

The role and importance of personal identity philosophy essay



“ Trying to define yourself is like trying to bite your own teeth” - Alan Watts.

Personal Identity play its role as to define human with quality of its own which makes him or her a unique one. The identity of a person that is in question must be able to realize them, and he must be identified by other people. In short, what makes John unique from Felicia? Both internal (mind) and external (body) views are the two essential aspects that have to be differentiated by one. There are several general philosophical theories of this identity problem.

Body theory, Soul theory and Conscious Theory will come to fit into the missing piece of the puzzle of personal identity.

The body theory is one of the theories that define personal identity. It can be defined as when Person A has a personal identity if and only if they have the same body X. However, two problems can be found in this definition.

Qualitatively, it is right to own the same body, but if changes happened to the body, can we still define that person as the same one? Everyone's body is definitely different if we were to compare at the age of 60 and 4. Another problem popped out on the matter of body alteration. If Felicia becomes injured by a mine at war, and then her legs have to be amputated, is she not the same person, Felicia? Therefore, the definition of the theory is insufficient as the same body alteration is not accounted for. On the other hand, numerically, if a person lost his finger due to an accident, does that finger is counted as a different body? What if a scientist decided to use another person's DNA to clone another person with the exact same DNA?

Two people with identical body surely cannot be the same person because they are still two different people with identical body. Both of them would be

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living totally different lives. Hence, in defining personal identity, the body theory by itself had failed to make it valid.

The Soul theory will be the next common theory in defining personal identity. Similarly to the body theory: Person A has a personal identity if and only if they have the same soul. The idea became a lot more complicated when we are trying to define a rather controversial term – soul. In the religion aspect, it is thought to be spirit of a person that passes through one's body into another realm (eg. Heaven or hell). However, it is still a mysterious phenomenon since there is no proof that can prove its existence. For instance, when a cloud changes to grayish puffy substance, we will still say, “the cloud had turned gray”. In short, we still recognized it as a cloud. It is just many souls in one body. Therefore, the soul theory is also not valid as it fails in that the definiens is insufficient to define personal identity.

The truest and most recognized philosophy theories about personal identity are the consciousness theory. However, this theory is interpreted differently in three ways: the experiential content, conscious self, and connected stream of consciousness theories. First on the list, the conscious self-theory: he or she is said to have personal identity if they have the same self-conscious. In another words, if there is a different conscious in two people, then both of them has personal identity. At first sight, it seems like a good theory to prove personal identity. It is analogous to Descartes' cogito, “ I think therefore I am.” Secondly, the consciousness of experiences theory is the common derivatives to the theory of consciousness. It is more easily known as the experiential content. This theory comes from the Locke's theory of having the mind blank, and accumulation from experiences. One is <https://assignbuster.com/the-role-and-importance-of-personal-identity-philosophy-essay/>

to have personal identity because only one person can experience at one finite space. We take twins for instance. Although they have identical bodies, the moment they were born, they are already experiencing different moments. Therefore, both of them have personal identity because they experience different surroundings and see things in a different manner. The major problem is that we do not have the ability to remember every single experience in our life consciously. For instance, one can still tell another person what they have eaten three days ago but it is impossible for a person to tell another what they ate today after 10 years. In another example, one cannot be defined as having different personal identity because they were drunk and acted like another person. In other words, because the human mind has failed to consciously remember every single moment of their lives, this theory eventually is invalid.

The connected stream of consciousness will be the last theory about personal identity. With its definition of a person's identity is made out of a "stream" of connected conscious experiences, this theory eventually had solved the problem of human being unable to remember about their experience consciously. With this theory, we will still be the same person although we are unable to remember what we have done at the age of 4 when we are 60 years old. Generally with a finite mind, conscious is affiliated in a chronological pattern. In short, we will take the river as a metaphor. If you see a river flowing every day, you will not be looking at the same part of the river (representing body or experiences), however you will not be able to dispute that is not a river. Hence, let say the river is personal identity. This theory almost had it all right then.

Thomas Reid which is also my preferred option to the idea of personal identity disagreed with Locke's memory theory by reducing it to absurdity. Locke's theory was criticized for a few irrelevancies. First of all, I strongly agree with what Reid hold on to. He thinks that personal identity should be determined with something that cannot be divided into parts – indivisible but not by determining by operations. He, too, stated the main problem of Locke's is his ideas are of confusing proves of another thing with itself. Officer paradox was introduced by Reid at his attempt to Locke's theory to absurdity.

Memory is the best evidence for identity, says Locke. If Felicia was able to remember what she had done, hence, she will be the same person with the same identity. But if Felicia happened to be a forgetful person, will that means she loses her personal identity? Reid's idea can further support my point where he believes that to be able to prove something for its constituents and its existence, an evidence of a particular matter is relatively irrelevant. It was argued that if I were to believe the world is created, it does not mean that the creation of the world is valid. This argument is similar to someone who remember doing something but that does not mean he will the same person who did that something. I personally think that the memory and personal identity are both affiliated. They are related not in the sense of determining who a person is but they are related in a sense where one existed over time instead. Therefore, it was concluded by Reid that Locke's memory theory is a presupposition of personal identity by memory rather than the creation of it.

A U. S. author, James Baldwin once quoted, “ An identity seemed like it has arrived by the way when a person faces and uses his experience”. Assuming that we will not be able to put everything into a complete puzzle, we are left with one choice. Pluck a rose, separate the petals one by one which each petals represents one idea. Whatever came out at the end, it is your call by your very own intuition. But for me, I would choose to go for Reid’s philosophical views about personal identity.