How To Create A Mind: The Secret Of Human Thought Revealed

RAY KURZWEIL

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Synopsis

Ray Kurzweil, the bold futurist and author of the New York Times bestseller The Singularity Is Near, is arguably today's most influential technological visionary. A pioneering inventor and theorist, he has explored for decades how artificial intelligence can enrich and expand human capabilities. Now, in his much-anticipated How to Create a Mind, he takes this exploration to the next step: reverse-engineering the brain to understand precisely how it works, then applying that knowledge to create vastly intelligent machines. Drawing on the most recent neuroscience research, his own research and inventions in artificial intelligence, and compelling thought experiments, he describes his new theory of how the neocortex (the thinking part of the brain) works: as a self-organizing hierarchical system of pattern recognizers. Kurzweil shows how these insights will enable us to greatly extend the powers of our own mind and provides a road map for the creation of super-intelligence - humankind's most exciting next venture. We are now at the dawn of an era of radical possibilities in which merging with our technology will enable us to effectively address the world's grand challenges. How to Create a Mind is certain to be one of the most widely discussed and debated science books in many years - a touchstone for any consideration of the path of human progress.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition
Listening Length: 10 hours and 11 minutes
Program Type: Audiobook
Version: Unabridged
Publisher: Brilliance Audio
Audible.com Release Date: December 14, 2012
Whispersync for Voice: Ready
Language: English
ASIN: B009VSFXZ4


Customer Reviews

How to Create a Mind: The Secret of Human Thought Revealed by Ray Kurzweil "How to Create a Mind" is a very interesting book that presents the pattern recognition theory of mind (PRTM), which
describes the basic algorithm of the neocortex (the region of the brain responsible for perception, memory, and critical thinking). It is the author's contention that the brain can be reverse engineered due to the power of its simplicity and such knowledge would allow us to create true artificial intelligence. The one and only, futurist, prize-winning scientist and author Ray Kurzweil takes the reader on a journey of the brain and the future of artificial intelligence. This enlightening 352-page book is composed of the following eleven chapters: 1. Thought Experiments on the World, 2. Thought Experiments on Thinking, 3. A Model of the Neocortex: The Pattern Recognition Theory of Mind, 4. The Biological Neocortex, 5. The Old Brain, 6. Transcendent Abilities, 7. The Biologically Inspired Digital Neocortex, 8. The Mind as Computer, 9. Thought Experiments on the Mind, 10. The Law of Accelerating Returns Applied to the Brain, and 11. Objections.

Positives:
1. Well researched and well-written book. The author's uncanny ability to make very difficult subjects accessible to the masses.
2. A great topic in the "mind" of a great thinker.
3. Great use of charts and diagrams.
4. A wonderful job of describing how thinking works.
5. Thought-provoking questions and answers based on a combination of sound science and educated speculation.
6. The art of recreating brain processes in machines. "There is more parallel between brains and computers than may be apparent." Great stuff!
7. Great information on how memories truly work.
8. Hierarchies of units of functionality in natural systems.
10. Evolution...It does a brain good. Legos will never be the same for me again.
11. The neocortex as a great metaphor machine. Projects underway to simulate the human brain such as Markram's Blue Brain Project.
12. Speech recognition and Markov models. Author provides a lot of excellent examples.
13. The four key concepts of the universality and feasibility of computation and its applicability to our thinking.
14. A fascinating look at split-brain patients. The "society of mind." The concept of free will, "We are apparently very eager to explain and rationalize our actions, even when we didn't actually make the decisions that led to them." Profound with many implications indeed.
15. The issue of identity.
16. The brain's ability to predict the future. The author's own predictive track record referenced.
17. The laws of accelerating returns (LOAR), where it applies and why we should train ourselves to think exponentially.
18. The author provides and analyzes objections to his thesis. In defense of his ideas. Going after Allen's "scientist's pessimism."
19. The evolution of our knowledge.
20. Great notes and links beautifully.

Negatives:
1. The book is uneven. That is, some chapters cover certain topics with depth while others suffer from lack of depth. Some of it is understandable as it relates to the limitations of what we currently know but I feel that the book could have been reformatted into smaller chapters or subchapters. The book bogs down a little in
Like a news commentator explaining a bad day on Wall Street, the cortex has an explanation for everything—it generates our subjective universe. To paraphrase George Box, all our brain’s models of the world are wrong, but some are useful, generative, and simple (but not too simple). In How to Create a Mind acclaimed inventor Ray Kurzweil puts forth a model of how the brain works: the pattern recognition theory of mind (PRTM). The brain successively interiorizes the world as a set of patterns. Kurzweil’s framework uses hierarchical hidden Markov models (HHMMs) as its main stock in trade. HHMMs add to the PRTM model the notion that those patterns are arranged into a hierarchy of nodes, where each node is an ordered sequence of probabilistically matched lower nodes. So, the key question for me is this: are HHMMs really the key to understanding and building a mind? Ray has been on this track since the sixties, when he and I were classmates at MIT. In a spectacular career spanning decades, Ray invented systems for OmniPage OCR, text to speech (famously for Stevie Wonder), and automated speech recognition as in Dragon Naturally...
Speaking. Nuance bought Ray’s precursor company. All automatic speech recognition nowadays is done using HHMMs, and the results are astounding. For example, see Microsoft Research Chief Rick Rashid’s YouTube “Speech Recognition Breakthrough.” A computer transcription of Rick’s talk appears in real time and is quite accurate. The amazing success of HHMMs in handling speech and language is a story that needs to be understood by AI aficionados, and Kurzweil presents this topic in a beautifully comprehensible exposition. Kurzweil elaborates a story here that 1) the cortex is the key to thought; 2) it is hierarchically organized into 300 million pattern recognizers; 3) each pattern recognizer consists of a 100 neurons in a vertical minicolumn, and 4) those pattern recognizers communicate with one another via a Manhattan-like grid (similar to an FPGA) - end of story for the neocortex. This is a story similar to the one told by entrepreneur Jeff Hawkins in On Intelligence, and one that Hawkins, his former associate Dileep George (now at Vicarious), and Kurzweil himself are trying to capitalize on in cortex-engineering startups. I eagerly follow their results. So, HHMMs work well and are a required part of a computational neuroscience curriculum, but ARE THEY THE MASTER KEY that will unlock the doors not only to a full understanding of the mind but also to a future of superintelligent AIs? How to Create a Mind is a good story but IS IT FICTION or nonfiction? While HHMMs are required reading for automatic speech recognition, they DO NOT DO all the brain’s heavy-lifting. Rather, the brain employs MANY mechanisms (which robots that aspire to humanity may need to incorporate or emulate.) Five stars for HHMM exposition. Subtract one star for giving short shrift to the following pivotal neuroscience principles: 1) attentional mechanisms, 2) brain-wide dynamical networks, 3) gamma oscillations and inhibitory networks and also 5) the role of insula and brain stem in emotion, 6) reward based learning including the essential role of basal ganglia and midbrain, and 7) hippocampus and memory. Despite its corticocentric focus, Kurzweil’s impressive engineering successes make this an important story; furthermore, it is engagingly told. I cover neuroscience and AI at bobblum.com. Below are two recent ‘DO NOT MISS’ FIVE STAR stories.) Addendum: 30 Nov 2012 - Today’s issue of SCIENCE (and Ray K’s newsletter) features a story about a new 2.5M spiking neuron model (SPAUN) that performs 8 tasks and outputs to a physically modeled arm. See the videos at NENGO > Videos > Collection of Spaun. That is the state of the art! Addendum: Jan 2013: Want to know where the brain stores meaning? (YOU DO!) See Alex Huth’s 5 min YouTube from Jack Gallant’s lab. Search: Alex Huth, gallantlab.ucb “Perceptual Object and Action Maps in the Human Brain.”

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