

# ON SAMENESS OF IDENTITY

By Thomas Hobbes

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## **From *De Corpore* (1655) part 2, chapter 11**

If (for example) that Ship of Theseus ... by continual reparation, in taking out the old planks, and putting in new ... were, after all the planks were changed, numerically the same ship as it was at the beginning—and if some man had kept the old planks as they were taken out, putting them together afterwards in the same order, and had again made a ship of them, this without doubt had also been numerically the same ship with that which was at the beginning—and so there would have been two ships numerically the same, which is absurd.

But, according to the third opinion, nothing would be the same as it was; so that a man standing would not be the same as he was sitting; nor the water which is in the vessel, the same with that which is poured out of it.

## **From *Thomas White's De Mundo Examined* (1642) chapter 12, parts 3-4**

3. Say, therefore, with respect to any body such as a ship, we ask: “Is it the same being, or the same body as it was before?”—for nothing but the material is determined by the word “being” or “body”. Then, if the material is the same as [it was] formerly (no part of it having been removed and no new material added), that material will be, in number, the same being and the same body, as to number, that existed before; but, if some part of the first material has been removed or another part has been added, that ship will be another being, or another body. For, there cannot be a body “the same in number” whose parts are not all the same, because all a body’s parts, taken collectively, are the same as the whole.

Now if we ask, concerning a ship: “Is it, as regards number, the same ship as existed before?” [then,] because its form is determined by the word “ship”, namely that it may be suitable for sailing, that which remains [after the removal of some of the ship’s parts] will always be a ship, and that ship the same as before, because the ship previously existing was never destroyed. But, if some part of the ship is removed so as to make the ship no longer fit to sail, what is left will not be a ship at all, and therefore not the same vessel [as existed before].

Hence, if another plank is substituted for one that has been removed, the result will be that a different form of ship (the first having ceased to exist) is imposed on different material. From this material, which is now not the same [as that of the earlier vessel] a ship will be created that is not the same in number [as the earlier ship], but is the same in appearance; i.e., similar.

Besides, the fact that a ship of which one plank alone is changed—this plank being essential for the form of the ship—is not the same in number as it was before, may be shown thus: If it is the same ship after a single plank has been changed, then by the same criterion it will be the same ship when a further plank has been changed, and when yet another; and so on until all the planks are changed. So if anyone believes that when planks have been removed and they are joined up again in the same pattern as before and will make up a ship just as previously, then there will be two ships the same in number; so two and one are the same number, which is impossible.

4. Now, if we ask, concerning a river, “Is it the same being, or the same body, as previously?” the reply will be “No”. For the term “being” or “body” signifies material alone, and waters move along and pour themselves into the sea, being replaced by waters, different as to number, that are discharged from a spring, and these latter move forward in the same way. Further, a river is, in number, not a body; it only resembles body and is of the same appearance. So, if we ask, “Is it the same river?”, because the term “river” determines material in no more than as being fluid, the reply will be: “It *is* the same river,” for a single river is classified by the continuity of its flow, which is one unbroken motion. Therefore, since the motion and the flow are one and the same, the river will also be one and the same.

Likewise, if one asks: “Is a man, when old and young, the same being, or matter, in number?” it is clear that, because of the continual casting of [existing] body-tissue and the acquisition of new, it is not the same material [that endures], and hence not the same body; yet, because of the unbroken nature of the flux by which matter decays and is replaced, he is always the same man.

The same must be said of the commonwealth. When any citizen dies, the material of the state is not the same; i.e., the state is not the same being. Yet, the uninterrupted degree and motion of government that signalize a state endure, while they remain as one, that the state is the same in number.