

Philosophy and personal identity philosophy essay



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Personal identity starts at the moment of conception, within time personal identity can change or not change. The change in identity differs in many instances by causes of psychological, physical or environmental changes in the person life. As life progresses in time people tend to change their views on many issues and identity is involved with those issues. Day to day activities also play an important role on a person's present or prior identity by being exposed to different elements encountered within their mind while operating in these activities. The mind is the most important influential part of a person to establish their identity thru time present or future. The identity is very important for the well being of a person in their everyday life, at work, and even with their relationships.

When it comes to philosophy Personal Identity is a very broad and extensive topic, many philosopher have their own views on the issue. On the other hand my personal choice for this paper has to be a very well known philosopher by the name of John Locke who was one of the greatest in Europe in the late 1600's and early 1700's until his death. John Locker was born into the stage in Europe which was called the Enlightenment in which he helped find the identity of Thomas Jefferson to the idea of the Declaration Of Independence by stating this " men are " endowed with certain inalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." With these words stated by Thomas Jefferson, John Locke began his successful thrill of Philosophy and the issue of Personal Identity.

As Locke explains his version of Personal Identity he explains it in a higher power and often relies on faith, as opposed to science, to aid him in his major life decisions by using his

personal identity. John Locke's views on personal identity are set out in the selection, "Of Identity and Diversity", taken from his Essay Concerning Human Understanding. In this essay he talks about humans are able to understand by applying his theories and ideas. John Locke had his heart of personal identity in Section 9 of his essay in which he states his idea of a person is that of a thinking, intelligent (rational) being with consciousness of itself (self-consciousness). The notion of a thinking intelligent being amounts to this. While John Locke had his opinion and theories on personal identity other philosophers do too. In reference Identity is very complex and it has no set definition everyone agrees on. Sarup (1996) talks about identity by using the example of a passport. This may include a photograph of the person as well as other details including nationality, a person's full name and date-of-birth. While a passport is a form of identity it does not express who you are as a person. It "show's you who you are so that you can be recognized in a bureaucratic sense" (Sarup, 1996). Sarup the author states "that identity is to do with who one thinks one is, what one believes and what one does". While Kidd another author believes that "identity" relates to how we think about ourselves as people, how we think about other people around us and what we think others think of us. In other words, the ability to "figure out" (Kidd, 2002) who we are as a person. Kidd the other author states that we are shaped by our culture, and we shape it and perpetuate in it in our day-to-day lives. Although culture and identity are often linked they are, in fact, different in many ways than one. "With culture representing the 'macro' pattern- the bigger picture- and 'identity' representing the smaller more 'micro' meanings we have as individuals" (Kidd, 2002, p. 7).

In my personal identity I have experienced many facets within my 25 years of living in this earth. My personal identity has been developing each minute of the day, as well as days on and in years. In my readings and research I personally coincide with authors who state that personal identity is divided by two subsets. These two subsets are characterized by experience and learning. On the contrary to Lockes belief's I feel these two subsets characterize my personal identity's growth. According to Wenger, identity can be seen as a negotiated experience, which is developed through engagement in practice in which gives us " certain experiences of participation and what our communities pay attention to makes us as participants" (Wenger, 1998). " Identity in practice is defined socially not merely because it is believed in a social discourse of the self and of social categories, but also because it is produced as a lived experience of participation in the specific communities" (Wenger, 1998, p. 151).

Learning is a very crucial item people should encounter because it benefits us in the long run when it comes to our daily lives and personal encounters and relationships. The many things ive learned thru out my years has set out to my advantage and my personal identity . While working for different companies and organizations my personal identity has differed in each setting because I had a different role in each one. Having different roles in each of my jobs, my personal identity had to change in time in order for my tenure their to be successful and keep up with the rest of the laborers. According to the author Wenger " A sense of a learning trajectory gives us ways of sorting out what matters and what does not, what contributes to identity and what remains marginal" (Wenger, 1998, p. 155).

When we speak of one's personal identity we speak as what makes us the person that we are. Our identity consists of what makes us unique and different as an individual and from others. According to Locke personal identity does not involve the body at all, the person could be involved by his soul. If such would occur Locke suggested that the person could be transferred by his own soul. However personal identity to Locke cannot be equated with the identity of a thinking substance either because the identity doesn't follow the identity of the soul, but follows the set of individual thoughts it contains. Here is an excerpt of one Locke's essay where he states the personal identity would follow the thoughts themselves, and not the thinking substance.

" Let any one reflect upon himself, and conclude, that he has in himself an immaterial Spirit, which is that which thinks in him, and in the constant change of his body keeps him the same; and is that which he calls himself: Let him also suppose it to be the same soul, that was in Nestor or Thersites, at the Siege Of Troy. But he, now having no consciousness of any of the Actions either of Nestor or Thersites, does, or can he, conceive himself the same person with either of them? Can he be concerned in either of their actions? Attribute them to himself, or think them his own more than the actions of any other man, that ever existed? But let him once find himself conscious of any of the actions of Nestor, he then finds himself the same person with Nestor."(Section 15). Since we know and read that Locke rejects that the identity of a person is the identity of an immaterial substance or soul. For Locke at every moment you could have a different soul, thoughts, or a different thinker and still have the same person see.(Section 25)

Another rejection by Locke is the idea that the identity of a man is needed for the identity of the person. It wouldn't be necessary since you could have the same person in two different beings as he states in the Prince and the Cobbler story.

“ For should the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince's past life, enter and inform the body of a cobbler, as soon as deserted by his own soul, everyone sees he would be the same person with the prince.”(Section 15).

For Locke personal identity is not enough if it doesn't include the identity of consciousness. According to Locke consciousness is the ideas that a soul entertains, not in the soul that entertains them. The most important part of consciousness is memory, since memory can remember the actions and experiences of some past person, from the perspective of that person, then one thereby qualifies as identical with that person. To Locke he describes personal identity as a “ forensic” notion.(Section 26). While most philosophers and philosophy get confused with his identity of consciousness Locke stated” For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things: in this alone consists personal identity and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done.”(Section 9).

Overtime John Locke has been criticized by his theories and his way of thinking by fellow philosophers and other entities. Thomas Reid has a view that is similar to Descartes in which a person who is a simple indivisible substance that has no temporal or spatial parts. Thomas Reid states that “ My personal identity implies the continued existence of that indivisible thing which I call myself. Whatever this self may be, it is something which thinks, and deliberates, and resolves, and acts and suffers. I am not thought, I am not action, I am not action, I am not feeling; I am something that thinks, and acts and suffers. My thoughts, and actions, and feelings change every moment; they have no continues, but a successive, existence that self or I, to which they belong, is permanent, and has the same relation to all the succeeding thoughts, actions, and feelings which I call mine.” Reid argues that memory is the evidence for personal identity, but not the basis of personal identity. Reid developed several arguments which go against John Locke’s memory is the basis of personal identity. The four main arguments that Reid goes against Locke are:

The Duplication problem which states one person may be identity with more than one person.

The Brave Soldier Paradox which a man may be , and at the same time not be, the person that did a particular action.

The problem of removing reward punishment and responsibility.

The minor objection that confuses consciousness with memory.