

Beyond the Individual

Fred Cummins
University College Dublin
2008

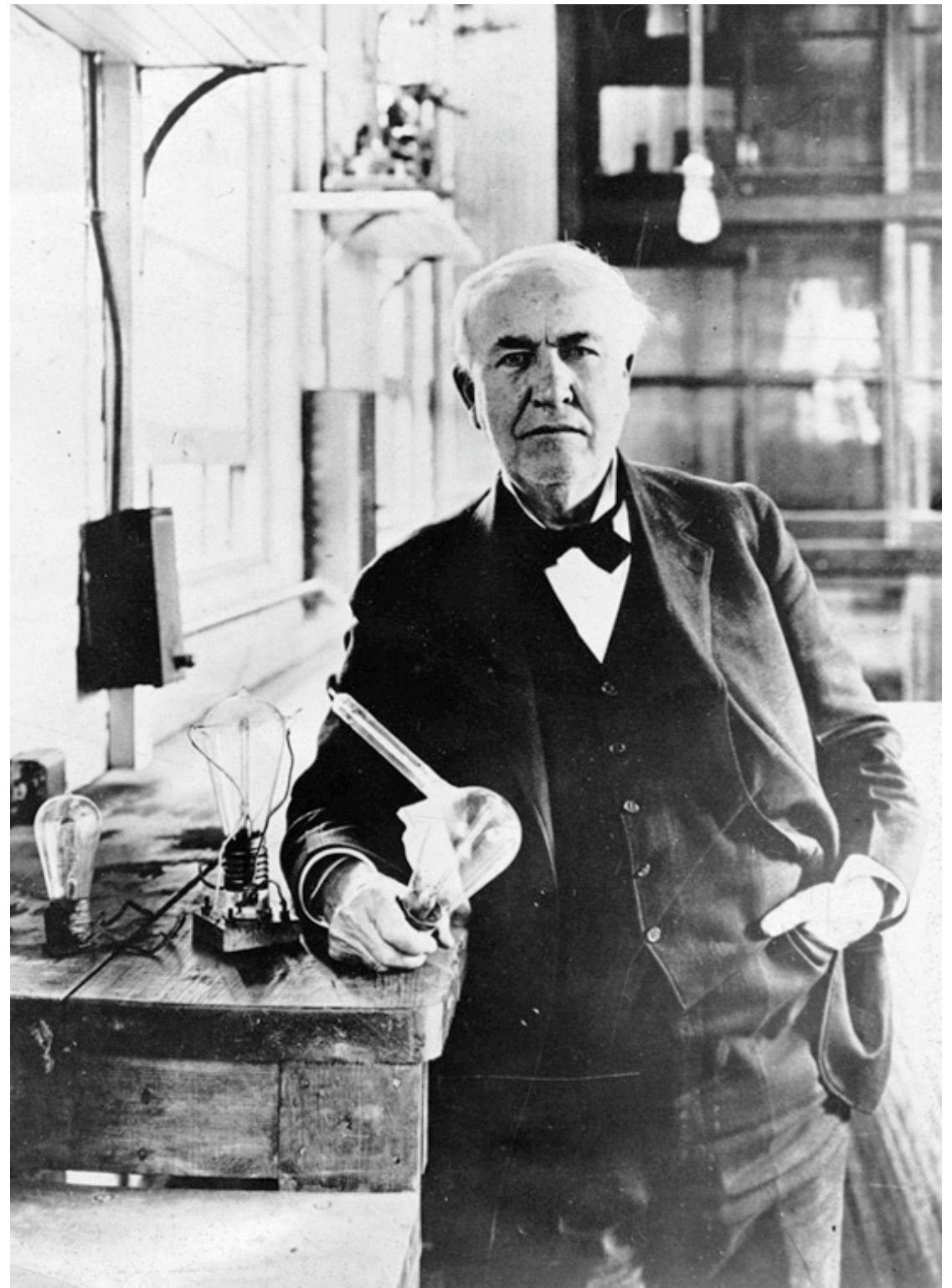
1879



Anglo-Zulu war starts (and finishes)

1879

Thomas
Edison
invents and
displays the
light bulb

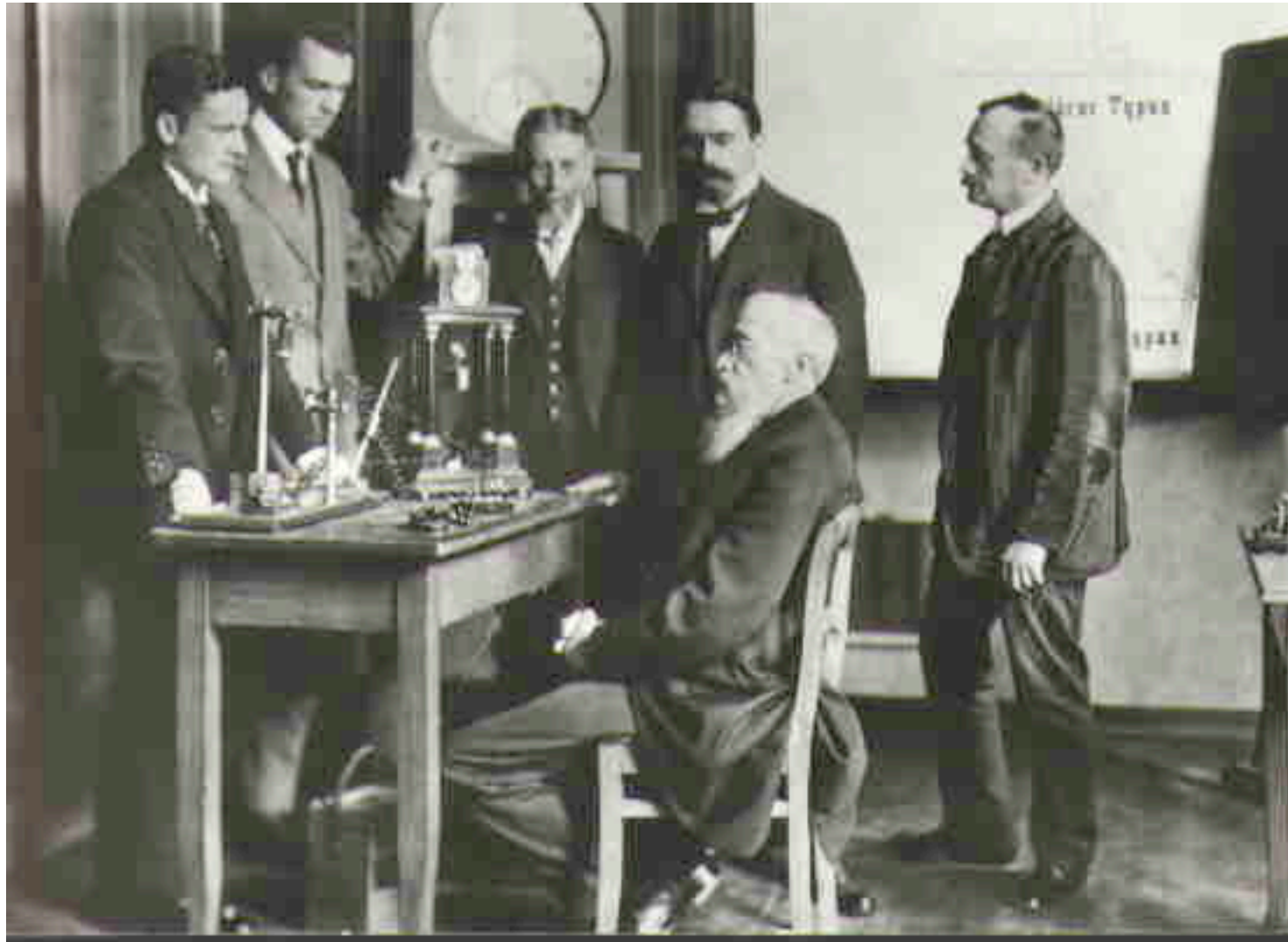


1879

Virgin Mary, and
St Joseph and St
John the
Evangelist, all
appear at
Knock, Co Mayo

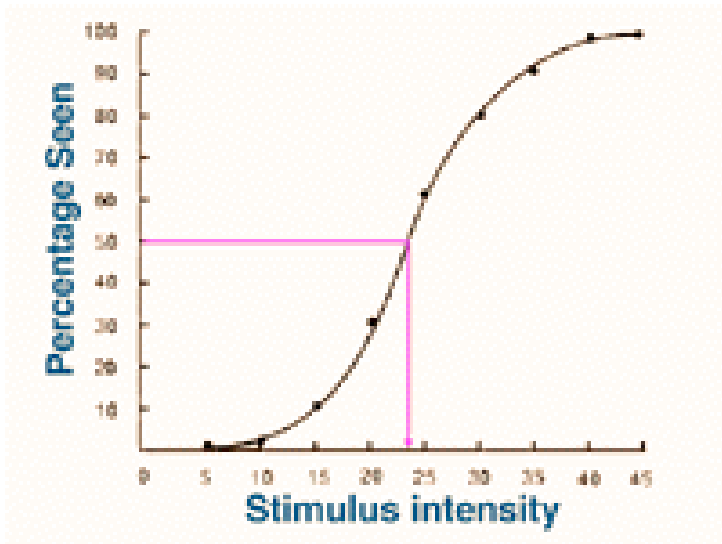


1879



Wilhelm Wundt opened the worlds first laboratory for Psychological Research in Leipzig.

How do you study the mind, scientifically?



Psychophysics



Hypnosis



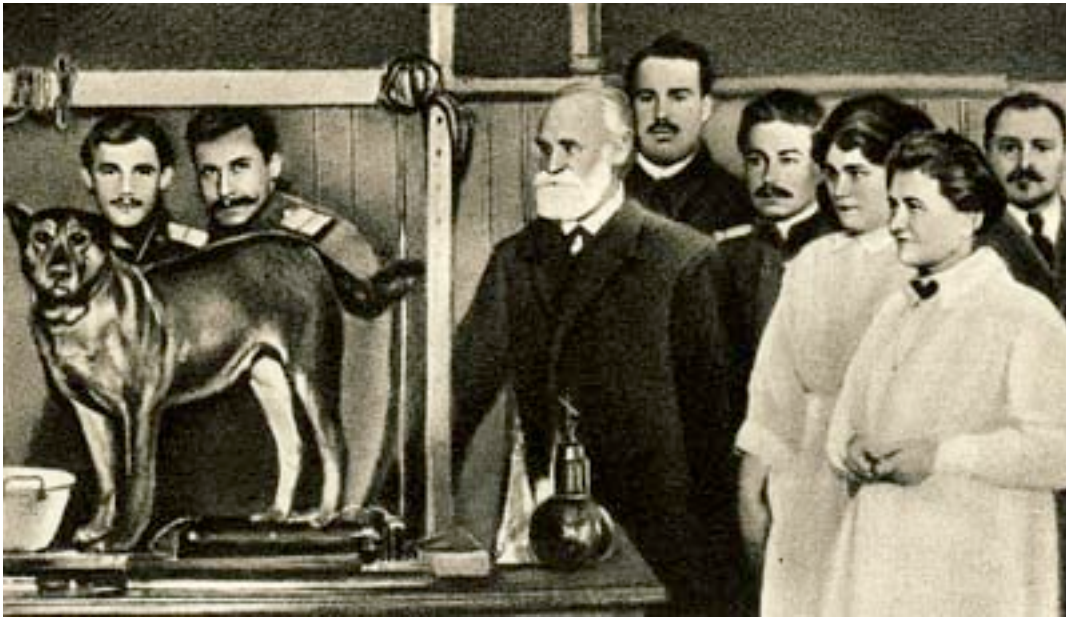
Reaction times



Analysis

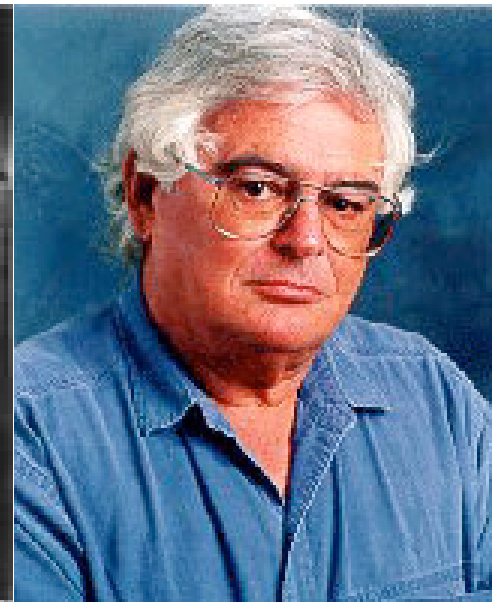


Introspection



No appeal to
unobservable
mental entities

Bringing back the
mind????????

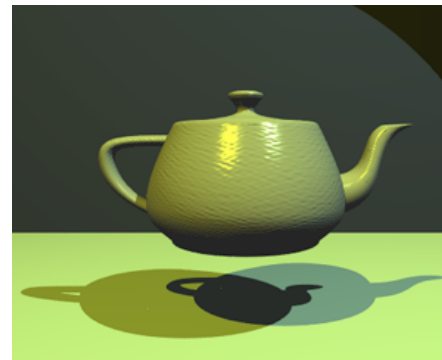


Cognitivist approaches to mind, treat mind as a *thing*.

The mind is not a thing.

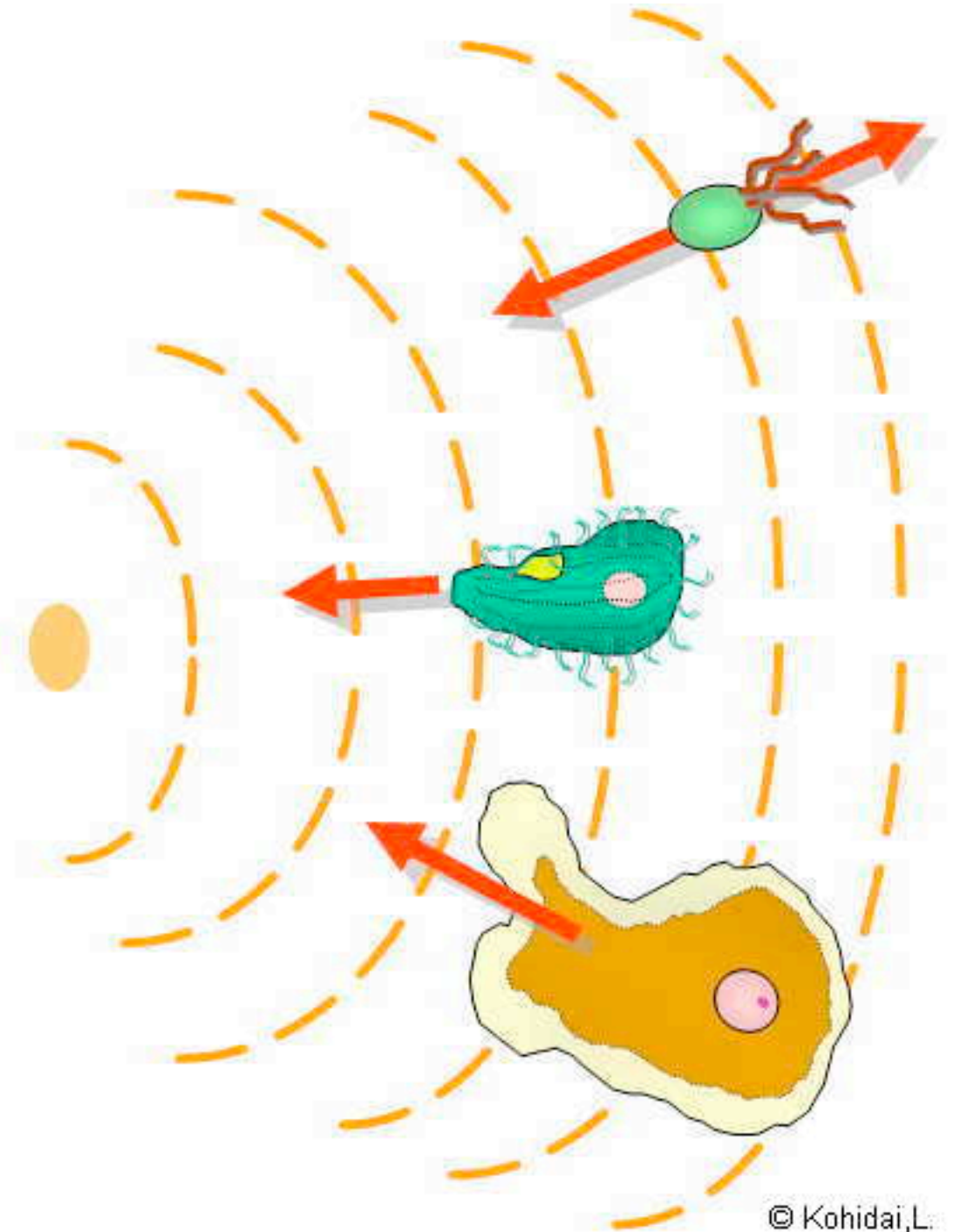


Why?



A cell that exploits
a chemotactic
gradient to move
towards nutrients
has learned to
distinguish *this*
from *that*.

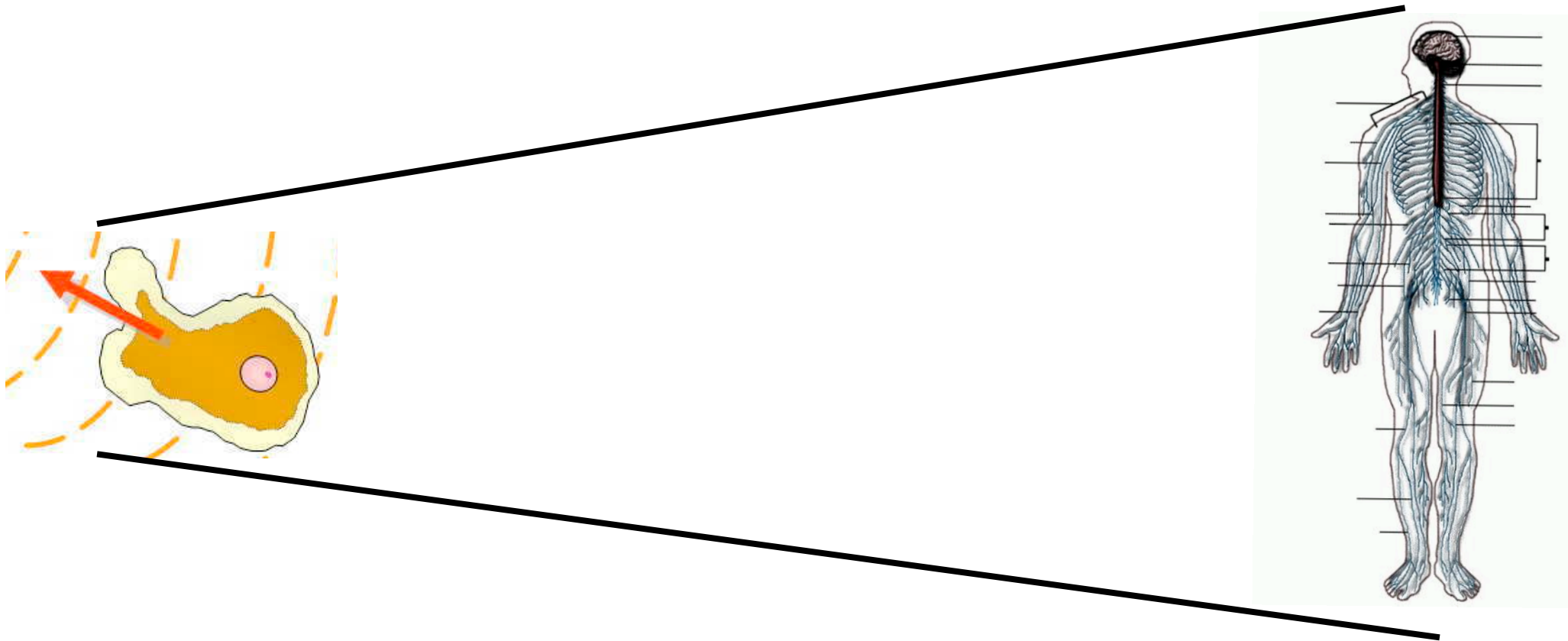
The distinction is
predicated upon
the constitution
and needs of the
cell.



With a nervous system,
a vastly greater number
of distinctions are
possible. Reactions
become nuanced, and
unpredictable.

But all distinctions made
are predicated upon the
nature of the organism.





The phenomenal world brought forth by the nervous system is a function of the kind of entity that the perceiver/actor is (including the entire phylogenetic lineage).

Terminology:

P-world: the subjective world of **P**henomenal experience

(also, of course, **P**ersonal and **P**rivate)

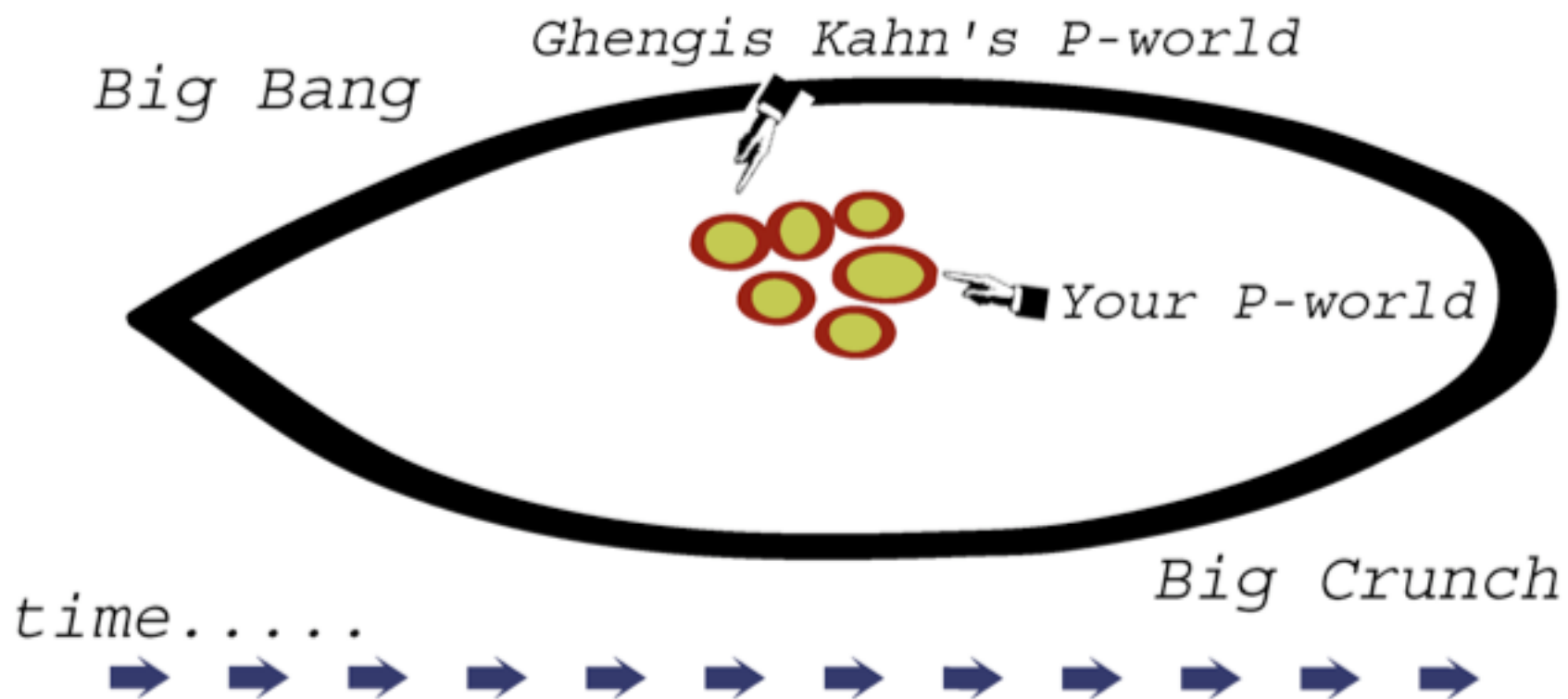


Characterizing the P-world is not straightforward.

Epistemic Caution Advised.

Things are seen within the P-world.

The P-world is both foreground and background, and so cannot be seen as a thing.

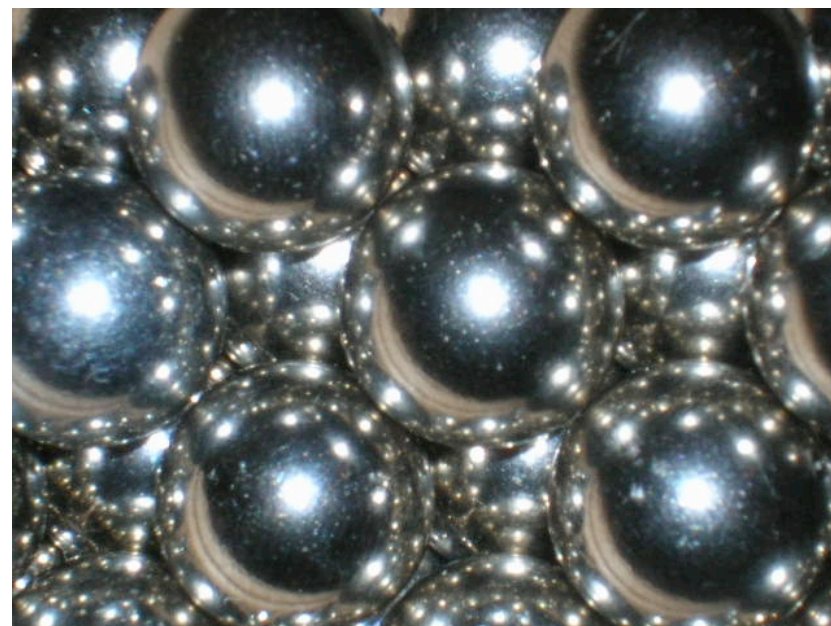
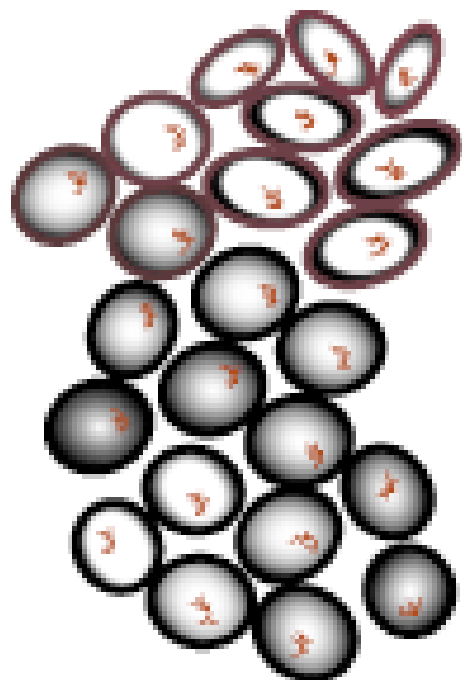


Without making assumptions about the nature of the P-world, we can observe:

They have rich autonomous dynamics

and

They interact



I, We, You, They

Our use of personal pronouns is complex.

Now we refer to something from the P-world, now to a nation, or a belief, or a fashion

The P-world is only part of that. By pointing to it, we may make progress in the scientific study of mind...

and of ourselves.

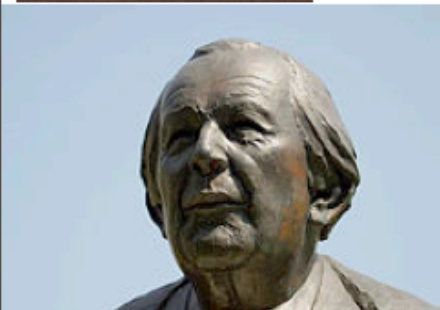
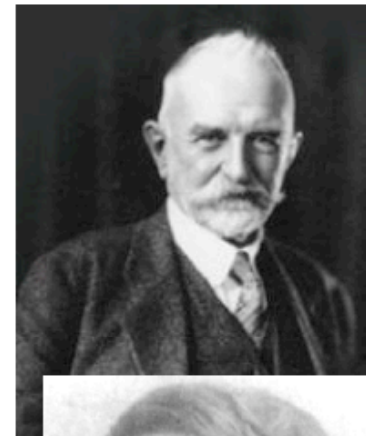
Psychology of the Individual

Psychology of the Social

Henry James and George Herbert Mead

Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky

J.J. Gibson and Roger G. Barker



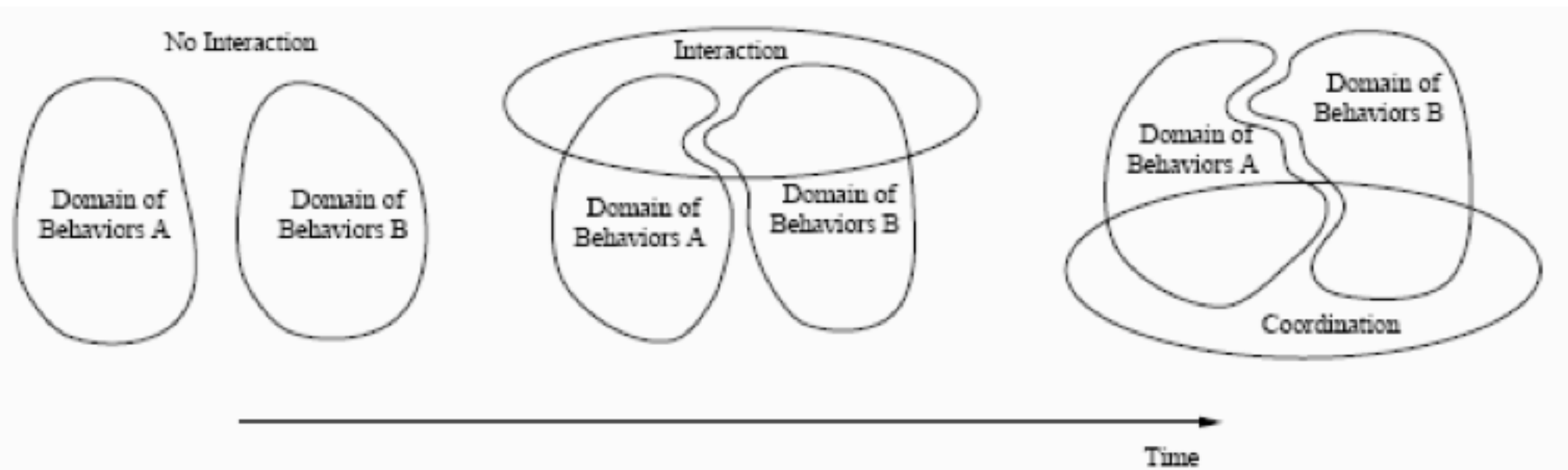
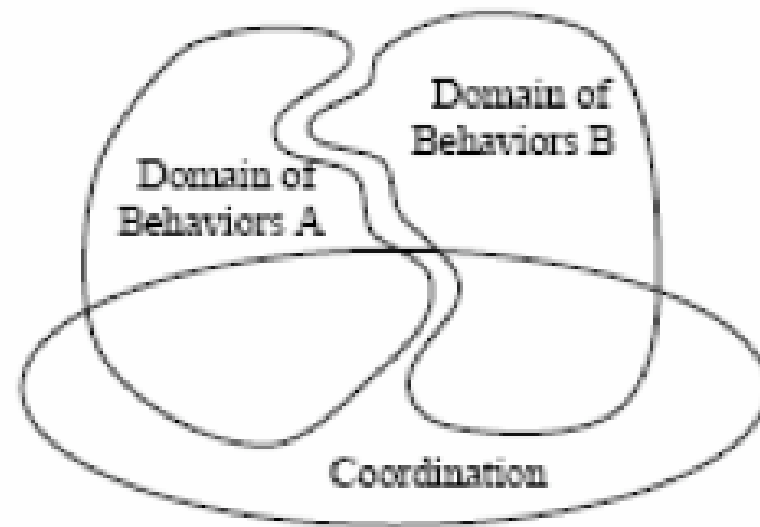


Figure 2.1: Illustration of the concept of coordination.





The environment within which coupling takes place is *both* physical *and* social

- P-worlds are naturally occurring, well-formed and bounded objects (autopoietic systems, if you like).
- P-worlds are not co-extensive with persons, though they exist in I-to-I relationship.
- Personhood is more complex.
- P-worlds exhibit structural coupling.

So what do we get?

What's the cash-value?

Psychoanalysis

Phenomenology

**Contemplative
Traditions**

Neuroscience

Psychiatry

Psychology

Neuroscience:

More reasonable expectations as to what might be found in brains.

Acknowledgment of a richer variety of socially constituted phenomena.

Recognition of a greater role for the environment (social, physical).

Everything we see, we see within P-worlds. Hence, the search for 'neural correlates of consciousness' is a rational goal.

Psychiatry:

The start of a theory of how the personal and the social are related.

Recognition that depersonalization, and many 'delusions' of psychosis may be grounded.

LANGUAGE

Language as essentially distributed systems

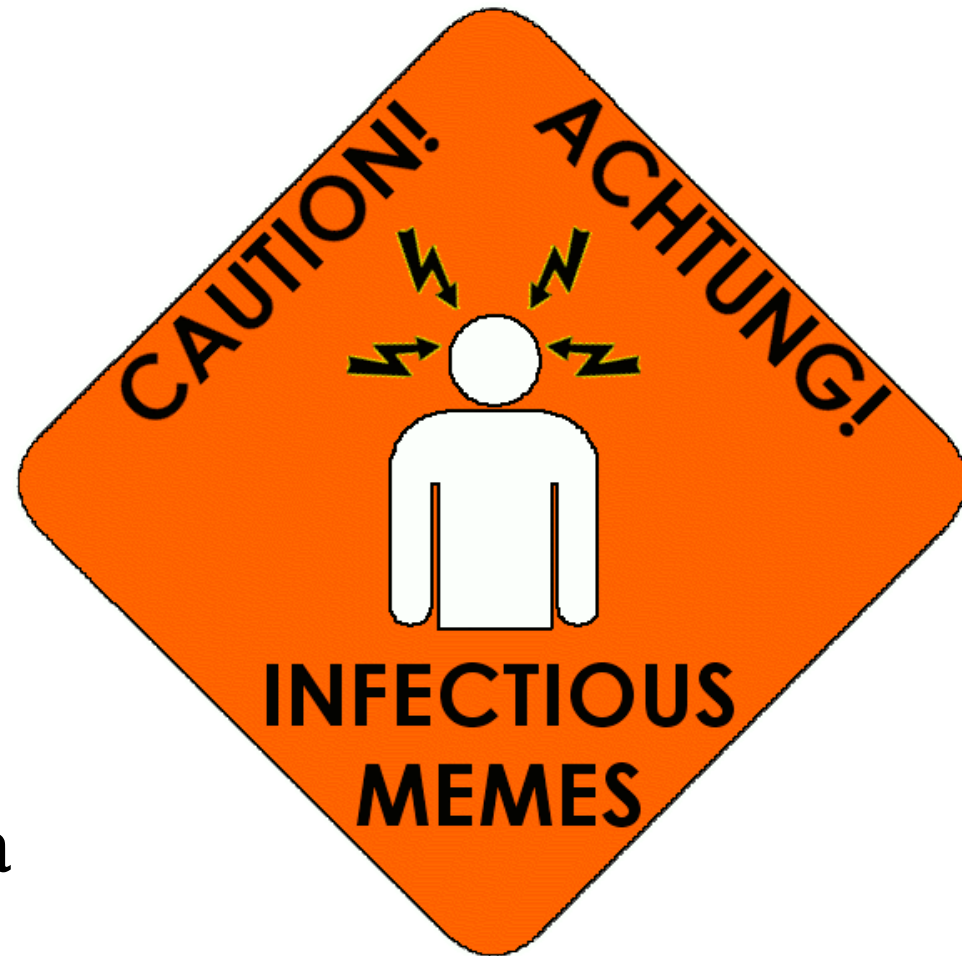
Syntax: Coupling among P-worlds

Meaning: Personal, irreducible

Case study: the Pirahã



MEMES



Recognition of the
reality of phenomena
defined across P-
worlds.

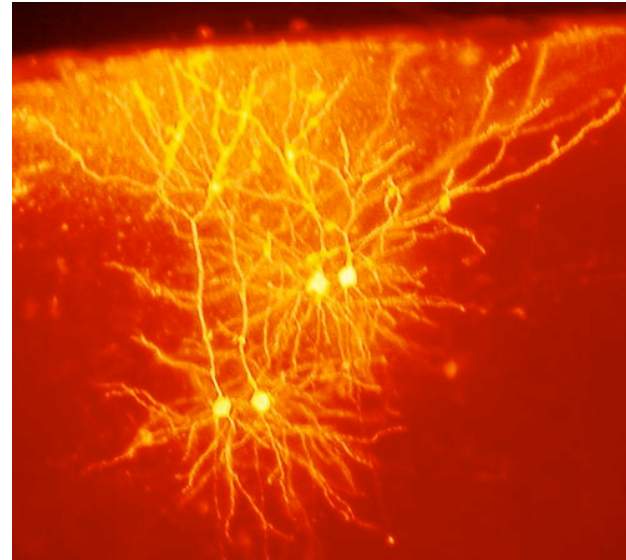
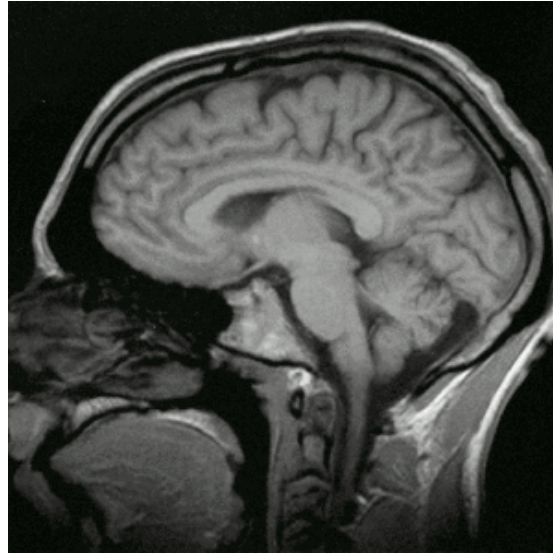
Buddhism and Neuroscience

Eastern contemplative traditions have a long history of analyzing P-worlds critically

They are often well aware of the lack of identity between personhood and P-world

<http://pinkmonkeyfarm.com> takes this a little further

Phenomenology



Variation among nervous systems assures us that heterophenomenology (the third party description of correlates of experience) will never reduce entirely.

Recognition of an irreducible core to personal experience and perceived reality

Psychology??

Psychoanalysis???

Ethics????