

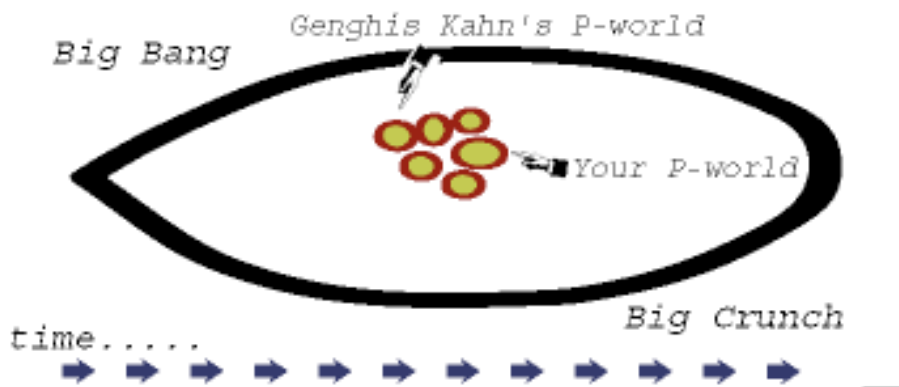
P/R



The P-world, R-world Distinction

There is something that came into existence around the time you were born, and that ceases to exist when you die. This is the P-world: the subjective world of phenomenal existence. It is a natural phenomenon, meaning that it lawfully arises within the R-world, as described by physics. But that is not to say that it allows the owner of the P-world some kind of direct knowledge of the R-world. Philosophers talk of “noumena” to describe the underlying reality, independent of any observer.

The P-world is the Phenomenal, Personal and Private world you inhabit. If we imagine the R-world all at once, from the big bang to the big crunch, it might look like this, in which P-worlds are little bubbles. The geometry of this illustration is a cartoon, but the embedding and temporal extent of P-worlds is meant to be taken seriously.



Your P-world is not my P-world. They are distinct, non-overlapping entities. As sketched above, the entire subjective experience of a single individual is shown from womb to grave, embedded within the R-world, as all natural entities must be. As we progress, we will try to understand the extent, character and origin of the P-world. Becoming aware of P-worlds can be a little surprising. The “Hologram Analogy” tries to make this clear.

A word of caution is necessary. When we use personal pronouns (“I”, “you”, “we”...) we are not just referring to a P-world. Much of what we mean by our “selves” is best understood as being defined across multiple P-worlds. We are partly communal in our very being. We vacillate in our allegiance to ideas (collective phenomena) and to our P-worlds (resolutely individual). Because P-worlds exist in large numbers, they give rise to phenomena that are defined over the P-worlds, but are not found within any one world. This theme will be developed as we go along. For now, I suggest you go read the analogies and notes in the right side bar.