form be present to the same [i.e., identical] subject as that to which *B* is present."³⁵ Although Hume does not adequately counter this objection, he appears to possess the resources to do so. If change and endurance are, as Hume suggests, only experienced as relational phenomena, then the self's perception of a perceptual succession need not require the self to contain any permanent or unchanging parts. It might be the case that the part of the self that *perceives* change is not itself permanent or eternally unchanging but only a thing which exhibits a relative stability or endurance in relation to the perceived change (and perhaps only exhibits these qualities while the perceived change is ongoing). In any case, Hume does not commit himself to the view that either the whole self or any part of the self is forever identical. Thus the bundle theory is not self-contradictory on this point.

But does Hume hold that parts of the self *inhere* in the self? His account of the faculty of memory appears committed to this substantivist doctrine. We generally

³³ Abraham Sesshu Roth, "What was Hume's Problem with Personal Identity?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Jul., 2000): 94.

³⁴ See D. G. C. McNabb, *David Hume: His Theory of Knowledge and Morality* (Aldershot, England: Gregg Revivals, 1992), 149-150.

³⁵ C. A. Campbell, *On Selfhood and Godhood* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), 75-76.

suppose that the existence of a particular memory implies the existence of a particular self, i.e., the very self for whom the memory is a memory. But Hume denies, at least implicitly, that we can know whether other mereologically equivalent bundles exist that contain the same parts, e.g., the same memories, as ourselves. While a self may call a memory 'its own,' the self cannot know whether memories, associations, perceptions, propensities, etc. *inhere* in itself or not. Thus Hume's bundle theory is not self-contradictory on this point either. He does not presuppose or contend that parts of the self can be known by the self to inhere in the self. Hume has thus countered the charges that the bundle theory is self-contradictory on the issue of the self's supposed identity and on the issue of the supposed inherence of the self's parts.

Hume claims that his scepticism enforces "a diffidence and modesty in all my decisions" (T 633). For an example of this modesty, consider Hume's claim that he can only settle his own nature and not the nature of all selves at all times: "if any one [...] has a different notion of himself [...] all I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular" (T 252).³⁶ Here Hume is engaged in the presumption that the self is a discrete entity, i.e., an entity that stands in epistemic separation from others of its kind. Nowhere is this presumption, which informs all Hume's arguments for and against various other properties of the self, more clearly present than in his analysis of dreamless sleep and of death:

³⁶ c.f. Locke's avowal, "I think the intellectual faculties are made and operate alike in most men. But if it should happen not to be so, I can only make it my humble request, in my own name and in the name of those that are of my size, who find their minds work, reason, and know in the same low way that mine does, that the men of a more happy genius will show us the way of their nobler flights" (John Locke, "Second Letter to Bishop of Worchester," *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 467).

When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of myself, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions removed by death, and could I neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate after the dissolution of my body, I should be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is farther requisite to make me a perfect non-entity (T 252)

Hume's claim is that his cessation would follow not from the removal of perceptions that enter into the differing constitution of some other self, but only from the removal of his own constitutive perceptions. This condition for the existence of the self specifies one of the way in which selves, as discrete entities, stand apart from each other: the dreamless sleep or death of one self never implies the sleep, wakefulness, death or life of any other self just as "when one is born blind [...] the impressions [of sight and] their correspondent ideas" are lost not for all selves but only for the one who is born blind (T 5). Hume's atomism operates primarily at the level of perceptions, especially in his analysis of simple impressions in succession. But his atomism also operates at the level of discrete selves. Although the self is always divisible into its constituting parts, each self is, as it were, surrounded by an epistemically impenetrable void that separates and renders it discrete from all others. While the bundle theory does not preclude the presumption that the self is a discrete entity, the theory does not justify it either, and in failing to provide some such justification, the bundle theory is deficient.³⁷

³⁷ It is important to note that this conception of the self as a discrete entity does not specify whether the self is a substance. In the final analysis, the self's substantive character remains an open question (albeit no longer a pressing one). Hume is clear that the self is not an independent, changeless and hidden unity in which changing accidents inhere. But perhaps there are other ways of conceiving the self to be a substance. For Hume, the pressing question is that of whether the self's parts empirically exhibit a special or unique

Hume's analysis of dreamless sleep also illuminates his other important presumption, i.e., that the self is both a heap of bundled perceptions and an ongoing perception-bundling activity. It suggests, further, that the self's bundling activity is no less fundamental for the self's ongoing existence than is the self's bundled perceptions. For Hume, the self's everyday ordinary experience entails a *removal* of perceptions insofar as the self's past and present perceptions are always succeeded upon by novel perceptions that take the place of the former. In this respect, dreamless sleep and ordinary experience are indistinguishable: both entail the same removal of past and present perceptions. In Hume's account, however, the distinguishing mark between ordinary experience and dreamless sleep is that, whereas dreamless sleep entails both the cessation of the self's ongoing receptivity to novel perceptions and the cessation of the self's perception-associating or bundling activity, ordinary experience does not strictly entail the cessation of either. Thus Hume seems to agree in spirit with Descartes' claim that, "if I were to cease all thinking [i.e., perceiving] I would then utterly cease to exist."³⁸ As such, what Hume views to be fundamental for the ongoing existence of any self, whatever that self's content might be, is the activity implied by the self not as a bundle, but as a *bundler* of perceptions. While any change in the self's bundled parts is sufficient to undercut the claim for the self's changeless identity, only a cessation of the self's receptive and bundling activity will realize the self's complete cessation or non-existence.

type of relation with one another, i.e., a relation that the self's parts do not exhibit in connection with any other (real or fictive) parts that are not present in or constitutive of the self. Hume's analysis suggests that the self's parts form a cohesive and discrete collection inasmuch as each part is what it is exclusively through its ongoing relation and interaction with the other parts within the self.

³⁸ René Descartes, *Meditations, Objections and Replies*, ed. Roger Ariew and Donald Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 15.

Hume confesses in the Appendix to the *Treatise* that his bundle theory is problematic (T 633). It is puzzling, however, why Hume thought to cite the ‘problems’ that he does.³⁹ He claims that the bundle theory brings to a head an inconsistency between two equally well-reasoned principles: “[i)] that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and [(ii)] that the mind never perceives any real connection among distinct existences” (T 636). But as Kemp Smith points out,⁴⁰ these principles are not inconsistent. Rather, the second principle follows from the first. If distinctness precludes all real connection, then there will be no perceivable real connection between two distinct existences. Hume’s doubts seem to concern the degree to which the self draws its perceptions (i.e., those previously-separate entities it encounters) into a unity.

This question of the self’s unity seems to hinge on the issue of which aspect of the self one presumes to be fundamental. If one argues that the bundling aspect is fundamental, the self appears to be predictable and continuous, an unfolding of the same cardinal activities of association. If one holds the bundled aspect to be fundamental, the self appears to be a changing and incohesive mixture of perceptions. However, the consistency of the self’s parts might change through time. In Hume’s analysis, the self begins as a passive and receptive being, an open door to an unconnected series of simple impressions. The early self is simple in elements but complex in disorder. As the bundling activity takes hold, the self begins to integrate new perceptions into an ever-broadening network of associations. This complex network casts novel perceptions in a

³⁹ Donald C. Ainslie, “Hume’s Reflections on the Identity and Simplicity of Mind,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (May, 2001), 558.

⁴⁰ Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (London: Macmillan, 1941), 555-58.

holistic light, situating each into an elegant pattern with little trace of their former chaos. In short, novel perceptions no longer appear novel (at least not in any radical sense). Thus the self can be viewed, in terms of mereology, as a simplicity tending toward complexity or, in terms of order, as a chaotic complexity tending toward well-behaved simplicity. But, more fundamentally, this analysis suggests that the self is structured by a particular path of development, i.e., from an entity that is purely receptive of perceptions to an entity that is characterized by mixture of perception-receptivity and perception-associating activity. Thus while the self's endurance may be purely relative, its telos or path of development appears to be otherwise.

PART III. HUME'S DENIAL OF SELF-PERCEPTION

As noted in the Introduction to this Chapter, Hume's attempts to perceive himself, to center himself in a perception, always result in a perception of something other than himself; e.g., Hume perceives the furniture in his study. Although Hume does not argue as much, this phenomenon seems to support the thesis that the self is *diaphanous* in the sense that "when we try to focus on it, we see through it to its object(s)."⁴¹ A key feature of Hume's account, however, is that in addition to striking upon this first diaphanous perception, he claims also to perceive that he has failed to perceive himself. The claim is

⁴¹ Kenneth R. Merrill, *Historical Dictionary of Hume's Philosophy* (USA: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 128.

that the self alone is never perceived but the failure to perceive the self is perceived. But Hume cannot know that he has failed to perceive himself without already knowing what not failing to perceive himself would consist in, i.e., without anticipating at least some of the details of a counterfactual case in which he did not fail to perceive himself.⁴²

Scholars have questioned what self-perception, on a bundle theory view, would entail. Some have regarded Hume's claim that the self cannot perceive itself to be ironic or merely a moment in his polemic against substantivism and not representative of his overall position. Pitson, for example, claims that it is Hume's view that self-perception or "self-awareness consists essentially in the occurrence of a certain perception—namely, a perception of myself as a series of perceptions—within the series."⁴³ Noonan's interpretation is similar. For Noonan, Humean self-perception consists in "a perception which is a perception of the perceptions constituting the mind as a bundle."⁴⁴ But the claim forwarded by both Pitson and Noonan finds little textual support in the *Treatise*. In discussing abstract ideas, Hume argues against an infinite capacity in the mind. He claims that when we perceive an abstract or general idea such as that of a triangle we do not thereby perceive all possible variations of the object at once or in a single perception and neither do we perceive an unending series of perceptions in which each possible variation of the object is given due consideration. Instead, our perception always tends toward a singular object, e.g., toward a particular triangle. Hume is thus likely to disagree with Pitson and Noonan's claim that the mind can perceive all its present and past perceptions

⁴² Noonan claims, "if Hume has no idea of a self he presumably has no conception of what it would be like to observe one. In that case, however, how does he know that he is not doing so? Maybe he is, but just fails to recognize the fact" (Harold W. Noonan, *Personal Identity*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), 68).

⁴³ A. E. Pitson, *Hume's Philosophy of The Self* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 40.

⁴⁴ Harold W. Noonan, *Personal Identity*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), 164.

at once or in a single perception. Fortunately, the bundle theory implies a model according to which the self can perceive itself without perceiving all of its content at once. Thus self-perception can be simple in content and free from any conflict with Hume's analysis of abstract ideas.

If a thing perceives itself at a particular time then that thing, at that time, both 'perceives' and 'is perceived' through the same act of perception. In terms of the bundle theory, self-perception implicates the bundling (or active) aspect of the self as that which perceives and the bundled (or passive) aspect of the self as that which is perceived. If the self is discrete,⁴⁵ then the self is finite or limited in the quantity of properties or parts that it contains. The active and passive aspects, as aspects of this finite self, must also be finite. A self-perception which implicates both aspects might, therefore, be doubly finite or twice limited in content because the content of the self-perception must be finite on account of the self's finite active (perceiving) aspect and on account of the self's finite passive (perceived) aspect. For this reason, self-perception may well be simple because neither the full spectrum of the self's bundling activity, nor the full collection of its bundled perceptions is, of necessity, entailed in the self-perception's content.

The argument that self-perception requires the self to perceive all its parts at once seems to rest on the idea that if the self could perceive all its parts, it would somehow know these parts to be its own and it would therefore know that *what* it perceives is its own constitution and not the constitution of something else, e.g., the constitution of another self. But, in Hume's view, the self is always incapable of knowing whether its

⁴⁵ See the definition of 'discrete entity' on pp. 3-4.

parts exist only within itself or whether they exist in other selves as well. The self cannot know whether exact mereological copies of itself exist. It cannot even know whether every other self that exists is, in fact, an exact mereological copy of itself. Even if the self could perceive all its parts at once, it could never know whether these parts were (i) only or exclusively in itself, (ii) in itself and in other copy selves as well, or (iii) in itself and in all selves (i.e., in the case that all selves are copies of one another). Thus it seems that while a self cannot perceive itself without perceiving at least one of its parts, the number of parts (greater than zero) that the self perceives is not essential. Even if the self could perceive all its parts at once, it could not know this perception to be a self-evident case of self-perception.

This leads us to the question: 'Given that the self cannot know whether it contains such-and-such parts exclusively, what else does the self perceive about its parts, or about the way in which it perceives its parts, which might lead to, or be constitutive of, self-perception?' For Hume, the self as a bundle of perceptions aggregates all the perceptions it encounters into itself. As such, all the self's perceptions are parts of the self. To this extent, the self perceives itself whenever it perceives anything. But it seems that the self could and probably very often does perceive something without perceiving that what it perceives, i.e., its perception, is a part of itself. How, then, does the self perceive that every perception is always already a case of self-perception? It is on this question that Hume's two presumptions, i.e., that the self is discrete and that the self has both an active and a passive aspect, find their connection. If the self perceives itself then the self is both perceiving and perceived. But if we attempt to divide the self into two discrete entities,

one perceiving and the other perceived, we strike an impasse: discrete entities are incapable of perceiving, and of being perceived by, one another. In the case of the self, the active aspect's inability to perceive anything but the parts constitutive of the passive aspect, i.e., its epistemic access to only those parts, suggests that the two aspects persist within one and the same discrete entity.

Hume's bundle theory implies that selves have numerous things in common: e.g., perceptions, associations, memories, etc. But it seems that an infinite number of perceptions, associations and memories are possible. Since every self, by contrast, is finite it is thus possible that no two selves will ever share a particular perception, association or memory in common. There are also cases to consider where few salient memories (e.g., in amnesiacs) and few or no associations (e.g., in newborn humans) appear to obtain. What then, is the criterion of a self? The above account of self-perception suggests an answer. A self might be defined as anything that perceives any one of its parts.⁴⁶ We may distinguish a self as fully self-aware if it additionally perceives that its active perceiving aspect and its passive perceived aspect are not themselves discrete from one another but, instead, subsist within the same discrete entity. The bundle theory exploits the differences that obtain between selves, the differences of past and of character, and focuses less upon the properties common to all selves. When the bundle theory is combined with a positive account of self-perception, however, a more complete picture of the self and selfhood emerges.

⁴⁶ Arguments aiming to establish the selfhood of certain non-human systems exhibiting perceptive abilities, e.g., the higher animals, computers, etc., may find this definition useful.

CONCLUSION

Hume's scepticism about the self is motivated by a belief that any conclusion we reach on its nature, like those reached on the nature of God, will beget the liveliest of consequences. Although the bundle theory is, by Hume's own admission, inadequate, it is not irredeemably so, and the profound influence it has had on subsequent philosophy of mind is a testament to this fact.⁴⁷ Hume postulates a self that is non-identical, complex and endlessly becoming. Its past and future are shrouded in probabilities and its full, present constitution is ever impenetrable to its own self-perceiving advances.

Hume is often credited as having drawn classical empiricism to its logical conclusions. But in addition to this consummation, he opens a new tradition wherein the self is approached as something which is incapable of any full or adequate reflection upon itself, and wherein self-knowledge is held to be not a self-evident starting place, but a distant goal that is always to some extent unrealized, if not unrealizable. In short, he inaugurates a tradition in which the self theorist's use of the first-person singular pronoun, 'I,' is always problematic and imbued with a subtle irony.

But Hume's denial of self-perception, rather than providing the sceptical constraint its author sought, produces only an epistemological contradiction. Just as a

⁴⁷ For example, the *Treatise* has been hailed as "the foundational document of cognitive science" (Jerry Fodor qtd. in Kenneth R. Merrill, *Historical Dictionary of Hume's Philosophy* (USA: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 188).

figure cannot be both square and round, a self cannot be both (i) able to call its own nature into question and, (ii) unable to perceive itself. The question Hume sought to answer, the question of the self, like the question, 'What am I?' presupposes that the object in question can be perceived. The question is really one of what more can be known of the self in addition to and on the basis of the fact that the self can be perceived.

Suppose a sceptic insists, 'I cannot perceive myself nor do I know what I am.' If by 'I' the sceptic refers to himself, i.e., to some conception of himself, then clearly he must have some idea of what 'I' means, and by extension, of what 'I' is. If, on the other hand, he really does not perceive, think of or have a meaning attached to the term, 'I,' his statement ought to be purged of its appeal to the grammar of the first person singular and rephrased as follows: '(x) cannot perceive (x) nor do/does (x) know what (x) am/are/is.' Clearly this second statement is nonsense. The use of 'I' as a first-person singular pronoun presupposes a belief on the user's part about that in which the first-person consists, just as the use of 'I' as a roman numeral presupposes some belief about the nature of number.

CHAPTER 2

HUSSERL'S THEORY OF THE SELF

INTRODUCTION

A survey of his early philosophical writings would not suggest that Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the pupil of Brentano and leading proponent of the latter's intentionality theory of consciousness, would go on to become a major theorist of the self. In his early work, Husserl dismisses the traditional conception of the self as a groundless fiction and holds that man's immanent experiences appear to exist "in a nowhere land" and "[for] no one at all."⁴⁸ As his career progressed, however, Husserl began to explore objects of experience as structures which bear the stamp of being intended and wholly constituted by a complex and active self, a self which can endlessly examine and explicate itself in form and content. Proceeding from the constitution and temporality of objects as 'transcendental clues,' Husserl uncovers the self as the principle and constituting origin not only of all its objects and acts but also of whatever sense or meaning it has for itself as a self-reflective entity.

Like Hume, Descartes and other luminaries in western philosophy of the self, Husserl's aim in analysing the self is to uncover a universal foundation that can distinguish the genuine sciences from pseudoscience and support and defend science against principled sceptical attack. In Husserl's view, the selection of the self as a universal foundation is justified on the basis of the self's fundamental or absolute

⁴⁸ Rudolf Bernet, Iso Kern and Eduard Marbach, *An Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 206.

evidence of which he distinguishes two forms.⁴⁹ The first form, which is indubitable and establishes the “inconceivability of the non-being of the evident thing,”⁵⁰ is called *apodictic evidence*. The second form, marked by its complete comprehensiveness, is called *adequate evidence*. Husserl’s claim is that the self is grounded in apodictic evidence, i.e., in the self-giving or immediately intuited veracity of the self’s existence which, as apodictic, “discloses itself [as] the absolute unimaginableness (inconceivability) of [its] non-being, and thus exclud[es] in advance every doubt as ‘objectless’, empty” (CM 16). He is clear, however, that the self is not grounded in adequate evidence, i.e., in the self’s experience of itself as completely or comprehensively self-given. Husserl came to view adequate evidence as a guiding goal or *ideal* for which the phenomenologist always strives but, in practice, never possesses.⁵¹ The self is thus “not adequate but it is apodictic.”⁵² Although it is revealed to the phenomenologist in some apodictic details, the self always remains extensively open to further refinement, reformulation and discovery.

In this chapter, I analyse Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* (first published in 1931) and his attempts therein to illuminate this apodictically evidenced self.⁵³ I offer a critique

⁴⁹ Husserl defines evidence as the “the self-giving, of an affair [...] or other objectivity, in the mode: ‘itself there’, ‘immediately intuited’, ‘given originaliter’” (Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: an Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 57. Cited hereafter as “CM”).

⁵⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 86.

⁵¹ John J. Drummond, *Historical Dictionary of Husserl’s Philosophy* (Lanhan, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2008), 32.

⁵² Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 90.

⁵³ *Cartesian Meditations* is widely regarded as Husserl’s most mature treatment of the self and of the transcendental role of the ego in phenomenology. Subtitled, ‘an Introduction to Phenomenology,’ the work aims to uncover the existence and nature of the ego. Since Husserl is known to have shifted his views on

of his efforts to forward the modern claim that the self is the sole pre-scientific foundation upon which both the sciences and all genuine philosophy must rest. I focus on his account of pre-reflective and reflective self-awareness and his claim that the self's innermost core, i.e., its functioning consciousness, always evades the reflection necessary for any would-be explication of it. In the course of his phenomenology, Husserl finds new grounds to support a Humean claim, i.e., the claim that the self is unable to gain an adequate or comprehensive understanding of itself through reflection. Husserl's key grounds for this claim are twofold:

- (i) The horizontal framework in which objects in reflection (i.e., reflective objects) are invariably presented precludes a complete or adequate understanding of the reflective object, and thus also of the self as it is presented in reflection;
- (ii) The functioning or performing consciousness that forms the center of the self cannot be reflected upon or thematically explored due to the unbridgeable gap between the pre-temporal situatedness of the self's functioning consciousness and the temporal situatedness of the self's acts, objects and attempts at understanding within an always advancing temporal life-stream;

the ego throughout his career, *Cartesian Meditations* suggests itself as an essential text to any research which aims, as this thesis does, not to measure the shifts in Husserl's thought but, rather, to analyse his mature, and in many ways final, critique of the self.

I argue that Husserl's claim that the self's understanding of itself is always inadequate or incomplete is problematic and threatens to undermine the intelligibility of the self as the common foundation for science and phenomenology. We have dubious grounds for claiming the self as a foundation if our reflections on the self are, as Husserl suggests, not merely vague at the edges but vacuous at the core.

Although he worked untiringly to counter the charge of advancing a new solipsism, Husserl accepted that the phenomenologist works, at least for a portion of her study, from within a comportment toward the world which takes as its principle that everything encountered by the phenomenologist is something which has a sense or meaning solely 'for her', that this sense is constituted solely 'from her', and that the things encountered by her have being solely 'in her.' As a result of this solipsistic filtration, Husserl's exegesis of the self explodes in scope and encircles all that is incidental and fundamental in all aspects of all possible objects and acts. Once one has grasped the central characteristics of his phenomenology, however, his theory of the self can be approached through an examination of his key characterizations of the self as an ego pole, life-stream, *eidos ego*, monad and functioning consciousness. To this end, I shall begin with a review of Husserl's celebrated *epoché*, and his account of intentionality.

PART I. THE EPOCHÉ

In *Cartesian Mediations*, Husserl lauds the “absolute unprejudicedness” (CM 36), radical authenticity and “self-responsibility” (CM 6) he finds in Descartes. Citing the latter’s injunction that each philosopher affirm only the indubitable “for himself and in himself” (CM 7), he claims that his phenomenology is neo-Cartesian in precisely this “absolutely self-responsible” (CM 6) spirit and in its quest to discover a presuppositionless beginning (CM 1). Husserl also shares Descartes’ goal of discovering an “absolute foundation” (CM 1) or “transcendental grounding” (CM 27) for the sciences. But he rejects what he understands to be the deductive bias of the Cartesian system (CM 7) and argues that science must be founded not upon “an axiom, *ego cogito*, but [only upon] an all-embracing self-investigation” (CM 156). Instead of concluding in or deriving from an indubitable self-evident formula, e.g., *cogito ergo sum*, phenomenology attempts an ever-widening self-investigation which frequently retraces and reexamines its own steps in an attempt to produce a rigorous account of the peripheral and core structures of subjectivity. This self-investigation depends wholly upon the correct performance of the epoché.

Husserl indicates that the epoché, like the Cartesian programme of universal doubt, can only serve as a method for one who has already established, or presupposed, a conception of himself as “me, the one who is meditating” (CM 25). Although Husserl views the self under a manifold of characterizations, this initial conception figures

prominently in his final theory of the self. And while he would argue that this initial conception is shown to be necessary by later phenomenological developments, these developments depend without exception upon the conception of the self as an isolated, self-responsible and self-affirming meditator.

The epoché begins in a manner that is again reminiscent of Cartesian doubt, i.e., it begins with the meditating ego's recognition that he has only imperfect grounds with which to counter the sceptic's claim that the world is but a "coherent dream" (CM 17). The meditating ego, having discovered the dubitability of the world, is now led to affirm the "being of the world [...] only [as] an acceptance-phenomenon" (CM 18), i.e., only as a thing which can bear a sense or meaning *for him* (e.g., the sense of 'existing' or 'not-existing'). The meditator thereby suspends questions about the world's ontological status, its causal relations and its alleged possession of things-in-themselves.

Husserl presents the epoché as a systematic neutralization, parenthesizing or bracketing of the naïve realism of the natural attitude, i.e., of the view of the world as a realm which exists independent of the ongoing activity of any ego. He is careful to distinguish this bracketing from the "general demolition"⁵⁴ of beliefs prescribed by Cartesian doubt. Instead, the epoché fosters a "detached and impartial"⁵⁵ and "nonpositional attitude,"⁵⁶ i.e., an attitude not of disbelief, but of non-belief. The adoption of this non-positional attitude sets the phenomenologist upon a 'return to the things themselves,' a return which has as its goal the discovery of a universal foundation, an

⁵⁴ René Descartes, *Meditations, Objections and Replies*, ed. Roger Ariew and Donald Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 9.

⁵⁵ Jean-Marc Laporte, S. J., "Husserl's Critique of Descartes," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Mar., 1963): 339.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 338.

“intrinsically first field of knowledge” (CM 23), or set of “absolute insights [...] behind which one cannot go back any further” (CM 2).

The phenomenologist, no longer affirming that the world exists independent of him, focuses upon the actual and possible sense that the world and every object has *for him*. Overturning Descartes’ second injunction, i.e., to “withdraw the mind from the senses,”⁵⁷ he now accepts only phenomenology’s ‘principle of principles,’ i.e., that “everything intuitively presented is to be accepted as true as it presents itself and only so far as and in the manner in which it presents itself.”⁵⁸ Thus he encounters objects of experience not as the pale representations of things existing in an independent world but as immanent, open and self-revealing structures which can be gradually unfolded to greater degrees of clarity and comprehensiveness. This study of ‘everything presented’ exclusively in terms of the features with which everything is presented proceeds by description. Explanation, which presupposes and is founded upon description, is exiled from use.

Now that neither the world nor any object in it is assumed to exist independently, all things are treated as things which have a sense *for the self*. As such, the self is “necessarily presupposed” (CM 26) by this overturning of realism. Husserl claims that the self, *qua* necessary, is “legitimately called transcendental” (CM 26) and is given to itself “as existing” (CM 139) and as an “intrinsically first” (CM 8) principle within which alone “every grounding, every showing of truth and being, goes on” (CM 82).

⁵⁷ René Descartes, *Meditations, Objections and Replies*, ed. Roger Ariew and Donald Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 6.

⁵⁸ John J. Drummond, *Historical Dictionary of Husserl’s Philosophy* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2008), 170.

Accordingly, objects are reconceived as the direct correlates and outcomes of the self's sense-giving subjective processes: "objects exist for me, and are what they are, only as objects of actual and possible consciousness" (CM 65). The world now signifies only a "world constituted [...] purely within the transcendental ego" (CM 52). For Husserl, this affirmation of the ego's centrality follows not from a dubious metaphysics, but from the renaissance of an implicit, pre-existing and pre-critical attitude toward experience.

The self forms the centre of this newly rediscovered attitude as the irreducible subject of all phenomenological descriptions and the immutable core of phenomenology as a "transcendental theory of knowledge [about experience]" (CM 81). It comes as a price of its centrality and role as foundation, however, that the self has no foundation of its own, i.e., that, as the first principle of Husserl's "transcendental idealism" (CM 86), the self is a principle 'behind which one cannot go back any further.' The phenomenological discovery that "natural being [...] presupposes the realm of transcendental being" (CM 21) entails as a consequence that the transcendental ego at the center of this transcendental field does not and cannot presuppose any deeper realm: all being, Husserl claims, "derives its whole sense and its existential status [...] from me as the transcendental ego" (CM 26). Although its foundations are thus foreclosed, He claims that much of the self remains open for discovery. He writes of Descartes:

The evidence of the proposition, ego cogito, ego sum [*sic*] – remained barren because Descartes neglected [...] to direct his attention to the fact that the ego can explicate itself ad infinitum and systematically, by means of transcendental experience, and therefore lies ready as a possible field of work (CM 31)

In transcendental phenomenology, each object, as “a product of transcendental subjectivity, a product constituted in [an intentional] performance” (CM 85) and as a ‘transcendental clue,’ illuminates two pathways of exchange: “the radiation [of intentionality] from the ego [toward its objects]”⁵⁹ and the “counter-radiation that issues from the objects [toward the ego].”⁶⁰ Thus our experience of objects is approached both as experience *of* an object (*Erfahrung*) and as experience *for* a subject (*Erlebnis*). But, since the object and subject are no longer held to be ontologically distinct, the self’s ‘outward moving’ constitution of objects is also explored insofar as it entails a parallel and simultaneous constitution of the self. Husserl recognizes that if “the constitution of the ego contains all the constitutions of all the objectivities existing for him, whether these be immanent or transcendent, ideal or real” (CM 75) then, as Drummond puts it, “in constituting objects the self also constitutes itself.”⁶¹ Thus, every description of the self’s intentionality and its constitution of objects is always also a description belonging to a “transcendental-descriptive egology” (CM 38), i.e., to an “intentional self-explication” (CM 153) of the self’s “self-constitution” (CM 66). This self-constitution is uncovered

⁵⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 53.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ John J. Drummond, *Historical Dictionary of Husserl’s Philosophy* (Lanhan, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2008), 55.

primarily through genetic phenomenology which, in contrast to static phenomenology, does not merely consider the present sense and constitution of objects but which aims to uncover the necessary developments in the generation of this sense and constitution over time. The result of the epoché is then, in sum, to reveal the transcendental character of phenomenology as an “absolutely subjective” science and the role of the self as its “universal” (CM 38) and “sole theme” (CM 30). The phenomenologist is thereby sent forth with “the all-embracing task of *uncovering* [him]self, in [his] full concreteness – that is, with all the intentional correlates that are included therein” (CM 38).

But the epoché has another, more invasive effect. The movement of the self “from the world and from its body in the world [to a position from which it can] question its body and the world”⁶² causes a crisis or *splitting of the ego* wherein the “phenomenological ego establishes itself as ‘disinterested onlooker’, above the naively interested ego” (CM 35). In other words, “the phenomenological meditating ego [becomes] the ‘non-participant onlooker’ at himself” (CM 37). The vista opened by this splitting presents the self as the psychological, empirical or worldly ego, i.e., as an ego characterized by its sense of being contained within a transcendent and independently existing world and which, thereby, sharply contrasts with the sense of the transcendental ego as that which constitutes and contains all acts and objects within itself. Although the two egos “must at first be kept strictly distinct” (CM 32), as phenomenology progresses it becomes clear that the splitting is not founded upon any parallel and underlying ontological division within the ego’s core but is, instead, a splitting or separation

⁶² Jean-Marc Laporte, S. J., “Husserl’s Critique of Descartes,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Mar., 1963): 339.

“grounded in an underlying connection.”⁶³ The splitting does not unsettle “the unity of the concrete ego” (CM 38). Nevertheless the drifting apart of the two egos forms a lasting theme in Husserl’s phenomenology: “the more the soul [i.e., psyche] is objectified, the more the pure ego has to be removed from objectification.”⁶⁴ As a result of this process, the transcendental ego faces a peculiar experience of being “at the two extremities: as man at the extremity of objectification, as transcendental ego at the extremity of subjectivity.”⁶⁵ Although he insists that the splitting or double reification of the ego is not fundamental, neither of the egos, conceived as outcomes of the split, cease to be of concern to Husserl.

In his efforts to move phenomenology beyond a “transcendental solipsism” (CM 30), Husserl is especially concerned with exploring the sense of the world as being not merely “my private synthetic formation but [...] as an intersubjective world actually there for everyone” (CM 91). But he struggles with the phenomenological grounds upon which to establish that “other egos – not as mere worldly phenomena but as other transcendental egos – can become positable as existing and thus become equally legitimate themes of a phenomenological egology” (CM 30). Moreover, he precludes any return to a realist approach to the world, to other egos or to both as, in principle, absurd:

⁶³ Hans Bernhard Schmid, “Apodictic Evidence,” *Husserl Studies*, Vol. 7 (2001): 229.

⁶⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 67.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

The attempt to conceive the universe of true being as something lying outside the universe of possible consciousness, possible knowledge, possible evidence, the two being related to one another merely externally by a rigid law, is nonsensical. [...] If transcendental subjectivity is the universe of possible sense, then an outside is precisely – nonsense (CM 84).

Thus, although it was conceived as a neutral bracketing, the epoché fundamentally shifts the phenomenologist's orientation toward the realism of the natural attitude. Although it is unclear whether, as Husserl claimed, there is any route which is both consistent with the epoché and which also leads out of solipsism or whether the epoché's solipsism is final, it is in any case certain that the epoché provides no grounds upon which to reaffirm the natural attitude. The epoché reveals the world to be unthinkable without the transcendental ego or self. But the self, in turn, is not "a little tag-end of the world" (CM 24), and "would continue to exist [even if] this world were non-existent" (CM 3). Thus the epoché "dispel[s] irrevocably the realistic illusion of the in-itself"⁶⁶ and of the world as a transcendent, independent realm.

Although the epoché opens the self to itself as a field of possible enquiry, Husserl is known to have rejected the Cartesian doctrine of self-transparency according to which the self is always granted an adequate and apodictic understanding of its own inner contents. Thus he rejects Descartes' claims that "nothing can be perceived more easily and more evidently than my own mind"⁶⁷ and that "there cannot be anything within me of

⁶⁶ Ibid., 88.

⁶⁷ René Descartes, *Meditations, Objections and Replies*, ed. Roger Ariew and Donald Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 19.

which I am not somehow aware.”⁶⁸ For Husserl, self-experience is not a groundless or impossible venture. But he is also clear that self-experience is neither to be understood as apodictic, i.e., as “absolutely indubitable in respect of single details” (CM 28), or as adequate, for it can always be “enriched, without limit” (CM 29).

While Husserl evidently supported the doctrine of self-transparency in his early career,⁶⁹ he came to reject the view that the self can reflect upon itself in a “special and direct way.”⁷⁰ Instead, he argues that the self is reflected upon in a way that is similar to the way in which objects are reflected upon. Just as objects in reflection are presented with horizons, “I am given to myself (. . .) with an *open infinite horizon* of still undiscovered internal features of my own.”⁷¹ An analysis of Husserl’s theory of intentionality will help to clarify this horizon and its significance for his theory of the self.

PART II. INTENTIONALITY

Intentionality is the theory according to which all consciousness is consciousness of or about something or, as Husserl puts it, that “every conscious process is, in itself,

⁶⁸ Ibid., 62.

⁶⁹ Hans Bernhard Schmid, “Apodictic Evidence,” *Husserl Studies*, Vol. 7 (2001), 220.

⁷⁰ Sydney Shoemaker, “On Knowing One’s Own Mind,” *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 2 (1988), 183.

⁷¹ Hans Bernhard Schmid, “Apodictic Evidence,” *Husserl Studies*, Vol. 7 (2001), 221. The emphasis is mine.

consciousness of such and such” (CM 33). For Husserl, consciousness of an object is understood both in terms of the *Weise* or mode in which the object is presented (e.g., perceived, remembered, doubted, etc.) as well as the *Wie* or mode-independent qualities that the object presents (e.g., shape, color, etc.). Each conscious act “means something or other” (CM 33) and, as such, exhibits a sense or meaning which is understood both as a sense given *to* the object (*noema*) and as a sense given *from* the self (*noesis*). Similarly, every act of consciousness is understood both in terms of a *cogito* or act of thinking and a *cogitatum* or thing toward which the act is aimed. Examples of *cogitatum* include objects, states of affairs and other conscious acts.

Whenever an object is presented to consciousness, the object is presented within or in combination with what Husserl calls a horizon. He describes this horizon in terms of its inner and outer features. The inner horizon points to the possibilities for qualitatively and formally different presentations of the object in subsequent and antecedent acts. The outer horizon indicates the presented object’s relation to other objects which are or can be thematically related to the presented object. Both forms of horizon foreshadow Husserl’s theory of time. Husserl is not an atomist with respect to time. He rejects the Cartesian doctrine of punctualism according to which “the present time does not depend on the time immediately preceding it.”⁷² Instead, it is his view that the acts and objects of consciousness always contain an inseparable share of retention (or sense of the past) and protention (or sense of the future).⁷³

⁷² René Descartes, *Meditations, Objections and Replies*, ed. Roger Ariew and Donald Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 97.

⁷³ For Husserl’s analysis of some of the temporal and horizontal characteristics that a mundane object (specifically, a piece of chalk) can exhibit, see Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the*

The self's constitution of its objects and of itself is neither intermittent nor episodic but the outcome of a continuous process. For Husserl, consciousness is closely identified with a synthesizing activity that continually integrates and draws all acts of constitution together in a way that tends towards unity.⁷⁴ As a result of this synthesis, the self's experience does not confront him as a "chaos of intentional processes," (CM 54) but as the ordered and "harmonious flow" (CM 29) of objects that endure through time and are situated within complex and durable horizons. The orderly *sense* that objects have for the self is only possible because of this synthesis for "every sense is a synthesis of identification."⁷⁵ Thus the self's synthesis activity is essential for the constitution and explication of the sense that the self presents to itself.

In Husserl's phenomenology, each conscious act or cogito "reveals itself through [or in] a horizontal structure."⁷⁶ In perceiving a table, for example, I also perceive, by virtue of the table's horizon, that I am capable of having other perceptions of the table, and as such, that I can freely take up other conscious acts in addition to the act I presently embrace. Thus, as Ricoeur puts it, the "horizontal structure is the index of [the ego's] liberty."⁷⁷ Similarly, when reflecting upon itself and taking itself as an object, the transcendental ego is presented with an "open horizon" (CM 23) of "undetermined determinability" (CM 30), such that whatever part of the ego is objectified or presented

Consciousness of Internal Time (1983-1917), trans. J. Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 8.

⁷⁴ According to Murphy, Husserl holds the transcendental ego to be "a universal constituting synthesis in which [the ego's acts of] constitution are encompassed in a determinately ordered way" (Richard T. Murphy, "Husserl and Pre-Reflexive Constitution," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Sep., 1965): 103).

⁷⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 96.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

within the reflective act is always presented as a being a surface behind which other absent or non-objectified parts of the ego remain undiscovered. Although Husserl claims that “horizons are ‘predelineated’ potentialities [which] we can explicate or unfold [...] at a particular time” (CM 45), the performing or functioning consciousness which forms the core of the transcendental ego is always absent from any reflection upon the self. Before turning to his theory of inner time consciousness in which this invariable absence becomes apparent, we must consider Husserl’s other key characterizations of the self: the self as ego pole, as life-stream, as *eidos* ego and as monad. In Husserl’s view, the ego is itself responsible for generating these characterizations.

PART III. THE EGO POLE, LIFE-STREAM, EIDOS EGO AND MONAD

Husserl argues that one of the key ways in which the transcendental ego conceives of itself is as “I, who live this and that subjective process, who live through this and that cogito, as the same I” (CM 66). This conception of the ego as the changeless and “abstract stratum of concrete things”⁷⁸ presupposes and flows out of the ego’s synthesis of experience. The ego as pole or formal substratum is taken to underlie all experience, to

⁷⁸ Richard T. Murphy, *Hume and Husserl: Towards Radical Subjectivism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980), 99.

be an identical principle in contrast to the changing acts and objects of consciousness.

This conception is reminiscent of Descartes' view of the self. Descartes claims:

The human mind is not likewise composed of any accidents [...] for even if all its accidents were changed, so that it understands different things, wills different things, senses different things [etc.] the mind itself does not on that score become something different.⁷⁹

Husserl unfolds three senses of the ego *qua* pole or substratum. First, the ego is a pole over and against the changing objects of consciousness. Second, the ego "as subject of his pure cogitationes" (CM 3), is a pole underlying all subjective or conscious acts. These two senses are complimentary: "the identical ego, who, as the active and affected subject of consciousness, lives in all processes of consciousness and is related, through *them*, to all object-poles" (CM 66). Third, the ego is conceived as "the substrate of habitualities" (CM 66), which I shall address below.

Ricoeur correctly points out that Husserl tries to 'go beyond the abstraction' of a "[pure] ego which is not an object at all, which is in no way an intended noematic unity, [and is], therefore only a point-like I."⁸⁰ While it is true that the ego as pole, i.e., as a barren substratum, is point-like with respect to qualities, it is not *prima facie* point-like with respect to time. The ego is not conceived as merely 'this pole of this object, act or

⁷⁹ René Descartes, *Meditations, Objections and Replies*, ed. Roger Ariew and Donald Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 7.

⁸⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 54.

habit at this time' but as the pole of all objects, acts and habits and, as such, as the integration of all three in time. Husserl, however, makes the passage from a point-like to a qualitatively broad or field-like conception of the self through his second characterization of the ego as a life-stream.

Husserl came to accept, as Schmid puts it, that the "transcendental ego [is] inseparable from the processes making up his life"⁸¹ and claimed that "the ego's self-explication [is] his explication of his conscious life" (CM 63). Noting the harmonious flow of conscious acts, he began to conceive of the self as not merely a static pole, form and principle of order, but as a flux, an activity which brings about the synthesis of its own experience as an intelligible and harmonious temporal stream. Under this conception, the self is held to be not something exclusive and independent over and against the stream but something which has the sense of 'moving' within it (CM 64). The self is not a single "process or [even] a continuity of processes" (CM 67) but is, rather, the moving origin of all processes such that, as one process ceases, "I, with my life, remain untouched in my existential status" (CM 25). The stream of conscious acts is, in an important respect, accessible to the ego insofar as the ego can "contemplate it and [...] explicate and describe it" (CM 31). This is the meaning of Husserl's phrase "this life is always there *for me*" (CM 19). In reflecting upon the life-stream, the ego does not grasp the life-stream entirely but takes up some of its retained content and considers it again as a unity that is "inseparable from [his] ego and therefore belong[s] to [his] concreteness itself" (CM 89).

⁸¹ Hans Bernhard Schmid, "Apodictic Evidence," *Husserl Studies*, Vol. 7 (2001): 221.

The ego conceived as life-stream indicates the way in which the ego “constitutes itself in [a unified] history” (CM 75), and produces the sedimentation of its own constitution through time. The ego “is not an empty pole of identity [because] with every act emanating from him and having a new objective sense, he acquires a new abiding property” (CM 66). These durable properties which the self acquires through time form an important part of the self-explication of the ego. The “habituality of my ego” (CM 68) forms “ego-determinations” (CM 104) which are included within my “self-transforming identity over time”⁸² such that “I myself [...] become changed if I ‘cancel’ my decisions or repudiate my deeds” (CM 34). Nevertheless, the ego remains something in addition to these properties as something which can, for example, develop and reflect upon them. While “habitual properties” (CM 28) perhaps form the core of personality or character, they do not form the core of the transcendental ego. What is, therefore, more fundamental for the transcendental ego’s self-explication is the ego’s identification with the stream as a system of ordered events wherein “all the life-processes belonging to the ego [...] must present themselves” (CM 42).

Husserl develops and advances Hume’s discovery that a central activity of the self is the integration of time, i.e., that a temporal aggregation of parts is constitutive of the self. Hume recognized that a key characteristic of human nature is our awareness that mental events or perceptions are always situated in a temporal series or experienced succession. In Husserl, this discovery culminates in a more comprehensive analysis of lived time, of time as a form, necessary precondition and determining limit of the mind’s

⁸² John J. Drummond, *Historical Dictionary of Husserl’s Philosophy* (Lanhan, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2008), 205.

acts and objects.⁸³ But, in Husserl's view, the self is not merely an aggregate of time slices or temporal points, or indeed even an aggregate of full-blooded events where the distinguishing qualitative content of each event is taken into account. Instead, (and here he differs from Hume) Husserl holds the self to contain a part that stands outside of time. This pre-temporal part, i.e., functioning consciousness, is responsible for and independent of the temporal order in which the self's acts and objects are situated. The self is thus both qualitatively and temporally extended (if not pre-temporally extended as well). As such, the characterization of the self as a mere aggregation of time, a stream of events or a synthesis of temporality is overly simplistic.⁸⁴ I shall examine Husserl's account of the ego's pre-temporal functioning consciousness in further detail in Part IV. There are two remaining characterizations to be considered: the self as eidetic ego and as monad.

Husserl claims that "there extends through all the particular data of actual and possible self-experience [...] a universal apodictically experienceable structure of the ego" (CM 28). This universal structure, which Husserl calls the *eidos ego*, is illuminated by what he calls eidetic phenomenology or the phenomenological investigation of experience insofar as every experience reveals itself to be an experience of a certain type or *eidos*. In this investigation, each experience is grasped as but one of a number of

⁸³ For a detailed analysis of the connections between Hume and Husserl on the issue of the self's experience of temporal order, see Louis N. Sandowsky, "Hume and Husserl: The Problem of the Continuity or Temporalization of Consciousness," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Pt 1, 181 (2006): 59-74.

⁸⁴ Indeed, the self's experience of spatial objects destabilizes any characterization of the self as an *exclusively temporal* (i.e., non-spatial) synthesis.

possible experiences of the same *eidos*. Thus the inquiry moves from the *de facto* to the *de jure*,⁸⁵ from the concrete particular to the structure or set of all possible variations.

Husserl argues that in the eidetic approach to self-experience the “*de facto* transcendental ego and particular data given in transcendental experience of the ego have the significance merely of examples of pure possibilities” (CM 73). Eidetic phenomenology thus reveals modes of self-constitution that “exist as possibilities for me” (CM 75) and are alternatives to the self-constitution presented in the ego’s concrete life-stream. In grasping these possibilities, the ego also grasps the *eidos* or structure from which these possibilities emanate. Thus the ego demonstrates its ability to “go beyond itself into its implicit horizons,”⁸⁶ and it thereby “explores the universal *a priori* without which neither I nor any transcendental ego whatever is ‘imaginable’” (CM 72). In performing eidetic phenomenology, I attempt “imaginative variations on my own life.”⁸⁷ Each time I find a structure in myself which resists all conceivable variation,⁸⁸ I grasp another part of the *eidos ego*.

Husserl is clear, however, that the *eidos ego* is not a window onto any existential Other or transcendent being. As Ricoeur puts it, “I have no access to the plural through the universal.”⁸⁹ As such, the discovery of the *eidos ego* does not entail the *de facto* ego’s participation in a transcendent Platonic realm of Ideas, or even in an intersubjective

⁸⁵ Rudolf Bernet, Iso Kern and Eduard Marbach, *An Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 79.

⁸⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 113.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁸⁸ Eidetic phenomenology is premised upon what Husserl calls “a new universal concept of possibility [i.e., that of] mere imaginableness” (CM 58).

⁸⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 92.

community which has the *eidos ego* as the form of all its members. Rather, the *eidos ego* is a product of the self, informed by the self's particular efforts to uncover it and is derived from the self's *de facto* constitution. Thus "eidetic self-variation" (CM 136) is but one mode of the self-explication of the *de facto* transcendental ego and provides only a partial understanding of the latter.

In Husserl's final characterization, the ego is conceived as a monad, i.e., as the totality of all actual and possible acts, objects and times. He claims:

The monadically concrete ego includes also the whole of actual and potential conscious life, [and thus] the problem of explicating this monadic ego phenomenologically [...] must include all constitutional problems without exception. Consequently the phenomenology of this self-constitution coincides with phenomenology as a whole (CM 68)

The monad is the view of the ego as both the pure or absolute consciousness *qua* "constitutor of all reality"⁹⁰ and as the absolute concretum or sum of all constitutions. As the universal container of all acts and objects, the ego as monad implies "the total triumph of interiority over exteriority and of the transcendental over the transcendent."⁹¹ Although the ego as monad, by definition, 'contains everything' we nevertheless have only an inadequate grasp of what it contains. To explore the center of this monad, i.e., the part of the self about which our knowledge is least adequate, we must consider Husserl's

⁹⁰ Ibid., 52.

⁹¹ Ibid., 107.

theory of inner time-consciousness, a theory that is understood to be “among the most important and difficult”⁹² in his phenomenology.

PART IV. INNER TIME-CONSCIOUSNESS AND SELF-AWARENESS

Husserl distinguishes three “layers or levels of temporality: the objective time of the appearing objects, the subjective, immanent, or pre-empirical time of the acts and experiences, and finally, the absolute pre-phenomenal flow of inner time-constituting consciousness.”⁹³ Each layer is founded on those beneath except the layer of inner time-consciousness which is itself absolute and foundational. Husserl claims that this lowest level is a “realm of a Heraclitean flux” (CM 49). At this lowest level of temporality, Husserl discovers a principle of functioning consciousness, i.e., a principle that serves as the ultimate origin and end of the intentionality issuing forth toward and reflecting from objects. The ego at this level experiences itself as “the point through which time streams and in which its content-laden moments appear to well up as present and actual”⁹⁴ and as a “point of actuality [...] from which springs the now.”⁹⁵ Conceived in this way,

⁹² Dan Zahavi, “Inner Time-Consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness,” *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 164.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁹⁴ James R. Mensch, “Freedom and Selfhood,” *Husserl Studies*, No. 14 (1997): 47.

⁹⁵ Richard T. Murphy, *Hume and Husserl: Towards Radical Subjectivism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980), 103.

functioning consciousness is “not itself temporal but [...] is self-temporalizing,”⁹⁶ i.e., it is a pre-temporal condition for the possibility of the self’s experience of the higher temporal levels.

Husserl holds functioning consciousness to be the central principle in the life of the ego and the pre-condition for the ego’s other aspects. Since he regards functioning consciousness to be foundational, he seeks to disclose it “ever more fully and concretely [but] without transforming this disclosure into a thematic display claiming total reflective clarity.”⁹⁷ Thus he never presents functioning consciousness as a proper object of reflection which in turn can be analysed and disassembled into still more fundamental pre-functioning or pre-conscious parts. He limits the disclosure of functioning consciousness by constraining the ego’s ability to reflect upon itself, i.e., by limiting the self’s self-awareness.

Husserl sought to avoid presenting self-awareness either as an “instantaneous [or] non-temporal”⁹⁸ revelation of the self to itself or as a “completely fractured [i.e., episodic] time-consciousness, which makes both consciousness of the present, and of the unity of the stream unintelligible.”⁹⁹ His solution is to articulate both a pre-reflective (i.e., instantaneous) and a reflective (i.e., episodic) variety of self-awareness.

The first of these, *pre-reflective self-awareness* (hereafter PRSA), is the ultimate structure underlying “how consciousness experiences itself, how it is given to itself, how

⁹⁶ John J. Drummond, *Historical Dictionary of Husserl’s Philosophy* (Lanhan, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2008), 200.

⁹⁷ Richard T. Murphy, *Hume and Husserl: Towards Radical Subjectivism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980), 139.

⁹⁸ Dan Zahavi, “Inner Time-Consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness,” *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 173.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

it manifests itself.”¹⁰⁰ PRSA, as pre-reflective, does not objectify the self as a reflective object against a horizon. Rather, the self is “immediately given” to itself in a pre-temporal or “ecstatic unity.”¹⁰¹ PRSA is primary and always present in every conscious act and informs every act not as an added quality but as the act’s implicit mode.¹⁰² PRSA is not an act of consciousness, it is not “initiated, regulated, or controlled by the ego.”¹⁰³ Rather, it is a structure to which all conscious acts conform. Furthermore, PRSA is not itself founded on another type of self-awareness but is that upon which the other type of self-awareness, i.e., *reflective self-awareness*, is founded.

According to Ricoeur, Husserl holds that PRSA facilitates an awareness of the self that “conceals no hidden internal domain [and] is absolutely simple and lies entirely open.”¹⁰⁴ The PRSA presentation of the self is absolutely simple and cannot be unfolded or explored because it is strikingly vacuous in content: Husserl explicitly denies that PRSA yields *any* knowledge of the self. Despite the ego’s possession of PRSA, functioning consciousness as “the streaming flowing present remains [for the ego] an enigma.”¹⁰⁵

The second type of self-awareness Husserl identifies, i.e., *reflective self-awareness* (hereafter RSA), takes place as a voluntary, occasional and explicit act wherein the self is objectified. RSA can yield knowledge when its presentation of the self

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 160.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 173.

¹⁰² Ibid., 160.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 172.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 54.

¹⁰⁵ Richard T. Murphy, *Hume and Husserl: Towards Radical Subjectivism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980), 126.

as a horizoned reflective object is methodically unfolded. RSA does not *produce* awareness of the self but is founded upon it. As Schmid puts it, “I’m not aware of myself because of self-reflection, but I can reflect upon myself because of [pre-reflective] self-awareness [as] a precondition of reflection.”¹⁰⁶

In Husserl’s view, RSA or “reflection on the self is reflecting on life,”¹⁰⁷ on the self’s life-stream and the manifold of particular temporally situated acts and objects therein. Thus RSA can yield a wide array of discoveries, such as the Cartesian discovery that “I have previously existed for some time.”¹⁰⁸ But all discoveries founded in RSA are informed by a kind of temporal self-distancing. As Mensch puts it, “fixed as I am in the temporal center, I always experience an inner distance between the self I presently am and the self that I can objectively grasp [because] the objective self, is already fixed in departing time.”¹⁰⁹ In short, every act of RSA “comes always too late to catch the subject in the act of performing.”¹¹⁰ This temporal self-distancing produces a second splitting of the ego in which the “‘Object-Ego’ and ‘Subject-Ego’ step apart [such that] the living and performing ego itself remains completely inaccessible.”¹¹¹ What RSA facilitates then, is not a “monologue of the ego, but [...] a ‘dialogue with another.’”¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Hans Bernhard Schmid, “Apodictic Evidence,” *Husserl Studies*, Vol. 7 (2001): 229.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 93.

¹⁰⁸ René Descartes, *Meditations, Objections and Replies*, ed. Roger Ariew and Donald Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 25.

¹⁰⁹ James R. Mensch, “Freedom and Selfhood,” *Husserl Studies*, No. 14 (1997): 48.

¹¹⁰ Hans Bernhard Schmid, “Apodictic Evidence,” *Husserl Studies*, Vol. 7 (2001): 227.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

In Husserl's view, when I objectify or "thematize myself in a reflection, the very act of thematization remains unthematic"¹¹³ because "reflection always grasps an object, [but] not the source itself which is at work in it; and yet it inevitably *points to* just such a source."¹¹⁴ RSA is incomplete insofar as it fails to draw itself, i.e., the RSA act, into thematic view and insofar as it never affords a view of functioning consciousness as the origin of the RSA act. Since it arises out of deeper structures within the ego, RSA is "only a prominence within a total consciousness always presupposed as unitary" (CM 43). Ricoeur summarizes the issue as follows:

There is an ego which lives in every constituting consciousness, but no word can be said about it, [it] cannot become the object of inquiry; it cannot be 'thematized.' One can only come upon its 'ways of relating itself to [objects]. [...] There is then, at the most, a phenomenology of the how of the ego, although there is none of the quid of the ego.¹¹⁵

Functioning consciousness and the objectified self are essentially incommensurable, and Husserl understood them as such: "Husserl does not dream of a fusion of the transcendental and the objective within an ambiguous experience which

¹¹³ Dan Zahavi, "Inner Time-Consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness," *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 161.

¹¹⁴ Jan Patočka and James Dodd, *An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology*, (USA: Carus Publishing Company, 1996), 124. The emphasis is mine.

¹¹⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 150.

somehow holds them in an irresolvable suspension.”¹¹⁶ While the self can reflect upon itself and explicate some of its content, the explication always centers on the self’s acts, objects and the intentional exchanges by virtue of which those acts and objects have meaning. The self cannot step outside of functioning consciousness to analyse the way in which the latter structures the self. Phenomenology, in short, offers an account of the self’s activity in founding objects but no account of the foundation of this activity. Functioning consciousness can only “stop or initiate reflection,”¹¹⁷ it cannot be reflected upon and thus remains an anonymous “blind spot in the core of subjectivity.”¹¹⁸ It is a thing in itself to itself and the last remaining transcendent entity ever eluding the transcendental system or, put differently, the entity which holds the entire phenomenological enterprise as transcendent in relation to it.

CONCLUSION

In a closing passage of *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl claims that his phenomenology provides “the Delphic motto, ‘Know thyself!’ [with] a new signification” (CM 157). In this chapter, I have sought to clarify the grounds for this claim and to analyse phenomenology’s reply to Husserl’s own iconic question (also posed in

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 68.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 54.

¹¹⁸ Dan Zahavi, “Inner Time-Consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness,” *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 171-172.

Cartesian Meditations), i.e., the question of, “How far can the transcendental ego be deceived about himself?” (CM 23).

In Husserl’s phenomenology, the self’s awareness of itself is essential because, he claims, “only if my experiencing of my transcendental self is apodictic can it serve as ground and basis for apodictic judgments” (CM 22). For Husserl, PRSA provides this apodictic experience of the transcendental self. But the self in PRSA is empty, inscrutable and vacuous: essentially, it is incapable of being supported by analysis or of supporting analysis. Perhaps, as Ricoeur claims, Husserl would regard the idea that functioning consciousness could perceive itself and unfold its own hidden structure to be “monstrous, something like an empiricism of the transcendental.”¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, the lack of some such exegesis of functioning consciousness casts doubt upon the claim that the self is an intelligible foundation for science and phenomenology. Perhaps, as Wittgenstein claims, explanation (or, in Husserl’s case, description) has to stop somewhere and Husserl selects functioning consciousness as the place at which phenomenological description must end. But stopping here renders the core of his concept of the self groundless, empty and incapable of defending science or philosophy against sceptical attack. Instead of detailing the process by which the self comes to be aware of itself, Husserl seems to have presupposed that the self always already is self-aware. His account of PRSA offers no concrete explication of what self-awareness consists in or of how the self perceives itself at the level of functioning consciousness.

¹¹⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 90.

Husserl's account of PRSA seems to affirm the conclusion derived from one of Hume's lesser known thought experiments. According to Hume, the thought experiment shows that self-awareness must be either omnipresent in all our perceptions or never present in any of them. Hume draws his thought experiment as follows:

Suppose the mind to be reduc'd [and] to have only one perception, as of thirst or hunger. Consider it in that situation. Do you conceive any thing but merely that perception? Have you any notion of self or substance? If not, the addition of other perceptions can never give you that notion.¹²⁰

Self-awareness, for Hume and Husserl, cannot be produced or built up through an addition or combination of acts that are not already informed by self-awareness. Although Hume's atomism precluded him from allowing any complex self-awareness at the level of simple sense experience, it would not have precluded the absolutely simple PRSA advanced by Husserl. Hume would be likely to claim, however, that, as absolutely simple, PRSA is absolutely empty and only apodictic precisely in virtue of its vacuity. Both Hume and Husserl hold that the self as a whole is never objectified in reflection. Husserl argues that reflection on the self is possible but claims that the self never has more than an inadequate or non-comprehensive understanding of itself.

¹²⁰ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P.H. Nidditch, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1978), 634.

CONCLUSION

In this conclusion, I shall examine the many striking similarities and central differences that obtain between the theories of the self forwarded by Hume and Husserl. I argue that although their similarities are derived from a variety of shared commitments, the key disagreements between the two derive from their differing responses to the question of whether ordinary perception entails the existence of a percipient or perceiving subject. I argue that while their responses differ in letter, their actual positions are similar because both Hume and Husserl appeal to a conception of the percipient and both fail to explicate sufficiently this conception. Finally, I argue that this deficiency which faces both theories would be mitigated or remedied if Hume and Husserl were to accept the specific model of self-perception that is implicitly illuminated, although foreclosed in general terms, in Hume's bundle theory. I shall begin with an analysis of the ways in which the two theories agree.

Hume and Husserl tend, in general, to treat the self and the mind as one and the same entity.¹²¹ They both hold this entity to be not only the agent but also the means of all possible inquiry. It is their shared conviction that regardless of whether an inquiry aims for science or art and of whether it advances by a collaborative or solipsistic effort, the self, as the means of the inquiry, will *condition* the inquiry in much the same way as the physical properties of a piano will condition the audible qualities of the notes played on that piano. Or, put differently, they hold that the self acts as an idiosyncratic filter or ‘cognitive architecture’ through which the execution, deliberation and conclusion of all inquiry must pass.¹²²

Further, Hume and Husserl hold that in the inquiry into the nature of the self, a peculiar confluence occurs such that the self is at once the agent, the means and the end toward which the inquiry aims. Although both philosophers aim to discover a strong foundation for philosophy and for the sciences, in the case of each this foundation turns

¹²¹ Although in Books II and III of the *Treatise* Hume presents the self as an *object* of moral deliberation, he always conceives of the self as the (mental) origin of such deliberation. Similarly, Husserl’s efforts to present the self in an ethical, intersubjective light cash out in an underscoring of the self’s primacy as the *res cogitans*, i.e., thinking thing or mind, that is presupposed by and responsible for all such ethical considerations.

¹²² There appears to be some tension on this point in Hume. In the *Treatise* he explicitly emphasizes human nature, rather than the self, as that which conditions all understanding. But this emphasis is misplaced. Hume holds that the study of human nature proceeds as the self observes the regularities with which its own mental events come to be. On the basis of these observations, the self infers laws of human nature, i.e., regularities held to obtain in all selves that are tokens of the type, ‘human.’ But, in accordance with his scepticism, Hume accepts that inferences about other selves are always dubious and that the self cannot know whether or in what ways other selves differ from the self. Indeed, the self cannot even know whether one of the regularities it finds within itself is derived from human nature or whether that regularity is idiosyncratic and peculiar to their person. As such, the Other may observe different regularities and form different, but no less *empirical*, inferences about human nature. On this issue, Hume claims, “all I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular” (David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P.H. Nidditch, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1978), 252). Thus it seems to be Hume’s true position that the self, as a collection of regularities that are ultimately unknowable in origin, is that which conditions all possible inquiry.

out to be a synonym for the self or for the central features thereof. Just as Hume presents the self as the origin of the causal reasoning that is presupposed by Newtonian science, Husserl presents the self as the principle underlying the observer-observed dichotomy that is central to modern scientific practice. Thus the aim to know the self and the aim to found the sciences become hardly distinguishable.

A key variable which is conspicuous in having not already been determined in advance by the nature of the inquiry into the self is the *method* by which the inquiry will proceed. Despite their differences, Hume and Husserl agree on several important points of method. Both adopt an idealist, solipsistic (at least initially), anti-metaphysical and anti-rationalist approach that utilizes inference based upon observation and proceeds from a *de facto* to a *de jure* understanding of the self. They also agree on several conclusions reached. For example, both hold the self to be a complex entity and one that is in some sense contingent on *what* it thinks. And, most fundamentally, both hold the self to be not only epistemically *windowless*, or unable in general to perceive other selves, but also to be epistemically *mirrorless*, or unable in general to perceive itself. I shall now explain each of these points of agreement in detail.

Hume and Husserl are distrustful of any metaphysical speculation into the self or into any supposed foundation thereof. In the case of Hume, all legitimate inquiry into human nature must observe empirical, anti-metaphysical constraints. For Husserl, the epoché suspends metaphysics and explanation generally and retains only phenomenological description. Both reject the use of tautologies and axioms as a means by which to prove the existence or reveal the nature of the self. Neither would accept, for

example, that the existence of a percipient can be derived from the existence of a perception. Husserl's epoché and Hume's empiricism are designed to undercut such rationalist tendencies. They proceed, instead, in a piecemeal fashion by carefully crafting general inferences that correspond to the particulars of observed experience.

Both philosophers subscribe to a variety of idealism that approaches objects endogenously or exclusively insofar as they arise within the self's structures and experience. In Husserl's view, objects have meaning, existence and veracity only in relation to the self that intends these values. For Hume, objects can be known only in the context of the self's perceptions and not as they might be in other contexts, e.g., in themselves. As a further consequence of this idealism, Hume and Husserl tend to present other selves in an anti-realist light, i.e., as *non-egos* or mere objects reified in perception, and they approach the actual existence, constitution and life of other selves as matters that transcend the self's experience and, thus, remain forever unknowable.¹²³

¹²³ I do not wish to put too fine a point on this issue because there is, arguably, some ambiguity in Hume and Husserl about whether the views they present are, in the end, solipsist. While it is not a central aim of this thesis to decide the issue in a definitive manner, it remains the case that the solipsist tendency in Hume and Husserl powerfully affects the ultimate determinations they place on the self. The tendency culminates in their shared conception of the self as a discrete entity. Neither Hume nor Husserl are prepared to accept a naive realist view of the self's awareness of others as an awareness arising out of the self's interaction with independent beings that exist in an external world. Their philosophies scorch the earth upon which such a retreat to realism might have, in different circumstances, been viable. Husserl joins Hume in holding the realist claim for the existence of self-independent entities to be 'nonsense' (CM 84). If knowledge of other selves is possible for Hume and Husserl, then such knowledge must be pursued through general inferences (Hume) or eidetic variations (Husserl) based upon the self's own constitution, i.e., upon the perceptive parts constitutive of the self. To grasp others, and to determine the accuracy of this grasp, the self can only consult itself. It is in this sense, if not in a more final or absolute one, that the self is, in the theories of Hume and Husserl, "windowless" or, broadly speaking, solipsist.

Husserl's views on this issue, however, are especially nuanced. As discussed above, he holds the self to be the absolute constitutor and absolute concretum of all reality, the monadic center of intentionality through which alone objects are 'sent forth' and enter consciousness as meaningful. To deny the self this *absolute* status is to undercut the central principle of Husserlian phenomenology. While subsequent phenomenological circles often work in this vein, the history of phenomenology is, as Ricoeur rightly puts it, "the history of Husserlian heresies" (Paul Ricoeur, *A l'école de la Phenomenology*, (Paris: Vrin, 1987),

Despite their solipsistic approach, Hume and Husserl seek a universal model of the self, i.e., a model that accounts for the structures informing all selves and not only those that inform the self of David Hume or of Edmund Husserl. They hold the concrete *de facto* self to be the sole, if perhaps idiosyncratic, lens through which the *de jure* self, the *eidos* ego or the laws of human nature, can be examined. They also agree in viewing this movement, from the *de facto* to the *de jure*, as in some sense an epistemic abstraction. Hume holds all claims on the nature of other minds to be dubious. Husserl likewise insists that the *eidos* ego, i.e., the self's grasp of the universal structures that inform all possible selves, is not a window or epistemically-valid route by which the lives of others, or the world as it is experienced by others, can be accessed. In this sense as well, both regard the self to be windowless.

The critical and guiding role of the meditating ego in Husserl's epoché and of the first person 'I' in Hume's scepticism broadly suggests a Cartesian conception of the self

9). However, there is an extent to which the seed of these heresies is already present in Husserl. In his treatment of other selves, Husserl attempts to qualify or retract the self's absolute status. He adopts a kind of pluralism, claiming that the self always encounters the world, and the other selves situated within it, not as mere projections of the ego, i.e., as objects constituted exclusively in and through the self's intentional acts. Instead, the self is always presented with a world that is *shared*, co-constituted or co-intended by others. It seems that Husserl qualifies the self's absolute status in order to avoid the conclusion of absolute solipsism. As Scheler puts it, "if the world [...] is something other than the content of experience of individual egos, no ego [...] can be the condition of the world. Conversely, every assumption of an egological condition of the world and its givenness necessarily leads to solipsism" (Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. M. Frings and R. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 379). The improbable balancing act for Husserl is to uphold the conception of the self as absolute monad while also allowing other selves and the world to transcend the way in which they are intended, constituted and contained within the self as monad. It is in this context that Husserl outlines his theory of the self's meaning-laden encounter with what he calls an analogizing appresentation of the Other (hereafter, AAO). It is outside the specific aim of this thesis to analyse Husserl's theory of the AAO in detail. It is noteworthy, however, that Husserl's efforts to escape solipsism through the self's encounter with the AAO are, at the least, problematic. If the self alone bestows *all* objects, including the AAO, with their meaning, then it does not matter what meaning the phenomenologist interprets the AAO to have because the AAO cannot, in any case, be plausibly viewed as genuine objective evidence for the independent or transcendent existence of any other self. However, as stated above, Husserl's theory of self-other relations is a topic for future work.

as a self-responsible and unified center of contemplative activity, i.e., a free and rational center of bracketing, deciding, doubting, etc. But the theories advanced by Hume and Husserl draw upon a tradition that is rooted in Plato, Aristotle, the ancient atomists and several other pre-Socratics. According to this tradition, the self or soul is a complex of mereologically-bound but distinguishable parts. For Hume and Husserl, questions about the nature of the self's parts, their coming together, their relations with one another and with the self as a whole are central.¹²⁴

Hume and Husserl also share in their rejection of Descartes' doctrine that although it is essential *that* the self thinks, the self is not contingent upon *what* it thinks, i.e., that the self, as a whole, is essentially independent and unaffected by any change or succession among its own acts and objects of thought. Instead, they claim that acts and objects enter into the constitution of the self and that the self is at least to some extent contingent upon these parts. For Husserl, the constitution of acts and objects is simultaneously a constitution of the self. For Hume, the self is the bundle of perceptions that bundles all encountered perceptions into itself. Husserl, however, holds the self to be something in addition to its objects, i.e., the self is also an independent functioning consciousness, whereas Hume denies any such additional content in the self. Despite this difference, both hold that the self cannot pursue itself as an independent object of inquiry in an important sense. If in seeking to know itself the self encounters new perceptions,

¹²⁴ On the surface, Hume appears to reject a hierarchy of parts in the self whereas Husserl appears to accept one insofar as the latter allows that functioning consciousness would alone continue to exist even if all the self's acts and objects ceased to be. But Hume's appeal to an active aspect of the self, if it does not imply a hierarchy in the self, at the very least diminishes the ease with which he can reject one. As I shall argue below, Husserl, for his part, never adequately explains functioning consciousness. Thus any hierarchy based upon this principle would seem ill-founded if not unintelligible.

then the self both as the seeker and as the thing sought will undergo some change as a result of those perceptions. The self is like a dishonest archer who steps ahead of the shooting line only to find that her target has also moved and, moreover, that it has moved the same distance and in the same direction as she.

Hume and Husserl raise doubts over the extent to which the self can be reflected upon. It is true that both allow that the self can know itself to the extent that it can grasp the acts and objects, i.e., the parts, that successively enter into its constitution. But, for both, the self can neither grasp all its parts at once nor grasp its own essence. For Hume, the self contains a number of parts so great that no single perception can represent all of them together at once. Similarly, for Husserl, the totality of acts and objects which collectively constitute a life-stream are too broad and diverse to be grasped as the object of a single reflective act in that stream.¹²⁵ The self cannot grasp its own essence, in Hume's view, because it has no such essence. For Husserl, the self's essence, i.e., functioning consciousness, cannot be grasped because it extends beyond every act of reflection as the pre-temporal condition for that act and as origin of the process which brings that act into being.

Husserl's conception of functioning consciousness is analogous to Hume's conception of the self as a theatre in which only mental events and the parts thereof can be perceived. For Hume, we can know nothing of the nature of the theatre in addition to or apart from these events. Although Husserl is less explicit, the fact is that his

¹²⁵ In *Ideas*, Husserl claims that the totality of the self's acts can never be thematized in a single reflection (Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, First Book, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), 197).

phenomenological explication of the self centers increasingly upon the self's objects and acts and never provides any adequate explication of what functioning consciousness is as a principle in itself. In short, little if anything meaningful can be said and nothing whatever can be known of functioning consciousness. In this respect, functioning consciousness and Hume's view of the self as an unknowable theatre are equivalent.

The key difference between the theories of the self forwarded by Hume and Husserl is the latter's recognition and the former's failure to acknowledge that in their own philosophies the term 'perception' is used in a way that implicates both a process of perceiving and a thing perceived. Husserl accepts this double meaning by analysing perceptions in terms of a 'cogito' and a 'cogitatum' as well as a 'noesis' and a 'noema.' He holds consciousness to be relational and accepts the Kantian framework in which the intending ego and its intended objects figure as "two inseparable poles of a single dynamic process of representation."¹²⁶ The bundle theory appears to have an advantage in terms of eloquence or economy insofar as, for Hume, there is no formal ego in addition to the streaming matter of perception. But this eloquence is illusory and only possible because Hume fails to acknowledge or explicate his appeal, made throughout the *Treatise*, to the self's active bundling aspect. While Husserl acknowledges a perception-percipient distinction and a meditating ego as foundational, he fails to explicate the percipient at the level of either functioning consciousness or the meditating ego. Indeed, the revelation of functioning consciousness as empty or inscrutable appears to be triggered by Husserl's early acceptance of a bare or essentially vacuous notion of the

¹²⁶ Jay F. Rosenberg, *The Thinking Self* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 6.

meditating ego. The two principles are closely linked, if not one and the same. I conclude that both philosophers appeal to a conception of the self, i.e., to a model of the crucial term in their philosophies, without adequately explicating this conception.

Thus neither Hume nor Husserl offer a theory of the self that is, in present condition, tenable. Nevertheless, both are compatible with and best understood in light of the particular model of self-perception outlined in Chapter 1. According to this model, self-perception occurs whenever the self perceives any one of its parts—i.e., whenever it perceives anything. This self-perception can become thematic or understood to be a case of self-perception if, as the self perceives some part of itself, the self also perceives (i) that the part which it perceives is a part of a passive or bundled aspect, (ii) that the perceiving is a part or a function of an active bundling aspect, and (iii) that the active aspect's epistemic access to the parts of the passive aspect, i.e., the former's ability to grasp or reflect upon the parts of the later, implies that the two aspects cannot be discrete with respect to one another. The fact that the active aspect appears incapable of perceiving anything which is not a part of its passive aspect suggests that the two aspects subsist in one and the same discrete entity.

Hume and Husserl already agree that the self always perceives itself to the extent that it always perceives one of its parts. The aforementioned model of self-perception allows us to press this agreement a step further. The model clarifies that the self realizes the most comprehensive and concrete perception it can have of itself when it perceives its own inability to perceive anything but itself, i.e., when it perceives that its own windowlessness is, if not derived from, at least ensured by its possession of, and its

immutable fixation upon, a mirror in which some part of itself is always reflected. In short, the self perceives itself most completely when it perceives itself to be a discrete or exclusively self-perceiving entity.

The question of how the active and passive aspects are constitutive of a discrete and unified self is a topic for future research. However, Hume seems to point towards startling grounds for the self's unity. His analysis suggests that each aspect, like each actor in the theatre of the mind, is what it is only in relation to the changes, endurances and other properties exhibited by the other. On this view, the differing ontological natures of the aspects are not determined by a differing and immutable essence peculiar to each. Rather, the nature of each aspect determines and is determined by the nature of the other aspect; and it is through this relation of co-dependency and co-determination that the aspects are folded into a real and discrete unity. Since the qualitative difference between the two aspects is determined exclusively through their pre-existing and ongoing connection with one another, efforts to separate the aspects are a species of abstraction.

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