Class 22: April 14
David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part 4, Section 6 (AW 525-532)

I. The Psychological Definition of Causation

We have looked at Hume's problem of induction and his skeptical conclusions.
Hume's skepticism is not just Locke's humility.
It is a thorough rejection of ordinary beliefs.
It is founded on his observation, perhaps inherited from Berkeley, that we are isolated from causal connections.
All we can experience are conjunctions of events, certain regularities in the past.
From those regularities we formulate laws of nature,
But we can not know that the regularity will persist.
Still, we talk about causation all the time.
We do believe that there are connections between events.
We exit through the door, not the window.
We do not really doubt that the sun will rise.

> When one particular species of event has always, in all instances, been conjoined with another, we make no longer any scruple of foretelling one upon the appearance of the other, and of employing that reasoning which can alone assure us of any matter of fact or existence. We then call the one object *cause*, the other *effect*. We suppose that there is some connection between them, some power in the one by which it infallibly produces the other and operates with the greatest certainty and strongest necessity (*Enquiry*, §VII.2, AW 563a).

If a philosopher denies a common belief, it is intellectually responsible to account for that belief.
Hume thus reinterprets ordinary talk of causal connections.
He argues that our confidence in the regularity of nature is mere unjustified habit.

> After a repetition of similar instances the mind is carried by habit upon the appearance of one event to expect its usual attendant and to believe that it will exist. This connection, therefore, which we *feel* in the mind, this customary transition of the imagination from one object to its usual attendant, is the sentiment or impression from which we form the idea of power or necessary connection...The first time a man saw the communication of motion by impulse, as by the shock of two billiard balls, he could not pronounce that the one event was *connected*, but only that it was *conjoined* with the other. After he has observed several instances of this nature, he then pronounces them to be *connected*. What alteration has happened to give rise to this new idea of *connection*? Nothing but that he now *feels* these events to be *connected* in his imagination, and can readily foretell the existence of one from the appearance of the other. When we say, therefore, that one object is connected with another, we mean only that they have acquired a connection in our thought (*Enquiry*, §VII.2, AW 563a).

When we devise, by induction, physical laws, we make a mental leap, unsupported by evidence.
Consider if a person were suddenly brought into the world.
She would have no habits, and so no beliefs about regularities or causal powers.
By experience, she would develop certain habits, certain expectations, all while never having any experiences of causal connections.

> Suppose...that he has acquired more experience and has lived so long in the world as to have observed familiar objects or events to be constantly conjoined together - what is the consequence of this experience? He immediately infers the existence of one object from the appearance of the other. Yet he has not, by all his experience, acquired any idea or knowledge of the secret power by which the one object produces the other, nor is it by any process of reasoning he is engaged to draw this inference. But still he finds himself determined to draw it. And though he should be convinced that his understanding has no part in the operation, he would nevertheless continue in the same course of thinking. There is some other principle which determines him to form such a conclusion. This principle is *custom* or *habit* (*Enquiry*, §V.1, AW 549a-b).

What she has developed is a mental capacity, not an insight.
But habit, again, gives you only conjunction, and not connection.
Similarly, we habitually suppose the existence of an external, material world, without any direct experience of it.
Remember, Hume agrees with Berkeley that we experience our sensations, and not their causes.
We have no experience of the things in themselves.
Thus, the term 'cause' refers to a mental phenomenon.

> The appearance of a cause always conveys the mind, by a customary transition, to the idea of the effect. Of this also we have experience. We may, therefore, suitably to this experience, form [a] definition of cause, and call it *an object followed by another, and whose appearance always conveys the thought to that other* (*Enquiry*, §VII.2, AW 563b).

Properly distinguished, causes are internal, rather than external.
They are not in nature, but in our minds.
Causes are psychological, rather than objective.

Berkeley, when faced with the limits of what we can know, interpreted the terms we use that seem to refer to objects as referring to our mental states.
Hume, rejecting Berkeley's idealism, assumes that there is a material world.
Still, we can not know about the laws which govern the interactions of objects in the world.
Instead of internalizing the world, Hume internalizes cause and effect.

To see how radical Hume's psychologistic claim is, it might be useful to compare his views with those of Frege, writing in 1884.
In the following quote, Frege is responding to Mill's psychologistic view of numbers, which is essentially the same as Locke's, and Hume's.

> Number is no whit more an object of psychology or a product of mental processes than, let us say, the North Sea is. The objectivity of the North Sea is not affected by the fact that it is a matter of our arbitrary choice which part of all the water on the earth's surface we mark off and elect to call the North Sea. This is no reason for deciding to investigate the North Sea by psychological methods. In the same way number, too, is something objective. If we say 'The North Sea is 10,000 square miles in extent' then neither by 'North Sea' nor by '10,000' do we refer to any state of or process in our minds: on the contrary, we assert something quite objective, which is independent of our ideas and everything of the sort (Frege, *Grundlagen*, §26).

Hume recognizes that we speak as if the world and the causal laws are objective, existing independently of us.
But, he argues that we are unjustified in believing that.
Thus, we are left as skeptics.

II. The Self

Locke argues that we can neither identify our selves with our bodies nor our souls, in a traditional sense of 'soul'.
The biological theory of personhood applies the same identity conditions to people as we do to other individual animals.
Locke provides thought experiments, including the Prince and the Cobbler, which ask us to consider the possibility of transferring consciousness among biological entities.
Most of our intuitions support the claim that the self transfers with consciousness and memory.
The person consisting of the Cobbler's body and the Prince's thoughts is the Prince and not the Cobbler.
Similar arguments, from Locke, apply to the soul theory.
Given some common views about the soul, that it exists prior to birth and after death, our personhood can be seen to be different from our soul by considering some simple thought experiments.
We can imagine two different souls inhabiting (or whatever the relation is) the same person.
Two different persons can house (or whatever) the same soul.
Instead, Locke argues that we identify with our conscious experience, linked by memory.
Locke's consciousness, or memory, theory relies on psychological continuity to identify a person over time.

Hume worries that the common notion of self outruns our memories.
There are experiences which I call mine that I do not remember.

> Memory does not so much *produce* as *discover* personal identity by showing us the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions. It will be incumbent on those who affirm that memory produces entirely our personal identity to give a reason why we can thus extend our identity beyond our memory (*Treatise* I.4.6, AW 530b).

Berkeley worries that given Locke's constraints on our capacities to acquire beliefs, we have no sense of self.
We sense our bodies, but they are always changing, while the self remains constant.
We never sense our selves.
Thus, we have no idea of the self, which Berkeley identified with the soul, or of God.

> There can be no idea formed of a soul or spirit; for all ideas whatever, being passive and inert... they cannot represent unto us, by way of image or likeness, that which acts...The words *will*, *soul*, *spirit* do not stand for different ideas or, in truth, for any idea at all, but for something which is very different from ideas, and which, being an agent, cannot be like or represented by any idea whatsoever - though it must be admitted at the same time that we have some notion of soul, spirit, and the operations of the mind, such as willing, loving, hating, inasmuch as we know or understand the meaning of those words (Berkeley, *Principles* §27, AW 452b).

Berkeley abandoned, for these special cases, his strict policy of never admitting an object that was not first in the senses.
He claims that we have notions of the self and God, even if we do not have ideas of them.
We posit the self in order to unify our experiences; we posit God as the source of all the ideas.
Esse is *percipi* or *percipere*; to exist is either to be perceived or to perceive.

Hume agrees with Berkeley that we have no impression, and thus no idea, of the self.
But, where Berkeley relaxed his epistemic standards and allowed for notions in addition to ideas, Hume stands his ground.
Since we have no idea of the self, we have no reason to believe in any such thing.

> If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same through the whole course of our lives, since self is supposed to exist after that manner. 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 derived, and, consequently, there is no such idea (*Treatise* I.4.6, AW 526a).

If what we mean by the self is some constant substance or property which persists through time, there is no such thing.
There is no underlying, unifying object which we can call the self.
There are just perceptions.

> 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 (Hume 349a-b).

Since Hume denies that there is a self, we can call Hume's theory of self the no-self theory of self.

Whenever a philosophers denies the existence of some thing that people commonly believe exists, s/he has to provide some account of our ordinary beliefs.
If I were to tell you that there is no Santa Claus, I would have to explain to you how the properties you think belong to Santa Claus really belong to other people: your parents bring you presents, a neighbor puts on the Santa suit for the party, the department store hires people to dress as Santa at the mall.
When Berkeley argues that there is no external world, he has to account for our ordinary beliefs in material objects.
Berkeley did that by showing that our ideas of objects could, strictly speaking, be interpreted as about our own sensations; we mis-perceive the world as material.
So, when Hume argues that there is no self, he has to provide some account of our ordinary beliefs in the self.
We can evaluate his no-self theory of the self both on the plausibility of his argument for the theory and on the plausibility of his account of our ordinary experiences.

III. The Bundle Theory

Hume's claim that there is no self relies on his premise that the self must be precisely identical over time.
That claim seems too strong.
As we age, and acquire more experiences, we have different properties.
Even having lunch or shifting our bodies slightly to the left changes our relations to the world without changing our ordinary conceptions of our selves.
The biological theory of the self accommodates these changes by relying on the functional organization of the body as a criterion for identity over time.
Another way of looking at the biological theory would be to see the self as a collection of loosely-related individual instances of selves, each just a moment of time wide.
The self over time would be a bundle of related biological entities.

Hume's account of our ordinary conception of self is similar to this functional view.
Hume argues that we never see a self.
But, we do have experiences.
So, whatever we call ourselves must be related to our series of experiences.
Our experiences are joined by a variety of psychological connections among our ideas: resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect.
These psychological connections govern all of our thoughts.
They do not connect our ideas in some underlying substance.
These psychological capacities merely conjoin our experiences over time.
Even memory, for Locke the essential characteristic of the self, merely demonstrates such conjunctions.
The ordinary notion of self which we are pursuing outruns our memories: there are experiences which I call mine that I do not remember.
For Locke, we needed connections among our memories, an underlying haecceity.
For Hume, there is only a series of loosely-related conjunctions of experiences.

Instead of being a paradigm of unity, Hume thus argues that the self is an exemplar of diversity.
Just as Berkeley argued that the apple is just a bundle of independent sense experiences, its taste independent from its roundness and its crunch, we are just a collection of various, independent experiences.
As far as we know, even the world itself is just a loose collection of events, unconnected by causal laws.
Everything is particular, and all the particulars are independent.

> Every distinct perception which enters into the composition of the mind is a distinct existence and is different and distinguishable and separable from every other perception, either contemporary or successive (AW 529b).

Even the self is dissolved.

> 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. What will suffice to prove this hypothesis to the satisfaction of every fair enquirer, is to show from daily experience and observation, that the objects, which are variable or interrupted, and yet are supposed to continue the same, are such only as consist of a succession of parts, connected together by resemblance, contiguity, or causation... (AW 527b).

For Hume, then, the self, as we ordinarily understand it, is just a loose bundle of experiences.
Instead of calling Hume's view the no-self theory, we can call it the bundle theory of self.
That term is a bit misleading, since it might be interpreted as claiming that there is a self which ties the bundle together.
We can have a practical interest in maintaining a notion of the self over time.
But, the bundle theorist argues that the claim that there is a self underlying the experiences, some haecceity, is, strictly speaking, false.
There is no I, beyond the experiences.

Hume's claim that there is no self is similar to the Buddhist view.
There is no I, beyond the experiences.
On the Hume-Buddha view, Descartes's claim that the cogito yields the existence of a thinker is too strong.
There is just thought.

Hume was not fully satisfied with his account, his destruction, of personal identity, as you can see in his Appendix, AW 531-2.
He did not return to the topic in the *Enquiry*.
It might have been too skeptical a conclusion even for Hume.