Virtual Memory: Concepts

COMP402127: Introduction to Computer Systems
https://xjtu-ics.github.io/

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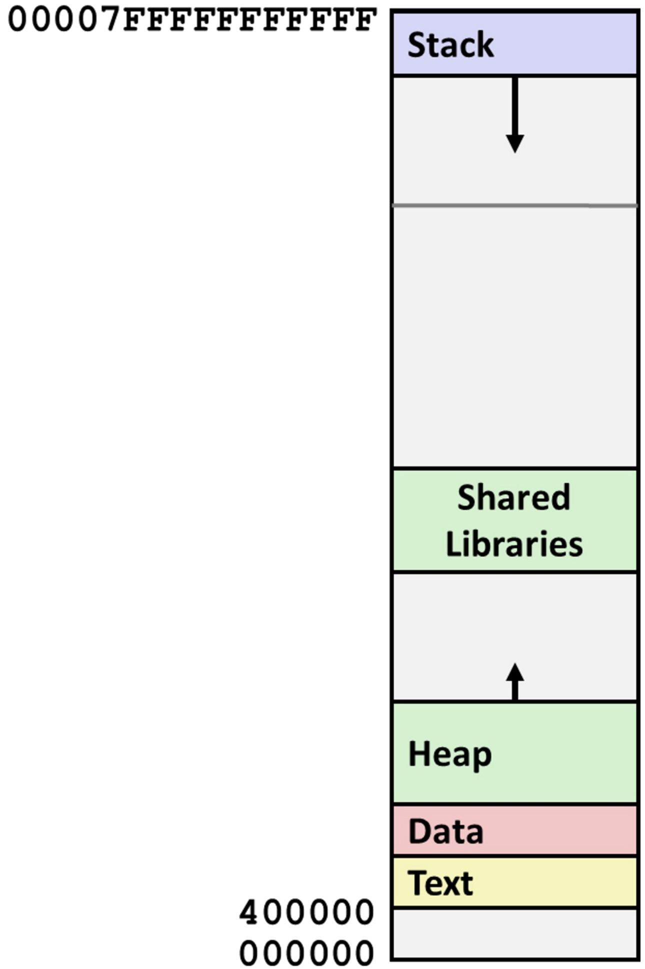
This Picture is a Lie

- This is RAM, we said…
- But the computer can run more than one program at a time!
- Where are all the other programs?
- Let's *investigate*.



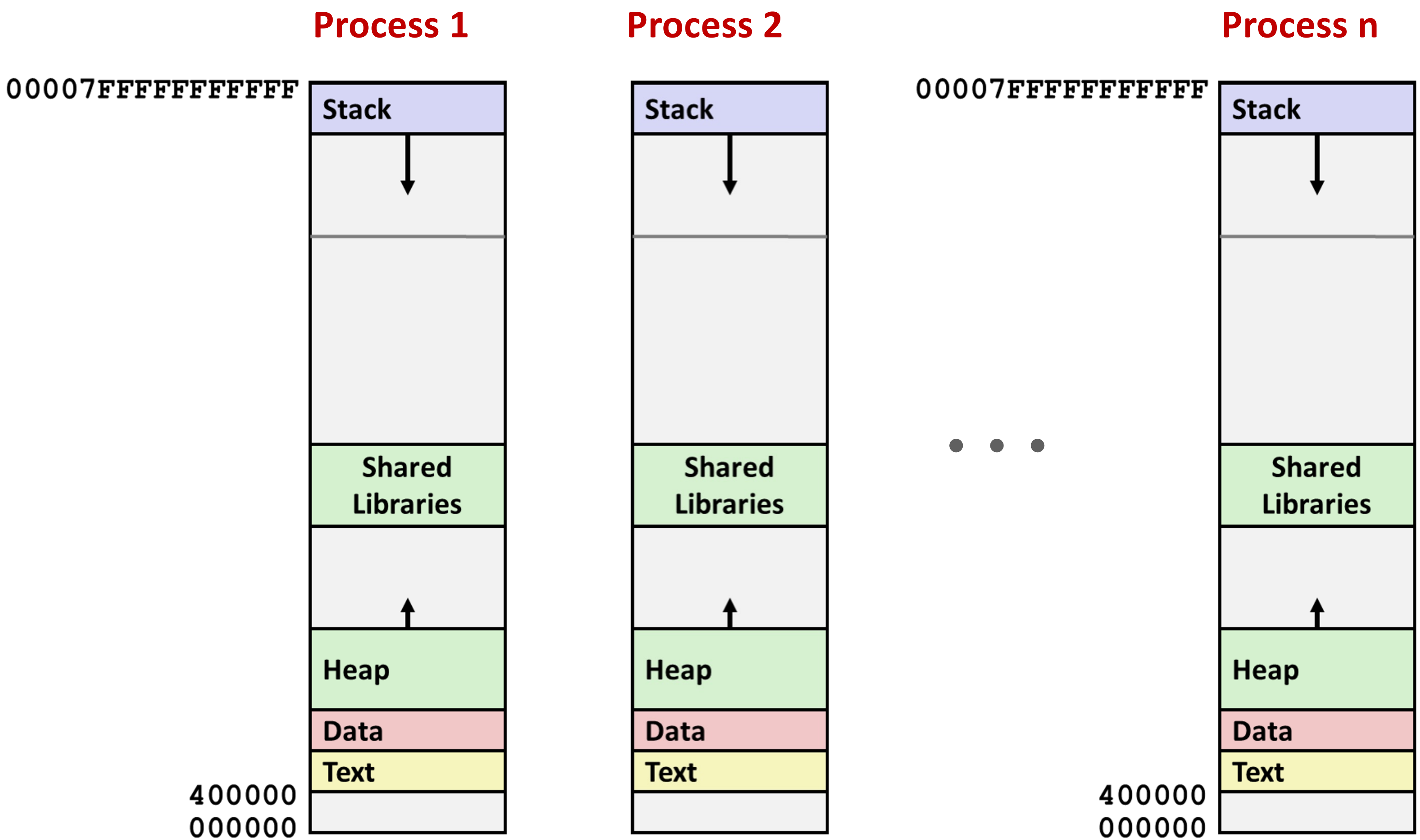
Processes

- **Definition: A *process* is an instance of a running program.**
  - One of the most profound ideas in computer science
  - Not the same as "program" or "processor"

- **Unix: A *parent process* creates a new *child process* by calling `fork`**
  - Child is (sort of) a copy of the parent
  - `fork` returns *twice*—once in each process
    - Different return value in each

- **Parent can wait for child to finish by calling `waitpid`**
  - For now, think of this as "what `main` returns to"

Hmmm, How Does This Work?!

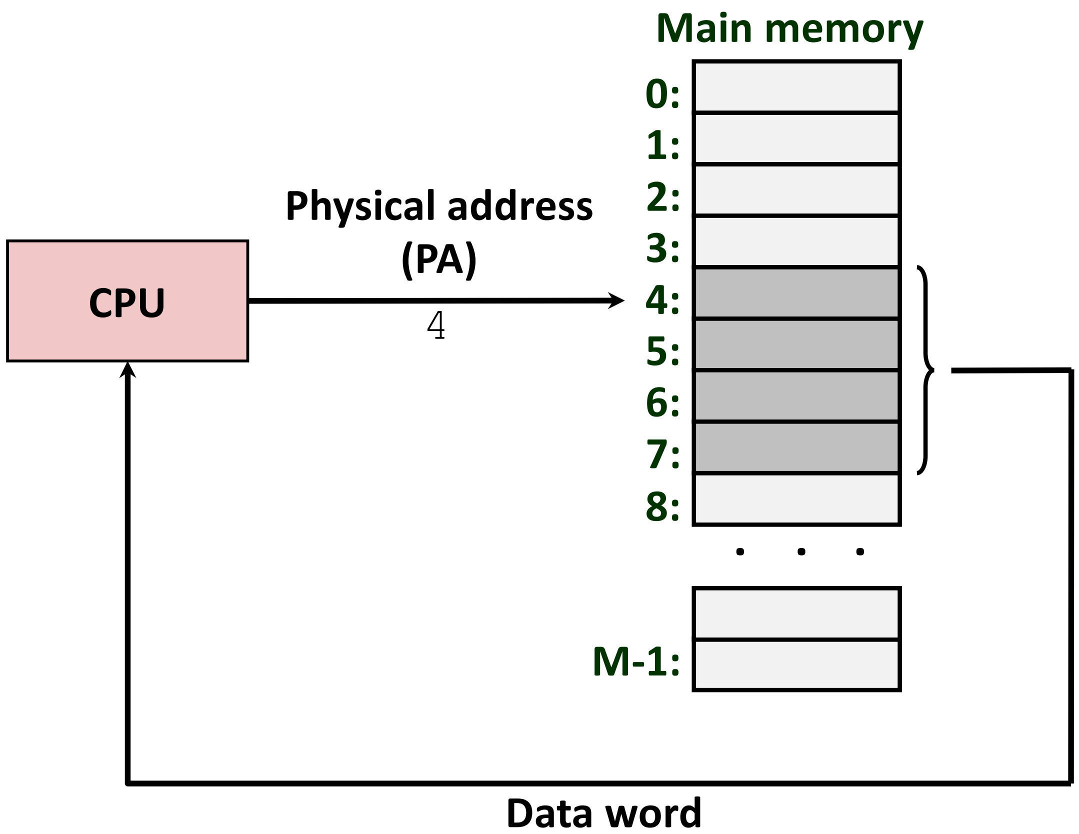


Solution: Virtual Memory (today and next lecture)

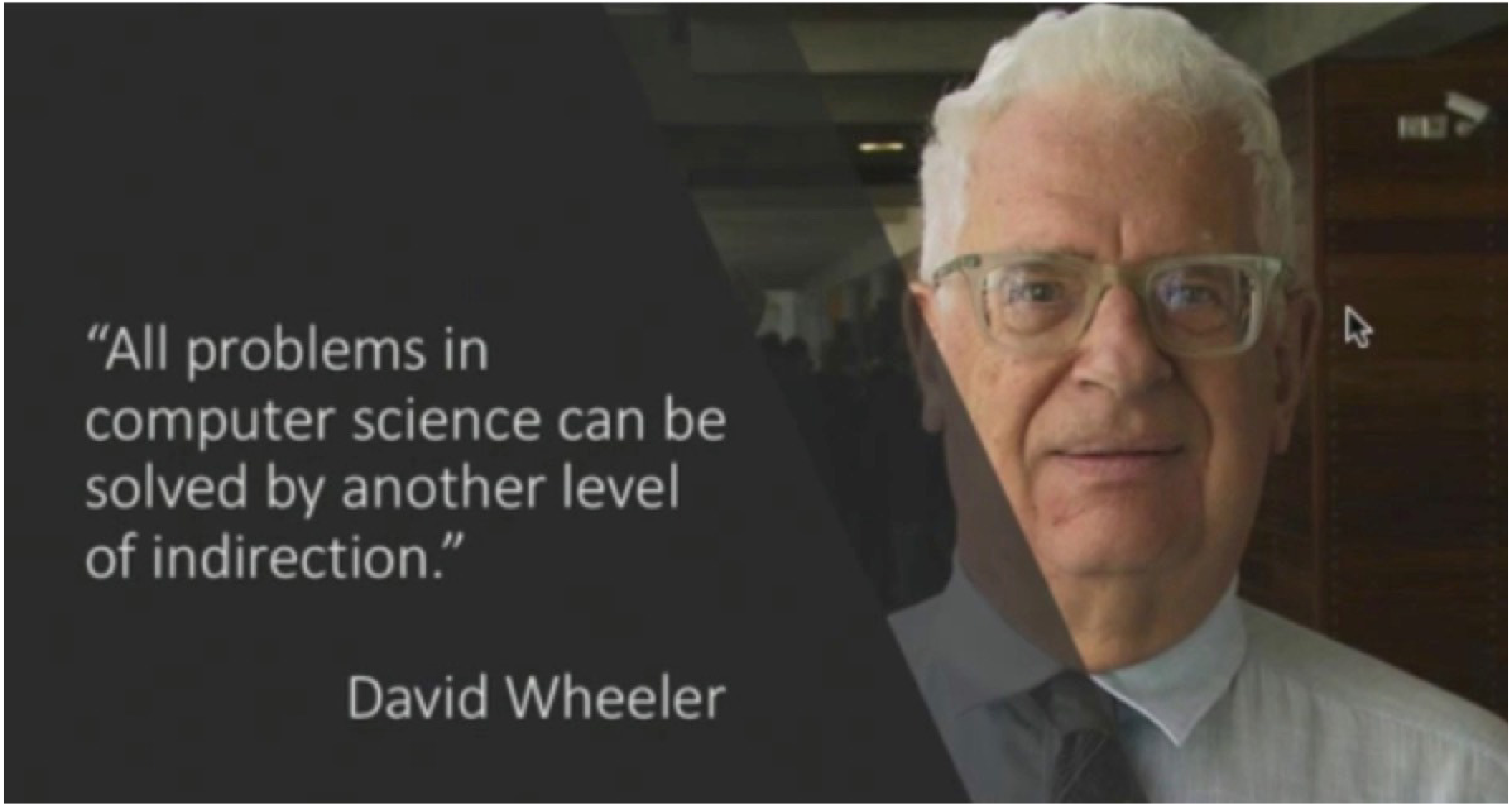
Today

- **Address spaces**
- VM as a tool for caching
- VM as a tool for memory management
- VM as a tool for memory protection
- Address translation

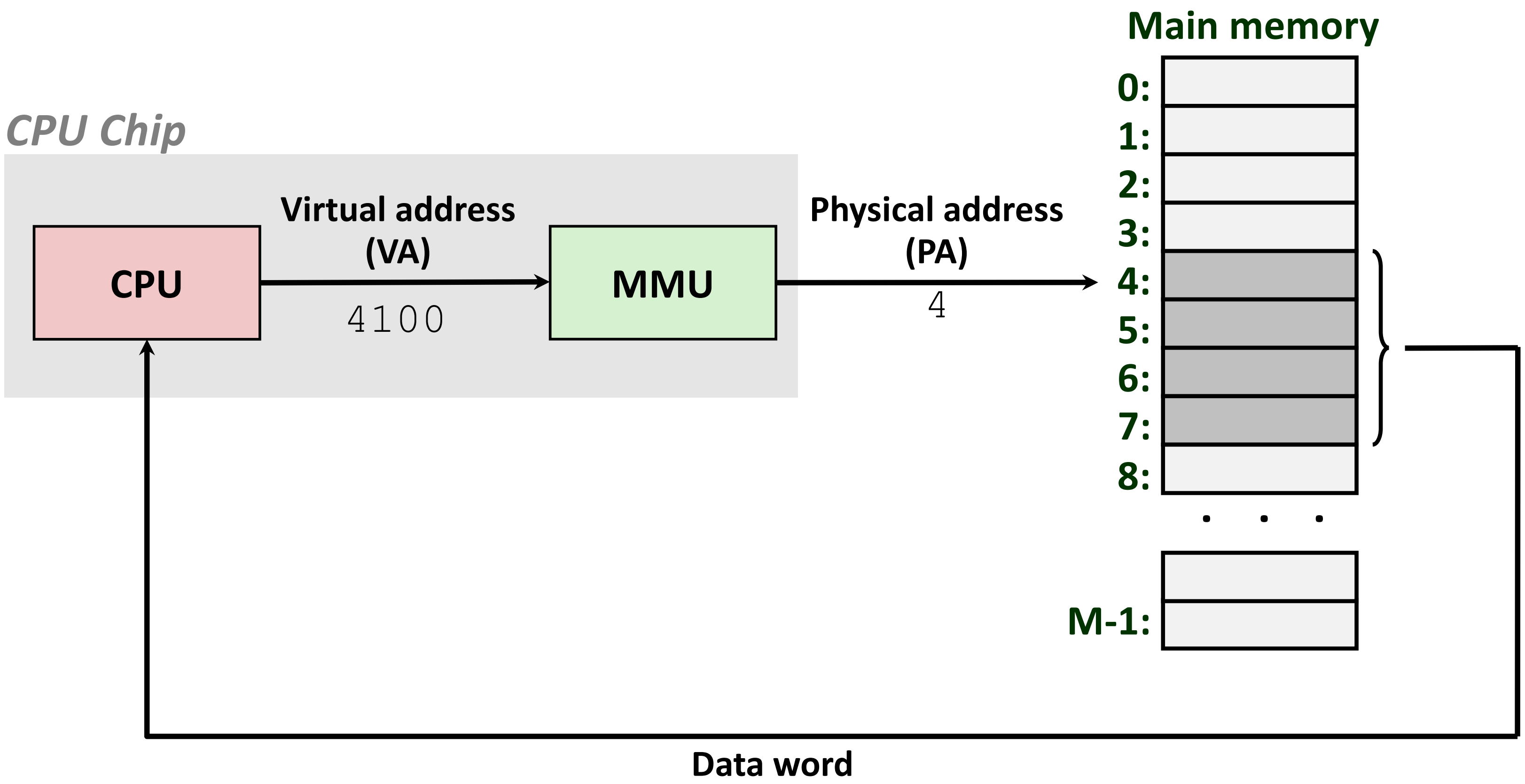
A System Using Physical Addressing



- Used in "simple" systems like embedded microcontrollers in devices like cars, elevators, and digital picture frames


"All problems in computer science can be solved by another level of indirection."
David Wheeler

A System Using Virtual Addressing



- Used in all modern servers, laptops, and smart phones
- One of the great ideas in computer science

Address Spaces

- **Linear address space:** Ordered set of contiguous non-negative integer addresses:

  {0, 1, 2, 3 … }

- **Virtual address space:** Set of $N = 2^n$ virtual addresses

  {0, 1, 2, 3, …, N-1}

- **Physical address space:** Set of $M = 2^m$ physical addresses

  {0, 1, 2, 3, …, M-1}

Why Virtual Memory (VM)?

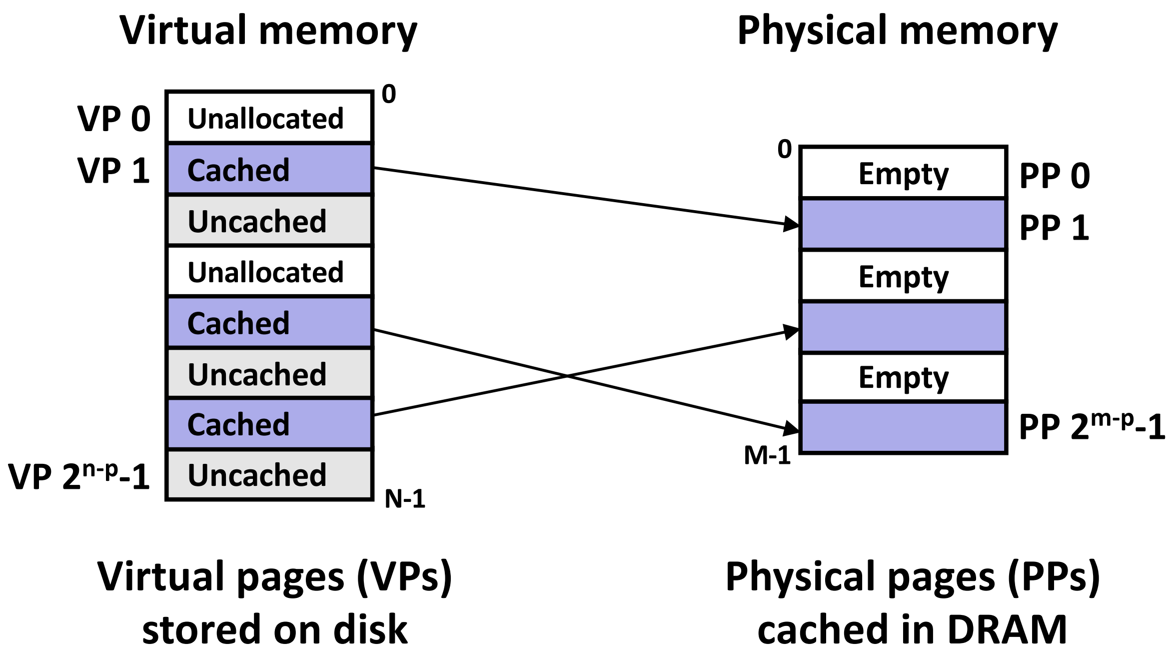
- **Uses main memory efficiently**
  - Use DRAM as a cache for parts of a virtual address space
- **Simplifies memory management**
  - Each process gets the same uniform linear address space
- **Isolates address spaces**
  - One process can’t interfere with another’s memory
  - User program cannot access privileged kernel information and code

Today

- Address spaces
- **VM as a tool for caching**
- VM as a tool for memory management
- VM as a tool for memory protection
- Address translation

VM as a Tool for Caching

- Conceptually, ***virtual memory*** is an array of N contiguous bytes stored on disk.
- The contents of the array on disk are cached in ***physical memory*** (***DRAM cache***)
  - These cache blocks are called *pages* (size is $P = 2^p$ bytes)



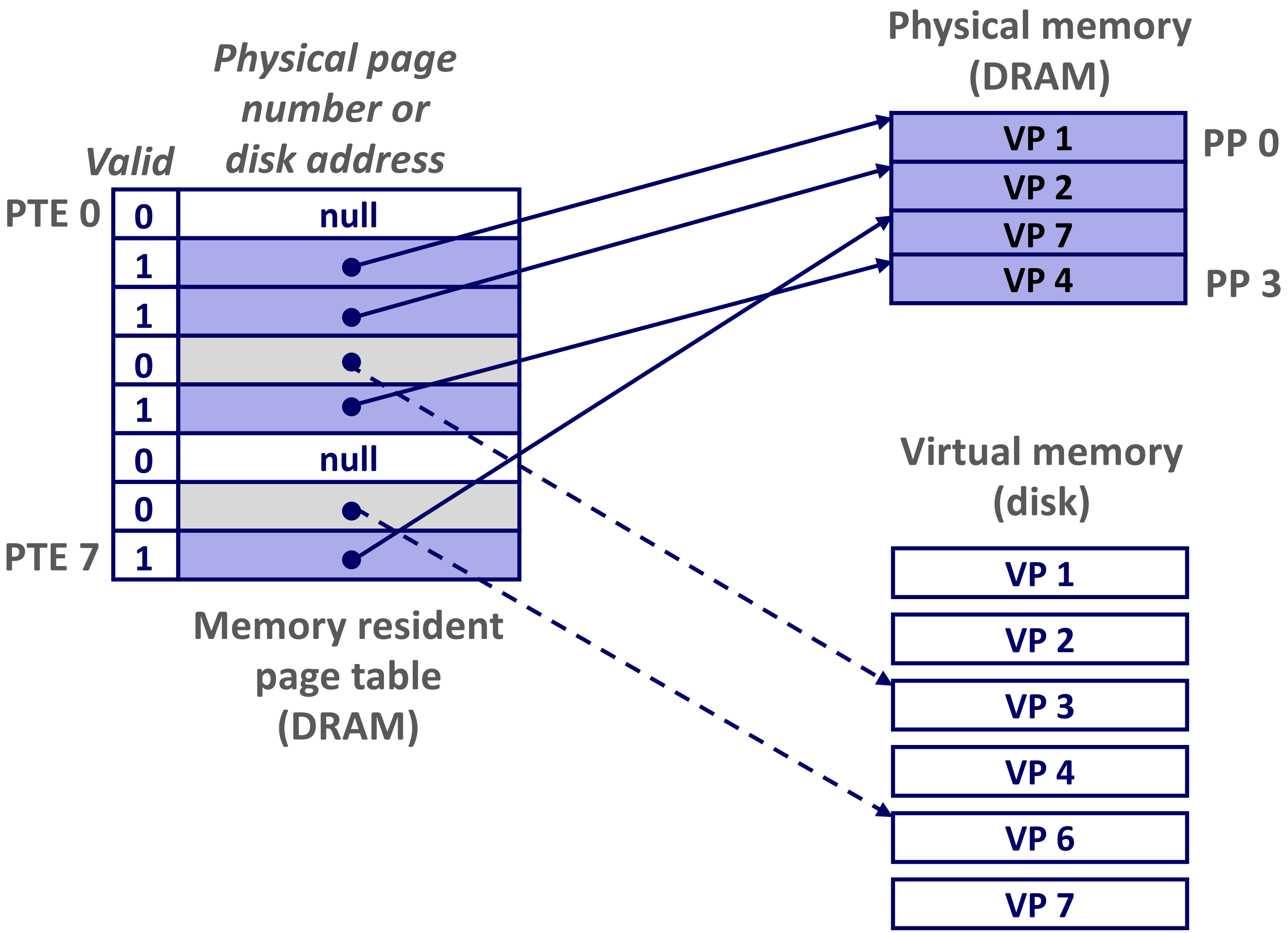
DRAM Cache Organization

- **DRAM cache organization driven by the enormous miss penalty**
  - DRAM is about ***10x*** slower than SRAM
  - Disk is about ***10,000x*** slower than DRAM

- **Consequences**
  - Large page (block) size: typically 4 KB, sometimes 4 MB
  - Fully associative
    - Any VP can be placed in any PP
    - Requires a “large” mapping function – different from cache memories
  - Highly sophisticated, expensive replacement algorithms
    - Too complicated and open-ended to be implemented in hardware
  - Write-back rather than write-through

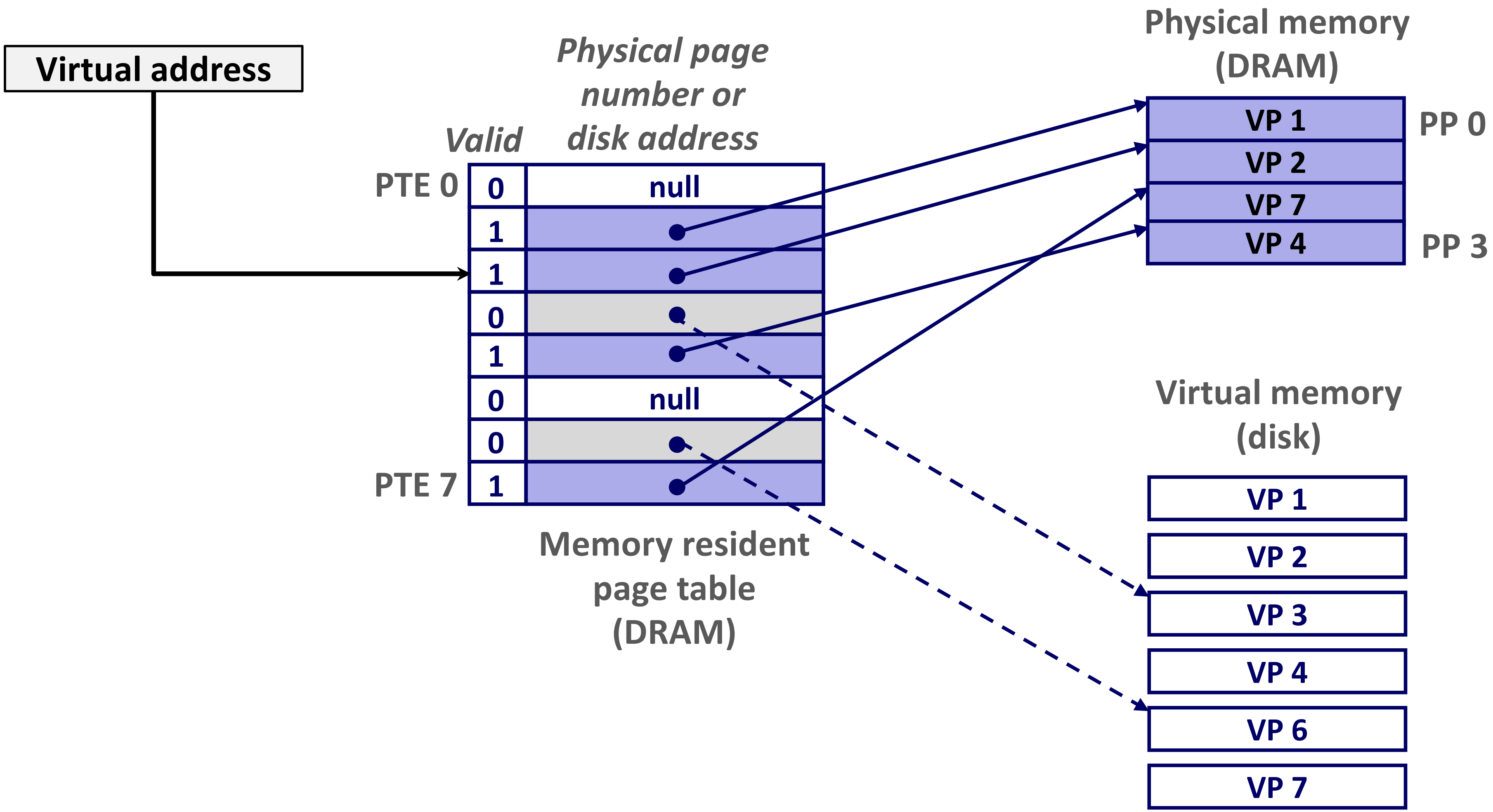
Enabling Data Structure: Page Table

- A ***page table*** **is an array of page table entries (PTEs) that maps virtual pages to physical pages.**
  - Per-process kernel data structure in DRAM



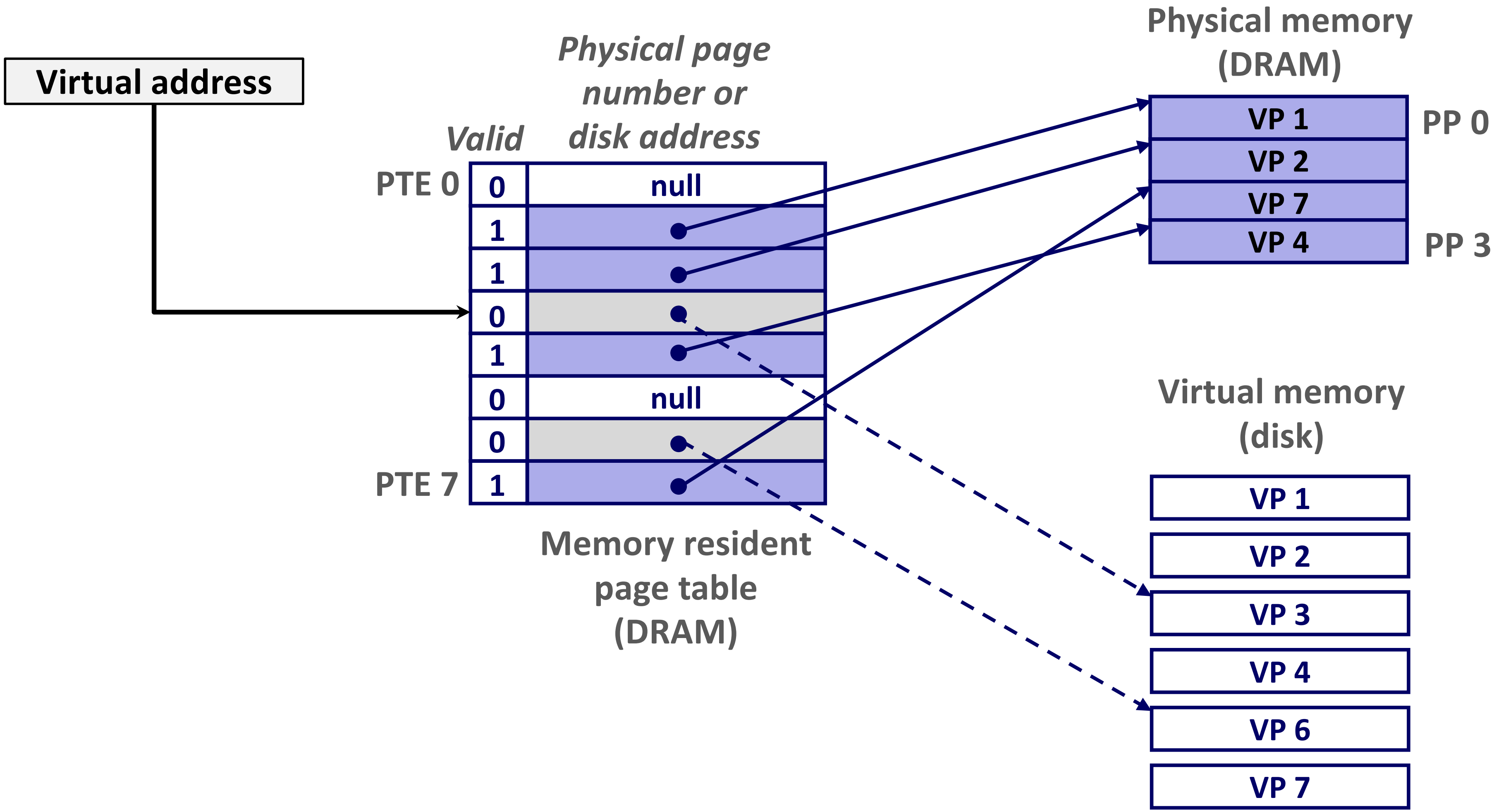
Page Hit

- ***Page hit:*** **reference to VM word that is in physical memory (DRAM cache hit)**



Page Fault

- ***Page fault:*** **reference to VM word that is not in physical memory (DRAM cache miss)**



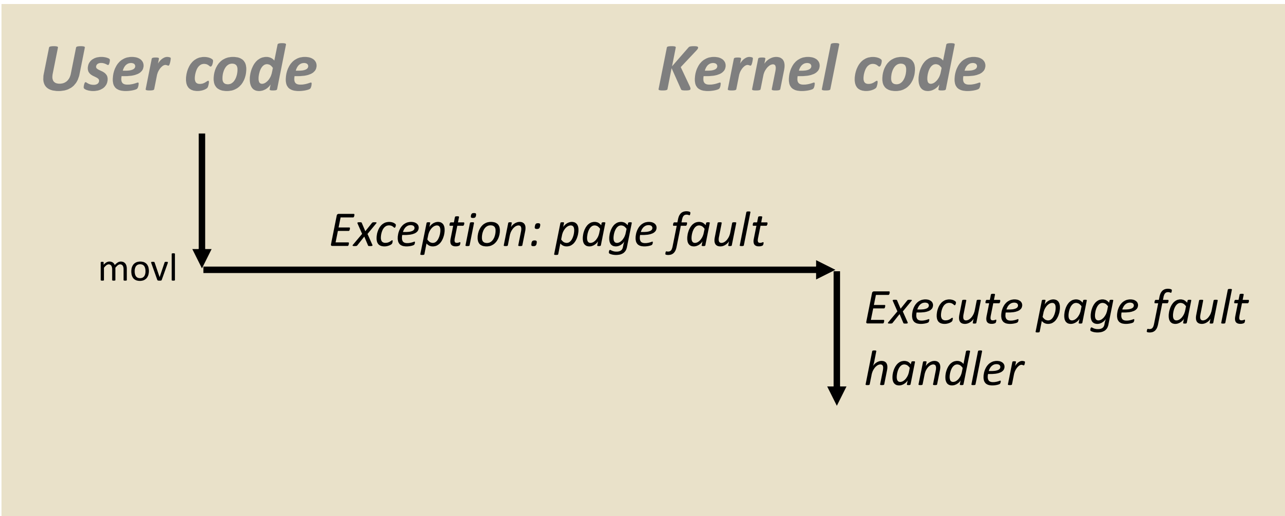
Triggering a Page Fault

- User writes to memory location

```
80483b7:        c7 05 10 9d 04 08 0d   movl   $0xd,0x8049d10
```

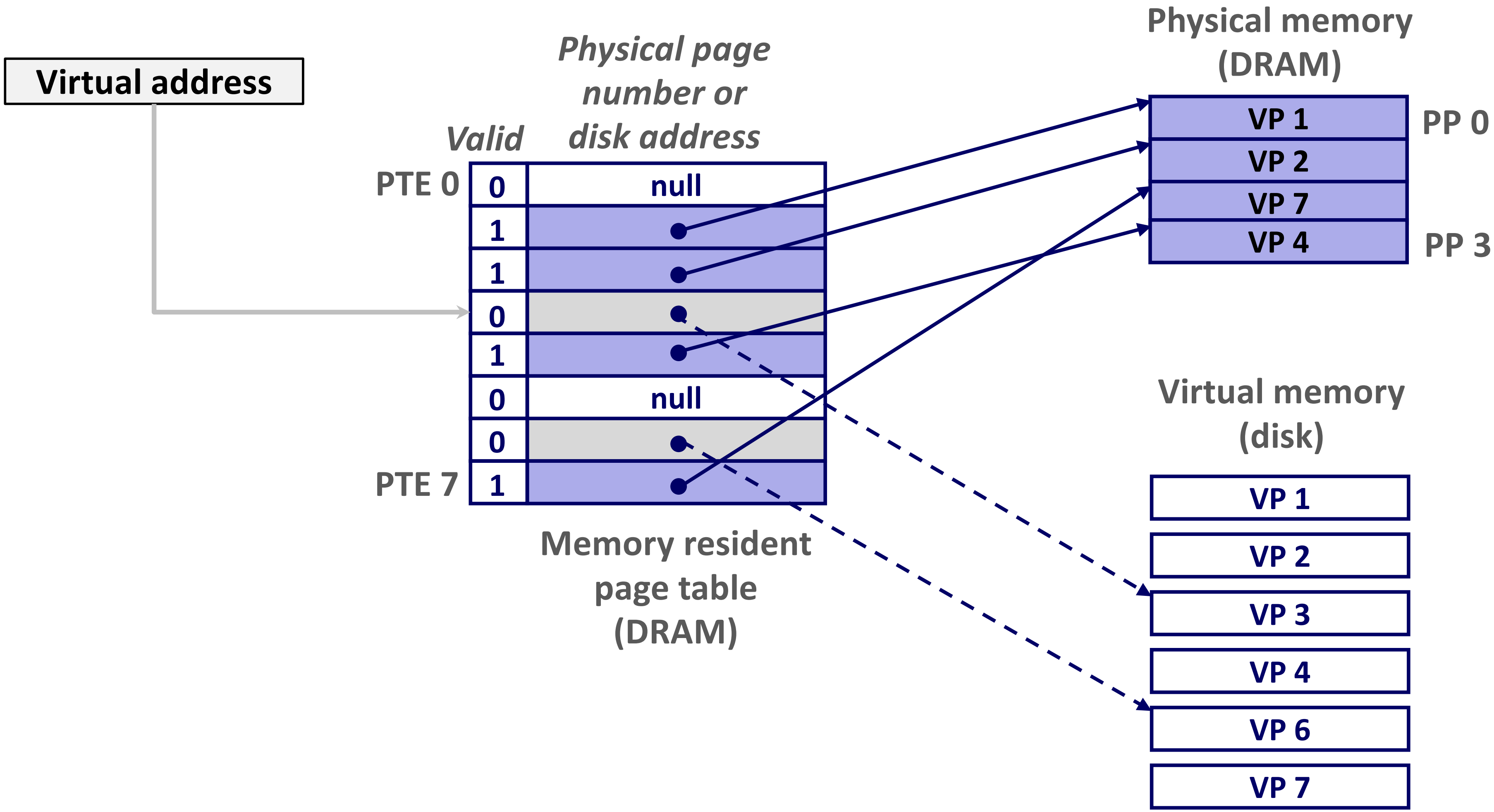
- That portion (page) of user's memory is currently on disk
- MMU triggers page fault exception
  - (More details in later lecture)
  - Raise privilege level to supervisor mode
  - Causes procedure call to software page fault handler

```
int a[1000];
main ()
{
    a[500] = 13;
}
```



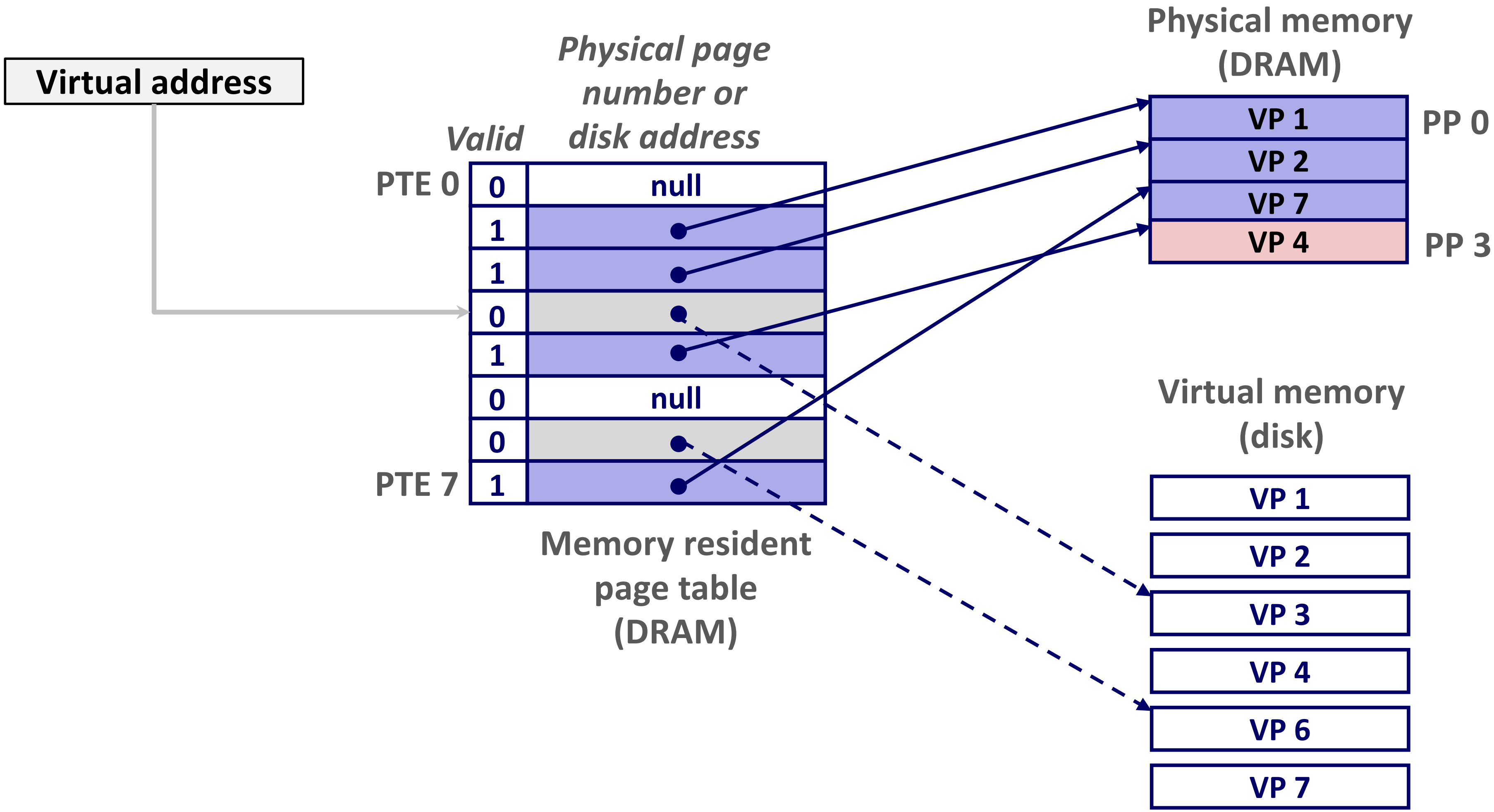
Handling Page Fault

- Page miss causes page fault (an exception)



Handling Page Fault

- Page miss causes page fault (an exception)
- Page fault handler selects a victim to be evicted (here VP 4)



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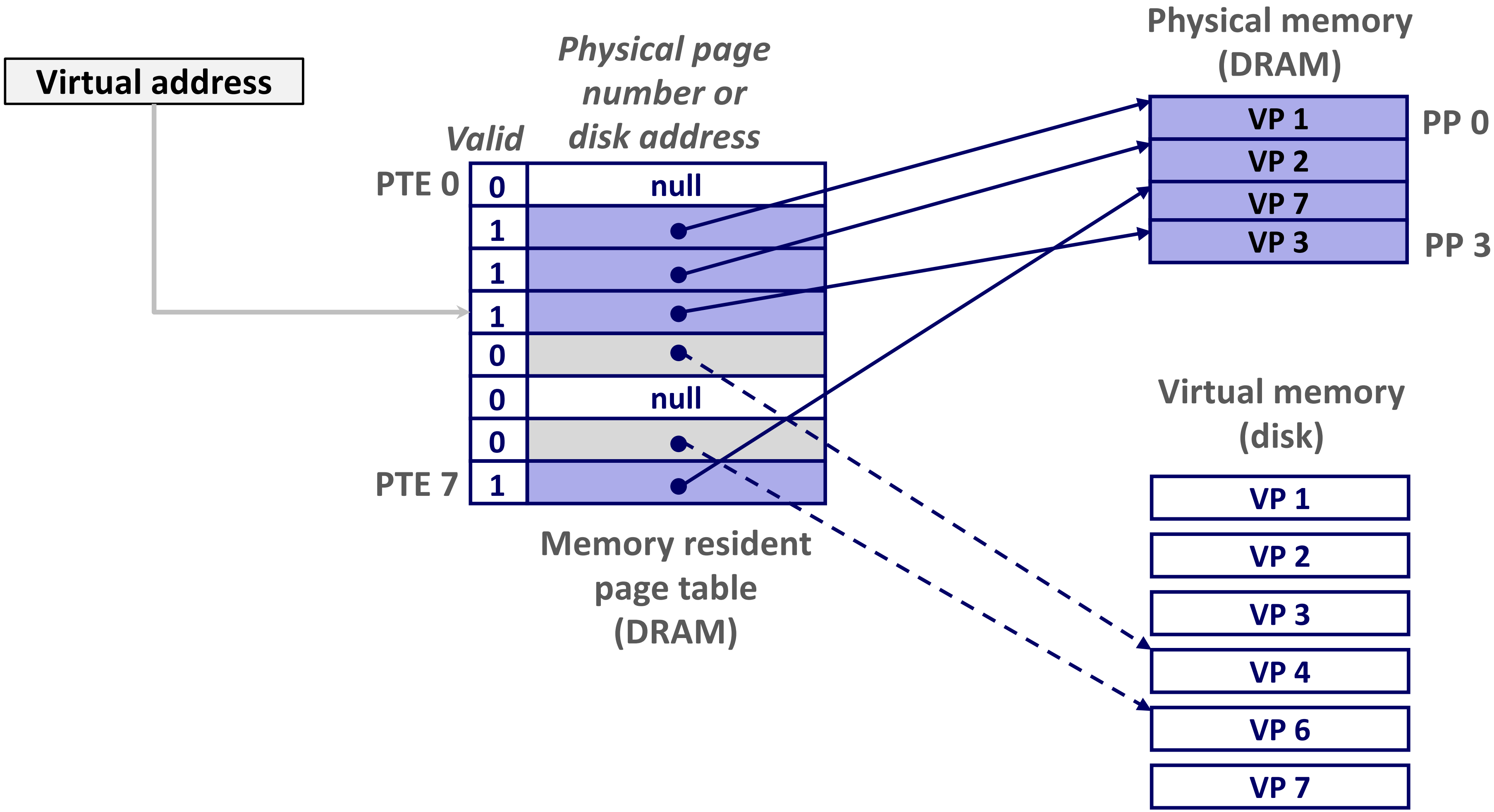
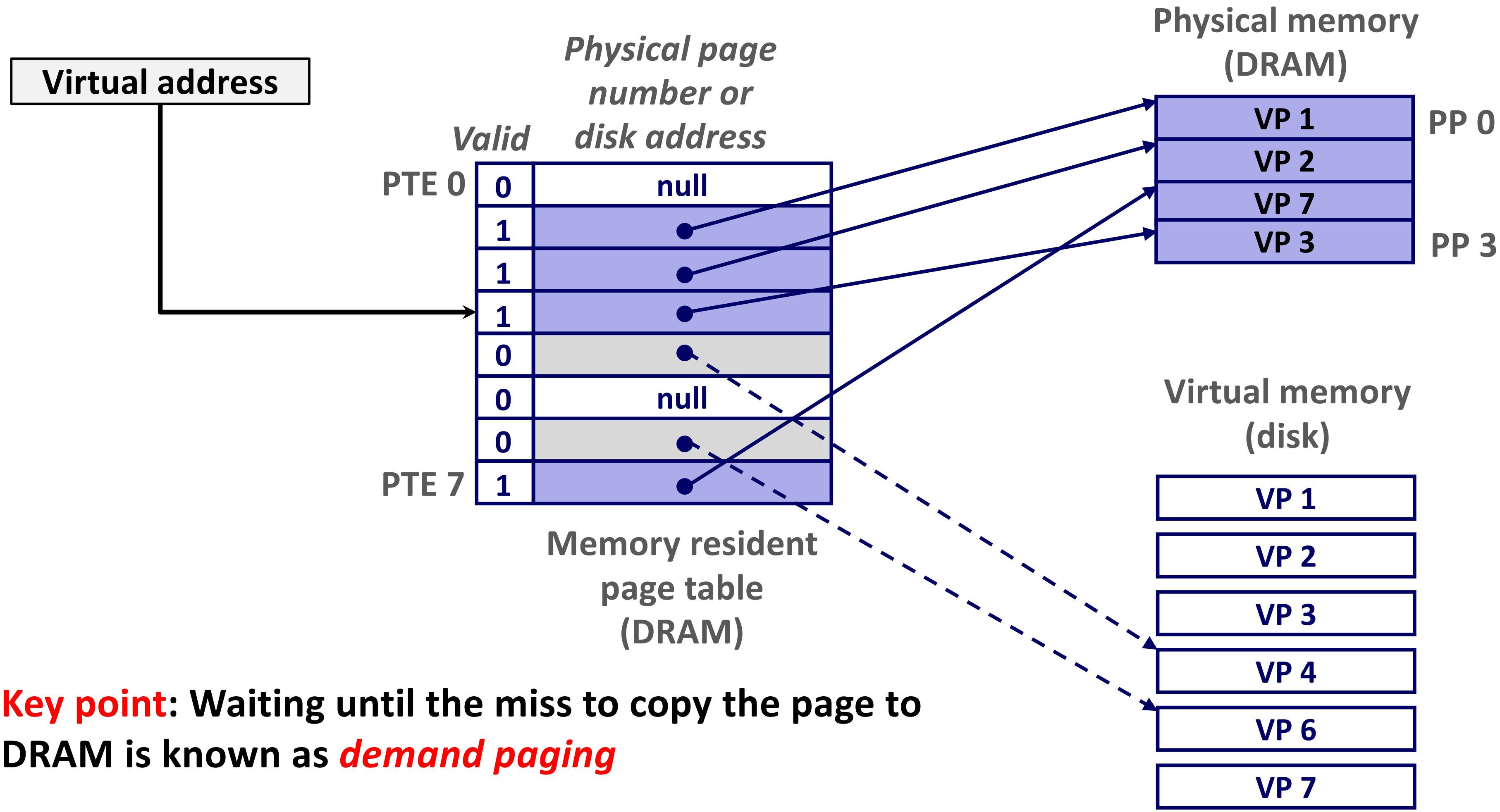


Handling Page Fault

- Page miss causes page fault (an exception)
- Page fault handler selects a victim to be evicted (here VP 4)
- Offending instruction is restarted: page hit!



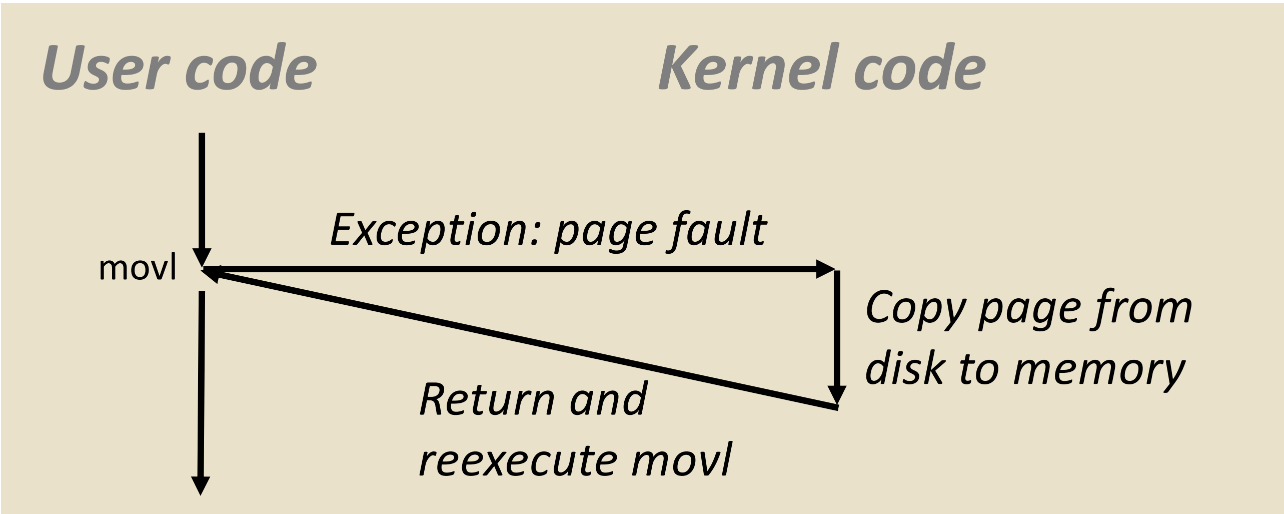
Key point: Waiting until the miss to copy the page to DRAM is known as *demand paging*

Completing page fault

```
int a[1000];
main ()
{
    a[500] = 13;
}
```

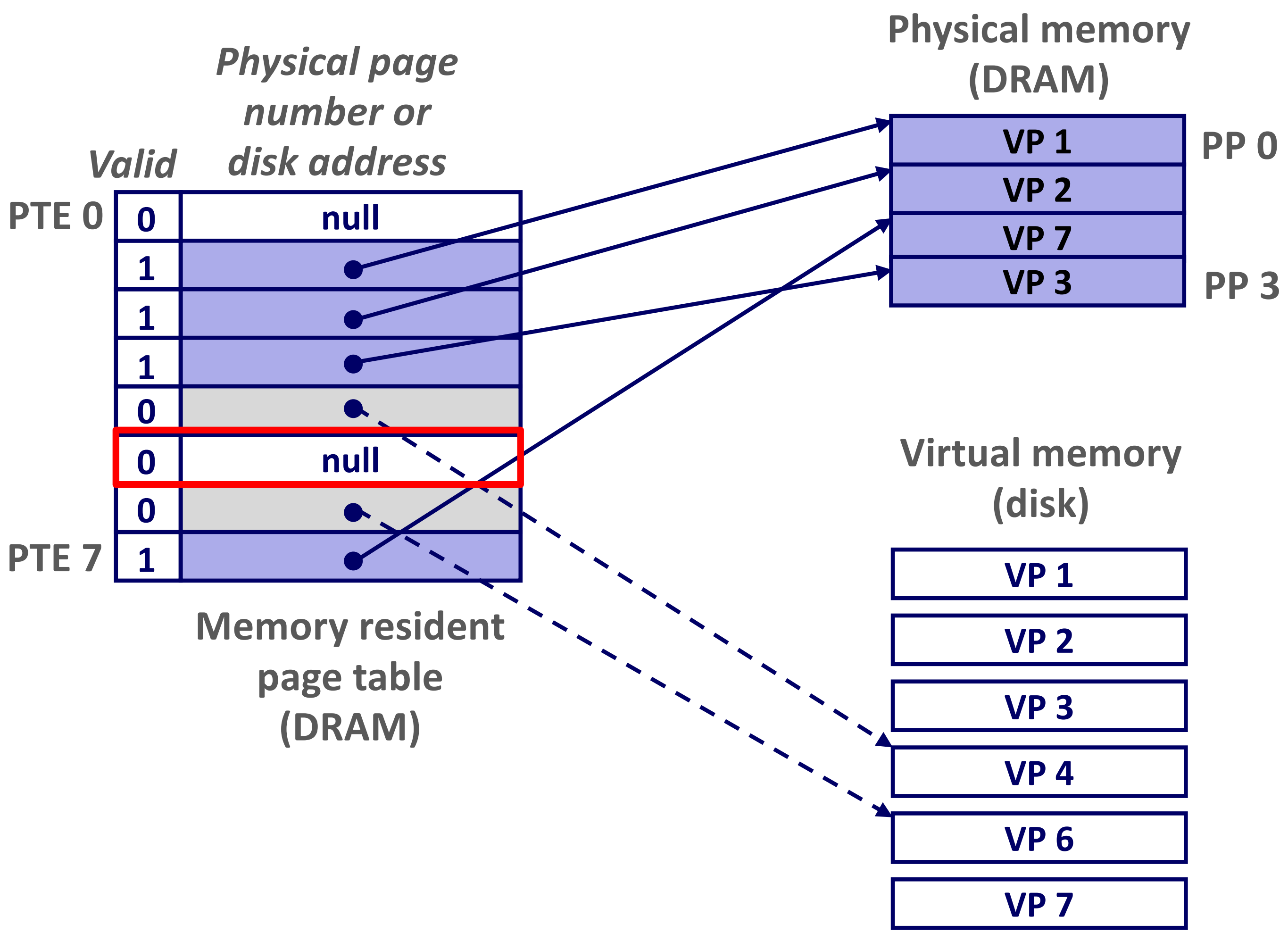
- Page fault handler executes return from interrupt (**`iret`**) instruction
  - Like **`ret`** instruction, but also restores privilege level
  - Return to instruction that caused fault
  - But, this time there is no page fault

```
80483b7:      c7 05 10 9d 04 08 0d   movl   $0xd,0x8049d10
```



Allocating Pages

- Allocating a new page (VP 5) of virtual memory.



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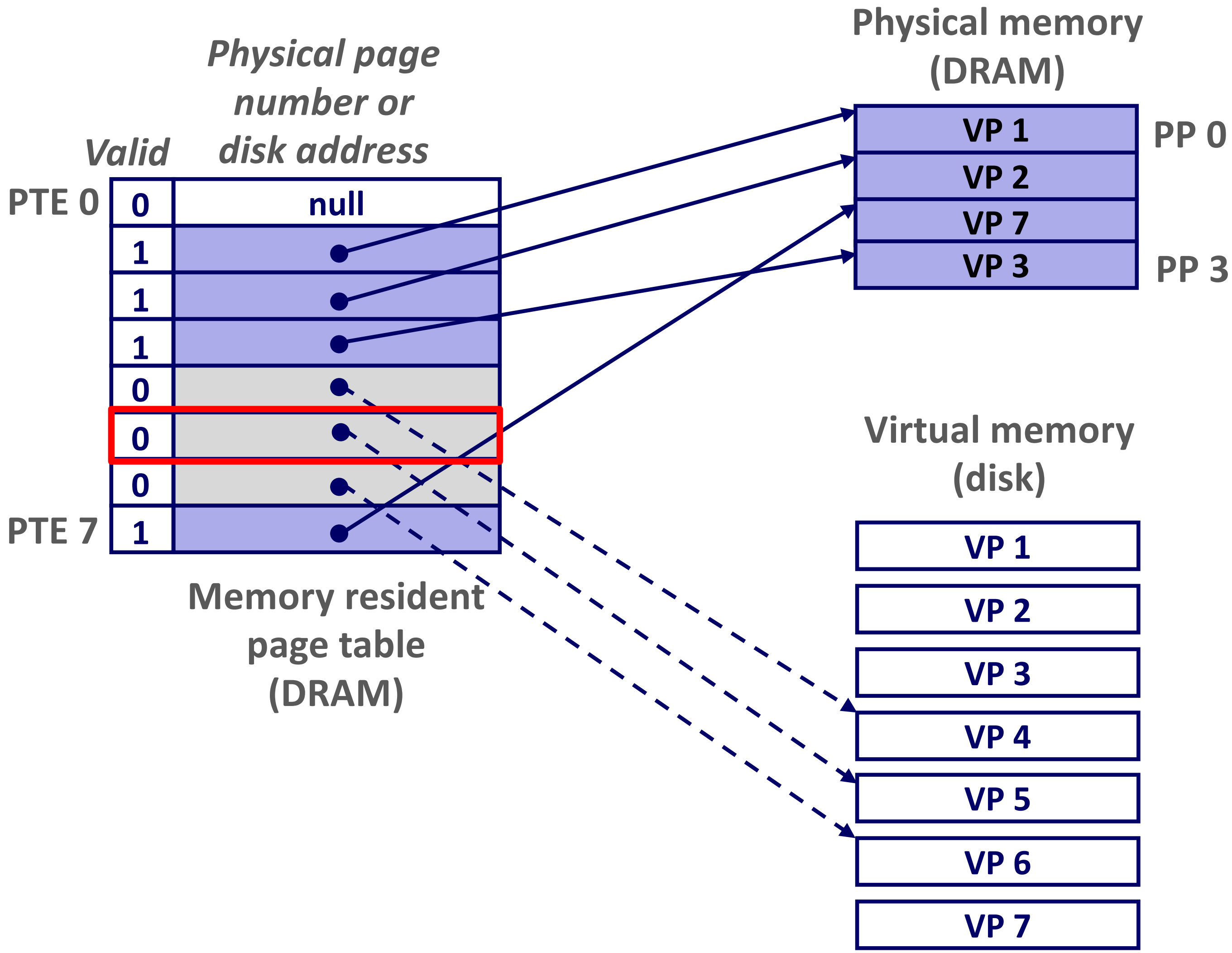

Locality to the Rescue Again!

- **Virtual memory seems terribly inefficient, but it works because of locality.**
- **At any point in time, programs tend to access a set of active virtual pages called the *working set***
  - Programs with better temporal locality will have smaller working sets
- **If (working set size < main memory size)**
  - Good performance for one process after compulsory misses
- **If (SUM(working set sizes) > main memory size)**
  - *Thrashing:* Performance meltdown where pages are swapped (copied) in and out continuously

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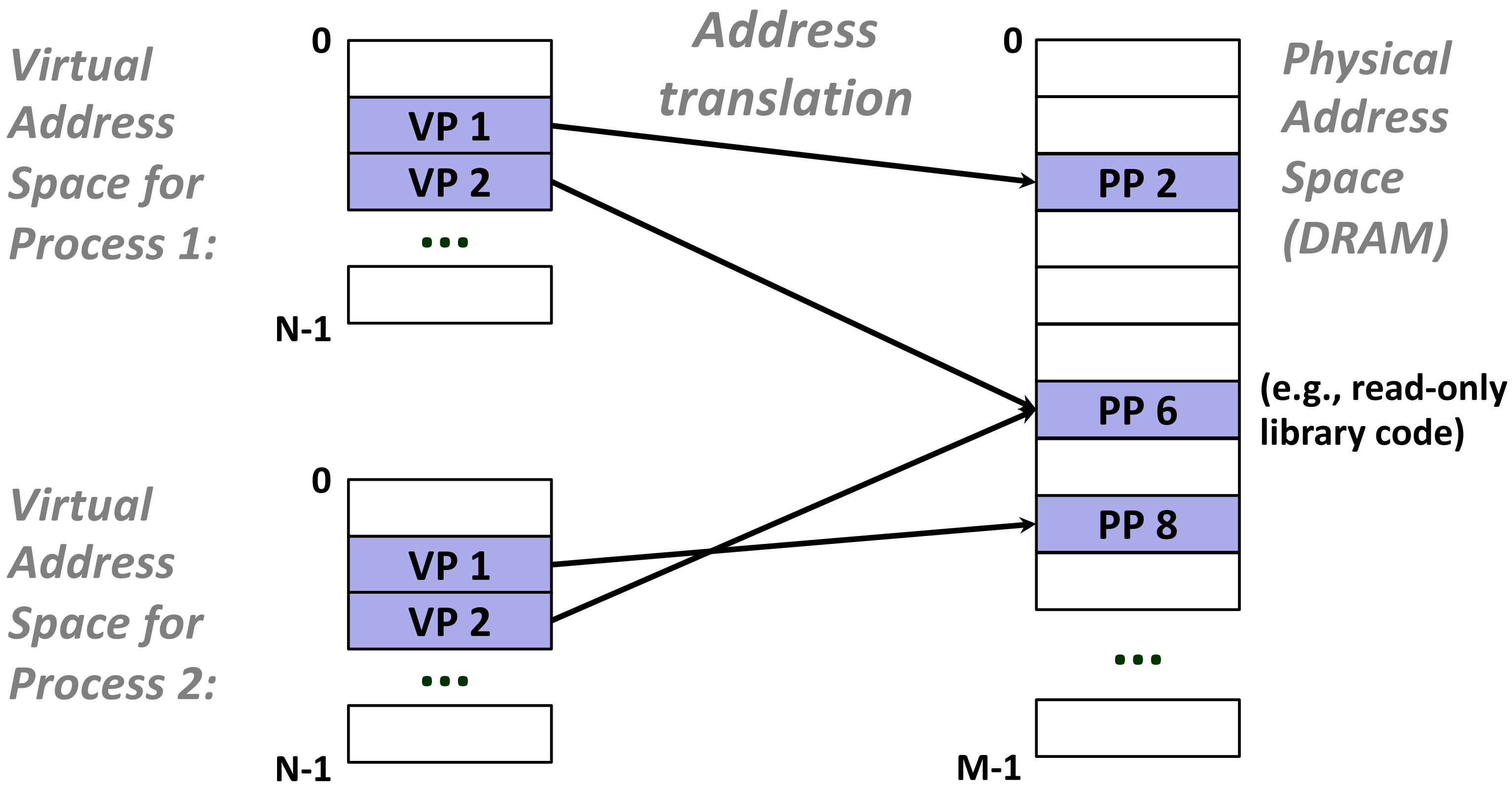
- Address spaces
- VM as a tool for caching
- **VM as a tool for memory management**
- VM as a tool for memory protection
- Address translation

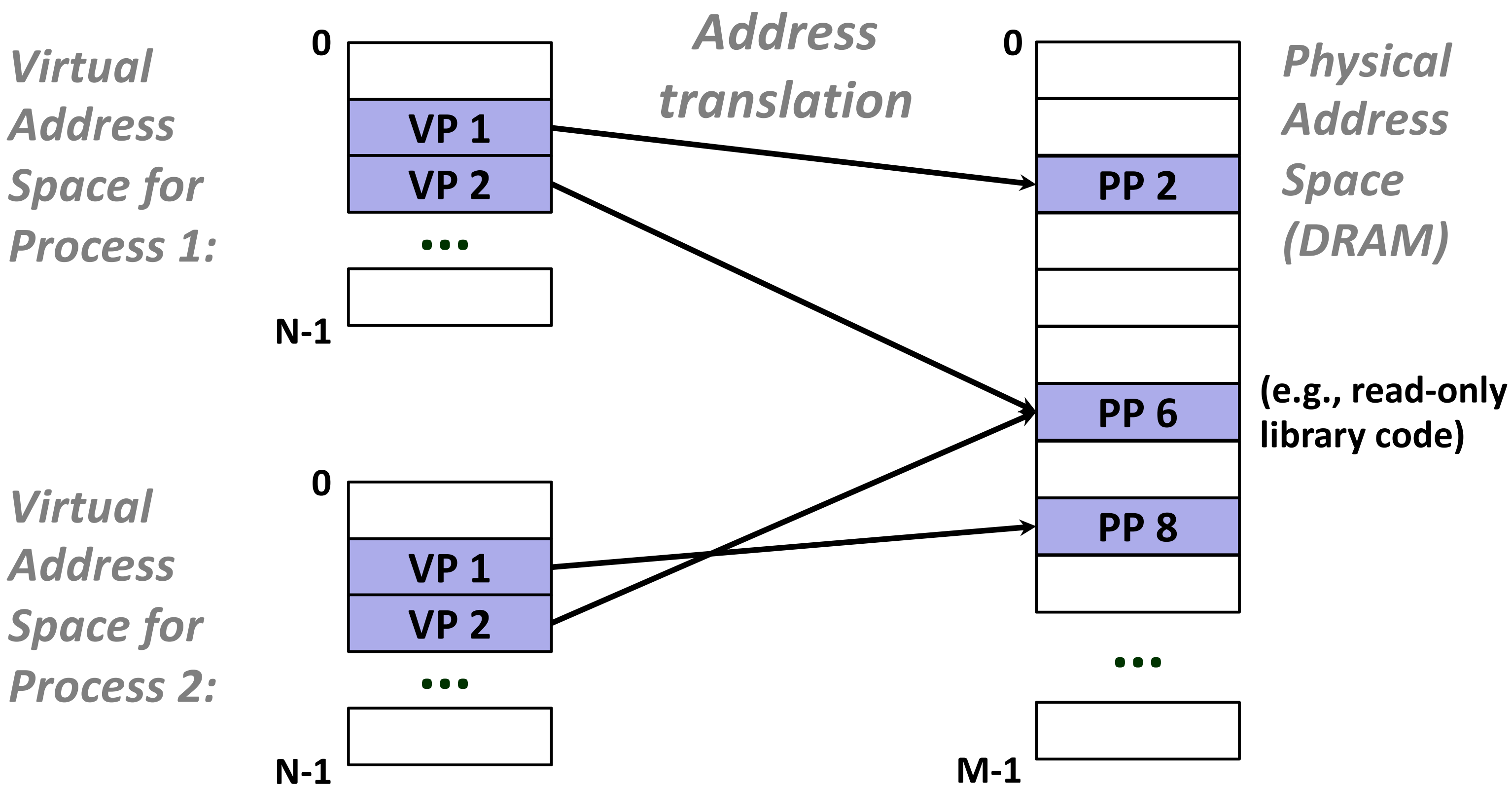
VM as a Tool for Memory Management

- **Key idea: each process has its own virtual address space**
  - It can view memory as a simple linear array
  - Mapping function scatters addresses through physical memory
    - Well-chosen mappings can improve locality



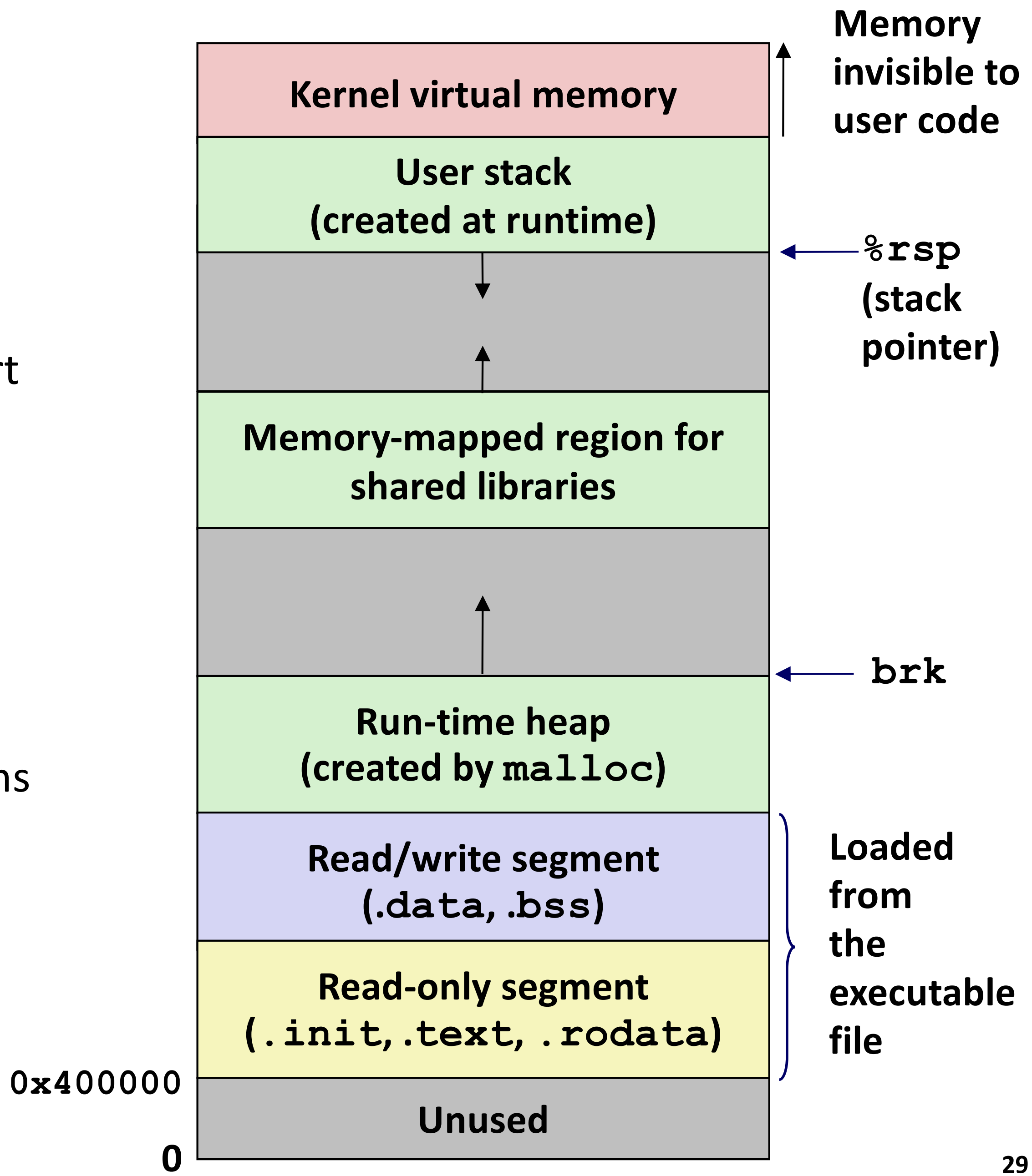
VM as a Tool for Memory Management

- **Simplifying memory allocation**
  - Each virtual page can be mapped to any physical page
  - A virtual page can be stored in different physical pages at different times
- **Sharing code and data among processes**
  - Map virtual pages to the same physical page (here: PP 6)



Simplifying Linking and Loading

- **Linking**
  - Each program has similar virtual address space
  - Code, data, and heap always start at the same addresses.
- **Loading**
  - `execve` allocates virtual pages for .text and .data sections & creates PTEs marked as invalid
  - The `.text` and `.data` sections are copied, page by page, on demand by the virtual memory system
- **Sharing**
- **Memory allocation**



Today

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- **VM as a tool for memory protection**
- Address translation

VM as a Tool for Memory Protection

Extend PTEs with permission bits

MMU checks these bits on each access

Process i:

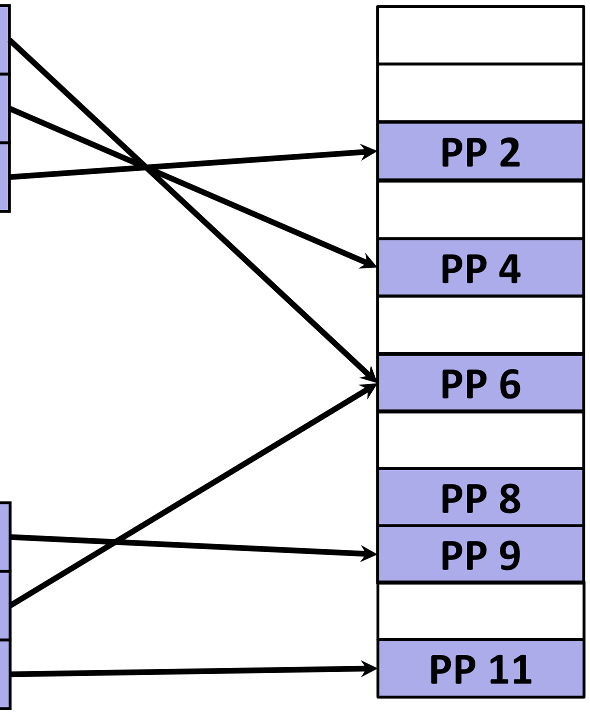
	SUP	READ	WRITE	EXEC	Address
VP 0:	No	Yes	No	Yes	PP 6
VP 1:	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	PP 4
VP 2:	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	PP 2

•
•
•

Process j:

	SUP	READ	WRITE	EXEC	Address
VP 0:	No	Yes	No	Yes	PP 9
VP 1:	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	PP 6
VP 2:	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	PP 11

Physical Address Space



Today

- Address spaces
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- VM as a tool for memory protection
- **Address translation**

VM Address Translation

- **Virtual Address Space**
  - $V = \{0, 1, \ldots, N-1\}$
- **Physical Address Space**
  - $P = \{0, 1, \ldots, M-1\}$
- **Address Translation**
  - $\boldsymbol{MAP: V \rightarrow P \cup \{\emptyset\}}$
  - For virtual address ***a***:
    - ***MAP(a) = a'*** if data at virtual address ***a*** is at physical address ***a'*** in ***P***
    - ***MAP(a) = Ø*** if data at virtual address ***a*** is not in physical memory
      - Either invalid or stored on disk

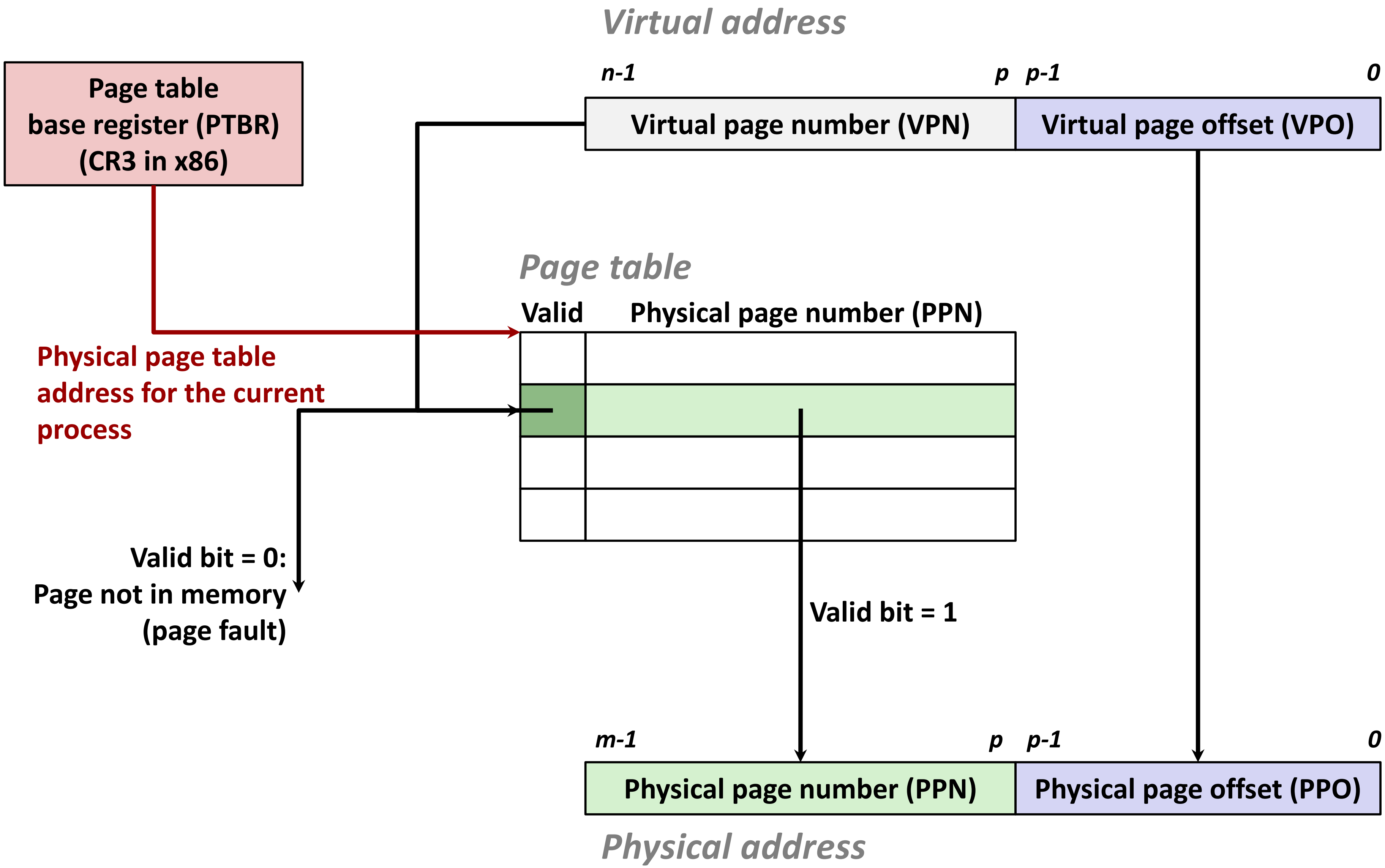
Summary of Address Translation Symbols

- **Basic Parameters**
  - **$N = 2^n$** : Number of addresses in virtual address space
  - **$M = 2^m$** : Number of addresses in physical address space
  - **$P = 2^p$** : Page size (bytes)
- **Components of the virtual address (VA)**
  - **TLBI**: TLB index
  - **TLBT**: TLB tag
  - **VPO**: Virtual page offset
  - **VPN**: Virtual page number
- **Components of the physical address (PA)**
  - **PPO**: Physical page offset (same as VPO)
  - **PPN:** Physical page number

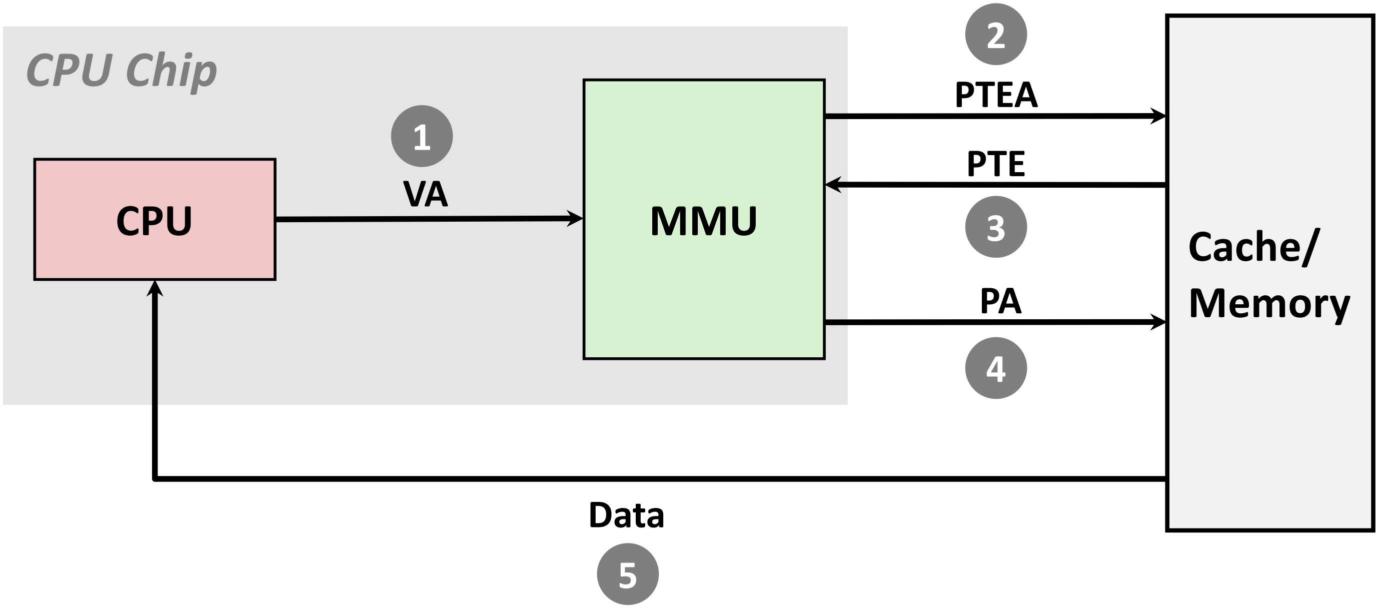
MAP: V -> P

- **Mapping function from virtual pages to physical pages**
  - Page is the granularity of mapping set by the ISA
- **Function must be simple and efficient**
  - Implemented in hardware
  - Significant design constraints
- **K-nary tree aka Page Table**
  - Each node of the tree is 1 page in size

Address Translation With a Page Table



Address Translation: Page Hit



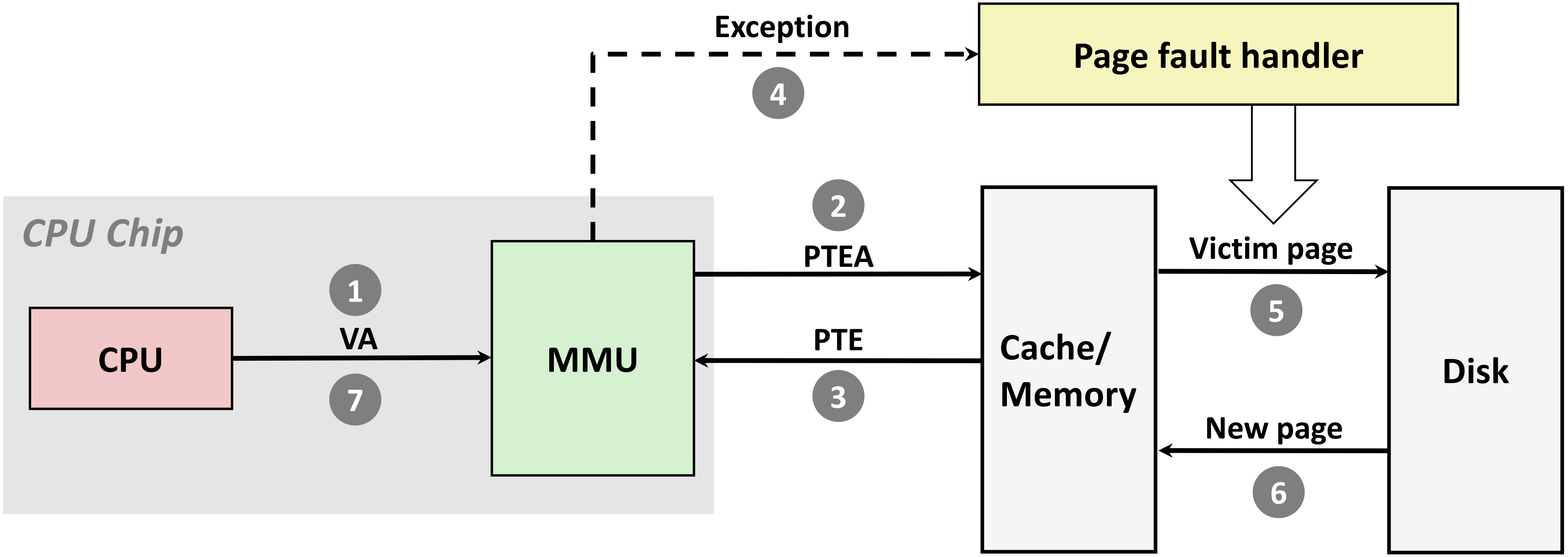
1) Processor sends virtual address to MMU

2-3) MMU fetches PTE from page table in memory

4) MMU sends physical address to cache/memory

5) Cache/memory sends data word to processor

Address Translation: Page Fault



1) Processor sends virtual address to MMU

2-3) MMU fetches PTE from page table in memory

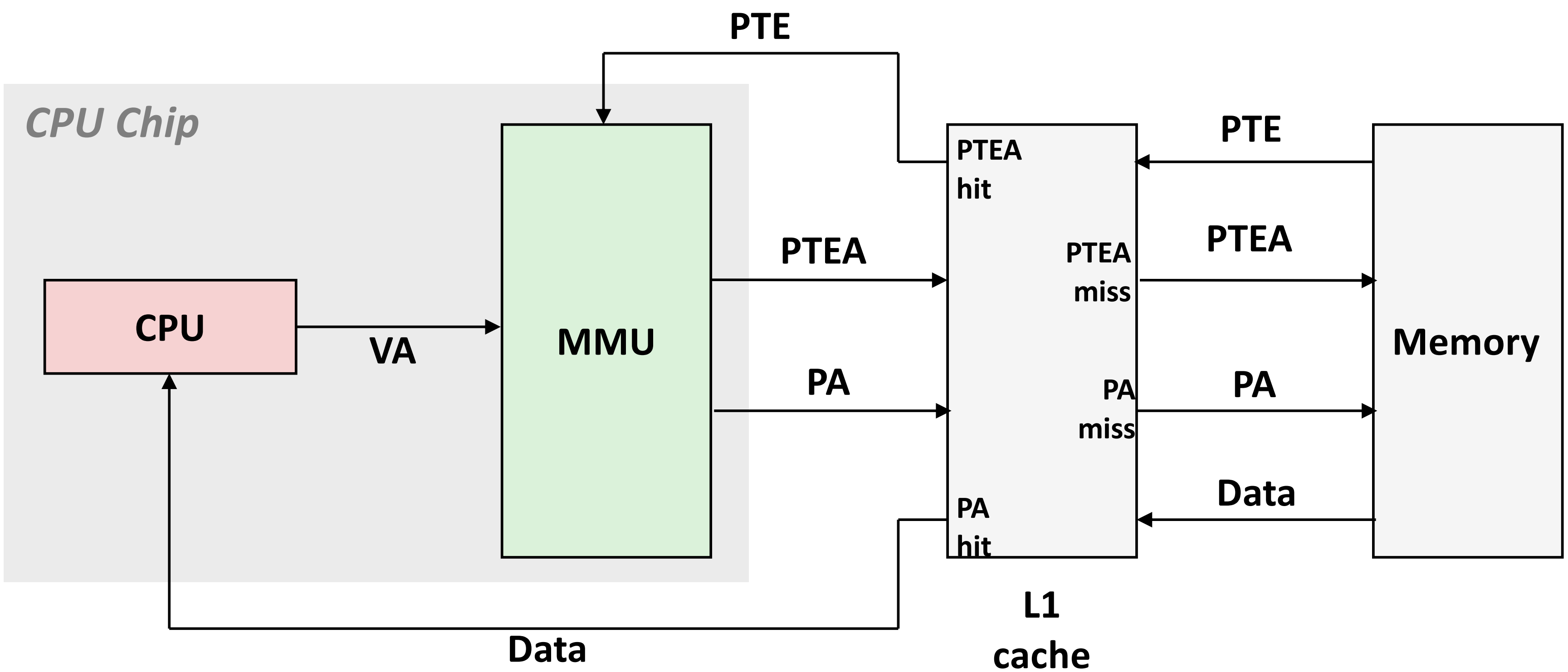
4) Valid bit is zero, so MMU triggers page fault exception

5) Handler identifies victim (and, if dirty, pages it out to disk)

6) Handler pages in new page and updates PTE in memory

7) Handler returns to original process, restarting faulting instruction

Integrating VM and Cache



VA: virtual address, PA: physical address, PTE: page table entry, PTEA = PTE address

Speeding up Translation with a TLB

- **Page table entries (PTEs) are cached in L1 like any other memory word**
  - PTEs may be evicted by other data references
  - PTE hit still requires a small L1 delay
- **Solution: *Translation Lookaside Buffer* (TLB)**
  - Small set-associative hardware cache in MMU
  - Maps virtual page numbers to physical page numbers
  - Contains complete page table entries for small number of pages

Summary of Address Translation Symbols

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- **Components of the virtual address (VA)**
  - ***TLBI***: *TLB index*
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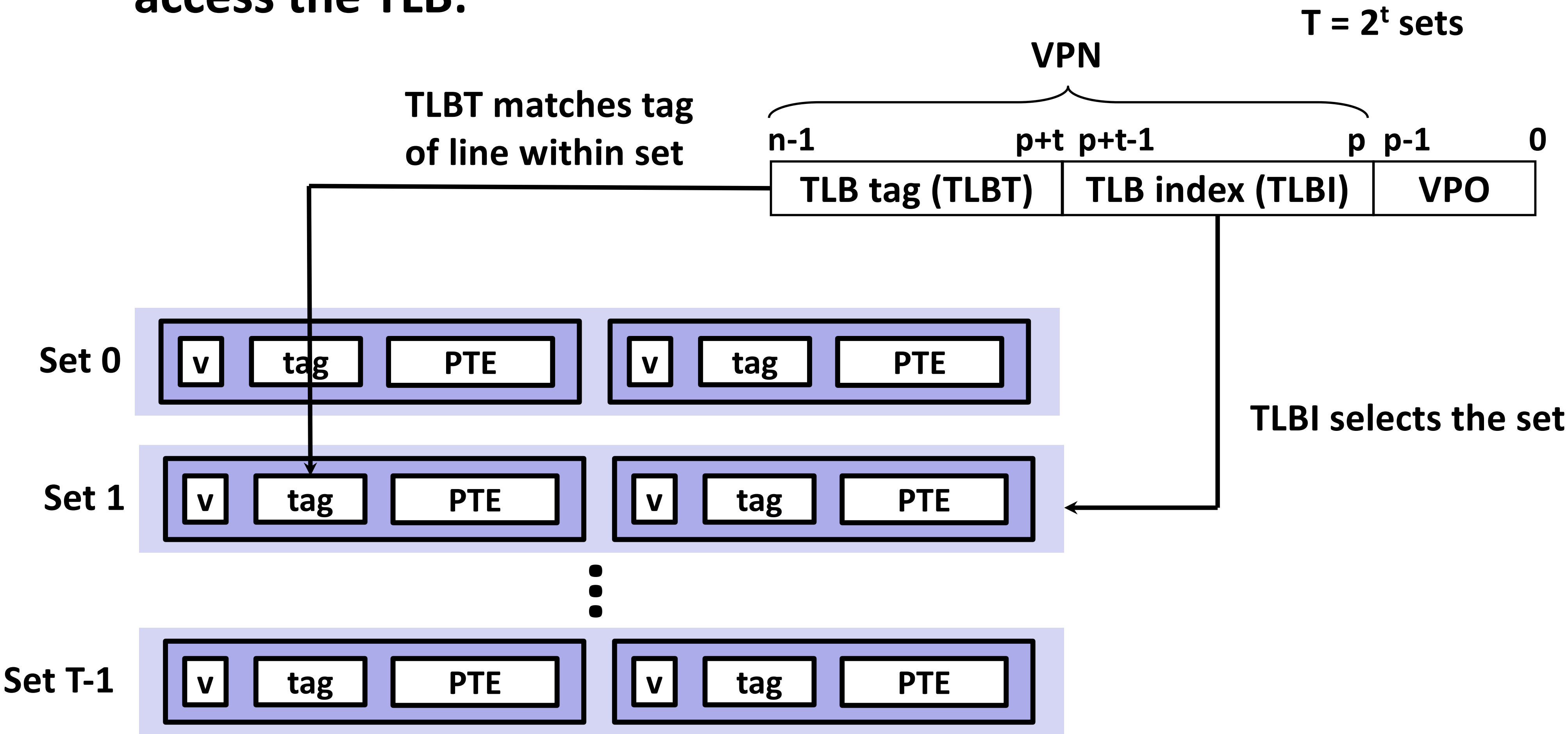
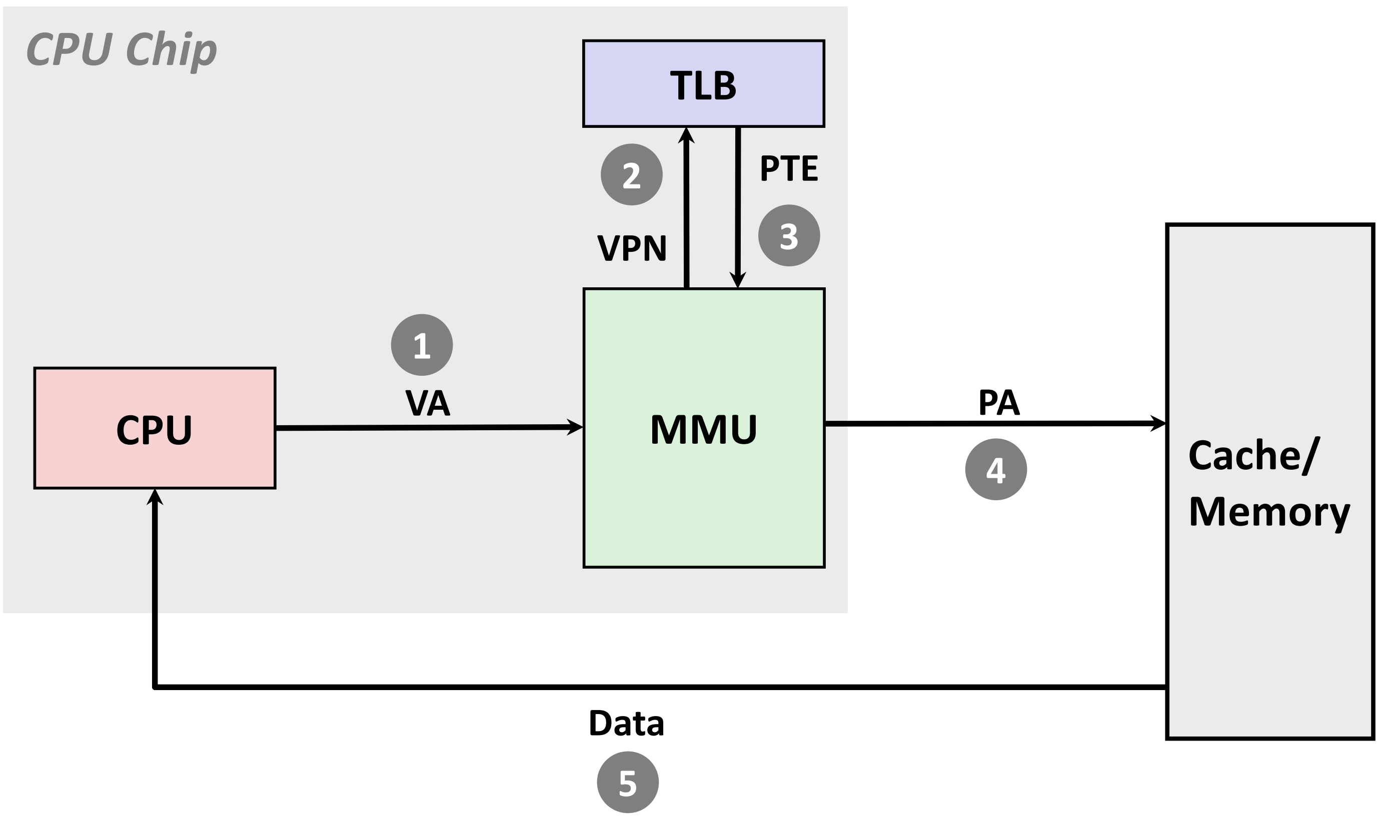
  - **VPO**: Virtual page offset
  - **VPN**: Virtual page number
- **Components of the physical address (PA)**
  - **PPO**: Physical page offset (same as VPO)
  - **PPN:** Physical page number

Accessing the TLB

- MMU uses the VPN portion of the virtual address to access the TLB:

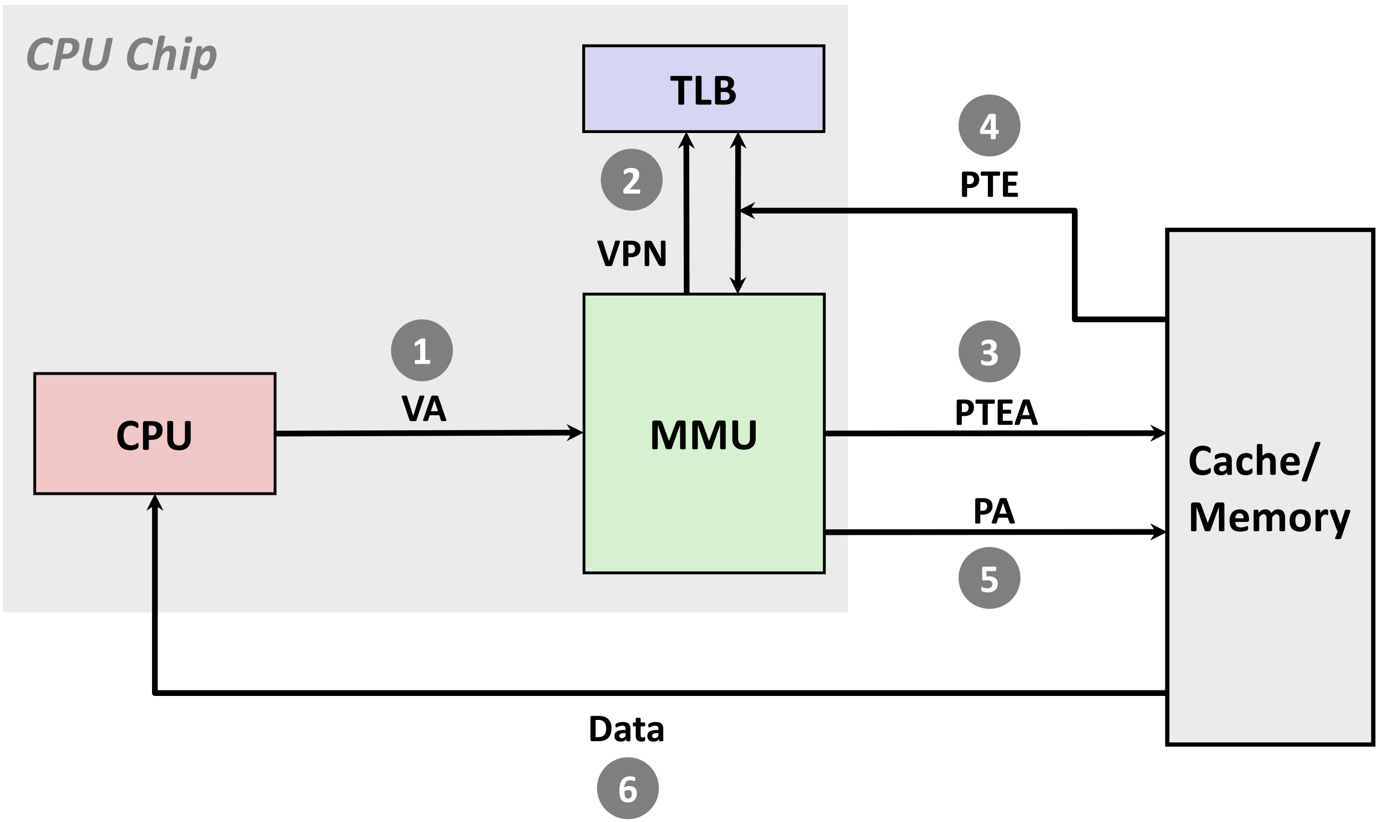


TLB Hit



A TLB hit eliminates a memory access

TLB Miss

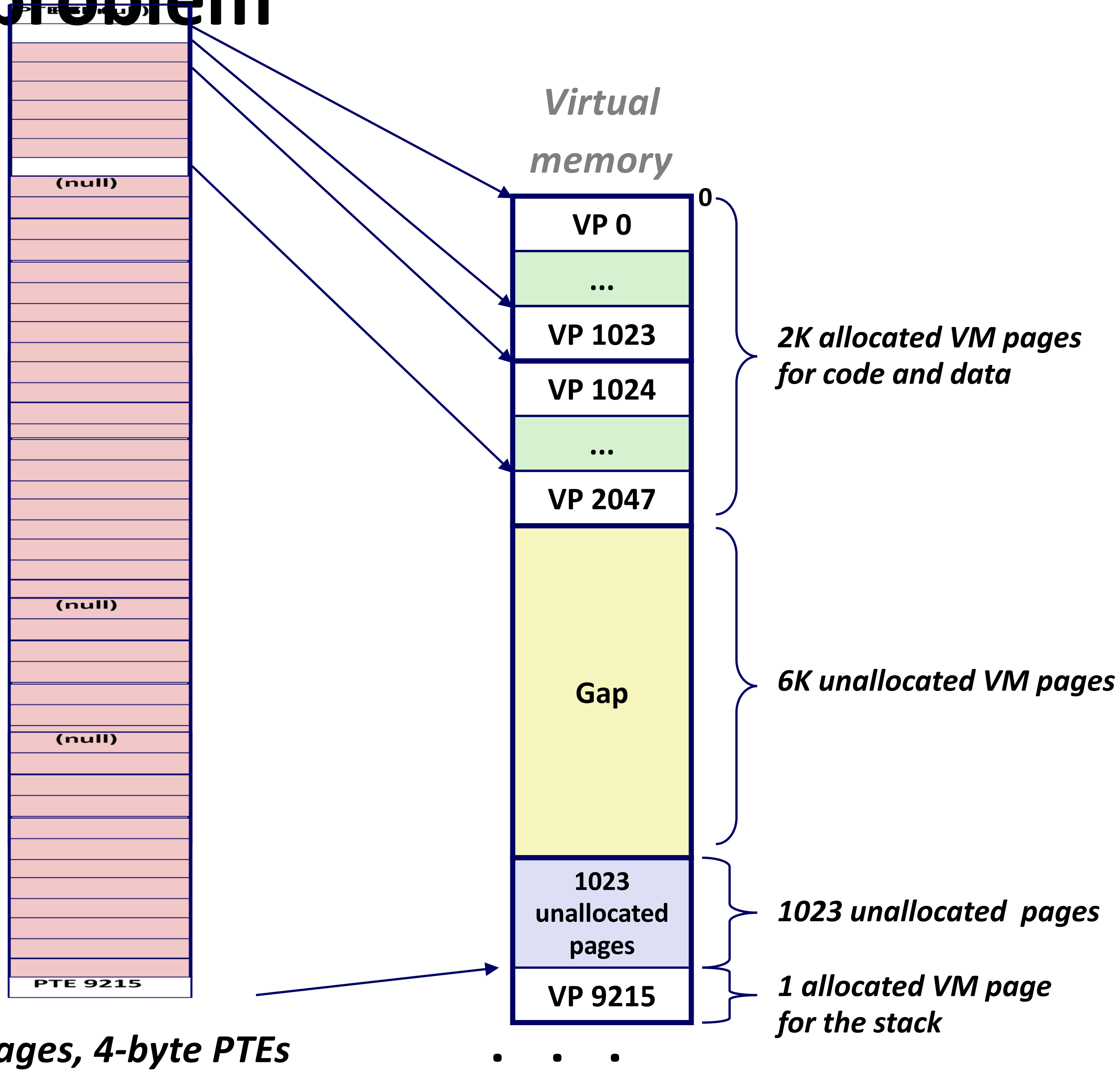


A TLB miss incurs an additional memory access (the PTE)

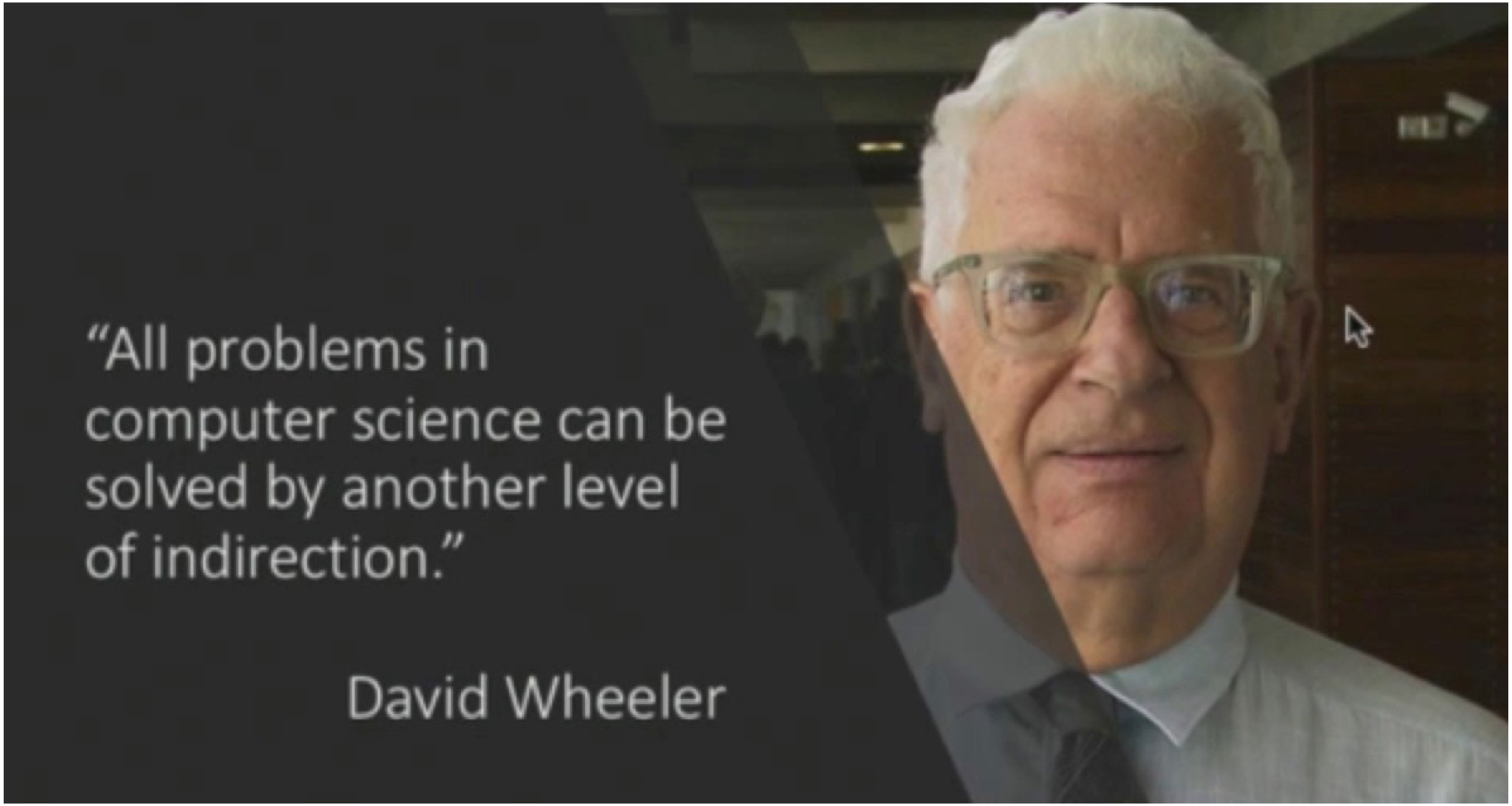
Fortunately, TLB misses are rare. Why?

We have a problem

2^{20} Entries of
4 bytes each



32 bit addresses, 4KB pages, 4-byte PTEs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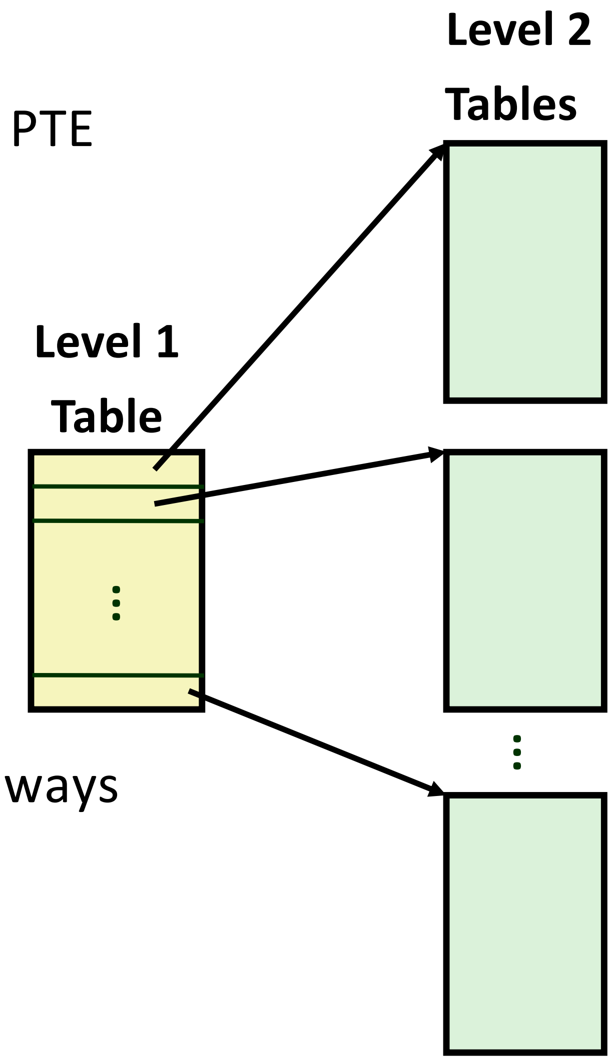
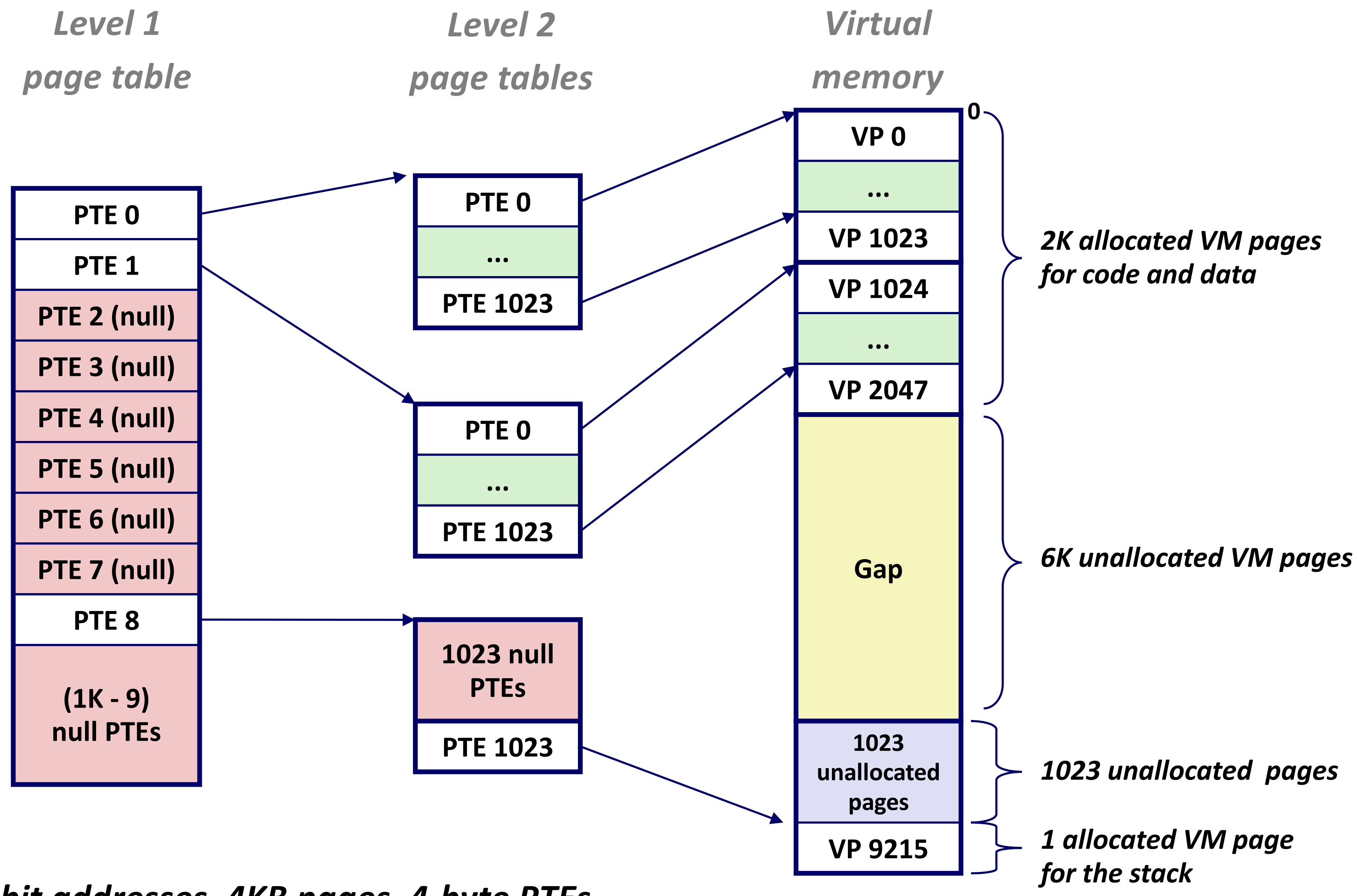
David Wheeler

Multi-Level Page Tables

- **Suppose:**
  - 4KB (2^{12}) page size, 48-bit address space, 8-byte PTE
- **Problem:**
  - Would need a 512 GB page table!
    - $2^{48} * 2^{-12} * 2^{3} = 2^{39}$ bytes
- **Common solution: Multi-level page table**
- **Example: 2-level page table**
  - Level 1 table: each PTE points to a page table (always memory resident)
  - Level 2 table: each PTE points to a page (paged in and out like any other data)



A Two-Level Page Table Hierarchy



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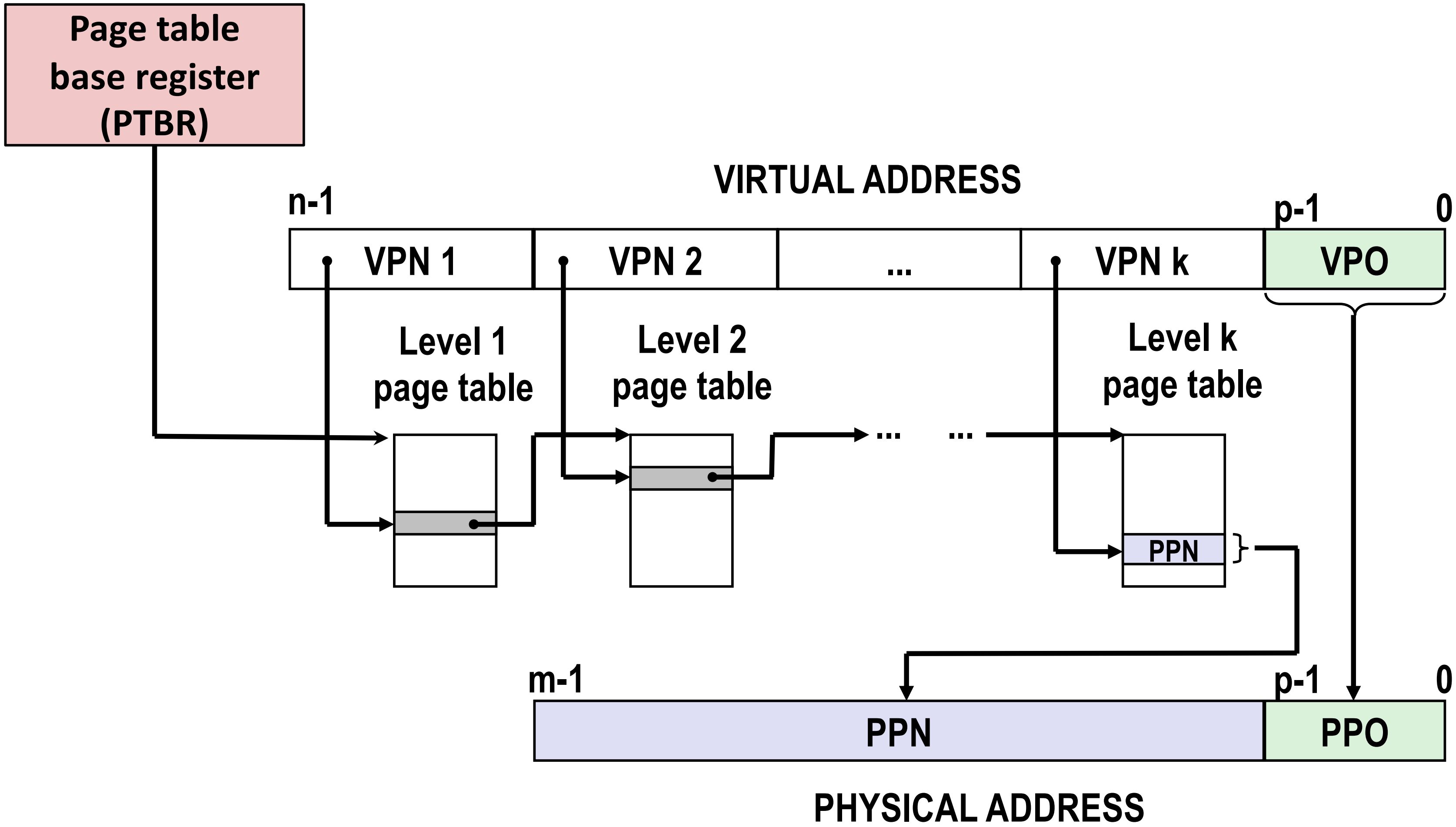
Translating with a k-level Page Table



TLBs and k-level Page Tables

- **TLBs cache the complete virtual to physical mapping**
  - Regardless of the levels of page tables,
    the TLB stores the VPN -> PPN

Summary

- **Programmer’s view of virtual memory**
  - Each process has its own private linear address space
  - Cannot be corrupted by other processes

- **System view of virtual memory**
  - Uses memory efficiently by caching virtual memory pages
    - Efficient only because of locality
  - Simplifies memory management and programming
  - Simplifies protection by providing a convenient interpositioning point to check permissions