



Connectionism and the Mind

William Bechtel, Adele Abrahamsen

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The newest cognitive models are inspired by the properties of the brain itself. Various referred to as "connectionist", "parallel distributed processing" or "neural-network" models, they explore the idea that complex intellectual operations can be carried out by large networks of simple, neuron-like units. The units themselves are identical, very low-level, and "stupid" - intelligent performance is derived from the pattern of connection strengths between units, and the fundamental cognitive activity is pattern recognition and completion. In contrast, in traditional models knowledge is represented symbolically, and the basic cognitive activity is the manipulation of symbols in accord with rules. "Connectionism and the Mind" provides an introduction to this newly emerging approach to understanding the mind, and includes exposition of several of the actual simulations that connectionists have developed. In addition, this book addresses the implications of connectionism for theories of the mind, both philosophical and psychological. Finally, "Connectionism and the Mind" examines the relation of connectionist models to philosophical accounts of propositional attitudes, and to a variety of other inquiries in cognitive psychology, linguistics, developmental psychology, artificial intelligence and neuroscience.

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