Hume's denying Substance Identity

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doi.org/10.64643/IJIRTV12I5-185528-459

Abstract*— The 18th century philosopher David Hume, in his work "A Treatise of Human Nature", presented a deeply controversial theory on "identity" which created a deep stir in Western empiricism. He denied the identity of substances by giving various definitions about their existence. According to Hume, substance or individual identity is what we perceive through collective perceptions, that is, the existence of substance is nothing more than a bundle of perceptions. Notwithstanding why Hume attributed perception to the existence of substance is the subject of this study. Here we will see how Hume analyzed the identity of substance based on the mind of bundle perceptions.

Index Terms— **David Hume, Substance, Identity, Bundle of perception.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Hume cited various definitions of the existence of substance in his controversial work "A Treatise of Human Nature" in the context of the explanation of "identity". Where he took the topic of perception to consider whether substance exists at all. Because according to him, without perception we cannot describe the existence of substance. Because whenever we describe any object or know about its identity, we express some of its collective perceptions one by one. Therefore, without perception, we cannot describe anything by which the substance maintains its own characteristics. In this case, according to Hume, substance does not exist. Hume mentioned the example of apple to further clarify this idea where he said that when we perceive an apple, we only perceive its color, smell, sweet taste, shape, etc., but this perception is a collective perception. Therefore, we can never describe substance on a perception. So, Hume has repeatedly clarified that substance is nothing but a bundle of perceptions, although each of these perceptions exists differently, and even each perception is different in space and time, but the mind organizes them and perceives them as substance. Therefore, Hume thinks that he has not found any logical definition to accept the existence of substance.

But the question arises against Hume's bundle theory: if substance does not exist, then how does the identity of substance arise in us? Why does the idea of substance arise in us? In answer to this, he clarified that we know each perception separately such as color, shape, size, volume, etc., but when we see them in an object, we see its total form, without which the object cannot be described. Moreover, we can recognize an apple as an apple only on the basis of our previous experience, such as when we first eat an apple, we are aware of its taste, smell, color, etc. and when we eat an apple for the second time, the next apple bears some resemblance to the previous one, in this case Hume makes it clear that perception is "something which may exist in itself", by which we identify an apple as an apple. However, this identification becomes irrelevant because this identification is completely sensory-based which connects the previously experienced sensation with the newly experienced sensation and in this case the mind plays an important role, where the mind maintains a conscious experience of the object through which we become aware of the identity of that object. Although Hume denied such identity because every perception of substance is changeable regardless of place and time because no perception can be similar to any other perception, so what our mind thinks is similar is nothing but our mistake. In this case, he clarified the numerical identity in the case of the identity of substance or person and said that each of our perceptions is never consistent with the above, it is different and different. In his opinion, identity is that which remains the same even after the evolution of time, no change will occur, which he called perfect identity and he only accepted this identity. Hume in his work "A Treatise of Human Nature" clearly mentioned how our mind expresses the

identity of a substance or person, which is clearly analysed below.

II. THE DEFINITION OF SUBSTANCE IS JUST A FICTION OF IMAGINATION

Hume first begins with the "Immaterial of the Soul" section in the "Treatise of Humen Nature" to discuss personal identity, which we need to analyse. Where he goes on to definition of substance, we will analyse how perception is interpreted. Hume, as an empiricist philosopher, presented sense experience as the source of knowledge, as John Locke had previously theorized. As Stroud said, "[H]e (Hume) agrees with Locke that the mind is originally 'white paper', in the sense that it contains no ideas, and that all its 'materials' come from experience. But he insists on a distinction between the entities involved when we are feeling or experiencing, on the one hand, and those involved when we are thinking or reasoning, on the other." (Stroud, 1977, P.18). Stroud's consideration of Hume's theory shows that Hume drew on Locke to describe experience as personal identity where he denied the self.

According to Hume, in the case of our experience there are two different perceptions, "impressions" and "ideas" in the "Treatise of Humen Nature" (THN)/ Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (EHU). There are explained below,

Impressions: In an Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (EHU), "By the term *impression*, then, I mean all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will" (Hume, 1751, EHU 2.3/p.18) and in THN, "which enter with most force and violence… all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul… These impressions are "lively" and "vivid."" (Hume, 1739, T1.1.1.1/p.1)

Ideas: In Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (EHU), "All our ideas are nothing but copies of our impressions" (Hume, 1751, EHU 7.4/p.62) and in THN, "the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning; such as, for instance, are all the perceptions excited by the present discourse, excepting only, those which arise from the sight and touch, and excepting the immediate pleasure or uneasiness it may occasion." (Hume, 1739, T1.1.1.1/p.1)

In his "EHU" (Hume, 1751), he says in that context, "impressions are distinguished from ideas, which are the less lively perceptions, of which we are conscious, when we reflect on any of those sensations or movements above mentioned." (Hume, 1751, EHU 2.3/p.18)

It is clear that Hume meant only the bundle of perceptions by the self, but we must now understand that what exactly he meant by the bundle and how important it is. He goes on to speak of perception, the influence of the worldly phenomena on our minds by which we hold into our identity. The difference between the two is marked by a difference of "forcefulness" and "vivacity" so that impressions relate roughly to "feeling" (or 'sensing') and ideas to "thinking". Although we may try to feel that we do not find any fixed impression that we can understand or any permanent impression by which we can form a definite identity, by which I can always address myself as "the same I" _ it is really not possible because Hume tries to make clear in his theory that the idea that we form the soul as a continuous impression in the mind is actually a misconception, there is no reason to accept the soul. Hume considers the term "liveliness" and "vivacity" in his terminology that is:

"For he requires that degrees of liveliness or vivacity (which apply to all perceptions and not merely to those of one sense modality) be degrees of a distinctive kind of phenomenal "manner" that does not alter the qualitative character of the perception itself, so that an impression and an idea can be identical in qualitative character even in such respects as brightness or loudness while differing only in this one further dimension."(Garrett, 2008, p.42)

Hume cleared that the two kinds of perceptions:

"Simple perceptions or impressions and ideas are such as admit of no distinction nor separation. The complex is the contrary to these and may be distinguished into parts. Tho' a particular color, taste, and smell are qualities all united together in this apple, 'tis easy to perceive they are not the same, but are at least distinguishable from each other." (Hume, 1739, T.1.1.1.2/p.2)

Hume divides perceptions into simple and complex. In this respect, it seems to be an analogy between Locke's two ideas. In this case, Locke (Locke, 1690) in "An Essay concerning Human Understanding", he includes the color, smell, sound, taste of an apple – simple idea, even opposites such as cold, heat, solidity, extension, past, rest, pleasure, pain etc. belongs to the idea of simple. Locke recognized the necessary relation in some of these simple ideas and identified them as sources of knowledge. However, Hume in some cases regards the concepts cited by Locke as complex idea, including space, extension, image, motion, and succession, but ignores apple's (or any objects) concept of simple idea. Hume denies the existence of invariable constant or simple perception. In this context, he points out that because we cannot precisely define simple and complex ideas, we are connected to the necessary principle called causation, which is actually a fictitious necessary connection rule.

However, Hume expresses his theory of personal identity in THN1.4.6, he rejects the position of the ancient philosophy's concept of self (Remes, 2008) where it is clear that the definition of the substance itself is interpreted in the same way as in the case of perception. It can be stated, "Philosophy of self could also be understood in a new way, if we approach it from the idea that selfhood is not a single thing but a many-dimensional phenomenon. If this is accepted, we can neither explain selfhood within a single branch of philosophy nor give an unambiguous and clear-cut definition of what a self is."(Remes, 2008, p.2)

But Hume makes it clear that even if the bundle of perceptions is called a soul, the interpretation of each perception is not called out as a soul. After many definitions of substance, he considers this definition "something which may exist itself" but it is rejected some explanation. In that explanation of substance, he defined the definition of perception. The first question that arises in this section is "are perceptions a substance?" this definition basically agrees with everything and gives his master argument:

"The definition of a substance is something which may exist itself; and that this definition ought to satisfy us: Shou'd this be said, I shou'd observe, that this definition agrees to everything, that can possibly be conceiv'd; and never will serve to distinguish substance from accident, or the soul from its perceptions." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.5.5/p.233)

According to this definition, perceptions are the substance, that is, every perception and quality is the explanation of a substance. Here he directly attacks Locke's conception of substance. Locke defined a substance based on the role of sense and reflection; he claimed that substance is "the mind is furnished with a number of simple ideas or qualities, which are found in 'exterior things.' But what is the source of these simple ideas? Locke claims that such simple ideas are obtained via the senses." (Guta, 2013, P.2)

The recent scholar Guta states that, for Locke, simple ideas are combinations of many ideas, so if he considers an idea as a mental phenomenon, the word "idea" is no longer static, but the word "idea" refers to a special quality for existing that creates a particular idea in our mind (Guta, 2013, P.2).

However, Hume argues that each perception exists independently, and it is easily conceived by our thought and imagination. These are some of the arguments Hume gives for calling perceptions as distinct existences as substance:

(1) "Our perceptions are all really different, and separable, and distinguishable from each other, and from everything else, which we can imagine." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.5.27/p.245)

(2) "Everything, which is different, is distinguishable, and everything which is distinguishable, is separable by the imagination."(Hume, 1739, T1.4.5.5/p.233) _SP (Separate Principle)

(3) "Whatever is clearly conceiv'd may exist; and whatever is clearly conceiv'd, after any manner, may exist after the same manner." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.5.5/p.233) _CCP (Conceivability Criterion of Possibility)

(4) "[t]hey [perceptions] [...] may exist separately and have no need of anything else to support their existence." (Hume, 1739, T App. 12/p.634).

In that case, it follows two different principles.

First Principle: "Whatever is clearly conceiv'd may exist; and whatever is clearly conceiv'd, after any manner, may exist after the same manner. This is one principle, which has been already acknowledg'd." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.5.5/p.233)

Second Principle: "Again, everything, which is different, is distinguishable, and everything which is distinguishable, is separable by the imagination. This is another principle". (Hume, 1739, T1.4.5.5/p.233)

Hume clearly states two principles. According to his first principle, whatever can be conceived can exist, and what can be clearly conceived can exist in any way_ these would be the same method. Because when one perceives something at first sight, he perceives only the impression of the simple perception of the object and the divisibility of the idea. Since "*all our ideas are copied from our impressions*" (added italics), there are no two impressions which are perfectly inseparable (Hume, 1739, T1.1.3.4/p.10). Thus, Hume seems to limit indivisibility to simple perception. However, it is nothing more than a transformation of the imagination that makes our simple perceptions integral.

According to the second principle, we divide ideas of objects by imagination. Because we exercise the freedom of our imagination, the perceptions or impressions of objects are differently conceived and transferred. Indeed, impressions of objects represent ideas and contribute to the content of ideas. Thus, the impressions of objects come to exist separately. Let us say that such concepts or impressions of content and objects are distinguishable because our imagination separates them. So, the individual concept we conceive extends to the existence of objects that represent concepts individually through objects. Then, we can distinguish the perceptions of objects in this way through imagination, as if they existed by themselves. It should be clearly noted that the existence of the concept of such objects is derived from our sense impressions.

So, it can be said from Hume's argument that each perception is different and distinct; there is no similarity with any other perception. When each perception is different based on variation of time, it must be numerically different, but it constitutes with our psychological process. According to this argument, Hume cleared that every perception is a substance. They exist independently like any other object, so every perception exists independently in the mind and to composite a distinct existence (the heaps of perception that they are in the mind). Hume states in that context,

"'Tis still true, that 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." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.16/p.259)

Hume tries to make it clear that we attribute the mind in such a way as to conceive of identity as an absolute/perfect, but that we can never perceive different perceptions in the same way because the character of perception is never the same. They are uniquely integrated in our minds and in the flow of time new perceptions are introduced that are different from contemporary/present perceptions. Hume's argument goes as follows,

"Now as very perception is distinguishable from another and may be considered as separately existent; if evidently follows, that there is no absurdity in separating any perception from the mind; that is, in breaking off all its relations, without connected mass of perceptions, which constitute a thinking being".(Hume, 1739, T1.4.2.39/p.207)

In this context, it is to be noted that if every perception exists separately like objects, then it would not be unreasonable to say that perceptions are separate from the mind. Consequently, there is no relation between perception and mind. But in this case, the question arises, how can a thinking entity be formed without perceptions? If we distinguish any perceptions based on imagination, it becomes difficult to actually claim them to exist separately. As per Nyaya Indian philosophy, an entity can be claimed to exist only when there is "*Saṃyoga* (conjunction) *Sannikarṣa* (refers to "sense object contact")" between soul (*ātman*) with mind, mind with sense and sense with external object that we can say "this is the table" (see (Ganeri, 2020)). Although Hume after all analysis rejects such a "substance" explanation of any definition. For in general, we may consider that the mental object is a collection of our experiences, so that

although these perceptions may be interpreted separately, it is these perceptions that constitute the thinking being. In the same way, we can imagine the properties of substance separately from the substance. Hume says in this case,

"The custom of imagining a dependence has the same effect as the custom of observing it wou'd have. This conceit, however, is no more reasonable than any of the foregoing. Every quality being a distinct thing from another, may be conceiv'd to exist apart, and may exist apart, not only from every other quality, but from that unintelligible chimera of a substance." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.3.7/p.222)

Although Hume claims that in that case, we have no proper idea of the succession of things that do not have concepts inherent in something to support its existence. He spoke,

"Inhesion in something is suppos'd to be requisite to support the existence of our perceptions. Nothing appears requisite to support the existence of a perception. We have, therefore, no idea of inhesion." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.5.6/p.234)

On the one hand, Nyaya philosophy refers to the relationship called "*Sannikarṣa*" to explain material entities where one can gain accurate and clear definition of the persistence of objects through "*Savikalpa-Pratyakṣa*" (Determinate Perception). But Hume thinks that we find no perception by which we can ascertain the existence of anything, but that the perceptions which we claim to exist are in fact the impressions of our integrated mind. Therefore, either the perception definition or the substance definition can never be supported, so the "existence by itself" is a failed explanation. However, Hume himself has admitted that we cannot reach any satisfactory idea about the substance through any definition, which gives an accurate idea of the substance as well as of the self. I can never perceive an apple/ any object except the bundle of perceptions. So, Hume said, we can't explain the exact concept of substance, that's there is no substance:

"We have no perfect idea of anything but of a perception. A substance is entirely different from a perception. We have, therefore, no idea of a substance." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.5.6/p.234)

Hume was following John Locke's theory about complex individual substances and pure substances. In the context of existence, Baxter (Baxter, 1988) says, "[S]uppose we wonder what the number is of things that exist. By the principle I began with, if something exists, then it is one thing. So, if it is existing, it is in a count. But not both a whole and its various parts are in a given count. So, what exists is relative to count. Thus, I will speak of existing in a count as a variant of being in a count, and so as a variant of being one thing on a given way of counting" (Baxter, 1988, p.201). Locke's statement is about to rejecting a pure substance,

"The Ideas of Substances are such combinations of simple Ideas, as are taken to represent distinct particular things subsisting by themselves; in which the supposed, or confused Idea of [pure] Substance, such as it is, is always the first and chief" (Locke, 1975, E2.12.6/p.149)

Hume determined that, "we have no idea of substance, which is not applicable to matter; nor any idea of a distinct substance, which is not applicable to every distinct portion of matter. Matter, therefore, is not a mode but a substance, and each part of matter is not a distinct mode, but a distinct substance." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.5.24/p.244)

If the perceptions exist by itself, and if the perceptions are not a substance, that means that being a substance requires some other condition besides the existence by itself. But which condition for being a substance is lacking in perceptions? As Baxter says in that (T1.4.5) passage,

"On the assumption that a substance is unitary, this passage appears to commit Hume to unitary perceptions having unitary perceptions as parts". (Baxter, 2015a, p.9)

However, Hume is explicitly rejecting that assumption in this passage. Hume claims that we are just unity of "*feign of perceptions*" (my italics). Although Hume says that perceptions exist separately like things, we cannot perceive them separately but are nothing more than bundles. Furthermore, Hume claims that perceptions cannot claim existence just as objects cannot claim existence because they are nothing more than fiction of persistence of things. For

we always describe the identity of individuals or things in terms of the material concept of materiality which Hume rejects. Moreover, he claims that the definition of substance cannot be interpreted in any way that requires the persistence of substance. He therefore claims that explaining any definition of substance is a misinterpretation of the philosophical circles that prepares us for various fallacies in our interpretation of identity. He states,

"First, As to the principle of individuation; we may observe, that the view of any one object is not sufficient to convey the idea of identity. For in that proposition, *an object is the same with itself*, if the idea express'd by the word, *object*, were no ways distinguish'd from that meant by *itself*; we really shou'd mean nothing, nor wou'd the proposition contain a predicate and a subject, which however are imply'd in this affirmation. One single object conveys the idea of unity, not that of identity." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.2.26/p.200)

Hume thinks that the definition of substance creates a problem for us because we could not find any reasonable fact to argue that the existence of substance and the identity of entities. Advises us to assume that an object as the same object repeatedly in the flow of time. But if we consciously explain the substance, we realize that perceptions are indeed changing and are transitory. So, the question is, how do we identify the objects/persons? Hume's argument in this case, when we explain identity, we use mental entities to express the various characters of the mind that help to recognize an object. To explain such identity, one can imagine something that is unknown and incomprehensible. In this case he says,

"But when we alter our method of considering the succession, and instead of traceing it gradually thro' the successive points of time, survey at once any two distinct periods of its duration and compare the different conditions of the successive qualities; in that case the variations, which were insensible when they arose gradually, do now appear of consequence, and seem entirely to destroy the identity." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.3.4/p.220).

III CONCLUSION

At the end of the above discussion, we have come to the conclusion that is now the subject of our discussion. At the beginning of his Treatise, Hume particularly discussed how we analyse things when we observe them. Can our mind and mental processes accurately analyse the identity of an object at all? Hume here paints a picture of how our mental processes actually work through his theory. He thinks that when we analyse the identity of an object we describe its various perceptions without finding any single impression on which we can get a clear idea of the object. In this case, Hume concludes with regard to substance and personal identity that they are nothing more than bundles of different perceptions on which we base the idea of self. So, when we recognize the identity of a person or thing, the various perceptions of that object or person are gathered in our mind like a bundle, by which our mind closely connects the various perceptions by imaginary relations. It should be noted, however, that imaginary relationships play a central role in personal identity, where our memory serves only as an auxiliary principle. In that case, Hume cleared that "the memory not only discovers the identity, but also contributes to its production" (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.18/p.261), but every perception is connected together by imaginary relationships like resemblance and causality. Here Hume differed from John Locke. For Hume makes it clear that if one were to forget his memory entirely, he would be known as the same person because his causal relations would identify him as the same person. Although Hume calls these relations a mere imagination of ours. However, this thesis develop some arguments about Hume's notions of identity, which are outlined below.

Hume's three arguments here are very doubtful, which we cannot easily explain, such as 1. According to him, each impression has different and distinct qualities, and they never depend on each other. That is why he calls perceptions an independent substance. Because perceptions are as independent and numerically distinct as substances. 2. Although the perceptions are numerically distinct and distinguishable, they exist independently in the mind in the form of bundles. But in this case, the major argument is how he made that the definition of the concept of substance. 3. The question about "*The definition of substance*", how can we say, according to his argument, that the substance of perceptions is numerically distinct at overtime?

Because that being said, the numerical difference in the substance of perception cannot be accepted. Because he has already said that each perception exists in a different way.

But we can state that Hume tries to clarify identity but much of the time he analyses the inherent perceptions and their close relation, how we mistakenly imagine their relationship, but he does not critically explain the identity of person, so that we can accurately interpret personal identity in the application of language. Because to be clearer, his position on identity is:

"The first is, that tho' we commonly be able to distinguish pretty exactly betwixt numerical and specific identity, yet it sometimes happens, that we confound them, and in our thinking and reasoning employ the one for the other." (Hume, 1739, T1.4.6.13/p.257)

However, Hume tried to clarify the concept of numerical i.e., perfect identity, and qualitative identity with the help of various examples in his Treatise. Because we confuse "perfect" and "imperfect" identity in analysing our personal identity. Where we regard our eternal existence as "invariable" and "uninterrupted". Hume, however, supports this belief and says that in the identity of all "vegetables" and "animals" we wish to mark the "perfect identity" because we believe it to be constantly existing, though it changes in the course of time. But Hume makes it clear, the slightest change in substance is "perfect identity" will create barriers to identification.

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