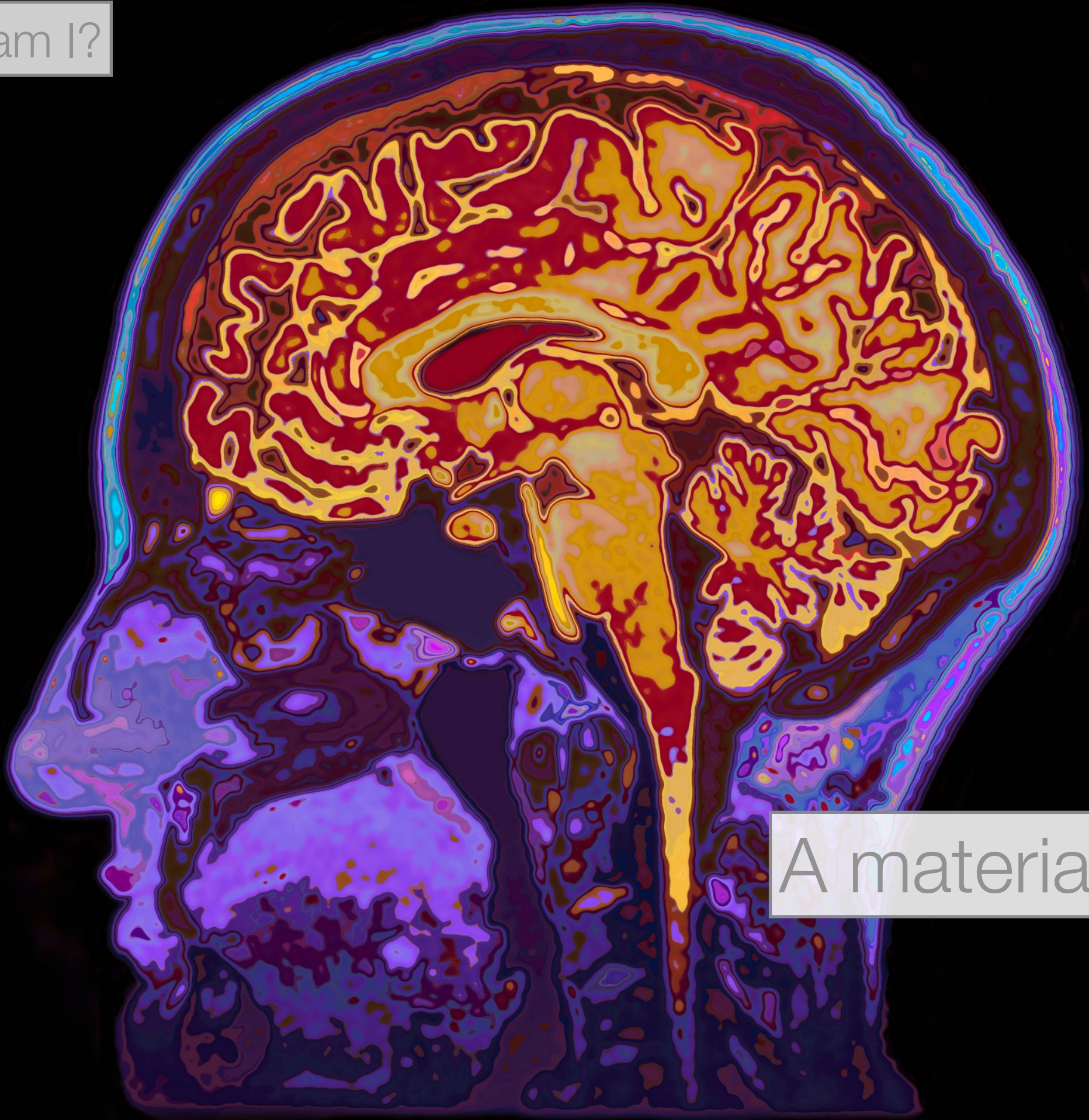


What am I?



A material thing



A central alternative to the view that persons are immaterial souls is the view that persons are certain sorts of material things — namely, physical organisms.

We saw that the conceivability argument provides a powerful argument for dualism. Why might one hold the physicalist, or materialist, view?

One argument, which van Inwagen calls the [interaction argument](#), is the argument that physicalism is to be preferred over dualism on the grounds that dualism makes it hard to understand the causal connections between mind and body. We discussed this in connection with Elisabeth's correspondence with Descartes.

Let's look briefly at two other arguments van Inwagen gives for physicalism.

The first is what he calls the remote control argument.

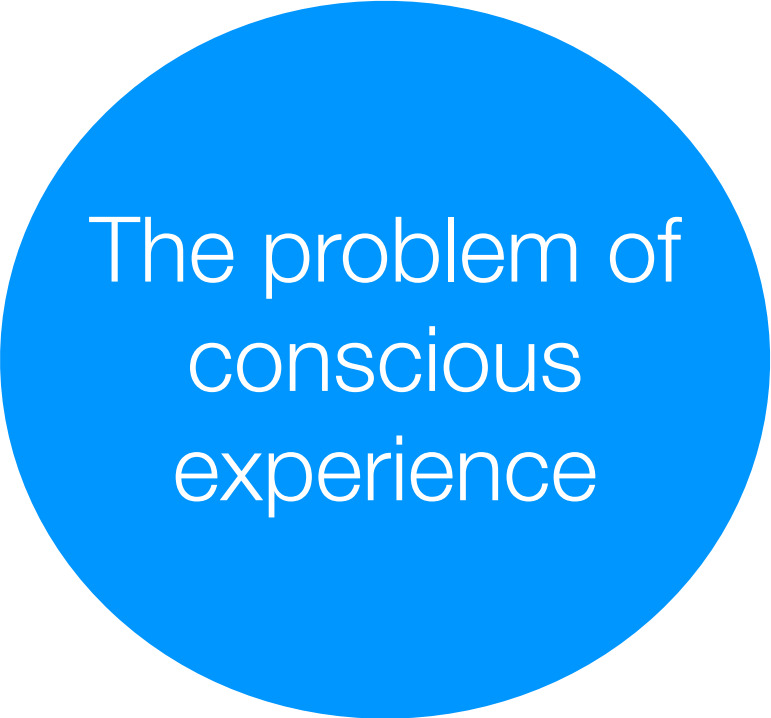
“If dualism is true, our relation to our bodies is analogous to the relation of the operator of a remotely controlled device (such as a radio-controlled model airplane) to that device. Now consider Alfred, who is operating a model airplane by remote control. Suppose that something—an unwary bird or a large hailstone—strikes a heavy blow to the model in midair. If the blow does significant damage to the model, we can expect that both the performance of the model and Alfred’s ability to control the model will be impaired. But the blow will have no effect at all on *Alfred*, or no effect beyond his becoming aware of the blow or of some of its effects on the performance of the model and his ability to control it. But if Alfred’s *body* were struck a heavy blow, and particularly if it were a blow to the head, this might have an effect on *him*, an effect that goes beyond his becoming aware of the blow and its damaging effects on his body and his ability to control his body: Alfred might well become unconscious. This is just the sort of effect we should expect if Alfred were a certain human organism, for if the processes of consciousness are certain physical processes within the organism, a damaging blow might well cause those processes to cease, at least temporarily. But what effects should *dualism* lead us to expect from a blow to the body? I submit that if we are non-physical things and if the processes of consciousness are non-physical processes that do not occur within the body, the most natural thing to expect is that (at the worst) we should lose control of our bodies while continuing to be conscious. ... Dualism, therefore, seems to make wrong predictions about what the human person will experience in certain situations.”

The second is the **duplication argument**.

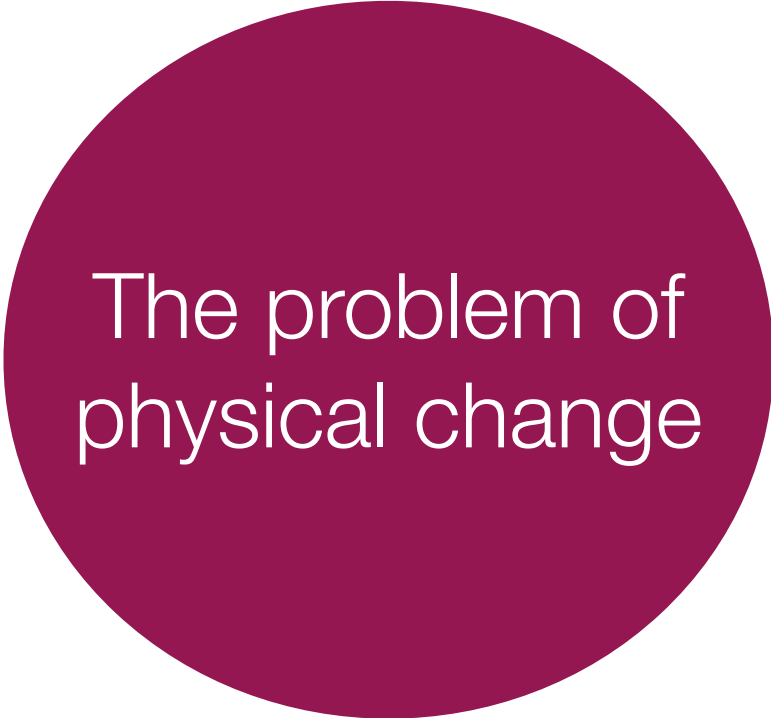
“The duplicating machine consists of two chambers connected by an impressive mass of science-fictional gadgetry. If you place any physical object inside one of the chambers and press the big red button, a perfect physical duplicate of the object appears in the other chamber. ... And now, finally, let us put *Alfred* into one of the chambers of the duplicating machine and press the button. What do we find in the other chamber? ... Dualists must say that since thought and sensation are not physical processes occurring within a living human organism, the human body the duplicating machine creates will crumple mindlessly ... But is this really what any of us believes? Aren't we strongly inclined to believe... that the duplicate would “have” thoughts and feelings and beliefs and memories ... and desires and emotions? Aren't we strongly inclined to believe that the duplicate would have a conscious mental life like our own and would display the content of this conscious mental life in his observable behavior?”

How should the dualist respond?

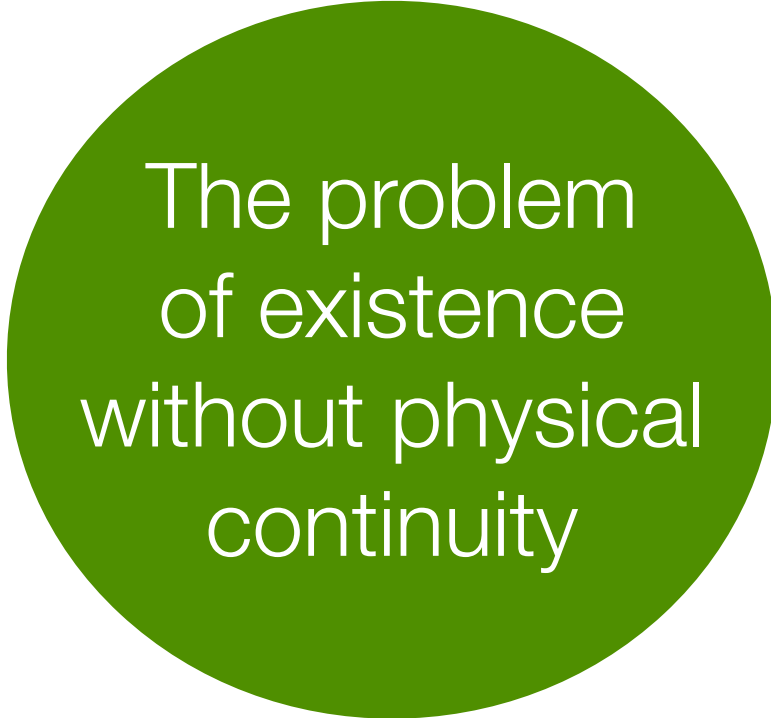
Today we are going to focus on three objections to this materialist view of human beings.



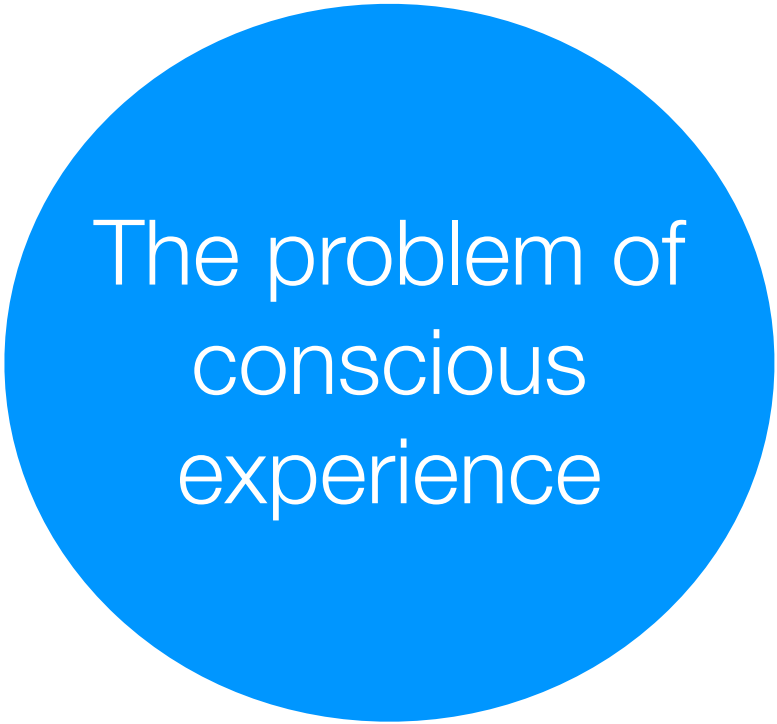
The problem of  
conscious  
experience



The problem of  
physical change



The problem  
of existence  
without physical  
continuity



## The problem of conscious experience

The first argument against physicalism tries to show that the view cannot make sense of conscious experience.

What does the physicalist say about conscious experiences?

“If a human person is a physical thing, any change whatever in a human person must be a purely physical change. If, for example, Tim becomes elated because of some news contained in a letter he has just received, this change in Tim, his becoming elated, must be the very same thing (or perhaps we should say the very same event) as some purely physical change.”

So conscious experiences must, if physicalism is true, be physical events.

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This is the view that the philosopher Frank Jackson tried to refute with his example of Mary and the black-and-white room.



Mary is a brilliant scientist who has been confined her entire life to an environment in which everything is colored white or black.



Mary is a brilliant scientist who has been confined her entire life to an environment in which everything is colored white or black.

She is so brilliant, in fact, that she has learned every fact that there is to learn about the physical world. In particular, she has learned all of the facts about the neurophysiology of color vision, and has studied extensively everything that happens to the brain when subjects are experiencing color.



One day, someone brings a new object into Mary's room:



Does Mary learn anything new when she sees the tomato?

Intuitively, yes: she learns **what it is like to experience red things**.



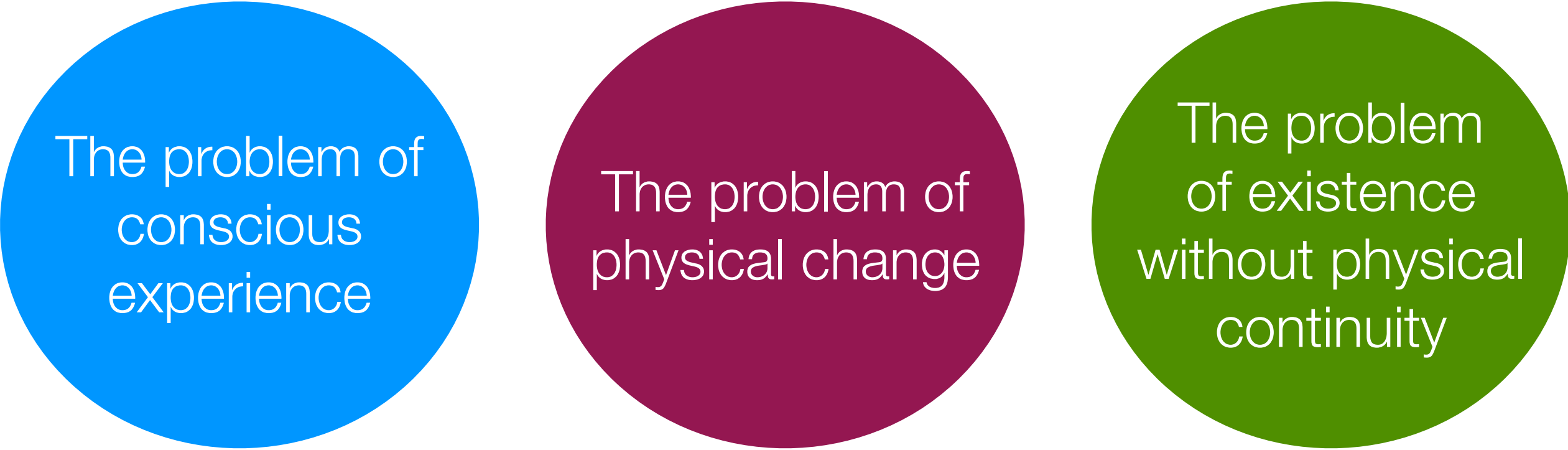
But this seems to show that conscious experience is not a wholly physical process.

Here is one way in which the argument, which is sometimes called the **knowledge argument**, can be laid out.

1. If conscious experiences are wholly physical processes, then all of the facts about conscious experiences are physical facts.
2. Before seeing the tomato, Mary knows all the physical facts about conscious experiences.
3. Upon seeing the tomato, Mary learns something new about conscious experiences.
4. There is at least one non-physical fact about conscious experience.  
(2,3)

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C. Conscious experiences are not wholly physical processes. (1,4)



The problem of  
conscious  
experience

The problem of  
physical change

The problem  
of existence  
without physical  
continuity

Let's turn now to the problem of physical change.



## The problem of physical change

The problem of physical change is simple. You are constantly gaining and losing physical parts, as, for example, small bits of skin are shed from your body. So it seems that the material being which you call 'my body' at one moment is distinct from the material being which you call 'my body' at the next moment.

But now suppose, as the materialist says, that you are identical to your body:

Jeff Speaks at 12:25 = Jeff Speaks' body at 12:25.

The argument just given seems to show that:

At 12:26, the material being which was Jeff Speaks' body at 12:25 no longer exists.



Jeff Speaks at 12:25 = Jeff Speaks' body at 12:25.

At 12:26, the material being which was Jeff Speaks' body at 12:25 no longer exists.

At 12:26, the person which was Jeff Speaks at 12:25 no longer exists.

This looks bad, since we generally think that we are able to survive such events as haircuts, and hence can exist for more than a few moments.

We can formalize this argument as a reductio of materialism about human persons.

1. Human persons are identical to their bodies.
2. Human bodies gain and lose parts every few seconds.
3. If  $x$  and  $y$  are material things, and  $x$  and  $y$  have different parts, then  $x \neq y$ .
4. Human bodies only exist for a few seconds. (2,3)

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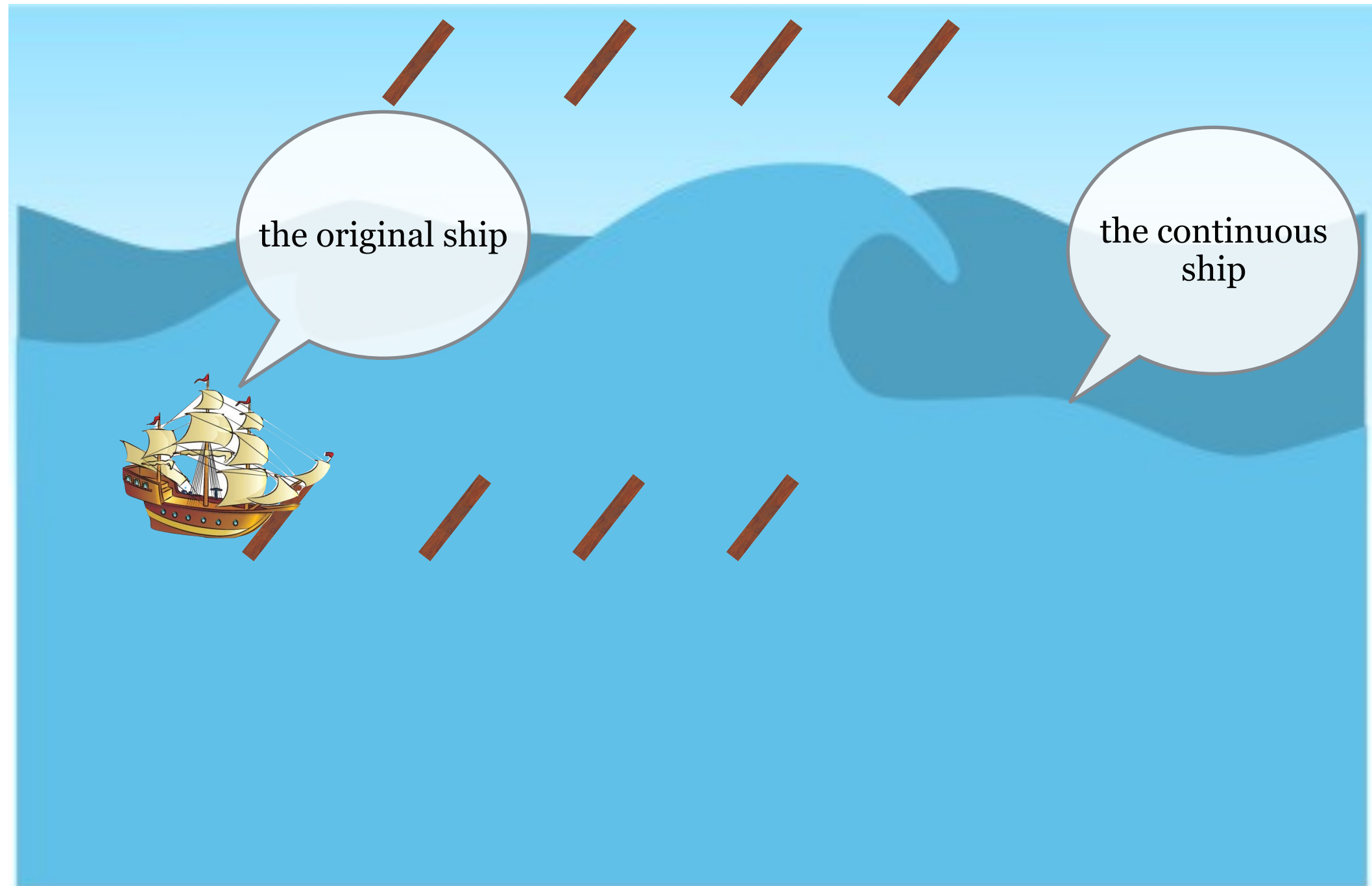
C. Human persons only exist for a few seconds. (1,4)

Suppose that you are a materialist. Which premise of the above argument should you reject?

1. Human persons are identical to their bodies.
  2. Human bodies gain and lose parts every few seconds.
  3. If  $x$  and  $y$  are material things, and  $x$  and  $y$  have different parts, then  $x \neq y$ .
  4. Human bodies only exist for a few seconds. (2,3)
- 
- C. Human persons only exist for a few seconds. (1,4)

It is natural to reject premise (3). For surely we ordinarily think that, for example, a bowl can continue to exist over a period of days even if it is a material thing, and even if it is constantly gaining and losing atoms.

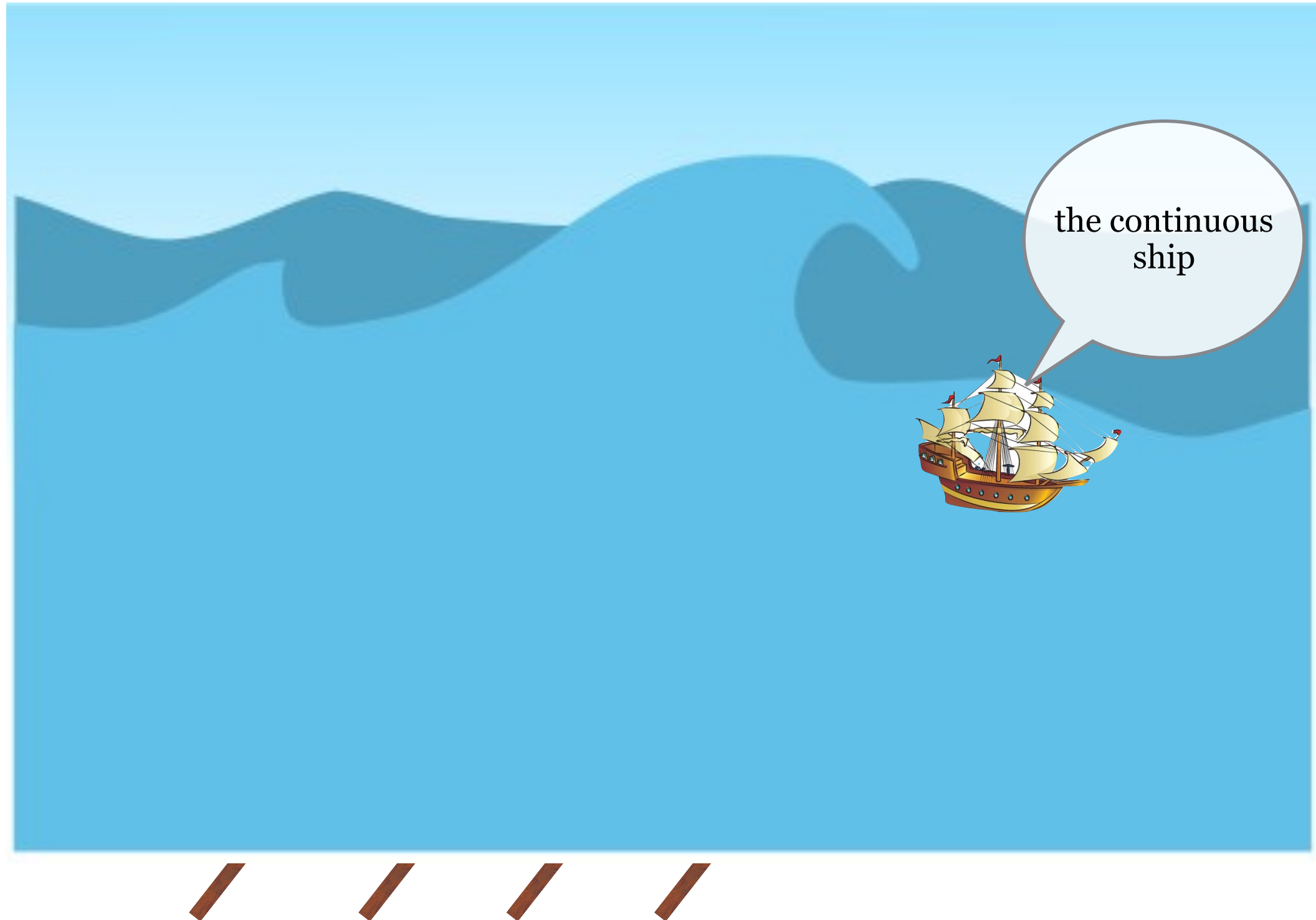
But the problem of physical change is not so easily disposed of. This can be shown by an ancient paradox, the puzzle of the [Ship of Theseus](#), which is discussed in today's reading.





Our previous discussion strongly suggests that the following claim is true:

Original Ship = Continuous Ship



Our previous discussion strongly suggests that the following claim is true:

Original Ship = Continuous Ship

But now imagine that some enterprising person gets the idea to rebuild the original Ship of Theseus from the wooden planks which have, over time, been replaced.



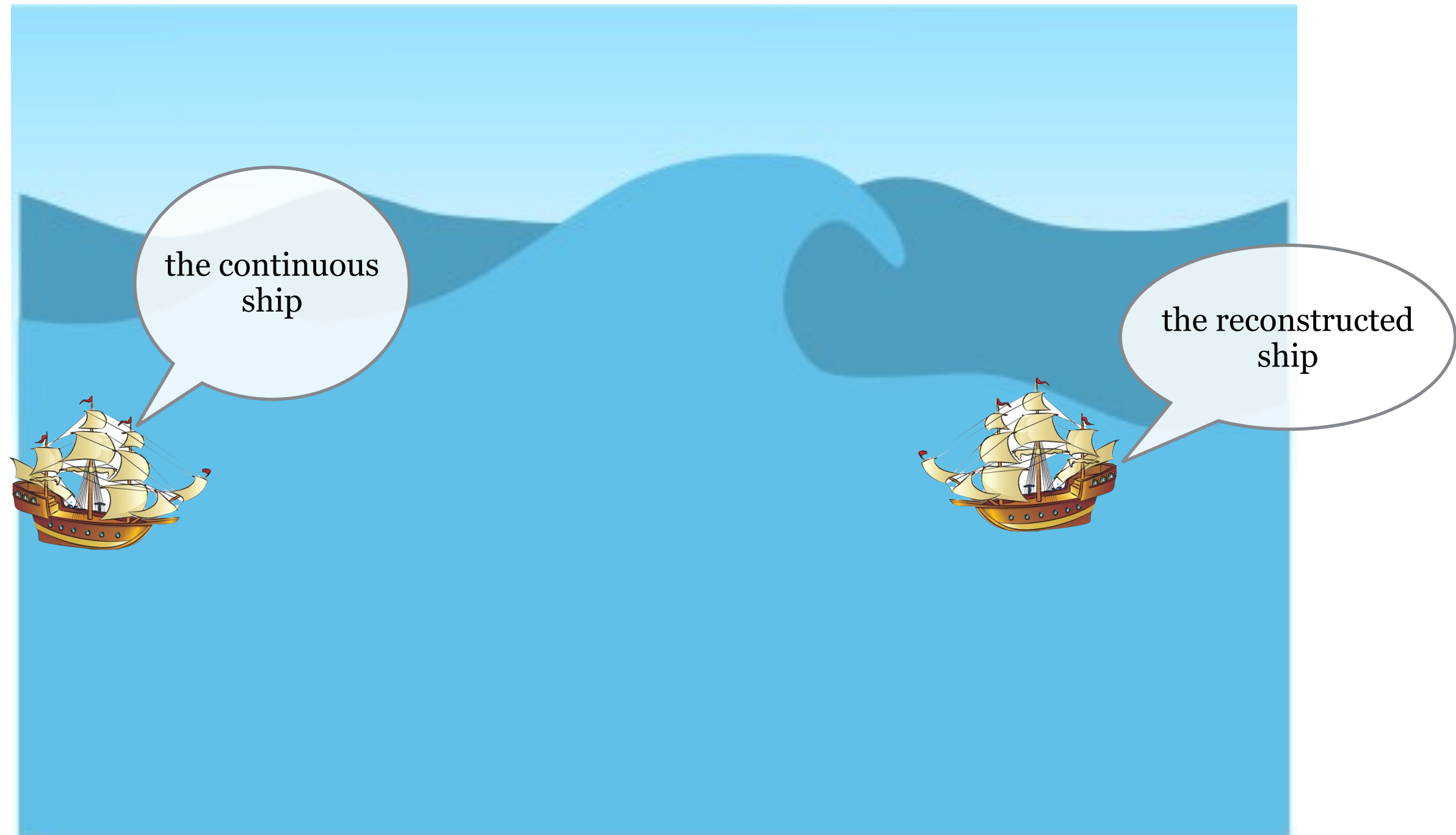
The following now seems plausible:

Original Ship = Reconstructed Ship



Original Ship = Continuous Ship

Original Ship = Reconstructed Ship



But suppose that we take our reconstructed ship for a cruise.

Original Ship = Continuous Ship

Original Ship = Reconstructed Ship

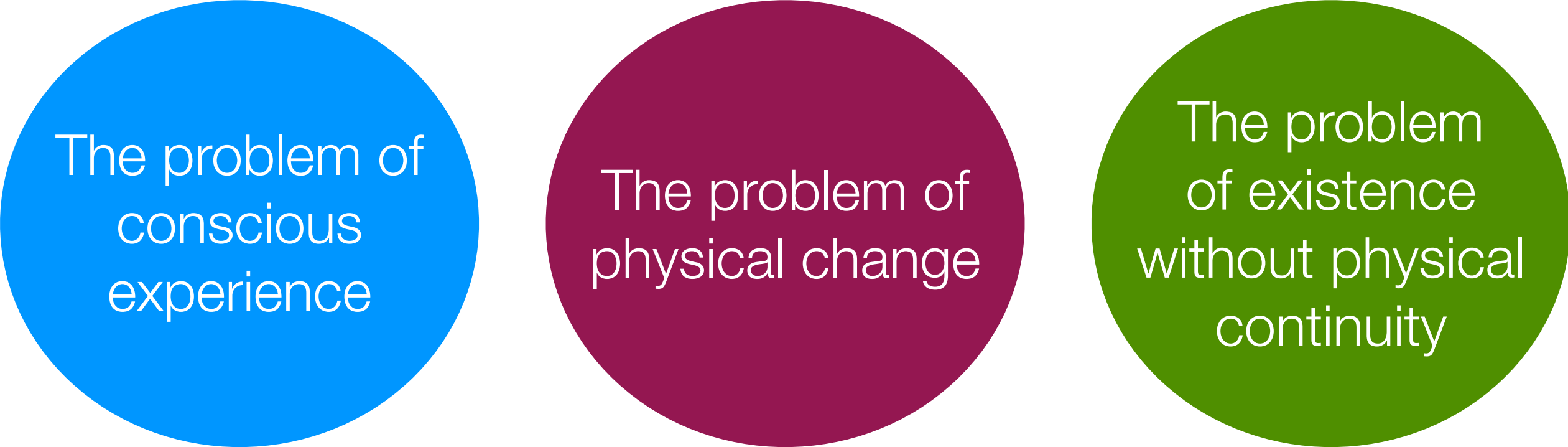
This is not a story of a ship crashing into itself; so it seems fairly clear that:

Continuous Ship  $\neq$  Reconstructed Ship

The problem, though, is that these three claims are inconsistent. This is due to the transitivity of identity: if  $A=B$ , and  $B=C$ , then  $A=C$ .

What's the best way out of this paradox?





The problem of  
conscious  
experience

The problem of  
physical change

The problem  
of existence  
without physical  
continuity

Let's now turn to our last problem for materialist theories: the problem of existence without physical continuity.

The problem  
of existence  
without physical  
continuity

This argument is based on John Locke's example of the prince and the cobbler.

For should the Soul of a Prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the Prince's past Life, enter and inform the Body of a Cobbler as soon as deserted by his own Soul, every one sees, he would be the same Person with the Prince, accountable only for the Prince's Actions

What sort of example is Locke imagining here?

This seems to be a problem for the simple materialist views of human persons introduced above. If Locke is right, and we can coherently imagine cases in which two persons “swap bodies”, then it seems that we cannot be identical to our bodies.

One might here simply say the same thing that we imagined someone saying to the conceivability argument: ‘Yes, this seems to be possible, but sometimes (as in the example of the small town with the barber) things are conceivable but not possible. Body-swapping is one of those cases. It is conceivable, but it is not really possible.’

But there is another option. One might say that we are, not immaterial things, and not material things, but psychological things, whose identity over time is given by relations of psychological connectedness. Next class, we’ll ask how we might go about developing a view of this sort.