

The Ideas of the Self and Time in Hume: Are these Two Ideas Reconcilable? †

[Hume'da Kendilik ve Zaman İdeleri: Bu İki İde Uzlaştırılabilir mi?]

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Abstract: The Cartesian/Substantial self (the traditional self) is a view which holds that the self is an agent who is the subject of all our mental states, i.e., thoughts, perceptions and so on. It also holds that the self is identical to itself at different times. However, on Hume's account, we have no such idea. That is, the self preserving its identity through time is a fiction. Hume states that all ideas must be derived from impressions (the Copy Principle). Nevertheless, there is no such persisting impression; so, there is no idea of the persisting self. However, even though, there is no single impression of time that corresponds to the idea of time, Hume argues that we do have the idea of time. This paper investigates Hume's view that the self is an illusion by concentrating on the role of (associative) imagination and memory. Furthermore, it aims to clarify Hume's idea of time. It appears that the ideas of the self and time are co-dependent. Yet, Hume rejects that we have the idea of the persisting self; whereas, he admits that we have the idea of time. Considering the Copy Principle, it appears that there is an inconsistency between the two claims at issue. The present paper also discusses whether this inconsistency can be remedied.

Keywords: the self, time, illusion, reality, reconcilability.

Öz: Kartezyen/Tötsel kendilik (geleneksel kendilik) fikri; kendiliğin/benliğin, algı ve düşünce gibi bütün zihin hallerinin öznesi olan bir fail olduğunu ileri süren bir görüştür. Bu görüşe göre, "ben" tüm zamanlarda kendisiyle özdeş olmalıdır. Ancak,

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Hume'a göre bizde böyle bir ben idesi yoktur. Şöyle ki, farklı zamanlarda özdeşliğini koruyan bir kendilik düşüncesi bir kurgudan ibarettir. Hume, tüm idelerin izlenimlerden çıkarsandığını savunur (Kopya İlkesi). Fakat sürekliliğini koruyan bir izlenim olmadığı için, sürekli değişmeden kalan bir kendilik idesi de yoktur. Buna karşılık, zaman idesinin çıkarsanabileceği bir zaman izlenimi olmamasına rağmen, Hume bizde zaman idesinin olduğunu iddia eder. Bu yazıda, Hume'un benlik yanılısaması fikri, çağrışımsal imgelem (*associative imagination*) ve belleğin oynadığı rollere vurgu yapılarak araştırılmaktadır. Bunu yapmak için, Hume'un zaman anlayışının aydınlatılması gerekir. Bu da kendilik ve zaman idelerinin karşılıklı gereklilik (*co-dependency*) içerisinde olduklarına gönderme yapar. Kopya ilkesini göz önünde bulundurduğumuzda, söz konusu iki idea arasında bir tutarsızlık olduğu göze çarpar. Bu yazıda ayrıca, bu tutarsızlığın ortadan kaldırılıp kaldırılamayacağı tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kendilik, zaman, yanılısama, gerçeklik, uzlaştırılabilirlik.

1. Introduction

Our general tendency concerning the self is to think it as a real subject that is the agent of all our mental states. That is, the self is considered as an entity, namely, the *substance* of all our inner and outer experiences. This traditionally considered self, Locke says, is “a thinking, intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and place [...]” (1999: 318). This is also what we understand by the Cartesian/Substantial self. On Descartes' account (1985a; 1985b) the self is a simple and identical subject (*substance*) that owns our perceptions and thoughts, i.e. the subject of properties. Contrary to this, the view that the self is an illusion¹ suggests that the existence of the “I” – a conscious entity that preserves its identity through time – is problematic. In fact, the view of the illusion of the self tells us that beyond the particular experiences there is nothing we can call the self; there is no particular impression corresponding to the idea of the self. On this view, such a self is a mere play of our imagination, a deceptive appearance. It is therefore a subjective experience. In other words, there exists no entity at all in the real world that is the real object of this experience. After what has been said so far, it must not be difficult to see that the Humean view of the self is a serious criticism directed towards traditionally considered self. On closer inspection, it is seen that the view of traditional self assumes time to account for the self that persists through change. Likewise, Hume's view of the self as a collection of the successive perceptions must presuppose time as well.

¹ By illusion of the self we should not understand that the self does not exist at all; rather, we should notice that there exists no simple idea of the self persisting through time.

Otherwise, the succession of perceptions, i.e., perceptions following one another in a temporal sequence cannot be accounted for.

This paper aims to show that Hume's ideas of the self and time are co-dependent. In the course of this, it elaborates Hume's idea of the illusory/imaginary self by focusing on the reasons that produce the illusion of the persisting self over time. Therefore, in this paper, it is essential to inquire into Hume's idea of time. Although Hume considers personal identity as an illusion, he seems to argue for the existence of the idea of time, which seems to violate the Copy Principle – each idea is a copy of a preceding impression. Taking into account that both ideas are derived by the same operation of the mind (imagination and memory), there appears to arise an inconsistency. The present paper also tries to answer whether this inconsistency can be remedied.

2. The Illusion of the Persisting Self

Actually, the root of the claim that the self is an illusion can be traced back to Buddha. For example, Giles (1993) considers Hume as a “no-self theorist” – who rejects the idea of personal identity entirely – like Buddha. Insofar as the self in the traditional sense is considered, Hume's theory of the self might be thought of as “the no-self theory”. However, Hume revisits this idea and reconsiders it. In the beginning of the discussion of personal identity in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume explicitly asserts that we can have no idea of the self at all. Undoubtedly, at first glance, it takes quite a time to process this claim, let alone to understand and admit it. For common sense tells us just the opposite; it clearly tells us that we have a real idea of ourselves. Hume opens the section of the *Treatise* which is entitled “Of Personal Identity” with a criticism directed against those who support the view of the substantial self:

There are some philosophers, who imagine we are every moment conscious of what we call our self; that we feel its existence and continuance in existence; and are certain, beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity. (2007: 164)

Having rejected that we have an idea of the self, he asks the question: “[But] from what impression could this idea be deriv'd?” (2007: 164). His response is that we can never give an answer to this question unless we fall into an apparent contradiction. What Hume thinks is that the idea of the persisting self simply results from a confusion or a mistake. The explanation of Hume's denial of this idea of the self – the self which exists beyond the succession of particular perceptions and is self-identical over time – can be found in the following passage:

For my part, 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 anything but the perception. (2007: 165)

It deserves to point out, as Giles (1993) states, that some critics of Hume think the use of first-person pronoun “I” damages Hume’s view of the illusion of the self. However, Giles denies this, referring to a distinction between the verbal (conventional) and ultimate (metaphysical) level at which the idea of the self can be employed (1993: 184). On Giles account, in using the word “I”, Hume does not commit himself to “the existence of self at the ultimate level”; instead, the first-person pronoun is used at the conventional level (1993: 188). Hume’s contention is that we can never catch any idea of the self at the ultimate level. Through introspection, what we can notice is nothing but some particular perception alone. Here, it is important to emphasize that for Hume all particular perceptions (impressions²), including perceptions concerning the self, are “different, and distinguishable, and separable from each other, and may be separately consider’d, and may exist separately, and have no need of anything to support their existence” (2007: 164). Thus, according to Hume, as Morrison expresses, “the sensation is a matter of discrete atomic impressions” (1978: 182). This point is essential in Hume’s rejection of the idea of the substantial self. Reasonably, one may argue that there must be a “thing” or a “real bond” that holds discrete impressions together. Nevertheless, Hume’s idea of discrete atomic impressions, albeit problematic, suggests that each single impression can exist on its own without being in need of anything whatsoever.

What Hume denies is that we have an idea of the unchanging and permanent self. On Hume’s view, the self or the person must be considered as a train of mental events which follow one another in a temporal flux. Therefore, the self, according to him, is “nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in perpetual flux and movement” (2007: 165).

In order to support that we have no idea of the self, Hume provides three basic premises. The first one is that all ideas start with impressions. That is, for every idea we must have a corresponding impression. Hume states that “all our simple ideas proceed, either mediately or immediately, from their correspondent impressions.” (2007: 164). Garrett calls this Hume’s “precedency principle” (the Copy Principle³), according to which “the idea of X must always be preceded by an impression of X” (1981: 342). Hume

² Hume says: “ALL the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS”. Impression are “all our sensations, passions and emotions”, while ideas are “the faint images of these [impressions] in thinking and reasoning [...]” (2007: 7).

³ Garret (2008) states that the Copy Principle is expressed in Hume’s proposition: “that all our simple ideas in their first appearance, are deriv’d from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them” (2007: 9).

explicitly says: There must be one single impression which causes every real idea. Clearly, this claim is a reflection of his empiricism.

His second premise is that for any impression to bring about the idea of the self it must preserve its identity over time; or in Hume's words, for an idea of the self, there has to be a corresponding "impression [that] must continue invariably the same thro' the whole course of our lives [...]" (2007: 164). This premise is essential since, it signifies the temporal character of Hume's view of the self.

Finally, his third premise is that we do not have any single impression of the self that is "constant and invariable". After posing these three premises, he asserts that there is no persisting self through time:

But there is *no impression constant and invariable*. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is deriv'd; and consequently *there is no such idea* [emphasis added]. (2007: 164)

There is no idea of the persisting self. Hume says, upon reflection, one can come across a particular perception; that's all! Through introspection, one cannot encounter the *simple* and *permanent* impression corresponding to the idea of the self; rather, one observes the multiplicity of discrete perceptions. There are indeed two different ideas of the self in Hume's mind. One concerns the *simplicity* of the self and the other does the *identity* of it (2007: 165). In the former case, Pitson (2002) explains, Hume thinks of the *synchronic* identity, which holds the identity of the self at one time, i.e., an instantaneous unity. In the latter case, Pitson continues, Hume has in mind the *diachronic* identity, which suggests the identity of the self at different times, i.e., a unity of succession. However, in the mind there can only be perceptions which "pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations" (2007: 165). That is, there is nothing in the mind but the flow of perceptions. Upon this, Giles states that "there is consequently never any simplicity within the mind at one time nor identity at two different times." (1993: 177). On Hume's account, there is no single persisting idea of the self to which the transitory perceptions refer or by means of which they are united. If we might want to re-construct Hume's argument in a syllogistic form, then, the argument would run as follows:

Premise (1): For every idea there must be a correspondent impression (the Copy Principle)

Premise (2): For one impression to be the cause of the idea of the self it must preserve its identity over time (it must be "constant and invariable")

Premise (3): We have no impression of the self that is “constant and invariable”.

Conclusion: Therefore, there is no idea of the self.

As a matter of fact, Hume’s denial of personal identity and his endorsement of the bundle theory have much to do with the operation of the associative imagination, the role of the memory, and the idea of time.

3. Reasons That Produce the Illusion of Personal Identity

According to Hume, the self is the succession of perceptions – perceptions following one another in a temporal order. Numerically identical self through time is an illusion. But, why does human nature has a mistaken tendency to think that the persisting self really exists? Hume asks: Why do we have such a powerful tendency “to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves possess of an invariable and uninterrupted existence thro’ the whole course of our lives?” (2007: 165). In fact, this question has two main answers which can be found in the operation of (associative) imagination and memory.

Hume says that philosophers fall into error of the idea of personal identity. Then, he sets out to question the reason for them to fall into such a mistake. In his account, the idea of such an identical self results from the confusion of *diversity* with *identity*, the confusion caused by the operation of imagination upon sense impressions. Hume draws an analogy between the identity we attribute to an entity other than a person (table, plant etc.) and to a person (self) (2007:165). He begins with the former:

We have a distinct idea of an object, that *remains invariable and uninterrupted thro’ a suppos’d variation of time* [emphasis added]; and this idea we call that of identity [...] We have also a distinct idea of several different objects existing in succession, and connected together by a close relation; and this [is an idea] of diversity [...] [T]hese two ideas of identity, and [of diversity] perfectly distinct [...] they are generally confounded with each other. *That action of the imagination*, by which we consider the uninterrupted and invariable object, and that by which we reflect on the succession of related objects, are almost the same to the feeling [...] The relation facilitates the transition of the mind from one object to another, and renders its passage as smooth as if it contemplated one continu’d object. This resemblance is the cause of the confusion and mistake, and makes us substitute the notion of identity, instead of that of [diversity]. (2007: 165-166)

As a result of the operation of the imagination, we mistake “the succession of related objects” (diversity) for the persisting object (identity). The important point here is that the imagination assumes the existence of the idea of time (or forms/derives this idea simultaneously) through which an object is regarded to remain identical. Otherwise, it

makes no sense to discuss whether an object can remain numerically identical through change.

We should notice that, for Hume, the so-called identity of an object is in fact the collection of distinct perceptions. Hume uses an argument by analogy to justify that personal identity results from the same confusion of identity and diversity, resulted from the “operation of the imagination”:

The identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetables and animal bodies. It cannot, therefore, have a different origin, but must proceed from a like operation of the imagination upon like objects. (2007: 169)

As in the case of objects, we must realize that the self is the succession of discrete perceptions spread out over time. Hume renders “the self” fictitious, since he states that we mistake the idea of the persisting self through time for the idea of the succession of various different perceptions:

Thus we feign the continu'd existence of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption: and run into the notion of a soul, and *self*, and substance, to disguise the variation. But we may farther observe, that where we do not give rise to such a fiction, our propension to confound identity with relation is so great, that we are apt to imagine something unknown and mysterious, connecting the parts, beside their relation; and this I take to be the case with regard to the identity we ascribe to plants and vegetables. (2007: 166)

In both cases, i.e., in the production of the identity of an object and that of the self, the operation of the (associative) imagination plays a central role. Therefore, this operation apparently gives rise to the confusion of the identity and diversity by which, as Giles argues, we feel obliged to invent a “supportive principle of unity” like the self (the soul) as substance, i.e., the bearer of all perceptions (1993: 11). Thus, the operation of imagination cannot be dissociated from “the unity of time”. For, to think of such a self, the imagination must suppose time through which the self must preserve its identity. That is, for the imagination to be able to remove the interruption and disguise the variation, it must assume time. It requires the idea of time to bind together the multiplicity of perceptions, which takes place at different moments. It seems that the ideas of the persisting self and time are somehow related.

Furthermore, the contribution of the memory in the production of the (fictitious) identity of the self (as Locke holds) cannot be neglected. Hume asks: “[B]y what relations this uninterrupted progress of our thought [identity] is produc'd, when we consider the successive existence of a mind or thinking person?” (2007: 170). First, he

considers the three relations of resemblance, causation, and contiguity⁴ from which, the connection (association) of ideas, and the notion of personal identity proceed. Having said a little about it, Hume sets aside the relation of contiguity, and then moves on to discussing those of resemblance and causation. Yet, he begins with shedding some light on the role of the memory first:

For what is the memory but a faculty, by which we raise up the images of past perceptions? And as an image necessarily resembles its object, must not the frequent placing of *these resembling perceptions in the chain of thought, convey the imagination more easily from one link to another, and make the whole seem like the continuance of one object* [emphasis added]? In this particular, then, the memory not only discovers the identity, but also contributes to its production, by producing the relation of resemblance among the perceptions. (2007: 170)

This passage explains the role of the memory in the production of the illusion of self-identity. There is in fact a crucial point we need to focus here. In contributing to the production of the self-identity, the memory must have the elements of time, that is, the ideas of the past, the present (and the future). It must also have the idea of their relation, i.e., the unity (the idea) of time; for, how else can the memory “raise up the images of past perceptions”, unless it relates the past to the present? In the absence of time, any idea concerning the self would not be any concern to us; that is, we would not attribute an identity to the self. For successive perceptions cannot be thought of identical through change without time; perceptions need a certain period of time to be unfolded over successively. Upon this, Giles reminds that there is no persisting self; instead, there is the “uninterrupted progress of thought within our imagination” (1993: 190). This idea of the uninterrupted flux of perception is a temporal idea, since “it is something that occurs over an extended period of time.” (Giles, 1993:190). As pointed out, the ideas of the self and time seem to be co-dependent.

In the production of the illusion of the self-identity, more important part is attributed to the relation of causation:

As to causation; we may observe, that the true idea of the human mind, is to consider it as a system of different perceptions or different existences, which are link'd together by the relation of cause and effect, and mutually produce, destroy, influence, and modify each other. (2007: 170)

The relations (of ideas) at issue make the smooth transition from one idea to another possible for the mind. As to the resemblance, this transition happens when “our

⁴ These three relations are the “things” that hold the different perceptions together. Hume calls them “the principles of union among ideas”. See Hume, 2007: 60.

imagination runs easily from one idea to any other that resembles it "; as regards the contiguity, it occurs when our imagination "run[s] along the parts of space and time in conceiving its objects" (2007: 13). And finally, as to the causation, the imagination passes from one to another easily insofar as the Copy Principle is accepted, that is, the effect (the idea) is preceded (copied) by the cause (the impression).

As Garret expresses, there is "no real idea of a metaphysically substantial self"; instead it is "an idea of a bundle of perceptions that are related by resemblance and causation" (1981: 340), produced by the imagination and memory. As regards memory, Hume says: "Had we no memory, we never shou'd have any notion of causation, nor consequently of that chain of causes and effects, which constitute our self or person." (2007: 170). To make his account of the self a little more understandable, Hume makes use of the following analogy of theatre:

The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor identity in different [...] The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is compos'd. (2007: 165)

Despite the analogy between the mind and a theatre, the mind should not be mistaken for a place where the play is performed. Hume rejects the idea of the self as a container in which every perception whatsoever takes place. On his account, the self is not the persisting "I" (soul) to which all particular perceptions must refer. Nor is it "something" that functions as a sustainer of all these perceptions. Rather, it is the collection of the successive perceptions.

4. The Reality of the Idea of Time

Having started to read Hume's account of time (and space) presumably the first thing that strikes the eye is the inconsistency or contradiction in his line of thought. Recall that Hume's denial of the idea of the self relies mainly on his Copy Principle. Contrary to this, while he argues that there is no one impression corresponding to the idea of time, he abstains from applying the same reasoning that he employed in the denial of the idea of the self. Even though the way we possess the idea of time is the same with the idea of the self, Hume clearly avoids rendering the idea of time an illusion. Instead, having discussed the matter at length, he acknowledges the possibility of the existence of the idea of time. Taking into account what has been said so far, it seems that we face an inconsistency. We have two propositions: (1) there is no idea of the identical self; (2) there is the idea of time. Are these two propositions compatible with each other considering the Copy Principle? At first sight, they do not seem so. So, in order to settle

the issue, we need to examine Hume's idea of time and try to understand why this inconsistency seems to arise.

The Copy Principle dictates that all simple ideas must be derived from simple impressions. Yet, there is no single particular perception corresponding to the idea of the self; so, there is no idea of the persisting self. Then, following the same line of thought, we must say that since there is no particular impression of time, there can be no idea of time. Therefore, time must be considered as a mere illusion; it must be fictitious. However, Hume does not say that; he does not claim that the idea of time is an illusion. Rather, he states that we have the idea of time. Given this, the two ideas at issue do not seem to run parallel to each other. It appears that there is an incompatibility between the ideas of the self and time.

5. Reconciling the Illusion of the Self and the Reality of Time

In fact, Hume denies a view of the substantial time existing prior to and independently of impressions, which is to function as the measure of them all. Still, claiming that we do not have the idea of the self, whereas we do have the idea of time gives the impression that there is an inconsistency in Hume's line of thought. However, if we approach the ideas at issue in terms of "abstract general ideas", this quasi-inconsistency disappears.

Hume rejects that "any idea has all the characteristics we are uncritically inclined to attribute to the idea of ourselves, but he does not and could not deny that we have any such idea" (Garrett, 1981: 341). Penelhum argues that we have an idea of the self; yet, this complex idea "will not be derived from one impression, but will be derived from the whole series of perceptions that make up the series that I have" (1976: 14). Garrett agrees with Penelhum on this, claiming that even though, for Hume, we do not have any idea of an uninterrupted, and invariable "impression of self or substance", perhaps we still do have "impressions of ourselves" (1981: 341). Hume says: "But *self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are suppos'd to have a reference.*" (2007: 251). Upon pondering the nature of "impressions of ourselves", Garrett (1981) takes into account an analogous case, i.e., space and time:

Hume asserts that we have ideas of space and time, yet denies that we have any distinct impressions of space or time, he is accused of violating his own "precedency" principle [...] But such an accusation misconstrues Hume's principle, and thereby fails to recognize the way in which his theory of abstract ideas is meant to vindicate it. There is of course no such impression as the impression of space, but many complex impressions are impressions of spatially-arranged simple impressions, and thus have the feature of spatiality [...] Furthermore, the idea of any such impression could be made to serve as the abstract idea itself: since all impressions with spatial relations are members of the class of

spatial things, the idea of any such impression may [...] serve as the particular idea representing the whole class of resembling things. Similar considerations apply in the case of time. And these considerations are sufficient, for Hume, to explain *the existence of the ideas* [emphasis added] in question. (1981: 342)

How we get “the particular idea of space” (representing the entire set of spatial things) is important; since, the mind’s taking notice of the ideas of space and time works in a similar fashion. Therefore, the way we derive the idea of space can be used as a model for the idea of time. Furthermore, as Waxman states, the employment of Hume’s principle [of resemblance] to the case of time is, “even more unavoidable than that of space”, because, “whereas ideas of spatial features originate only in vision and touch” the source of temporal ideas extends beyond this domain (2008:77):

The idea of time, being deriv’d from the succession of our perceptions of every kind, ideas as well as impressions, and impressions of reflection as well as of sensation, will afford us an instance of an abstract idea, which comprehends a still greater variety than that of space, and yet is represented in the fancy by some particular individual idea of a determinate quantity and quality. (2007: 28)

Unlike the idea of the self, Hume proposes that, even though the idea of time is not a particular, separate, and unchanging impression, it is “the bundle of impressions” (the idea of empirical framework) derived from perceptions successively arranged. That is, the idea of time is “the general idea of succession” (Baxter, 2016: 187). Moreover, it must be noted that whereas Hume associates space with co-existence, he considers time in terms of succession. That is, when we explain the idea of space we inevitably requires impressions belonging to “the class of spatial things”; yet, in the case of time, impressions arrayed successively will suffice for the derivation of the idea of time.

Now let us speak of the similarity between the way we get the idea of self and time. In Hume’s view, we have the abstract general idea of time. That is, this idea, in a sense, exists, i.e., it is not an illusion. The question is: how do we come to have this idea? In parallel with the claim that we have “impressions of ourselves”, here we can say that we have “impressions of time” (and space). It is certain that we do not have a particular idea of time corresponding to a particular impression; instead, we have an abstract general idea of time which arises from various impressions belonging to the class of temporal things.

For Hume, there is no particular/simple impression of the persisting self; nor is there that of time. Nevertheless, the absence of these particular impressions cannot prevent us from coming to have the ideas of the self and time. As discussed earlier, there might be a certain class of impressions (of ourselves and temporal things) to which our ideas of the self and time can correspond. The notion of each member of the class of

resembling things stands for the particular idea representing the whole class (Garrett, 1981: 342). The idea of the self consists in successively arrayed different impressions; yet, for these impressions to be taken notice by the mind as a bundle or a collection, the mind must have the idea of time as an empirical framework. This suggests that time and the self mutually entail one another. Without the operation of the mind, we cannot have the idea of time in which impressions follow one another in a successive order. The idea of time is indispensable because it appears like “the mental structure” in and through which the subject can take notice of itself as a collection of different impressions.

Time is considered as an empirically formed “structure” which impressions entail to be able to make sense to the mind. In fact, Hume’s idea of time should better be regarded as a “vision”, an “outlook” or a “frame of mind”.⁵

The idea of time is not deriv’d from a particular impression mix’d up with others, and plainly distinguishable from them; but arises altogether from *the manner, in which impressions appear to the mind*, [emphasis added] without making one of the number. Five notes play’d on a flute give us the impression and idea of time; tho’ time be not a sixth impression, which presents itself to the hearing or any other of the senses. Nor is it a sixth impression, which the mind by reflection finds in itself. (2007: 29)

Hume says: “The ideas of space and time are therefore no separate or distinct ideas, but merely those of the manner or order, in which object exist.” (2007: 31). He further says that “tis impossible to conceive either a vacuum and extension without matter, or a time, when there was no succession or change in any real existence.”⁶ (2007:31). On Hume’s view, time consists of discrete and indivisible simple units (Baxter, 2016: 174). This position seems to require an atomic view of time, which holds that “time is a whole consisting of parts.” (Bonnen and Flage, 2000: 1). As indicated, for Hume, the parts of time and space “are inconceivable when not fill’d with something real and existent”⁷. Baxter argues that “the visible or tangible object said to ‘fill’ a part of space is that part of space.” (2016: 182); then, it can be said that each successive objects said to fill a part of time must be that very part of time. Waxman also argues similarly on the topic, saying that “at the same time we attribute real existence to objects by means of causal

⁵ Contemporary physicist N. David Mermin’s thought concerning time (and space) lies very close to that of Hume. According to him, “[s]pace and time and space-time are not properties of the world we live in but concepts we have invented to help us organize classical events” (2009: 8-9). It is important to note that, it is common to contemporary physics to take space and time together as one and call it “space-time”.

⁶ As Melamed puts it, Hume’s denial of empty time allows us to claim that his theory of time is “like Leibniz’s, a variant of the relationist family” (2014: 238).

⁷ Baxter suggests that even though he uses the term “abstract”, Hume’s idea of time is best described as “general idea”; since, time is not some mental “thing” or form we get when we remove from experience all impressions successively arrayed (2016: 181).

inference, we do so to the places and times they occupy as well (2008: 80). Therefore, it appears that insofar as we treat perceptions (objects) as real, time (and space) must be considered as real as well. Nevertheless, we must keep it in mind that space and time are “never anything present to [us], prior to and independent of experience and habit, but rather something that exists only in and through the actions and affects of associative imagination as directed upon [...] objects (impressions and ideas).” (Waxman, 2008: 76)

The idea of time is derived from the various impressions belonging to the set of successive (temporal) things. Even though, there is no particular impression from which the idea of time is derived, we can still refer to the numerous impressions allowing us to think that we do have this idea (2007: 47). To explain it briefly, the endless stream (flux) of impressions produces in the mind a “vision”, an “outlook”, – which can also be described as an “order”; a “structure”; or a “frame of mind” – in and through which alone impressions can make their appearances to us. Time has an essential role in making sense of the world. It seems to serve as to provide the manner or the way for yet-meaningless impressions to turn into a meaningful form. Hume says: “For we may observe, that there is a continual succession of perceptions in our mind; so that the idea of time being for ever present with us.” (2007: 47)

6. Conclusion

In Hume’s view, there is no idea of the self. He argues that the self that endures over time is an illusion. Hume accounts for how this illusion arises by analyzing the operation of the imagination and the role of memory. He thinks that this illusion is merely due to the confusion of identity with diversity where the relations of resemblance and causation play roles. In fact, Hume’s denial of the reality of the persisting self⁸ over time depends mainly on his Copy Principle. Nevertheless, he seems to violate this principle in favor of the existence of the idea of time. This can be interpreted as an inconsistency in his philosophy. If we take into account general ideas and reconsider the self and time in terms of them, this seeming inconsistency may disappear. To clarify, even if, there is no single persisting impression of the self, there are “impressions of ourselves”. That is, there is a general idea of the self. Likewise, even if there is no particular impression of time, there are impressions belonging to the class of temporal things. That is to say, there is a general idea of time.

⁸ Hume, in the Appendix to the *Treatise*, states that “upon a more strict review of the section concerning personal identity, I find myself involv’d in such a labyrinth, that, I must confess, I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent.” (2007: 398-99)

As regards the relation between the self and time, it can be said that without the existence of the idea of time, no kind of impressions can make themselves apparent or meaningful to the mind, i.e., the world can make no sense to the mind. They cannot do so since, as Hume says: the ideas of space and time are the ideas of “the manner or order, in which object exist” (2007: 31). For attributing any meaning to the flux of impressions, the mind requires time as an empirical framework. This shows the co-dependency between the self and time.

7. References

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