

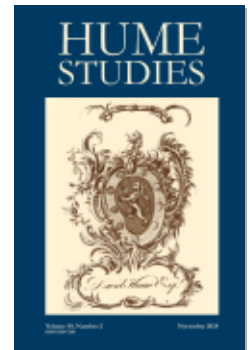


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Hume on the Self and Personal Identity ed. by Dan O'Brien
(review)

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Dan O'Brien, ed. *Hume on the Self and Personal Identity*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. Pp. xxiv + 321. Softcover. ISBN: 9783031042751. \$129.99

This is an engaging collection of essays on a central topic in Hume's philosophy. Perhaps Hume's best-known contribution to the philosophy of the self is his denial, in section 1.4.6 of the *Treatise*, "Of personal identity," of the existence of a simple, enduring self that is accessible by reflection. But as his distinction between personal identity "as it regards our thought or imagination" and personal identity "as it regards our passions or the concern we take for ourselves" suggests, he has more to say about the self and personal identity than the skeptical doctrines presented in T 1.4.6 (T 1.4.6.5). One virtue of the collection is that it strives to capture the breadth and complexity of Hume's thinking about the self.

The collection, which focuses primarily on the *Treatise*, is divided into three parts. The essays in Part 1 consider Book 1 and the Appendix. Andrew Ward's "How Sceptical is Hume's Theory of Personal Identity?" argues for the provocative thesis that Hume's intention in the Appendix is not to express dissatisfaction with either his metaphysics of the self or his psychological explanation of ascriptions of identity and simplicity to the self. According to Ward, Hume's aim is rather to "clarify and strengthen his sceptical position" by reinforcing his rejection of realist accounts of personal identity (13). To my mind, Ward does not adequately address the textual evidence that has led other commentators to believe that the Appendix identifies a defect in T 1.4.6's discussion of the self, such as Hume's complaint that he does not "know how to correct [his] former opinions, nor how to render them consistent" (T App 10).

Donald Ainslie's "Hume's Bundle" is also chiefly concerned with the interpretation of the Appendix. Ainslie has defended an influential reading according to which Hume's problem in the Appendix concerns his psychological explanation of ascriptions of unity to the self. Here, he argues against interpretations according to which Hume's problem concerns his metaphysical account of the self as a bundle of perceptions. According to Ainslie, Hume did not worry about how one's perceptions come to be bundled together, because he treated the fact that perceptions come in distinct bundles as brute. This argument against the bundling interpretation seems less than decisive. At least some versions of that interpretation can be understood to hold that Hume's problem in the Appendix arises from his being unable to answer a causal question: what is the cause of one's perceptions' being bundled together? In the "Letter from a Gentleman," Hume suggests that the maxim according to which everything has a cause enjoys moral, albeit neither intuitive nor demonstrative, cer-

tainty (LG 26). Insofar as he accepts this maxim, he would hold that the question of the cause of the bundling of one's perceptions has an answer and, accordingly, that the bundling of one's perceptions is not brute.

The themes of Galen Strawson's "What I Call *Myself*" will be familiar to readers of his *The Evident Connexion*. Strawson argues against a traditional reading of Hume according to which he both holds that the self is nothing more than a bundle of perceptions and denies the existence of subjects of experience. Central to Strawson's case is what he calls the "Experience/Experiencer Thesis," which says that the existence of an experience requires the existence of a subject of experience. Strawson takes Hume to endorse this "necessary truth" and, hence, to hold that no perception can exist without its being experienced by a subject (48). But there is a text that tells against Hume's endorsing the Experience/Experiencer Thesis. In section 1.4.2, "Of scepticism with regard to the senses," Hume argues that "the continu'd existence of . . . perceptions involves no contradiction" (T 1.4.2.40). Because what it is for perceptions to exhibit continued existence is for them to exist unperceived—"after they no longer appear to the senses"—this implies that it is not (absolutely) necessary that perceptions be experienced (T 1.4.2.3). Josef Moural's "Hume and Kames on the Self and Personal Identity" explores the significance of Hume's relationship with Henry Home, Lord Kames for understanding the former's account of the self. Moural argues that while Kames's criticism of Hume's theory of personal identity in his *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* neglects important aspects of the latter's view, he suggests that Kames may nonetheless have influenced the development of Hume's thinking about the self.

Part 2 of the collection focuses on Books 2 and 3 of the *Treatise*. Ruth Boeker's "Character Development in Shaftesbury's and Hume's Approaches to the Self" considers Shaftesbury's and Hume's views on the possibility and causes of character development, aiming to shed light on the question of "whether character development presupposes specific metaphysical views about personal identity" (107). Boeker uses Hume to assess Shaftesbury's position that the possibility of character development requires the existence of a substantial self, arguing that the *Treatise* contains at least one of two metaphysical accounts of persons that allow for the possibility of character development but deny that the self is an enduring substance. Moreover, she provides compelling arguments against interpreters who have held that Hume rejects the possibility of character development.

The next two essays consider Humean sympathy. After providing an intricate discussion of the psychological mechanisms that underlie sympathy, Dan O'Brien's "Sympathy, Self and Others" details sympathy's contributions to the formation of one's self-conception. This contribution arises from sympathy's interactions with pride, which, O'Brien claims, "plays a foundational role in self-consciousness" (143). In O'Brien's view, sympathy requires pride, because it is via pride that one acquires the impression of oneself, and this impression plays an indispensable role in the mecha-

nism of sympathy. Moreover, because, as Hume says, the causes of pride “have little influence, when not seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others,” sympathy also contributes to one’s feelings of pride (T 2.1.11.1). Sympathy and pride thus cooperate in what O’Brien calls the “spiral of self-creation” (146). Largely absent from the essay is the self-directed, indirect passion that Hume discusses in tandem with pride: humility. O’Brien claims that Hume himself emphasizes pride’s contribution, and suggests that this is explained by Hume’s wishing to distance himself from the negative assessment of pride associated with Christian morality (145n). But might this emphasis also be a result of Hume’s holding that humility’s contributions to one’s self-conception are in fact lesser in their extent than those of pride? In her “Scottish Sympathy’: Hume, Smith, and Psychoanalysis,” which is somewhat distantly related to the topic of the collection, Louise Braddock argues that Hume’s and Adam Smith’s accounts of sympathy can be used to illuminate contemporary psychoanalysis.

Anik Waldow’s “What is Humean Autonomy?” develops an account of autonomy that builds on Hume’s theories of sympathy and the self. The account, as a “relational account,” emphasizes the ways in which autonomous judgement is determined by one’s social relations and affective capacities. In Waldow’s view, the Humean account is distinctive in the role it ascribes to an agent’s engagement with her own self-conception. The account accepts that reflection is necessary for autonomous judgement. But because it understands reflective judgement as judgement made from the “general point of view”—a perspective in which agents “dissolve their perspective in the multiplicity of points of view relevant to the issue they seek to judge”—it differs from other relational accounts in denying that consideration of one’s own values and character is a precondition for autonomous judgement (194).

In his “A Fragmented Unity: A Narrative Answer to the Problem of the Unity of the Self in Hume,” Lorenzo Greco argues that Hume endorses a narrative conception of personal identity. While Hume seems to deny the unity of the self in Book 1 and the Appendix, Greco maintains that he holds that the self is unified by our viewing ourselves in narrative terms, where this narrative unification occurs in virtue of the self-consciousness generated by pride and humility. Greco provides a comparison of Hume’s narrative conception of the self with that of Alasdair MacIntyre and a Humean defense of narrative identity from criticisms raised by Galen Strawson. Greco’s essay is rich, although I had doubts about some parts of his discussion. He writes that what Hume recognizes in the Appendix are the limitations of associationism, which “works excellently when dealing with intellectual issues such as the nature of the mind, but proves ineffective once one moves on to examine human beings as passionate and moral agents” (205). But Hume does not seem to regard associationism as limited in this way, since he appeals to the association of impressions and ideas to explain the indirect passions, which, in Greco’s view, are the very passions responsible for our regarding ourselves as unified agents.

The essays in Part 3 consider Hume's relation to other philosophical traditions. Jay Garfield's "Candrakīrti and Hume on the Self and the Person" discusses several "homologies" between Hume's account of the self and Indian Madhyamaka Buddhist accounts, focusing on that of Candrakīrti. In Garfield's view, Hume and Candrakīrti agree in denying the existence of a self, understood as something simple and enduring. Moreover, both accept the existence of persons, although this existence is convention-dependent, generated, for Hume, by the passions. It turns out that persons are, on Garfield's reading, far from unique in this regard, because he (without textual support) ascribes to Hume what he calls "panfictionalism," according to which the existence of *everything* is convention-dependent (232, 247).

In his "Husserl (and Brentano) on Hume's Notion of the Self," Hynek Janoušek enhances our understanding of the reception of Hume's philosophy by examining the influence of his account of the self on the founding figure of the phenomenological tradition. In Janoušek's narrative, Husserl's views regarding the self become less Humean over time. In the first edition of his *Logical Investigations*, Husserl holds that one's consciousness is an "ego-less stream" of experiences (253). By the second edition of that work, however, Husserl, perhaps under the influence of criticisms directed at Hume by Theodor Lipps and Alexander Pfänder, embraces the existence of a pure ego at the center of one's experiences. The collection closes with Mark Collier's "Disguising Change: Hume and Cognitive Science on the Continued Existence of the Self." Collier argues that recent work in cognitive science supports Hume's view that ascriptions of personal identity are fictitious products of psychological biases. Empirical evidence suggests that ascriptions of personal identity are explained both by the propensity to postulate a "true," immutable self and by the propensity to assimilate one's experiences into a narrative of one's life.

Hume's philosophy of the self is far from being understudied. This collection is all the more valuable for considering topics that have been relatively neglected as well as those that have received sustained attention. Collectively, the essays nicely demonstrate the philosophical interest of the Humean self.

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