

What am I?



A psychological thing

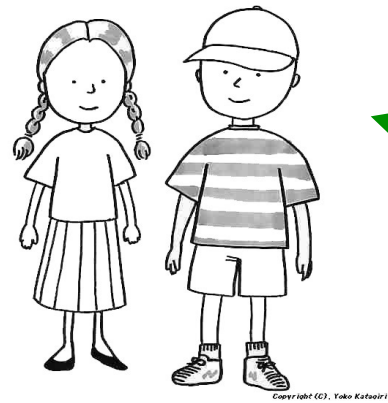
Last time we were discussing Locke's example of the prince and the cobbler.

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

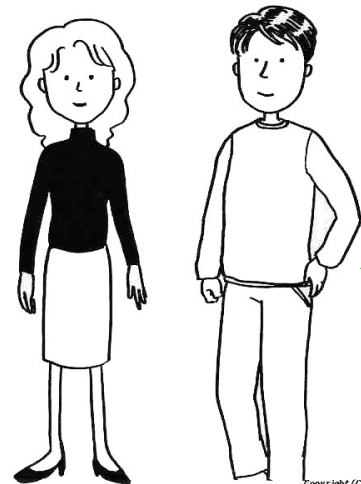
Suppose that one is convinced by Locke's example that the cobbler would be the same person as the prince. But suppose further that we are convinced that we live in a material world not inhabited by immaterial souls.

Is there any way that we can put these two ideas together?





psycho-  
logical  
connection



psycho-  
logical  
connection



Locke thought so. His view of personhood can be illustrated by considering a few different stages in the lives of some people.

What makes the child, the adult, and the elderly person stages of the same person? The dualist says: they are attached to the same immaterial soul. The materialist says: because they are the same material thing. Locke thought: it is because of **psychological connections** between the individuals.

This gives us the wanted result that the prince before the switch, and the cobbler after the switch, are the same person.

It is important to see that this view is not a version of dualism.

One can opt for Locke's psychological theory of persons without believing that there are such things as immaterial souls — and most believers in Locke's theory adopt the theory because they are materialists who nonetheless want to be able to say the right thing about cases like the prince and the cobbler.

But you might think that Locke's theory, so understood, faces a problem which is very similar to the problem posed by the Ship of Theseus.

Let  $t_1$  be a time before the prince/cobbler switch, and let  $t_2$  be a time after the switch. Let's use 'Probbler' as a name for the person who originally inhabits the body of the prince, and then later inhabits the body of the cobbler.

Then it seems that, if the psychological theorist wants to hold on to the view that we are material things, she will also have to endorse the following claims:

Probbler = the material object  
which is the prince's body at  $t_1$ .

Probbler = the material object  
which is the cobbler's body at  $t_2$ .

Probbler = the material object  
which is the prince's body at t1.

Probbler = the material object  
which is the cobbler's body at t2.

The material object which is the  
prince's body at t1 = the material  
object which is the cobbler's body  
at t2

How should the psychological theorist respond?

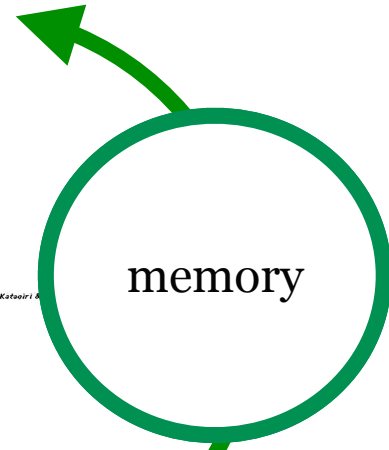
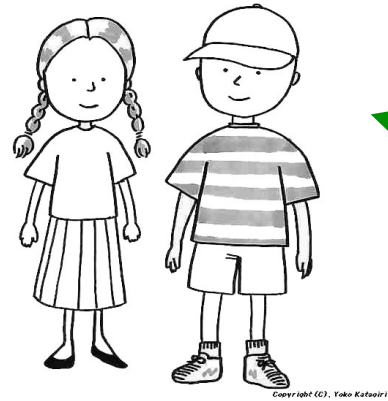
The psychological theorist must deny these two identity claims. But to do this, one does not have to say that the prince is identical to some immaterial object.

Probbler = the material object  
which is the prince's body at t1.

Probbler = the material object  
which is the cobbler's body at t2.

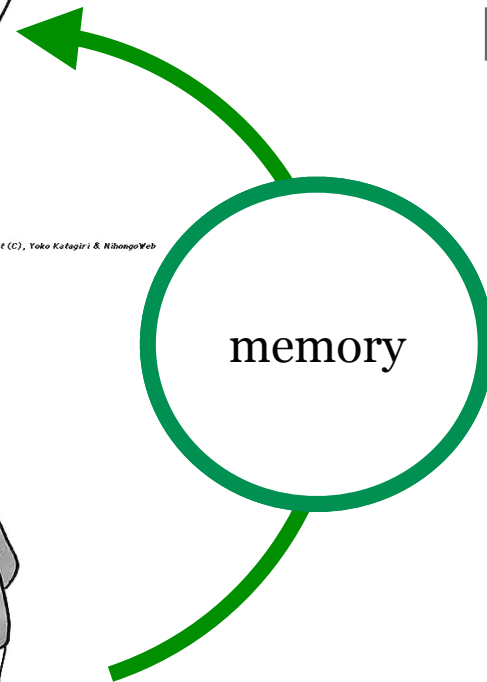
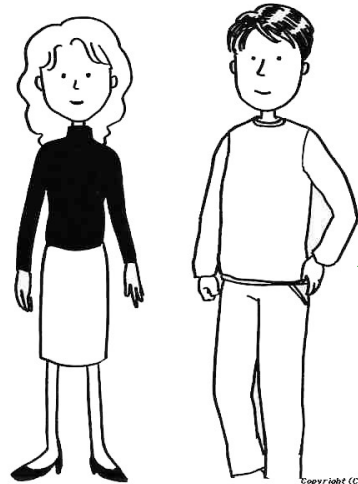
Rather, the psychological theorist should adopt a view of identity over time known as **four-dimensionalism**. According to this view, much as physical things are made up out of distinct spatial parts — like my left and right hand — objects that exist over a period of time are made out of distinct **temporal parts**.

Just as objects extend through space by having parts in different spatial locations, so objects extend through time by having different temporal parts at different times. And what makes these these distinct temporal parts all parts of the same person is their standing in certain psychological relations to each other.

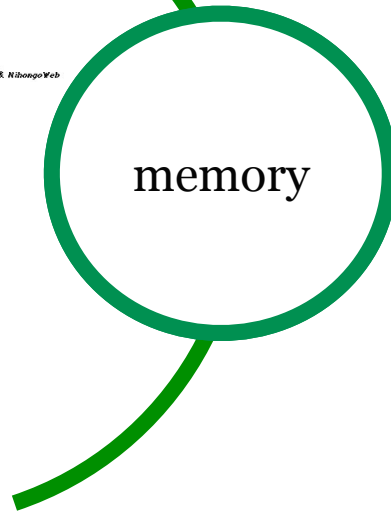


But what are the relevant psychological relations?

Locke's answer was: relations of **memory**.



But, as Locke's contemporary Thomas Reid noted, this answer leads to an immediate problem.

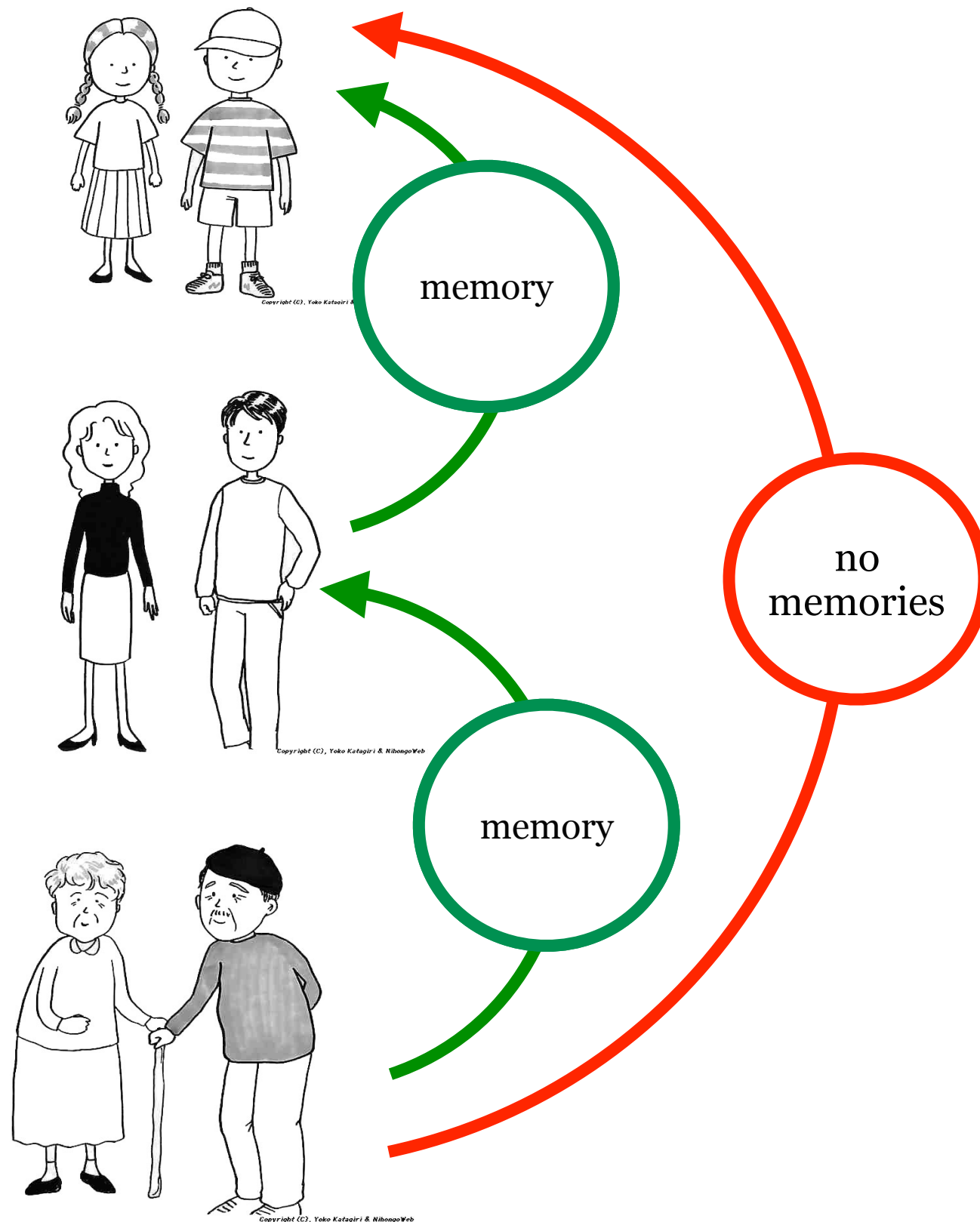




Suppose a brave officer to have been flogged when a boy at school, for robbing an orchard, to have taken a standard from the enemy in his first campaign, and to have been made a general in advanced life: Suppose also, which must be admitted to be possible, that, when he took the standard, he was conscious of his having been flogged at school, and that when made a general he was conscious of his taking the standard, but had absolutely lost the consciousness of his flogging.

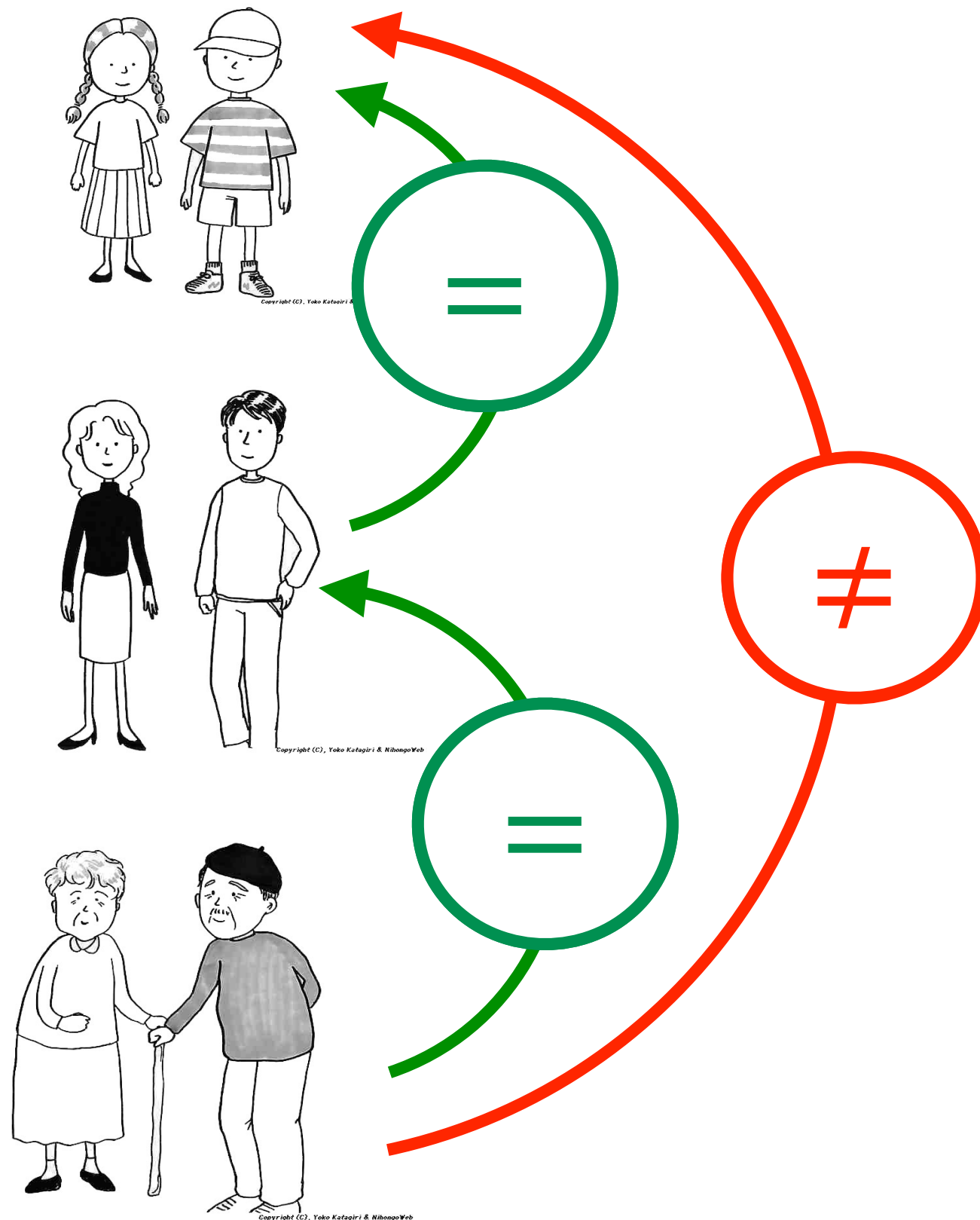
These things being supposed, it follows, from Mr Locke's doctrine, that he who was flogged at school is the same person who took the standard, and that he who took the standard is the same person who was made a general. Whence it follows, if there be any truth in logic, that the general is the same person with him who was flogged at school. But the general's consciousness does not reach so far back as his flogging—therefore, according to Mr Locke's doctrine, he is not the person who was flogged. Therefore, the general is, and at the same time is not the same person with him who was flogged at school.





We can illustrate the kind of scenario that Reid had in mind.

This is problematic because, if identity of persons is determined by memory or its absence, Reid's example leads to an impossible constellation of identity facts.



How should the psychological theorist reply?

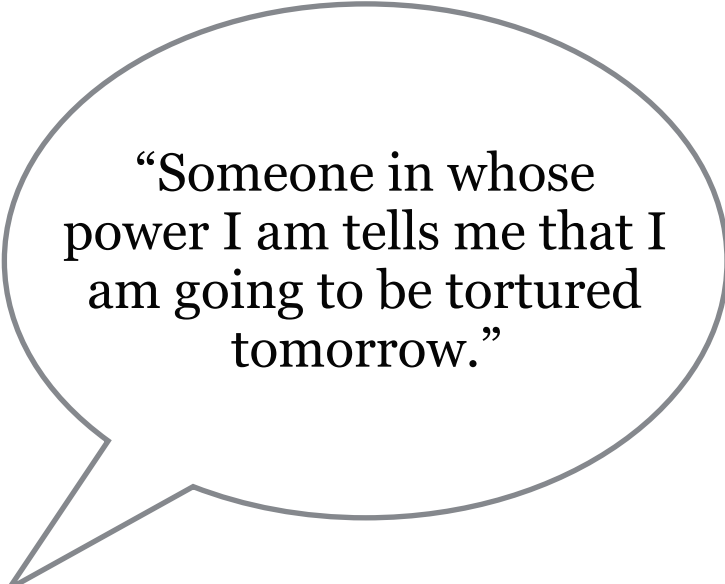
One promising reply: introduce the notion of an **indirect memory relation**, which is related to memory relations in the way that **ancestor** is related to parent.

Let's turn now to a quite different sort of objection to the psychological theory, which is due to Bernard Williams.

This objection relies on the fact that, in a certain sense of 'fear,' I can only fear things which are going to happen to **me**.

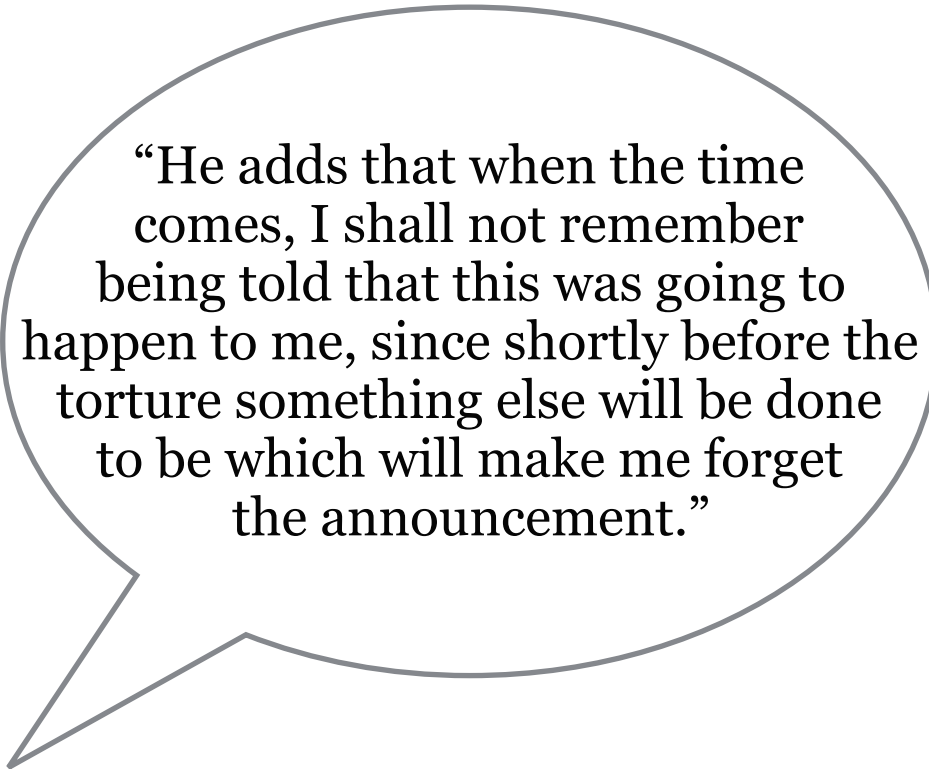


Williams gives us a kind of thought-experiment, which can be presented in stages.



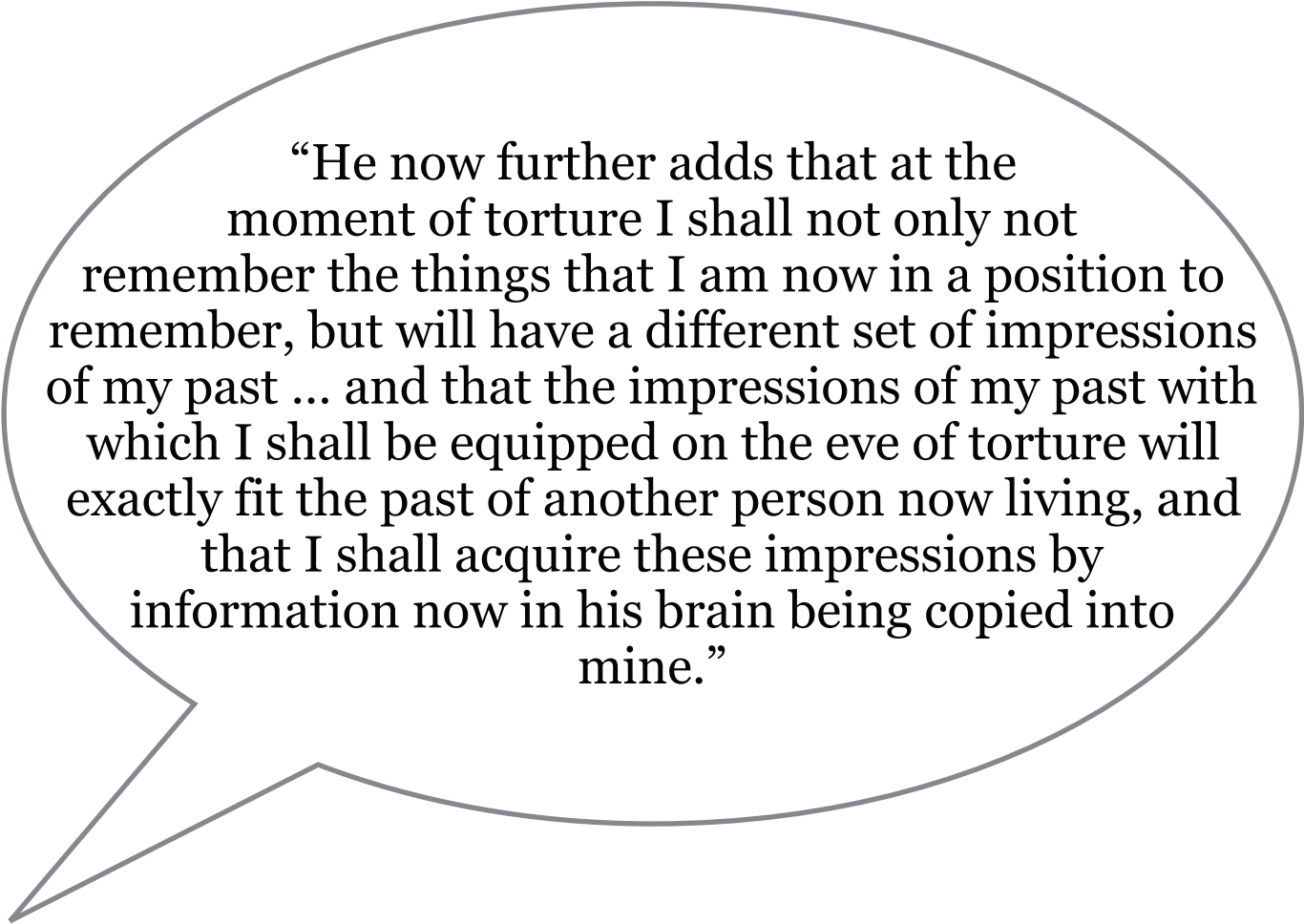
“Someone in whose power I am tells me that I am going to be tortured tomorrow.”

The reasonable response, as Williams says, is surely fear.



“He adds that when the time comes, I shall not remember being told that this was going to happen to me, since shortly before the torture something else will be done to be which will make me forget the announcement.”

As Williams says, “this certainly will not cheer me up,” since I know that it is possible to be tortured unexpectedly. The reasonable response is still, surely, fear.



“He now further adds that at the moment of torture I shall not only not remember the things that I am now in a position to remember, but will have a different set of impressions of my past ... and that the impressions of my past with which I shall be equipped on the eve of torture will exactly fit the past of another person now living, and that I shall acquire these impressions by information now in his brain being copied into mine.”

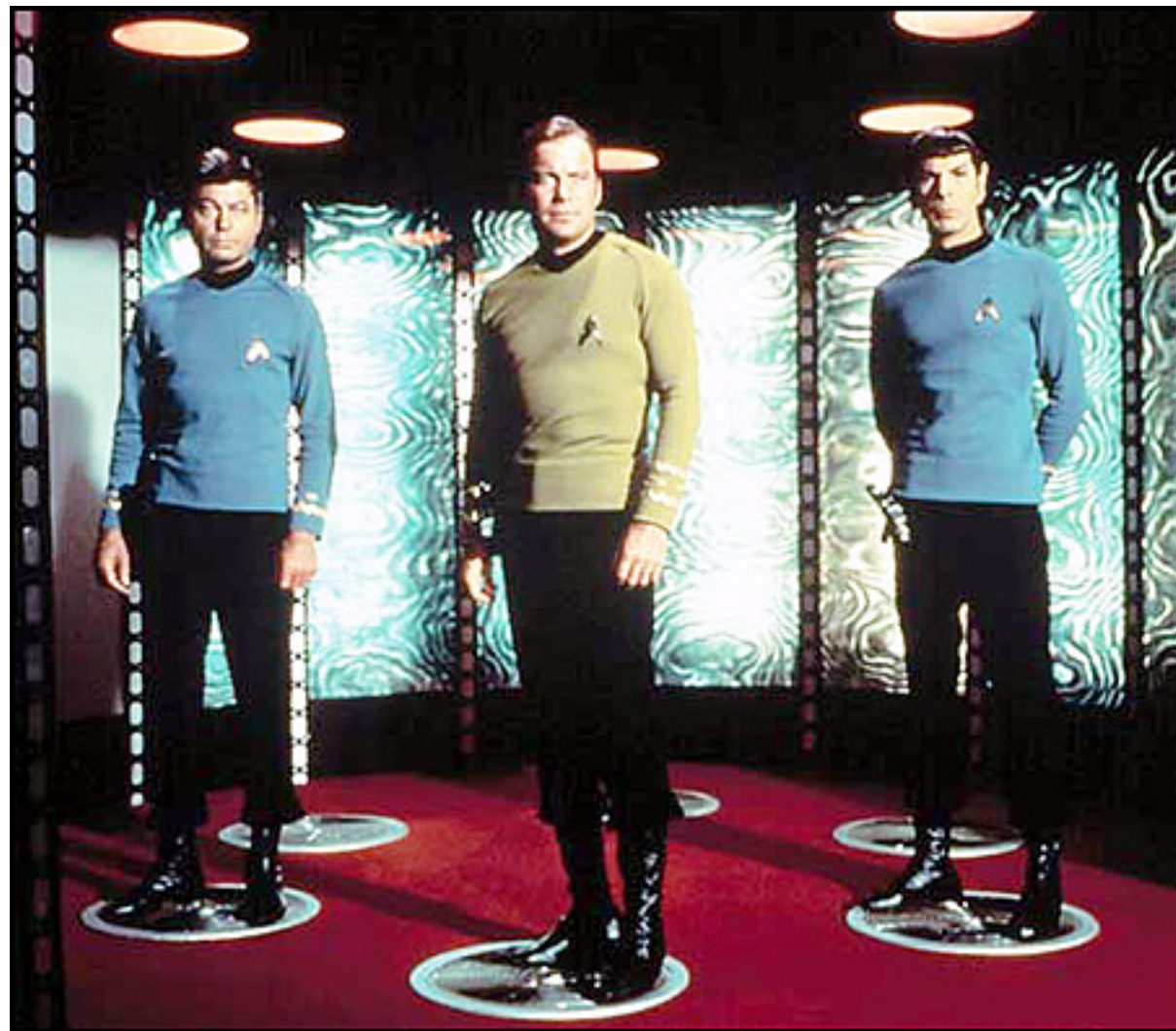
As Williams nicely puts it:  
“Fear, surely, would still be the proper reaction: and not because one did not know what was going to happen, but because in one vital respect one did know — torture, which one can indeed expect to happen to oneself, and to be preceded by certain mental derangements as well.”

Suppose that Williams is right, and that fear would still be the proper reaction. Is this a problem for the psychological theory?

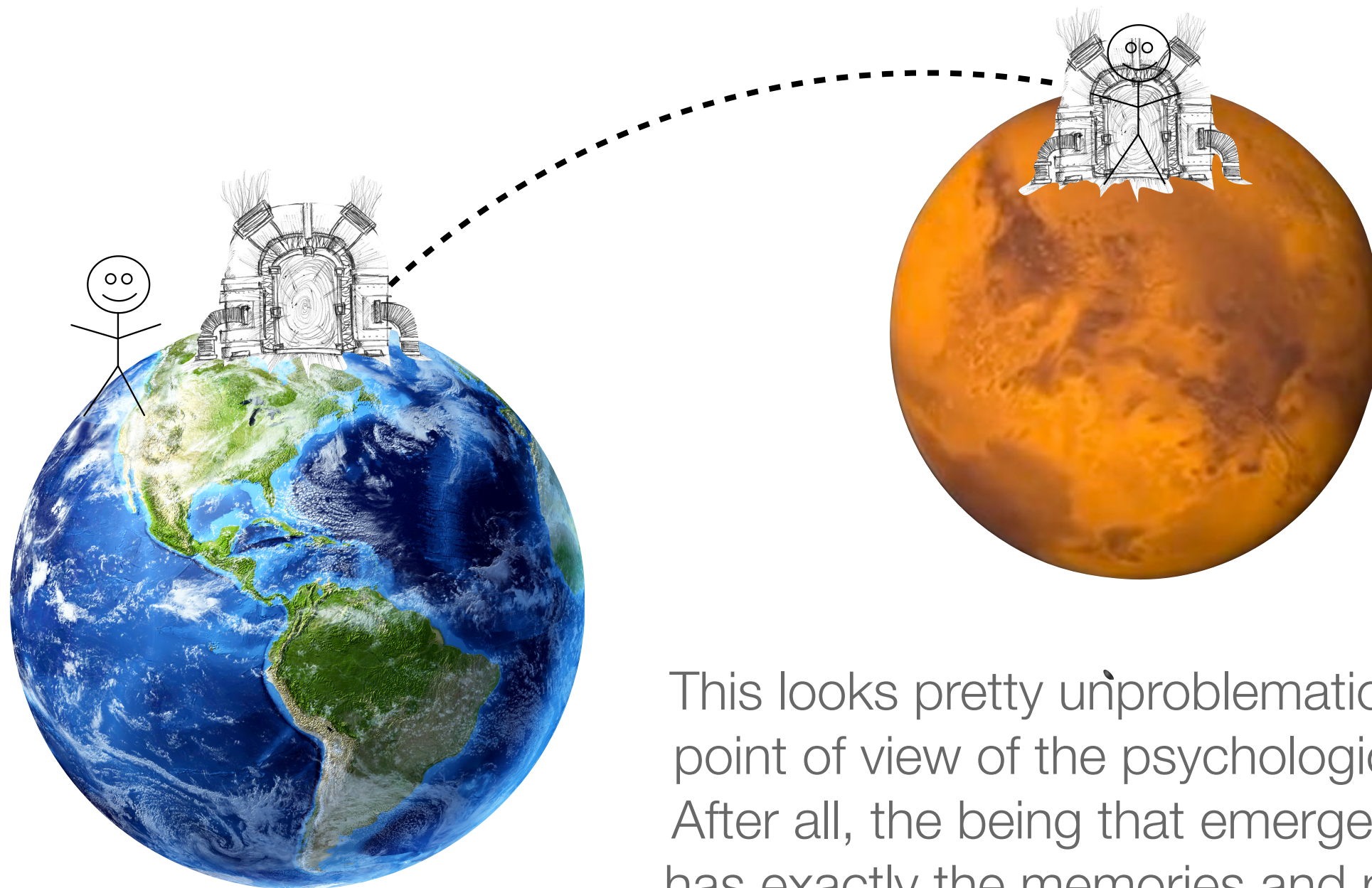


Let's now turn to what is arguably the most serious problem for the psychological theory: the problem of **fission**.

This is a problem which can be brought out by considering a device familiar from science fiction: **teletransportation**.



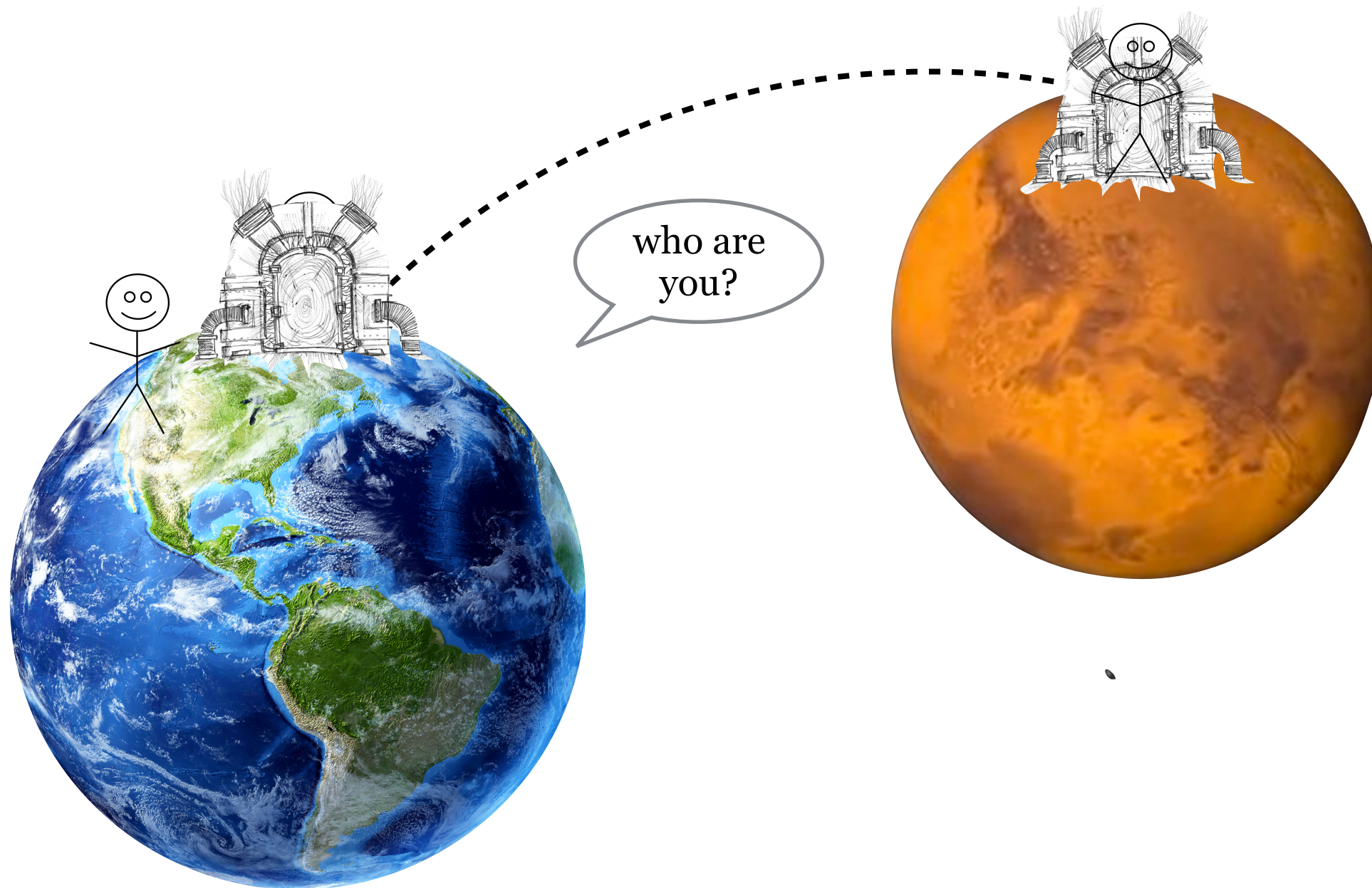
The teletransporter was invented as a way of traveling quickly from Earth to the now-colonized planet of Mars. One simply steps into the teletransporter on Earth, at which time all of the data about my cells is recorded and transmitted near the speed of light to Mars, at which time that data is used by the teletransporter there to reconstitute me.



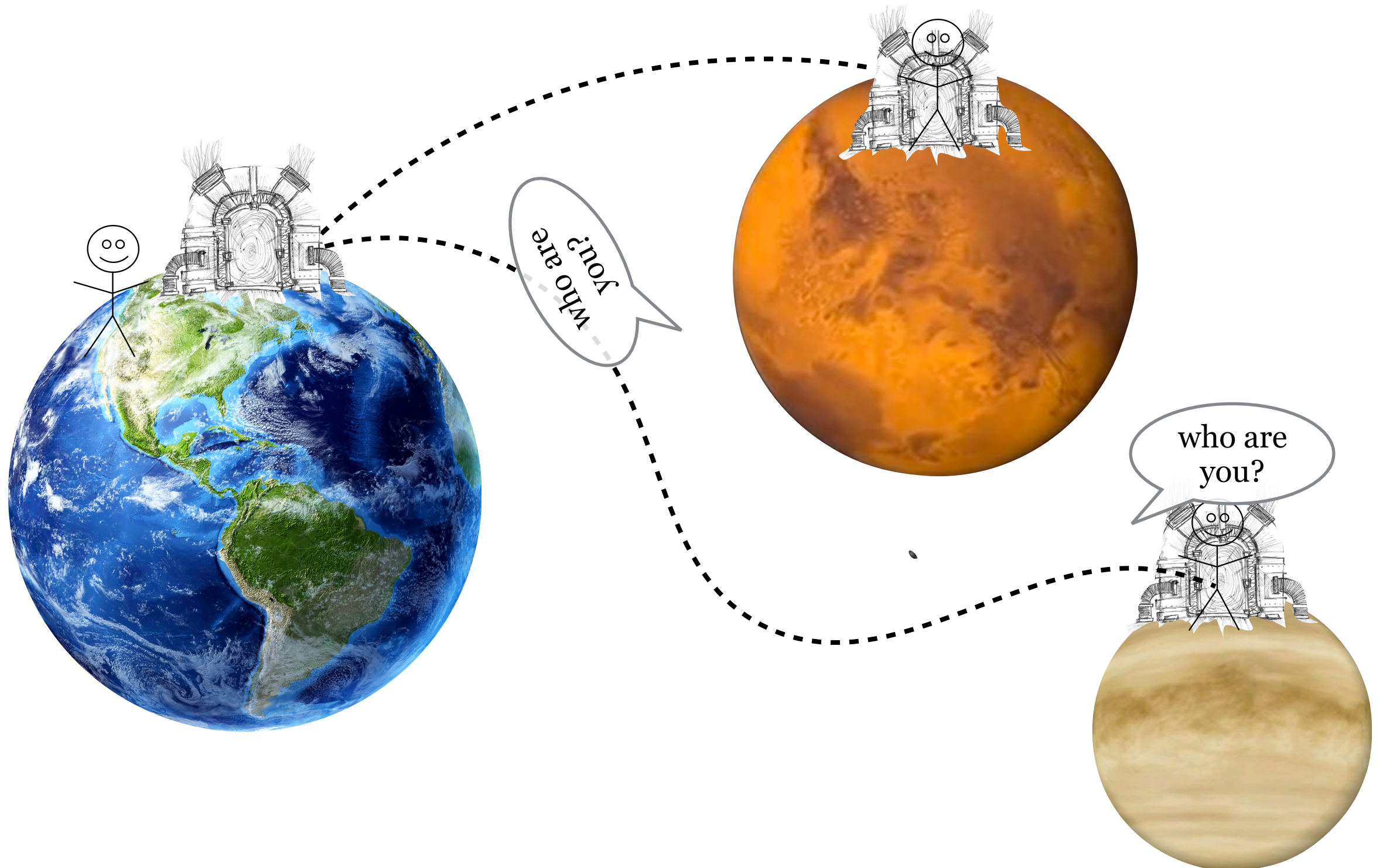
This looks pretty unproblematic, from the point of view of the psychological theory. After all, the being that emerges on Mars has exactly the memories and personality as the person who stepped into the machine on Earth. So it is the same person.



But problems are not far away. What happens if the teletransportation machine on earth, after copying all of the information about the cells of the person who steps into the teletransporter, simply leaves the body in the teletransportation machine untouched?



Or we can imagine that there is another teletransportation machine located on the surface of Venus, to which the machine on earth simultaneously transmits the relevant cellular information.





We appear to face a problem which is in some ways similar to the problem posed by the Ship of Theseus. Let's focus on the version of the story in which there are teletransportation machines on Mars and Venus.

Let's call the person who steps into the teletransporter on Earth 'Earthy,' the one who steps out on Mars 'Marsy,' and the one who steps out on Venus 'Venusy.'

We have already seen that, if the psychological theory is true, then the idea that a single person can travel (and continue to exist!) via teletransportation is unproblematic. So we know that, if the psychological theory is true, then:

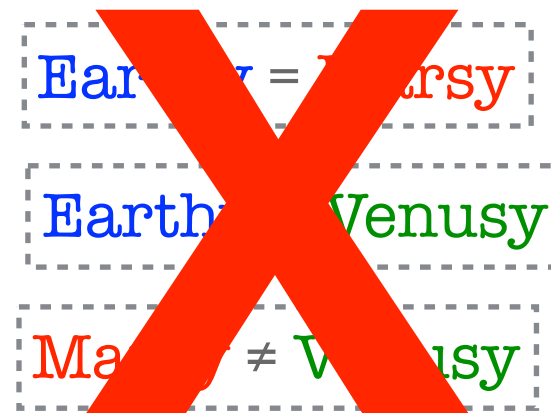
Earthy = Marsy

Earthy = Venusy

But the following seems clearly true:

Marsy ≠ Venusy

But, for reasons we have already discussed — namely, the fact that identity is transitive, these three claims do not sit well together. So it appears that the psychological theory implies a contradiction.



Basically the same point could be made about the version of the story on which, after the transmission to Mars, the individual who steps into the teletransporter on Earth steps back out. To tell that version of the story, we'd just need to introduce two names — Earthy-1 and Earthy-2 — for the individual on earth pre-teletransportation, and the individual who exists after the teletransportation.

How should the psychological theorist respond?