

Summary of Issues Connected to the Self and Personal Identity

Buddhist view – no “core” self.

The notion of the fixed or “core” self is

- a) Inaccurate (it doesn't exist)
- b) Unhelpful (believing in the fixed self makes us unhappy)

Hume

Following the empiricist method, he finds no evidence to support the idea of the self. He sees a “bundle of sensations” instead.

Locke

Personal identity is to be found in psychological continuity. Without this continuity there can be no sense of being the same person.

Descartes

The self exists. Even at the height of his doubt, Descartes recognises the existence of the thinking thing, the mind. This thinking thing is who we are.

Kant – the rescue of the self

The self is necessary in order for us to be able to experience the world

Experience must occur in space and in time

A fixed reference point (like the origin on a graph) is necessary in order for space and time to work properly as a priori categories.

The self is this fixed reference point.

We do not experience the self, but the fact that we experience anything at all means that there must be a self!

The self and new technology

1. Changing self – reinvention of identity e.g. Facebook profiles
2. The “tethered self” (Turkle) – the self as expressed/realised through **always on/always on you** communication devices. We are not necessarily occupying a physical reality, but one in which we are permanently in touch with/available to those who are not physically present.

Think of the modern train station. There are lots of individuals using mobile phones. They are all in touch with others who aren't physically there. Their relationships with others are perhaps defined through these devices.

Does the modern “I” only really exist through its various mobile devices?