Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind and Cognition Prof. Ranjan K. Panda Prof. Rajakishore Nath Department of Humanities and Social Science Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay

Lecture No. # 39 Personal Identity - 1

Today I am going to discuss the problem of personal identity. The problem of personal identity is one of the most important problems in the contemporary issues in philosophy of mind and cognitions, because the way we have been identifying the person with different things, with different objects, like, with machines, and if your identifying persons with machines, then how can we identify persons from one time to another time? What is that continuity that is there in the personal identity and all these problems are what we are going to discuss in this lecture.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:59)

Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition

There is no single problem of personal identity, but rather a wide range of loosely connected questions.

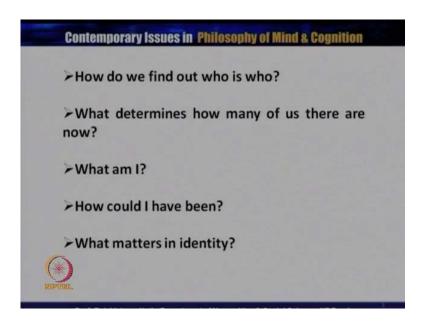
Who am I?

What is it to be a person?

What does it take for a person to persist from one time to another—that is, for the same person to exist at different times?

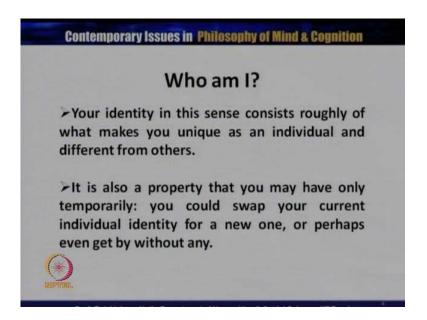
Firstly, there is no single problem of personal identity, but rather a wide range of loosely connected questions. Here are the most important, and familiar ones - who am I? Who is it to be a person? What does it take for a person to persist from one time to another - that is, for the same person to exist at different times?

(Refer Slide Time: 01:23)



Then, how do we find out who is who? What determines how many of us there are now? What am I? How could I have been? What matters in identity? All these questions play a vital role in the problem of personal identity.

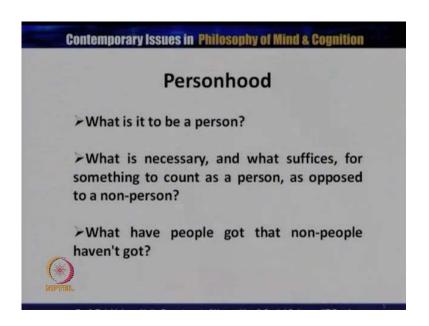
(Refer Slide time: 01:46)



Firstly, we have to see the question of - who am I? We often speak of one's personal identity as, that which makes one the person one is. Your identity, in this sense, consists roughly of what makes you unique as an individual, and different from others.

Or, it is the way you see, or define yourself, or the network of values, and conventions that structure your life. This individual identity is a property, or a set of properties. Precisely, it is the one you have only contingently; you might have had a different identity from the one you have now. It is also a property that you may have only temporarily; you could swap your current individual identity for a new one, or perhaps even get by without any thing.

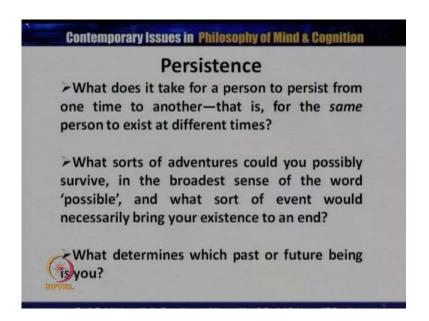
(Refer Slide Time: 02:52)



Secondly, we have to see that second question on personhood - what is it to be a person? What is necessary, and what is sufficient for something to count as a person as opposed to a non-person? What have people got that non-people have not got?

This amounts more or less, to asking for the definition of the word 'person', and answer would be taken from, necessarily, x is a person, if and only if, x is something like this. More specifically, we can ask - at what point in one's development from a fertilized egg, there comes a person, or what would it take for a chimpanzee, or a martin, or an electronic computer, to be a person if they could ever be.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:44)



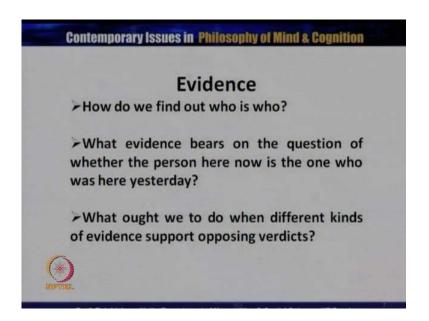
The third question is very much related to persistence - what does it take for a person to persist from one time to another? That is, for the same person to exist at different times. What sort of adventures could you possibly survive in the broadest sense of the word 'possible', and what sort of events would necessarily bring your existence to an end?

What determines which past, or future of being is you? Suppose, you want to look at a child in an old class photograph, and say, "That is me!" What makes you that one, rather than one of the others? What is it about the way she relates to you then, as you are now? For that matter, what makes it the case that anyone at all, who existed back then, is you? This is the question of personal identity over time, and answer to it as an account of our persistence conditions, or criteria of personal identity over time.

Historically, this question often arises out of hope or out of the fear that, we might continue to exist after we die. Plato's (()) is a famous example, on whether or not this could happen depends on whether biological death, necessarily brings one's existence to an end. Imagine that, after your death there really will be someone in the next world, or in this one, who resembles you in certain ways.

How would that being have to relate to you, as you are now, in order to be you, rather than someone else? What would the higher powers do to keep you at a distance after your death? Or is there anything they could do? The answer to these questions depends on the answer to the persistent questions.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:08)



Now, we have to see the evidence. How do we find out who is who? What evidence bears on the question of whether the person here now is the one who was here yesterday? What ought we to do when different kinds of evidence support opposing verdicts? One source of evidence is past person memory; if you remember doing some particular actions, or at least seem to remember, and someone really did do it, then that person is probably you.

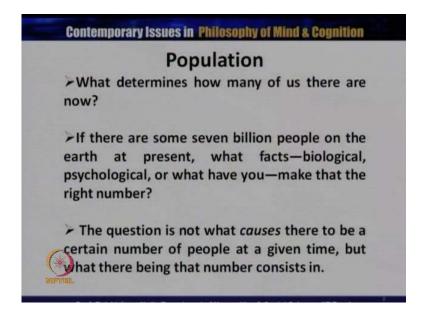
Another source is physical continuity; if the person who did it looks just like you, or even better, if she is in some sense, physically or ((specio)) temporarily continues with you, this is the reason to think she is you. Which of these sources is more fundamental? Does past person memory count as an evidence all by itself? Or, we can check it against publicly available physical evidence.

The evidence questions dominated the philosophical literature on personal identity. If you see their writings on (()), and (()) has given an elaborate explanation that I will be explaining later on. It is important to distinguish it from the persistent questions. What it takes for you to persist through time is one thing, and how we might find out whether you have, is another.

If the criminal had fingerprints just like yours, the court may conclude that it is you; but, even if that is conclusive evidence, having your fingerprints is not what it is for a past or

future being to begin to be you. It is possible that you could survive without any fingers at all, nor sufficient someone else could have fingerprints just like yours.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:34)



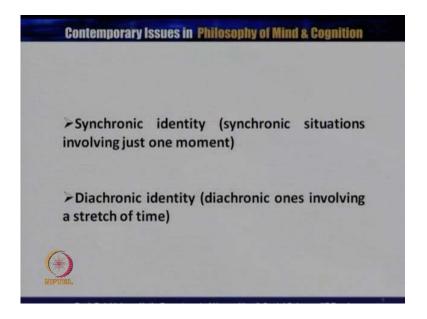
These questions are very much related to evidence, and this evidence also plays a vital role to identify the personal identity. Now we have to see the problem of population. If we think of the persistent questions, it is asking - which of the characters interviewed at the beginning of a story, survive to become the ones at the end of it?

We may also want to ask - how many are on the stage at any point of time? What determines how many of us are there now? If there are some, 7 billion people on the earth at present, what facts, like biological, psychological facts you have, makes that the right number?

The question is not what causes there to be a certain number of people at a given time, but what there being that number consists in? We may think that, the number of people at any given time is simply the number of human organisms there are then, but this is under dispute. Surgeons sometimes cut the nerves bands, connecting one's cerebral hemispheres. This results in behavior that suggests some sort of radical disunity of consciousness, such as, simultaneously pulling one's treasure with one hand, and pulling them down with the other. You might think that this gives us two people sharing one organism. This is sometimes called, 'the problem of synchronic identity', as opposed to

the diachronic identity of the persistent questions. In the contractual identity of the questions, we have seen that these terms need careful handling.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:16)



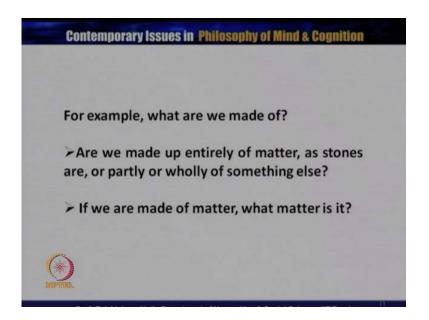
They are apt to give the impression that identity comes in 2 kinds - synchronic and diachronic. A serious blunder that, truth is simply that, there are two kinds of situations, where we can ask how many people, or other things there are - synchronic situation involving just one moment, and the diachronic involving the stretch of time.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:00)



Now, you have to see - what am I? The question of what am I is very much important in the philosophy of mind, and also, in particular to the personal identity. What sort of things, metaphysically speaking, are you and I and other human people? What is our basic metaphysical nature?

(Refer Slide Time: 11:21)



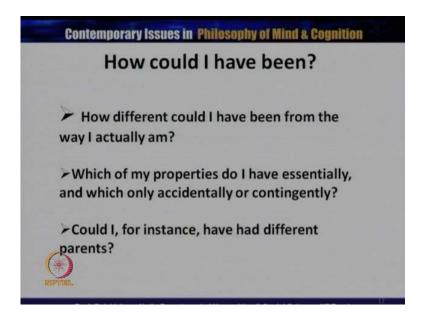
For example, what are we made of? Are we made up entirely of matter, as stones are, or partly, or wholly of something else? If we are made of matter, what matter is it? Just the matter that makes up our bodies, or we might be larger or smaller than our bodies? In other words, where do our special boundaries lie? More fundamentally, what fixes those boundaries? Are we substance, or metaphysically independent beings? Or each of us a state, or an aspect of something else, or perhaps some sort of process, or events? One possible answer to these bold questions is that, we are biological organisms.

Also sometimes, many philosophers reject this view that we are biological organisms. Another is that, we are partly immaterial substances, or compound things made up of immaterial soul, and a material body. Hume suggested that, 'each of us is a bundle of perceptions'. A popular view now a days is that, we are material things consisted by organisms.

You are made up of the same matter as a certain animal; but you and animal are different things because, what it takes for you to persist is different. This is the view of Sumyakar. Another is the fact that, we are temporarily parts of animal; and this is the view of

persons, and there is even the paradoxical view that, 'there is nothing that we are. We do not really exist at all.'

(Refer Slide Time: 13:29)

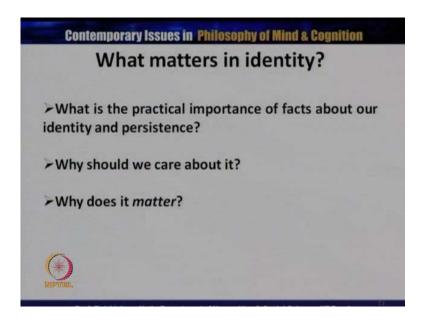


If you see, in some other writings they have explained in that way. Now, we have to see the questions on - how could I have been? How different could I have been from the way I actually am? Which of my properties do I have essentially, and which only accidentally or contingently? Could I have had different parents? For example, Frank, (()) and (()) might have had children together.

Could I have been one of them? Or could they only have had children other than me? Could I have existed in their womb, and died before ever becoming conscious? Are there possible ((walls)) just like the actual one, expect for who is who, where people have changed places so that, the impact in your career is mine, and vice-versa.

While these are the best discovered questions about personal identities, which are debatable, they not about whether beings, in other worlds are identical with the ones in the actual world. What they are is sometimes discussed in connection with the others.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:48)



Now, we have to see the questions on - what matters in identity? What is the practical importance of facts about our identity and persistence? Why should we care about it? Why does it matter? Imagine that, surgeons are going to put your brain into my head, and that neither of us have any choice about this. Will the resulting person presume that he is responsible for my actions, or for yours, or both, or neither?

Suppose, he will be in terrible pain after the operation, unless one of us pays a large sum in advance, if both of us were entirely selfish, which one of us would have a reason to pay? The answer may seem to turn entirely on whether the resulting person would be you, or I. Only you can be responsible for your actions.

The only one whose future welfare you cannot personally ignore is yourself. You have a special selfish interest in your own future, and no one else. Identity itself matters practically, but some deny this; they say that someone else could be responsible for your actions, you could have an entirely selfish reason to care about someone else, but it will be for his own self.

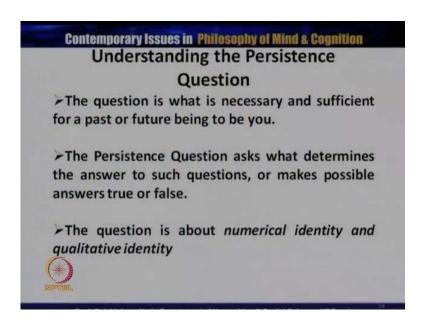
Perhaps, what gives me a reason to care about what happens to the man, whom people will call by my name tomorrow, is not that he is me, but that, he is then physiologically continuous with me as I am now, or because he relates to me in some other way, that does imply that he and I are one. If someone other than me were psychologically

continuous tomorrow with me, as I am now, he would have what matters to me, and I have got to transfer my concern to him.

Identity itself has practical importance; that completes our survey of problems. Though these eight questions are always related, it is hard to find any important common feature that makes them all, questions about personal identity; and, all these questions play a vital role in order to identify, in order to explain about the problem of personal identity.

Different scientists, philosophers, and ordinary people have explained personal identity in different ways, and about all these questions we will be discussing while discussing on the problem of personal identity. In any case, they are different, and failing to keep them separate will only bring trouble.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:07)



Now, you have to see some the basic problems on understanding the persistence questions. The question is - what is necessary and sufficient for a past, or future being to be you? If we point to you now, and then describe someone, or something existing at another time, we can ask whether we are referring to one thing twice, or referring once to each of those things.

The persistence question asks, what determines the answer to such questions, or makes possible answers true or false. The question is about numerical identity, to say that this,

and that are numerically identical is to say that they are one and the same; 1 thing, rather than 2.

This is different from qualitative identity. Things are qualitatively identical when they are exactly similar. Identical twins may be qualitatively identical; there may be no telling them apart; but, they are not numerically identical, as there 2 of them that is what makes them twins. A past or future person need not be at that past or future time, exactly like what you are now, to be you. That is, in order to be numerically identical with you.

You do not remain qualitatively the same throughout your life. You change, you get bigger, or smaller, you learn new things, and forget others, and so on. So, the question is not what it takes for a past or future being to be qualitatively just like you, but, what it takes for a past or future being to be opposed to someone, or something other than you.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:24)

Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition

The confusion of qualitative with numerical identity is one source of misunderstanding about the Persistence Question.

The question of what it takes for someone to remain the same person is not the Persistence Question.

It is not even a question about numerical identity.

The confusion of qualitative with numerical identity is one of the important aspects in personal identity; and there is some kind of misunderstanding about the persistence question. Here is another, people sometimes ask what it takes for someone to remain the same person, from one time to another.

The idea is that, if I were to alter in certain ways, if I lost most of my memory, or my personality changed dramatically, or I underwent a profound religious conversion, then I

would no longer be person I was. If the question of what it takes for someone to remain the same person, is not a persistence question. It is not even a question about numerical identity.

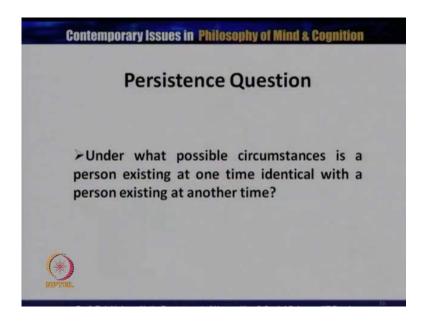
If it were, it would answer itself. I would necessarily remain numerically the same for as long as I exist. Nothing could make me a numerically different person from the one I am now. For someone existing tomorrow, to be numerically identical to me, is precisely for him to be me. Nothing can talked out us one thing and end of us another thing a different one.

This has nothing to do with personal identity in particular. It is simply a fact about the logic of identity, and this logic of identity also plays a very vital role in the problem of personal identity; because, very ordinary people identify themselves with the logic of identity, and this logic of identity may not be sufficient to explain the personal identity.

Logically you may prove some kind of personal identity, but it is empirically impossible, and I will be discussing all these things in the due course. Those who say that, after a certain sort of adventures you would be a different person, or that you would no longer be the person you once were, presumably mean that, you would still exist, but you would have changed in some important ways. The usually thinking of one's individual identity in the - whom am I sense, is about the possibility of you losing some, or all of the properties that makes your individual identity, and acquiring new ones.

This has nothing to do with the persistence questions. It is inconvenient that, the word 'identical' and 'same' means so many different things, in numerical identity, and qualitative identity, individual psychological identity, and more. To make matters worse, some philosophers speak of surviving, in a way that does not imply numerical identity.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:47)



So, I could survive a certain adventure without existing afterwards. Confusion is inevitable. Here is a more insidious misunderstanding. Persistence question is that - under what possible circumstance is a person existing at one time is identical with a person existing at another time?

In other words, what does it take for a past or future person to be you? We have a person existing at one time, and a person existing at another, and the confusion is - what is necessary and sufficient for them to be 1 person, rather than 2? This is not a persistence question, it is too narrow. We may want to know whether you were even an embryo, or fetus, or whether you could survive in an invisible vegetative state, or as crop.

These are clearly questions about what it takes for us to persist on account of our identity over time, or to answer them. Their answers may have important ethical implications. It matters to the morality of abortions, and whether someone, that is, in an embryo or fetus at 1 time, can be an adult person at another time, or whether the adult person is always numerically different from the fetus.

Many philosophers define 'person' as something that have certain special mental properties, for example, a famous person said that a 'person' is a thinking, intelligent being, that has reason and reflections, and can consider itself as itself.

The same thinking in different times and places, implies that, something is a person at a given time, if and only if, it has those mental properties then; and neurologists say that, fetus and human beings in a persistent vegetative state have no mental properties at all. Then if anything like Lock's definition is right, such beings are not people, not at the time. Anyway, in that case, we cannot infer anything about whether, you were once an embryo or you have come as a vegetable, by discovering what it takes for a past or future person to be you.

We can illustrate the point by considering a particular answer to the question. One, necessarily a person who exists at one time is identical with a person who exists at a second time, if and only if, the past person can at the same time can remember, and experience the second person as at the second time, or vice-versa.

That is, a past or a future person is you, just in the case that, you can now remember and experience that she had then, or she can then remember, and experience what you are having now. Then we can say that, memory is the main criteria for personal identity. Therefore, with the help of memory we can identify some persons.

The memory criteria may seem to imply that, if you were to lapse into an irreversible vegetative state, they resulting vegetable would not be you, as it would be unable to remember anything. You would have seized to exist, or perhaps passed on to the next world; but in fact, it implies no such thing, assuming that a human vegetable is not a person, that is not a case involving a person existing at one time, and a person existing at another time.

The memory criterion is supposed to tell us, which past or future person you are, but not which past or future thing. In other words, it says what it takes for one to persist as a person, but now what it takes for one to persist with the qualifications. So, it implies nothing at all about whether you could come to be a vegetable, or a crop. For the same reason, it tells us nothing about whether you where even an embryo.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:56)



So, rather than question 1, we ought to ask what it takes for any past of future being, or person, not to be you or I. Now, we have to see questions on persistence - under what possible circumstances is a person who exist at one time is identical with something that exists at another time?

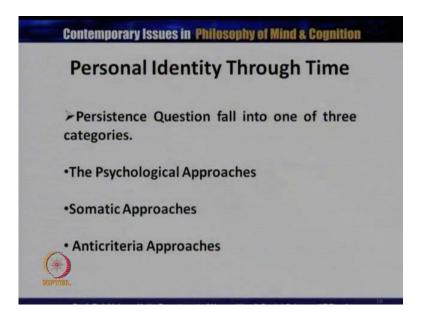
This is the persistence question. Philosophers typically question 1, rather than question 2; because, they assume that, every person who is a person essentially is nothing, that is, in fact, a person could possibly exist without being a person.

By contrast we can say that, someone who is in fact a student could exist without being a student. No student is essentially a student, and it would be a mistake to enquire about the condition of student identity by asking - what it takes for a student existing at one time, to be identical to a student at another time? This claims a person's essentialism; it implies that, whatever is a person at 1 time, must be a person at all times.

When she exists, she is making the 2 questions equivalent. Persons essentialism together, with something like the (()) account of personhood, implies that, you could not possibly have been an embryo. The embryo that gave rise to you is not strictly you. You came into being only when it developed certain mental capacities, nor could you come to be a human vegetable. For that matter, it rules out us being biological organisms, since, no organism is a person essentially. Every human organism starts out as an unthinking embryo, and may end in a vegetative state, accounting our identity through time, and this

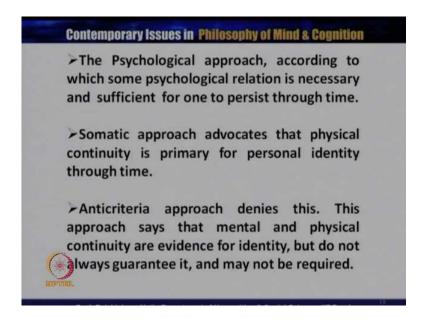
also plays a very vital role. This personal identity, if you see, through time, will play an important role.

(Refer Slide Time; 31:10)



Now, we have to see the personal identity through time. Almost all who propose answers to the persistence questions fall into 1 of 3 following categories. First one is the psychological approach, the somatic approach, and the anti-criteria approach.

(Refer Slide Time: 31:34)



First is the psychological approach, according to which, some psychological relation is necessary and sufficient for one to persist. You have that future being, in some sense, inherited its mental features, belief, memories, performance ,the capacity for rational thought, that sort of things from you; and you are the first being whose mental features you have inherited in this way.

There is dispute on what sort of inheritance that has to be. Further it must be undermined by some kind of physical continuity, for instance, whether a non-branching requirement is needed. There is also a disagreement about what mental features need to be inherited, but, most philosophers, writing on personal identity, since the early 20th century, have enrolled some version of the psychological approach.

The memory criteria mentioned earlier is an example. A second idea is that, our identity through time constituting in some ((root)) physical relation, you are that part or that past or future being that has your body. That is the same biological organism as you are, or like you.

Whether you survive or perish, has nothing to do with psychological facts. You may think that, truth lies somewhere between the two; we need both mental, and the physical continuity to survive, or perhaps either would suffice without the other, these of this sort, are usually versions of psychological approach as we have defined it.

Here is a test case, for example, imagine that your brain is transplanted into my head to bring a result. The person ends up with your cerebrum, and most of your mental features, and the empty headed being left behind which may perhaps be biologically alive, but will have no mental features. Those who say that, you would be the same as who gets your brain, usually say so because, they believe that there is some relation involved psychologically suffices for you to persist. They accept the psychological approach.

Those who say that you would be the empty headed vegetable, say so because, they take your identity to constitute something entirely non-psychological, as the semantic approach has it. Both the psychological and somatic approach agrees that, this somatic approach is nothing, but for them that the bodily criterion is primary to identify the persons.

Both of these approaches agree that there is something that it takes for us to persist with our identity through time, consists in or necessarily follows from something other than itself. A third view is – anti-criterialism, which denies that mental and physical

continuity are evidence for identity, but do not always guarantee it, and may not be required.

No sort of continuity is both necessary and sufficient, for you to survive. The only correct, and complete answer the persistent question is the survival statement that - a person existing at one time is identical with a being existing at another, if and only if, they are identical. Anti-criterialism is poorly understood, and deserves more attention than it has received.

It seems that, the persistence questions mostly have an answer in 1 of these 3 views; and these 3 views play a vital role to explain on some of the problems on personal identity. If there is such a thing as you, if there is anything sitting there, and reading this now, then some condition must be necessary and sufficient for it to persist.

Those conditions will involve psychology, or only ((root)) physical continuity, or something else, or they are trivial and uniform, as anti-criterialism has it. Moreover, utmost one such 'you' can be true. We will see this approach some other way, but, if you see many philosophers, and many students of philosophers, and students of psychology, they have explained persons in the psychological approach, because it seems obvious that he would go along with your brain if it was transplanted, and this is so because, that is the organ you carry your memories and other mental features in.

This would lead to a recipient to believe that he or she was you; and why should this belief be mistaken? This is one way of psychological approach of explaining a personal identity, and this makes it easy to suppose that our identity over time has something to do with psychology. It is notoriously difficult however, to get from this condition, a possible answer to the persistence questions.

What psychological relations might our identity through time consist in? We have already mentioned – memory; a past, or future being might be you, if and only if, you can now remember and experience what she had then, or vice-versa. For suppose, a young student is fined for overdue library books, later as a middle aged lawyer, she remembers the paying the fine, later still, in that age, she remembers her law career, but has entirely forgotten not only paying the fine, but everything else she did in her youth.

According to memory criterion, the young student is the middle age lawyer, the lawyer is the old woman, but the old man is not the young student. This is an impossible result; if x and y are one, and y and z are one, x and z cannot be two. Identity is transitive; memory continuity is not. Secondly, it seems to belong to the very idea of remembering that you can remember only your own experience. To remember paying a fine is to remember yourself paying, that makes it trivial and ((uninformative)) to say that you are the person who whose experiences you can remember, that is, the memory continuity is insufficient for personal identity.

It is ((primitive)) because, you cannot know whether someone genuinely remembers a past experience, without already knowing whether he is the one who had it. Suppose we want to know whether Blot who exists now, is the same as the Clot, who we know had existed at some time in the past.

The memory criteria tells us that Blot is Clot if, Blot can now remember the experiences of Clot that occurred at that past time, but Blot seems to remember one of Clot's experience from that time, and counts as genuine memory only if Blot actually is Clot.

So, we should already have to know whether Blot is Clot before we could apply the principle that is, supposed to tell us whether this she is. One response to the past person is to modify the memory criteria by switching from direct to indirect memory connections.

The old women is the young student because she can recall the experience that the lawyer had at a time, when the lawyer remembers the student's life. The second problem is traditionally made by replacing memory with a new concept of electro cognitions, or quasi memory, which is just like a memory, but without the identity requirement, even if it is self contradictory to say that; and remember doing something I did not do, but someone else did, I could still quasi remember it.

This 'quasi remember' also is one of the important things. Sometimes we make use of it in our day today life; whenever we meet our old friend, and very old officials, then we used to say that, I think we have seen, or I have seen you, and like that. This kind of memory is known as 'quasi memory'. Neither of the moves get us far, as both the original and the modified memory criteria plays a more of (()) problem.

There are many times in my past that I cannot remember, 'quasi remember' at all; and to which I am not linked even indirectly by an overlapping chain of memories, for instance, there is no time when I could recall anything that happened to me while I was dreamlessly sleeping last night.

The memory criteria has the absolute implication that I have never existed at any time, when I was completely unconscious. The man sleeping in my bed last night was someone else. A better solution appeal to questions is dependency. We can depend on two notion's psychological connectedness and the psychological continuity.

A being is psychologically connected at one future time with me as I am now. Just if he is in the psychological state he is in then, in large part because of the psychological state I am in now, having a current memory or a quasi-memory of an earlier experience is one sort of psychological connection. The experience causes the memory of it, but there are the others.

Importantly, one current mental state can be caused partly by the mental state one was in at times, when one was unconscious, for example, most of my current believes are the same ones I had while I slept last night. Those beliefs have caused themselves to continue existing. We can then define the second notion thus. Therefore, the psychological continuity with a past or future being, just if someone of my current mental states relate to those he is in then by a chain of psychological connections.

Now, suppose that a person x who exists at one time is identical with someone called y existing at another time, if and only if, x is at one time psychological continuous with y as it at the other time. These were the most obvious objects to the memory criterion. This still leaves important questions unanswered. However, suppose we could somehow copy all the mental acquirements of your brain on to the mind, as much as we can copy the contents of 1 computer device on to another, and suppose this process erased the previous connection of both brains, whether this it would be a case of psychological continuity depends on what sort of casual difference counts.

The resulting being would be mentally like you were before, and not like I was; and he would have inherited your mental properties in a way, in a funny way. Is it the right way? Could you literally move from 1 human animal to another, via brain state transfer, and the all these questions are very vital questions in the problem of personal identity.

Whenever we identify some persons, these kinds of problem arise. You need to identify particular persons, and therefore the problem of personal identity is one of the important issues in the philosophy of mind and cognitions. In the next lectures I will explain some of the different issues on personal identity, in respect to non-materialistic view on persons, whether we can say that psychology, or somatic, or physical continuity, with personal identity, or there is something called non-physical continuity, which is identified as persons. That I will explain in the next lectures. Thank you.