

My Modivation

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A series of personal events drew my attention to the mind, something that at first glance seemed out of scope for someone headed down the computer science route. I quickly found that nothing could be further from the truth. The two are deeply interconnected, and never more so than now, when people are exploiting the biology of the mind to turn distress into profit, a problem society has only just begun to grapple with. After taking Modeling Human Behavior, a class with Paul Schrater, now my mentor and collaborator at the University of Minnesota, I threw myself fully into computational neuroscience and started reading everything I can get my hands on. The field can sound boring until you remember what it actually gets used for. In its more nefarious form, computational neuroscience crafts the algorithms, interfaces, and systems that exploit every manner of our mind as efficiently as possible. This is what's collectively known as the race to the brainstem, the hunt for the most effective way to hijack our most basic instincts. I intend to be on the other side of that race. The work this field does feels ridiculously important to me: stopping exploitation, and building toward a society where technology helps us instead of preying on us. But it isn't only about defense. The questions that really hold me are bigger than that. What is intelligence? What makes us human? How do we learn, and how can technology complement us rather than hijack us? How do we model the world, and how do we come to understand one another? And what are the ways we can model the mind when it goes wrong? These are the questions I find deeply fascinating, and the ones I hope to pursue as I gear up for a PhD.