

Hypothesis/Speculation

Extended Being

By

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In 1997 a paper by Drs. Andy Clark and David J. Chambers appeared in the journal *Analysis* 58:10-23, 1998 titled "[The Extended Mind](#)". In this seminal work a cogent argument was advanced for a species of active externalism in which objects in the environment outside a person's head function as a part of the mind. Among the numerous examples offered by the authors is this one:

"By embracing an active externalism, we allow a more natural explanation of all sorts of actions. One can explain my choice of words in Scrabble, for example, as the outcome of an extended cognitive process involving the rearrangement of tiles on my tray. Of course, one could always try to explain my action in terms of internal processes and a long series of "inputs" and "actions", but this explanation would be needlessly complex. If an isomorphic process were going on in the head, we would feel no urge to characterize it in this cumbersome way.[*] In a very real sense, the re-arrangement of tiles on the tray is not part of action; it is part of *thought*."

There is an adaptive biological cost-savings to finding or creating ways to complete cognitive tasks extra-cranially. As University of Miami Professor of Philosophy Dr. Mark Rowlands put it in "The New Science of Mind":

"Roughly, we get the environment to do some of the work for us; and this reduces the work that we need to do" (page 16)

And

"We get the world to do some of the work for us, and we do this by acting on the world – manipulating and exploiting structures that contain useful information and thereby making this information available to us" (page 17).

Extended Being

Distinctly human consciousness and its attendant cognitive and reasoning processes and modules appear to be the tip of an iceberg; that is, they emerged from and are tied into antecedent paleocircuits and affective neurocircuitry. This ancient wiring conferred survival advantages on our primate and hominin ancestors insofar as mood and emotion facilitated the kind of quick responses needed to escape and outwit predators and highly competitive, even

unfriendly conspecifics. It was also the crucible that favored and shaped both animal and human socialization trends (which is now widely believed to underlie distinctly human brains and the technologies and cultures they have spawned).

Naturally, the development of tools and the recording and transmission of messages and information in the form of marks and images on stone, wood or bone plus knots made in rope that were linked to real world objects, events and such, coupled with other “memory aids” and ways of off-loading information for later retrieval and manipulation, extended human memory and cognition to the environment. The extended mind.

However, because human cognitive processes and consciousness are firmly rooted in more ancient neurocircuitry and both emerge from and are shaped and informed by these mostly mood & emotion generating modules, it follows that the “extended mind” thesis does not go far enough. We are not just offloading mental tasks but our emotions, perceptions, elements of our personalities and more into the brains of others.

Some of this takes the form of projection, anthropomorphizing objects and discerning patterns (messages) that aid us to survive and flourish, but this is not the end of it. We also verbally and nonverbally communicate or transferring part of our affective selves and personality into others and internalize some of theirs (This is accomplished, in part, by bodily gestures, facial signals and any physical contact and happens between people and between humans and animals they in some way forge bonds with). This connectedness takes place whether done face-to-face physically or via 2 or more way phone or video link-ups or even in particular instances in the absence of visually seeing a person while he is speaking (as well as absent tactile real-time transference). This exchange is more than mere sharing and the eliciting of emotional responses or the generation of feelings. It actually creates a *dynamic circuit* between two people that is to varying degrees internalized with expression at the conscious and (I propose) especially pre/unconscious levels. This, in turn, influences and even partners with thoughts, dreams, daydreams and other neuro-processes. The other person becomes part of us and accompanies and influences us. This shared circuit and its internal components (both in the brain and perhaps the enteric nervous system) can complement, enhance, augment and even complete our sense of personal wholeness and wellness, or conversely complicate, compromise or even undo this.

This extension of the “we” in our heads to the “we” that is us (Self and another) plus others is our extended being. We are both fulfilled and completed in some ways by it.

Extended Being

Our brain, like that of our fellow animals, was shaped in the crucible of nature meaning that traits, faculties, adaptive mechanisms and such that favored survival and conferred an advantage in terms of producing viable offspring were selected for.

The complement of survival and coping skills and patterns in-a-way constitutes biological algorithms or mechanisms, some innate or instinctive and some learned and some a

combination of both. These adaptive short-cuts enhance action (especially in the face of real or perceived threats) and thus survival and by virtue of this comprise a biological set of logic gates or pathways, e.g., if this is a tiger and close enough to pose a threat then run, if this gesture is friendly approach or if unfriendly move away, etc.

These neuro-mechanisms (modular and nonmodular algorithms) are animated or fueled as well as conditioned, in part, by affect (Mood and emotions). The enhanced speed of action-reaction that emotions facilitate and augment or enhance such as fight-or-flight would tend to confer survival advantages on those animals that possess them (including humans) and thus would be selected for. Their contribution to human evolutionary and cultural success is such that anything that substantially diminishes or compromises the affective dimension in our species would likely result in profound individual and collective costs. Indeed, if one extinguished the affective dimension of the affective-cognitive (or affective-logic) wiring in humankind we would likely be reduced to the biological equivalent of poorly functioning computers.

Ultimately, our affective-cognitive brain both gives rise to and informs that which we identify as consciousness or being conscious, as well as the preconscious (as in below immediate awareness)-unconscious. And it is the continuous dialog twixt the conscious and preconscious-unconscious and our bodies that gives rise to and influences that which each of us uniquely associates with “I” as opposed to “not I” or other.

The evolution of affective neuro-wiring is, I contend, actually central to not only our being but also to the creation and maintenance of our extended being.

Being or the [Dasein](#) emerges from and is dependent on brain activity associated with consciousness with many aspects of decision-making, judgment, and what is identified with “free will” going on in the pre/unconscious (with the conscious being largely oblivious to the operation and activity of the latter). It is the many who craft that which we perceive as the singular or unitary “I”.

Extended being involves the creation of dynamic, largely affective neuro-subroutines that are, in effect, a form of dynamic connectedness or connective circuit between individuals; circuits that incorporate the other, their image (sighted people), mannerisms, attitudes and other significant aspects of their person and conduct; circuits that are fed by as well as facilitate and enhance certain aspects of socialization, behavior and self-awareness as well as distinctly human consciousness; circuits that predominately operate in our pre/unconscious and influence judgments and choices and etc. made there, as well as conscious thought flow and content, mood, and actions. *But circuits, too, that mean that part of our being is operating external to our bodies* (It is not that this circuit exists in the sense it can be detected and measured outside us but, rather, that our emergent sense of being, the “we” that us, includes the other and experiences him or her as both an internal reality and an external, connected one. This circuit is reinforced and additional content added while in the other’s presence and may be diminished during their absence, but is unlikely to be extinguished entirely even when the emotionally meaningful other ceases to be a part of our life for whatever reason).

Most of us experience profound glimpses of these circuits at work during sleep, e.g., dream content in which we commune with or otherwise share ideas, information, emotion-laden content, etc. with individual with whom a connective-dynamic circuit (and by virtue of this extended being) has been established (These circuits are distinguished from fleeting dream or memory consolidation content in that a significant affective bond or tie has been established that operates beneath consciousness and takes on a “life of its own”). They also appear to emerge from the pre/unconscious during instances in which higher executive brain functions are disrupted or altered such as occurs with use of certain drugs including certain [hallucinogens](#) and [etheogens](#), alcohol intoxication, exposure to certain extracranial ELF magnetic fields, extreme stress or trauma, NDEs (Near Death Experiences), and (I am inclined to believe) during religious ecstasy and [glossolalia](#) episodes that are documented among certain religious believers including those identified as mystics, hyper-religious and such.

As these circuits run in the background as-it-were, they would be expected to intrude into conscious thought in the form (among other things) of what have historically been identified as paranormal happenings or events. Example: A woman, Karen, has a dynamic circuit with her mother that lives out various likely real life scenarios or routines in this lady’s pre/unconscious. On a particular day a scenario plays out of an accident and the dynamic (mother) circuit sends a distress call to her daughter that emerges from Karen’s pre/unconscious in the form of a “premonition” that something dire has happened to her mother. Most such convictions are dismissed as they crop up but occasionally gel with real life (coincidental) events. This lends them powerful emotional impact and to some constitutes “proof” that something paranormal or supernatural has transpired.

Extended being via circuit creation & operation

By their very nature – running intermittently or even continuously in the pre/unconscious with varying influence on sleep and conscious content and activity -- the connective-dynamic circuits would likely be forged with people who have particular emotional significance or impact. Some might argue that human-animal circuit can be established and this may be so, though the circuit operating in the human would be unlikely to generate a dialog that influences beliefs, convictions and such. Interestingly, it is conceivable that some might establish or forge a circuit with an interactive virtual human, alien or such (Just as the human sex drive can be hijacked by pornography so can the connective-dynamic circuitry formation & maintenance be hijacked by a relationship with an image whose underlying software closely mimics human intelligence, emotions, thought patterns and choice-making).

As the formation of a connective-dynamic circuit is predicated on emotional significance or impact, it logically follows that the most personally meaningful and satisfying will be those forged with person with whom one enjoys some form of bond with and empathic ties to. It is anticipated that circuits crafted by those with certain attachment disorders or sociopathy would be affected by these, which would be expected to restrict or diminish the content or quality of their extended being.

The optimal form of extended being via connective-dynamic circuits is an active one; that is one informed by shared presence & communication (give-and-take) between the individuals involved (That which is offloaded to/assimilated by another is returned to us in the form of words, gestures and perceived feelings). When an individual loses contact with an individual who is part of a circuit and thus their extended being, the circuit continues to operate though it is internalized and fed by imagination-fantasy and memory. To the affective pre/unconscious the person who was once an interactive part of the circuit still is part of one's extended being as elements of the model or representation that run beneath consciousness continues to do so and exert an influence on conscious content and activities and (when sufficiently affectively valenced/strong enough) even certain aspects of personality and conduct. There may be a perception, too, of the extended other as a "psychically connected" external reality (A sense of being in contact with the other in a way that transcends time, space and distance. And though there is nothing mystical afoot as this is an expression of the dynamic circuit at work in the brain, it partially anchors reality, in part, outside oneself).

Importance-Endurance

As the connective-dynamic circuits that comprise extended being is crafted in the crucible of human relationships and socialization, and these are deemed to have played integral roles in both biological and sociocultural evolution of our species, it follows that they play a vital role in individual development, maturation, integration into society, emotional and physio-psychological well being and wholeness, and thus general life satisfaction and even success at all stages.

Conversely, anything that thwarts or pathologically diminishes the formation or maintenance of these circuits would tend to produce corresponding mental, emotional and other problems and issues.

It seems logical, too, that the circuits most resistant to decay, degradation or significant compromise are those forged with individuals with whom one enjoys a strong emotional connection or bond. However, as many of us know from firsthand experience, some of the most powerful and enduring affective influences – circuits that run and crop up in dreams and "slips of tongue" – involve people who are no longer part of our lives for whatever reason but whose impact is sufficient to sustain these circuits across a lifetime. They are part of us – of the "we" that is "I" – of our extended being.

In addition, it is anticipated that these circuits would not necessarily be born only on the heels of romantic and/or highly sexual interest or desire, whether shared/mutual or unilateral ("unrequited love"), but can also arise in instances of platonic friendship or even transcendent love (A species of very powerful, unconditional love that wants what is best for the other but neither asks nor seeks anything from the other. Christian theologians, writers and others refer to this as agape or God's kind of love – see [1 Corinthians, chapter 13](#) which embodies much of what is identified as "agape love". It is also reflected and embodied in Judaism's [Shema](#) which is also part of the Christian faith tradition).

And, if these circuits and the extended being they facilitate are significant or even vital players in the psychological, emotional and physical wholeness and wellness of all of us, it follows that those individuals whose extended being is largely comprised of dynamic circuits with dysfunctional, abusive or otherwise negatively impactful people will have lives that reflect this. They will likely experience more anxiety, depression, and recourse to escapist (compulsive-addictive) behaviors and pursuits than would have been the case had their extended being been with healthy, adjusted souls whose life and career patterns are conducive to success (wholeness & wellness & etc.)

As these dynamic circuits likely resist extinction and would actually be animated by conscious attempts to do so, the best approach to overcoming a pre/unconscious populated by these would be sever ties with the individuals who helped form these circuits, avoid environmental triggers and reminders of them or the things they exemplified, did or advocated (especially life eroding aspects), and essentially forge new ones with people whose behavior, values, ideals, goals, personality patterns and such encourage that which builds up, nourishes and sustains as opposed to that which erodes, undermines or even destroys.

Supplemental Reading:

<http://affect-logic.com/5.html>

[The Self Illusion: How the Social Brain Creates Identity](#) by Bruce Hood, Ph.D.

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