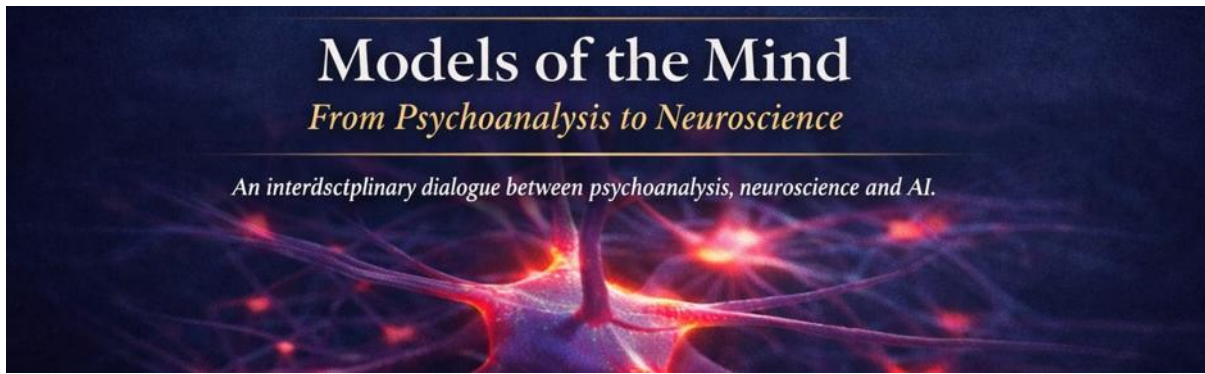




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The mind modeling the mind: a paradoxical never ending quest.

Abstract: The mind can build a model of itself, but that model will necessarily be incomplete. Self-representation appears to be most effective as a useful heuristic rather than as a testable account of the system in question. Introspection is a contentious method and several reviews argue that it is often unreliable for directly knowing mental states or consciousness. In fact, human self-knowledge often depends on self-interpretation, using the same mind-reading capacities applied to other people. However, people often confabulate, creating plausible narratives about motives and attitudes that do not reflect their actual causes. Predictive processing accounts suggest that the brain continually models both the world and itself; however, this model is also incomplete. Both psychoanalysis and neuroscience have reached the same conclusion: that some key parts of the self-model are likely to be non-verbal and inaccessible to introspection yet still guide behaviour and attention. Formal and computational arguments reveal further limitations, including incompleteness, the frame problem, and the absence of theories of subjectivity.

Modelling helps to explain certain aspects of thought, memory and learning, but it still does not fully explain the brain–mind relationship or consciousness.

Work on LLMs highlights the issue: the evidence is mixed, with some successes in simple self-prediction, but significant failures in privileged self-access and risks of epistemic drift.

Despite all these limitations, the quest for self-knowledge has fascinated humankind since the time of Socrates at least.