



A Few Preliminaries...

The Puzzle of Personal Identity

An ancient puzzle...

- ▶ One useful way to begin tackling questions of personal identity is by considering the 'ship of Theseus'
- ▶ Theseus was an Athenian hero who sailed to Crete, defeated the Minotaur and rescued some Athenian captives. In his honor, the Athenians preserved his ship, and used to sail it around on parade once a year





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- ▶ Over time, however, various bits and pieces of the ship needed repairing so the Athenians just found new parts (shaped just like the old parts and made out of the same materials) and made the necessary repairs
- ▶ It seems plausible (and very intuitive to say) that Theseus' ship was still 'one and the same ship', even after some repairs of this sort were made





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- ▶ Next, let's suppose that he's able to carefully put these pieces together, according to the design of the original ship, until it's completely rebuilt
- ▶ Finally, let's suppose that this guy's really proud of his work and so the next time the annual 'Ship of Theseus Parade' comes around, he brings out his ship and bills it as the *real* ship of Theseus!





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Question: Which ship is the *real* ship of Theseus?

- ▶ Is it the carefully repaired ship? Or is it the reconstituted ship built out of all of the discarded pieces?
- ▶ This ancient puzzle raises a number of interesting issues about the identity of objects over time
 - How can something change and yet remain the same thing? If something changes, it's different. And if it's different, it's no longer the same


