

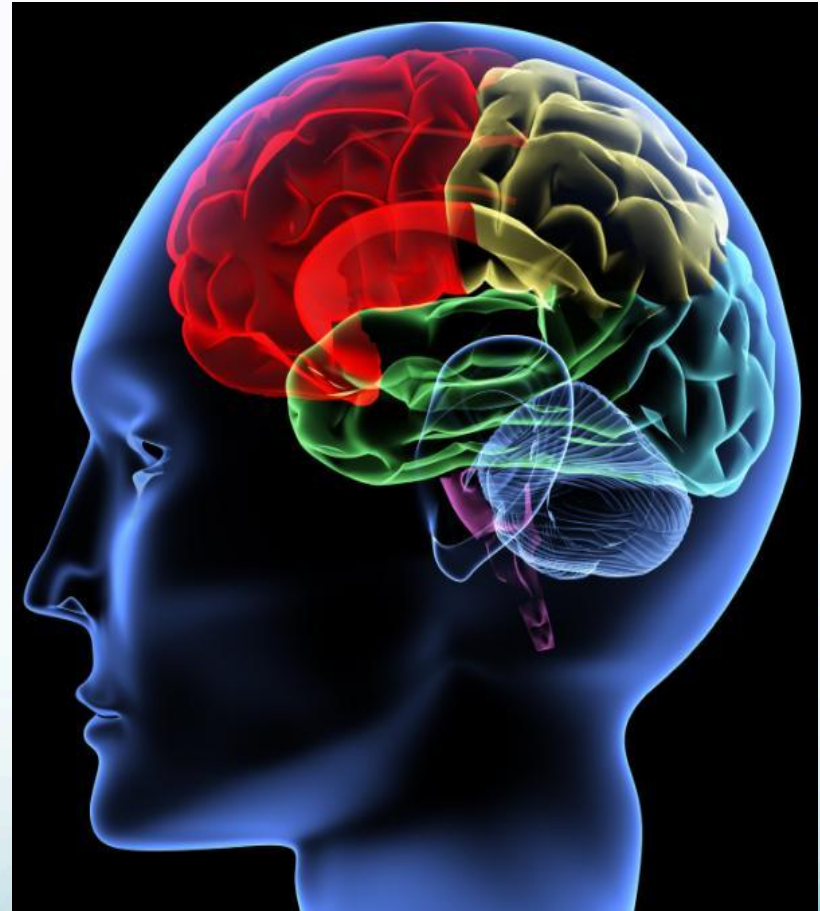
What is Morality?

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Outline

1. Questions about morality
2. Theories about morality
3. Emotions
4. Needs
5. Needs-based consequentialism
6. The self



Morality Questions

1. What is the difference between right and wrong?
2. What is the best ethical theory?
3. Why be moral?
4. What is the meaning of life?

Method: consider alternative answers and choose according to coherence with all knowledge, especially science.

The Story so Far

1. Mind=brain, i.e. all mental processes are neural mechanisms, which are physical (biochemical) processes. Lectures 2-3.
2. Knowledge is multimodal, consisting of semantic pointers that are reliably acquired, explanatorily coherent, good approximations to the external world. Lectures 4-5.

What is Right and Wrong?

Relativism: there is no objective difference.

Individual: morality is just emotional

Social: morality is just cultural practice

Rationalism (Kant): morality is a priori truths about rights and duties

Utilitarianism: moral = greatest good (pleasure) for the greatest number

Needs-based consequentialism

Emotions are Semantic Pointers

Emotion = bind (concept or belief, cognitive appraisal, physiological perception)

Example: being happy to be in Trnava = bind (Trnava, appraisal, physiology)

Moral example: murder feels wrong = bind (murder, appraisal, physiology)

Why Emotions are Biologically Valuable

1. Evaluation: They provide assessments of current and future states of the world.
2. Attention: They focus attention on what is most important and worthy of consciousness.
3. Motivation: They provide reasons to do things and cause actions.
4. Social connections: They motivate people to interact with each other encouraging cooperation, care, and reproduction.

Emotions Can Be Rational

Physiological changes are not subject to rational evaluation, but beliefs and cognitive appraisals are.

Is the belief supported by evidence and explanatory coherence?

Does the cognitive appraisal accurately take into account all the relevant goals?

Moral Judgments are Emotional

Evidence:

1. People feel emotional about right and wrong.
2. People argue vehemently about right and wrong.
3. Moral disagreements are hard to resolve.

But moral judgments can still be rational, if the beliefs and cognitive appraisals are rational – justified by reliable coherence.

Vs. Emotivism, expressivism.

Values are Emotional

Value = bind (concept or goal, emotion)

Example: bind (democracy, love)

In the brain, facts and values are interconnected, just like cognition and emotion.

Emotional coherence: decisions are based on balancing different emotional goals, not calculations of maximizing expected utility.



Ethical Judgments and Emotional Coherence

Given a question (e.g. democracy), what is the most emotionally coherent answer?

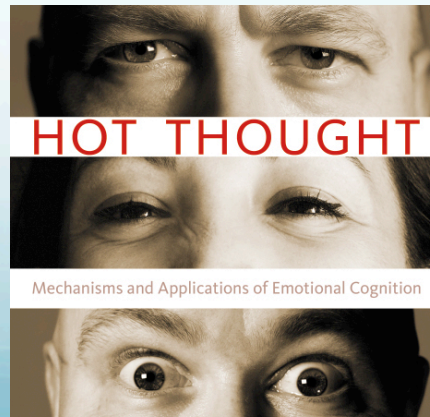
Compare deliberative coherence: actions and goals.

Conscience is the intuitive judgment of right and wrong resulting from unconscious processes of emotional coherence, not divine inspiration.

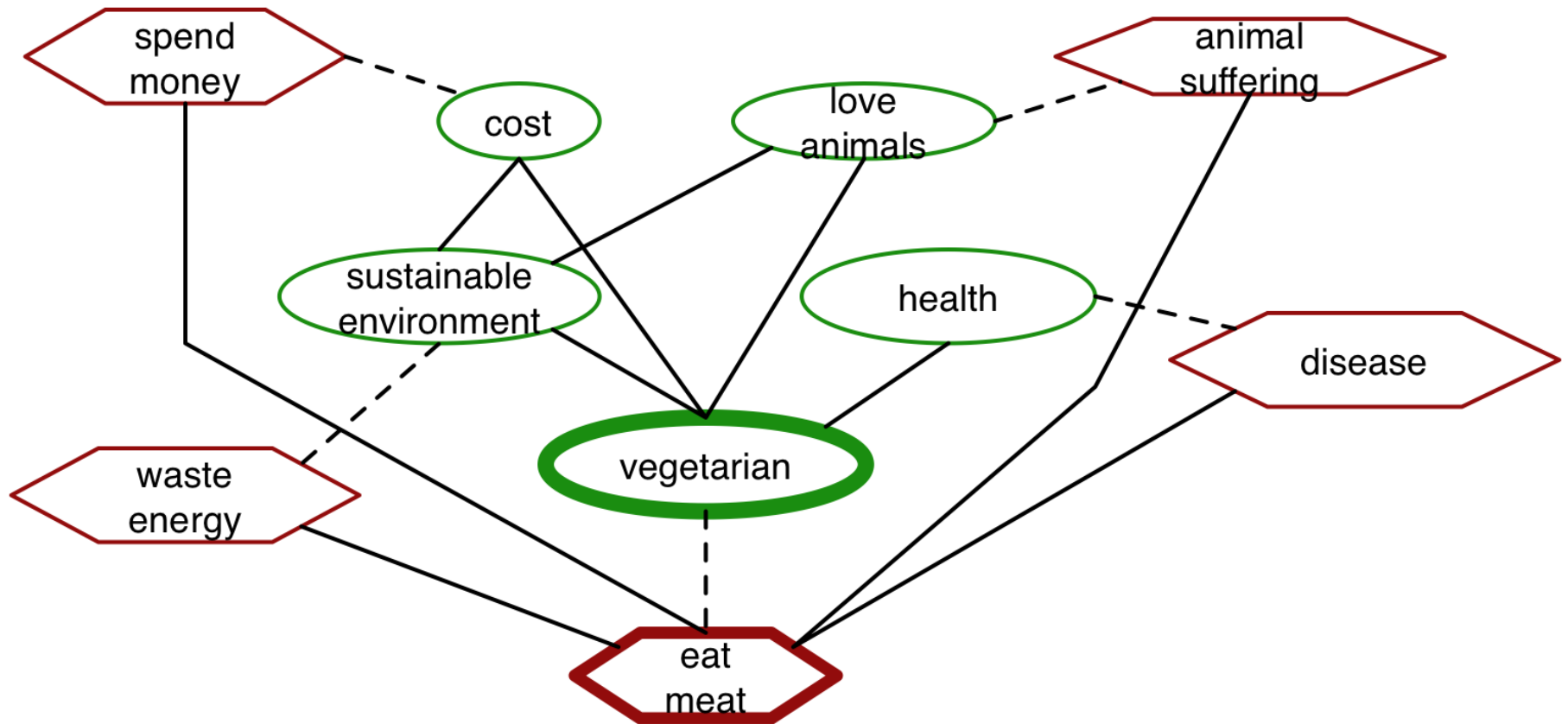
Problem: How can emotional coherence be objective and rational?

Emotional Coherence

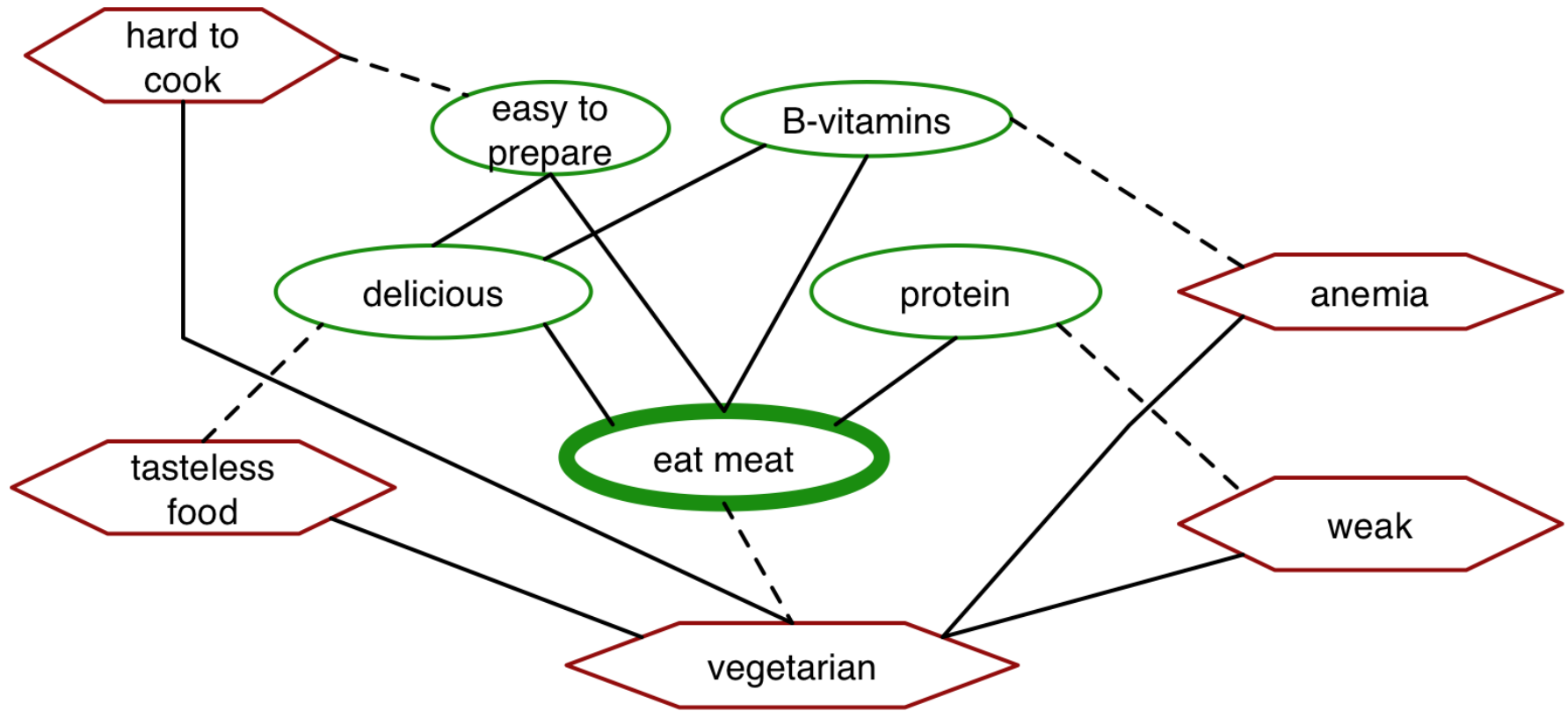
1. Elements have positive or negative valences.
2. Elements can have positive or negative emotional connections to other elements.
3. The valence of an element is determined by the valences and acceptability of all the elements to which it is connected. Use coherence algorithms similar to neural network ones used



Value Map of Vegetarians



Value map of non-vegetarians



Needs

1. Needs are biologically basic goals, innate because of evolution.
2. Biological needs: food, water, shelter, health care.
3. Psychological needs:
 - a) Relatedness, belonging, affiliation
 - b) Autonomy, freedom, power
 - c) Competence, achievement

Needs-Based Consequentialism

1. Emotions are rational when they incorporate plausible beliefs and accurate cognitive appraisals.
2. Ethical appraisals should be based on needs, not socially acquired wants.
3. Hence a rational, justified ethical judgment is one that uses emotional and epistemic coherence to produce an emotional reaction that something is right or wrong.

The Moral Self

What is the self that performs actions?

What is the self that is held to be responsible and subject to blame and punishment?

Answers: transcendental, deflationary, multilevel mechanisms

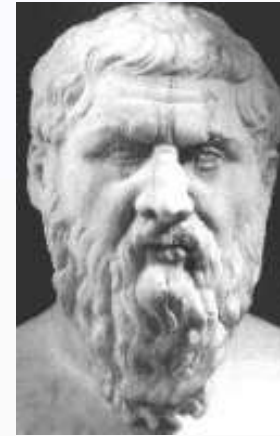
The Transcendental Self

The self is a
supernatural entity
(soul).

Plato, Aquinas, Kant.

50% of Canadians, 80%
of Americans.

Problem: lack of
evidence.



Plato



Kant

The Deflationary (No-) Self

David Hume: The self is just a bundle of perceptions.



Hume

Daniel Dennett: The self is a “center of narrative gravity”.



Dennett

Thomas Metzinger: The self is a myth.

Problem: The self is an important psychological concept.

The Self in Social Psychology

SELF-PHENOMENA

SELF-REPRESENTING

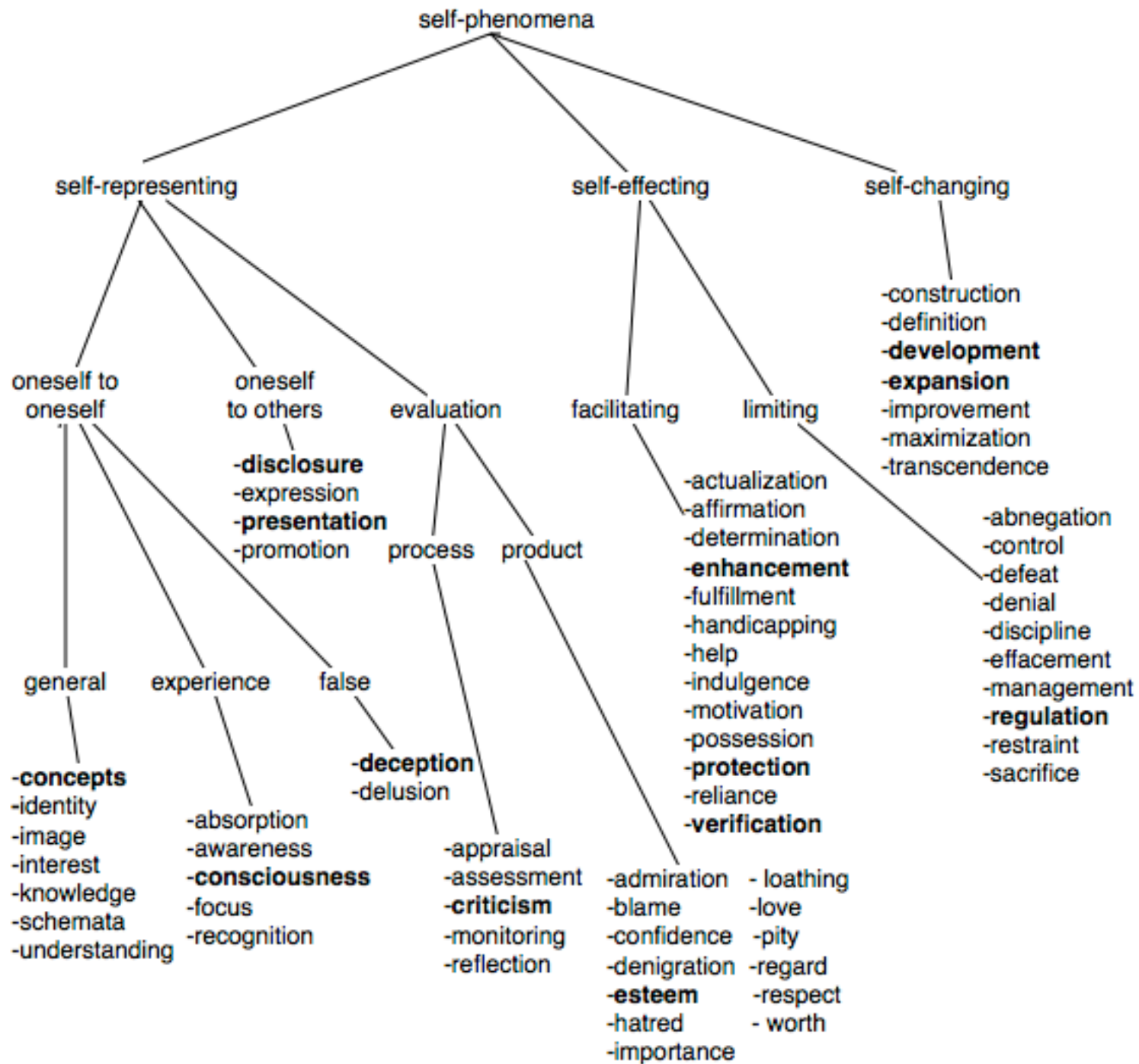
E.G. SELF-CONCEPTS,
SELF-IDENTITY

SELF-EFFECTING

E.G. SELF-HELP,
SELF-REGULATION

SELF-CHANGING

E.G. SELF-
IMPROVEMENT,
SELF-
DESTRUCTION



Multilevel Systems

A system (mechanism) consists of:

Environment

Parts

Interconnections

Changes



A multilevel system has mechanisms at several levels:

$\langle E_1, P_1, I_1, C_1 \rangle$

$\langle E_2, P_2, I_2, C_2 \rangle$, etc.

The Multilevel Self

Social self: Parts are people.

Psychological self: Parts are mental representations.

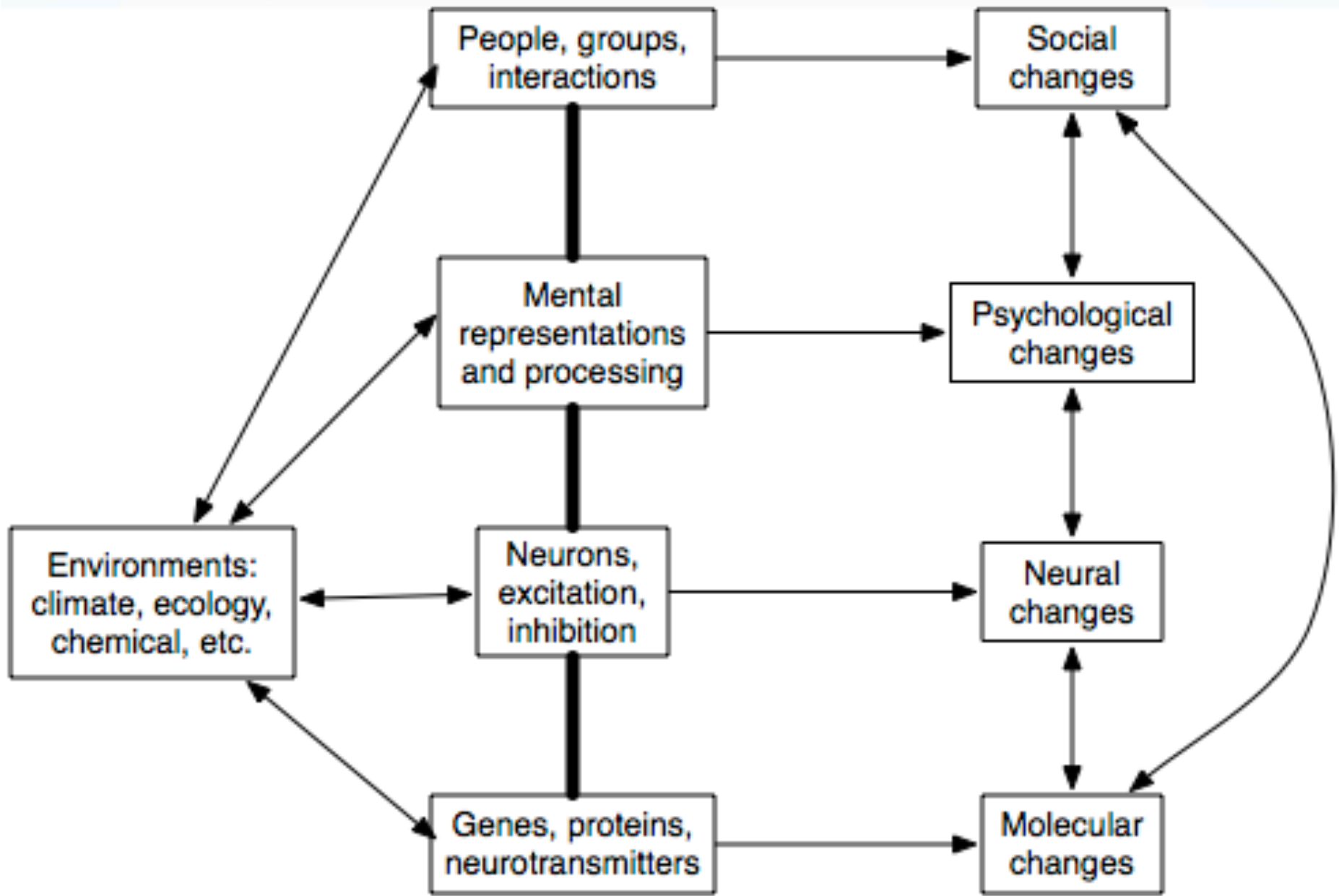
Neural self: Parts are neurons.

Molecular self: Parts are chemicals.

These are not four selves, but components of one complex system.

Multilevel emergence: the self emerges from multiple levels.

See Thagard & Wood, 2015: *Frontiers in Psychology* 23



Personal Identity

Persistence problem: What makes you the same person you were yesterday? Will you survive death?

Supernatural: same soul.

Psychological: same memories.

Somatic: same body.

No-self: nothing persists.

Multilevel: persistence of molecular, neural, psychological, and social mechanisms.

Why be moral?

1. Nihilism: don't be moral.
2. Rationalism: reason demands morality (Kant).
3. Social contract: people agree to be moral (Hobbes).
4. Emotion: people (except psychopaths) have evolved to care about each other – empathy.

Conclusions

1. Moral judgments are emotional, but can be objective and rational.
2. Needs are objective.
3. Morality can be judged by needs-based consequentialism.
4. The self is multilevel emergence from mechanisms.

