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Personal Identity Essay

Meredith W. Michaels is a research associate in the philosophy department at Smith College in Massachusetts and one of the authors of the renown philosophy textbook *Twenty Questions*. At points throughout the book, Michaels shares her views on certain philosophical perspectives, one of the most interesting being what determines personal identity. In short, Michaels evaluates both the mind and body in trying to determine identity. In the following paragraphs I will explain the argument that Michaels offers, an objection to it, and then determine which argument I agree with more by using personal examples. The excerpt; *Persons, Brains, and Bodies*, opens up with Michaels describing an interesting scenario. She asks the reader to imagine that you and a friend named Wanda are on a trip and while Wanda isn't paying attention she is crushed by a steamroller. In reaction to Wanda being crushed you have a stroke that does serious damage to your brain. Both of you are immediately sent to a hospital.

After a procedure, you ultimately end up with Wanda's brain in your body. This raises a lot of questions. Is it you or Wanda that is still alive? (Michaels 347). After thoroughly presenting the scenario Michaels delves into her evaluation. She makes it clear that she recognizes John Locke's Memory Theory and that the idea of the body often gets lost in traditional concepts, which leads her to point out the importance of the body in determining identity. This is evident as Michaels states, "Though the brain in question is indeed the same, it is nonetheless clear to all of us that brains alone do not learn to ride bicycles, or, indeed, do brains alone remember having done so. People learn to read bicycles and people remember having done so." (Michaels 348). Within this quote essentially lies Michaels' main argument that someone's identity is not solely body or mind but rather both combined. She wants the reader to realize that our bodies are an important part of our self-identity, and states, "This might suggest to us that our concept of self-identity is not an all-or-nothing one, that, in fact, our concept is one which admits of degrees." (Michaels 349). This last quote sums up her argument of the importance of not forgetting how big of a role our body plays in who we identify as. As mentioned previously, John Locke, the well known 17th-century academic has a different viewpoint on how to define identity and he addresses it in his essay *Of Identity and Diversity*. The main thing that Locke alludes to is the power of consciousness and how all of our decisions as human beings always relate back to the idea of our inner thoughts and internal compass.

Locke says, "For it being the same consciousness that makes a man be himself to himself, personal identity depends on that only, whether it be annexed solely to one individual substance, or can be continued in a succession of several substances." (Locke 340). Locke is pointing out tha

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