

Documentation on the impacts of automobility through the metaphysical lens by university students

Author: Rachel Bobb

Introduction

Philosophy is a concept that exists within our everyday realities. We constantly gain experiences that help form and construct who and what we are, our beliefs, morals, and ethics that form our identity and self. The predominant ideas used within this research paper are the Humean ideas of self and identity.

David Hume argues that we do not have a constant sense of the self; rather our experience consists of a "bundle" of perceptions that are constantly changing. He presents a very fascinating perspective on self awareness, which in philosophy is the experience of one's own individuality. Hume implies that self-awareness only occurs through reflection, distinguishing between direct perception and self-awareness. For Hume, perceptions occur independently of any awareness of the self.

Additionally, Hume presents his concept of secondary ideas. Secondary ideas build from the idea of self-awareness in the sense that identity stems from ideas of perception; however it is important to understand that they are two distinct entities. Secondary ideas arise occasionally in common life, allowing moments of self-awareness, but do not constitute a stable identity. Hume emphasizes that questions about identity require deep philosophical inquiry, contrasting with the more determinate everyday ideas of self. His perspective suggests that our understanding of personal identity is less about a fixed essence and more about the interactions of perceptions.

Hume models his understanding of personal identity based on the human tendencies to comprehend simplicity and identity within complex and intricate experiences. The philosopher's

beliefs about the mind's identity are invariably linked with his theory of secondary ideas.. Hume believes identity can be both perfect and imperfect. This "imperfect identity," is ascribed to changing objects, and "perfect identity," is associated with static objects. Imperfect identity arises from ancillary processes that overlook differences among perceptions, often influenced by causation, similarity, and proximity. Hume suggests that our belief in identity is based on the relationship formed among perceptions, leading us to view our changing experiences as continuous. This applies to both external objects and the perceptions constituting the mind.

Hume hypothesizes that the dynamic relationships of perceptions form the essence of self and identity, serving as the foundational framework for this paper. I will apply this concept to explore how university students experience shifts in their sense of self and identity in relation to automobility. Automobiles play a critical role in shaping our experiences in the modern day, being the vessel that introduces us to a variety of new ideas and perceptions. Philosophy and automobility are interconnected; as the landscapes, people, and other variables in our environment evolve, so too does our sense of identity and self.

Methods Section

David Hume is an empiricist, which means his philosophical viewpoints are rooted in observation and experience rather than in theory or pure logic. This emphasis on empirical evidence highlights the importance of experience in forming knowledge. I aim to combine empirical methods with analytical analysis, adopting a Humean perspective as I approach my question. By engaging with both my observations and the insights of other scholars, I hope to construct a refined understanding of identity, self & the automobile.

To achieve this, I will engage in empirical methods alongside phenomenology; a philosophical approach rooted in the structure of experience itself. Phenomenology encourages

examining how different phenomenons are displayed through perceptions and lived experiences, urging us to set aside prejudged notions. This focus on lived experience allows for a better exploration of Humean thought, as it prioritizes human perception and the context in which experiences occur.

Incorporating this philosophical structure will be beneficial when conducting interviews for my research. By approaching participants with a phenomenological lens, I will be better equipped to create a space that encourages authentic dialogue. This means actively listening to their stories and experiences without imposing my own biases or assumptions. I will focus on understanding how they perceive their experiences within the realm of automobility and the meanings they derive from them, rather than simply collecting data for analysis.

In addition, adopting an empiricist stance during interviews will help me remain mindful of observable details and specific experiences of all the participants. This focus will allow me to identify patterns and themes that emerge from the conversations, ensuring that my analysis is firmly rooted in real experiences. By blending both empirical data and phenomenological insights, I will construct a comprehensive narrative that reflects the complexity of human experiences and the automobile. This approach aims to showcase the complexities of the human experience and contribute to the field of philosophy and mobility.

For this research paper, I will interview students from various universities in the Houston and Austin areas of Texas. The primary institutions I will focus on include the University of Texas at Austin, Southwestern University, Rice University, the University of Houston, and Texas A&M University. My interviews will specifically target students who have brought their vehicles to campus.

I will ask a variety of questions centered around the theme of automobility. One key aspect of the interviews involves asking the participants to recount a long-distance driving experience. I will explore how the changing scenery influences their thoughts and emotions. For example, I'll ask how their feelings change as they drive, whether the music they choose shifts based on the duration of their trip and if they made any stops along the way. Additionally, I will inquire about any conversations they had during their travels and how those interactions may have altered their perspectives.

Overall, I aim to have students describe their experiences in detail, creating narratives that not only recount their journeys from point A to point B, but also connect to the philosophical themes of empiricism. By taking a storytelling approach, I will reveal how mobility shapes identity and perception.

In contrast to Hume's philosophy, John Locke, another empirical philosopher, offers an interesting view on the concepts of self and identity. Locke argues that our identity remains consistent from birth to death, fundamentally rooted in the continuity of our physical being. He postulates that this continuity allows us to perceive ourselves as the same person throughout our lives.

Locke emphasizes that, although our experiences may evolve, it is our "unchanging" physical existence that anchors our identity. This implies that as long as our physical body remains intact, we maintain a stable sense of self, regardless of the changes we undergo whether emotional, intellectual, or experiential. Locke argues the importance of the physical body in forming our identity, suggesting that the essence of "who we are," and "what we are," is linked to our physical existence, providing a concrete foundation for our sense of self over time. Locke would argue that because your physical being has not changed during the duration from point A

to point B, you possess the same identity. I aim to provide reason to Locke's faulty argument as an empiricist.

I seek to merge empirical methods with phenomenological analysis, inspired by the philosophies of David Hume. Hume's empiricist outlook emphasizes the importance of observation and experience when forming knowledge, which aligns perfectly with the objective of my study: to explore identity and self within automobility. By emphasizing real-life experiences, I aim to have an understanding of how individuals comprehend their journeys and the meanings derived from them.

Incorporating phenomenology allows for a deeper examination of lived experiences, it urges me to set aside any prejudged beliefs and solely focus on the participants' perspectives. This philosophical framework is important for conducting interviews, it creates a space for authentic dialogue to form.

This empiricist and phenomenological approach will help identify patterns and themes within the interviews, leading to a narrative that reflects the complexities of human experiences in relation to the automobile.

Summary

This research paper aims to explore the relationships between identity, self, and automobility through a series of interviews with students from various Texas universities, including the University of Texas at Austin, Southwestern University, Rice University, the University of Houston, and Texas A&M University. Focusing on students who have brought their vehicles to campus, I will gather detailed narratives about their long-distance driving experiences.

Using an empirical and phenomenological framework, I will encourage participants to share how changing scenery, music, and conversations during their travels impact their thoughts and emotions. This approach aims to illuminate the nuances of their lived experiences, tying them to broader philosophical themes, particularly those articulated by Hume and Locke. While Hume emphasizes the role of observation in knowledge formation, Locke provides insight into the continuity of identity through our physical existence. By integrating these perspectives, I hope to reveal how mobility shapes self-perception and contributes to our understanding of identity.

Results

This research paper aims to explore the relationships between identity, self, and automobility through a series of interviews with students from various Texas universities. A car is a confined space that moves through space and time. It is a concept that is fascinating when viewed through a philosophical lens.

I will present the stories of a few interviewees and analyze the metaphysical changes in identity and self, and how their experiences on the road shaped their perspectives. Then, I will compare the stories, identifying their similarities in philosophical themes.

Student 3.

This student recounted the story of when they were going to see their father in the penitentiary, located in Del Rio, Texas. At the time the student was about eight or nine years old and their father had just gotten sentenced.

The student recounts feeling nervous and feeling unsure, leaving San Antonio, and these feelings only progressed as they got out of the big city and into the countryside. He expressed that it was the unfamiliar places, his mother's country music that kept reminding him of these

feelings. But finally as they approached closer to this destination, this feeling of acceptance began to wash over the student. He said that it felt natural and almost homely. He spent a couple of hours with his father before having to drive back to San Antonio. Within the confined space of his car, looking out into the countryside of North Central Texas he felt a wide range of emotions. Sadness, comfort, and guilt in the beginning of the trip back home. Slowly faded back to acceptance as he neared closer to the big city of San Antonio.

Over the progression of this trip, he noted that the music had changed a lot, but went back and forth from country to Drake. However, on the drive back, in the beginning, the music played as it did on the drive there, but eventually, after driving for such a long duration, the radio switched off and in the blackness of the night they returned to San Antonio.

The student's story about visiting his father in Del Rio provides insights into Humean concepts of identity and self. Hume says that the self is not a fixed entity but rather a collection of perceptions and experiences that are constantly changing. This notion is presented in the student's evolving feelings throughout the road trip. I will discuss more about this intersection within the discussion portion of this paper.

Student 5.

The student recalls when his parents visited him from Taiwan for a road trip through Texas. They began their journey in Houston, heading to San Antonio amidst heavy rain. His parents compared the downpour to typhoons back home, finding Texas's erratic weather puzzling. Normally, he would blast EDM and drive fast, but out of respect for his parents he drove more cautiously and kept the music low.

From San Antonio to Austin, the weather improved, and instead of playing music they focused on planning their Austin activities. His parents had no agenda but enjoyed a stop at Buc-ee's, where they bought a beaver plushie that accompanied them for the rest of the trip.

Next, they traveled from Austin to Dallas, pausing at an outlet mall for his mother's delight-fueled shopping spree. They also spent some time in Fort Worth before continuing to Dallas late at night. As his mother grew tired, he noticed conversations with his dad shifted to comparing life in America and Taiwan.

The student mentioned that in larger cities, his father became very anxious around heavy traffic, often directing how he should drive.

Finally, on the trip from Dallas to Galveston, his father, excited from travel guides, had meticulously planned their route. However, when the student deviated from it, his father's anxiety resurfaced. Upon arriving, the father was disappointed to find Galveston didn't match the guide's allure. On the return to Houston, his annoyance faded into silence, hinting at acceptance.

. The trip serves as a backdrop for the student's reflections on his identity, as he navigates familial expectations and cultural differences. His shifting roles—as a son, a driver, and a cultural mediator—beautifully illustrates the fluidity of self.

A common theme to be noticed among the stories is that the longer the duration of the trip, the more they become aware of this “changing identity”. Tiredness mixed with the quiet of the night or the quiet of the early morning essentially provokes this change in identity. Students are noticing how conversations between groups in the cars might switch from this loud gossip to philosophical discussions or deep conversations. If the student is driving in solitude, by himself, I have heard common remarks about conversing with oneself along the journey. This often leads

to a change in music genre from songs, like pop or rap to classical soft piano music. Oftentimes students may even turn off the radio and embrace the quiet of their surroundings.

When I asked the students if they noticed these shifts in self and identity presented during long drives, at first, around 40% of the students said no and were confused about what exactly I meant. I formulated my question by first providing different descriptions of “possible identity changes” they could’ve been experiencing. After this, the initial 40% dropped to 5%. This can likely be credited to the fact that these students notice a change in mood but do not immediately correlate these changes with the philosophical fluidity of identity and self.

Discussion

In the stories shared by students, like the one who visited his father in Del Rio, the evolving emotional landscape highlights Hume's idea of identity as fluid. At first, the student was met with a feeling of anxiety and uncertainty, the student's feelings change in response to the journey's context—both the changing scenery and the music. This is symbolic of Hume's idea that identity is shaped by immediate perceptions and sensations. The journey itself acts as an inspiration for reflection, prompting a change from discomfort to acceptance, thus showcasing the fluidity of identity.

The second student's narrative further reinforces this notion. His shift from a carefree driving style to a more cautious demeanor out of respect for his parents highlights how interactions shape identity. The father's anxiety and expectations serve to complicate the student's self-perception, as he navigates the complexities of familial relationships while reconciling his identity as both a son and an autonomous driver. This illustrates Hume's view that self-awareness arises from the relationships of emotions and perceptions within social contexts,

further supporting the argument that identity is a product of dynamic interactions rather than fixed.

However, while the overall theme aligns with Humean fluidity, there are elements in the students' narratives that suggest a more stable identity. For instance, the students' persistent roles in their family dynamics. One such example being the student who drives his parents and the feeling of duty to uphold familial expectations. This indicates a continuity in identity despite the shifts experienced during the journey. This continuity could be interpreted as an anchor for their self-perception, suggesting that while moments of identity may be fluid, there exists a core that remains relatively stable.

Moreover, the initial confusion among students about the concept of identity change highlights a common assumption: that the self is more stable than Hume suggests. This points to a societal tendency to view identity as a consistent narrative, despite the multitude of influences that shape it. As many students initially expressed difficulty recognizing the philosophical implications of their experiences, it suggests that while fluidity may characterize their emotional journeys, their understanding of self remains rooted in more traditional notions of identity.

The cultural backgrounds of the students is a factor that significantly influences their perceptions of identity during automobility. For instance, the Taiwanese student's experience reflects a complex relationship between familial expectations and cultural norms. His approach to driving, characterized by caution and consideration for his parents, contrasts with his typical behavior, underscoring Hume's view of identity as fluid and context-dependent. This illustrates how cultural factors can shape not only interactions but also self-perception, adding depth to the analysis of identity in the context of automobility.

By grounding my research in Humean philosophy, I emphasize the importance of lived experiences and perceptions, which is relevant when exploring concepts of identity and self in the context of automobility. Hume's skepticism about the notion of a fixed identity aligns well with my aim to investigate how individuals experience their identities during travel. I recognize that identity is not static; rather, it is shaped through experiences, perceptions, and contexts. This fluidity in identity challenges the more rigid framework proposed by Locke and other philosophers, offering a perspective on the continuous relationship between self and environment.

Incorporating phenomenology into my methodology allowed my study to center the subjective experiences of participants. This approach allowed me to delve into how individuals comprehend their journeys. This provided insight into the emotional feelings and cognitive thoughts presented while driving.

The differences between Hume's and Locke's perspectives on identity highlight interesting viewpoints that serve to deepen the research presented. While both sides are understandable and valid, the idea that identity accounts for the impact of experiences, emotions, and context is far more powerful in the context of automobility. The conducted interviews revealed how participants navigate their sense of self in relation to the automobile, and how their identities shift during travel. The methodology effectively combined empirical methods with phenomenological insights, which offered a promising structure for exploring identity in the context of automobility. By engaging with the philosophical traditions of Hume and Locke, I aim to contribute meaningfully to discussions about self, experience, and the significance of mobility in shaping identity.

Conclusion

This paper presents the exploration of identity and self through the lens of automobility, drawing on the philosophical insights of David Hume .By employing empirical and phenomenological methods, I highlight how the personal narratives of university students reveal the fluid nature of identity shaped by experiences during travel. The stories shared by participants show that the journey itself—marked by changing scenery, music, and conversations—serves as a catalyst for introspection and emotional shifts, underscoring Hume's argument that the self is a dynamic bundle of perceptions rather than a fixed essence.

References

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