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Self and Substance

The following paper discusses Locke's account of the self, and the distinction that he makes between the self and substances. He refers to the self as the thing that has the power of seeing, touching, hearing, smelling and has reason as well as reflection. On the other hand, he holds an obscure view on substance, but he mentions it on his Essay: The immaterial and the immaterial substances; the material, I guess is, palpable and the immaterial that is not, namely the soul.

The self is regarded as a thing that is capable of perceiving himself at different times and places. And this is possible with the help of the senses, reason, and reflection. We use our senses, reason, and reflection to experience the things around us, and the very moment that we experience something, we become aware of our selves. For instance, if I happen to be running around the courtyard of my house, it follows that I know that I am running around the courtyard; therefore, I know that someone is running. In addition, if I happen to deny my own existence, it follows that I must be someone in order to deny my own existence. For I must be someone in order to be running or to deny my own existence. Therefore, personal experiences are essential to a person in order to prove his existence. Anyone is capable of experiencing hunger or any other pains, and each of us is something that exists, because it is impossible to be nothing and experience the things around us.

In order to maintain the same self, it is important to keep track of our own personal identity at different times and places. This only happen if the same thinking thing and consciousness come along, therefore, for a person to remain the same, he must remember the thoughts and actions done before as well as his present thoughts, and actions. This means that

the sameness of thinking thing and consciousness are the only ones that make the person to be the same self. This means that a thought or action done should be attributed to a person without regarding the short or long period of time, because actions and thoughts take place from time to time, and an action or thought can be attributed to a person as long as he does remember that are is his and can repeat it.

In addition, in order to remain the same self, it is essential to keep the same thinking thing and consciousness with the changing composition of the body over time with the same kind or different matter (substance). We know that each body has a process of replacement and each cell is replaced within a period of time, but this is done beyond our control, therefore the replacement of each cell depends on matter itself, but the thinking thing and consciousness should come along with any change due to the matter, and this way still be the same person. For instance, if I happen to have a hair cut and let it grow, it follow that I have new hair, but I would be the same self as long as I have the same thinking thing and consciousness. So our material composition is useless for personal identify. In addition, Locke would agree that if there should be a complete change of body or transfer to a different body, the person would be the same self as long as he remains with the same thinking thing and consciousness.

Also, if there is a change in the immaterial substance (soul) or not, this should not matter, because the immaterial substance is not in charge of keeping personal identity of a self, therefore it should be okay for a person to have the soul of Socrates today and the soul of Descartes later on. For instance if I claim to have the soul of Descartes, I should not be considered as Descartes, because I do not remember any actions and thoughts of Descartes. Nevertheless, if a person at any time remembers all the actions and thought and is able to repeat any previous acts and thought by Descartes, then the person is Descartes; therefore the same thinking thing and

consciousness are essential for the same person. And the soul should be discarded, because it does not make the same person overtime.

The self remains the same if the same self can remember the thoughts and actions done before. This means that when we sleepwalk and we do not remember the next day when we wake up about the actions done while sleepwalking, it follows that we were different persons. In addition, we tend to have a fallible mind that forgets most of the things during our lives, it follows that during our lives we were different persons. So, we remain the same person if and only if we keep the same thinking thing and consciousness. Moreover, we can say that a person is the same as far as the thinking thing and consciousness can reach. For as far as any intelligent Being can repeat the idea of any past action with the same consciousness it had of it as first, and with the same consciousness it has of any present action so for it is the same personal self (II.XXVII.X). So remembering is the sole requirement for being the same self.

It seems that Locke says that since an agent does not remember what he did yesterday or twenty year ago, therefore the agent should not be held responsible for his actions. My objection to his position is that an agent whether remembers or not should be prosecuted according to the law for his evil crimes committed, or even be removed from the civil society, and be institutionalized.

On the other hand, the one who has done noble acts should be rewarded even if he does not remember. For instance, if there were living soldiers who fought during the Vietnam War, but they do not remember, because they suffered some kind of mental incapacity while fighting, they should still be rewarded, and be treated in the best hospital of the nation. I think that just because someone forgets, this does not means is a different self, but we can say that the self is no present, but it may be come back anytime, and if it does not, therefore the self is gone.

In conclusion, the self is the thinking thing and consciousness, and the self remains the same even if the self passes through drastic body changes. However, it seems intuitively that a pair of metal arms, legs and a plastic heart; these added into a human body, they would not be living things. Whereas a natural organ from another person could become a part by participating to the human flesh and this way the thinking thing and consciousness be maintained. In addition, it seems intuitively that I would not be the same person if I transfer my thinking thing and consciousness into a body like the fish, or a worm. I also doubt that such creatures can maintain my same thinking thing and consciousness overtime, and even if it is maintained, I would not be able to repeat one of my past actions. For I need my body composition, my human unity, in order to repeat one of my past activities. I need my senses, my brain that has reason and reflection, in order to say that I exist.