

**Penelhum's arguments on Hume's concept of personal identity in terms of
"linguistic mistake": A Defense**

Dr. Nargish Afroza¹

Abstract

In this paper, I have pointed out how Penelhum overruled Hume's interpretation of identity theory in his famous work "Hume on Personal Identity". This paper has argued that the extent to which Hume's theory of identity is tenable in this respect and has tried to make clear that Penelhum's interpretation of Hume's theory is in no way tenable. Penelhum thinks that Hume misinterpreted the linguistic convention in describing identity theories, that he did not use properly the words "numerically one" and "variable" correctly, to clarify the "identity" term in his work "A Treatise of Human Nature". Because, according to Penelhum, Hume tried to explain the identity of animals and plants based only on general views, where he did not use examples such as sentences or musical themes to explain the identity properly. However, the main purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that Hume's account of personal identity is a logically plausible account.

Keywords: David Hume; Terence Penelhum; Personal Identity; Numerical and Qualitative Identity; Conventional Regulations; Linguistic Consistency.

¹ Ph D. in Philosophy, Department of Communication, Philosophy and Politics, University of Beira Interior, Portugal, nafroza.ma@gmail.com.

Introduction

The famous 18th-century Western philosopher David Hume played an important role in the theory of identity in his work “A Treatise of Human Nature” (THN) (Hume, 1739). And Hume’s theory of identity has been called an important, controversial theory in the writings of scholars from ancient times to contemporary times. As noted, scholar Penelhum famously criticized Hume’s theory of identity in his work “Hume on Personal Identity” (Penelhum, 1968). He felt that the theory of identity as expounded by Hume could never be considered acceptable because he could not draw a precise distinction between numerical identity and qualitative identity. Penelhum believes that Hume did not maintain linguistic clarity in explaining the theory of identity, which is why he confined himself to the fence of language. In his essay, Penelhum tries to make it clear how we should use language to identify an object so as not to create confusion. Because when we specify an object, we specify its verbal meaning, which usually does not change. But when Hume described the identity of the person, he was not thinking about the meaning of the word. He calls the object or person a bundle of different perceptions that exist separately in the flow of time. It is here that Penelhum objects that if an object has different perceptions, it should be identified by different names because the object or person is different in the passage of time. Penelhum criticizes Hume’s theory of identity because if we accept Hume’s theory, we cannot explain identity. Penelhum, however, does not contradict the argument of “one” and “many” in terms of identity, for he gives the example that “a sentence” or “a melody” is made up of “many words” or “many notes”. So, “one” and “many” cannot be said to be opposed to each other, as “many notes” or “many words” define “a melodious melody” or “a beautiful sentence”. However, Penelhum makes it clear that when we talk about identity, it depends entirely on what kind of thing we are talking about, so Hume’s definition of identity in terms of person, trees, etc., does not appear to be correct in terms of sound or tone. Another objection Penelhum made to Hume’s theory of identity is that if an object has different perceptions and exists separately, how can they be closely related? Penelhum rejects Hume’s argument in this case; he thinks that, in order for Hume’s argument to be valid, the object must be recognized as consistent with its inheritance, but he first declares the inheritance of objects to exist differently. So logically, Penelhum thinks that Hume did not apply the correct meaning to his explanation. However, we think Hume’s interpretation of the theory of identity may seem to suggest that Penelhum’s theory of identity is ultimately untenable, even if it seems more plausible in terms of language use. Hume’s use of the word “change” in the context of identity seems warranted, as we have explained in this

paper in Hume's defense. Although he admits different apprehensions of an object in terms of identity, those apprehensions are differently organized in the mind by mental processes whereby we metaphysically conceive of the identity of an object by causal processes. And there is nothing wrong with this imagination; without this imagination, we cannot explain the identity of the individual, so Hume thinks that there is no opposition between "numerically one" and "variable" in such a process.

Did Hume make a "*Linguistic Mistake*" about Personal Identity?

Terence Penelhum's illustrious article "Hume on Personal Identity" claimed that Hume mistakenly refers to "identity" as we identify individuals. He claimed that the inheritance of distinct perceptions can be counted as one substance. For, according to Hume, a substance is both "numerically identical" and "diversity/impermanence" in contrast, but this is contradictory. It is to say that Hume makes *the linguistic error* in identity, which Penelhum criticizes in his article. In this section, this thesis will show how Penelhum explains Hume's error. Penelhum states about this, "Hume's language throughout makes it clear that he thinks the error he claims to detect is committed by everyone, that is, by every user of the language, not just by philosophers." (Penelhum, 1955, p.588). Then it is said that

"[I]t is plain that persons (qua bundles of perceptions or whatever they may be) are objects that change. Hence, if Hume's contention about identity is true, it is a mistake to ascribe identity to persons. Penelhum believes that Hume's contention is plainly wrong." (Stone, 1981, p.276)

His argument is that Hume absurdly expresses the definition of personal identity because of his misunderstanding of the indispensable circumstance of numerical identity, which is not acceptable. Furthermore, Penelhum believes that all the arguments that Hume attempts to describe personal identity with cannot be considered a valid method of analysis. He goes on to describe "perfect identity" and fails to properly analyse the description of personal identity, which leads to a false and imaginary analysis of personal identity that clearly creates linguistic confusion among us. In this case, Penelhum identified that Hume could not properly explain identity by applying proper language because "[H]e (Hume) certainly says that our tendency to talk of changing things as identical is a mistake and a confusion, but he only says this at the beginning, in an attempt to discredit philosophical constructs like the self, which only occur when philosophers try to justify, or show rational ground for, a practice which is just a matter of habit and could not conceivably depend on anything they had to say. Hume is

not trying to discredit our usage, but only to discredit misguided attempts to defend it.” (Penelhum, 1955, p.586)

It is clear that Penelhum makes a strong claim about Hume’s *fallacy* of the theory of a person’s identity. Because we repeatedly apply the same word to denote the existence of a changing entity and repeatedly (the nature of humans, such as habits) use the same name to identify the same person, which, according to Hume, we misinterpret language each time. Therefore, it can be said that a person is identical through his changeability, i.e., the previous person is identical with the present person. Hence, Hume misunderstands the meaning and interpretation of the word “identity” when he goes to explain the uniformity of persons.

But while Penelhum’s argument seems plausible in this context, it is not plausible in many passages—in which case, Hume explains personal identity without regard to language. Because Hume, in his clear interpretation of “perfect identity,” would be “numerically one” and “invariable”, but slight changes in entities in some cases do not prevent them from being numerically the same, but do not allow for “perfect identity”. But this is where Penelhum feels that there is confusion about his theory of identity, where he tries to explain that we think of our continuous personal identity as “perfect identity” because our psychological system imagines that we are numerically one, which is a complete misconception. Penelhum makes it clear in his writings that “[B]ut I can remain the same in the numerical sense without doing so in the specific sense—I can be numerically the same but changed. In fact, I cannot be said to have changed unless I am the same in the numerical sense.” (Penelhum, 1955, p.580). That’s why Penelhum seems to think that the *succession* and *one* is not contradictory in this case,

“A succession of notes is one theme. A succession of words is one sentence. If the succession does not form a theme or sentence, it is still a succession or series.” (Penelhum, 1955, p.580)

However, according to Penelhum, it is never a contradiction that a collection of different perceptions is an object, such as a “sentence” or a “musical theme”. They are composed of many words or notes, so in this case, *one* and *many* should not be opposed. Hume’s theory, on the other hand, claimed that “perfect identity” would mean that identity or sameness would never change over time. But according to Hume, we are tricked by mental processes into misidentifying a substance as the same substance that changes with the variation of time. Penelhum, on the other hand, claims that Hume did not correctly distinguish between numerical and qualitative identity in describing these processes but was “confusion between numerical and specific identity.” (Penelhum, 1955, p.582). Because we are not always talking

about the one thing in an object through mental processes, we are talking about different aspects of an object when we explain or discuss in anything.

Hume claimed that personal identity is an identity that changes from moment to moment, i.e., the individual changes with the passage of time. So, it should be said that each perception of a person's life is different and never dependent on the others. When a person grows from childhood to adulthood, he exists through different perceptions over time and thus becomes a different person with no resemblance to his childhood. So according to Hume, personal identity is that he/she will always be numerically different, but we mentally support the flowing qualities of that person as the same person. But the identity of the individual is so changed by inheritance that we do not want to regard him/her as the same person, Hume says, "but where the change is produc'd gradually and insensibly, we are less apt to ascribe to it the same effect (that the loss of its apt is, identity)." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.10/p.256), then we imagine that person as the same person. Hume says in this context, "[T]hus 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." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.6/p.254)

However, it is clear that people have different perceptions, and they are changing. Therefore, if Hume's contradiction about identity is true, then it is wrong to identify a person. Penelhum claimed that Hume made an error theory about this conception. Because Hume quoted the passage mentioned:

"Our chief business, then, must be to prove, that all objects, to which we ascribe identity, without observing their invariableness and uninterruptedness, are such as consist of a succession of related objects." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.7/p.255)

For Hume, the identity of a person or thing is uninterrupted over a period of time – analysing this context, he says that only perception varies within a person. But he does not notice any constant change in that person or thing. Although one does not observe any pure immutability or pure constancy, or follow any such principle that confuses us. Again, we confuse our identity by thinking that every object or person exists as the same thing. Hume, therefore, argues that we must always analyse identity in different ways in order to maintain an equivalence between identity and time. In this case, Hume places more emphasis on mental phenomena in explaining this idea because it is the mind that explains our identity. So, he claims that the existence in any object/person is just a belief in our mental procession, "... that

the idea, of existence is nothing different from the idea of any object, and that when after the simple conception of any thing we would conceive it as existent, we in reality make no addition to or alteration on our first idea.” (Hume, 1739, T1 3.6.2/p.87)

But according to Penelhum Hume points out that if one’s identity is impermanent at flow of time, then that person never maintains identity because identity is *one* and *fixed*. Penelhum considers that Hume to be a controversial doctrine because Hume explains that identity is immutable and permanent. But whatever we can imagine according to our mental inclinations does not clarify identity in this case.

Because Hume said that “*a succession of different objects is one thing*” (added italics) (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.4) that our personal identity is successive such as A1² at T1, A2 at T2, A3 at T3, A4 at T4...but we are numerically “one” and “changeable”. In that case he seems that the successive of perceptions are distinct to each other, for a perception never bears its identity in the same way.

Hume considers that when he agrees that one object’s have many successions and that is countable, but it is not contradictory to say that one object and its many successions is the same object. In this context, Heraclitarian comment to be said:

“As they step into the same rivers, other and still other waters flow upon them’ (L, D. 12). The identity of the river is one of form and physical continuity, but not of material identity or preservation of the same content.” (Kahn, 1979, p.223)

Here an example can be used to explain the survival of the subject, the “whole thing” never exists at one time, nor is it necessarily a substantial object. Simply put, only the parts make up the whole object, and only temporary variations make the object itself a permanent object. But with change comes the unknown, and for some people the uncertainty can be hard to accept. Change is often associated with risk, but in that case, it can never be said that it is a different object. It can be said about Heraclitus concept,

“The fragment is typically Heraclitean in that a profound truth is couched in everyday language. The mundane image of the river makes the thought at once extraordinary and

² In that case “A” is a person/object. A’s succession A1, A2, A3.....

familiar, a (common) sense perception that can be apprehended only by a knowledgeable soul.”(Chitwood, 2004, p.66)

Penelhum clarifies Hume’s identity problem. In this case, Penelhum’s statement seems correct, we give it class names for different series, so “five series” and “one class name” – there will be no contradiction. Similarly, we can observe “a melody” which consists of “six notes”. But if we look at it superficially, it is a contradiction in terms because “a melody” and “six notes” can never be known as “the same”. This explanation is not correct. Because in this case, “six notes” define “one melody” there is no contradiction. But in the context of personal identity, Hume speaks of various perceptions that, combined with previous perceptions in our mind, give the person’s identity. In this case, Penelhum clarifies Hume’s error—if the person’s perceptions are countable in terms of identity, how can a succession of different perceptions be the same person? Hume could not retract the absurdities of personal identity, as Penelhum thinks that inheritances of perception can never confer identity on objects or persons because the individual can never be exactly what he was in his inheritance. He states,

“He (Hume) has not noticed what is wrong because he has chosen to talk in very general terms here, and to ignore the way in which we would actually talk on particular occasions.” (Penelhum, 1955, p.579)

However, Penelhum’s argument is quite significant that “melody” or “sentences” are things that do not inherit other things. Then Hume’s idea in this case seems to be wrong because he conceives of one thing as a succession of different things. But in this case, Penelhum’s argument is also not acceptable because “melody” or “sentence” is a thing whose existence is permanent at a certain time and is especially transient. Hence, its existence is logically impossible to deduce. But Hume in this case claimed a different existence of matter. So, while there are logical restrictions on such instances as “melody” or “sentences”, there are no legitimate criterium on persons, trees, or churches. For in such instances, we may indeed imagine their existence at different times, but the “melody” in such instances exists instantaneously at particular moments. So, I cannot imagine the “melody” or the “sentence” varying at over time. But we can also think of a person as existing at a specific time, in which case, we would ask whether an individual persisting at a specific time is identical to a previous individual persisting at a previous moment.

But we do not apply this type of question to “melody” because neither the “melody” nor the “sentence” exists at any one time, because a few notes make up the “melody” or a few words make up the “sentence”. Penelhum supports Hume’s argument in some areas, such as

Hume admits that an object is composed of many perceptions and that there is no contradiction between “one” and “many”.

As James Giles states on this context,

“Hume concludes his account with the important remark that all “nice and subtle” questions concerning personal identity are best considered as grammatical rather than philosophical difficulties. (Giles, 1993, p.178)

Hume holds that for some; personal identity is a *verbal dispute*. Because we cannot come to any correct conclusion in analysing it. Because not all questions related to personal identity can be answered. So, there is a grammatical difficulty more than a philosophical difficulty in describing personal identity. The identity depends on the relationship of concepts, so in this case, he concluded that “the relations, and the easiness of the transition may diminish by insensible degrees; we have no just standard, by which we can decide any dispute concerning the time, when they acquire or lose a title to the name of identity.” (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.21/p.262)

Penelhum argues that when Hume says in the Treatise,

“The word RELATION is commonly used in two senses considerably different from each other. Either for that quality, by which two ideas are connected together in the imagination, and the one naturally introduces the other, after the manner above explained: or for that particular circumstance, in which, even upon the arbitrary union of two ideas in the fancy, we may think proper to compare them.” (Hume, 1739, T1.1.5.1/p.13)

Then he argues that it is not acceptable to say the successions are every moment changed, but they are related by causality and resemblance,

“When a note is played, for example, as soon as the tone is raised or lowered we have another note, not the same one at all. But in the case of most things, the words we use to talk about them are words the meanings of which allow us or require us to continue to use them throughout certain changes, though not of course any changes.” (Penelhum, 1955, p.580)

According to Penelhum, when we recognize the changeability of an object, even if it is numerically different, the object is by definition immutable. This definition means that even if we accept the classification of objects, the meaning of the object or its existence does not change definitively. This allows us to assume that the words we use have a meaning that allows us to continue to use them despite the fact that the object changes. Moreover, if we admit many

changes in an object, then the object ceases to exist, and in analysing the changes, we must know the meanings of the words. According to Penelhum, the words we use actually mean things that do not change in any specific sense. When we use the word “change” what kind of change can occur in the object depends purely on which type of objects we are identified about,

“Put generally, whether the result is logically absurd, or logically possible, or logically necessary, if the two phrases “the same continuing x” and “several differenty’s” are used of the same thing depends entirely on what nouns we use to replace x and y. It does not depend on the words “same” and “different” in themselves.” (Penelhum, 1955, p.582)

We know that when it explains an individual’s persistence, that person is living through various changes, but how can the person’s bundle of perceptions be connected to these changes? Because, according to Hume’s doctrine, the sum of different perceptions of an object or person is not fixed. In this case, Hume suggests that we protect the identities of objects by a metaphysical fiction. Here is Penelhum’s argument against Hume. Penelhum thinks that Hume here wrongly analyses identity because of how he can say that the person persists by his/her different succession, but the different perceptions connected by the “*RELATION*” (my italics).

Penelhum thinks that there is no contradiction between the words “numerically one” and “changed” because we must admit both theories in order to describe identity. But Hume did not maintain this because he did not analyse linguistic conventions in describing identity. According to Hume, “change” cannot be attributed to existence because there is nothing to attribute existence to. It is clear that we cannot depend on word meaning alone for any identity as one word can have different meanings like “*Saindhava*” (Perrett, 2016, Word. 4, How do meanings become known?) meaning “salt” and “a kind of horse”. So, when we define the identity of an object, it totally depends on the situation in which we are using the word, for example, if it is time to eat, then we will identify “salt” as the meaning of the word “*Saindhava*” and in the case of war, we will identify “horse” as the meaning of the word “*Saindhava*”. So, it would not be logical at all to say that the meaning of words is dependent on identity. Notwithstanding, it is understandable that Hume does not speak of linguistic consistency in the trace that Penelhum tries to clarify his view of identity by thinking of linguistic regulation. He has consistently applied the class-terms interchangeably to our linguistic regulation. Although it finds that Hume’s argument is plausible because Hume attempts to provide a theory of identity based on metaphysics, which it analyzes in the next section.

However, Penelhum exemplifies his position in the following way, assuming a ship is changing; in this case, an example can be taken of a ship that has been replaced³. In this case-

I will call the Ship “S”.

The replaced collection of parts “p”.

Before collection of parts “q”

It can never be said that p is identical with q, that is, two completely different notes $p \neq q$. Now my ship is a substantial object throughout its entire career. So, if my ship is self-identical throughout time, if an object A is at rest with all its parts at one time and another object B is at rest with all its parts at another time, then we can say that $A = B$. But if my ship is merely a succession of p, q...if so, the ship does not maintain its self-identity. For if $S=q$, then S will not be $S=p$, e.g., $S \neq p$ (as $q \neq p$). So just the successors p, q... is not enough for the identity of the ship. It is reasonable to say that if an object exists through different perceptions, then that object can never acquire its identity. For Hume, first, enumerates many perceptions of an object which claim more than the identity of that object. Secondly, if an object is thus admitted of many perceptions, then the absence of an object without the identity of that object must be admitted. And thirdly, we know that the opposite of one is many and the opposite of many is one, so it stands to reason that one object and many perceptions - this is contradictory. So, according to Penelhum, Hume’s conception is absurd in explaining that our personal identity is existential through different perceptions.

In this regard, from the theory presented by Hume, we can find-

1. How can Hume say that one person has different perceptions, and it would be counted as one?
2. How can we imagine that the different successions persist differently, but they are closely related, and we think we are one in variation over time?

In this context, Hume says that “...*invariable and uninterrupted...variation in time*” (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.6) (added italics), it’s accordance how is possible “the idea of identity and sameness”? However, according to this statement, we can observe that Hume creates an identity definition that would be *strictly invariable* (added italics), which means when an object

³ But Penelhum analyse Hume’s “church” example, here I am using Hume’s “ship” example according to Penelhum’s examination.

persists its entire career with the same properties, then it would be called its identity; otherwise, it would never maintain its identity. Penelhum states in this case, if a person changes slightly every moment, he will become a different person, which we have given him the same name just to identify him, but he never said the same person in *strict notion*. It to be said that.

“Such an object would have the property of existing at t_1 , say, for its entire career. So, at t_2, t_3, t_4, \dots the invariable object would have the property of existing at t_1 (tenseless present). We may say that an object is strictly invariable when it has the same set of properties at every point in its career. Strict invariability does seem to be a necessary feature of persistence.” (Stone, 1981, p.281)

Now we can explain the object’s identity in this way: if an object is O_1 (object) at T_1 (time), it will be O_2 at T_2 , that is, one object is externally and internally changed in the variation of time. Since for Hume, identity is strictly invariable, then how can we represent an object/person as its/his identity? To clear these errors, Hume presents the theory of personal identity as based on “close relation” as persons' derivative persistence and states that a person’s identity is compatible with qualitative change. Then, is A the same person as B? The answer to these questions will probably be: “A and B will be the same person only when they are at the same place or at the same time.” (It would be simple to see (Perry, 2009), (Baxter, 2008))

In this case, when two things are said to be numerically the same, they are actually one thing, and there will be no qualitative difference, and generally unchanged means the same thing. According to Hume, in the weak sense, x will be numerically one and the same even though it changes. But in that case, Locke asserted that an object could exist in one way at one time and at another. Because Locke claims that I remain the same person in the flow of time, because I am familiar with past events that happened to me, and I am conscious of my past identity. So, this awareness has made me the same person; I am numerically the identical person. Locke claims that personal identity is determined by our awareness of our memories, so our personal identity is the extent to which we are aware of the past. But according to Hume (Hume, 1739), one person’s succession of life is a different person, e.g., one person is numerically different.

However, it is already described that Hume’s perfect identity and imperfect identity. What makes it clear is that, according to Hume, the individual can never bear absolutes because personal identity does not bear continuity over time. As a Hume’s scholar, such as Lawrence Ashley (Ashley & Stack, 1974) says in this context,

“The notion that “identical” means complete sameness is a strong one, and clearly this is not what we have with persons. Of course, we do not have it because we cannot have it, at least on Hume’s account, and there might be some doubt as to whether necessary imperfections are imperfections at all.”(Ashley & Stack, 1974, P.247)

Here, the “identity” term is entirely equated with the term of “sameness” in the *strict sense*. That means the “sameness” refers to a strong and clear form that is truly “perfect”. But this “sameness” of meaning is never acceptable in a person’s identity. A person’s or our identities are considered as “imperfect” in the sense that they are fluid over time, which we recognize, but that sameness is different from the sameness of a particular time, and that identity is related to earlier identities. Middle of 17th to early 18th century philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz takes the alternative in the sense of “sameness” in the axis where the terms “perfect” and “imperfect” do not apply much to identity. But according to Hume, “sameness” is a word in which the word “perfect” must be taken, so that the word “imperfect” needs interpretation in its proper sense. So, Hume interprets our identity as always “imperfect”. In this context, to refer to Leibniz’s thesis “Indiscernible Identity” to be clearer,

“To suppose two things indiscernible, is to suppose the same thing under two names. And therefore, to suppose that the universe could have had at first another position of time and place, then that which it actually had; and yet that all the parts of the universe should have had the same situation among themselves, as that which they actually had; such a supposition, I say, is an impossible fiction.”(Leibniz et al., 2000, pp.22-23)

It is very clear that when A’s property is perfectly same with B and B have an exact same property with A, it will be clear that A have a perfect intrinsic and extrinsic property to B and vice versa, then in this case I can be said that A and B have an identical identity with same space and time, never differences between them. But if A does not have same intrinsic or extrinsic properties to B, then A would not be able to identical to B, then A and B have differently persisted with space and time. It can be said about that,

“The Principle of the Identity of Indiscernible (henceforth: PII) — the principle that no two numerically distinct things are perfectly alike — features prominently in Leibniz’s metaphysics. Leibniz uses it when he discusses atoms, the vacuum, the nature of space and time, and the nature of individual substances, to name just a few of its applications.” (Bender, 2019, P.1)

However, some philosophers have explained that even if two objects look different extrinsically in their properties, if they share intrinsic properties with each other, they will be identical, as John Locke accepts this type of identity. So, it is not difficult to understand Leibniz's statement,

“A can never become B, and, as A and B are simple, no part of A can ever become B, or a part of B. One Monad can never become another, and no quality of one Monad can ever become a quality of another.” (Leibnitz, 1898, p.69)

And,

“If two things x and y differed merely ‘numerically’, the only difference would be that x is one thing and y is another, i.e., that jointly they are two” (Leibnitz, 1996, P.7)

Even if whatever changes an object in the variation of time, this object is numerically one and the same. For instance, when a sapling tree ‘A’, grows from small to large ‘B’, we notice the differences between them, even if different branches are added to the big tree. All the properties of ‘A’ are contained in ‘B’, and all the properties of ‘B’ are contained in ‘A’ and vice versa, i.e., the plant is never a different object. If ‘A’ and ‘B’ are one and same, when they are numerically identical.

But in this case of Derek Parfit's (Parfit, 1984) doctrine of personal identity in “Reasons and Persons”, it is quite different, who was middle of 20th to early 21st century philosopher. His “teletransportation” (Parfit, 1984, p.200) the case is very elucidated about personal identity, where he says it is a replica of a person, such as “I” and “my counterpart”. In that case, “I” and “my counterpart” are the same as our own time, and we share the same properties with each other. So, we provided the same identity. But it is Parfit's fantasy explanation about *identity*. He states that personal identity should be “Relation-R”, that means it would be *psychologically continuous* and *connectedness*; nevertheless, our identity is not describable because it is reducible with the variation of time, our mind/brain does not have memories of every activity. It seems that Derek Parfit's reductionism is quite similar to David Hume's theory of identity because he only accepts the perfect identity in a strict notion, and also, memory never stores the whole career of a human's life.

However, return to Hume's linguistic mistake on these words who are used in the “sameness” or “identity” questions, there two notes: “the pairs of expressions, (a) “numerically the same” and “containing many parts” and (b) “numerically the same” and

“changed,” are not pairs of contradictories”” (Duque, 2009, p.24). We can analyse these types of arguments because Hume makes it clear that there is no contradiction in pairs of these experiences.

That is, it is clear from the above statement that to specify the identity of an object, if one claims that the bundle of perceptions of the object gives its identity to the object, in this case, even if the object undergoes a radical change in the course of time, the identity of the object should not be disturbed. Furthermore, something that is immutable and continuous in an object does not require the property of identity to be successively different, but the negation of identity for a related one. In the context, Penelhum argues, that creates natural responses one way or the other. But some of Penelhum’s points, which are quite acceptable to Hume, such as one. For Hume has always spoken of the combination of various perceptions in describing personal identity, and this combination only occurs by some kind of imaginary causal relationships in which we connect our various perceptions in the mind, and we identify ourselves or the person and identify him with a specific name. Penelhum was exactly against these imaginary causal relationships because when I know the identity of a person in the evolution of time, there is nothing to imagine that “this is that person”. Moreover, Hume declared that individuals are always numerically different, and this fact he tried to bring out before us again and again in his theory. But Penelhum questioned Hume’s use of conventional language to explain perception and the existence or identity of persons or things, which cannot be correct at all, because we interpret different things in different ways. So, in that case, I have to understand exactly which thing I want to explain because the interpretation of all things cannot be the same; we interpret different things in different ways. But Hume disregards such linguistic facts and applies the explanation of giving the same identity to all objects, which Penelhum says is a misinterpretation. So, Hume’s interpretation becomes absurd compared to Penelhum’s in this case. Below, it will illustrate what Penelhum mistakenly understood about Hume’s identity.

Penelhum could not properly analyse Hume’s numerical and specific (qualitative) identity

It is time to argue that how Penelhum misinterprets Hume’s identity argument. In fact, Hume explained that the transformation of a person as an imaginary causal relationship. But Penelhum explains the person’s identity change in a way that implies a complete change in what we understand. But Hume connects different understandings of the individual that metaphysically conceive of that person’s identity. That’s why there is never a linguistic mistake

by a Scottish philosopher, when Penelhum claims “[I]t is not hard to find his error here. What he is saying is that since we would call something the same for a given length of time when it continued without any alteration, and since we would say that a succession of objects was a collection or number or series of objects, it would obviously be a contradiction to say that in the latter case we would have one object. In a sense, this is true, but not in the sense which Hume requires.” (Penelhum, 1955, p.579). But to express here, Hume’s idea is not an absolute denial of the concept of personal identity.

Hume thinks that the explanation is plausible that even though we have no immutable self, we can give identity to objects or persons, and this process occurs only by mental processes. We do not notice the gradual change (or unchanged) of an object, we perceive an object as a continuous object, even though that object is related to its succession, it is still considered to us as the same object. The relation between those successions of objects is brought about by resemblance and causal relations between our various perceptions. But according to Hume, these relations are only our mental phenomena, so they are negated because they are imposed on objects by the imagination.

In this case, Hume explicitly treated the idea that no matter how qualitatively you change based on the past and present, you will remain the same in any numerical way. But judging based on qualitative identity, one moment your existence will change as you are, that is, one moment you will exist, another moment you will discover your existence. So, it can be said that the presence of a numerically different person but the same one will happen in the blink of an eye. As James Giles (Giles, 1993) Analysis of Hume’s numerical and specific identity according to Penelhum. According to James Giles, Penelhum could not properly analyse that concept; he created many complications that Hume did not explain about identity. James Giles analysed the numerical and qualitative identity of Hume with the help of an example. As Hume says in that example,

“A ship, of which a considerable part has been chang’d by frequent reparations, is still consider’d as the same; nor does the difference of the materials hinder us from ascribing an identity to it. The common end, in which the parts conspire, is the same under all their variations, and affords an easy transition of the imagination from one situation of the body to another.” (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.11/p.257)

As James Giles analyses that we can express this relationship as two ships having qualitatively the same identity, two ships are similar to each other. But to say that two ships are qualitatively the same but numerically the same is not logical because to call them

numerically the same would be a lie. It is clear that none of the new ships that are part of the earlier ship can be numerically “one”. According to Penelhum, on the other hand, the ship has somewhat lost its identity (i.e., it has changed into something else) and the ship remains unchangeable. Such a definition of Penelhum’s “identity” concept confuses us because such a definition does not entirely deny that the ship’s part has been repaired. It is clear that today’s ship does not suffer from any of the earlier ship’s parts like planks, bolts etc. But if it is said that the earlier and today’s ship is numerically identical, one and the same ship but accepting this we have to face different problems. Then we have to do the analysis like this –

First of all, if a ship is not changed in any part and it is kept in a completely permanent condition then in the passage of time various differences will appear in that ship and the ship will change. Second, the modified ship, whose parts have been destroyed by the passage of time, will be brought back to its original state, in this case, the various parts of the ship will have to be re-modified, and the ship with the new parts will look like the original new ship. In this case, today’s ship and earlier ship will look the same.

Now we find two identities of the ship where_

First: the permanent and changing ship was numerically “identical” and “one”.

Second: today’s new ship (repaired ship) is only specifically “identical” to previous new ship.

But Penelhum could misunderstand to explain of Hume’s “numerical one” and “changed”. Hume thinks that numerical identity is equally claimed for such identity instances, so no distinction is made. An important difference, however, is that the unaltered ship of the past is strongly identical to the ship of today, whereas the ship of today is weakly identical to the ship of the past, since all the old parts have been replaced with those of the earlier new ship. Naturally, in this case, numerical and qualitative distinctions are made. So let it be said that Hume gives us a description of identity in this way that we can serve the distinction. But Penelhum does not allow us to distinguish in this way but rather confuses the distinction past identity which is not clear.

Penelhum’s explanation of personal identity in terms of “*linguistic regulation*”⁴ (my version) is quite plausible, which we do not find in Hume’s interpretation of identity theory. But if we accept Penelhum’s argument, we must acquire a psychological disposition that supports our persistence and misinterpretation of language. But Penelhum’s approved

⁴ Which is also called linguistic convention according to Penelhum.

conventions are overruled in practical language use because the use of such clear language appears inconsistent with the theory of “identity”.

So, in this example, it appears that a ship survives through its various modifications. But while this variable ship relates to its legacy, none of its various perceptions remain constant. Hence, no object identity survives Penelhum’s analysis above. Although in this case, we have to accept Hume’s argument that to defend the identity of matter is to posit a metaphysical imagination.

For what Hume really means by our “identity” is that we are a sum of different perceptions connected with its hereditary parts. So, if the “identity” of an object is identical or sameness, it will be more than our “identity”. For, according to Hume, to defend our “identity” we need to reflect on the new and unintelligible principles” (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.6/p.254) that bind things to retain their identity, just as we need inherited principles. Therefore, according to Hume, perceptions of matter must be imagined or a fictional attachment in order to defend our “identity”.

It is important to clarify here that Hume did not posit any contradiction between “change” and “numerically one”. But Penelhum warns against this argument, although it is easily refuted. Analyse the matter in below:

1. By “change” Hume never meant dramatic/drastic change. What we mean by “change” in simple terms is a complete change in an object that has nothing to do with its previous state. So according to Hume, “change” is a very slow change which is not visible to the naked eye.

2. By “change” Hume refers to the very familiar changes in object whereby we can easily recognize the object.

3. The “change” is the “relationship” between different perceptions of the object or person’s identity that causes us to think of that person as “one”.

4. The “change” is the relationship between different inheritances of objects.

5. The “changes” and “relationships” between different perceptions – numerically unites the individual.

6. So, the “change” of a person depends on the relation of different perceptions, and this relation is caused by resemblance and causality between different perceptions. It is logical to say that only through the slow changes in a person can we determine the identity of the person.

7. It must be said, however, that according to Hume, this holistic process is a fundamental mental process and a metaphysical imaginary process that determines the individual's identity.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Hume characterized the identity of the individual as “imperfect” identity. Because according to Hume, “identity” does not bear resemblance to any one thing, rather identifies the thing as “one” and “the same,” i.e., where no change takes place. Hume is called “perfect identity”. But Penelhum misinterprets Hume's statement and tries to confuse Hume between numerical identity and qualitative identity. Moreover, Hume has always tried to make it clear that he does not accept such an “imperfect” identity of the individual; he always means “identity” as a perfect identity because it is fixed and unchangeable over time. “Imperfect identity” is not acceptable because we mistakenly associate our different perceptions with necessary relations and think of individual identity as a mental process that is actually nothing more than a fiction.

In fact, Hume says that we should be aware of the truth of the psychological language we use to define the identity of supposedly discrete and variable objects. Otherwise, we would be ascribing some imaginary expedient terms to introduce objects based on belief alone. Hume clarified, indeed, that the instance of perceptual variety of things is not the true identity of things. In this respect, Hume says of perfect identity, “[T]here is a very remarkable circumstance, that attends this experiment; which is, that tho' the change of any considerable part in a mass of matter destroys the identity of the whole, yet we must measure the greatness of the part, not absolutely, but by its *proportion* to the whole. The addition or diminution of a mountain wou'd not be sufficient to produce a diversity in a planet; tho' the change of a very few inches wou'd be able to destroy the identity of some bodies.” (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.9/p.256)

It is clear that we always want to identify the “perfect identity” for the “mass of matter” and accept no change of it. Hume sees the identity of other objects in the same way as “An oak, that grows from a small plant to a large tree” (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.12/p.257). In this case, we despise its constant change but *strictly speaking* the object loses its identity. Hume also makes it clear that even though the seedling changes slowly over many years, we hesitate to pronounce it the same way. Of course, the change of the seedling over the years does not seem trivial anymore.

So, we have to be careful that Hume never described the supposed variable of the object as an identity. He has tried to make it clear that the example of the variation is never the identity of the object, because it is a mistake and an irrational explanation of us. According to Hume's

argument, a person who has changed over time can never be described as one. Penelhum says if we accept the statement, then we will make a mistake if a person declares the same. He states that one person is changed every moment, so we have to apply the correct language. So, when we notice something has changed, it is necessary to use a separate name. Hume, on the other hand, says in the case of such language inconsistencies when we consider the repaired ship to be the same ship as before, our language is not wrong in this case. He added that we fictionalize in our mind that the identity of the approved things is in reality, so there is no dispute over the identity of the consistent object.

When Hume stated about the identity of successive perceptions, there is no conflict to clarify the substance or the individual's identity. So, if two people argue about whether the previously heard sound and the current heard sound are the same, neither of them can come to a correct conclusion. In this case, their linguistic misconception can be noticed. So, here one has to be aware of what the word "same" means to the two persons and explain the meaning of the word "same". That is, they will not dispute their true identity.

In this case, we can imagine that if the debaters agree that there is no error in our *linguistic regulation* in calling the two ships as the same, then we can see that there is not a mistake in calling the two objects the same. Two concepts of identity appear in this truth interpretation: a metaphysical or ultimate level of truth that deals with questions of identity, which identities do not actually exist, and a verbal or conventional level of truth that deals with those whose real existence is acknowledged.

Conclusion

So, Penelhum criticizes Hume's concept of personal identity in his seminal work "Hume on Personal Identity". Because Hume affirms his theory of identity, "[o]ur notions of personal identity, proceed entirely from the smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought along a train of connected ideas" (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.16/p.260). But this description makes us believe that he was very sceptical about personal identity; he did not provide a clear concept of the existence of a person. Because Hume shows that different objects exist in different ways, but only through "relation" can be connected to each other, that's why we can imagine an object as the same object. According to Penelhum, Hume's error in explaining the personal theory, i.e., he failed to give a correct explanation of numerical and qualitative identities. As a result, we will make a mistake in understanding the difference between these two identities, which will be a misinterpretation of language.

Because the wrong step that Hume took to establish his theory is that we accept different successions to identify the “identity” of the person, that is, to understand the identity of that person, there will be differences in time, the object will be different in each case, not the same. The question that arises in this case is how do we recognize the object if it is different at each step? In order to answer this question, he said, to explain the identity of an object based on gradual change or the slightest change, and he also spoke of the *natural connections*, by which various realizations will become causally linked with each other over time to create the identity of an object. But how, as Penelhum argues, can he explain that “numerically identical” and “changed” are contradictory? Because, according to Penelhum, these two words are never contradictory in determining the identity of an object. So, when an object changes over time, we declare it as one; that is, that object is the same as last time, so no natural connection is needed to identify that object. Because admitting natural connections would require admitting the object to be numerically different from the past, which is never possible.

Hume, in this respect, acknowledges the similarity of his superiority between the perceptions of the object in revealing the truth of personal identity, which gives it its identity. But in this case, Penelhum does not admit the analogy of succession between different perceptions of things because successions can never be fixed in the same way, so there is no analogy in this case. Hume, therefore, errs in admitting *necessary relations* in identity.

However, Hume introduces a fundamental metaphysical problem when representing personal identity through change. In this case, the change that Hume describes is not the change we are talking about. But in this case, Penelhum uses change in the sense that it makes use of identity. In fact, Hume tries to correct everyone’s mistake in this respect by clarifying that change is a very small change in identity that is not visible to the naked eye. However, Penelhum centralizes Hume’s theory in his writings; he clarifies that Hume’s concept of identity is the immutability and continuity that Hume admits. So, in the case of mutable matter, everything changes; nothing remains unchanged, so it cannot be numerically the same.

Therefore, in that case, “if Hume’s contention about identity is true, it is a mistake to ascribe identity to persons.” (Stone, 1981, p.276). Because when we use the language about the identity of any objects, generally we consider it as a common proper name. In that case, when Hume argues that the concept of person’s identity is an impression of a person which is produced by a mental tendency of ours because we consider the identity of the object to be invariant over time, but he assigns that this type of identity is only imaginable. This is why he

makes it clear that we only use the proper name for identification. But Penelhum argues that Hume's use of identity language creates confusion.

In this respect, Penelhum's argument is acceptable because Hume never clarified exactly what term we should use to describe when we use the word identity. Hume, therefore, did not establish the validity of the conventional language used to express any object. So, in such cases when we speak of numerical or qualitative identity it must be clear what kind of object we are referring to. Because when we refer to a "sentence" or "melody" its numerical or qualitative identity will be interpreted or defined differently from that of an "animal" or "plant". Therefore, Penelhum thinks that Hume uses the wrong language in the case of *identity* because an analysis of his theory does not yield a proper theory of identity.

But it is somehow true that Penelhum's argument against Hume is never accepted because to identify any object, we use its common name even though that object changes numerically with time. In this case, if we have used different words, then the object is clearly identified, but conventionally it is not supportable. So, we habitually use the natures that we naturally acquire from society. Therefore, in the case of using such conventional language, there is no disturbance of numerical identity to refer to any object. Therefore, Hume's analysis of identity by using conventional linguistic terms is well-argued.

Let us conclude that Hume defines personal identity theory as a purely metaphysical fiction. So, there is no possibility of a linguistic mistake here. The "change" he acknowledges is not an "absurd change" but rather a very "slow/gradual change" in identity that we cannot see with the naked eye. This transition is so "smooth" that there is not much difference between the individual's legacy of perception and the new perception, so we infer similarity and causality between perceptions by mental processes. Hume thinks that the identity, however, we must necessarily admit the relations between perceptions as *fictions*. It is clear that there is no linguistic error or contradiction between the words "numerical one" and "variable" in describing Hume's personal theory. So, the charges Penelhum makes against Hume about identity are untenable. Thus, Hume concluded in that context,

"Thus, the controversy concerning identity is not merely a dispute of words. For when we attribute identity, in an improper sense, to variable or interrupted objects, our mistake is not confined to the expression, but is commonly attended with a fiction, either of something invariable and uninterrupted, or of something mysterious and inexplicable, or at least with a propensity to such fictions" (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.7/p.255)

Conflict of interest:

The author/authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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