

Herding Cats



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Imagine your brain as a vast range of convoluted cortical hills stretching into the distance before you, upon which a multitude of intelligent cats wander aimlessly, thinking their individual feline thoughts, each seeking some higher purpose. Note the random patterns in which the cats freely roam. The hills represent your ideas, your desires and your intentions. The activity of the cats on each of these hills is your brain, thinking about those things.

As you survey your cognitive terrain from the high vantage point of your prefrontal cortex, you cast the bright spotlight of your attention on one thematic hill after another, according to your evolving interest and intention. The cats are attracted to the spotlight and their aimless wanderings are drawn into patterns that are increasingly focused on the objects of your attention. They continue to think about those things on your behalf, for a while, even after you have turned your attention elsewhere, drifted into a dream, turned on the television or fallen asleep. Your brain continues to expend metabolic energy at about the same rate around the clock, regardless of what you think you are doing, and all of those neurons are thinking about *something* with that energy.

If you are thinking systematically, and if you reanimate each thematic cat hill periodically with provocative new thoughts and your attention, I think you can maintain about 5 parallel thought processes (plus or minus 2) around the clock without any particular stress or strain. Few people habitually think this way, although I recommend it for you in your particular situation. This description is not entirely fanciful. Neurons fire in groups and that is how you think. Trust me. Call me.

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