

Vividness & ‘I’

An Investigation of the Notion of Self

in David Hume’s

Treatise of Human Nature

by Samuel Harder

Note: all citations of Hume are from the Prometheus edition of the

Treatise of Human Nature.

I. Super-Oysters

The distinction between self and other has a radical effect on the experience of life: possession, choice, arrogance and humility, embarrassment and pride, in all of these the notion of self seems to be prominent, even essential. Such an important concept seems worthy of some attention. Where does it come from? How does the mind come to see the world in such a way?

The philosophical notion of self is not an idea like ‘waterfall’ or ‘hot-air balloon,’ which evidently comes simply from the perception of an object in the world; the meaning of the word *I* is in a way much more abstract than that. (To be sure, there is generally a body that is associated with the self; but it is common to make a distinction between ‘my body’ and ‘me.’) Descartes was content to say that he just *had* such a notion; he believed that it was self-evident even as he was able to question everything else. But what if he was wrong?

In Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates describes a situation in which people spend their lives chained up in a cave with a fire at its mouth so that the only thing they ever see is the shadows cast on the wall of the cave. It is claimed that, in this situation, the people will mistake the shadows for objects in their own right. In his description, Socrates specifically implies that the people will take the shadows cast on the wall of the cave by their bodies to be their very selves. Now let us imagine that the lighting of this scene has been manipulated so that the people are not able to see shadows of themselves. What notion will these people have of themselves now? If we believe Descartes, their idea of ‘I’ will be totally unimpaired. But if we believe Socrates, then it seems possible that the constraints of the cave could prevent this notion from arising in their minds.

If we wanted to take a middle course, we could accept Descartes’s conclusion that their notion of self is ultimately inevitable while still following Socrates’s apparent suggestion that it does not simply exist *a priori*. Then the notion of self might be something that arises as a natural consequence of having an experience—regardless of what that experience is. This, I believe, is the approach taken by David Hume in considering this question. But he struggles with it: “The thought alone finds personal identity, when reflecting on the train of past perceptions, that compose a mind, the ideas of them are felt to be connected together, and naturally introduce each other.... But all my hopes vanish, when I come to explain the principles, that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness.... In short there are two principles, which I cannot render consistent; nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz. that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences.... For

my part, I must ... confess, that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding. I pretend not, however, to pronounce it absolutely insuperable. Others, perhaps, or myself, upon more mature reflexions, may discover some hypothesis, that will reconcile those contradictions” (Book I. part iv. section 6. Appendix. pages 635–636). I would like to see what I can find in exploring this difficulty.

Considered apart from their larger context, it seems to me that the two principles identified here as supposedly contradictory actually have the relationship of the two premises of a logical syllogism of the simplest kind: “all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences,” and “the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences”; therefore, the mind never perceives any real connection among our distinct perceptions. So there is no contradiction here. The two propositions fit together very neatly. Then why the perplexity?

Let us return to the context. Then the trouble becomes apparent. The conclusion of our syllogism seems to be in opposition to the previous statement, “Reflecting on the train of past perceptions, that compose a mind, the ideas of them are felt to be connected together, and naturally introduce each other.” How can both of these be true?

Perhaps ironically, I find that Hume’s immediately preceding sentence highlights the point of difference between these two propositions perfectly: “We only *feel* a connexion or determination of the thought, to pass from one object to another.” That is, a felt connection is not the same as a real connection, so these statements are about two different things. Why would their juxtaposition be problematic for Hume then? Why can he not simply conclude that there is no real notion of self (that is, no accurate image of the ‘mind’ as the sum total of all perceptions) but rather only an illusory one (something that is mistakenly considered as such)?

I think the implication is that Hume is not interested merely in whether there is a real notion of self but also in how it could be, if there is no real notion of self, that we have an illusory one. Where would such an illusion come from? It has already been proved that self cannot be an idea arising from some single impression: “Every idea is deriv’d from preceding impressions; and we have no impression of self or substance, as something simple and individual. We have, therefore, no idea of them in that sense” (I. iv. 6. App. p. 633). If moreover we have just shown that the *connection* of the perceptions cannot bring about a notion of self either, which was Hume’s proposed alternative, then the origin of this notion seems quite enigmatic. This is troublesome.

It seems to me that the only conclusion we can draw is that it is *not* inevitable for a notion of self to arise simply from a train of perceptions. It seems right to me that the experience “reduc’d even below the life of an oyster” (I.iv.6.A634) would not entail a notion of self. In other words,

'having' an experience does not necessarily result in the notion of an experiencer. "If not, the addition of other perceptions can never give you that notion" (I.iv.6.A634). And yet, humans do seem to have it even if sub-oysters do not. So I think that the nature of this notion of self familiar from ordinary life must be different from how Hume seems to think of it. His middle course does not succeed in accounting for the self as an independent object involved in every experience. So we have to choose between Socrates and Descartes: either 'self' is a notion that will arise from some types of experience but not from others, or it is something *a priori* that does not come from experience at all.

Of course, if we choose Descartes, then the case is closed and there is nothing more we can say about it. Hume has already rejected this answer anyway: "He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continu'd, which he calls *himself*, tho' I am certain there is no such principle in me" (I.iv.6.252). But if we choose Socrates, then we have an investigation to make. If we pursue this course, then we have a chance of finding an answer that Hume would consider satisfactory.

So: what is it about the typical human experience that makes it capable of producing a notion of self?

II. The Hand of Power

Although Hume deals with this issue in only one section, he invokes the notion of self as if it were well-established in many other parts of his Treatise. For the purpose of approaching this puzzle of the development of the notion of self, let us see what we can glean by considering the connections that it has in his discussion of other things. In his section on the love of family members, for example, he says, "The idea of ourselves is always intimately present to us, and conveys a sensible degree of vivacity to the idea of any other object, to which we are related" (II.ii.4.354). So it is clear that Hume sees a strong connection between the notion of self and the concept of vividness ("vivacity"). In a nearby passage (in his general account of love and hatred) he says, "But every thing, that strikes upon us with vivacity, and appears in a full and strong light, forces itself, in a manner, into our consideration, and becomes present to the mind on the smallest hint and most trivial relation" (II.ii.2.339). This is a remarkable juxtaposition of thoughts here. For on the face of it, Hume is just saying that self and vividness are related things and that vividness has such-and-such properties. But if we look at these statements more closely, we can see that he is saying that those perceptions which are associated with the self are constantly present to our

consciousness, and vividness is a thing that makes perceptions constantly present to our consciousness.

Let us take into account also what he says about vividness elsewhere. For instance, in the section on belief, he says, “This different feeling I endeavor to explain by calling it a superior *force*, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *firminess*, or *steadiness*. This variety of terms, which may seem so unphilosophical, is intended only to express that act of the mind, which renders realities more present to us than fictions, causes them to weigh more in the thought, and gives them a superior influence on the passions and imagination” (I.iii.7.A629). With this I find it likely that Hume would agree that vividness is even *the* thing which makes perceptions more present to our consciousness, or perhaps indeed is the very presence of them itself. But if that is the case, then it is a necessary conclusion that the reasoning of the previous passage is essentially a tautology: the perceptions associated with the self have great vividness; therefore they have great vividness.

But now let us consider: what is the context in which Hume introduces the concept of vividness? It is in the very first section of the *Treatise*; he says, “Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name *impressions*; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul” (I.i.1.1). “Sensations, passions and emotions”—these are perceptions whose conception (or causal explanation) necessarily entails reference to the self. The statement, “This feels cold,” or, “This tastes sweet,” is one that we cannot at all account for (if we think it needs to be accounted for) without invoking the idea of a creature, a *body*, that has this sensation. As soon as the statement, “This feels cold to me,” becomes false, we become rather reluctant to assert the statement, “This feels cold,” unqualifiedly; the latter already implies the former in common usage. The statements, ‘I feel angry,’ ‘I am in love,’ ‘I feel proud,’ can hardly even be formulated without explicit reference to a mind or soul that experiences them. “By ideas,” on the other hand, “I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning” (I.i.1.1). The abstract statement, “The figures on the legs of a right triangle are equal to the figure on the hypotenuse,” is something that we consider far less readily to be a direct affection of our own body or soul. In short, those perceptions that Hume identifies as having great vividness can be defined as the direct perceptions of (or by) our mind and body.

But then, in another passage, Hume says, “Pride and humility have the qualities of our mind and body, that is *self*, for their natural and more immediate causes” (II.i.9.303). If I understand the force of this “that is” correctly, then in this passage Hume is in fact equating “our mind and body” with self. (Of course this is also very much in accordance with common usage.) So now it becomes

evident that it is appropriate to say not merely that association with the self is one possible source of vividness for perceptions, but that a perception will have vividness if and only if it is associated with the self.

Here it might be objected that Hume does not mean “our self” to be simply equated with “our mind and body,” for otherwise he would not say, “We have no impression of self” (I.iv.6.A633); clearly, we do have impressions of our own body. (In fact, Hume’s proposed definition of “self” is even narrower than that; for he says, “In order to answer this question, we must distinguish betwixt personal identity, as it regards our thought or imagination, and as it regards our passions or the concern we take in ourselves. The first is our present subject” [I.iv.6.253].) But if we proceed from the assumption that self is just ‘mind,’ totally distinct from body, then we come to Hume’s perplexity, as we have seen. We have already formulated the hypothesis that a *true* idea of self is not possible; now we are trying to find a way to explain how an *illusory* notion of self might have come to be. So a mix-up of this sort is precisely the kind of thing we are looking for.

What is this possible solution then? First we have said that association with the self is consistently correlated with great vividness. Now we have said that there is at least one sense of the word *self* that is used to describe perceptions of our body. These two points taken together seem to me to suggest at least the beginnings of a plausible answer to Hume’s question. First we develop an idea of our body from the myriad impressions we have of it. Then we observe a frequent correlation between impressions of the body and the great vividness of other perceptions. The sight of the adjacency of a hand and a stone, for example, coincides with certain feelings of pressure, texture and temperature. Whenever the hand is seen adjacent to any other object, similarly sensations of pressure, texture and temperature arise. And so on. But the sight of other hands in contact with things is not accompanied by any such impressions. Other hands may suggest the *ideas* of sensations, but this is only by virtue of their similarity to *the* hand, and this connection no doubt takes significantly more time to develop. Only this hand, ‘*my*’ hand, has the power to bestow vividness on the perceptions of touch. Sometimes these impressions do occur without the sight of the hand; but in the vast majority of cases only a slight adjustment is necessary to bring the hand of power into view: just look for it, and there it is, touching some other object, just as has come to be expected. In this way, the great vivacity of the perceptions associated with one particular body (‘my’ body) enables a distinction between ‘me’ and all other objects of the experience.

III. Pineapple

So much for the body. But what about the mind? The whole premise here was that somehow the perceptions constituting the human experience would lead to a false notion of self, not just an idea of the body as the originator of physical sensations, but the notion of “a self or thinking being” (I.iv.6.A633), of an experiencer to be the frame for all experiences, from the grossest feeling of heat to the most abstracted mathematical idea. The distinction between ‘my’ hand and other hands, ‘my’ feet and other feet, is an important step, but it does not get us all the way to being able to say, ‘I am happy,’ or, ‘I like triangles.’ For that we will need to add another element—not a truly different element, for then we would be stealing beyond the realm of Hume’s philosophy—but a qualitatively different aspect of the human experience: comparison between ‘my’ body and other bodies in the experience.

Disregarding for a moment the significance of being able to say, ‘I am happy,’ (that is, to express it in terms of an ‘I’), let us consider simply what the meaning of this statement is. In a Humean analysis it should be possible to express this as an experience—that is, in terms of impressions and ideas. But this is actually very simple—simpler, in fact than the everyday formulation of the experience would suggest. For Hume says that impressions include “all our ... passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul” (I.i.1.1). Surely happiness counts as a passion or emotion. Therefore happiness itself is an impression. But we can say more. Hume makes a distinction between simple impressions and complex impressions: “Simple perceptions or impressions and ideas are such as admit of no distinction nor separation. The complex are the contrary to these, and may be distinguished into parts. Tho’ a particular colour, 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” (I.i.1.2). Which kind would happiness be? At the beginning of his examination of pride and humility, Hume says, “The passions of pride and humility being simple and uniform impressions, ’tis impossible we can ever, by a multitude of words, give a just definition of them, or indeed of any of the passions. The utmost we can pretend to is a description of them, by an enumeration of such circumstances, as attend them” (II.i.2.277). (It seems to me that this statement is equivalent to his observation concerning sensory perceptions, “We cannot form to ourselves a just idea of the taste of a pine-apple, without having actually tasted it” (I.i.1.5). Such impressions just cannot be analyzed.) Likewise, when I feel happy, if I try to think about this feeling, it does not strike me as something that could be analyzed into distinct components. I just do not see any way it could be done. So considering that he extends this claim to

all passions, and also consulting my own experience, I think it is quite reasonable to conclude that happiness is a simple impression as well.

So what about the statement, 'I am happy'? Well, when does one say that? One says that when one has the *experience* of happiness. The *experience* that corresponds to this statement is happiness itself. That is all there is to it. So this is the 'true' (Humean) meaning of the statement, 'I am happy': the simple impression known as happiness, just as the 'true' meaning of the statement, 'I taste pineapple,' is the simple impression known as the taste of pineapple.

But this statement still has the word *I* in it. What are the implications of this linguistic phenomenon? In order to try to understand it better, let us see what happens to the 'true meaning' of the statement if we replace this word *I* with something else. What does it mean, for example, to say, 'Socrates is happy,' or, 'Socrates tastes pineapple'? We can stipulate that we want the original meaning—that is, the one that consists, if possible, entirely of impressions, as opposed to a more abstracted one consisting entirely of ideas, which would be derived from the original case, as Hume says. Then at first glance it might seem adequate to say that this time we are talking about a compound of impressions (or a complex impression, as Hume puts it), one part of the compound being the impression of Socrates, a flat-faced, bulging-eyed old Greek philosopher, and the other part being an impression of happiness, or the taste of pineapple. But if such a complex impression is present, then it must be possible to say that the individual constituent parts are present. Therefore the simple impression known as happiness must be present whenever this most vivid perception of, 'Socrates is happy,' is present, and the simple impression known as the taste of pineapple must be present whenever this most vivid perception of, 'Socrates tastes pineapple,' is present. But this does not seem right. The fact that Socrates tastes pineapple does not mean that 'I' taste pineapple. Of course, we did say that there would be room for more than one case; we did not need this perception to be perfectly vivid in all cases, as long as it was perfectly vivid in some cases, from which the less vivid cases would be derived. But with the statement, 'Socrates tastes pineapple,' it seems that even a single case where the perception were so vivid as to include the impression of the taste of pineapple would be quite hard to come by. If the perception, 'Socrates tastes pineapple,' did lead directly to, 'I taste pineapple really vividly,' then one would presumably start looking for some sort of disease or drug to explain this strange phenomenon. So even if such instances did come up, it would be quite implausible to say that all the other instances of the perception, 'Socrates tastes pineapple,' are "preceded by [these] more lively perceptions, from which they are derived, and which

they represent” (I.i.1.7). The only logical conclusion is that the meaning of, ‘Socrates tastes pineapple,’ can never be an impression.

What else can it be then? If it can be experienced at all, then we must be able to explain it in terms of impressions and ideas. It is not an impression. Could it be an idea? If it cannot be an impression, then it cannot be a simple idea; for Hume says, “All our simple ideas ... are deriv’d from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent” (I.i.1.4). Therefore it would have to be a compound of some kind. Of course it can be a complex idea, composed of the idea of the taste of pineapple and the idea of Socrates. But the perception of Socrates can be as vivid as we like. So if Socrates is vivid enough to be an impression, then what we have is a kind of compound that Hume does not talk about: a compound of an idea (the taste of pineapple) with an impression (Socrates). I will venture to say that this example makes it obvious that such a complex perception is possible: it seems almost inevitable that one would have this experience if one were to watch Socrates eating pineapple. (I suppose one might prefer to say that in this case there is the complex idea, ‘Socrates tastes pineapple,’ *in addition to*, but not compounded with, the impression of Socrates, but it does not seem useful to quibble on this point.)

But how can such a compounding happen? Why would one ever make such an association between the idea of the taste of pineapple and the perception of Socrates even when the impression known as the taste of pineapple is not present at all? Of course, as soon as we start asking ‘how’ and ‘why’ perceptions do what they do, we are leaving the scope of the experience itself and speculating about things beyond the experience while still treating them as if they were part of the experience—which is ultimately not merely undesirable but actually nonsensical. The perceptions do what they do and that is that; they just are that way. Nevertheless, at this stage it may still be helpful to give an ‘explanation’ in terms of our everyday experience as it is commonly described.

So let us be commonsensical about it. Why would the taste of pineapple become associated with Socrates? Because of the perception, ‘Socrates *eats* pineapple.’ It is obvious. The perception of tasting pineapple always comes from the perception of eating pineapple. If you perceive Socrates eating pineapple (whether this perception be an impression or an idea), then, and only then, will you think, ‘Socrates tastes pineapple.’

All right. But there is still something enigmatic about this. What are the grounds for this common-sense maxim, ‘The perception of tasting pineapple always comes from the perception of eating pineapple’? One could watch people eating pineapple all day long and still never have any idea what pineapple tastes like. As we have said, the idea must originally come from the impression. So in

order for there to be the perception, ‘Socrates tastes pineapple,’ there must also at some point have been the impression itself that is the taste of pineapple. We have asserted that the perception of the taste of pineapple comes from the perception of eating pineapple, but we have also admitted that not every impression of a person eating pineapple results in the impression known as the taste of pineapple. What are the instances where the impression of a person eating pineapple does result in the taste of pineapple? It is when the person eating pineapple is ‘I’: ‘my’ mouth brings the connection between pineapple and its flavor, just as ‘my’ hand brings the connection between the stone and its hardness, its coldness, its roughness.

So now we have a kind of justification for that common-sense maxim: there is in fact a correlation between the impression of eating pineapple and the impression known as the taste of pineapple, for whenever ‘I’ eat pineapple, the taste of pineapple also appears. (This is why this impression is called, ‘the taste of pineapple.’) Then what about those cases where it is Socrates eating the pineapple, and the taste is not present? Why is it that the idea of the taste is still involved?

This we can account for by way of *similarity*. The impression of ‘my’ mouth eating pineapple is always accompanied by the taste of pineapple. But, although it is not as easy as with hands or feet, one can observe an analogy between ‘my’ mouth and the mouth of Socrates so that they can both be called ‘mouths.’ Now, as Hume says in his section on the association of ideas, “In the course of our thinking, and in the constant revolution of our ideas, our imagination runs easily from one idea to any other that *resembles* it,” and moreover, “Two objects are connected together in the imagination, not only when the one is immediately resembling, contiguous to, or the cause of the other, but also when there is interposed betwixt them a third object, which bears to both of them any of these relations” (I.i.4.11). So: Socrates is eating pineapple. This is a connection between pineapple and the mouth of Socrates. But the mouth of Socrates is like ‘my’ mouth. So since there is a connection between pineapple and the mouth of Socrates, and a connection between the mouth of Socrates and ‘my’ mouth, therefore the ideas of pineapple and ‘my’ mouth get connected. But whenever pineapple and ‘my’ mouth come together, the result is the *taste* of pineapple. So even if it is only in the space of ideas that pineapple and ‘my’ mouth are being associated, it is still natural for the idea of the taste of pineapple to arise. Therefore, even though the relation between Socrates eating pineapple and the idea of the taste of pineapple is more indirect than the relation between ‘me’ eating pineapple and the taste of pineapple, nevertheless there is a natural pathway for a compounding of those perceptions to occur: a certain action of ‘my’ body results in a certain impression, and so the analogous action of Socrates invokes the idea corresponding to the

impression. The similarity of the two bodies, 'mine' and Socrates, is the link between Socrates and the idea.

IV. The Face of a Cyclops

We can say similar things about, 'Socrates is happy.' This is likewise a statement that is meaningless without the prior occurrence of the impression known as happiness. And likewise there needs to be some intermediate connection that allows such a compounding of the idea of happiness with the perception of Socrates. In this case we can say that, 'Socrates is smiling,' is an intermediate perception. But how does smiling come to be associated with the idea of happiness? We *can* say, there is again an analogy between the mouth of Socrates and 'my' mouth, the movement of the mouth of Socrates and the movement of 'my' mouth. And indeed this is what Hume seems to think: "However the parts may differ in shape or size, their structure and composition are in general the same. There is a very remarkable resemblance, which preserves itself amidst all their variety; and this resemblance must very much contribute to make us enter into the sentiments of others, and embrace them with facility and pleasure" (II.i.11.318). After mentioning other ways in which another person can be related to 'me,' he concludes, "All these relations, when united together, convey the impression or consciousness of our own person to the idea of the sentiments or passions of others, and makes us conceive them in the strongest and most lively manner" (II.i.11.318). But to me this seems like something significantly less obvious than the case of eating pineapple. There is no external object that corresponds to the pineapple here. So this presupposes a very strong awareness of the similarity and other relations between the other people and 'me'; in short, it presupposes a very strong awareness of "the impression or consciousness of our own person" (as indeed he says). Given that we have already given an account for a notion of 'me' by analogy with other people at an immediate physical level, I suppose the explanation that Hume gives here is theoretically possible, provided that we stipulate that one first observes a correlation between 'my' smiling and the impression known as happiness. But my intuition is that the correlation between, 'Socrates is smiling,' and the impression known as happiness is more direct than that. "A chearful countenance infuses a sensible complacency and serenity into my mind" (II.i.11.317). This seems like the natural phenomenon that should be taken as primary, rather than a thing that "must be trac'd up to its first principles" (II.i.11.317). No doubt conscious awareness of the relations between 'me' and Socrates does "very much contribute" to this effect of sympathy (as Hume calls it); but I believe that this awareness of relation is not sufficient to account for the phenomena of my experience, especially

since the way Hume describes it seems to be depending on a perception of self not merely in terms of body but also or even primarily in terms of mind or emotions, so that he is presupposing a solution to (or rather the non-existence of) the very problem that he raised and that we are trying to address: where does the notion of self come from in the first place? If on the other hand unlike Hume we simply take it as given that the impression of Socrates smiling is directly correlated with the impression known as happiness, then we are asking no more than when Hume denies the existence of underlying causality for correlations of ‘external’ impressions: “Motion in one body is regarded upon impulse as the cause of motion in another. When we consider these objects with the utmost attention, we find only that the one body approaches the other; and that the motion of it precedes that of the other, but without any sensible interval. ’Tis in vain to rack ourselves with farther thought and reflexion upon this subject” (I.iii.2.76-77). And indeed Hume also says that he means his critique of causality to apply to ‘internal’ impressions like happiness as well: “Tho’ the ideas of cause and effect be deriv’d from the impressions of reflexion as well as from those of sensation, yet for brevity’s sake, I commonly mention only the latter as the origin of these ideas; tho’ I desire that whatever I say of them may also extend to the former. Passions are connected with their objects and with one another; no less than external bodies are connected together. The same relation, then, of cause and effect, which belongs to one, must be common to all of them” (I.iii.2.78).

In any case, we can see that, directly or indirectly, there is a connection between, ‘Socrates is smiling,’ and the perception of happiness. But what (one might object) if it is not Socrates who is smiling, but rather the one-eyed giant Polyphemus, who wants to eat us and our friends? Will it still be a moment of happiness then? Of course Hume will point out that the relations of resemblance, origin, and acquaintance are much diminished in this case. But if my identical twin with whom I have lived all my life is smiling when he wants to eat me, that will not be a happy situation either. But let us again apply common sense. Of course that will not be a happy moment, but it can still involve the idea of happiness. It will still be possible to say, ‘Polyphemus is happy,’ (or, ‘My cannibalistic evil twin is happy,’ as the case may be). It seems to me, then, that the most reasonable explanation is that the natural effect of the smile (the perception of happiness) is overruled by other considerations, but it still conveys the idea of happiness by virtue of its similarity with other smiles that appeared under more favorable circumstances. (One might also say that the perception of happiness is still created, but its vividness is much less because of the contrary influence of other factors; under this interpretation it is simply a question of degree.)

V. The Fountain of Vivacity

In any event, we have now shown how it is possible for the perception of another person to be compounded with an idea such as happiness or the taste of pineapple, to form a complex perception like, 'Socrates is happy,' or, 'Socrates tastes pineapple': the perception of the other person in one way or another results in the idea of 'one's own' experience in such a way that they are closely associated as cause and effect. Given that this is possible, there can of course be many such ideas that attach themselves to the perception of another person, and they can be much more complex than happiness or the taste of pineapple. For example, it eventually becomes possible to say things like, 'Socrates knows that Meno's slave will think that the square that is twice as large will have a side twice as long,' or, 'Socrates does not know that someone has eaten his pineapple.' With all of these ideas being compounded with the perception of Socrates, there is a sense in which they are all compounded with each other, so that there can be one extremely complex idea which is the compound of all of them. This complex idea is what is known as 'Socrates's mind.' Naturally such complex ideas are liable to be associated with any person in the experience, so we have not only 'Socrates's mind' but also 'Meno's mind,' 'Meno's slave's mind,' 'Polyphemus's mind.' Now, if when Socrates is smiling or eating pineapple it makes sense to attribute the idea of happiness or of the taste of pineapple to 'Socrates's mind,' then *by analogy* when 'I' am smiling or eating pineapple it would also make sense to attribute the impression known as happiness or the taste of pineapple to... 'my mind.' But what is this 'my mind'? What could that mean? If we follow through the analogy, then just as all the ideas associated with the perception of Socrates are attributed to 'Socrates's mind,' so all of the perceptions associated with 'my' body can be attributed to 'my mind.' But which are the perceptions that are associated with 'my' body? The ones that are vivid, as we have seen. Therefore 'my mind' is the complex perception consisting of all perceptions that have vividness.

Now we are in a position to answer our original question. What is the implication of the fact that we express the impression of happiness (or the taste of pineapple) as a statement in the form, 'I am happy,' (or, 'I taste pineapple')? In this statement, *I* is an element that simply replaces *Socrates*; *I* is presented as an 'external thing' that can be used as a subject of this predicate just like any other 'external thing.' In other words, the way in which one expresses a direct, vivid impression is by pretending that it is a compound of an indirect, un-vivid idea and some 'external' object. But what is that object? That object is that magical object that pours vividness into every perception that comes in contact with it, that ever-flowing fountain which is the source of all vivacity; and it is called: *I*.' The abstracted idea of 'my' body, plus the sum total of all present impressions (whose vividness is

attributed to it),—this system is the focus of all attention, the core of the sphere of all perceptions, the center of the universe. This is what Hume is referring to when he says, “’Tis evident, that the idea, or rather impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us, and that our consciousness gives us so lively a conception of our own person, that ’tis not possible to imagine, that any thing can in this particular go beyond it” (II.i.11.317); this is why, when he actually tries to study this thing in which everywhere else he seems to have so much faith, “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 any thing but the perception” (I.iv.6.252); this is what Descartes means when he says, “I think; therefore I am.”

So there we have it. The hypothesis from Socrates’s description of the cave was right: the notion of self arises from having, not just any experience, but a particular sort of experience, namely one in which the impressions of a certain object (which comes to be called ‘my body’) are correlated with the vividness of other perceptions. In this sense, the notion of self is actually not so different from ‘hot-air balloon’ or ‘waterfall’ after all: *I* is simply the name of this body in statements like, ‘I have ten fingers.’ But proceeding from this kind of direct statement about the body is an analogy in which all impressions (not just impressions of the body) come to be *attributed* to the body (as in, ‘I taste pineapple’) just as ideas can be attributed to other bodies (as in, ‘Socrates tastes pineapple’). By virtue of this analogy, the meaning of *I* is then expanded so that in effect it becomes the colloquial word for *vivacity*. ‘Mind’ or ‘consciousness’ is a notion that originally refers to the compounding of ideas with ‘external’ objects, and later becomes a thing that is fallaciously supposed both to be and not to be the universe—yes, the universe, for as the notions of ‘a person’s ideas’ and ‘my mind’ become more and more sophisticated, more and more things come to be attributed to them, until finally there is not a single perception (that is, a single object in the universe) that is not considered to be a part of ‘my perspective.’ So the universe gets attributed to ‘me,’ and all other objects are left with nothing to be attributed to them, nothing but vague conjectures about ‘things in themselves’ and ‘other perspectives,’ which flee and vanish like shadows at the approach of epistemological rigor. ‘My mind’ is the universe, and there is nothing but ‘my’ perceptions to be explored; “the mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations” (I.iv.6.253).