

Way of Knowing: Perception

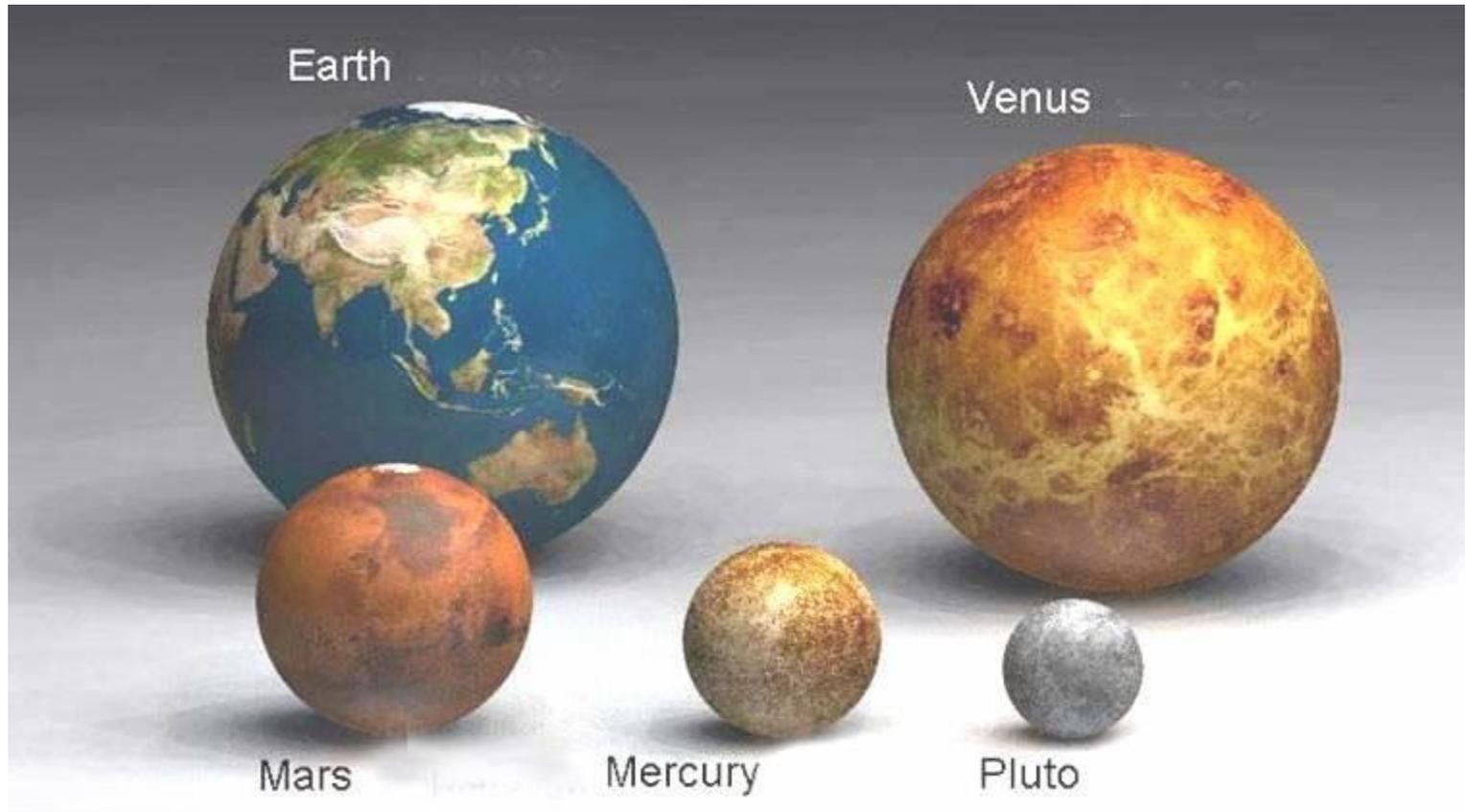












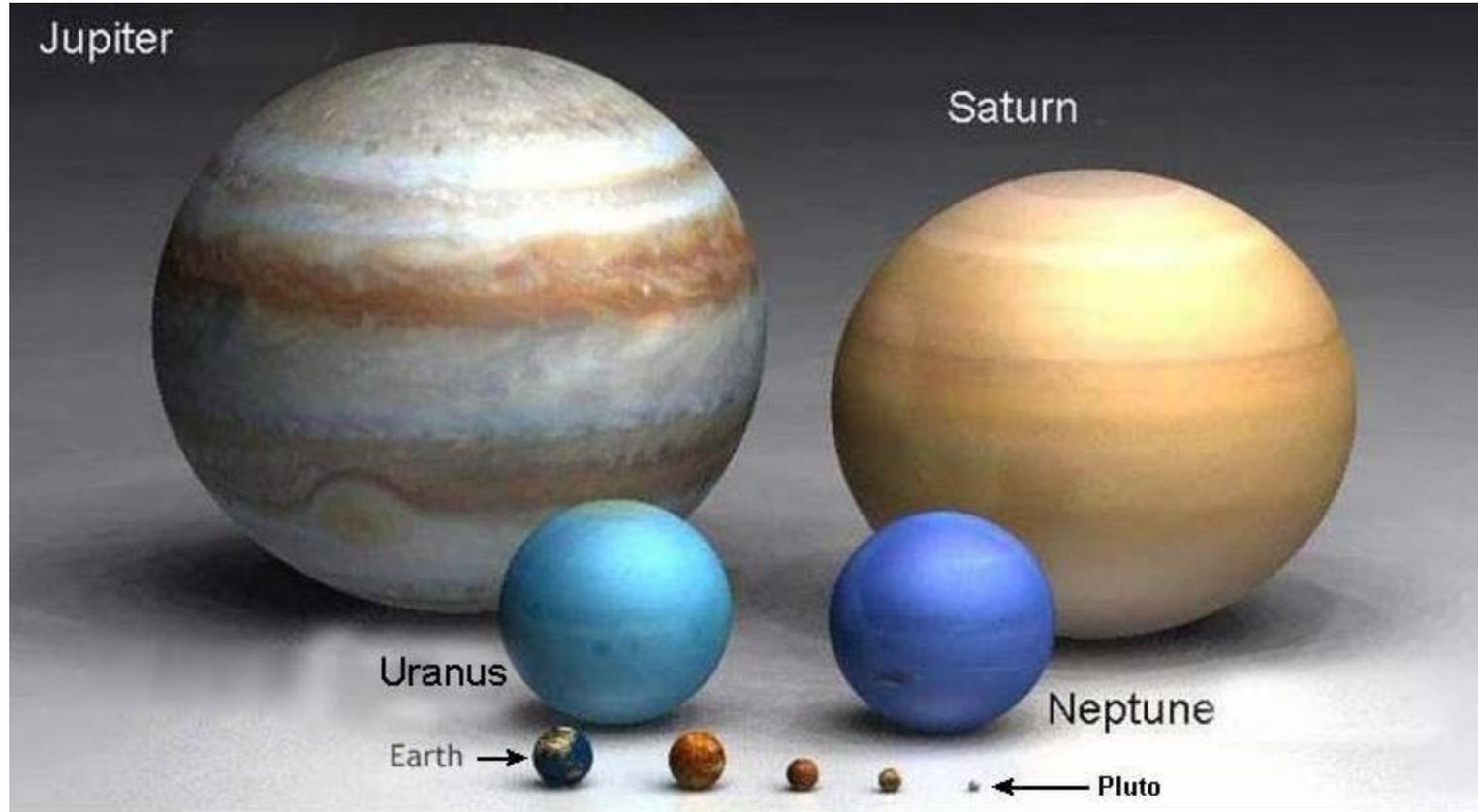
Earth

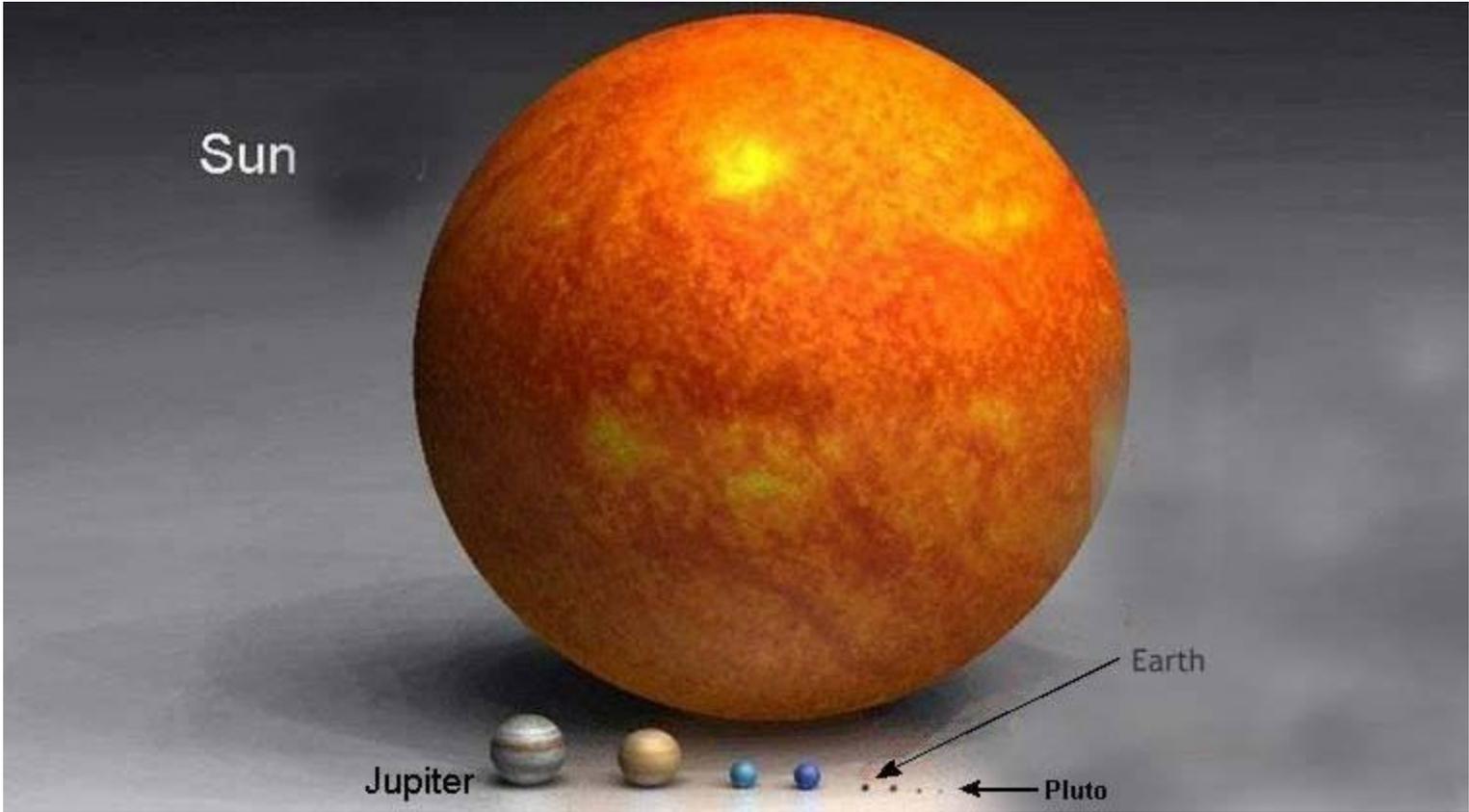
Venus

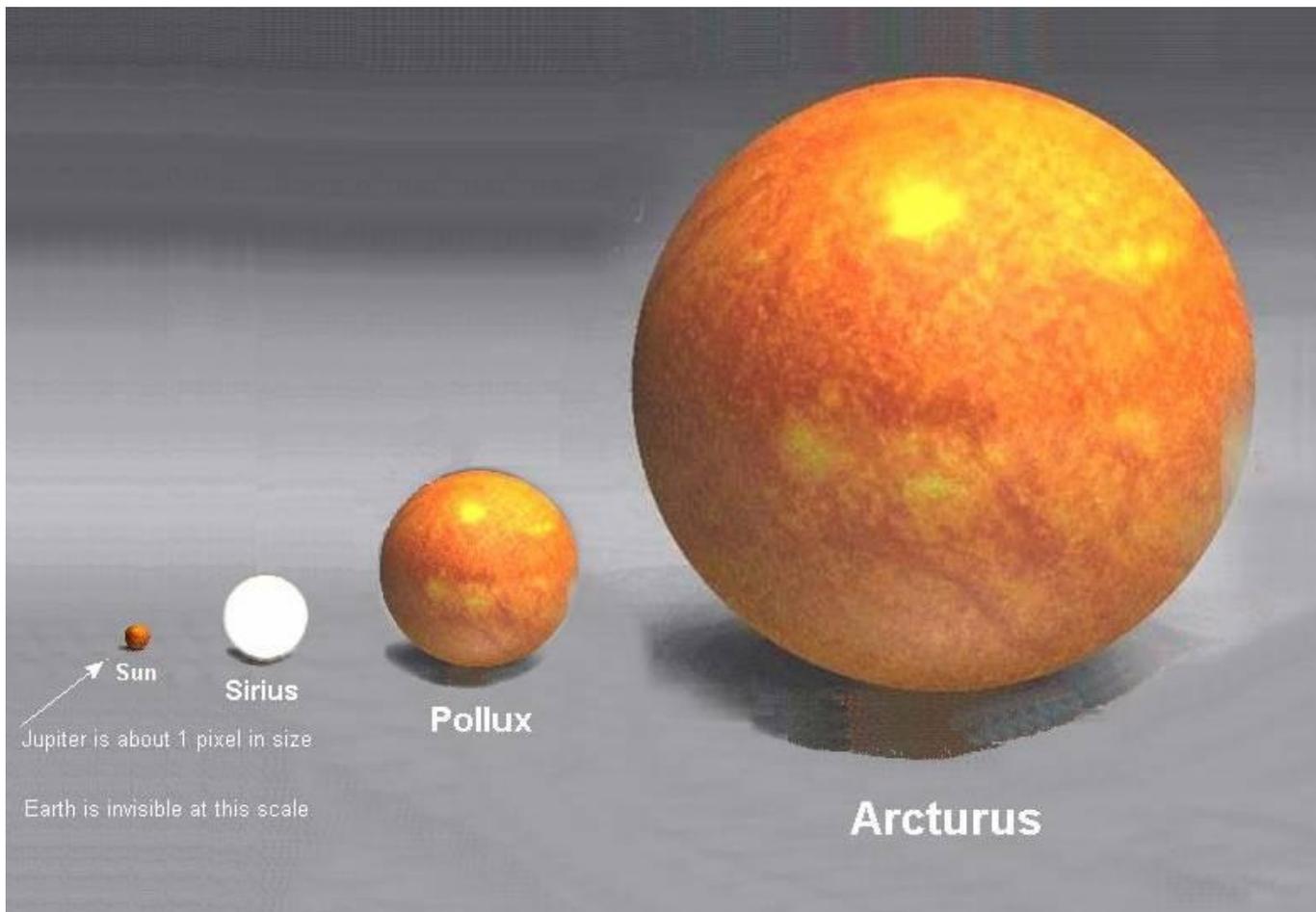
Mars

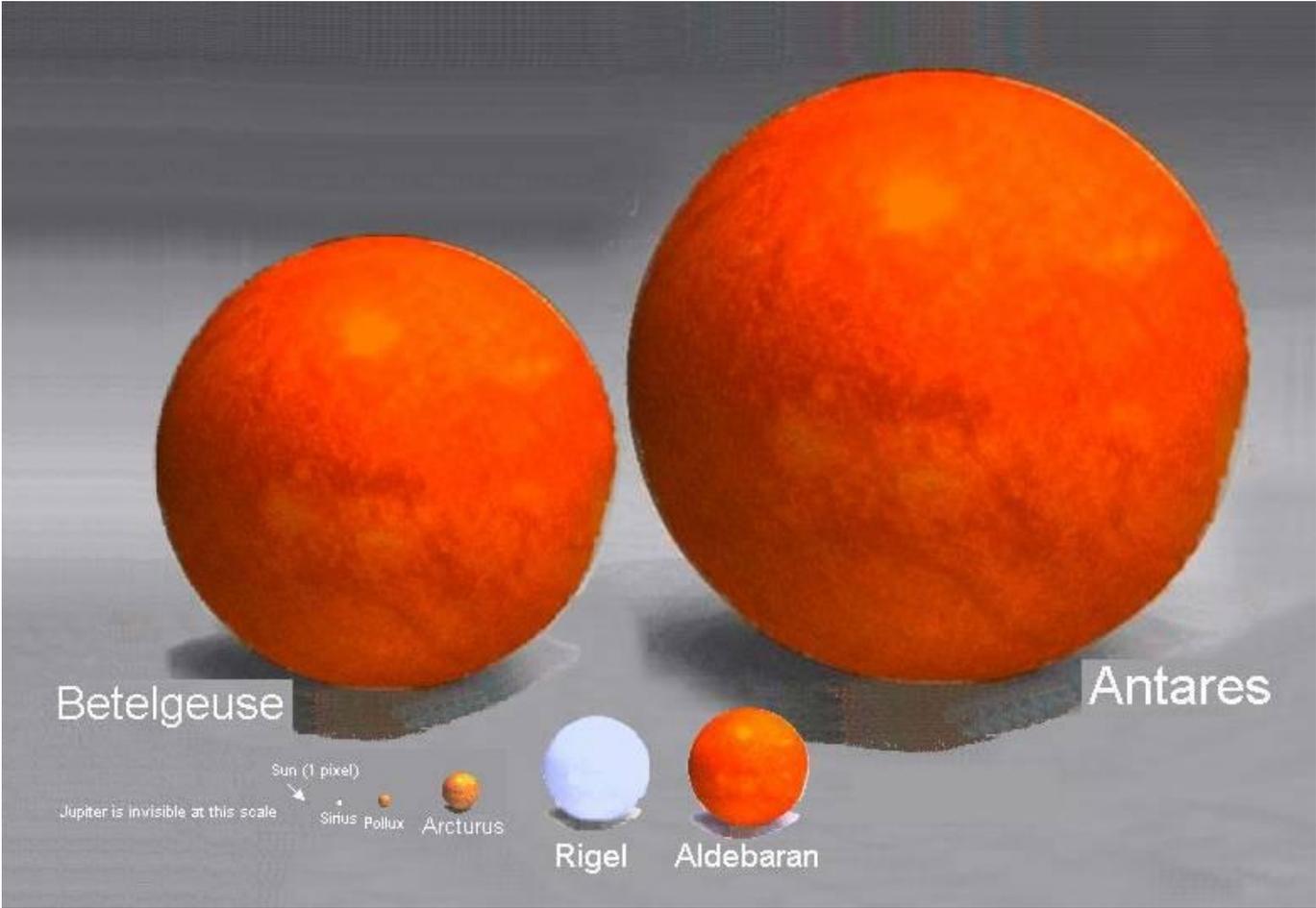
Mercury

Pluto









Perception

- Our perception of the world is determined by sensory input—the things we experience.
- It is the active, interpretive, and selective process of recording or becoming conscious of the external world.
- Because our sensory perceptions are so important in our understanding of the world, it is necessary to study it as a Way of Knowing

Nature of Sense Perception

- In what ways does the biological constitution of a living organism determine, influence or limit its sense perception?
- If humans are sensitive only to certain ranges of stimuli, what consequences or limitations might this have for the acquisition of knowledge?
- How does technology extend, modify, improve or restrict the capabilities of the senses?

Nature of Sense Perception

- What possibilities for knowledge are opened to us by our senses as they are? What limitations?
- Is the nature of sense perception such that, as Huxley suggests sensations are essentially private and incommunicable?
 - “By its very nature every embodied spirit is doomed to suffer and enjoy in solitude, sensations, feelings, insights, fancies—all these are private and except through symbols and at second hand, incommunicable.” Aldous Huxley

Importance and Limitations of Sense Perception

- To what extent do our senses give us knowledge of the world as it really is?
- Does the predominance of visual perception constitute a natural characteristic of our human experience or is it one among several ways of being in the world?

Take time to read the poem—The Blind Men and the Elephant



Importance and Limitations of Sense Perception

- What is the role of culture and language in the perceptual process?
- Given the partially subjective nature of sense perception, how can different knowers ever agree on what is perceived?
- Do people with different cultural or linguistic backgrounds live, in some sense, in different worlds?

Importance and Limitations of Sense Perception

- How, and to what extent, might expectations, assumptions and beliefs affect sense perceptions?
- How, if at all, can factors that bias our views of the world be identified?
- Is all sense perception necessarily theory-laden?
- Do Knowers have a moral duty to examine their own perceptual filters?

Importance and Limitations of Sense Perception

- It is often claimed that information and communication technologies are blurring the traditional distinctions between simulation and reality.
- If this is so, what might be the consequences?

Linking Questions

- To what extent is visual perception in particular a justifiable model not only of all sensory perception but of human understanding as well (In English, “I see” often means “I understand”)?

Linking Questions

- What is the role of sense perception in the various areas of knowledge, for example, history or ethics?
- How does it differ across the disciplines?
- Is it more important in relation to some disciplines than others?
- Is there any knowledge that is completely independent of sense perception?

Linking Questions

- Does sense perception perform fundamentally distinct functions in the arts and the sciences?
- To what extent does the artist make and advantage out of the subjective nature of sense perception, while the scientist regards it as an obstacle to be overcome?

Linking Questions

- What can be meant by the Panchatantra saying, “Knowledge is the true organ of sight, not the eyes”?
- Is it necessary to have clear ideas to see?

Sense Perception and Areas of Knowledge

- What role does observation play in the methods used to pursue knowledge in different disciplines?
- For example, are the conditions, function and results of observation the same for biology and human science?
- If not, what accounts for the differences?

Sense Perception and Areas of Knowledge

- What role does what we expect to see, or are used to seeing, play in what we observe?
- For example, after learning about the structure of cells from a textbook, how “neutral” might the observation of a slide under the microscope be?
- Can we learn how to see things properly?