
What Is Personal Identity? - Definition, Philosophy & Development

Personal identity is the concept that develops about oneself that evolves over the course of life. This may include aspects of life that one have no control over, such as where one grew up or the color of skin, as well as choices one make in life, such as how spending time and what one believe. A person demonstrates portions of personal identity outwardly through what one wear and how he or she interacts with other people. An individual may also keep some elements of personal identity to oneself, even when these parts are very important. Personal identity is discussed under the protean term self. And 'self' does sometimes mean 'person'. But it often means something different: some sort of immaterial subject of consciousness, for instance (as in the phrase 'the myth of the self').

One's personal identity in this sense is contingent and changeable: different properties could have belonged to the way one defines oneself as a person, and what properties these are can change over time. It contrasts with ethnic or national identity, which consists roughly of the ethnic group or nation one takes oneself to belong to and the importance one attaches to this.

The issue of personal identity and its determents has always been of concern for many philosophers. Questions are raised as to what does being the person that you are, from one day to the next, necessarily consist of. Personal identity theory is the philosophical confrontation with the ultimate questions of our own existence, such as who are we, and is there a life after death? This sort of analysis of personal identity provides a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the identity of the person over time. In the modern philosophy of mind, this concept of personal identity is sometimes referred to as the diachronic problem of personal identity. The synchronic problem is grounded in the question of what features or traits characterize a given person at one time. There are several general theories of this identity problem. In this paper, the views of John Locke and a criticism of his theory of personal identity are presented.

According to Erikson, the main social task of the adolescent is the search for a unique identity—the ability to answer the question, “Who am I?” In the search for identity, the adolescent may experience role confusion in which he or she is balancing or choosing among identities, taking on negative or undesirable identities, or temporarily giving up looking for an identity altogether if things are not going well.