

Where Are You Thinking?

Written by Vincent J. Shuta Jr.
Saturday, 24 May 2014 12:12 -

Pardon the pun but here's some food for thought. According to Discovery.com, researchers are currently trying to map out the brain in the hopes that eventually memories could be downloaded and uploaded at will:

<http://news.discovery.com/tech/robotics/download-memories-retrieve-later-130603.htm>

Interestingly enough, according to the current research memories disappear when we are not using them. They can't figure out where the memories are actually stored. There's no great surprise in this, as the brain is a wildly complicated device. I have no idea how you would even begin to look at the state of every neuron in the brain at once. This is the bleeding edge between science and science fiction here.

But these finding fit with a theory that I've had for some time. It's just a theory, and I'm likely to be wrong about it. But I think it's an interesting theory.

Let us for a moment imagine we could build a time machine, and use it to bring back a scientist from the days before electricity. You can pick your favorite for this exercise. We would need someone with great reasoning power and the ability to use the scientific method.

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In front of this person, we place a laptop running on battery and connected to the internet via a wireless connection. We then let them surf the internet, and ask them how it works.

As they investigate, they're going to assume all the information is inside the computer. We could show them the internet cache where the temporary files are stored, and they would continue to look for the larger cache where the rest of it is stored.

They would naturally assume it's all in the computer on their desk.

Now we know you can't put the whole internet on your laptop. Perhaps someday we'll have that technology, but its way beyond us right now.

So the computer is just an interface to the internet. The computer tricks us into thinking it has everything right here, because that's the only part of the puzzle most people see. Of course I build websites, so I get to see that other side. I get to interface with GoDaddy's servers and make the magic happen. This makes me wonder, what if the brain is the same way.

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What if the brain doesn't store anything?

What if it's just an interface?

Oh the subroutines that control biological functions might be localized, but what if the brain is for all intents and purposes a connector?

For this model to work of course there must be something with which the brain connects. There has to be something that contains the entirety of your personality and memory, or the model falls apart. There needs to be some "essence of you" which the brain draws upon.

I'm pretty sure everyone knows where I'm going by now. Yes, I'm talking about the often denied but never disproven soul.

Imagine the effects of a scientific breakthrough that determined that the true function of the brain was to join the soul to the body. If true, then transferring memories would involve only

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changing the soul-body interface. If perfected, your soul could be connected to a robot body—either temporarily, in the case of emergency first aid for trauma or major surgery, or permanently to stave off death entirely.

I can't even comprehend what this will mean for the field of psychiatry. How do you approach it? Is it the soul that suffers from the illness, or is the interface damaged?

Even if the brain isn't simply a connection to the soul, science and engineering work wonders with equivalent models. Even if the mind is self contained, approaching the mind from this angle might yield the very goals that scientists are now pursuing.

As a theory, it's outlandish and I don't really expect that it will ever be proven true. But it does explain why memories are only detectable in the brain when they are being used, and disappear otherwise. The model fits the data. Until new data—the discovery of where memories are stored in the brain—is found, my theory is viable.

Coming up with a viable theory—no matter how farfetched—is a lot of fun. I haven't seen it proposed before during my limited search of the internet, so it may or may not be an original idea.

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It did seem good enough for a blog post. And as fodder for fantasy, horror and sci-fi, it's fantastic. Imagine a zombie apocalypse brought on not by disease or chemicals, but by a strange pulse of energy that disconnects people from their souls, leaving the bodies to drift with no direction! Or what about a story of "Soul Hackers" that breach the interface and use people to commit crimes!

Again, it's just food for thought...and where that thought happens is anyone's guess.