

Buddhism, Philosophy, and Consciousness

Week 2 of 4 in the series, 'Buddhism, Science, Philosophy, and Consciousness. Mahasraddha and Chris discuss the different approaches to consciousness in Buddhism and Western philosophy.

Given at the Manchester Buddhist Centre on April 2nd 2007

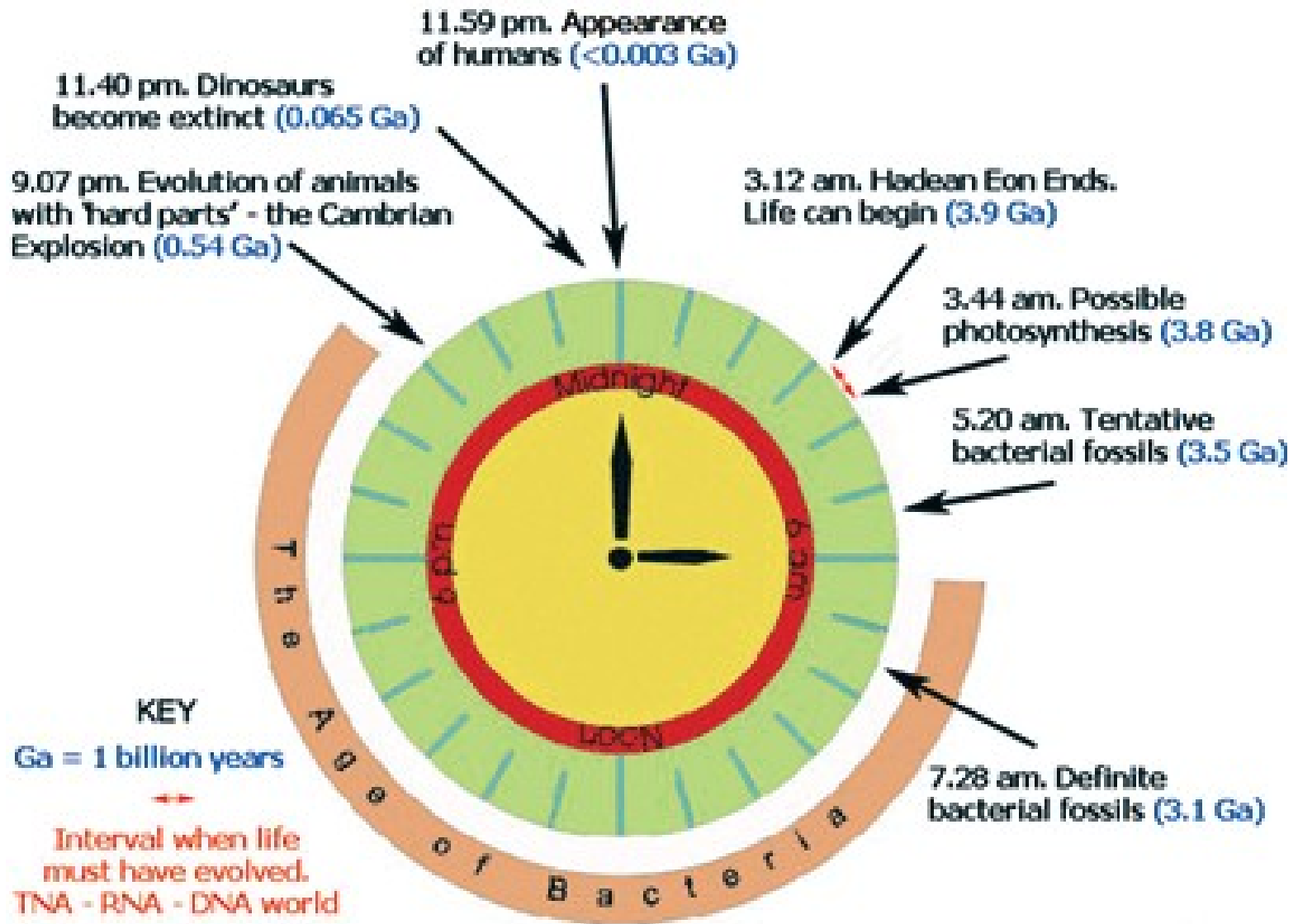
Consciousness

- “Consciousness” derives from the Latin *conscientia* which primarily means moral conscience or, in the literal sense, shared knowledge
- Oxford Dictionary:
 1. Awareness of
 2. The totality of a person’s thoughts and feelings or a class of these

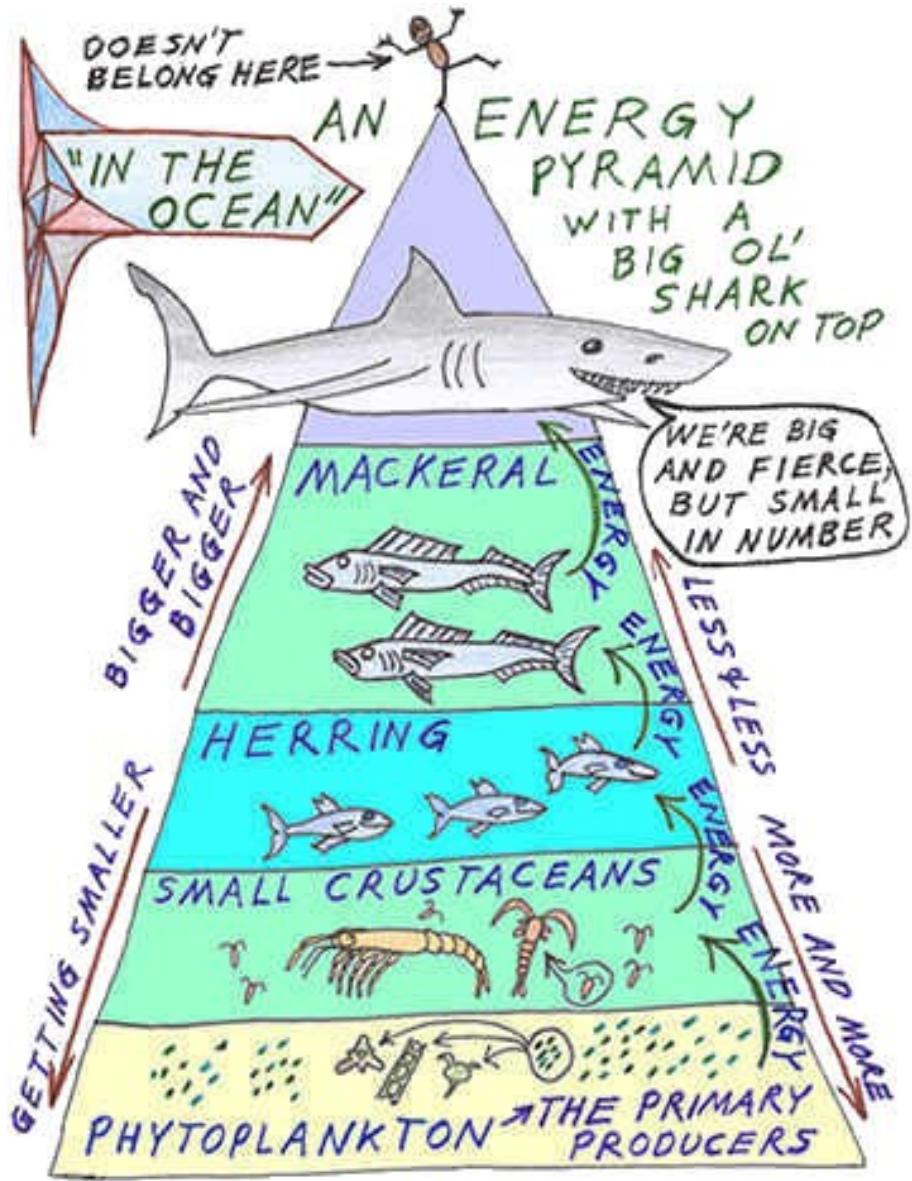
Consciousness

- Qualities such as:-
 - Subjectivity
 - Self-awareness
 - Sentience (perception through the senses)
 - Sapience (wisdom)
 - Ability to perceive relationships between oneself and one's environment

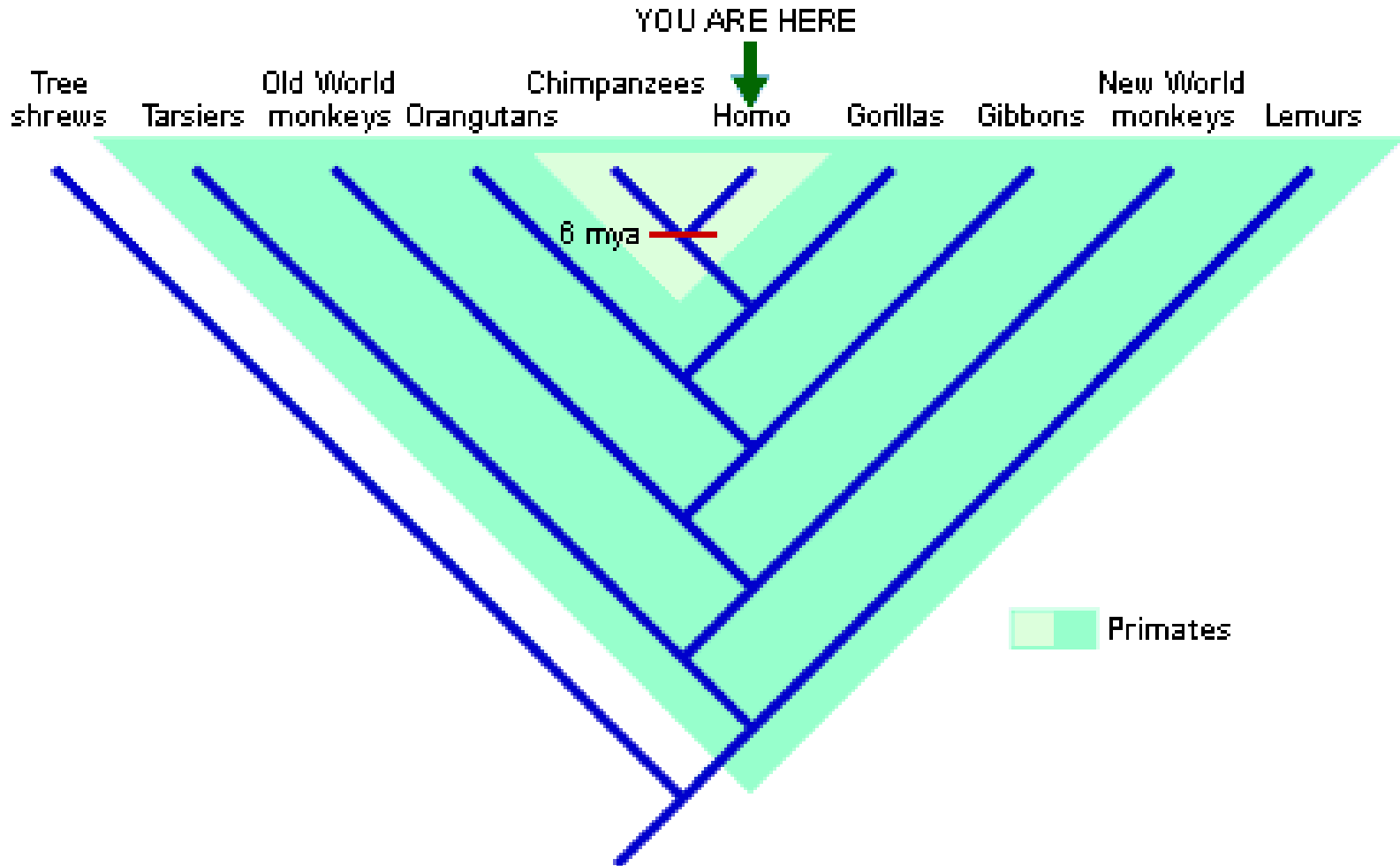
Perspective



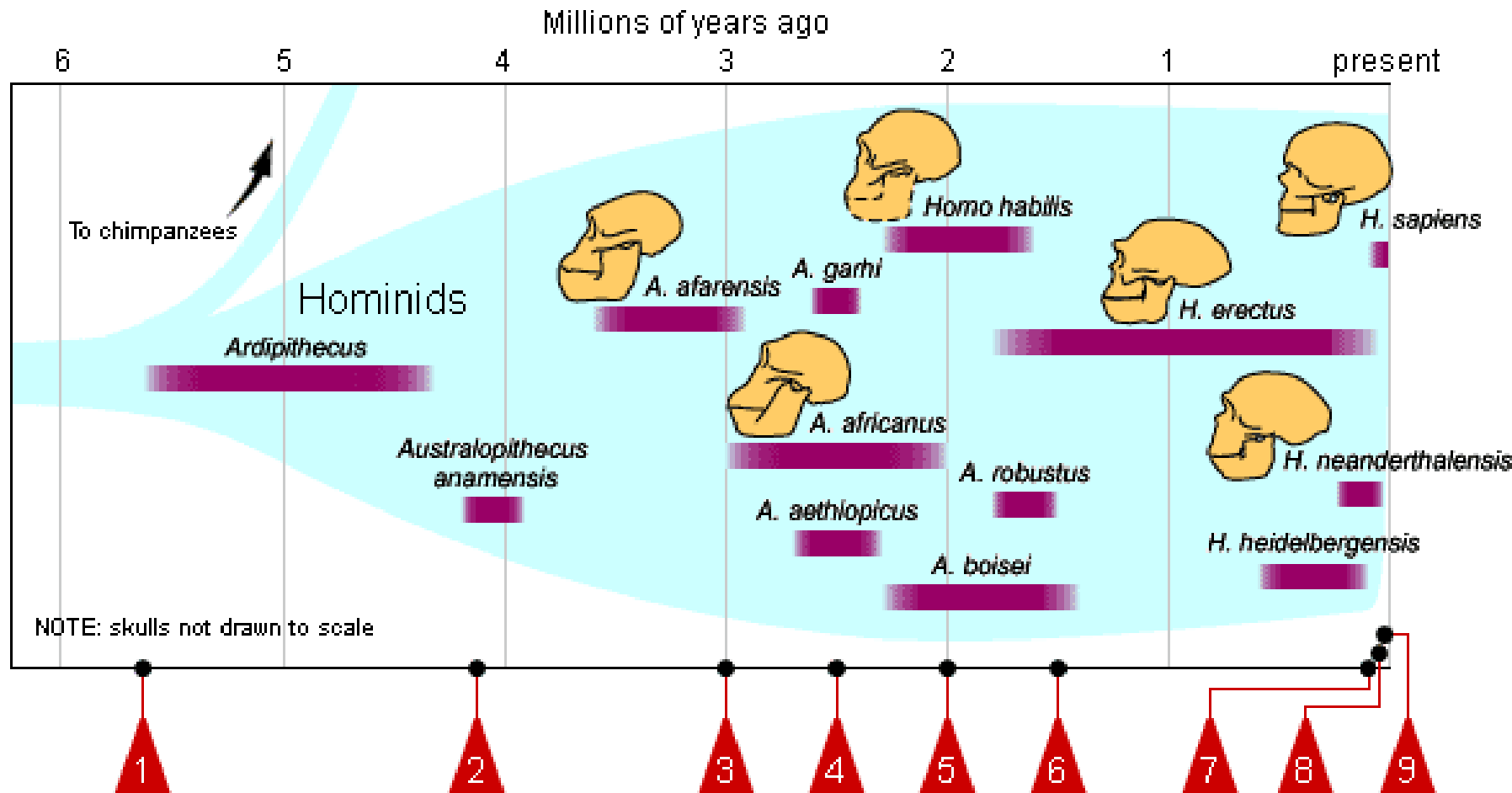
Energy pyramids and food chains



Human evolution



Human evolution



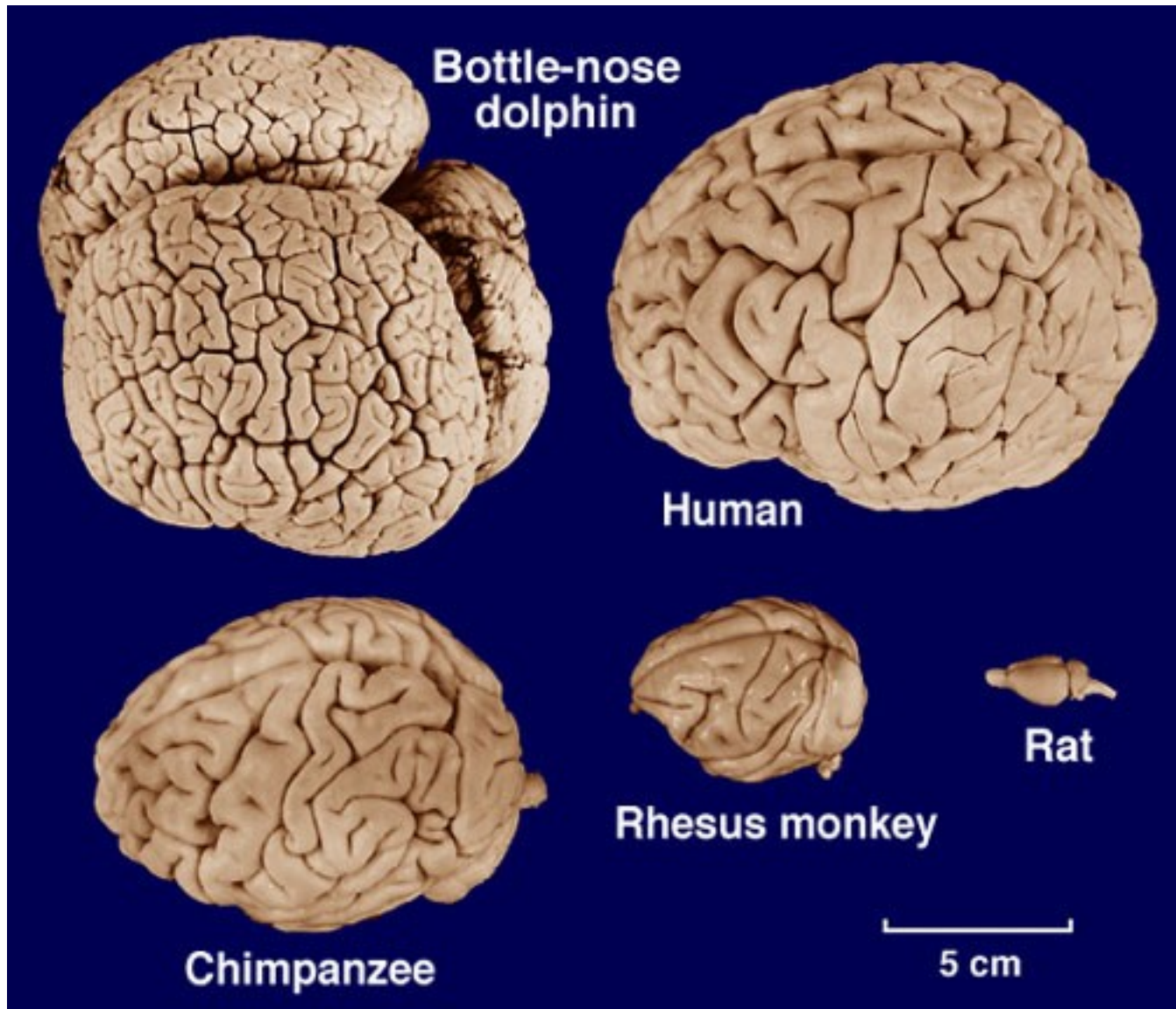
Evolution of consciousness

One foot tall statuette
carved from ivory
30000 years ago.

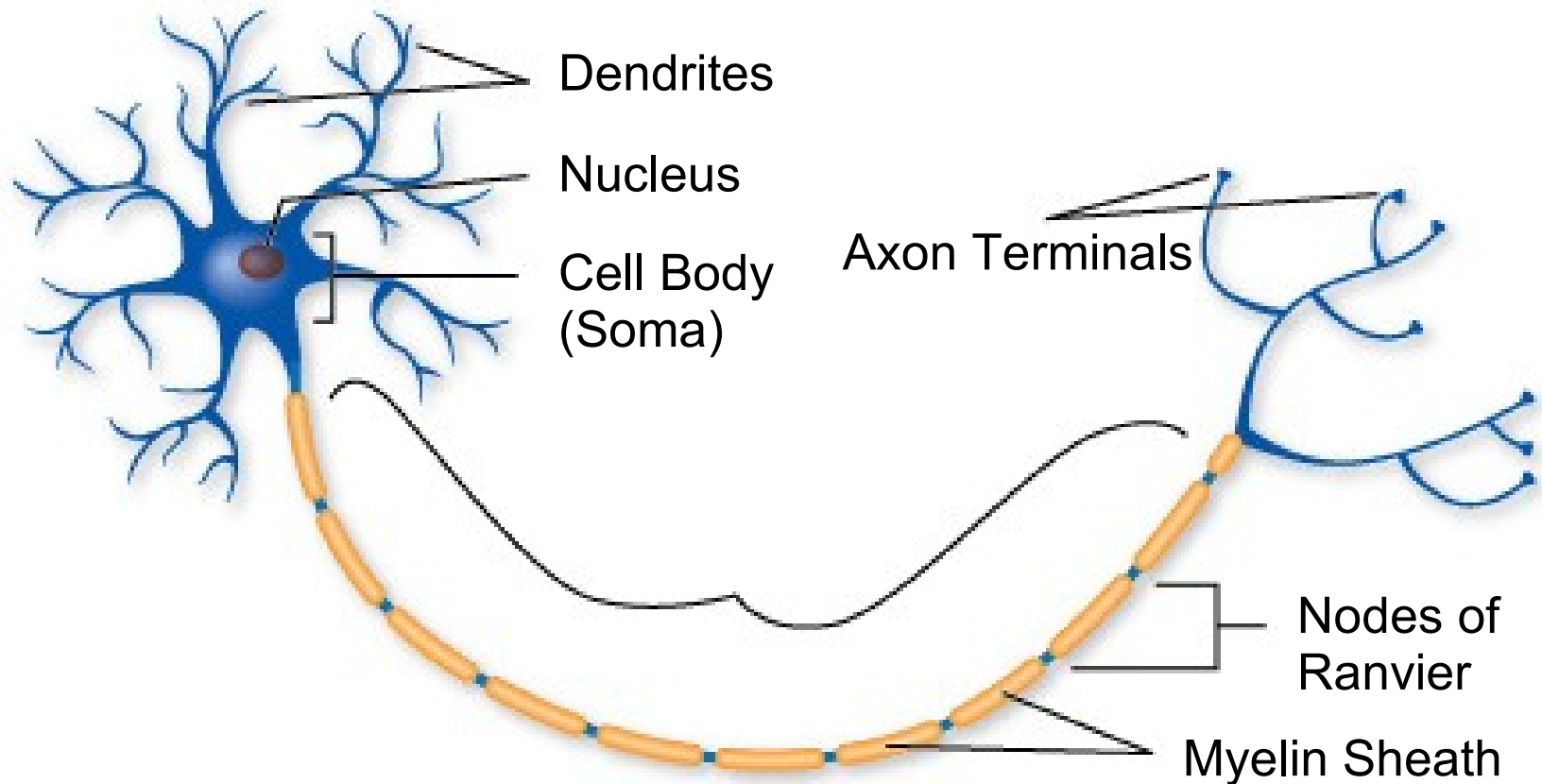
Feline face and human body
are evidence of artist's
ability to think abstractly



Brain structure and size

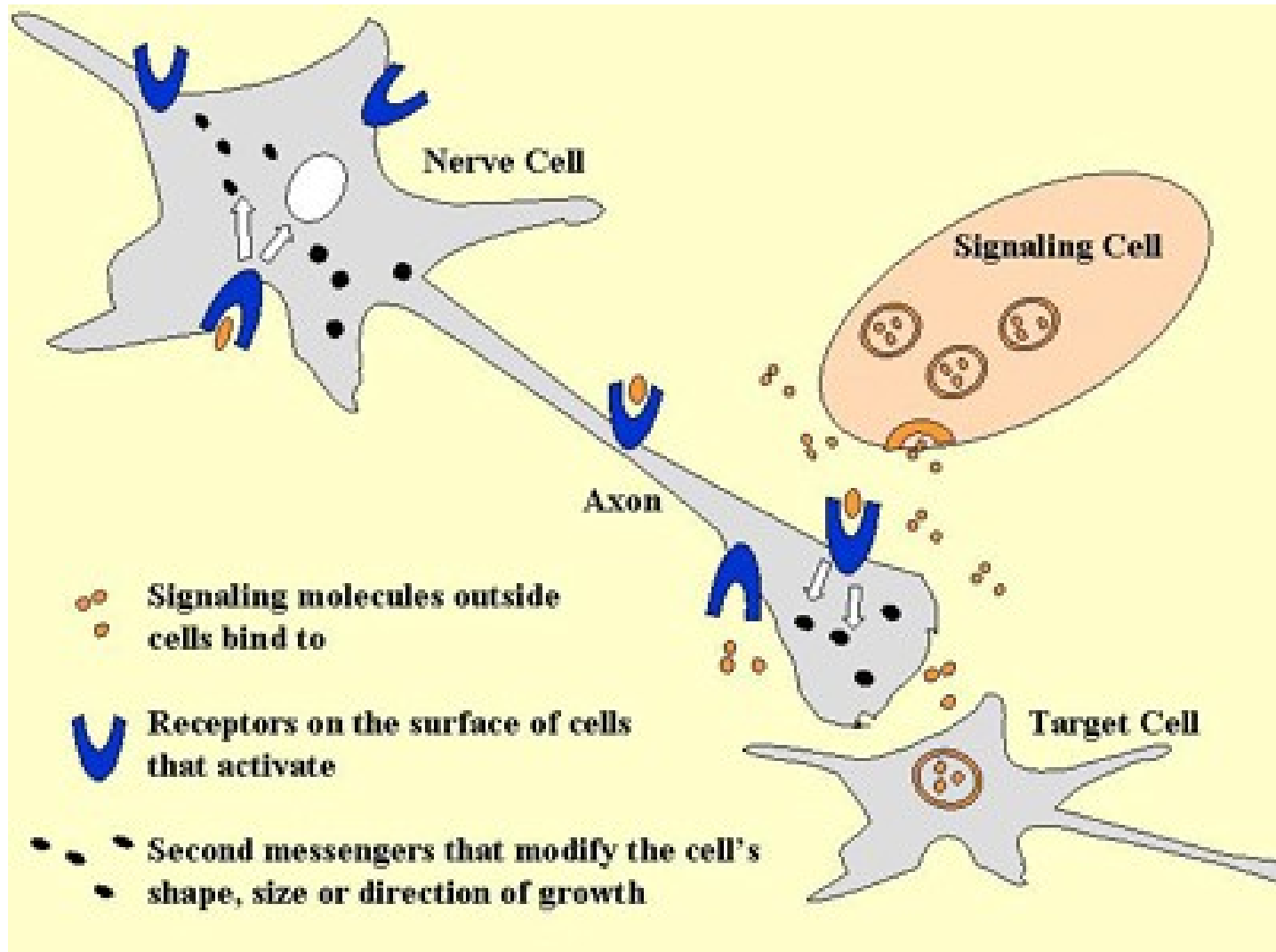


Neurons transmit messages in the brain

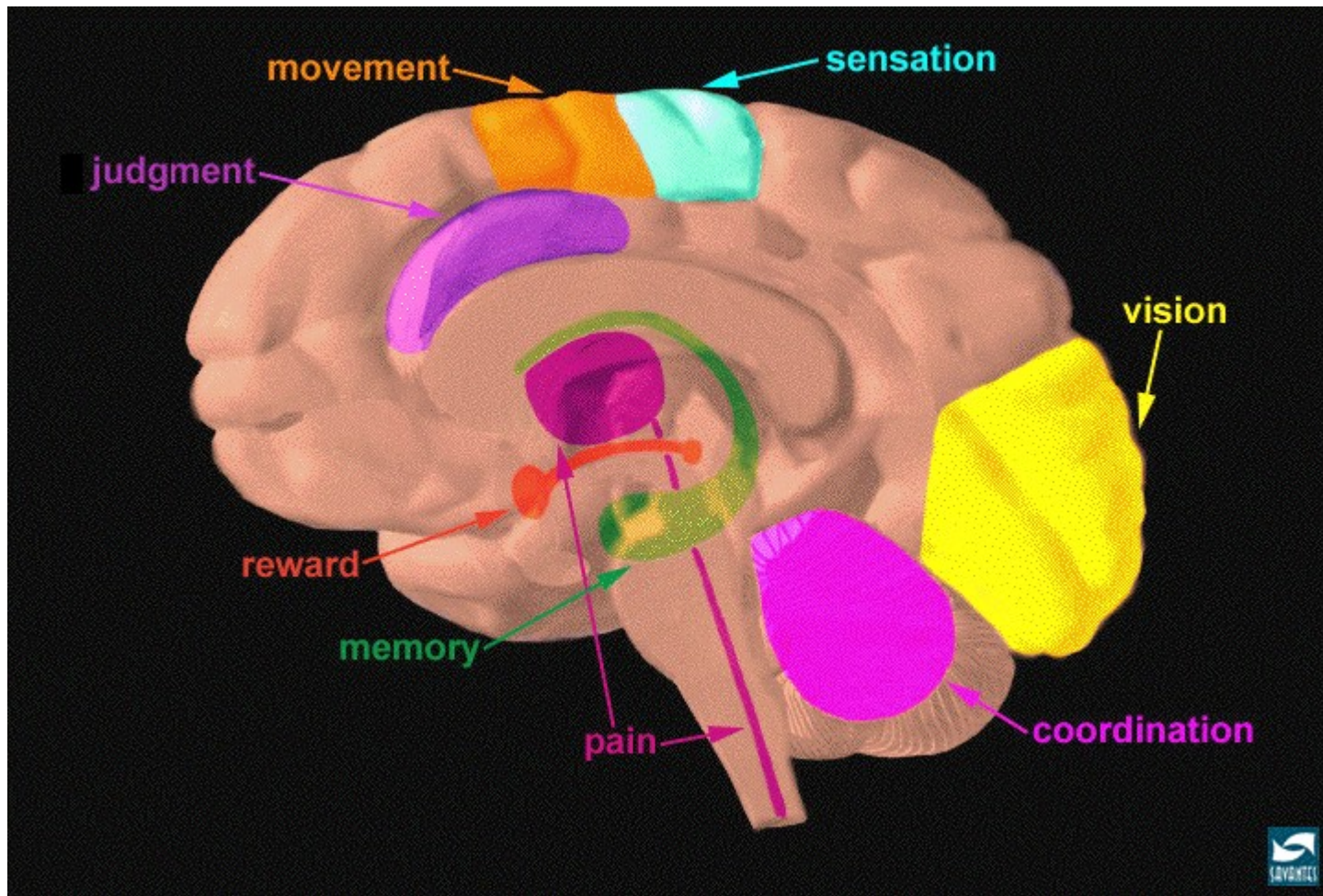


Dendrites bring information to the cell body and axons take information away from the cell body

Development of the brain



Functionality of the brain



Three Basic Units of the Human Brain

Intermediate brain

Limbic system

Emotions



Rational brain

Neocortex

Intellectual tasks



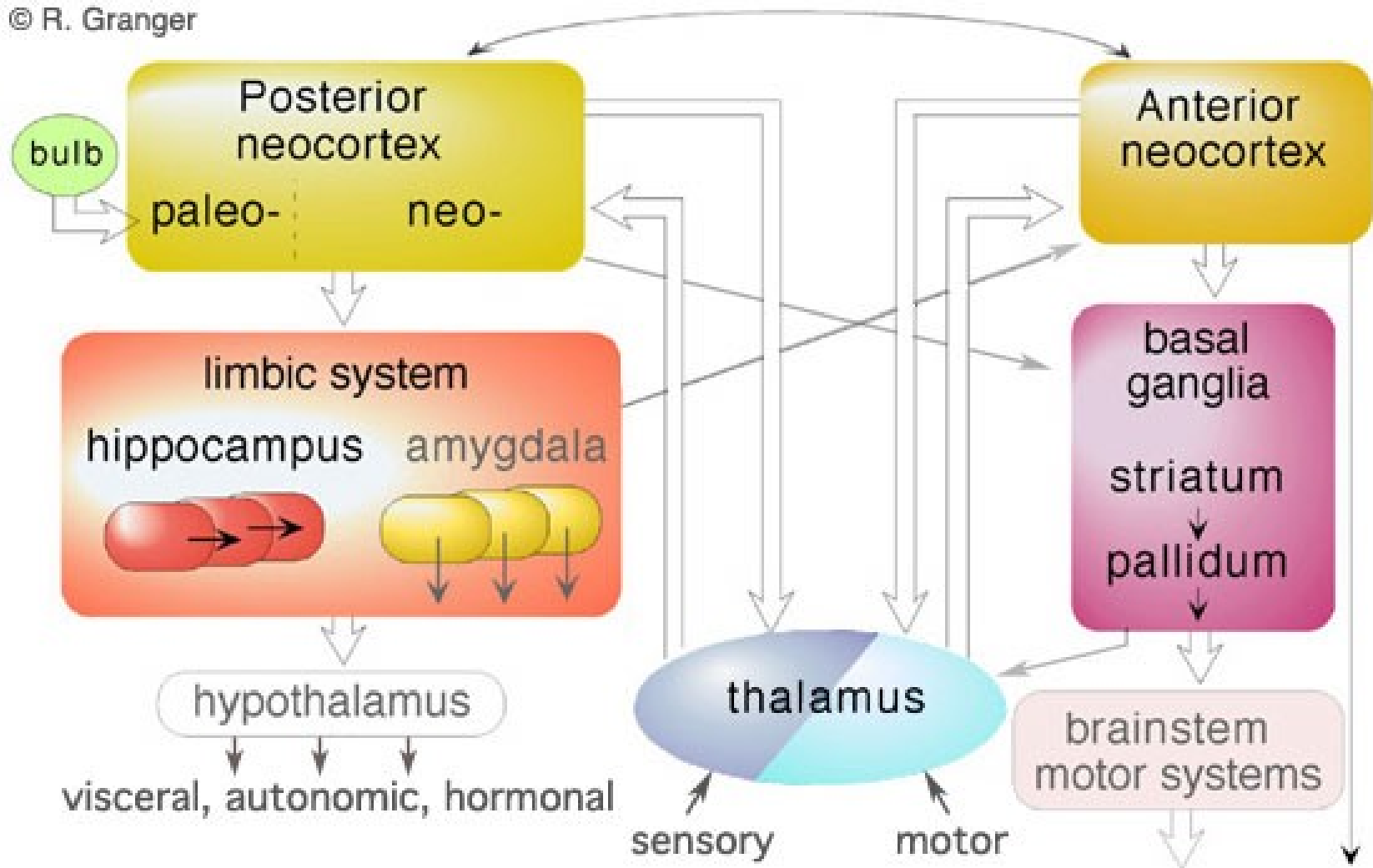
Primitive brain

Self preservation/aggression



The Thalamocortical system

© R. Granger



Note interactions between posterior thalamocortical areas involved in perceptual categorisation and anterior areas related to memory, value & planning

Key concepts of consciousness

- **Dynamic core**

- Is the current but constantly changing pattern of reentrant neuronal groups that are active at any one time
- Process of their reentry is basis of consciousness
- How can the reentrant activity account for both the unitary nature of consciousness as well as its complexity and changeability?

Processes, not definitions

- Karl Popper:-

“Knowledge and understanding advance not through asking for definitions of what things are, but through asking why they occur and how they work”