



## **Identity In Question**

*Individual, Person and Self*

### **Paul du Gay**

My name is Paul du Gay. I'm joined by Professor David Saunders of Griffith University in Australia who is a historian of law and culture. David, hello.

### **David Saunders**

Hello Paul.

### **Paul du Gay**

David, in some of the histories you've conducted you argue that not all individuals have or are persons. That seems somewhat of a strange statement. What do you mean by it?

### **David Saunders**

Well you're right that it's strange and it certainly produces strange looks when you say this in public because we simply assume that person and individual are identical. If we want to make some headway, however, I think we should begin to distinguish between the two and say why person and not individual? But look, because it means breaking a deep habit of identifying person with individual, maybe I could give a couple of examples.

### **Paul du Gay**

That'd be excellent.

### **David Saunders**

Well the first example could be one that some of the students will know, namely how do you get into the United States without a correct visa?

### **Paul du Gay**

How do you?

### **David Saunders**

I don't know whether it's happened to you, it's happened to me and let me tell me that when you're at the US Immigration Control it is useless to say 'Let me in I'm a human individual'. The answer of course is – you might be a human individual, but do you have a visa? Are you a visa'd person – in other words, do you occupy that particular status and I call that a personal status. You have to be the right person whatever you are as an individual. Now another example, Paul if you like, and everyone will know this one because you're all Open University students, you're Open University persons, enrolled persons. Paul and I aren't. It's no good Paul or myself saying look I want to get credit for this course, I'm a great individual. If I'm not enrolled then I don't have that particular attribute that I need for that particular purpose. I mean Paul and I are both great individuals, intellectually and in all ways, but it will do us no good whatsoever in relation to getting the credit that an Open University enrolled person can get. Now these are two simple examples but how far can you take them? Well I think quite a long way. Let me just say four things about these two examples and I think you'll follow what I'm saying. Not all individuals hold US visas or are enrolled in the Open University. That means not all individuals are persons for those two purposes, so that's the first point. The second point is of course that these are technical, persons are technical. Individuals are like raw material. Persons are technical. You have to fill out a visa application or an enrolment application. You have to meet certain technical conditions to be those types of person. That's the second point. A third point is that these two types of person have no necessary relation to each other. You may be both, or neither, or one. It all depends on the purpose. In other words, there's no such thing as a complete person. Persons – plural – are tied to particular purposes and finally, of course, it could all change. Persons are historically very variable, depending on all sorts of circumstances from government policy to the

ambitions, educational ambitions of a certain class of student. So those are reasons, Paul, why it is useful if you want to understand how our society works, how we work in it, it's useful to distinguish between persons and individuals.