

Who am I?

No, don't call for the white coats just yet. I am not particularly confused about my identity. However, on reading some current neuroscience, I may be excused for wondering a bit. I inevitably see myself as a **person**, as a very complex, but still fundamentally unitary being, as a main, if not exclusive, **cause** of my thoughts and actions, and as (more or less consciously) **choosing**. This immediate experience of choice is, of course, at the core of the old metaphysical idea of "free will". But neuroscience seems to paint a picture of me as a teeming society of neurons, busily communicating among themselves along constantly changing pathways, and their collective patterns of activities are the real causes of my "choices", which are "mine" only in the sense of resulting from neural activity in "my" brain. This picture seems to be underpinned by experimental evidence to the effect that the cascade of neural events directly leading to some simple motor act (like pressing a button) starts a fraction of a second before the subjectively reported decision to perform this act. In my talk at the CauBio workshop in 2011, I explored some possible ramifications of this evidence, and its possible future extension and solidification. In this talk, I want to more or less continue where I left off last time (though there will be some overlap, naturally), and further investigate what modern neuroscience really tells us, which is more than fascinating enough without the philosophical short-circuiting of some of its practitioners (and philosophers). Also, I will try to place this within a broader scientific and human context. Some possible keywords (I cannot guarantee I will mention them all) are:

relationships between brain, mind, and "I",
consciousness and self-consciousness,
will, choice, and their "causality",
first, third, and second person perspectives,
evolution (biological and cultural),
self-reference and its paradoxes,
entropy, information, and meaning (which I touched upon in my CauPhy talk last fall),
self-organization,
artificial intelligence,
empirical and transcendental apperception,
antinomies and paralogisms,
ethics and law,
and, just possibly, love (now, there I got your attention...).

Wow, if I really say something even remotely sensible on all those issues within half an hour, I think I do deserve the mandatory applause...