**Ship of Theseus**

A useful way to begin tackling questions of personal identity is by considering the Ship of Theseus. This is a famous philosophical example, dating back to ancient times. Theseus was an Athenian hero who sailed to Crete, defeated the Minotaur, rescued some Athenian captives, and sailed them back to Athens. In his honor, the Athenians preserved the ship, and used to sail it around on parade once a year. Over time, however, various bits and pieces of the ship needed repairing. No problem. They just found some new parts, shaped just like the old parts and made out of the same materials, and made the repairs. It seems plausible that it was still one and the same ship, even after some repairs of this sort were made.

Now suppose that over time, every part of the ship eventually gets replaced in this gradual, piecemeal way. Is it still one and the same ship? Here it seems a bit more problematic than before to say it's the same ship. But we might persuade ourselves that, since the replacements were all gradual and piecemeal--and since it doesn't appear like any one of the replacements caused the original ship to cease to exist, and a new ship to spring up in its place--that yes, this is still the same ship as the Theseus' original ship. Of course, it has undergone some qualitative changes. But that was also true of the ship when Theseus still owned it. Back when Theseus owned the ship, it was constantly getting wet, having pitch applied to it, and even having parts replaced. That's the ordinary course of events for a ship.

Now let's add a new twist to the story. Suppose that one enterprising Athenian collects all the discarded parts of the original ship. As time goes by, his collection accumulates, until eventually he has all the pieces of the original ship. Now he carefully puts these pieces together, according to the design of the original ship. Next time the annual "Ship of Theseus Parade" comes around, he brings out his ship and bills it as the real Ship of Theseus! The other Athenians are dismayed. They thought that the ship they had been carefully repairing all of these years was the Ship of Theseus.

Who is right? Which ship is one and the same as the original ship? The carefully repaired ship? Or the ship built out of all the discarded pieces?

**Monochrome Mary**

From the moment of her birth Mary was confined in a black-and-white room, where she was never exposed to anything that was not black, white, or any shade of grey. Her education may have been unusual but was certainly not neglected, and by reading books (no color books of course) and watching lectures on black and white television, she eventually became the world’s greatest scientist. She learned literally everything there was to know about us and about the environment. Finally the day came when Mary was let out of her monochrome room and into the world outside. And what a shock she had! She saw color for the first time. She learned what is was like to see red and blue and yellow. So, even though she knew every physical fact about color, there were still things about color that she didn’t even know…

Moral: (1) there are some facts that are not physical; (2) be very careful how you pick your parents.