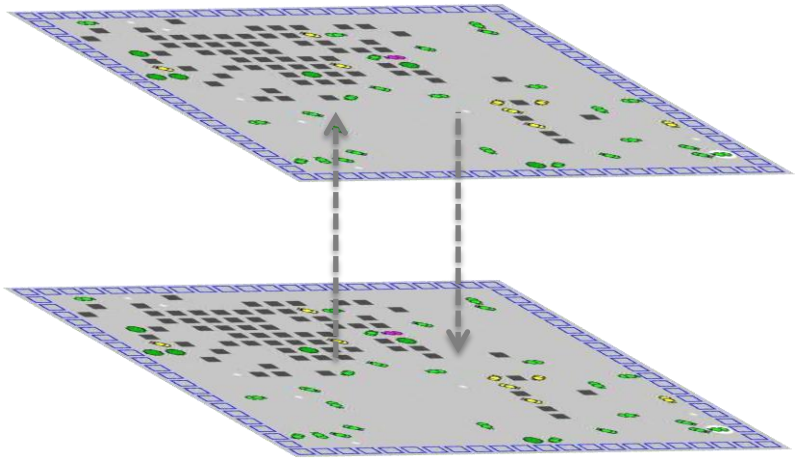
Simulation of philosophical hypotheses about sentience

A project proposed by Manu Herrán

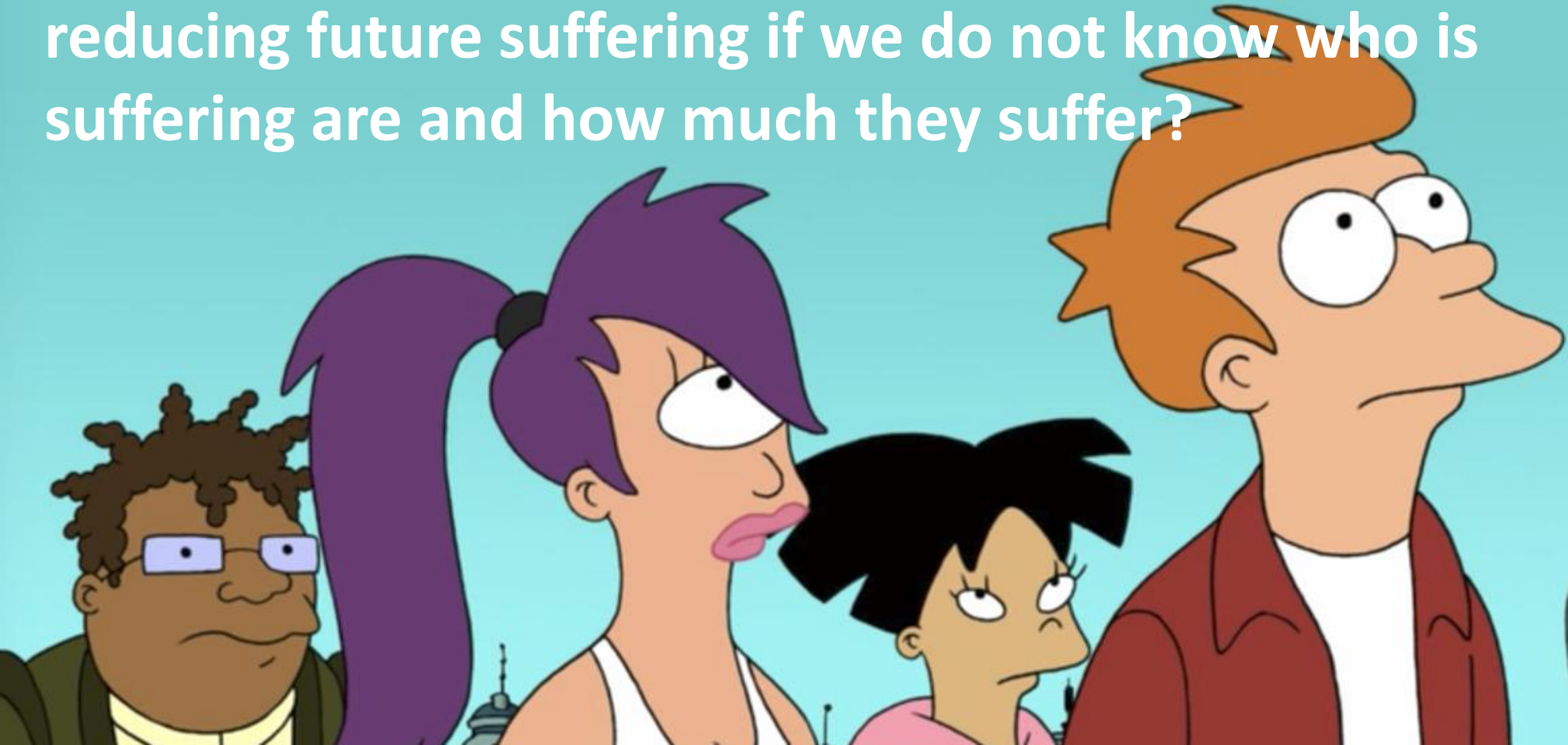



Sentience is a fact


We recognize the sentience in others because of their resemblance to us

But how can we know if other objects very different from us are sentient?

How to prioritize limited resources aimed at reducing future suffering if we do not know who is suffering are and how much they suffer?



The situation could be even worse than it seems. Not only we need to know who the suffering beings are and how much they suffer. We also need a better understanding about what sentience is. For example, according to some paradigms, the idea of "being who suffers" apart from everything else could be wrong. That is, we not only ignore the answers, but we could be asking some wrong questions.

Objectives of the project

I. Create tools to better understand the different hypotheses, theories, paradigms and worldviews on sentience, as well as their implications, providing clarity in the debate about the details and alternatives within each of the proposals.

II. Find good arguments to assess the plausibility of the different proposals, so that we can have better criteria to allocate more or less resources to investigate or take into account one or the other within a plan to reduce future suffering. In particular, assess hypotheses evolutionarily to check if they are evolutionarily viable.

This should allow real advances in the understanding of sentience, as well as a more adequate distribution of the attention received by the different paradigms, both initiatives being aimed at reducing future suffering.

Project assumptions (I)

- Many people, and among them, many of those who focus their work on reducing suffering, believe in a single hypothesis of sentience, discarding all others. This would be a great position if that hypothesis, with all its details, were correct. But we can not be sure of this, and if it were not true, the resources allocated to reduce suffering could be very inefficient and in some cases even ineffective.

- Therefore, I believe that it is justified to take into account more than one hypothesis about the ability to feel and investigate its implications. For example:

  - I believe that it is justified to listen to those who say that the suffering of insects does not exist, or if it existed, would be so small that it would not be relevant, but also to those who argue that the suffering of insects is not only real, but also grouped, it is much more relevant than the suffering of the rest of the animals.

  - I believe that it is justified to listen to the voices of those who defend the idea that artificial machines such as robots will never be able to feel, but also of those who claim that robots, under certain conditions, could feel as much or even more than human beings.

Project assumptions(II)

- I believe that communities (scientific and others), in general, could be incoherent with some of the consequences of the paradigms that they themselves, intuitively, assume to be true; as well as discarding other paradigms perhaps simply because they are difficult to understand.

- Specifically, I believe that a large part of the scientific community assumes an evolutionary emergentist paradigm as true, but rejects mainly, probably by intuition, the idea of sentience in machines, being in my opinion both incompatible ideas. That is to say, to support the evolutionary emergentist paradigm should be incoherent, at least under certain conditions, with the rejection of the idea of sentience in machines.

Project assumptions (III)

- I also believe that a large part of the community without scientific specialization and whom that does not base their interpretation of the sentience on some religious criteria or of divine nature, assumes as true, at least implicitly, a paradigm based on biological aspects of natural neurons, but rejects the moral consideration of non-human animals even, in some cases, rejects their ability to feel. We think that these simulations can be very useful to provide clarity in the debate on these types of issues.

- I believe that computer simulations, besides serving to solve problems or perform calculations, have an enormous didactic and explanatory capacity, allowing to communicate complex ideas, as is the case of philosophical hypothesis about sentience, and therefore can serve as tools for make progress in this field.

How are we going to do it?

- Identifying different theories or hypotheses about sentience, as well as various aspects of them, whose implications are relevant in order to prevent future suffering.

- Proposing different simulations that can help us understand these different hypotheses and their aspects.

- Describing in detail such simulations. In certain cases, this could be sufficient to achieve the objectives pursued.

- In the cases in which it were necessary, programming the simulations and executing them to check their results.

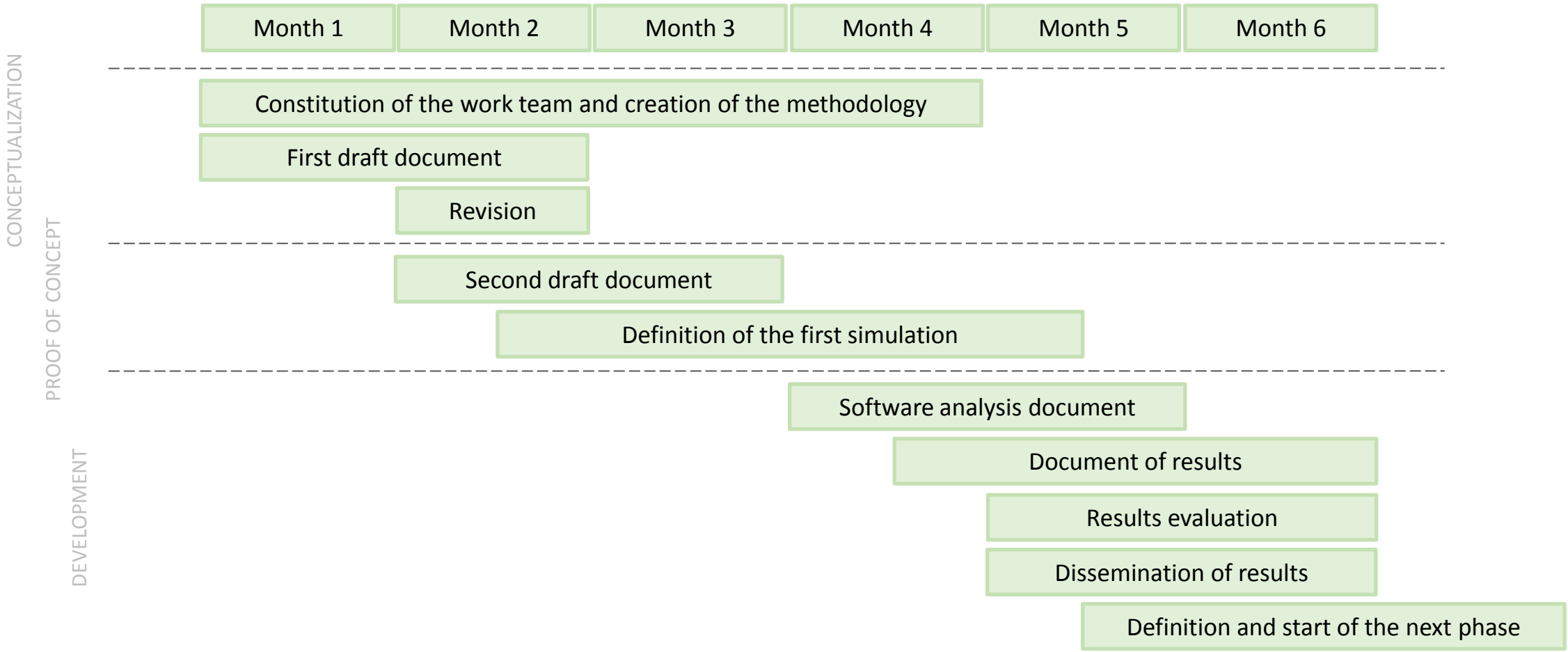
Project deliverables

- Documents that define the project, with special detail in the theories and aspects of the theories that are to be studied.
- A document of definition and analysis for each proposed simulation, created as if it were to be programmed.
- In cases where it was decided to create the simulation:
  - Software development of the simulation.
  - Results of the execution tests.
- Papers and other media (videos, etc.) with the results of the project.

Team / Roles

- **Main researcher**: project director, establishes the main lines of the project, the specific aspects to investigate and the methodology; and coordinates the work of the team.
- **Scientific and philosophical researchers**: develops research lines ensuring the philosophical and scientific solidity of the project.
- **Expert in communication**: defines and creates the best vehicles to communicate the ideas we want to transmit.
- **Software designer**: create the design documents of the different simulations.
- **Software developper**: develops the simulations based on the design specifications.
- **Tester and runner**: test and run simulations based on the specifications.

Project Planning (First phase)



More information

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