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No Self: Consciousness, Life, and Value

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Honors Thesis

Philosophy Department

April 24, 2024

Advisor: Professor Geoffrey Gorham

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Acknowledgement

‘Who am I’ is the first question I encountered in my journey of studying philosophy. Looking back to all the philosophical works I have done in the last four years, most were on personal identity. In sophomore year, one conversation with Professor Gorham inspired me to do further research in no self. From that point, I considered the metaphysics of identity as one of my biggest philosophical interests and decided to do this honors thesis. I believe this thesis is both the conclusion of my undergraduate study and the starting point of my further career as a scholar in philosophy.

I would like to acknowledge all the support I have received in the past four years. I sincerely appreciate everything that I got from our lovely philosophy department. Thanks to Professor Gorham, Professor Asarnow, Professor Ihlan, Professor Kim, Professor Patwardhan, and Professor Folina for their teaching and support over the last four years. Special thanks to my honors thesis advisor, Professor Gorham, for constant encouragement and advice throughout all my years in Macalester. Thanks to Professor Ihlan’s love, care, and support throughout the last two years. Also, thanks to the professors who supported me in this thesis, who are outside of the philosophy department. Thanks to Professor von Geldern, Professor Moore, and Professor Latham’s support and inspirations.

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Introduction

The problem of personal identity has been an ongoing debate in the history of philosophy for thousands of years. In traditional philosophical definitions, for something to have identity, it needs to remain unchanging for the whole time of its existence. In this paper, I refer to these kinds of identities as the 'metaphysical self.' In the first chapter of the thesis, I adopt the traditional definition of personal identity. I review three famous philosophers from history, Descartes, Locke, and Hume, and how they argue about the self. As they all build upon each other, I want to use contemporary arguments in the philosophy of mind to support Hume's argument for no-self. My main goal is to examine that there is no such thing that can exist unchanged for a man from birth to death. In this chapter, I want to examine how Descartes and Locke failed to define personal identity properly. I will also introduce Hume's argument for no-self and how two concepts from contemporary research will support that argument in the philosophy of mind. At the end of the chapter, I want to argue that there's no such thing as the 'metaphysical self.' The definition of unchanged identity cannot work out metaphysically, and we should find different definitions of personal identity.

In the second chapter, instead of following the traditional definition of personal identity, I want to explore another way to define personal identity, a social and conventional way. I want to strike the whole definition from early modern philosophers, who claimed that personal identity must remain unchanged from birth to death. As I prove that there's no such thing as continuous consciousness, I explore a loose definition of identity. Starting with reflecting on my own identity, I find that there's no possibility to separate my identity from society to define who I am. My goal is to prove three things in this chapter:

1. Identities can change frequently, and different identities can co-exist at the same time.

2. Society plays a major role in building one's identity, as society is the cause of anyone's identity. Our identities start with a relationship and historical background, and because society is the cause of everyone's identities, our identities are shaped by both people around us, who were shaped by the society at the time, and by the current societies we live in.
3. Society also intentionally constructs personal identities to achieve social control. Society sets up values for people, so people can behave in certain ways.

In the end of this chapter, I want to show that to determine who we are, there is no way to escape the societal influences. We are products of society.

In the third chapter, I will use examples to illustrate my argument in the previous chapter. I will focus on how societies determine our social roles, values, and our fundamental thoughts about ourselves. In this chapter, I will examine three political ideologies: Confucianism, Communism, and Neoliberalism. In addition, I will also examine gender-construction theories, in which feminist philosophers believe gender is constructed by society as they argue that gender, instead of existing as a biological identity, is the result of social construction. People act according to their gender given the expectations of society. With these examples, I will support the idea that societies play a huge role in our identities. Societies have the large determination of who we are, and they use many constructed opinions to make us believe that we are free of identities. Still, we are under societal control.

In the fourth chapter, I will address potential objections for my view. These objections will be in each chapter, and I will address three important issues: emotions, random events, and autonomy. I will start with how emotions are a complicated idea and are not directly linked with perceptions. Random events also seem able to change people's identities completely, and there's

no social construction that serves as the necessary cause for these random events. Explaining my objection, I provided examples, such as how illness or sudden historical events can completely change people's lives. An unexpected exposure to one event can also raise people's interest in something they have never considered before, and it may change their identity completely. Random exposure or decisions can also lead to personal autonomy in deciding their social roles. However, I still believe there are necessary historical causes for anything related to identities. I think completely random events can change how people view themselves, but they cannot change their identities completely. In the end, by replying to my objections, I will show that even though random events can affect the efficient cause of identity, they cannot determine who we are. Social construction still plays a significant role in identities.

Chapter 1: No Self in Metaphysics: Non-Successive Consciousness

Many famous philosophers have tried to solve the puzzle of the self, which is how I can be the same person over time and despite changes in me. Recently, psychologists and neuroscientists have also explained the self. In this section, I want to address the puzzle of the self by arguing through philosophical approaches and using psychological supporting evidence. My main goal is to argue that no self exists as a coherent entity because consciousness, which makes up the self, exists as separated pieces, and these pieces are not in succession bond with each other. I need to clarify the terms here and set up assumptions to argue that. In the paper, I will explain the historical assumption that if there's a self, it must need to be made by consciousness. Further, I will argue why consciousness, which exists in pieces, can't make the self become a coherent entity. I will use some evidence from psychology and philosophy of mind to show that our thoughts and memories do not work in successive orders. They are separated pieces. Lastly, I will argue that these memory pieces do not tie together with a casual relationship and can't be coherent.

I start with some famous arguments from known philosophers. I would like to start with rebutting Descartes's main argument on the self: "I think therefore I exists." (Descartes)¹ Descartes believes that the existence of the self is based on the internal thoughts. He thinks we clearly and distinctly intuit the self. He argues that people have continuous thoughts at all times, and these continuous thoughts make who we are, as the self. Locke, on the basis of Descartes, argues that we have continuous consciousness. He argues that even though we may forget things, as long as consciousness exists in a continuous order, we have the self. Both of them are focused on the idea of continuity. In contrast with Descartes and Locke, Hume argues that the continuity

¹ Descartes, Meditation II.

of consciousness cannot make the identity. In this paper, I will focus on the debate of continuity in consciousness and thoughts, and further build on Hume's arguments on no self.

Many psychological research studies and philosophy of mind researchers prove that our memories are not continuous in the order of time. I will introduce two psychological arguments in this paper: the Specious Present and the Attitude-Situation tie for memories. First, I will talk about how our thoughts can exist in succession quickly, which is the specious present. However, the specious presents do not exist in succession at all times, which is an excellent rebuttal to Descartes's argument of continuous thinking. I would also like to introduce Tim Crane's arguments on the mechanical mind in memories. Tim Crane describes the memories as filled with Attitude-Situation ties. He explains that memories contain two parts: situations and attitudes. Tim Crane's argument changes Locke's general assumption of memories, which argues that consciousness is continuous with the succession of events. Rather, our thoughts are made by numerous pieces of attitude-situation ties. I also want to argue that no strong relationship can tie up all memory pieces.

Therefore, I doubt whether self exists as a separated, distinctive entity or not. I agree with Hume, that the self must exist as a permanent being. I believe that internal experience can't exist as a succession. According to all the historical arguments, if the internal experience, which contains the idea of the self, can't exist as a succession, then we can't have a coherent identity. In this paper, I will rebuild Hume's arguments with more proof from the philosophy of mind arguments. To reach my conclusion of non-self, here are what I want to prove in this section:

1. Succession makes coherent entities.
2. Consciousness exists as thoughts and memory.
3. Both thoughts and memory existed as pieces.

4. There's no relationship between pieces in thoughts and pieces in memory,
5. If there's no relationship, the separated thoughts and memory can't exist as a succession.
6. Thoughts and memories contain the idea of the self.

Conclusion: Therefore, self can't exist as a succession, and further an entity.

1.1 Historical arguments

Descartes believes that our soul, which is also the permanent self, forms thoughts. He believes the relationship between the existence of the self and having thoughts are symmetry: having thoughts proves that we have a self, and because we have the self (soul), we can have thoughts. Descartes argues that:

“I am simply a thing that thinks - a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason, these being words whose meaning I have only just come to know.” (7)

As Descartes concludes that he is a thinking thing, he argues that the self is solely from his thoughts. He believes that the self is continuous and permanent because thoughts are continuous and can't be interrupted.

“Thinking? At last I have discovered it – thought! This is the one thing that can't be separated from me. I am, I exist – that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking.” (7) ²

Descartes does not try to argue that the permanent self is like the light switch, which can be opened and closed freely. He believes that the people always think, and the self would always be there. Therefore, in his arguments, people think all the time, even in their sleep. Continuous thoughts is the key in Descartes's argument of the self.

² Descartes, Meditation II.

On the ground of Descartes, Locke argues that the self exists with the succession of consciousness. Locke believes that the continued existence of one's consciousness makes the same person. He argues that:

“We must consider what PERSON stands for: - which, I think, is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in a different times and places; which it does only by the consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it.” (Locke)³

As Locke believes that the self has immaterial or material substances, he believes that people do not think at all time as Descartes argued. The continuous succession of consciousness doesn't mean that people can remember everything from birth to death. Rather, even this person may not remember every single moment, but if the person's consciousness exists continuously, that is said, if they can remember things and forget things in a succession, this person is the same person. For example, even though I can't remember what happened when I was five, if I can remember it when I was six, and have memories in that succession, then I have the same identity. Both Locke and Descartes all believe the continuity of our internal consciousness is the key to make the self as a permanent entity.

Hume doubts that it is not possible to have individual perceptions tied together as an entity. He argues that to be the same identity, it needs to exist as a single, unchangeable perception along with the existence of time. He claims that:

“We have a distinct idea of an object, that remains invariable and uninterrupted through a supposed variation of time; and this idea we call that of identity or sameness.” (Hume, 187).⁴

³Locke, *Of Identity and Diversity*, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.

⁴Hume, *Of Personal Identity*, A Treatise of Human Nature.

Therefore, to be the same identity, the self needs to be the ‘invariable’ and ‘uninterrupted’ throughout a long period of time. Hume believes that the idea of self cannot be invariable or uninterrupted. He believes that the idea of self is in each single perception, and perceptions are changing all the time. He claims that:

“If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, through the whole course of our lives; since self is supposed to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable.” (Hume, 186).⁵

Hume believes that every perception changes at every moment. There’s no long lasting perception existing as a permanent identity, but the perception changes as time passes. Our knowledge of self is from our impressions. In Locke’s arguments, perceptions are closely tied up in a succession, and that makes consciousness. However, Hume doesn’t believe that a succession of perceptions can be identity. Hume agrees with Locke that perceptions exist in succession with the order of time, but he doesn’t believe the succession of perception can make the identity of the self. Hume believes that identity must be unchangeable. If we have a perception of self that is always there and remains unchanged, then that perception can be the self. However, we don’t have any perceptions that remain changed.

1.2 The Specious Present

Do our thoughts exist as succession? Temporarily, yes. In William James’s *Principles of Psychology*, he first introduces the idea of the specious present. The doctrine of the specious present argues that:

⁵Hume, *Of Personal Identity*, A Treatise of Human Nature.

“The specious present doctrine, as it is often referred to, is the view that we experience the present moment as nonpunctate, as having some short but nonzero duration.”(Andersen, 1) ⁶

The specious present points out that people experience some length of time while they experience the ‘present’. When they believe they are doing something now, it must take some length of time because any motion requires time. To do anything, it must take a nonzero duration of time. As people call it now, this duration is hard to feel directly. When they think about now, because the brain activity is also in motion, it experiences a nonzero duration of time. In Andersen’s paper, she argues that:

“Our maximum distinct *intuition* of duration hardly covers more than a dozen seconds (while our maximum vague intuition is probably not more than a minute or so.” (James) ⁷

The changing motions are hard to be perceived in every detail in the shortest amount of time. While motion and thinking take some physical duration of time, it is very hard to be noticed by us. In the specious presents, our thoughts are in successions because the motion is continuous. However, the specious presents only lasts for a very short amount of time, for only 12 secs (James).

⁶ Andersen, *The Development of the ‘Specious Present’ and James’ Views on Temporal Experience*.

⁷ James, William. *The Principles of Psychology*.

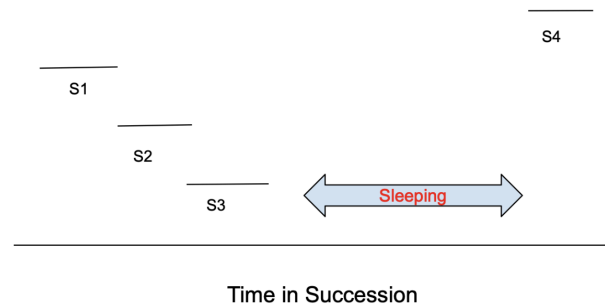


Diagram 1

Does a specious present always exist and never pause? I believe it is not like that. Unlike Descartes's argument that people's thoughts are always continuous and never paused, the specious presents require more specific motions. Under the specious present, I believe that it is impossible to exist while sleeping. In Diagram 1, I use S1, S2 and S3 to represent each duration of the specious present. They may exist continuously when we are awake and fully conscious, but it is not what happens while we are asleep. When people are asleep, they hardly have the idea of time. Instead, people either can't feel the time at all and wake up in the morning, or people have dreams and have vague understanding of the time. As the specious presents require us to have clear ideas of 'now', in sleeping, it is impossible for us to have this idea. Therefore, the succession of the specious presents breaks down everyday when we sleep. Also, when we awake, we start a new chain of the specious presents, which is S2 in Diagram 1. Even though we have a lot of specious presents everyday, they are not in a coherent tie that never breaks down. Whatever we experienced in the last cycle become memories, which I will explain further. This is different from Descartes's argument of continuous thinking, and provides us with more reliable psychological evidence of how thinking truly works.

I want to clarify between my arguments on thoughts and memories in this paper. Hume doesn't distinguish between thoughts and memories. Instead, he calls them all as 'perceptions'. I would like to fix it in this paper. Thoughts and memories are two different parts of containing the idea of the self. Thoughts, as I talked about the specious present, are ideas that are happening with the timeframe of 'now'. Even if it takes a relatively short duration of time, it still goes on momentarily and falls into the idea of now at all time. Thoughts in my argument are more similar to Descartes's continuous thinking, but it is more easy to be paused and it comes in and goes away and discontinues at all times. Therefore, although the specious present itself exists in a short succession, it can't cohesively tie together as what Descartes describes. Memories, instead, are thoughts that are restored in mind. Even if we experience lots of the specious presents and countless events, we may easily forget about them. Unlike the specious present, which we remember every detail of in a short amount of time, we easily forget about things and we pick favorites for what to put in our memories. In the next section, I will argue that memories are not in succession as well, and they exist as individual pieces.

1.3 Memory as Pieces

Modern psychological research and philosophy of mind arguments helps to even further advance on Hume's arguments, that our perceptions and memories exist as individual pieces. In Tim Crane's *The Mechanical Mind*, he argues that our mental representation in memories is made by attitude and situation. The relationship between attitude and situation is symmetry: when we have attitudes in mind, they tie with certain situations; similarly, situations in mind tie with certain attitudes. Crane claims that:

“Every hope, belief or desire is directed at something. If you hope, you must hope for something; if you believe, you must believe something; if you desire, you must desire something.” (Crane, 18)⁸

The mental states are made by situations and their attitudes. In Crane’s arguments, thoughts (mental representation) are all ties of attitude and situation. He also argues that the same situation can tie with different attitudes, and the same attitude can tie with different situations. He claims:

“Where ‘A’ stands for the person who is in the mental state, ‘ ψ ’ stands for the attitude (the Greek letter psi - for psychological’) and ‘S’ stands for situation represented, the best description will be of the following form:

A ψ s that S” (Crane, 18)⁹

For thoughts in the form of A ψ s that S, ψ s, the psychological attitude, plays a huge role in every thought. Without psychological attitudes, there’s no start of any thoughts. For example, even when people make a claim for the absolute truth, $1+1=2$, there’s an attitude of believing imply in the claim $1+1=2$. We can’t make the claim of $1+1=2$ without believing this is true. In this case, believing is the attitude.

I believe this attitude-situation tie makes sense in memories, and it further solves a lot of puzzles. One puzzle is that we seem to remember things with a certain attitude. For example, being important can be an attitude. When we assign some situation with a label of being important, we are more likely to remember. These attitudes and labels are not constrained by the succession of time. Rather, it is constructed by us. Our perceptions do not exist as a chain, but rather people will re-process perceptions and conceptualize them. When people see something,

⁸ Crane, *Mental Representation*, The Mechanical Mind: A Philosophical Introduction to Minds, Machines, and Mental Representation

⁹ Crane, *Mental Representation*, The Mechanical Mind: A Philosophical Introduction to Minds, Machines, and Mental Representation

their perception will process it and combine the image with their thoughts. We put some important details into this picture, and we assign an attitude for it. When people eat something, they will remember it and conceptualize it as 'delicious' or 'terrible.' It is hard for people to remember specific perceptions in the order of time, but people will process them into concepts and remember them. Our memory, or consciousness, is combined by concepts from perception and memory of events that combine multiple concepts. Therefore, the idea of self is based on two sources: concepts in our memory and events in our memory, and both of these two sources are highly related to perception.

We naturally assign some attitudes to our perception, and we choose to remember it or not. We choose from our perceptions when conceptualizing perceptions into memory. Looking back to our memories, it hardly exists in the order of time. Instead, we remember 'important things.' For example, I cannot easily recall what I ate three days ago for lunch, but I can definitely recall an event that made me mad two months ago. Psychologists found out that people's memory is not designed to remember perception with all the details. Instead, we will choose what is in our memory, which is sometimes guided by emotions.¹⁰ Therefore, perceptions are chosen to be in our memory by us. When we conceptualize things into attitudes and situations, we choose perceptions that fit with the attitude. For example, if we remember something that made us mad, we probably ignore unimportant details such as what we wore at that moment. Conceptualizing something important in memory is choosing perceptions that can be determined as important in our standard. We may also make up some memories to fit the attitude.

My personal experiences make me further understand the attitude-situation tie. For me, I couldn't remember everything before I was 12. I barely remembered some names of my lower

¹⁰ Heshmat, Shahram. "Why Do We Remember Certain Things, but Forget Others?"

school mates, but these names didn't pop up in my head. One day, my lower school mates contacted me and added me to a group chat. Then, I saw a lot of familiar names and started to chat with a good friend in lower school. I remembered her name but had not contacted her for ten years before this interaction. When I began to chat with her, I suddenly remembered a situation in my mind. I remembered that we both held hands and ran into the school. I certainly have no idea whether this happened, but this is a situation in my memory that I searched for, and I found this piece. This situation is tied to some attitudes, and one of these attitudes is loving. This experience makes me wonder whether my memory is in a succession. I cannot remember anything from lower school, but this piece popped into my head. This piece of memory is not in the succession of the order of time, but I conceptualized some points and put them as a piece there. If I recall the attitude or related information of this piece of memory, I will eventually remember what happened. Even if this piece can be false or never happened, I still conceptualize this attitude and have a related situation.

Therefore, what are in our memories? Numerous pieces of these attitudes and situation ties. These ties have some relationships with the succession of time but don't exist along with the succession of time. Back to my lower school classmate example, I remembered that it happened in my lower school time. However, I can't remember everything in the order of time from my lower school to today. Even though I remember something that happened before, these memory pieces do not equal my memory as a succession with time. I recalled pieces from a long time ago, and it is an attitude-situation tie in my memories. When we conceptualize our memories and choose to forget something, they no longer exist as in the order of time. Our memories don't come with a built-in 'time-stamp' like photos saved on a phone or computer. Instead of recalling

every detail of certain memories, we recall one piece of memory that exists as attitude and situation tie, and we choose this. They exist as pieces in our minds and fulfill our memories.

1.4 The Idea of the Self

The idea of the self is from both thoughts and memories. Back to Hume's arguments, he claims that the idea of the self is from our perceptions. He argues that without perceptions, we can never feel ourselves. He argues that:

“I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist.” (Hume, 186)¹¹

As Hume argues that our ideas of self come from perceptions, I believe that he doesn't clarify what is in our perceptions. In Hume's arguments, thoughts and memories are all called as perceptions, and they all contain the idea of the self. Hume also argues that every perception is equally the same. He claims that:

“I may venture to affirm the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.” (Hume, 186)¹²

Hume claims that perceptions are all separated and exist in a succession. He didn't distinguish between perceptions and points out that there might be differences between perceptions, and he argues these perceptions all have the idea of the self in it. However, even though I don't deny that both thoughts and memories have the idea of the self, I want to point out that they are different in their mechanism. Thoughts, as I argued with the specious present, are successive

¹¹Hume, *Of Personal Identity*, A Treatise of Human Nature.

¹²Hume, *Of Personal Identity*, A Treatise of Human Nature.

with the order of time and each lasts for short periods of time. During the specious present, we can feel that we are doing something now. The idea of the self ties with the motion that is ongoing, and the idea of the self is the one who controls the behavior. However, memories are different. Memories are attitude and situations that already exist for long periods of time. They are not successive with the order of time. Rather, we are more likely to recall a story. We may not be able to remember all the details of the event, but we remember some concepts and events that tie with some attitudes. The idea of the self here is not as strong as the specious present, but our memories are still related to the events in our memories with us, and we still have some idea of the self from our memories.

Then, what contains the idea of the self, thoughts, and memories are numerous, separated pieces of the specious present, and lots of individual attitudes and situations memories tie. They exist as separate pieces and have no relationship to each other. Let's start with the specious present. As the existence of multiple periods of the specious present may be similar to Descartes's continuous thinking, it is more complicated than it. In the second section, I mentioned that even though we have successive thoughts with the order of time in the specious present, there's no solid succession between multiple periods of the specious present. While we have continuous thinking and all of time exists in a short period of time for a couple of seconds, we can't conclude that we have thoughts every time, and they can be re-ordering. As Hume may argue, there are lots of the specious present exists as separated pieces for perception, the reality is we have no perception happening in sleeping. In a situation like that, the successive chain broke. Then, we no longer have all of our thoughts as individual, successive perceptions. Instead, we have some of them existing in succession, and this chain is easily broken, and it starts a new chain, and it goes on and repeats again and again. Memories are more separated than the chain

between periods of the specious presents. As I argued in section 3, what in our memories are numerous pieces of attitudes and situations. First, the pieces of my memories don't exist as a succession of time. Even though they vaguely exist with the sense of time, they do not exist with the order of the time. For example, I can remember my lower classmates' situations with no context, and I can forget everything before or after this situation. I still have the sense of time because I remember it happened in my childhood, but that doesn't mean I can remember everything from this situation to today in the order of time. It exists as a piece in my mind. Also, there's no relationship between pieces in my memories. My memories of my lower school classmates are not related to what I argued in my mock trial closing. They are all memories that exist as attitude-situation ties, but that doesn't mean that these ties have any relationship, whether it is a casual relationship or a relationship of resemblance.

Thoughts and memories, as two parts of our consciousness, can't exist as a succession. Hume argues that there are certain relationships between our perceptions, and it makes us imagine our identities together. He argues that there are certain relationships between our perceptions, and it makes all perceptions exist in a succession. Thus, we can use this succession to imagine the self. He argues that:

“The only question, therefore, which remains, is, by what relations this uninterrupted progress of our thought is produced, when we consider the successive existence of a mind or thinking person. And here it is evident we must confine ourselves to resemblance and causation, and must drop contiguity, which has little or no influence in the present case.”

(Hume, 192)¹³

Hume points out that our perceptions have relationships of resemblance and causation, and that's what makes them tie together through imagination. However, I doubt this is not true once we

¹³ Hume, *Of Personal Identity*, A Treatise of Human Nature.

start to distinguish between thoughts and memories. Thoughts and memories are two different mechanisms. We constantly have some duration of the specious presents, and it may pause when we are not conscious. At the same time, we constantly feel and conceptualize thoughts into memories. Once it is in the memory, it starts to become individual pieces and have no relationship with other pieces. Thus, even though thoughts may cause what is in our memories, there is no relationship between pieces of memories, nor any relationship between the mechanism of the specious present and the attitude-situation ties.

1.5 Conclusion

Let's review all of my premises:

1. Succession makes coherent entities.
2. Consciousness exists as thoughts and memory.
3. Both thoughts and memory existed as pieces.
4. There's no relationship between pieces in thoughts and pieces in memory,
5. If there's no relationship, the separated thoughts and memory can't exist as a succession.
6. Thoughts and memories contain the idea of the self.

Conclusion: Therefore, self can't exist as a succession, and further an entity.

First premise is the historical assumption of the self. I agree with Descartes and Locke that succession is the key to make things as coherent entities. However, Consciousness, as thoughts and memories, does not exist in succession. For thought, it exists as numerous pieces of the specious present. For memories, it exists as multiple attitude-situation ties. Thus, the second premise is proved as well. Because thoughts and memories are in different mechanisms, they can't have any relationship to tie them together. There's no relationship of casualty or resemblance, nor do they exist in the succession of time. Thus, premise 4 is proved as well. If

there's no relationship between thoughts and memories, they can't be considered together with the succession of time. They are not comparable, thus they can't exist as a succession together. Therefore, I argued about my premise 4. In section 4, I also argue that thoughts and memories are the source of the idea of the self. Following the arguments of Hume, that our perceptions are the sole source of the idea of the self, I further elaborate on that and argue that thoughts and memories are all perceptions. I believe premise 6 is established. Then I come to my conclusion, that there is no self that exists as a coherent entity because consciousness, which makes up the self, exists as separated pieces, and these pieces are not in succession that bond with each other. I follow Hume's no-self theory and his framework, but further points out that there's no succession at all and further to build that we are not able to have a metaphysical self.

Chapter 2: Redefining Personal Identity

Throughout Chapter 1, I argued the metaphysical definition of the self has problems. As early modern philosophers defined the self as continuous consciousness, I found that consciousness is discontinuous. Therefore, I want to explore other possible definitions of identity. If we don't metaphysically have the self, do we still have identities? Identities are often mentioned not only in philosophy but also in our daily life. As we talked about identities at all times, I would like to know what identity is, and whether we truly have it. In our conventional life, our identity makes us who we are. One of the most compelling examples is the self-introduction. When I do a self-introduction, I try to introduce my identities to others. Here is my typical self-introduction: My name is Alice Ma. I use she/her pronouns. I am originally from Xi'an, China, and I lived in Albany, New York for five years. I'm a philosophy major, with double majors in International Studies and a minor in Economics. When I reflected on my self-introduction, I shockingly found out that my self-introduction is full of social-related identities. Beyond that, I also have multiple aspects for my identity. These multiple identities added up together and made who I am. In reflecting what are in self-introductions, I found that there's no way to escape the social construction in talking about identities. It makes me wonder about two major problems: first, where are our identities from? Second, can our social identities make us who we are?

To have conventional identities, such as names or roles, there must be external beginning points. I wasn't born with a name. Instead, when I was born, my family members got together and decided my name. They must come to decide about my name, and they all agree that my name contains some good meanings in their mind. My name, as one of the most essential parts of my identity, is given by others, who are affected by their society at their time. This example can

apply to many things. It can apply to my occupation, living experiences, nationality, and more importantly, it can apply to how I view myself and determine my identity. In this chapter, I want to examine that relationship between me and other people around me determine the majority of my identities. These determinations are fundamentally from the societies. Other people are like me, whose identities are determined by their societies as well, and they used their identities to shape my identity. This makes the inescapably efficient cause of identity: we start with external beginning points that build on family relationships, which is birth; by growing up and living our lives, we keep engaging with other people and societal institutions; other people we met in lives also experienced the same influences. These interactions built the cause of our identities, and society always plays a huge role in behind.

The society also intentionally plays this role. In this chapter, I will introduce the concept of sociology: social control. I will introduce the idea that society serves as the cause of our identities and intentionally shapes people's identities. As a result, they want people to behave in ways they expect so that people can maintain the stability of society. Societies use their power to set up goals and values for people. Ultimately, they want people to serve their social roles without creating trouble. They intentionally shaped everyone's identity, and our identities are not only caused by society but also determined by society. By linking the societal forces to my earlier arguments in the efficient cause of identity, I found that there's no way out of social constructed identities.

Therefore, in this chapter, I want to prove three things. First, I want to redefine what identity is. I want to adopt a Marxist approach to identity and use it to reject the metaphysical definition of identity. From that, I argue that people can have multiple aspects to establish personal identity, and these different aspects make who we are. Then, I will introduce my

argument on the efficient cause of identity. I believe society is both the efficient cause and the final cause of people's identity. In the end, I will use the social control theory to show that society is not only the cause of everyone's identity but also the result of everyone's identity. We don't own personal identities. Still, we hold 'social collective identities.' Nietzsche and Marx have already proposed these arguments, and I want to prove them in my way, which is by using personal examples.

2.1 Identities beyond Metaphysical Self

Even if we don't have a metaphysical self, we still have identities to make who we are. Many continental philosophers have proposed their skepticism towards consciousness and identities. Both Nietzsche and Marx doubted that consciousness itself has a problem. They had similar arguments that human consciousness is nothing but historical and societal products. People don't own their consciousness, but rather, their consciousness came from other people's opinion and their experiences of activities. In this section, I will first introduce Nietzsche and Marx's critique of human consciousness. Then, I will introduce their description of consciousness, that consciousness is the product of human activity. Using these two arguments as my support and approach, I will discuss my definition of identities: identities are beyond the metaphysical self. They are historical and societal products, and multiple identities adding up together make us who we are.

In Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche doubts that our consciousness does not play a huge role in personal identity. Nietzsche doubts whether consciousness is the main cause of human activity, and further, can consciousness determine our life. He said:

“For we could think, feel, will, remember, and also ‘act’ in every sense of the term, and yet none of all this would have to ‘enter our consciousness.’” (Nietzsche, 212) ¹⁴

Nietzsche’s analysis is a shocking challenge to how Descartes, Locke, and Hume argue about consciousness and personal identity. In Chapter 1, I found that even Descartes, Locke, and Hume disagree on the relationship between consciousness and personal identity; but they never doubt that consciousness is the key element to determining who we are. However, Nietzsche argues that consciousness is not the main thing that determines who we are. Rather, it is just a tool to communicate. He said:

“My idea is clearly that consciousness actually belongs not to man’s existence as an individual but rather to the community and herd-aspects of his nature;” (Nietzsche, 213) ¹⁵

Consciousness is not that important to determine who I am. Rather, consciousness is only a tool to help man fit in the community. By being aware of their relationship in the community, people have their mental movements, thoughts and opinions. Nietzsche even argues that individuals do not own consciousness. He believes that if an individual does not have any socialization, they don't need consciousness. Therefore, consciousness is not a necessary part of determining an individual's identity but rather a helpful tool for individuals living in the community.

Marx also critiques that our consciousness cannot determine people’s personal identity. In *The German Ideology*, he raises his famous critique towards consciousness and believes that consciousness is a result of life activity. He said:

“Consciousness does not determine life, but life determines consciousness.”(Marx, 112) ¹⁶

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian del Caro, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001.

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx Selected Writing.

In his argument, Marx provides a new way to look at personal identity, which is life and consciousness. Descartes, Locke, and Hume all believe that consciousness determines personal identity, in which consciousness is the cause and personal identity is the result; Marx argues that life is the cause of consciousness, in which life is the cause, and consciousness is the result. He argues:

“The production of ideas, of conception, of consciousness is directly interwoven with the material activity and the material relationships of men; it is the language of actual life.

Conceiving, thinking and the intellectual relationships of men appear here as the direct result of their material behavior.” (Marx, 111) ¹⁷

For Marx, he points out a critical problem of consciousness, that consciousness is not a priori but rather the result of material life. He does not try to argue what kind of consciousness makes personal identity. He believes only material life can determine who a person is, and consciousness is just a product of material life.

I think both Nietzsche's and Marx's concerns on consciousness make sense. For my concern about the non-successive consciousness, I argue that if we use the definition of personal identity from early modern philosophers, then I can find their definition failed, and we should adopt Hume's arguments in no-self. However, if we don't have a metaphysical self, what makes us live and have a consistent existence as beings? Nietzsche and Marx showed me another way: I can study how people's material lives work instead of bothering with consciousness. From their material life, they also have who they are. They have careers, wills, activities, and families. Marx said:

¹⁷ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*.

“Consciousness can never be anything else except conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process.” (Marx, 111) ¹⁸

From here, I would like to focus my attention on conventional identities. If consciousness is not the cause of everything, I believe that consistent consciousness cannot make us who we are. If ideas are the product of actual life, then we don't have the soul to lead us to finish everything we did. I want to drop the definition that unchanged consciousness makes who we are and rather study what makes me have my self-introduction. I believe that my identity is beyond the metaphysical self. What makes my life is from my activities.

2.2 Efficient Cause of Identity

Life makes us who we are, but where did my life come from? I recall the start of my life and find that my life starts with my relationship with my family. I asked my mom the first phrase I said when I was a kid, and my mom proudly replied: “The first word you said is 妈妈 (mom in Chinese).” It is very common for kids to learn how to call family members when they start to learn a language. I never thought this was an interesting case, but when I collected thoughts for this thesis and tried to figure out who I am, my initial reaction was that my life comes from my family. This means not only my family gives me my biological existence but also my identity, which includes my name, language, basic knowledge, values, and activities, which all started with my family. More specifically, they are from my relationship with my family. My family provides a necessary cause for my identity, and these causes are from their life experiences and identity.

Taking a look back at my self-introduction, I started with my name. I have two names: my Chinese name, 马嘉玮, and my English name, Alice. Both of them were given to me by my

¹⁸ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*.

grandfather. If there must be a symbol to identify me, my name is the easiest way. Names are also used in my legal documents, along with my face, to identify who I am. Undeniably, my name is one of the most important aspects of my identity. This important part of my identity came with my family relationship. My grandfather, the father of my biological father, took the important responsibility of giving me a name. My name is full of his knowledge. My name, the start of my identity, is a result of his life-long experiences and knowledge. To give my legal name, first, he must know how to read and write in Mandarin, and he should be relatively good at using Mandarin because my name contains wishful thinking. The middle character, 嘉 (Jia), means fine, and the last character, 玮 (Wei), means jade. In Chinese culture, people worship jade and consider fine jade as one of the most beautiful things in the world. This name is full of his and my family members' wishes for me when I have not yet owned my identity. Interestingly, he also gave me my English name when I was 13, right before I went to the U.S. for high school. As a Chinese man born in the 1940s, knowing English was an impressive skill. This also shows that his skill and knowledge are the starting point of my identity.

His experiences and knowledge were historical products. He was born in the 1940s and spent several years in a traditional Chinese school that taught Confucianism and classical Chinese. After 1949, when the People's Republic of China started its sovereignty, he started to have regular schools. He earned a degree in aeronautics and became a top scientist in China in the 1980s. He worked as a scientist for his whole life and made huge contributions to aeronautics in China. He was good at both classical Chinese and modern Mandarin. He was also fluent in Russian and knew some English. Influenced by Confucian traditions and Confucian practices, he passed many Confucian values to his descendants. All the things he gave me are made by his knowledge, experience, the historical pattern of his time, and the culture he lived in. For

example, he was very dedicated to practicing Confucianism in my family. He always called us Ma's family because only paternal relationships are considered family in Confucian traditions. My last name is also his last name, and for all the important festivals, such as the Lunar New Year, I was asked to spend time with Ma's family instead of my mom's. These cultural values are another part of my identity. Even in my self-introduction, I described them as I am from China, and I knew that one aspect of my identity was Confucian culture. He is the starting point of many aspects of my identity, and his identity was also built by the culture of his time. His identity cannot be separated from his unique time, and the culture and society in his time shaped who he was. His family and relationships built his identity as he built me. Culture, societies, and the relationships around us make us.

Thus, family relationships and social backgrounds are the efficient cause to build everyone's identity. People's identity starts with primary family relationships and the community they live in. When I was born, my family members already had some steady identities. Their identities collectively built my identity as the start of my identity. Each makes different contributions to my identity, and all of them make the base of my identity. For sure, their influences are not the only determinants of my identity, but their influences provide the necessary starts. Many aspects of my identity, such as language, culture, and values, start with my family. The exact process can apply to my family members. My family members as individuals all have their different identities, which start with their primary family members. Their family members and the society they live in are the necessary causes for who they are. They experienced the same exposure as I experienced, but their experiences were completely different. The existence of the family tree makes this necessary causal chain become an unbroken chain. Now, I want to take a step forward to look at, beyond primary family relationships, what

shaped my identities: I believe both the society I grew up in and the societies my primary family members lived in shaped my identity.

Society is the main cause behind the efficient cause of our identity. By society, I believe both the society I lived in and the societies people around me lived in all impacted who I am. That can be complicated coalitions with different impacts from different societies, but there's no way to escape from any society. For example, I lived in China for 14 years and then moved to the U.S. to study. I was exposed to both Chinese society and American society. I was born in 2001, so the societies I lived in faced technological changes. Now, I cannot live without using phones

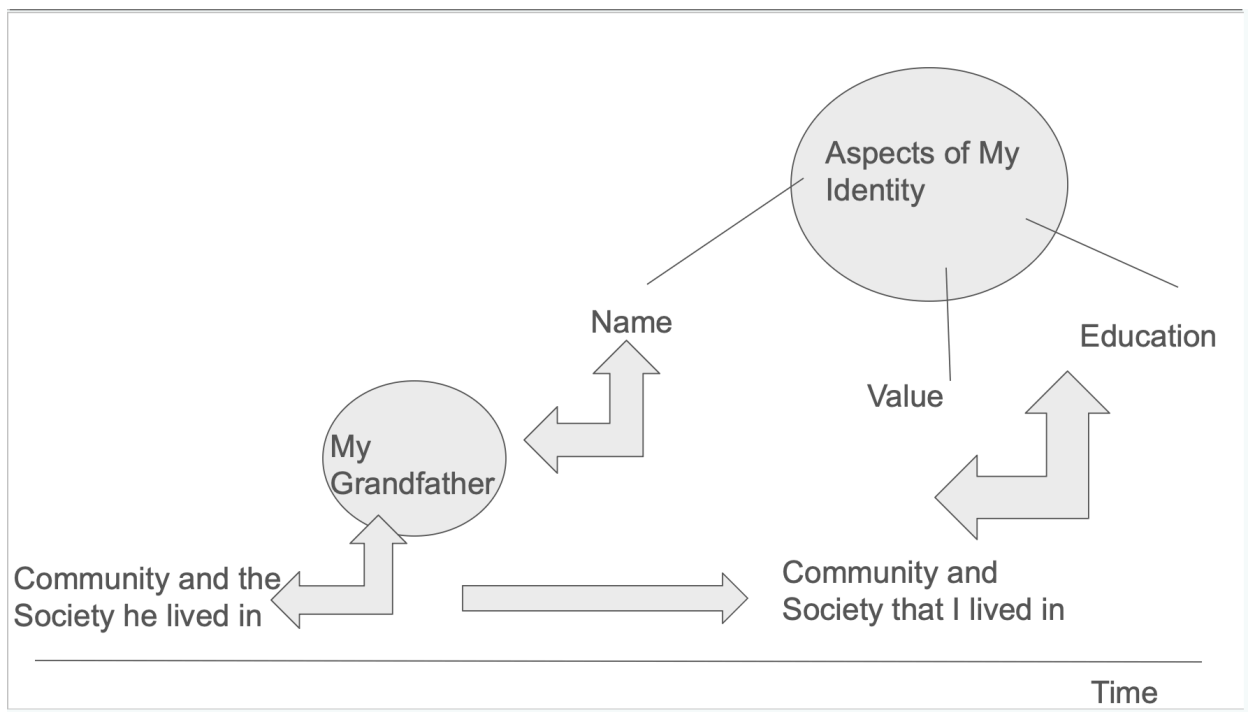


Diagram 2

and creating various online identities I share. Because I spent nine years in the United States, there is a part of my identity as an English speaker who understands some American cultures. This part of my identity is not caused by family but by my unique experiences. My family members also make different contributions to my identity. As I mentioned, my grandfather grew up in the early 40s and shared strong Confucian ideals with me. My father and mother, who also

have traditional Chinese values, grew up right after the reforming and opening to the world period, so compared to my grandparents, they shared more capitalist ideals with me. These values they carried are all from the historical time they lived in. Their societies teach them, took in these values as a part of their identities, and shared that with me. The societies they lived in caused their identity, and they caused my identity by using these values. The start of this causal chain is societies; clearly, there are many causal chains on me to create my identity collectively. This chain can also apply to them. Thus, different societies are the cause of everyone's identity.

2.3 Docile Identities

Society intentionally puts their expectations on people. Foucault called these expectations as disciplines. Foucault believes that these disciplines are from higher power, and it shapes who people are. In *Docile Bodies* from *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault talked about how the body can be the subject to be owned by others. He said:

“A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies.” (Foucault, 138)¹⁹

In this quote, Foucault believed the people or institutions who had more power owned the ability to control other people's bodies. He described it as political anatomy. Power can be constituted with lots of things – individuals, institutions, or society as a whole. Collectively, they put their expectations on people and hope they can become something to ‘operate.’ No matter whether soldiers, workers, students, or professors, all have some disciplines from a higher power.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*.

Because higher powers need them to operate in a certain way, they all have docile identities. As Foucault discussed docile bodies, I believe it can also apply to our identities. Having a docile body allows us to operate in certain disciplines to achieve the expectations of a higher power, and having docile identities allows us to value what powerful institutions value. In Chapter 4, I will talk about how autonomy may go against the discipline of identity. However, I still believe societal disciplines have substantial influences in constructing identity. Eventually, our identities will operate the same way as the power expected, and they never give up the chance to own us.

In sociology, there is one famous theory called social control. Stanley Cohen, sociologist and criminologist, defined it as:

“Social control, that is, the organized ways in which society responds to behavior and people it regards as deviant, problematic, worrying, threatening, troublesome or undesirable in some way or another.” (Cohen, 1) ²⁰

Society considers whether people’s behavior is problematic or not. If not, society ought to correct it and make it right. The definition of rightness serves society: if people don’t create trouble and affect the stability of society, their behaviors can be considered as right. Thus, society sets up its standard of rightness and puts those expectations on people, and it also expects people to follow the controls and the values. Regarding social control, Cohen said:

“The great problem of social order was how to achieve a degree of organization and regulation consistent with certain moral and political principles (for example, 'democracy' or 'civil rights') and without an excessive degree of purely coercive control.” (Cohen, 5) ²¹

The theory of social control points out that societies' goal is to achieve their moral and political principles. In the next chapter, you will see that different societies have different principles. Still,

²⁰ Stanley Cohen, *Visions of Social Control* .

²¹ Stanley Cohen, *Visions of Social Control* .

their goals are similar: setting up their principles, using control methods to make people follow them, and internalizing them as a part of people's identities. Social controls can be in many different forms. In James J. Chriss's *Social Control: An Introduction*, he pointed out that there are several areas that can be used to achieve social control. He said:

“These three basic forms, which will be expanded upon throughout the book, are legal, medical, and informal.” (Chriss, 3) ²²

Social control is everywhere. It should not be that people violate the law and get punished, but it is more in people's daily lives. Informal controls make people used to society's expectations, and when that becomes a part of their culture, their identities are also changed. Docile identities are waiting there and changed by these values. Because we need to be better in society, we must give up our identities to meet their expectations.

Thus, societies are not only necessary starting points of identities; they are also the determinants. It is the final cause of our identities. As society intentionally determines our identities based on their values, we all fall into the trap of social control. Societies exist as powerful beings and use that power to shape our identities in the way they like. Societies have their own goals: They have their own values and want everyone to live with these values. These values may vary depending on different societies, but the method is quite the same. How to behave, live, and consider ourselves are under social control. Thus, our consciousness and determination do not matter anymore because the people around us already shape us, the society we live in, and they live in. Our consciousness is a product of these determinations.

²² James J. Chriss, *Social Control: An Introduction*.

2.4 Many Different Constructions

As I identified out the efficient causes and final cause of our identities, there is still one question remaining: if society is the main determinant of people's identity, it is supposed to create similar people because many people live in the same society. However, each individual definitely has their unique identity. How so? I want to address here that even though societies are the main determinants of our identities, each individual has many different combinations of societies that shape them. With all the different influences each individual faced, they eventually became different persons and developed their unique identities. In my argument, people are different combinations of different efficient causes and societal determinants. Individuals have different identities because the combinations are too complicated and have many different determinants.

I want to start with my own identities as examples. Many contradictory aspects of identities co-existed with me because of the environments and the societal determinants I faced. First, as I mentioned in the previous sections, my family plays an important role in sharing their identities with me, such as the Confucian ideals of my grandparents. Along with that, I grew up in China in the 21st century. I received plenty of training in China and was exposed to the Chinese language and culture from both Confucianism and socialism of modern China. At this point, I have a relatively easy combination of my identities. After that, I came to the U.S. when I was 14. Suddenly, I faced a new society with new social values, controls, and expectations. These social determinants shaped my identities and combined them with those I already had. This process kept going, and my identity kept changing.

It sounds very odd when I say my identities keep changing with the society and people I've been exposed to. However, it makes sense in a historical materialistic way and works in the

conventional setting. When we celebrate birthdays, we say: “I grew up.” What do we mean? I believe we say we grew up; we don’t only talk about the numerical change with age. There are definitely things that have changed with our behaviors and mindsets, which are things in life. If I apply the Marxist definition of identity here, when things in life start to change, our consciousness and identities change along with it. As we grow up and start to have new ways to live because of societal construction, we are constantly changing the cause of our identities: life. For example, people sometimes describe others as more ‘mature.’ In my opinion, being mature is one aspect of fitting in the current society. We are not born with maturity. We are learning to live better in the current society, and society trained our docile identities to fit with their values and rules. When we become more mature, our identities are changing. We don’t have an unchanged identity because life is always a changing process, and we gain more and more aspects of our identity from societal determinants.

As I faced many different determinants and causes, I eventually became a complicated combination of many aspects of identity. Many aspects of identities added up together and made me. Many of these aspects can be very different and co-exist with contradictions. I can be a contradictory being and become a contradictory being. Everyone has unique experiences and exposures. Therefore, although they cannot control who they become, their unique experiences make them special individuals with different personal identities. In Chapter 4, I will talk about how randomness can play a big role in constructing identities and challenging the necessary casual relationships. Random exposure plays a huge role in becoming a contradictory being. In the next chapter, I will talk about four examples of societal constructing values on people. Three of them are three kinds of societies with different political ideals; the last example is

gender-construction. These examples will help me further illustrate how society is the cause and the determinant of people's identities.

Chapter 3: Examples on Social Construction on Identities

We are constructed by society, and no one can escape that. No matter what kind of society we live in, some ideologies from society indeed construct us, and that shapes our identity. For example, even if we consider ourselves entirely self-motivated and free, we worry about how our choices and behaviors may affect others. We may be afraid that our behavior will affect others' well-being, and that is taught by society. As the last chapter described, the sources of these ideas are from social control. Considering others' well-being is a moral rule constructed by society and directly affects our actions. We will feel bad if we disobey that, and we will try to fit ourselves into this moral rule. And there are millions of examples like it. We experience a lot of rules, standards, ideologies, and systems every day. Our perceptions and thoughts are directly related to it and shape our behaviors. Therefore, we are constructed.

In this section, we will see three prominent kinds of society, and I will argue that all of them are constructing people's identity, and create values for them to pursue and directly affect their lives. This chapter examines from historical ideals to modern society rules. Starting with Confucianism, it is the classical idea to argue that people should have specific social roles, and they should follow their social roles to make decisions. Also, Confucianism requires specific virtues as values for people to obey. In a communitarian view, 'people' are created by the community. Their ideologies, values, social roles, are all given by the community and serve for community ends. When people are born into some kind of relationship, their identities are built with the relationship and social roles of them. People can't exist separately, but the relationships make their identities. In a liberal society, although it claims that people can have the perfect freedom, people are also constructed by certain social roles and the values shared in liberal society. When people are ever pursuing a maximum utility, their life choices are limited.

Therefore, I found out that if a person ever lives in some kind of community and is affected by some values, their identities are constructed by social roles, values, and beliefs. Then, the so-called unique identities are just combinations of different constructions.

3.1 Confucianism and Social Roles

Confucianism is an ideology that focuses on building a structural society, and a big part of it is to assign everyone a social role. In a Confucian tradition society, everyone has an assigned identity, and they need to behave according to their social roles. A confucian society asked people to follow five virtues: benevolence or ren (仁), righteousness or yi (义), propriety or li (礼), wisdom or zhi (智) and fidelity or xin (信).²³ People should act appropriately according to their social roles by acting with these five virtues. For example, in the Confucianism setting, sons should obey their father and act with their roles. That is called filial piety (孝). In the Analect, the master determines specifically about what a son should do. It claims that:

“Meng Yizi asked about filiality. The Master said, “Never disobey.”

Fan Chi was driving the Master’s chariot, and the Master told him, “Meng Yizi asked me about filiality and I replied, ‘Never disobey.’” Fan Chi said, “What did you mean?” The Master said, “While they are alive, serve them according to *li*. When they are dead, bury them according to *li*; sacrifice to them according to *li*.” (The Analects 2.5)²⁴

The father-son relationship is probably one of the most important relationships in the Confucian tradition. Every child was born into the role of the ‘son’ (let’s assume that works for all genders in the Confucian tradition). Eventually, they will grow up to become elders. Therefore, in their lifetime, the first two identities people face are being young, and eventually becoming elders.

²³ Wang and Madson, *Philosophical underpinnings of the Chinese legal system*

²⁴ The Analect.

Their behaviors are based on the *Li* of their roles, and in the argument of the Analact, that means to obey.

The political system of Confucianism also puts everyone into specific roles and requires people to do the right things. People need to learn how to serve their roles, and they should do moral cultivation to serve their roles better. If you are a King, you should be benevolent to be a good king, and if you are a farmer, you should be hard-working so that you can serve your family and society. In Xunzi's work, he explicitly argued how a minister can serve their role better, and what they should practice. He argued that

“Being reverent, respectful, and obliging; hearing and obeying with haste; not daring to make decisions or choices according to selfish interests; not daring to take or give things according to selfish interests; having compliance with one's superiors as one's intention - these are what is *yi* in the service of a sagely lord.” (Xunzi, 136).²⁵

The Kings and the ministers should learn and try their best to be and serve the sagely lord so that they can benefit society. In The Analects, there are also some similar arguments. The master discussed the roles of Prince and ministers as well and argued how they should serve their roles to others. He claims that:

“Duke Ding asked how a ruler should employ his ministers and how a minister should serve his ruler. Confucius replied, saying: “The prince employs his ministers with propriety; the ministers serve their prince with good faith.” (The Analects, 3:19)²⁶

In this quote, we can find that people should not only serve their own social roles, but also serve the social relationships that are constructed by these roles. In both of these works, we find out that Kongzi and Xunzi do not care about individuality, but rather care more what a social role

²⁵ Xunzi, *The Way to Be a Minister*

²⁶ The Analact.

should be. Though they do not offer arguments on the existence of metaphysical self, they don't care about that because they believe the only thing individuals need to do is to fulfill their social roles.

Therefore, if we live in a Confucian traditional society, there are multiple identities that we need to follow. First, we need to act upon our identities in the family. This identity has been with us since birth. The identity in the family certainly affects our values and behaviors. For example, in a family with a traditional Confucian culture, it is rude to talk back to elders. Second, we also need to act upon our political identities constructed by society, and there are many rules of it. If we are from a lower social class, the best way for us to pursue is to study and become a governor. Therefore, whenever we notice our social identity, we have a clear value in our mind, and we will decide to pursue it. In our mind, our lives are not separable from our social identities, and our lives are linked with the social and political identities constructed by society. In Confucian traditional culture, the self and identity are already determined, and a successful life is to act appropriately according to our social roles. In a society like that, there's no way to form our identity based on our experiences, thoughts, and perceptions.

3.2 Communitarian Society and the Social Constitution Thesis

Communitarians believe that our participation in society makes us who we are. Communitarians claim that people are the means of the society, and people's values are based on their participation in society and their interactions with others. This is the Social Constitution Thesis. It believes that people's ends are given by the society. People are built by 'relationships' and communities. Charles Taylor, a contemporary political philosopher, gave a definition to the Social Constitution Thesis. He claims:

“One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it (Taylor 1989, 35).”²⁷

The Social Constitution Theory argues that there is an asymmetry relationship between the society and us because our identities and ends are given by the society, but we can't give society any ends. Society, made by multiple groups of people, assign values for individuals and make their existence highly dependent on others. The Social Constitution claims that in the journey of growing up, we are shaped by the social relationship with other people and socially given purpose. Society makes us who we are, and directly shapes how we process information. In Andrew Jason Cohen's work, Cohen explains the relationship between the society and us as moral agents. He argues that:

“This plausible view, that we become the particular persons (moral agents or even “liberal individuals”) we are because of the way we are “brought up,” can readily be assimilated into liberal theory. We are, according to this thesis, moral agents for other reasons (perhaps due to our language abilities or intelligence), but we are the *specific* agents we are because of our socialization.” (Cohen, 125)²⁸

Society can determine the personhood of a person. For example, if people live in a society which has education requirements, people will likely finish high school and receive training in language, math, history and science. They are very likely to go to some schools and build relationships with teachers and students, and their initial knowledge and social skills will be highly influenced by schools. The training from school also directly affects people's ability as moral agents, and will have long influences on ones' future decisions.

²⁷ Taylor, Charles. “*Hegel: History and Politics.*”

²⁸ Cohen, *Communitarianism, Social Constitution, and Autonomy.*

Further arguments from the Social Constitution Thesis is that people form the society, and 'people' are also created by the society. The idea of being a 'person' and having 'personhood' are all from the community. People live their lives in communities. Family, school, workplace, church, and any friend groups, they all are some kinds of community. Working in these communities is a part of being a person, and also people have the responsibility and ability to make communities better. Cohen claims that people need community to become 'people'. He claims that:

“While one must be in community to become a person, one does not need to remain in community to maintain personhood.” (Cohen, 128) ²⁹

Community played a tremendous role in making a person. For example, even people born with certain genders, how their community reacts to different genders may change people's life and value forever. If a woman lives in the feminist community, then probably she will live a life with less oppression, and she will be much more likely to become a feminist as well. These values can go with them even if they change to a new community. In feminism's argument, in modern society, the community is the key to shape people in the modern society. Marilyn Friedman, a philosopher of feminist theory claims that:

“Conflict and competition are no longer considered to be the basic human relationships; instead they are being replaced by alternative visions of the foundation of human society derived from nurturance, caring attachment, and mutual interestedness.” (Friedman, 276)

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²⁹ Cohen, *Communitarianism, Social Constitution, and Autonomy*.

³⁰ Friedman, Marilyn. “Feminism and Modern Friendship: Dislocating the Community.”

For Friderman's feminist philosophy, love and care are the essential traits for humans, and love and care can be achieved through relationships. The communitarian society is the society of caring, and different relationships teach people how to love. For example, feminist would consider the mother-child relationship to be one of the most important relationships. The mother-child relationship is a relationship based on caring and love, and directly ties two individuals into a whole. In a society like that, instead of existing as a single individual, people's identities are based on their relationships. Different relationships give people lots of different roles and responsibilities, and also ties different groups of people as a whole.

When people tie into a community, their social role is determined and they share the same values in a community. Different social roles give us different responsibilities. For example, when we were born into the mother-child relationship, we received care from the mother. This is the 'family relationship'. Through the journey of growing up, we live in a small community called family. In this community, we have roles as sons or daughters, and we need to fulfill our responsibilities with our roles. Similar situations can apply to every community that people live in. Therefore, we have already put into different assigned roles and assigned identities by having life in communities. We share certain values that are constructed by communities, and we also are restrained by social roles because of relationships. Therefore, this is highly similar to Confucian society. Our identities are determined by society, and our choices are restrained to our social roles. We use different communities as concepts to imagine and determine our identities, and still our identities are still determined by the community.

3.3 Liberal Individualism, Capitalism, and Determined Value

Now, let's discuss how liberal individualism does not give people chances to create their own identities, and it is actually shaping people into some directions. Even liberal individualism claims that everyone has the perfect freedom and they can become whoever they want to be, it gives people implicit values to follow and pushes people to pursue these values. In a liberal society, individuals are still constrained to the social roles and fulfill social duties that are taught to them, but their ideologies trained them to have complete freedom. This is a clear contradiction, and individuals living in such a society are not able to have the complete freedom as they wished. Also, in a modern liberal society, there are certain values that are already determined. In a liberal capitalist society, people are pursuing the maximum utility. The idea of utility is a constructed idea from the economy, and this is a social system that is built by people. The liberal capitalist society asks people to have freedom, but as it has already settled certain ways are the 'best' life, it doesn't leave any freedom for individuals. Therefore, under a liberal society, people's identities are still constructed by it.

There is a clear contradiction between the society's wanted social roles and the liberal ideology. In a liberal society, the communities and social bondings are quite similar to the communitarian society: people still live in communities and are influenced by the communities and society. Even liberal individualists argue that in a liberal society, individuals exist as a single unit instead of as a part of a community, they still exist in some kind of communities. Alisa Carse points out that individuals are embedded in society. She claims:

“As an individual, I am not only constituted by my ends and attachments, but the ends and attachments that constitute me are not for the most part ones I, as an individual, choose; rather, they are ones I "find myself with" through my "embeddedness" in a

particular social world-through inhabiting particular social roles, standing in particular relations to others, and inheriting shared ideals from my community.” (Carse, 188)³¹

Therefore, the existence of community and relationship are absolutely essential. No matter what kind of society, people are always formed in some kind of community and work together as a whole. Community makes everyone have some social roles, such as job, and relationship roles, and the natural born character can all be a part to determine the social roles. For example, the sex is a natural born character, but it can determine the potential social roles of people.

However, as the community and relationship asks everyone to be in some roles, it contradicts with the liberal ideals. Liberal individualists believe that individuals have higher priority than the community. They believe that they as moral agents should consider their moral values first. Alisa Carse claims:

“First, they are committed to the normative priority of the individual to community, that is, to the view that all moral obligations and social arrangements stand in need of justification to the individual.” (Carse, 185).³²

However, as liberal individualists claim that individuals have a normative priority to the community, the requirements of the social roles determine that the community has a priority to the individuals. Society has enough power to do so. The Covid-Response is one perfect example of how community and individual needs can contradict each other. In the Covid era, the community needed minimum numbers of death, but individuals needed normal life and freedom. However, people’s social role determines their choices. As citizens, when the government asks for stay-at-home, most of them would consider that choice and do so. A lot of them consider that

³¹ Carse, Alisa L. *The Liberal Individual: A Metaphysical or Moral Embarrassment?*

³² Carse, Alisa L. *The Liberal Individual: A Metaphysical or Moral Embarrassment?*

as the ‘right’ choice. They morally agree that caring for the community is more important than their individual needs, and this belief fits their social roles. It proves that individuals’ moral priorities are most likely limited to their social roles, and the construction of society shapes everyone’s moral standards.

Social values shape people’s choice and life, and they do not leave a lot of choices for people. In the Covid-response case, even if there are individuals who completely ignore the social moral standard, they are still limited to the socially considered goods – the utility. A lot of people ask to go work because they need money to survive. Modern capital society taught us that the rational choice is to maximize utility. Rawls, as one of the most important modern political philosophers, also includes utility and monetary resources into his model of a liberal individualist society with justices. He claims:

“All social values – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the basis of self-respect – are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone’s advantage.” (Rawls, 9) ³³

In Rawls’s model, he assumes that income and wealth are essential parts of the society. He still cites some values to pursue. Even though Rawls believes that people can achieve equality and freedom by redistribution of wealth, he ignores that society implies that wealth and resources are the most important things. Therefore, people still have a determined goal to pursue – to earn more profit. Also, their existence needs profits. They need money to ensure their basic needs of life, and they can’t stop to follow their social roles and respect the ideals of profit in order to live.

Do people have a choice in a liberal individual society, which encourages people to have free choices? They have, but only if they want to live a miserable life and against society.

³³ Rawls, *A Theory of Justices*.

Unfortunately, most people would not choose to do so. People sometimes joke about: "Under neoliberalism, everyone has the basic right to sleep under a bridge." Living in such a society shapes people's desire for profits in order to achieve basic needs. When Rawls links social equality to wealth and profit, he assumes wealth is essential in a neoliberal society. When people are born into such a society, their values are settled: they try their best to earn more profit, become better waged-labor or capitalist, and have a 'better' life in the future. Individuals seem to have liberty and shape their own identity, but the fact is that they are to be taught by society and become properly waged laborers. By valuing profits and efficiency, people eventually alienated themselves from profit-earning machines. Sadly, most people do not recognize how liberal individual society shapes their identities. In Macalester College, when we enjoy our freedom to learn whatever we want, we either carry student loans or let family pay high tuition to achieve this freedom. These societies put on a lie called liberty and try to let people believe that their identities are not from social construction. Living in such a society makes people unavoidably value profits, private property, and jobs, and they are forced to make their lives fit social expectations. They all have docile identities, and they make themselves become the perfect fit with the neo-liberal rules.

3.4 Gender Construction

Gender is also a social construction product. In this section, I want to discuss how gender itself is a constructive product, especially for women. Contemporary feminist philosophers argue that women are historical rather than biological products. They talk about how women, as an identity, are a product of patriarchal oppression. The identity of women makes them secondary and submissive because they never own their autonomy. In Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, she argues:

“Everyone agrees there are females in the human species; today, as in the past, they make up about half of humanity; and yet we are told that ‘femininity is in jeopardy’; we are urged, ‘be women, stay women, become women.’ So not every female human being is necessarily a woman; she must take part in this mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity.” (de Beauvoir, 3) ³⁴

Women are situational. As de Beauvoir argues, femininity is not from biological genes but rather from training. Women are learning to become women. In my childhood, I got criticism for being ‘not like a girl.’ Even today, for my parents, one of my traits is being submissive and cute, and they all appreciate it so much. That’s how I learned about becoming a woman. Femininity is a product of expectations. Women must have some definition of femininity to learn about and practice it. There must be a group of people or power itself.

Simone de Beauvoir argues that these expectations are from men. She points out that men are the rule makers who define what woman is. She argues:

“Humanity is male, and man defines women, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being.” (de Beauvoir, 5)

Based on de Beauvoir's arguments, the definition of femininity is from men. Men make women situational and relational to them, and women become someone who can fulfill their purpose. Therefore, the expectation of femininity is from men and the society made by men. To become women in men's expectations, women become someone to serve men. The identity of a woman is constructive in achieving men's purpose. De Beauvoir gives examples of how situational women's identity makes women serve men. She says:

³⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.

“Examples like this prove how impossible it is to consider the woman as a solely productive force: for man she is a sexual partner, a reproducer, an erotic object, an Other through whom he seems himself.” (de Beauvoir, 67)

Women are assigned purposeful roles. Like all the societal examples previously, gender as an identity contains all the assigned roles and values. People are asked and trained to follow their gender construction. Gender, as an inseparable aspect of identity, is never determined by us but by societal expectations.

As people have expectations with their gender, they also perform their gender based on the different expectations. According to Judith Butler’s argument, gender is not a stable identity but rather performed by people. She argues:

“In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.” (Butler, 519)³⁵

Judith Butler argues that instead of being a natural result, the way we perform our gender is influenced by society. Butler believes that we act our gender theatrically, in which our visual presentations, body gestures, movements, and expectations are all performed. (Butler, 517)

Therefore, being a woman is to perform the gender role with certain expectations, which become the standard by which to judge whether someone is a perfect female. Under a patriarchal system, there are many standards for ‘performing the female gender’ well. Judith Butler argues that the body can be constructed by historical culture. She argues:

“The body suffers a certain cultural construction, not only through conventions that sanction and proscribe how one acts one’s body, the ‘act’ or performance that one’s body

³⁵ Judith Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*

is, but also in the tacit conventions that structure the way the body is culturally perceived.” (Butler 523)

Butler argues that the culture, based on the historical context, shapes women’s performance and how they should act with the body. In the later part of this article, Butler argues that the culture that shaped women’s performance came from a traditional view of binary gender and heterosexual contract. Therefore, the image of women is served by the heterosexual view, and the people who judge women’s image are assumed to be men. Butler argues:

“My point is simply that one way in which this system of compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced and concealed is through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with ‘natural’ appearances and ‘natural’ heterosexual dispositions.” (Butler, 524)

It is undeniable that the construction of women is from the heterosexuality belief, which also contains men's needs for women's image. The standard of being beautiful and attractive is set by the patriarchal society, which serves heterosexual purposes.

What’s behind the men-defined femininity? It is the historical product of men-owned power. Similar to social control, because the patriarchal society owns more power, it has the power to set gender expectations and let people behave in its way. De Beauvoir argues that the main cause of such a definition is society in which men hold more economic power. She says:

“Men’s economic privilege, their social value, the prestige of marriage, the usefulness of masculine support – all these encourage women to ardently want to please men. They are on the whole still in a state of serfdom. It follows that woman knows and chooses herself not as she exists for herself but as man defines her.” (de Beauvoir, 156)

Because the economic privilege of men inevitably turns women’s identity into secondary and situational. It is about who owns the power and who can define it. Sadly, not only women but

also common men are trapped in gender construction. Normal men don't have the power to define themselves as well. They expect to act like men and take responsibility. Although they live in better situations, their gender is also a constructive result. Gender is also a docile identity. It is shaped by power and discipline and turns to expectations and values. When gender contains expectations, it is like social roles, which are constructed by power and forced to be a part of our identities. Through these examples, I firmly believe that our identities are socially constructive products. They construct our identities through expectations, social roles, and values. Applying back to what I argued in Chapter 2, in this chapter, I see lots of examples of how society constructs our identities. The most important part is societal expectations, which directly determine our lives. These constructions are inevitable and necessary, both the cause and end.

Chapter 4: Objections

In this chapter, I will discuss some important objections that must be addressed. I'm aware that there can be many objections to my arguments throughout. Although I know this project is not completely cohesive, I want to make sure that I'm aware there could be many objections, and I would like to continue working on this project in my academic career. I want to address three objections to each chapter. The first objection will be toward the first chapter, where I want to point out that attitude may not equal emotions in our minds. Attitude, which constitutes situations, cannot directly transfer to emotions in our memories. The second objection is toward my second chapter on the efficient cause of personal identity. Is the causal relationship the sole relationship that constructs our identities? I believe that randomness can play a big part in identity construction. The third objection is in the third chapter, where I argue that society determines our social roles. I want to object to people seeming to have some autonomy in determining their social roles. Where does autonomy come from? If society constructs people's identities completely, there's no chance for these kinds of identities to exist. Finally, I will reply to each objection. These objections will help me to clarify some vague points in this thesis, but these objections shall not weaken my overall argument.

4.1 Objection on Attitude and Emotion

Is the attitude on the situation and the emotion in our memoirs the same thing? In Chapter 1, I did not address the difference between attitudes and emotions, but I assume they are the same thing. When I worked towards my conclusion, I realized that I did not distinguish between these two concepts, and their differences may lead to a different conclusion. What if attitudes are feelings and situations that have no relationship with emotion in our memories? We have some feelings and some attitudes that exist momentarily. However, do these attitudes directly become

emotions that exist in our memories? How does time play a huge role in these two different concepts? I want to revisit Tim Crane's work and discuss how to address this problem.

What if attitude and emotions are two ideas? First, it can make emotions come from somewhere else. Attitudes come from momentary thoughts; emotions can come from long-lasting memories and thought processes. Memoires can be constructed and reconstructed many times. Tim Crane did not clarify the difference between mental representations and memory in his work. When he defines "A ψ s that S" (Crane, 18), he does not discuss whether mental representation is momentarily or lasts longer. The lack of time duration makes these two concepts confusing. In Crane's text, he also does not distinguish between attitude and emotions. The only term he used is 'mental representation.' He says:

"So states of belief, desire, hopes, love and so on are all thoughts in my sense, as they all represent things." (Crane, 17)

Are mental representations only momentarily? I can't find anywhere in Crane's analysis that he discusses time in mental representation. For me, his arguments can both apply to momentary attitudes and long-lasting emotions since they are all tied up in some situations. They all link with a situation that represents these conceptual feelings. Feelings must link with some situations no matter how long it lasts. If mental representations need to represent specific things, the emotions in our memory are also from real-life experiences. Emotions are not from nowhere, but all link up with situations.

Even if they are different and emotions are beyond situations, how should the difference influence my arguments that attitude-situation ties make our memories exist as pieces? I don't think the difference between these two concepts would harm my conclusion. As I already clarified Crane's definition of mental representations, I think I'm clear about what's in my

memory. Whether we construct or reconstruct our memories or not, the situations in our minds link up with an emotional concept. Emotional concepts cannot exist within the succession of time because there's no relationship between emotions and time duration. Although emotional concepts and situations in our memories can be influenced by the duration of time, the situations in our mind exist with how important the feelings are, but not in the order of when they happened. Therefore, I don't need to figure out the difference between attitude-situations ties and memoires. I also don't need to distinguish emotions and attitude in order to prove memory as pieces. As long as I know attitude plays a key role in memories and it has no direct relationship with the time succession, I already showed that memories do not exist within the succession of time, and I reached my goal to prove that memories are pieces.

I know this reply is not quite satisfying since I still prove the relationship between mental representations and memories. This question is way beyond my capacity in this thesis. My goal is to prove that if we consider successive consciousness as the self, it is problematic because there's no successive consciousness, and how memories and mental representation work is irrelevant to my argument. I believe my reply makes it clear that no matter how different mental representations and memories are, memories cannot exist closely in time succession. There must be some gaps. Memories contain emotional concepts that cannot exist regarding how time duration works. Memory has its own logic; even though I don't know how it works, I know it is different with the succession of time.

4.2 Objection on Causal Relationships and Randomness

In Chapter 2, I argue that society is the efficient cause and final cause to shape our identities. The objection is: is the causal relationship the sole relationship in building our identities? In this objection, I want to focus on how randomness is left behind in my earlier

consideration. What is randomness in personal identity? It can be all the random events that do not have necessary causes. For example, a random exposure to some ideology can be a random event because there's no definite cause for the exposure. I can accidentally go to a bookstore and pick Locke's work randomly, and suddenly, I'm convinced by his argument on the state of nature. From now on, I have decided to become a liberalist. It is clear that this random exposure made me a completely different person, but this random exposure caused a new construction of me. Can randomness play a role in constructing personal identity? It seems like it can be a cause of our identity.

One other example of randomness shaping identity is illness. Chronic illnesses can change a person completely. Chronic illness can affect people's physical ability, directly affecting how people move and their capability to do things. Even though people have values, expectations, and pre-determined goals, if they face a severe chronic illness and limited ability, they may not be able to do so and be forced to change it. One sociological research points out how chronic illness makes people readjust their identity. It says:

“As people shift their identity goals laterally or downward, they may relinquish what others view as the more socially valued identity. They feel their losses. They think about their lives. They assess the cost and benefit of relinquishing activities and responsibilities and, therefore, identities.” (Charmaz, 671) ³⁶

Although chronic illness can have lots of causes, whether to have it or not is a random event. Chronic illness, as a random event, can change people's identity completely. Even though people's identities are from societal construction, when people have chronic illnesses, they are unable to do so and are forced to change. In these two examples, random events play significant

³⁶ Kathy Charmaz, *The Body, Identity, and Self: Adapting to Impairment*.

roles in deciding people's identities, and they can have more significant impacts than the societal determinants.

In reply to these objections, I first admit that randomness does have some impacts on people's identities. However, the causal relationship can still work in both of these examples. Society is still the efficient cause of identities. For the first example, to understand Locke's argument, I have to have comprehensive language skills and receive some basic education to understand his philosophy. I have to visit a place that has a bookstore that has Locke's work in it. All of these conditions are necessary prior to this random exposure. The necessary societal cause determines these conditions. For example, to have the skill of reading English, my school or my family members must make me study English, and I have no determination to do it. In fact, most of the primary education I have received is from the school curriculum design. These designs are necessary to my identity, but I cannot change them. Going to school can be random, but receiving an education is necessary and unavoidable for me. Therefore, I still live in a causal chain. Even though the causal chain can be affected by random events, the causal relationship is still the main relationship which determines people's identity.

Similarly, in the case of chronic illness, it is undeniable that this random event can change people's identity completely, but how chronic illness changes people's identity is still caused by societal values and expectations. Chronic illness makes people not have a more socially valued identity, but to have such disappointment, people have to behave in a socially valued identity before. As in my earlier discussions, people who experienced chronic illness also trained and taught about socially valued identity before. The causes of changing identities are both social training and chronic illness. If they have a socially valued identity first, they will feel the rapid change of their identity. In this objection, I want to prove that even if randomness can

be a factor in deciding identity, the causal relationship is still on top of it. I'm not arguing that random events cannot happen and shape our identity at all. However, I argue that the necessary causal relationship is still the primary relationship determining people's identity. I noticed my limits of not providing a coherent argument on how the random event and the causal relationship can work together. However, my point is clear: in constructing identities based on life, the causal relationship is still the main one.

4.3 Objection on Autonomy in Social Roles

My third objection is quite similar to the second objection. This one is toward my third chapter on how society constructs our social roles. I haven't addressed autonomy as I described that everyone lives under social construction and expected social values. Do people own autonomy? How can the theory of autonomy influence our identity if our identity is socially constructed? Do we have autonomy?

Autonomy can definitely play a huge role in people's identity. For example, in a society, while most people obey the social rules, someone must decide not to do so. When social controls play important roles in society, there must be someone who needs to be controlled. These people don't follow their taught expectations and roles and decide to live in another way. They must have some autonomy; otherwise, there's no reason to disobey their constructed identity. Similar cases can apply to people who lived in revolutionary times. People who started revolutions or changed society completely lived and were educated by the old society. They all learned their social roles and social expectations from the old society. The old society used its power to construct people as every society does. However, why would the people in such societies start a revolution and decide to challenge the old system? If they don't have any autonomy, they should never challenge the old system. If the old society fully constructs its identity, then no

revolutionary figures exist. Therefore, they must have some autonomy outside of social construction, which can lead them to do something out of social control.

However, in replying to this objection, I believe even people can have autonomy, this autonomy is still under the social condition. People cannot live outside of a society in order to have full autonomy. Their autonomy is achieved by changing society or the social context around them. Jack Crittenden called this the ‘social nature of autonomy’. He defines it as:

“First, the autonomous person can and must separate himself from the social matrix with which he was earlier identified. So we have this straightforward though perhaps exiguous position on the social nature of autonomy that amounts to saying that no person is born autonomous but becomes so through social distancing and that even an autonomous person requires a social context, but now a context that seems more something to define the self against, to separate from, and to use.” (Crittenden, 43) ³⁷

Using the definition of the social nature of autonomy, both of my examples fall into the social nature of autonomy. People who commit crimes may have their actions caused by their community. Their action can either be considered as a result of societal influences, or they can be viewed as the rebellion of society. Either of these choices must have societal influences before their actions. Similarly, people who start a revolution must have plenty of exposure to the old society. They also need to experience some exposure to the ‘ideal society’ they want to live in. Both of these examples show that even though autonomy plays roles in identity, the primary cause is still from the society they lived in.

Therefore, autonomy can influence our identity, but the root of autonomy is still from society. Compared with my arguments in 2.2, the cause of autonomy is also from society. Again,

³⁷ Jack Crittenden, *The Social Nature of Autonomy*.

I recognize my limitation in defining autonomy and explaining its mechanism. This is far beyond my goal, and figuring out the definition of autonomy may affect my main argument. My goal here is to argue that even though autonomy may affect our identity, the root of autonomy is still influenced by society. In other words, society still plays a role in our decision-making ability. Society becomes the cause for many things, and society is our identity's formal cause and final cause.

Conclusion:

This thesis was inspired by my institutional recognition that I, as a being, do not exist cohesively. Two years ago, when I went through my depression, I suddenly realized that I could not control my emotions or behave as I wished. Rather, I am not as whole as I expected. This starts my curiosity about exploring no-self. When I studied consciousness and the self more, I realized the main problem of consciousness is that it cannot exist successively, and this trait makes it impossible to exist as an identity, which should not change at all. In this thesis, I try to solve the issue of the metaphysical self and provide a potential definition of identity. As I recognized the failure to define the self as a successive consciousness, I want to address how the self can work in a societal context. I'm not here arguing that there's no possible definition of the metaphysical self, and we must define it socially. Rather, my definition of societal constructing identity opens a possible way to consider personal identity. I believe that considering societal influences in personal identity can give me a new direction in considering who I am. As we are all parts of the society, through this thesis, I found that society is both the efficient cause and the final cause of our identity.

I recognized my limitations throughout this thesis. As I pointed out in Chapter 4, there are many more concepts involved in this thesis, and I cannot address their influence comprehensively. The only thing I can do with these objections is how my argument can build relationships with these objections, but I know that there can be more detailed studies on personal identity. The main point of this thesis is to provide a different way of reflecting on the problem of identity and recognize that societal causes play a big part. I want this thesis to be a starting point of my research in personal identity. As the conclusion of my undergraduate research, it opens me a broader path with more things to research on.

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