

## *The Principles of Psychology*

### THE PURE EGO

Having summed up in the above table the principal results of the chapter thus far, I have said all that need be said of the constituents of the phenomenal self, and of the nature of self-regard. Our decks are consequently cleared for the struggle with that pure principle of personal identity which has met us all along our preliminary exposition, but which we have always shied from and treated as a difficulty to be postponed. Ever since Hume's time, it has been justly regarded as the most puzzling puzzle with which psychology has to deal; and whatever view one may espouse, one has to hold his position against heavy odds. If, with the Spiritualists, one contend for a substantial soul, or transcendental principle of unity, one can give no positive account of what that may be. And if, with the Humians, one deny such a principle and say that the stream of passing thoughts is all, one runs against the entire common-sense of mankind, of which the belief in a distinct principle of selfhood seems an integral part. Whatever solution be adopted in the pages to come, we may as well make up our minds in advance that it will fail to satisfy the majority of those to whom it is addressed. The best way of approaching the matter will be to take up first—

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#### *The Sense of Personal Identity*

In the last chapter it was stated in as radical a way as possible that the thoughts which we actually know to exist do not fly about loose, but seem each to belong to some one thinker and not to another. Each thought, out of a multitude of other thoughts of which it may think, is able to distinguish those which belong to its own Ego from those which do not. The former have a warmth and intimacy about them of which the latter are completely devoid, being merely conceived, in a cold and foreign fashion, and not appearing as blood-relatives, bringing their greetings to us from out of the past.

Now this consciousness of personal sameness may be treated either as a subjective phenomenon or as an objective deliverance, as a feeling, or as a truth. We may explain how one bit of thought can come to judge other bits to belong to the same Ego with itself; or we may criticise its judgment and decide how far it may tally with the nature of things.

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As a mere subjective phenomenon the judgment presents no difficulty or mystery peculiar to itself. It belongs to the great class of judgments of sameness; and there is nothing more remarkable in making a judgment of sameness in the first person than in the second or the third. The intellectual operations seem essentially alike, whether I say 'I am the same,' or whether I say 'the pen is the same, as yesterday.' It is as easy to think this as to think the opposite and say 'neither I nor the pen is the same.'

This sort of *bringing of things together into the object of a single judgment* is of course essential to all thinking. The things are conjoined in the thought, whatever may be the relation in which they appear to the thought. The thinking them is *thinking* them together, even if only with the result of judging that they do not *belong* together. This sort of *subjective synthesis*, essential to knowledge as such (whenever it has a complex object), must not be confounded with *objective synthesis* or union instead of difference or disconnection, known among the things.<sup>16</sup> The subjective synthesis is involved in thought's mere existence. Even a really disconnected world could only be *known* to be such by having its parts temporarily united in the Object of some pulse of consciousness.<sup>17</sup>

The sense of personal identity is not, then, this mere synthetic form essential to all thought. It is the sense of a sameness perceived by thought and predicated of things *thought-about*. These things are a present self and a self of yesterday. The thought not only thinks them both, but thinks that they are identical. The psychologist, looking on and playing the critic, might prove the thought wrong, and show there was no real identity,—there might have

<sup>16</sup> "Also nur dadurch, dass ich ein Mannigfaltiges gegebener Vorstellungen in einem Bewusstsein verbinden kann, ist es möglich, dass ich mir die Identität des Bewusstseins in diesen Vorstellungen selbst vorstelle, d. i. die analytische Einheit der Apperception ist nur unter der Voraussetzung irgend einer synthetischen möglich." In this passage (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 2te Aufl., § 16) Kant calls by the names of analytic and synthetic apperception what we here mean by objective and subjective synthesis respectively. It were much to be desired that someone might invent a good pair of terms in which to record the distinction—those used in the text are certainly very bad, but Kant's seem to me still worse. 'Categorical unity' and 'transcendental synthesis' would also be good Kantian, but hardly good human, speech.

<sup>17</sup> So that we might say, by a sort of bad pun, "only a connected world can be known as disconnected." I say bad pun, because the point of view shifts between the connectedness and the disconnectedness. The disconnectedness is of the realities known; the connectedness is of the knowledge of them; and reality and knowledge of it are, from the psychological point of view held fast to in these pages, two different facts.

been no yesterday, or, at any rate, no self of yesterday; or, if there were, the sameness predicated might not obtain, or might be predicated on insufficient grounds. In either case the personal identity would not exist as a *fact*; but it would exist as a *feeling* all the same; the consciousness of it by the thought would be there, and the psychologist would still have to analyze that, and show where its illusoriness lay. Let us now be the psychologist and see whether it be right or wrong when it says, *I am the same self that I, was yesterday.*

We may immediately call it right and intelligible so far as it posits a past time with past thoughts or selves contained therein—these were data which we assumed at the outset of the book. Right also and intelligible so far as it thinks of a present self—that present self we have just studied in its various forms. The only question for us is as to what the consciousness may mean when it calls the present self the *same* with one of the past selves which it has in mind.

We spoke a moment since of warmth and intimacy. This leads us to the answer sought. For, whatever the thought we are criticising may think about its present self, that self comes to its acquaintance, or is actually felt, with warmth and intimacy. Of course this is the case with the *bodily* part of it; we feel the whole cubic mass of our body all the while, it gives us an unceasing sense of personal existence. Equally do we feel the inner 'nucleus of the spiritual self,' either in the shape of yon faint physiological adjustments, or (adopting the universal psychological belief), in that of the pure activity of our thought taking place as such. Our remoter spiritual, material, and social selves, so far as they are realized, come also with a glow and a warmth; for the thought of them infallibly brings some degree of organic emotion in the shape of quickened heart-beats, oppressed breathing, or some other alteration, even though it be a slight one, in the general bodily tone. The character of 'warmth,' then, in the present self, reduces itself to either of two things,—something in the feeling which we have of the thought itself, as thinking, or else the feeling of the body's actual existence at the moment,—or finally to both. We cannot realize our present self without simultaneously feeling one or other of these two things. Any other fact which brings these two things with it into consciousness will be thought with a warmth and an intimacy like those which cling to the present self.

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Any *distant* self which fulfils this condition will be thought with such warmth and intimacy. But which distant selves *do* fulfil the condition, when represented?

Obviously those, and only those, which fulfilled it when they were alive. *Them* we shall imagine with the animal warmth upon them; to them may possibly cling the aroma, the echo of the thinking taken in the act. And by a natural consequence, we shall assimilate them to each other and to the warm and intimate self we now feel within us as we think, and separate them as a collection from whatever selves have not this mark, much as out of a herd of cattle let loose for the winter on some wide Western prairie the owner picks out and sorts together, when the time for the round-up comes in the spring, all the beasts on which he finds his own particular brand.

The various members of the collection thus set apart are felt to belong with each other whenever they are thought at all. The animal warmth, etc., is their herd-mark, the brand from which they can never more escape. It runs through them all like a thread through a chaplet and makes them into a whole, which we treat as a unit, no matter how much in other ways the parts may differ *inter se*. Add to this character the farther one that the distant selves appear to our thought as having for hours of time been *continuous* with each other, and the most recent ones of them continuous with the Self of the present moment, melting into it by slow degrees; and we get a still stronger bond of union. As we think we see an identical bodily thing when, in spite of changes of structure, it exists continuously before our eyes, or when, however interrupted its presence, its quality returns unchanged; so here we think we experience an identical *Self* when it appears to us in an analogous way. Continuity makes us unite what dissimilarity might otherwise separate; similarity makes us unite what discontinuity might hold apart. And thus it is, finally, that Peter, awakening in the same bed with Paul, and recalling what both had in mind before they went to sleep, reidentifies and appropriates the 'warm' ideas as his, and is never tempted to confuse them with those cold and pale-appearing ones which he ascribes to Paul. As well might he confound Paul's body, which he only sees, with his own body, which he sees but also feels. Each of us when he awakens says, Here's the same old self again, just as he says, Here's the same old bed, the same old room, the same old world.

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*The sense of our own personal identity, then, is exactly like any one of our other perceptions of sameness among phenomena. It is a conclusion grounded either on the resemblance in a fundamental respect, or on the continuity before the mind, of the phenomena compared.*

And it must not be taken to mean more than these grounds warrant, or treated as a sort of metaphysical or absolute Unity in which all differences are overwhelmed. The past and present selves compared are the same just so far as they *are* the same, and no farther. A uniform feeling of 'warmth,' of bodily existence (or an equally uniform feeling of pure psychic energy?) pervades them all; and this is what gives them a *generic* unity, and makes them the same in *kind*. But this generic unity coexists with generic differences just as real as the unity. And if from the one point of view they are one self, from others they are as truly not one but many selves. And similarly of the attribute of continuity; it gives its own kind of unity to the self—that of mere connectedness, or unbrokenness, a perfectly definite phenomenal thing—but it gives not a jot or tittle more. And this unbrokenness in the stream of selves, like the unbrokenness in an exhibition of 'dissolving views,' in no wise implies any farther unity or contradicts any amount of plurality in other respects.

And accordingly we find that, where the resemblance and the continuity are no longer felt, the sense of personal identity goes too. We hear from our parents various anecdotes about our infant years, but we do not appropriate them as we do our own memories. Those breaches of decorum awaken no blush, those bright sayings no self-complacency. That child is a foreign creature with which our present self is no more identified in feeling than it is with some stranger's living child to-day. Why? Partly because great time-gaps break up all these early years—we cannot ascend to them by continuous memories; and partly because no representation of how the child *felt* comes up with the stories. We know what he said and did; but no sentiment of his little body, of his emotions, of his psychic strivings as they felt to him, comes up to contribute an element of warmth and intimacy to the narrative we hear, and the main bond of union with our present self thus disappears. It is the same with certain of our dimly-recollected experiences. We hardly know whether to appropriate them or to disown them as fancies, or things read or heard and not lived through. Their animal heat

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has evaporated; the feelings that accompanied them are so lacking in the recall, or so different from those we now enjoy, that no judgment of identity can be decisively cast.

*Resemblance among the parts of a continuum of feelings* (especially bodily feelings) experienced along with things widely different in all other regards, *thus constitutes the real and verifiable 'personal identity' which we feel.* There is no other identity than this in the 'stream' of subjective consciousness which we described in the last chapter. Its parts differ, but under all their differences they are knit in these two ways; and if either way of knitting disappears, the sense of unity departs. If a man wakes up some fine day unable to recall any of his past experiences, so that he has to learn his biography afresh, or if he only recalls the facts of it in a cold abstract way as things that he is sure once happened; or if, without this loss of memory, his bodily and spiritual habits all change during the night, each organ giving a different tone, and the act of thought becoming aware of itself in a different way; he *feels*, and he *says*, that he is a changed person. He disowns his former me, gives himself a new name, identifies his present life with nothing from out of the older time. Such cases are not rare in mental pathology; but, as we still have some reasoning to do, we had better give no concrete account of them until the end of the chapter.

This description of personal identity will be recognized by the instructed reader as the ordinary doctrine professed by the empirical school. Associationists in England and France, Herbartians in Germany, all describe the Self as an aggregate of which each part, as to its *being*, is a separate fact. So far so good, then; thus much is true whatever farther things may be true; and it is to the imperishable glory of Hume and Herbart and their successors to have taken so much of the meaning of personal identity out of the clouds and made of the Self an empirical and verifiable thing.

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But in leaving the matter here, and saying that this sum of passing things is all, these writers have neglected certain more subtle aspects of the Unity of Consciousness, to which we next must turn.

Our recent simile of the herd of cattle will help us. It will be remembered that the beasts were brought together into one herd because their owner found on each of them his brand. The 'owner' symbolizes here that 'section' of consciousness, or pulse of thought, which we have all along represented as the vehicle of the judgment