

Locke and Descartes on Personal Identity

Personal identity has always been a key topic widely discussed and debated about in the field of philosophy over the years. Questions have been raised concerning the definition and nature surrounding identity. How can we tell that we even know what personal identity is and how do we know whether or not our own identity even exists? Philosophers, such as John Locke and David Hume, explore the concepts, ideas, and meanings behind personal identity in their writings and have developed two distinct views on the subject that contrast each other.

Locke explores the concept of one's identity in his essay, "Of Identity," the discussion the meaning of personal identity as relating to one's consciousness. More specifically, he makes the claim that one's personal identity is made up of whatever that person is conscious of experiencing the egoism, "That one's consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity" (162).

He clearly states that he believes in a direct connection between one's thoughts and how it correlates with personal identity. To further illustrate his point, he elaborates with the example that if a poem or line was completed with a particular consciousness, it could be repeated again with the same consciousness by the same intelligent being (162). One of the problems with Locke's theory about personal identity is that his statements raise the issue that if an individual did not have the conscious memory of completing a