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New Essays Concerning Human Understanding.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1646-1716)

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If a sleeping man thinks without knowing it, the sleeping and waking man are two persons. I, in turn, will make you another supposition which appears more natural. Is it not true that it must always be admitted that after some interval or some great change, one may fall into a condition of general forgetfulness? Sleidan, it is said, before his death, forgot all that he knew; and there are numbers of other examples of this sad occurrence. Let us suppose that such a man became young again and learned all de novo; would he be another man for all that? It is not then, memory which, properly, makes the same man. Nevertheless, the fiction of a soul which animates different bodies by turns, without what happens to it in one of these bodies interesting it in the other, is one of those fictions contrary to the nature of things, which come from the incomplete notions of the philosophers, like space without body, and body without motion, and which disappear when one penetrates a little farther; for it must be known that each soul preserves all its preceding impressions and cannot divide itself equally in the way just mentioned. The future in each substance has a perfect connection with the past. It is this which constitutes the identity of the individual. Moreover, memory is not necessary nor even always possible, on account of the multitude of present and past impressions which cooperate toward our present thoughts; for I do not believe there are in man thoughts of which there is not some effect at least confused, or some sentiment mixed with subsequent thoughts. Many things can be forgotten, but they could also be remembered long afterward if they were recalled as they should be.

