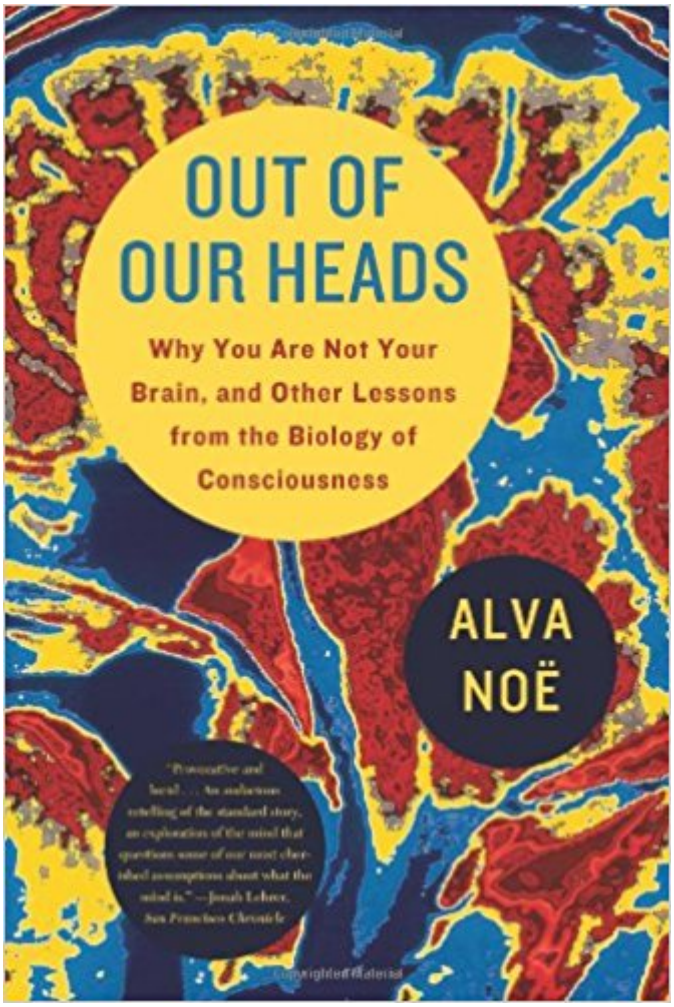
Out Of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, And Other Lessons From The Biology Of Consciousness



Synopsis

Alva NoÃƒÂ« is one of a new breedÃ¢â ¬â ¢part philosopher, part cognitive scientist, part neuroscientistÃ¢â ¬â ¢who are radically altering the study of consciousness by asking difficult questions and pointing out obvious flaws in the current science. In Out of Our Heads, he restates and reexamines the problem of consciousness, and then proposes a startling solution: do away with the two-hundred-year-old paradigm that places consciousness within the confines of the brain.Our culture is obsessed with the brainÃ¢â ¬â ¢how it perceives; how it remembers; how it determines our intelligence, our morality, our likes and our dislikes. It's widely believed that consciousness itself, that Holy Grail of science and philosophy, will soon be given a neural explanation. And yet, after decades of research, only one proposition about how the brain makes us consciousÃ¢â ¬â ¢how it gives rise to sensation, feeling, and subjectivityÃ¢â ¬â ¢has emerged unchallenged: we don't have a clue.In this inventive work, NoÃƒÂ« suggests that rather than being something that happens inside us, consciousness is something we do. Debunking an outmoded philosophy that holds the scientific study of consciousness captive, Out of Our Heads is a fresh attempt at understanding our minds and how we interact with the world around us.

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Customer Reviews

NoÃƒÂ« turns Descartes's famous statement on its head: I am, therefore I think, says NoÃƒÂ«. The author, a philosopher at UC-Berkeley, challenges the assumptions underlying neuroscientific studies of consciousness, rejecting popular mechanistic theories that our experience of the world

stems from the firing of the neurons in our brains. NoÃƒÂ« (Action in Perception) argues that we are not our brains, that consciousness arises from interactions with our surroundings: Consciousness is not something that happens inside us. It is something we do or make. NoÃƒÂ« points out that many of our habits, like language, are foundational aspects of our mental experience, but at the same time many, if not most, habits are environmental in natureÃ¢â ¬â •we behave a particular way in a particular situation. He goes on to challenge popular theories of perception, in particular the claim that the world is just a grand illusion conjured up by the brain. Readers interested in how science can intersect with and profit from philosophy will find much food for thought in NoÃƒÂ«'s groundbreaking study. (Feb. 24) Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The notion that consciousness is confined to the brain, like software in a computer, has dominated science and philosophy for close to two centuries. Yet, according to this incisive review of contemporary neuroscience from Berkeley philosopher NÃƒÂ¶e, the analogy is deeply flawed. In eight illuminating, mercifully jargon-free chapters, he defines what scientists really know about consciousness and makes a strong case that mind and awareness are processes that arise during a dynamic dance with the observerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s surroundings. NÃƒÂ¶e begins with a sharp critique of scientists, such as DNA co-discoverer Francis Crick, who insist that nothing but neurons determines our daily perceptions and sense of self. He then examines studies of human and animal behavior that demonstrate an inextricable link between identity and environment. NÃƒÂ¶e regrettably limits his treatise by ignoring considerable research from transpersonal psychology suggesting that consciousness transcends physicality altogether. Still, the resulting book is an invaluable contribution to cognitive science and the branch of self-reflective philosophy extending back to DescartesÃ¢â ¬â„¢ famous maxim, Ã¢â ¬Å"I think, therefore I am.Ã¢â ¬Â• --Carl Hays --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Written by brilliant Berkley researcher addressing a basic, the last of Decorates Error in separating cognition from our bodies. Providing evidence of the brain isn't our thinking alone, deeper issues of acton perception, with what we see as bidirectional, basic consciousness is presented in scientific form without loosing his The charming, warm, and caring attitude.Alva Noe has been mentored by some finest intellects, & deals with scientific realities, still unrealized my most researchers. Despite its 2005 first publication, its been released at least twice, latest 2010. A book for all thinking people to bettered understand the mind-Body meld.

Noe provides a very cogent explanation as to why your brain is only part of the story when it comes to consciousness. The world that we interact with, and our embodied, embedded engagement with it, are equally necessary in terms of consciousness. Take any one of these factors away and the system fails. The brain's role is not diminished, but body and world are elevated, as their roles have been grossly neglected or underplayed/undervalued in the traditional discourses of mind and consciousness. Each are fundamental to human development.

This is a very intriguing book. The idea that consciousness, while crucially depending on the brain, is neither equal to the brain nor strictly located there, is really useful. Noe says our mind is our whole self in all its action in the world. He raises a lot of issues with mainstream theory.

Full of good ideas! This material, though published in 2009 is just now beginning to capture the wide attention it deserves. The concept of consciousness being rooted not in our brains but in our relationship with the world will have profound affects on the unfolding of the future!

NoÃƒÆ'Ã Â« sets out with great energy to convince us that, "Consciousness is not something that happens inside us. It is something we do or make," in fact, something we do actively in our dynamic interaction with the world around us. It is this fact that explains why it has proven so difficult to create an explanation of the neural basis of consciousness. In this he works on dismantling the view that is it the brain that produces images of our environment - the brain being the sole author of what is commonly thought a "grand illusion." We are treated to interesting, sometimes great discussions of the actual conclusions we can draw from PET scan and fMRI technology, remarkable studies on vision, e.g., seeing ferrets with eyes wired to the brain's hearing areas, Bach-y-Rita's sensory substitution approach to getting the blind to see, NoÃƒÆ'Ã Â«'s (and O'Regan's) own thoughts on the critical role of action in vision. There is a bold and rare take down or at least re-evaluation of the otherwise worshiped importance of Hubel and Wiesel's findings on various cell classes oriented to different "features" of the world - a foundation of the idea that the brain is constructing the world from elementary features. Add to this a great reval of the notion of special (FFA) cells for recognizing faces, a thought provoking set of considerations on the critical role of habit in learning, skill and thought, and a nice trashing of the concept that the brain is simply creating a virtual reality. All told, this is a very worthwhile read. Its prime weakness is yet in its main thesis. The character of our experience (visual, or auditory, or kinaesthetic...) it is argued (and strongly so), is not a function

of the intrinsic character of the sensory stimulation (i.e., of the specific kinds of neurons stimulated) but in the way stimulation varies as a function of movement in relation to the environment. As I move around the table, the table transforms (in perspective) in a lawful way - the way an object in vision (not hearing) should. Implication 1: Connect up your neural net such that it responds lawfully to these transforms - you have vision of the external world. Note that in this conception there is nothing happening in the brain, obviously, that looks like the external world - the kitchen table, the coffee cup, the spoon stirring. Implication 2: We just need to be in relation to this external world, and miraculously, we get an image of it. One sees pretty much the same theme in expositors of Gibson (with whom NoÃƒÆ'Ã Â« is aligned), e.g., Barret (Beyond the Brain: How Body and Environment Shape Animal and Human Minds), Chemero (Radical Embodied Cognitive Science). The first question which begs to be asked: why is this not a specification for a seeing robot? I doubt there is an answer against this. The fact is, the thesis cries for some mechanism, some physical principle which explains this: why, given this action relationship to the environment, is there now an image of the external world? To make this problem concretely clear quickly, I'm just going straight to this: Embed NoÃƒÆ'Ã Â« (and Gibson for that matter) in Bergson. Bergson (Matter and Memory, 1896) presciently saw the universal field as a holographic field and the brain as effectively being a modulated reconstructive wave passing through (or resonating within) this field, and thus "specific to" a subset of the field, now, by this selective specification, an "image" of a (past) portion of the ever transforming field. This image is at a scale of time imposed by the brain's underlying dynamics - the fly in NoÃƒÆ'Ã Â«'s "environment" could be the "buzzing" being of normal scale, a being flapping its wings like a heron, or a crystalline ensemble of whirling particles. The selection principle for a subset out of the mass of holographic information is the relevance to the body's action, and to Bergson - deeply reflective of NoÃƒÆ'Ã Â«'s relation to action or Gibson's affordance concept - perception is "virtual action." In this holographic reconstructive wave model, where within the brain there are indeed no representations of the external world and no image being produced by or in the brain, we now have a concrete mechanism for explaining the origin of the image of the environment - not a mere abstraction about an "action relationship with the environment." NoÃƒÆ'Ã Â«'s notion of the proper relation of the external world to action (or Gibson's notion of the body/brain being directly "specific to" the environment) can only gain its needed coherence within some such framework. To make Bergson's model coherent, one needs at least this: a model of time and motion different from that of the current, classic metaphysic of space and time, a different concept of the relation of mind to time, a different notion of memory (where experience is not stored in the brain), consideration of possible scales of time in perception - subjects to which NoÃƒÆ'Ã Â« gives

virtually no consideration. With these, we would indeed understand why NoÃƒÆ'Ã Â«'s specification per se could not produce a seeing robot. So, all in all, a great book, but this "active relationship with the world" conception, of which NoÃƒÆ'Ã Â« is one of several proponents, struggles with these crying-to-be-answered gaps. It could be so much more powerful would these theorists pay attention to a thinker who was way ahead of them in 1896.

An eye opening description of how our brain perceives the world.

great read

Very good assessment of the hype surrounding PET and fMRI "findings". Provocative and thoughtful examination of consciousness. Whether or not you agree with Noe, you will learn something.

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