

## ON THE SHIP OF THESEUS: CRITIQUING THE OBVIOUS SOLUTION

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[Theseus'un Gemisi Üzerine: Bariz Çözümü Eleştirmek]

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### ABSTRACT

This paper calls into question E. J. Lowe's solution to the ancient puzzle of the Ship of Theseus which problematizes the issue of identity over time. Lowe claims that as long as qualitative change takes place over time and gradually, the new parts can be exclusively appropriated to the whole, owing to the principle of transitivity of identity. It will be argued that his proposition is problematic in approaching the puzzle in several ways: it endorses an oversimplification of the complexity of the problem by failing to acknowledge the ontological vagueness of the object in question – vagueness both as an artifact and as a composite object -; it gives an inaccurate account of the part-piece versus the whole relationship; it overrates spatiotemporal continuity as the identity criterion without giving a satisfactory explanation as to why other aspects such as intermittent existence and sameness of substance can be abandoned; and the exclusive appropriation theory Lowe suggests gives way to paradoxical outcomes such as fusion. Having explored the evaluation of the puzzle within the current scholarship, the paper favors the view that the puzzle does not have an easy solution, hence merits maintaining its status as a paradox because there is not an easy way to explain the situation without contradicting major theories of metaphysics.

**Keywords:** E. J. Lowe, metaphysics, the ship of Theseus, identity over time, identity of artifacts, spatio-temporal continuity, intermittent existence, part-whole relationship.

## ÖZET

Bu çalışma, E. J. Lowe'nin zaman içinde kimlik konusunu sorunsallaştıran Theseus'un Gemisi bilmeceğine getirdiği bariz çözümü sorgulamaktadır. Lowe, niteliksel değişim yavaş yavaş ve zaman içinde olduğu sürece kimliğin geçişlilik ilkesine binaen yeni parçaların kendilerini bütüne tamamen mal edebileceklerini iddia etmektedir. Bilmeceye bu şekilde yaklaşan bu öneri birçok açıdan sorunludur: Söz konusu objenin ontolojik belirsizliğini - hem eser hem de kompozit nesne olarak belirsizliğini - tanıyamayıp sorunun karmaşıklığını fazlaca basite indirgemektedir; parça-kısım ve bütün ilişkisine dair izahı kusurludur; niçin kesintili varoluş ve madde devamlılığı gibi boyutların reddedilmesi gerektiğine dair tatmin edici bir açıklama sunmadan kimlik kriteri olarak mekan-zamansal devamlılığa gereğinden fazla değer biçmektedir; ve Lowe'nin önerdiği bütüncül kendine mal etme teorisi füzyon gibi paradoksal sonuçlara yol açmaktadır. Güncel kaynaklarda bilmeceğin değerlendirilmesini inceledikten sonra bu çalışma, bilmeceğin kolay bir sonucu olmadığı görüşünü savunacaktır; metafiziğin temel kuramlarıyla çelişmeden bir açıklama getirmenin bir yolu olmadığından dolayı, bilmece paradoks statüsünü muhafaza etmeyi hak etmektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** E. J. Lowe, metafizik, Theseus'un Gemisi, zaman içinde kimlik, eser kimliği, mekan-zamansal devamlılık, kesintili varoluş, parça-bütün ilişkisi.

This paper calls into question “the obvious solution”, proposed by E. J. Lowe in his paper “On the Identity of Artifacts” to the ancient puzzle of the ship of Theseus. The obvious solution is problematic in approaching the puzzle in several ways: it endorses an oversimplification of the complexity of the problem by failing to acknowledge the ontological vagueness of the object in question – vagueness both as an artifact and as a composite object -; it provides an inaccurate account of the part-piece versus whole relationship; it overrates spatiotemporal continuity as the identity criterion without giving a satisfactory explanation as to why other aspects such as intermittent existence and sameness of the substance can be abandoned; and the exclusive

appropriation theory Lowe suggests gives way to paradoxical outcomes such as fusion. Without offering any better solution to the puzzle, it will nevertheless be argued that the puzzle continues to be a paradox eluding easy solutions. After briefly summarizing the puzzle and Lowe's position, the issues listed as debatable will be addressed.

The puzzle of the ship of Theseus emerges from the ancient legend according to which the Ancient Greek King Theseus, after long years of fighting and sailing, eventually returns to Athens and leaves his ship on the shore. He dies and the ship stays on the shore. As time goes by, the ship's planks get old and start to decay. To renovate the ship, the old planks are gradually replaced by new ones. The process goes on until all the planks, and eventually the whole ship is renewed over time, identical to its original form. But on the other hand, the original parts of the ship are gathered and put together in a warehouse, also identical to the ship's original form. Thus in the end, the philosophers in Athens cannot decide which ship is the original ship of Theseus; the renovated ship on the shore, or the reassembled ship in the warehouse (Lowe, 2002, p. 25). The case is an actual paradox because there is not an easy way to explain the situation without contradicting major theories of metaphysics. The philosophers trying to give an answer to the puzzle always end up having to choose between the conflicting theories of spatiotemporal continuity versus intermittent existence; Leibniz's Law versus coincidence; sameness of the matter versus form of the substance; vague identity versus determinate identity; fission versus fusion and so on.

According to Lowe's obvious solution, the original ship of Theseus (will be referred as A) is identical with the renovated ship (will be referred as B) but not with the reassembled ship (will be referred as C) because B has a spatiotemporal continuity with A; yet this continuing ship-history with A is lacking in C. So he claims that A is identical with B (Lowe, 1983, p. 221). As justification, he claims that as long as qualitative change takes place over time and gradually, the new parts can be "exclusively appropriated" to the whole (Lowe, 2002, p. 31), owing to the principle of transitivity of identity. He rejects that C can be identical to A because in that case, we would have to accept the implausible view that artifacts can survive disassembly and reassembly. He opposes the intermittent existence view by quoting Locke stating that "one thing cannot have two beginnings of existence" (Lowe, 1983, p. 222). However, Lowe does not find it problematic that composite objects such as watches and cars can be disassembled and reassembled without losing identity because they are "designed to be that way" (Lowe, 2002, p. 34). A ship is not

designed that way thus cannot survive dismantlement. It is crucial to mark this distinction concerning which objects can survive dismantlement and which cannot, because it tells us something about the identity of the object in question; and the punch-line of his argument goes as “metaphysical possibility is grounded in the natures of the things” (Lowe, 2002, p. 34).

Before I go into exploring Lowe’s argument and criticize it, it is important to see the line of thought of another philosopher who in some ways seems to contribute to Lowe’s position and our understanding of the problem. In his attempt to re-identify the ship of Theseus, Brian Smart has the same solution to the problem as Lowe, but with a different reason. In parallel to Lowe, Smart thinks that the sufficient condition of identity is a continuous space-time path and the same substance criterion is defeasible. Yet Smart makes another assertion and claims that B is identical with A because once a part is taken out of A, it no longer belongs to it; and when A receives a new plank, it is that “new” plank that is a part of A from now on. “The old plank *had been* a part of X but was no longer” (Smart, 1972, p. 148); meaning that the old plank’s career is over as soon as the new plank is recruited.

In my view, this idea of “newness” versus “oldness” raises some problems concerning the spatiotemporal continuity, the very position that Smart himself advocates. The notion of “newness” itself already signifies a lapse in time; more importantly, a discontinuity in the continuity of the spatiotemporal existence of the object. If Smart rules out a plank of A as “old”, and thereby no longer belonging to A, there is still no reasonable explanation as to why A should welcome the “new” part and assimilate it to itself. In other words, if the “old” is a threat to the identity of A, so is the “new”. Both “old” and “new” violate the continuity of the identity of the object. The “old” means “no longer” whereas the “new” means “from now on”. In both cases, “change” is signified and thereby the continuity of the identity is in question. In addition to that, there seems to be an oblique hint that the new should be hierarchically superior to the old – reminiscent of the appeal to novelty. But this prioritization is context-bound as well; if we need a fully functioning ship, we would prefer the new one, but if we are interested in antiquarian artifacts, the old one would be more appealing - The pragmatic motive in prioritization will be discussed in more detail towards the end of the paper.

Parallel to his new / old dichotomy, Smart draws attention to the notion of “becoming” whilst discussing the fission of A into B and C and conveys that A becomes B and C: “‘becomes’ is the ‘becomes’ of composition, not identity” (Smart, 1972, p. 147). The distinction between “becoming” and “being” is noteworthy; with his old / new point, what Smart means is that the new planks “become” parts of A, signifying a process. Actually, the notion of “becoming” is also crucial to Lowe’s argument on how A “appropriates” the new planks and in time B becomes identical with A. At this point, it will be helpful to unpack Lowe’s argument by looking into another critical issue; the issue of part versus whole relationship.

In his article “Parts and Pieces”, Charles A. Krecz notes the distinction between a “part” and a “piece”. He gives the example of a fragment of glass (wineglass) to exemplify piecehood versus the heart in the living body to exemplify parthood. According to him, the former is arbitrary and indifferent to the whole whereas the latter is non-arbitrary and has a strong relation to the whole (Krecz, 1986, p. 382). In a functional whole, the part is “sensitive to the remainder” but the piece is not. There is interdependency among parts for the sake of preserving the integrity of the whole, which is lacking among mere pieces (1986, p. 389). All in all, parts maintain a meaningful relationship to the whole whereas pieces do not.

Krecz’s account helps us see that both Smart and Lowe ignore the distinction between “part” and “piece” by treating parts as mere pieces. Smart does so obviously in his assertion that ex-parts of A no longer belong to A, and Lowe does so whilst claiming that the “identity of ship parts is neither necessary nor sufficient for identity of ships” (Lowe, 1983, p. 221). Lowe intends to refute the argument of intermittent existence by the analogy of a dismantled watch, claiming that it is a different case, and that the watch does not really go out of existence at the watchmaker’s as he writes: “Someone entering the workshop and seeing the pieces laid out carefully on the watchmaker’s bench would quite properly be told ‘That is Jones’s watch’” (1983, p. 222). We can infer that as long as the material on the table is somewhat identifiable – either by the person or by the help of someone else around -, Lowe does not regard the dismantlement of the watch as a cease in existence.

At this point, one wonders, how come someone walking into the watchmaker’s can reasonably exclaim “That’s Jones’s watch!” but someone walking into the warehouse and seeing the

disassembled parts cannot exclaim “Hey! That’s the Ship of Theseus!” It is as if Lowe regards the parts of the watch as “parts” in the Kreczian sense; as profound units in relation to the whole watch but the planks of the ship as mere “pieces” - alienated things which form on the ground nothing but a heap. Similar to Smart’s view, the moment they are taken out, they become irrelevant to the whole and when they lose their connection to the whole, they lose their legitimate rights on the constitution of the whole.

As a matter of fact, the watch analogy could have been much more complicated than the way Lowe prefers to bring it up. As David Wiggins suggests, we could have a watch which has a deep meaning for us; such as a watch inherited from our grand-grandfather, or a watch with some historical or artistic value (Wiggins, 1980, p. 98). Normally, we would not care much if the watchmaker changed certain parts, dismantled it totally, or replaced most of the parts of any ordinary watch. But would we be able to hold the same attitude towards a watch as described above? Probably not; and that is why we have to acknowledge the distinction between an ordinary watch and a somewhat “unique” watch. The latter makes the situation much more complicated as it blurs the identity of the object by giving it a certain “value”. In the case of the ship of Theseus – this is not any ordinary ship but *The Ship of Theseus* -, we need to keep that aspect in mind as well, and even if we insist on making an analogy with a watch, comparing the ship to an antique watch will be much more fruitful than comparing it to an ordinary watch - more discussion on this antiquarian value aspect, towards the end of the paper.

So, what makes a watch different from a ship so that the former can survive dismantlement whereas the latter cannot? Lowe has some ideas concerning this issue which seem counterintuitive because his theory insinuates that the object in question, the ship, is a vague object. In order to see Lowe’s point, first we would need to grasp the notion of “composite objects”, yet unfortunately, relying on Lowe’s account, we cannot get a full understanding of the term. To comprehend the change of composition, we are told by Lowe that composite objects are “composed of various other objects, which are therefore *parts* of them” (Lowe, 2002, p. 24). He gives a range of examples which include organic beings such as human beings or trees; and moreover states that these organisms, being compositionally very complex, are composed of other parts such as trunks, roots, branches; which in turn are composed of cells; and cells are composed of smaller organic bodies and eventually, of subatomic particles. As for artifacts, there is such a *hierarchy of composition* as well;

such as in cars or computers (2002, p. 24). Lowe claims that when a watch is dismantled, it does not go out of existence because it has those parts which are “identifiable” as watch-parts – which prompt us to exclaim in joy “That’s Jones’s watch!” In the ship case though, the only identifiable parts Lowe regards are “mast” and “rudder” (Lowe, 1983, p. 229). Thus, Lowe has a dubious notion of the hierarchy of composition. As for a watch, all parts are of equal importance whereas for a ship, only the mast and the rudder qualify as parts, and the rest are like sole “pieces” in Kreczian sense.

I find this distinction arbitrary because counting on Lowe’s notion of composite objects we are led to think that both watches and ships are composite objects. But without a clear criteria, we are expected to believe that some objects are mysteriously “more composite” than others. And the justification we get is something as ambiguous as the statement “metaphysical possibility is grounded on the natures of things” (Lowe, 2002, p. 34). For some reason, a watch is “designed that way”; meaning that it is composed of parts and thereby can be dismantled and reassembled without sacrificing its identity – the same goes for cars, bicycles, tents, trombones, or any kind of multi-purpose objects, as long as the parts are “identifiable” parts alluding to the “whole” – whereas ships are somewhat vague entities composed of both parts and pieces. Rather than the ship, it seems that Lowe’s criteria itself is vague, because arbitrary.

Regarding the issue of dismantling composite objects, we can also question the nature of “ceasing to be”, as a phenomenon. Clearly, it is not one of decay, decomposition or disintegration but of not being intact at the moment, which does not necessarily threaten the identity of objects. According to Henry Laycock, structured objects can survive and retain their identities through dismantlement and reassembly because:

... continuity, in the identity of criterion, cannot be construed as requiring the continued *intact* existence of the object in question. Cars, bridges and bicycles are more prone to such lapses in intactness than are other sorts of things, but it is difficult to see why any object at all might not in principle be dismantled and rebuilt. It may well be that items of certain types – for example, trombones, tents, guns – may in particular cases spend the greater part, even the whole, of their lives in an unassembled state (Henry Laycock, 1972, p. 28).

As Laycock advocates, being not spatially *intact* does not entail a lapse in temporal existence of the object. For a ship, it needs to be perfectly intact particularly if it is sailing in the sea, but as we know in our case, all those changes and the disassembly of the ship take place on the shore. As long as the object is in parts (maintaining its relation to the whole in the Kreczian sense) and not in pieces (not broken or shattered or badly damaged or irreparable), it is plausible to say that the object continues to exist. Moreover, unless we allow for interrupted existence, it becomes really difficult to explain multi-purpose objects such as sofa-beds; beds designed to be folded up to serve as sofas when not in use as noted by Michael B. Burke:

There are beds, commonly found in hotels and hospitals, which are designed to be folded up when not in use. Such a bed does not cease to be a bed when it is folded up. Now when you open out a 'hide-a-bed sofa', you have a bed. When you fold up the bed, the bed still exists, but there is also a sofa. The sofa and the bed are numerically different, since there is something true of the sofa that is not true of the bed: it has arm rests (which fold down to simulate night tables when the bed is folded out). Though the sofa and the bed are different material objects, they are composed of the same matter and occupy the same place (Michael B. Burke, 1980, pp. 394-395).

In prioritizing form continuity above all, Lowe hints at the "intact"ness that Laycock draws upon. Different from a trombone, a ship is supposed to stay "intact" for its history to continue because intactness is its means to preserve its identity. However, it can be argued that when it comes to distinguishing parts from pieces, Lowe implies that there is a hierarchy of composition at work for the ship. He seems to regard planks as pieces but must and rudder as parts. On the hierarchy of composition, the latter ones are valuable whereas the former ones can be treated as heap and thus make the ship susceptible to vulnerability and cease in existence. So, I think that there is a vagueness in the identity of the ship because it is indeterminate whether it is a composite object or not; or if composite, how composite is it after all?

Throughout the disassembly and replacement session, Lowe treats the planks as parts, because it is not clear how disassembly and replacement can ever take place if planks are random pieces; without maintaining a distinct yet strong, responsible and constitutive relationship to the whole, but once the "exclusive appropriation" takes place, he reduces the planks-as-parts into planks-as-pieces; as if the hierarchical ranking of the planks switches back. As a matter of fact, his notion of "appropriation"



hints at “piecehood” more than “parthood” by alluding to assimilation and incorporation into the whole body of the object.

Lowe’s theory of appropriation leaves us with the worry that as a process, appropriation can never fully entail an end. Even when we have the renovated ship (B) on one side and the reassembled ship (C) on the other, and calling the former (B) as the ship of Theseus, as Christopher Hughes suggests, there is always the possibility that at some later time, B’s parts may be gradually replaced by the parts of C. It is always possible that B can “re-appropriate” C later on; appropriation can always leave an open door to re-appropriation over and over again. Thus, as Hughes puts it, in such a re-appropriation, even though when the first parts of B (the ship of Theseus for Lowe) are “lost”; in time, the “Thesean parts” (the name suggested by Hughes that refer to the original parts with which King Theseus sailed and all) are “gained” (Hughes, 1997, pp. 60-61). It is controversial how Lowe would react to such a scenario, but one assumes, he could argue that as long as the replacement took place gradually and over time, anything is possible; meaning B can appropriate the parts of C and then, there is again, only one ship, identical with the ship of Theseus – owing to the principle of transitivity. But then, we would have B and C coincide; two ships within one body, both claiming to be identical to the ship of Theseus.

In that case, Lowe would have to acknowledge not only that the ship as an artifact did survive disassembly and reassembly but also, and even more interestingly, that two ships coincided. The limitation of the appropriation theory is that, appropriation may go on to infinity without promising an end. It is intuitive that this situation should pose a threat to identity because as long as there is appropriation, there is always a possibility and logical room for coincidence. In attempt to criticize this issue proposed by Hughes, Peter Simons claims that where there can be two, there can be  $n$ ; meaning there can be many (Simons, 1997, p. 763).

So, if we accept Lowe’s appropriation theory, we would logically have to admit that the same process can happen over and over; again and again with different ships as well, and we may end up with too many ships coinciding with one another, as in fusion. Paradoxically, Lowe suggests appropriation for the sake of preserving identity but when we see the situation with the insight provided by both Hughes and Simons, we realize that the outcome can be quite contrary to preserving identity; far from it, it may cause a multiplication of various identities. Lowe bases his

appropriation theory relying on the transitivity of identity, and it seems plausible only from a certain perspective. However the case of the ship of Theseus appears to be an incident hinting that the very principle of transitivity is in question as well - because transition may be so strong that the object may be capable of accommodating more than one thing. All in all, the basic problem with the principle of transitivity is that transitivity does not negate or exclude coinciding; which is a definite threat to identity.

In order to probe into the problems of appropriation theory even further, let us consider different scenarios put forward by Lowe and Burke. Presumably, sensing the potential troubles of appropriation theory, Lowe makes a distinction between a ship appropriating new parts or a car borrowing a wheel from another car and a hypothetical tree whose atoms are dispersed in the universe, becoming parts of various different things and then much later, by chance, happening to form the exact same tree at the same place. He thinks that the latter scenario is implausible and that the two trees cannot be identical whereas the former cases of the ship and the car work fine (Lowe, 2002, pp. 31-32).

Michael Burke offers a less fantastic scenario in which he asserts that a table made of thirty pieces of wood is taken apart; with those pieces first a chair; then a bird cage is made; and finally the same pieces are put back together to form the initial table (Burke, 1980, p. 391). According to Burke, this is a plausible case illustrating the possibility of intermittent existence (1980, p. 405) because the sameness of kind does not have to be a necessary condition for the preservation of identity (1980, p. 400). Following Burke, we conclude that a table, a chair and a bird cage are not things of the “same kind” but they are things existing of the same “stuff”; the same matter, and this should count as a legitimate condition for persistence as well.

Lowe tries to refute Burke’s argument by claiming that if such a case were ever possible, then we would basically have a multi-purpose object (Lowe, 1983, p. 229). Before commenting on Lowe’s objection of Burke’s argument, first, we need to go back to Lowe’s own comparison between the ship and the tree and point out that there is a huge gap in terms of “stuff”ness between a ship’s planks and a tree’s atoms. In my view, the comparison fails because a ship’s plank or a car’s wheel cannot be compared to a tree’s hypothetically dispersed atoms. The comparison is implausible because we can only compare atoms with other atoms, not with distinct parts like ship planks or

wheels. In giving this atomy example, he seems to avoid the shortcomings of his appropriation theory; but the example cannot save him from the controversy. As for his objection to Burke, I do not think that he manages to give an intelligible reason to refute the claim that the sameness of stuff is an inadequate or irrelevant condition for persistence. Saying that it is a multi-purpose object (which it is not; it is not a sofa-bed for instance) cannot clearly challenge the possibility of intermittent existence provided by sameness of stuff – if not of kind. To me, he cannot refute the argument but changes the subject.

As a matter of fact, intermittent existence and the issues related to the sameness of stuff or matter can be even more complicated; including the problems pertinent to the factor of history. We may question whether spatiotemporal continuity crystallized in form is the uniquely undefeatable criteria for persistence. In his article, “Identity, Origin and Spatiotemporal Continuity”, Theodore Scaltsas makes a distinction between “origination” and “coming to be”. Scaltsas comments on the intermittent existences of objects like prefabricated houses and tents and suggests that “the origin of such objects are the same, the initial one, and that the subsequent instances of coming to be of the objects are not origins of the objects” (Scaltsas, 1981, p. 398). In the case of prefabricated houses, there are intervals in which the house ceases to be, but whenever its walls are erected, the house is numerically identical to the original one. Even if not its form, the house’s parts are spatiotemporally continuous (1981, pp. 400-401). This way, we do not need to violate Locke’s law which asserts that an object cannot have more than one origin. Scaltsas notes that for this “coming to be” to occur, we rely on the skills of the environment – whether there are people at the time capable of repairing the object (he gives an example of a broken vase) and thereby enabling the object to “come to be” again. This does not mean origination, yet allows intermittent existence.

Lowe prioritizes the continuity of form as the basic criterion for persistence over time. However, as Scaltsas argues, there are other fundamental aspects to be considered as well, such as the preservation of matter substance and the history of the object in question. In order to explain his point, he gives the example of a statue. In his example, an artist makes a statue out of wax, and as soon as he finishes it, he melts it down and makes a new statue with the same wax. In such a case, we would not be inclined to regard the first and the second one as one and the same statue. However, if the statue stays in the artist’s studio for ten years and one day he accidentally knocks it down, when he attempts to immediately reconstruct and make the same statue using the same wax

and mould, we could be inclined to say that the first and the second one are one and the same statue. Thus, in the first case, because the first statue has no history, it has “no power to incorporate the second statue as a phase of it”; whereas in the second case, because the first statue has a long history, the point of origin is regarded as the time when the statue was first made – the reconstruction does not qualify as another point of origin but only as another phase of the initial statue (Scaltsas, 1981, p. 399).

So, whether an object has a long history or not plays a role in determining the continuity of the identity. Not only its form but also its history identifies an object; hence our evaluation of its identity. In the case of the statue, the aged statue does not remain spatiotemporally continuous; yet its identity is nevertheless preserved, and the object is recovered because even if not its form, its parts and matter are spatiotemporally continuous (Scaltsas, 1981, p. 40). Scaltsas suggests that form does not have to be the sole criterion of spatiotemporal continuity but parts and matter should also count as the criteria for spatiotemporal continuity. Thus, in the case of the ship of Theseus, when we think of spatiotemporal continuity, the form of the ship does not have to be our only reference point because we can regard the spatiotemporal continuity of the parts and the matter of the object as reference points as well, in determining the continuity of the identity.

Actually, it may be argued that in case of the ship of Theseus, even the issue concerning the exact point of origin is ambiguous. Normally, the original ship refers to the condition when that specific ship came into existence for the very first time. So, in our case it would be the time when the artisan(s) and workers finished preparing the ship and made it ready to hand it over to the king. Thus, it would be the ship that even Theseus had not set foot in yet. It would be the 0-mile ship, first-hand, unused. But, according to Hobbes’s story, when we say the original ship, we associate it with the ship that Theseus used, sailed, fought wars with, and eventually brought to the shore before he died. This is the used ship; the ship appropriated by Theseus; full of experience and memory and most importantly, alive with the “legacy” of Theseus; thus, historically much more significant than the practical sailable ship. Interestingly, when we argue that the renovated ship is historically continuous with the original ship, we historically go back to the unused ship, rather than preserving the ship used by Theseus in linear time.

As a matter of fact, the history of the object is a huge factor contributing to the puzzle. The history of the ship makes it a vague object because the object's history poses an unavoidable problem in determining whether the object is a ship or an antique art-object. This ontological dilemma is important because there are different persistence conditions for artifacts and antique art-objects; art-objects cannot survive replacement whereas artifacts can. Spatiotemporality is not as crucial as sameness of substance in art-objects. If we are specifically discussing the ship of Theseus, the issue concerning the undecidability of the object - whether it is an artifact or an art-object - cannot be avoided. This confusion apparently vexes many philosophers as well, and that is why, many philosophers (Hughes, Smart, Dauer, Wiggins, Scaltsas and so on) commenting on the puzzle make references to museums and directly or indirectly – through the thought experiments employed in their arguments - bring up the possibility of the ship being an antique object with art historical value. That is why, I believe that this dimension of the problem is relevant and merits some brief discussion as well, even though it focuses precisely on the ship of Theseus rather than directly on artifact identity.

Francis W. Dauer, in his criticism of Brian Smart's article "How to Reidentify the Ship of Theseus", brings forth a hypothetical problematic situation in which two cunning people, the Proteus brothers replace the ancient slabs of the Parthenon with exact replicas and try to fool people by claiming that since the replicas promise a spatiotemporal continuity with the original slabs, the replicas can qualify as the originals. Of course, in the story, the judges decide that reidentifying ordinary ships is different from reidentifying a national treasure, and "where the history of the object had a decisive bearing on the object's significance the usual criteria for reidentification were inappropriate" (Dauer, 1972, p. 64). Addressing the issue raised in Dauer's paper, Lowe acknowledges the difference between artworks and artifacts, asserting that the former ones are created by the intentions of artists and cannot survive replacements whereas the latter ones are made for pragmatic reasons and can survive replacements. However, in the footnote on the same page, he eventually confesses that one of the reasons why the ship of Theseus is so paradoxical is precisely because of the temptation to categorize the ship as an artwork owing to its historical value (Lowe, 1983, p. 231). Yet we must also note that the notion of "artistic intention" – pertinent to the modern genius artist - is a very modern conception which does not apply to ancient artifacts. The fact that we are unable to determine the anonymous intentions of the ancient artisans who made the ship of Theseus only adds further confusion to our puzzle.

All in all, people may have “different interests” in identifying the ship of Theseus. David Wiggins clarifies this point in his book *Sameness and Substance*, noting that one party may see the “archeological relic” and another, the “functionally persistent continuant” in the ship (Wiggins, 1980, p. 93). Each party would prioritize different conditions of persistence based on their interests; the archeologist would consider C as identical with A since in that case the authentic parts of the original ship would be regarded more valuable whereas a pragmatist would consider B identical with A since B has a functional spatiotemporal continuity with A. Based on those conflicting interests, Wiggins goes so far as to suggest that such distinctions might even be psychological (1980, p. 94). Yet, just the fact that we have to make a “choice” between B and C reveals that there is not an obvious solution at hand. We have to choose between the “Best Candidates”, or rely on our personal intuitions or interests; hence the ship, as an indeterminate object, eludes easy categorization.

Thus, even though Lowe’s solution seems at first sight convincing and plausible, when viewed from different angles, its limitations become apparent. His appropriation theory cannot provide us with a sound solution immune from problems of fusion. He does not give us a solid reason why we should prioritize the form aspect of spatiotemporal continuity and dismiss the possibility of intermittent existence and the significance of same matter principle altogether. He fails to clarify the vagueness of the ship as an artifact and as a composite object. On the whole, I am inclined to favor the view that the puzzle does not have an easy solution, let alone “obvious”. That is why I believe that the puzzle merits maintaining its status as a paradox and thus continues to haunt philosophers of the twenty-first century.

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