

What is the self according to Descartes? Do you think it is public or private?

**Thesis:** Descartes' idea of self is inherently private, although delineation between public and private is not clear because the mind and the body inform each other.

1. *Descartes' cogito ergo sum*
  - a. **Cogito ergo sum:** "I think, therefore I am"
  - b. Even if body and soul were just an illusory dream, then his suspicion of being deceived alone affirms the certainty of his existence. It is the capacity to imagine that characterises his self.
  - c. **Embodied self:** activation of the mind so that one can control their emotions
    - i. First-person access and autonomy, contrasting public self that entails third-person access, and others can correct us, or we correct ourselves according to others
    - ii. Involves **incorrigibility** of emotions: your mental state becomes your personal truth
2. Though inherently private, it is necessarily public
  - a. Advised Elisabeth, who could not ignore the way she was influenced by the suffering of others, to retreat into private self through intellectually stimulating reading. To read the words of others, however, is to have our thoughts affected and shaped by them, showing that the world still intrudes on the self even in private activities.
  - b. **Psychosomatic relationship** → Cartesian dualism: mind will manifest in the public self through behaviours, and hormonal states will conjure emotions that influence the mind. Therefore, public and private selves are not easily distinguishable.
  - c. Minorities and people who are publicly shamed do not develop confidence if they are oppressed, meaning that the external world can place an inherent limit to self-actualisation
    - i. Homosexuals can still be told that their sexuality is merely a phase, which shows that other people can still deny our emotions and experiences → the self is not exclusively private
3. Suppressing the public self and retreating into private self is not necessarily beneficial. Perhaps it is better to confront problems rather than denying the influence of others on our behaviour.