

# Term paper on psychological continuity

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Psychological continuity is related to the continuity of mental state and describes that a person A at a later stage of his life can remember the events happened to him five years back and even earlier. This provides the relation of the remembering the incidences occurred at earlier stages of life at the later stage of life. If the person is able to remember their experience, then it's the same person. Psychological continuity maintains that the same person remembers the experiences at every stage of his life and the two stages of the mental state belongs to same person only if there exists continuity in consciousness among the two stages. The continuity is maintained through the overlapping chains of memories; hence, memory is the identity criterion. This may be argued as people not necessarily remembers their childhood incidences which means it would make them a different person as there's apparently no continuity in memory. However, the continuity is not present only apparently and deep down the memory, the person might be linked to the stage of memory which remembers the earlier memories. So, the person might not remember his childhood incidences, however there are memories which are connected to the childhood memories of the person, thus making it an overlapping pattern of memories. Restating the Lockean account of psychological continuity in the light of above statement with the illustration; that between Z today and Z twenty years back there exists direct memory connections if Z can remember some of his experiences of twenty years ago. If Z is unable to recollect such experiences, there still exists the psychological continuity, in a way that Z remembers incidences of 10 years ago and ten years ago, remembered experiences of 10 years ago, thus leading to creating overlapping chain of

memories. The Lockean account of personal identity thus can be revised as: Z2 at t2 is same person as Z1 at t1 in case Z2 at t2 is linked by continuity of memories to Z1 at t1.

Psychological continuity couldn't be based on memory only and is based on several other types of direct psychological connections. Such connection is the intention to carry out an act which is followed by the performance of the act. Other connections which are accessible to consciousness are a desire or a belief. These direct connections form a link between traits of adult character and experiences of childhood. Psychological connectedness, in general comprises of any link between the present psychological traits and past factors. Psychological continuity is based on psychological connectedness and yet, these two have subtle differences. Connectedness is also linked to the survival of the body which is different from continuity. Psychological continuity is not enough for connectedness, for example; the case of Mr. Hyde and Dr. Jekyll demonstrates that these two personalities had continuity and they shared their memories, still they were not connected psychologically and had different perspectives. Continuity can be interrupted through amnesia, however the connectedness remains intact and the person maintains same values, beliefs and intentions though due to loss of continuity, their reason of formation will not be remembered (Shoemaker, Sydney & Swinburne, 1984). Connectedness is not transitive in contrary to continuity. The experiences and memories are continuous, however it does not necessarily imply that person was connected to his self all his life. He may have connected one year back, but not two years back. As stated by Williams (1970), " It is also recognized that mentalistic considerations and

considerations of bodily continuity are involved in questions of personal identity” (p. 90).

Psychological continuity alone can't constitute personal identity when the identity is presupposed. As stated by Noonan (1989), “ how do we distinguish between real and apparent memory except to say that real memories are memories of things you really experienced, which presupposes we already have settled the matter of personal identity” (p. 13). If the case of presupposition is removed, personal identity demonstrates the features of psychological continuity and is transitive in nature. The overlapping chain of memory which forms psychological continuity also involves personal identity. Personal identity can be compared to a chain, where one link of memory might not be directly connected to every other of memory however, it's sufficient for the formation of personal identity that one link is connected to another and another to some other link and so on.

Psychological continuity can't be sufficient for personal identity as the identity is in numerical terms and one identity can never be equal to two identities. This can be illustrated through the example of the Star Trek TV series of 1960. The serial involved a teletransporter which reads the information of a person's body including the neural composition and information of every cell. This teletransporter destroys the original body and creates similar body at some different location. Since psychological properties are related to the brain, then the new person will have all the psychological properties of the original person. Applying psychological theory, the new person should be the original person that is x is y now. Assuming now that the teletransporter

made an error and didn't erase x before creating y. Now theoretically there are two x which have same psychological properties and if personal identity is constituted of psychological identity only, then there are two x. logically, this is impossible as one person can't be made two persons. Personal identity is in numerical terms and hence, there can't be two identities for one person. For example, A & B have similar psychological continuity but A is not B and vice versa. As is it identified that despite of continuity, A & B are not similar; this implies there's more to the identity than just continuity.

Another dimension which is psychological connectedness and the psychological connections like belief retention and memory does not yield a complete personal identity criterion. This is because identity is transitive whereas psychological connectedness is not transitive. The psychological theory implies that a person stages are composed of psychological states which are standalone and does not required to be referenced to the preceding stages. This becomes the psychological atomism. As stated by Beld (2000), " this atomism fits perfectly in a conception of psychological continuity that hinges on psychological relations of qualitative similarity, that is, on physical connectedness" (p. 68). The discussion on psychological continuity not being sufficient for physical identity can be summarized as that identity does not allow for duplication in logical terms whereas psychological continuity does permit duplication, which implies that psychological continuity alone can't be identity. If x and y are considered to be same person, this means that qualitative identity is confused with numerical identity.

## **References**

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