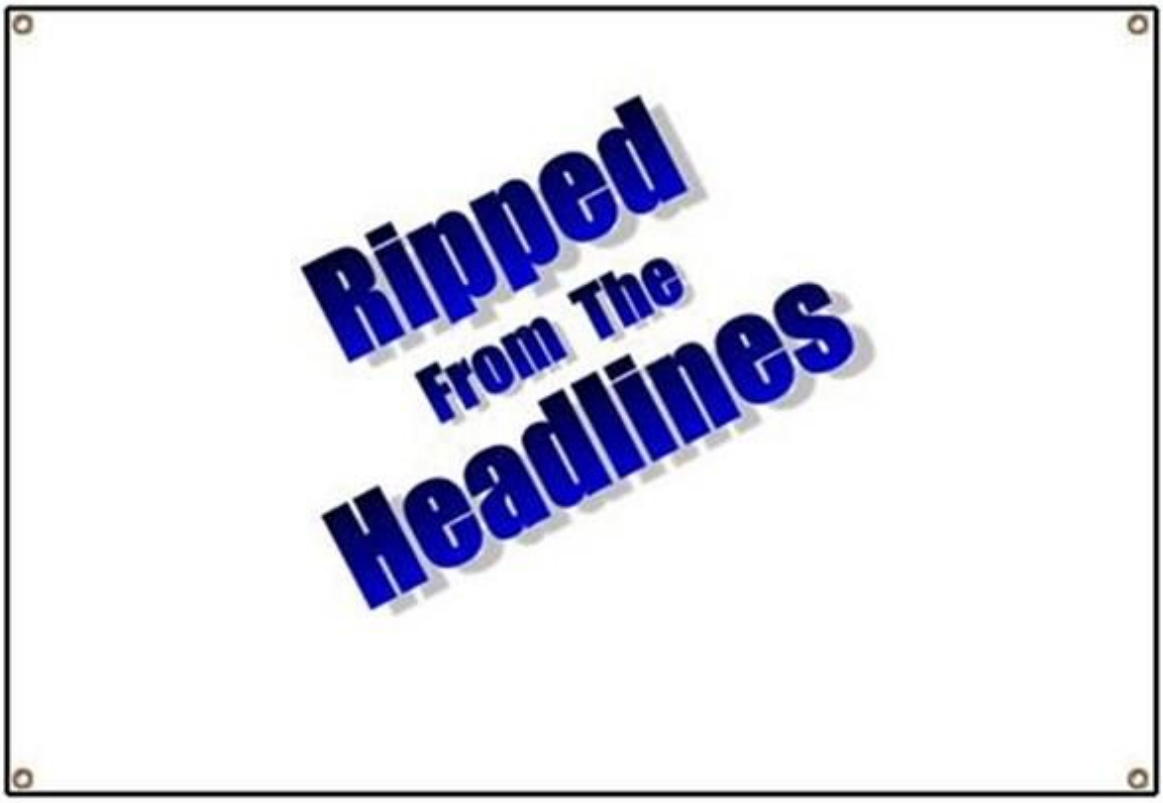
Philosophy Ripped From The Headlines!



Issue #10, June 2018
Compiled & Edited by *Philosophy Without Borders*

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By Stephen Mumford

IAI News, 30 APRIL 2018

URL = https://iainews.iai.tv/articles/can-our-jobs-make-us-happy-auid-1073

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Bertrand Russell famously argued in defence of idleness, depicting work as a necessary evil. It had no intrinsic value. Instead, we should look at what we produce for its own sake: literature, art and philosophy. The value of these achievements is revealed in their very uselessness and it is only when we have adequate leisure that we can turn to their creation (Russell, *In Praise of Idleness*, 1935).

But Russell’s view can be resisted. There is value, too, in what Russell dismissed as mere useful work. Russell’s argument reveals an aristocratic view of what counts as work and unreasonably relegates the value of certain forms of human activity to worthlessness.

Work is a necessity, Russell argues, only because nature is unkind to us, failing to provide easily all that we need in order to survive, bringing the occasional famine too. Even so, it is still up to

us what social arrangements are put in place to ensure such work as is necessary is properly conducted and rationally apportioned.

Here, we have failed to deliver a happy solution. Most people are doing far more work than they fairly should have to, while at the same time, and not merely by coincidence, we support a leisured aristocracy. Furthermore, some are worked near to death while others are unemployed and starving. If instead we all worked just four hours a day, not only would there be work for everyone but there would also be equal leisure time in which we all could contribute to human knowledge and culture, enhancing the development of civilisation. It is this that Russell really values. Thus far, everything that we call civilisation has had to come from those fortunate leisured few. Imagine, though, how much the sciences, arts and humanities would develop if everyone had the free time to fulfil their potential in that respect.

"If we all worked just four hours a day, not only would there be work for everyone but there would also be equal leisure time in which we all could contribute to human knowledge and culture, enhancing the development of civilisation."

Was Russell right, however, to claim that all work is bad? Doesn't that depict us all as fools or victims for doing it, especially when we perform work willingly?

To answer this, we need to understand what Russell took work to be. Fortunately, he offered us a clear definition. 'Work is of two kinds', said Russell, 'first, altering the position of matter at or near the earth's surface relatively to other such matter; second, telling other people to do so. The first kind is unpleasant and ill paid; the second is pleasant and highly paid.' Specifically, he did not take novelists, historians or physicists to be engaged in work. Theirs were activities of a higher order. They were advancing civilisation, not merely conducting the necessary evil.

We can challenge Russell's division from two directions. First, is one really not engaged in work when one is contributing to civilisation? Try telling that to the beleaguered academic scientist or philosopher, or a writer who slaves for a meagre royalty, and see what a reply you will receive.

Second, is what Russell calls work really devoid of intrinsic value?

On the first point, I will dwell little further except to wonder whether Russell separates from work the very indulgencies that he and his class had the good fortune to monopolise. Notwithstanding this speculation, though, I have little doubt that Russell worked, and worked hard, producing his popular books and journalism, conducting arduous lectures tours, even more rapidly when he had children and numerous alimonies to support.

"Who is to say that feeling useful is not a deep human need, reflecting a nature of activity and dynamism? All the more tragic, then, if we have an economic system that makes us resent exercising those abilities in the interest of capital."

The second point raises more interesting metaphysical questions. Initially, Russell's view seems correct. Workers typically have little interest in what they do and are willing to execute their tasks only in exchange for pay. People want a job so that they can feed, clothe and house

themselves and their families but would gladly forego those labours were such needs not an issue - for instance, if they won the lottery. Yet it also seems possible to explain away such depressing facts as a contingency of current economic arrangements. We are alienated from the product of our labour, as Marxists would say. We have neither ownership nor interest in the goods we produce in return for wages.

Such unjust circumstances might well hide a deeper truth concerning the place of work in our lives. This truth reveals that there is a natural pleasure and satisfaction to be gained from exercising our mental and physical capacities. We enjoy doing things. This drive may well be exhibited most acutely in 'useless' activities, such as the arts, sport and play. Nevertheless, there can still be such pleasure in the exercise of abilities that are also useful. Consider, for example, crafts such as basket making and pottery. These hobbies are satisfying not just because they produce something that can be used – although that might well be a precondition of such activities being pleasurable – but they are satisfying also in their execution. To have learnt a skill, acquiring physical and mental powers, and then manifesting such a skill expertly, makes us feel capable: in control of our immediate environment and not at its mercy. What we do might be useful – yes – but who is to say that feeling useful is not a deep human need, reflecting a nature of activity and dynamism? All the more tragic, then, if we have an economic system that makes us resent exercising those abilities in the interest of capital.

We like to be productive. Russell knew that. He was one of the most productive of us all. To say that what you produce is of value, but what others produce is not, sounds unfair, uncaring and self-important. Life is not just being; it should also be a doing. We do because we can. We do because we want to. And many things that we do can qualify as work, including activities that we do wholly for ourselves. But even those things that we do for others, given that right circumstances, can also be valuable, useful and pleasurable.

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ONE Follow-Up:

Is the following argument sound? If so, why? If not, why not?

1. Russell argued that all jobs are devoid of intrinsic value.

2. But Russell failed to distinguish between (i) jobs that are productive and useful (non-bullshit jobs), (ii) jobs that are meaningless, pointless, unproductive, and useless (bullshit jobs), (iii) jobs that are bad or demeaning or unhealthy or unpleasant, no matter what other features they have (shit jobs).

3. Russell also failed to distinguish between (a) work that inherently belongs to the capitalist economic system (wage labor + management, aka jobwork) and (b) work that one does for its own sake, such that, even if it currently

belongs to the capitalist economic system, one would continue to do it even if it *didn't* belong to the capitalist economic system and you weren't paid to do it (lifework).

4. Therefore, if a job is non-bullshit, non-shit, and lifework, then, it still has intrinsic value, and, contra Russell, some jobs have intrinsic value.

ONE Link:

"On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant"
URL = https://strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs/

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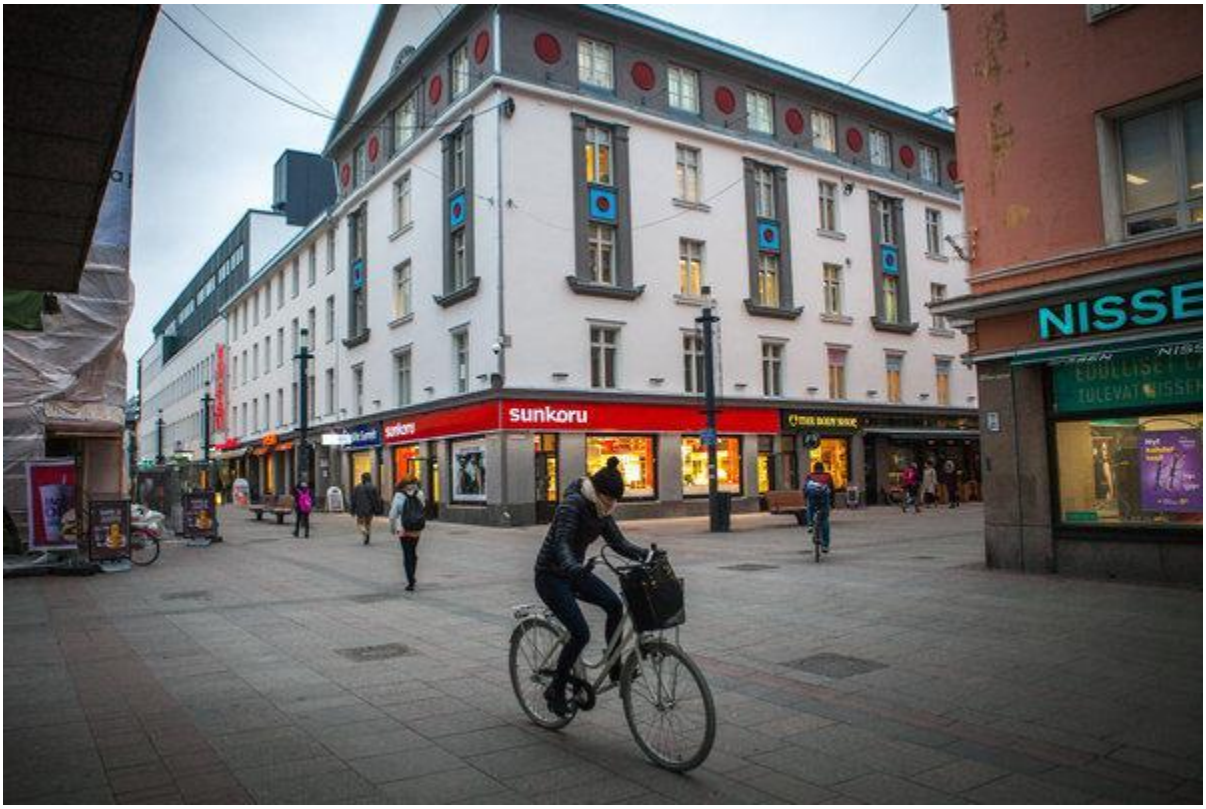
2. “Universal Basic Income Didn’t Fail in Finland. Finland Failed It.”

By Antti Jauhiainen and Joona-Hermanni Mäkinen

The New York Times, 2 MAY 2018

URL = https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/02/opinion/universal-basic-income-finland.html



Oulu, Finland, 2017.CreditJanne Körkkö for The New York Times

HELSINKI, Finland — “Thank goodness that this experiment is coming to an end,” Stuart Varney, a host for Fox Business Network, said after the Finnish government decided to stop its trial run with universal basic income (U.B.I.) at the end of the year. “You want money, get out there and work for it, please.”

Jussi Halla-aho, the leader of the far-right Finns Party, applauded the decision, arguing that “work is the best social security.” Some center-left politicians also have been skeptical. Antti Rinne, the leader of the Social Democratic Party, said last year, “I don’t need any basic income. I have a good salary, and if I happen to lose my job, I’d have unemployment benefits.”

But the demise of the U.B.I. experiment in Finland can’t be said to mean that U.B.I. has failed here. Not only are preliminary official results not even expected until 2019, but the Finnish government’s U.B.I. pilot project never really was about U.B.I.

As we wrote last summer, Finland's program was doomed as soon as it began in early 2017. Targeting just 2,000 randomly selected unemployed Finns to receive 560 euros a month (about $675) for only two years, it was too limited in both scale and duration.

Finland's conservative government was, of course, an implausible champion for progressive experimentation. Soon enough, it became clear that the Center Party, which leads the ruling coalition, had no intention of properly experimenting with U.B.I., which would have required conducting a much larger and longer study, as many academics recommended. Researchers overseeing the program were instructed to test whether the unemployed could be encouraged to take up low-paid work if they didn't lose benefits.

Even before the U.B.I. trial began, the government announced that it would concurrently reform unemployment benefits. What it calls the "activation model" kicked in at the beginning of this year: The measure withholds benefits from unemployed people who, for instance, are thought not to be searching for jobs actively enough — the opposite of a basic income program, which comes with no strings attached. The measure has been (rightly) criticized for creating more bureaucracy only to exercise stricter control over the jobless. Nearly half of the people affected by it have lost benefits as a result.

This outcome is a shame, because the Finnish government has been giving money away for decades with great success.

Many university students get a monthly €250 stipend from the state, and Finnish citizens pay no tuition fees. Low-income families are eligible for a housing allowance. Such benefits and various income redistribution measures help explain why the poverty rate and income inequality in Finland are among the lowest in the world.

For example, in 2016 the at-risk-of-poverty rate before social transfers was near 44 percent whereas the at-risk-of-poverty rate after social transfers was under 12 percent. Finland's Gini coefficient before taxes and transfers was 0.5 in 2014, compared with 0.26 after taxes and transfers.

About 34 percent of Finns aged 15 to 74 aren't working. The unemployed make up only a small part of this group, the majority consisting of students, the elderly, the disabled and stay-at-home moms and dads. This inactive population needs support, including money, in order to participate fully in society — a democratic right, according to the Constitution.

Government benefits, and measures transferring income or wealth generally, are a hallmark of the Nordic welfare state and enjoy robust public support in Finland. About 75 percent of the country's population wants the state to decrease income inequality further. In the most recent comprehensive poll about U.B.I., from the fall, 51 percent of respondents said that providing a partial basic income (€560 a month) was a "good idea," compared with just 21 percent who thought it was a bad idea.

On the other hand, the government's so-called activation model has been extremely unpopular, and not only among the people who have suffered from it. According to a survey early this year

by the national broadcaster Yle, 56 percent of respondents opposed the measure and 36 percent supported it. A major workers union organized a demonstration against it in February, in solidarity with the jobless.

Finland has an established history of very forward-looking social policy. Honoring that tradition, and the public's support for it, means properly setting up large-scale research and trials.

Instead of ending its experiment with U.B.I., the government should reframe it and expand it. The program should be extended to a wider and more varied group, including employed people. And it should test different levels of income.

The Finnish government's project — too limited, halfhearted, ideologically skewed — can only yield inconclusive data. To do U.B.I. right, we need to think big and try harder.

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ONE Follow-Up:

Is the following argument sound? If so, why? If not, why not?

> 1. The social program of Universal Basic Income, aka UBI, says that every person over a certain age—say, 18, or 21—should receive a permanent, monthly, generous, no-strings-attached income.
>
> 2. The aim of UBI is to end poverty and change our relationship to work.
>
> 3. UBI is *not* intended to replace other universalist social programs like universal healthcare, universal free public and higher education, and so-on; instead, UBI would operate *in addition to these*, and would replace only existing income-assistance programs.
>
> 4. Some UBI pilot programs, like the one currently being tested in Finland, offer a low monthly pay-out and place various other requirements on UBI recipients.
>
> 5. But, as per 1., genuine UBI programs have a *generous* monthly pay-out and a *no-strings-attached* basic income.
>
> 6. Therefore, the fact that Finland's UBI pilot program is being ended by its government indicates only a failure on Finland's part to create a genuine UBI system, but is otherwise irrelevant to the social value of UBI programs.

7. And in fact, there are other UBI pilot programs being currently tested—for example, in the province of Ontario, Canada—that meet all or at least most of the basic conditions for genuine UBI.

8. Therefore, the actual social value of UBI still remains to be determined.

ONE Link:

"Ontario Basic Income Pilot"
URL = https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-basic-income-pilot

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3. “Envy’s Hidden Hand: Why Inequality Bothers People More Than Poverty”

By James Suzman

Aeon, 2 MAY 2018

URL = https://aeon.co/essays/why-inequality-bothers-people-more-than-poverty

Nyae-Nyae in northern Namibia is the last place in Namibia where Ju/‘hoansi are free to hunt in the traditional way. *Photograph by James Suzman*

Selfish traits such as envy have a bad reputation. They are, after all, ‘deadly sins’, ‘impurities of the heart’ and, according to the *Summa Theologica* (*c*1265-1273) of Thomas Aquinas, their ‘object is contrary to charity, whence the soul derives its spiritual life’. And it is not just Catholicism that has it in for them. All major religions decree that a special kind of damnation awaits those in thrall to the green-eyed monster.

Yet, as socially corrosive as it might appear, there is an awful lot of envy about. Social media is saturated in it. So much so that it has spawned a flourishing new line of business for therapists, as well as a range of new diagnostic terms such as ‘Facebook envy’.

Reflecting its amplification in social media, envy has now moved from the shadows of the corridors of power to centre stage. But beyond headline-grabbing squabbles about inauguration turnouts and sniping on social media, envy plays a far more profound role in shaping our choices and actions than most of us would care to admit. This is not just because it often masquerades as ambition. Nor is it because so many of us now conflate self-worth with impossible expectations.

Rather, it is because envy served an important, if surprising, evolutionary purpose, one that helps us to reconcile this most selfish of traits with the sociability that was so critical to the extraordinary success of our species. If the behaviour of 20th-century hunter-gather societies is anything to go by, over and above its obvious selective benefits for individuals, envy formed part of the cocktail of traits that ultimately assisted *Homo sapiens* to form and maintain strong social groups.

Nyae-Nyae in Namibia's Kalahari Desert is a synonym for remoteness in a country where everything is remote. It is also home to the Ju/'hoansi 'Bushmen', the best-documented hunting and gathering community on the planet. But no one in Nyae-Nyae depends exclusively on hunting and gathering any more. A half-century of land dispossession, well-meaning if ineffective economic development programmes and a decade of military occupation make it no longer possible for the Ju/'hoansi to live as their ancestors did.

But research conducted among the Ju/'hoansi in the 1950s and '60s when they could still hunt and gather freely turned established views of social evolution on their head. Up until then, it was widely believed that hunter-gatherers endured a near-constant battle against starvation, and that it was only with the advent of agriculture that we began to free ourselves from the capricious tyranny of nature. When in 1964 a young Canadian anthropologist, Richard Borshay Lee, conducted a series of simple economic input/output analyses of the Ju/'hoansi as they went about their daily lives, he revealed that not only did they make a good living from hunting and gathering, but that they were also well-nourished and content. Most remarkably, his research revealed that the Ju/'hoansi managed this on the basis of little more than 15 hours' work per week. On the strength of this finding, the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins in *Stone Age Economics* (1972) renamed hunter-gatherers 'the original affluent society'.

If a society is judged by its endurance, then this was the most successful society in human history

This research also revealed that the Ju/'hoansi were able to make a good living from a sparse environment because they cared little for private property and, above all, were 'fiercely egalitarian', as Lee put it. It showed that the Ju/'hoansi had no formalised leadership institutions, no formal hierarchies; men and women enjoyed equal decision-making powers; children played largely noncompetitive games in mixed age groups; and the elderly, while treated with great affection, were not afforded any special status or privileges. This research also demonstrated how the Ju/'hoansi's 'fierce egalitarianism' underwrote their affluence. For it was their egalitarianism that ensured that no-one bothered accumulating wealth and simultaneously enabled limited resources to flow organically through communities, helping to ensure that even in times of episodic scarcity everyone got more or less enough.

There is no question that this dynamic was very effective. If a society is judged by its endurance over time, then this was almost certainly the most successful society in human history – and by a considerable margin. New genomic analyses suggest that the Ju/'hoansi and their ancestors lived continuously in southern Africa from soon after modern *H sapiens* settled there, most likely around 200,000 years ago. Recent archaeological finds across southern Africa also indicate that key elements of the Ju/'hoansi's material culture extend back at least 70,000 years and possibly long before. As importantly, genome mutation-rate analyses suggest that the broader population

group from which the Ju/'hoansi descended, the Khoisan, were not only the largest population of *H sapiens*, but also did not suffer population declines to the same extent as other populations over the past 100,000 years.

Taken in tandem with the fact that other well-documented hunting and gathering societies, from the Mbendjele BaYaka of Congo to the Agta in the Philippines (whose most recent common ancestor with the Ju/'hoansi was around 150,000 years ago), were similarly egalitarian, this suggests that the Ju/'hoansi's direct ancestors were almost certainly 'fiercely egalitarian' too.

Ju/'hoansi egalitarianism was not born of the ideological dogmatism that we associate with 20th-century Marxism or the starry-eyed idealism of New Age 'communalism'. There was no manifesto of 'primitive communism'. Rather, it was the organic outcome of interactions between people acting explicitly in their own self-interest in a highly individualistic society. This was because, among foraging Ju/'hoansi, self-interest was always policed by its shadow, envy – which, in turn, ensured that everyone always got a fair share, and that those with the natural charisma and authority to 'lead' exercised it with great circumspection. This was best exemplified in the customary 'insulting' of the hunter's meat.

Skilled Ju/'hoansi hunters needed a thick skin. For while a particularly spectacular kill was always cause for celebration, the hunter responsible was insulted rather than flattered. Regardless of the size or condition of the carcass, those due a share of the meat would complain that the kill was trifling, that it was barely worth the effort of carrying it back to camp, or that there wouldn't be enough meat to go round. For his part, the hunter was expected to be almost apologetic when he presented the carcass.

Of course, everyone knew the difference between a scrawny kill and a good one but continued to pass insults even while they were busy filling their bellies. Hunters rarely took the insults to heart, and those dishing them out often did so through broad grins. This was a performance in which everyone played well-rehearsed roles. But it was also a performance with a clear purpose, as beneath the light-hearted insults lay a sharp and potentially vicious edge.

More than any other food, meat was capable of making the Ju/'hoansi forget their customary good manners, so it required extra diligence in distribution. It also meant that there was a risk that particularly skilled and energetic hunters might begin to consider others to be in their debt, so fracturing the delicate egalitarian balance that sustained band (or small kin-group) life. The insults ensured that individual hunters took care not to be so successful that they stood out or, worse still, began to imagine themselves to be more important than others.

One Ju/'hoansi man gave Lee a particularly eloquent explanation of this, quoted in *The Dobe Ju/'hoansi* (1984):

> When a young man kills much meat, he comes to think of himself as a chief or a big man, and he thinks of the rest of us as his servants or inferiors. We can't accept this … So we always speak of his meat as worthless. This way we cool his heart and make him gentle.

This kind of teasing was not only confined to good hunters. It was meted out to anyone who boasted, got too big for his leather sandals or encountered a windfall of some sort. And anyone who was seen to be selfish, perhaps by hoarding tobacco or food, could expect a barrage of unfriendly insults.

They went to lengths to avoid being singled out for selfishness, which created a harmonious atmosphere

My enquiries into why the Ju/'hoansi were so quick to criticise, tease and mock always generated the kinds of answers that remind anthropologists that cultural norms are norms precisely because they are accepted rather than interrogated, and because they present themselves as natural and inevitable. Every time I asked, the mockery was ascribed simply to feelings of 'envy', just as the humility shown by good hunters and others with something to brag about was ascribed to 'embarrassment'. 'It is just how we are,' I was told again and again.

Everyone jealously scrutinised everybody else all the time – something easy to do when all social life was conducted in a public space. They took careful note of what others ate, what others owned, what others received or gave as gifts, and whether or not they were sufficiently generous in return. And most of the time everyone went to some lengths to avoid being singled out for selfishness or self-importance. Unsurprisingly, this created an atmosphere that was harmonious and that was torn asunder only rarely when someone felt wronged.

Insults and mockery weren't the only tool that hunter-gatherers had in their bags to maintain egalitarianism. Another that was explicitly linked to the expression of envy was 'demand sharing'. Where we usually consider it rude for others to ask unashamedly for something that we own or to just expect to receive it, the Ju/'hoansi considered this normal. More so, as far as they were concerned, denying someone's request ran the risk of being sanctioned for selfishness. Demand sharing did not lead to a free-for-all that ended up undermining any sense of private ownership. Instead, demands for things were usually – though not always – carefully considered. The net result of this was that, while private property was respected – after all, if there is no private property, how could you enjoy giving or receiving a gift? – material inequalities were quickly ironed out. However, the system was challenging for relatively well-resourced outsiders such as myself, which often resulted in a month's supply of tobacco and food for a field trip being exhausted within a very short period of time.

With mockery and demand sharing as its most obvious manifestation, envy was the 'invisible hand' of the Ju/'hoansi social economy. Yet it exerted its influence very differently from the 'invisible hand' imagined by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). For Smith, man 'intends only his own gain' but in doing so he is guided by an invisible hand 'to promote an end which was no part of his intention'. And this, according to Smith, is to 'promote the interests of society' more effectively than 'man' could, even if he had intended to. Smith believed that trade and enterprise in pursuit of personal enrichment and unburdened by regulatory interference ensured the fairest and most effective 'distribution of the necessaries of life' and so advanced 'the interests of society'.

Even if Smith's hidden hand is still solemnly invoked by some as gospel, there are few economists who will defend an inflexible interpretation of it now. Smith himself would almost certainly be among the first to acknowledge that the contemporary economic world with its convoluted financial derivatives and ever-inflating asset values is a very different creature to the 'merchants and mongers' he had in mind when he mused on the unintended benefits of self-interested commerce.

But, ironically, how envy functioned in societies such as the Ju/'hoansi suggests that, even if Smith's hidden hand does not apply particularly well to late capitalism, his belief that the sum of individual self-interests can ensure the fairest distribution of the 'necessaries of life' was right, albeit in small-scale band societies. For hunter-gatherers, the sum of individual self-interest ultimately ensured the most equitable 'distribution of the necessaries of life' because it discouraged profitable exchange, hierarchy, wealth-accumulation and significant material inequality.

Highlighting the explicit role of envy in Ju/'hoansi life risks giving the impression of a society of reluctant egalitarians constantly sniping at one another – an impression that any Ju/'hoansi will tell you is a far cry from the cheerful banter and mutual affection that characterises day-to-day life. And while, to be sure, the Ju/'hoansi do not reward people for being egalitarian, they are conscious of the positive emotional and social dividends that sharing, cooperation and harmony bring. Among these are the profound feelings of belonging so eloquently described by Lorna Marshall in her classic ethnography *The !Kung of Nyae-Nyae* (1976). And even if anthropologists have tended to focus on the material benefits of egalitarianism for creating networks that assist people in material risk, there is a strong case that the emotional benefits of the affective bonds that tied people together both within and between bands was arguably a more important consideration.

Unsurprisingly, envy still accounts for most conflict among the Ju/'hoansi in contemporary Nyae-Nyae where inequality is greater than ever before, because some have jobs or access to resources such as pensions that are denied to others. Envy squats quietly in the shadows of social life, reminding everyone of its presence when people argue or fight. To confine jealousy to the shadows, the Ju/'hoansi still emphasise the importance of good manners, great humility and go to considerable lengths to avoid giving others cause to feel aggrieved.

As much as the Ju/'hoansi's fierce egalitarianism served them and their ancestors well, it poses a challenge now. They are by far the poorest and most marginalised of Namibia's many distinct ethnic communities. But they remain deeply uncomfortable in elevating any of their peers to leadership positions, and those who assume the mantle of leadership do so often reluctantly, in the knowledge that they will be closely scrutinised and sometimes viciously criticised. As a consequence, they remain desperately underrepresented in state institutions with the result that their interests are often overlooked and ignored. Similarly, with many Ju/'hoansi now dependent on the cash economy (mainly as cheap labour) with its attendant employment hierarchies and management systems, many Ju/'hoansi are reluctant to take management roles or assume responsibilities that require making and imposing their decisions or authority on others.

If envy played a constructive role in small-scale band societies such as the Ju/'hoansi, it is harder to establish whether it has a similarly beneficial purpose in more complex, hierarchical societies. What is certain is that the emotions invoked play a significant role in shaping our economic choices and political affiliations.

Even so, understanding envy's cohesive role in band societies is analytically useful. It offers some insights into why this apparently corrosive vice has survived the mill of natural selection, and it reminds us that our sense of fairness almost certainly has a strong genetic component. Perhaps most importantly, it helps us to understand why inequality has proved time and time again to be a far more potent spur for political action than absolute poverty; why gaudy displays of wealth are capable of persuading nominally content middle classes to froth with rage, and why demagogues do so well when they position themselves as the enemies of 'elites' – both real and imagined.

A recurring theme in the ever-proliferating analyses of the febrile mood that has recently consumed established democracies in Europe and the United States is inequality. The trend towards increasing inequality – despite incrementally improving baseline living standards – has been the subject of major analyses by some of the luminaries of contemporary economics, from Thomas Piketty to Joseph Stiglitz.

But even if the gap between rich and poor (and more importantly, the super-rich and everyone else) had not expanded to the extent it has since the 1980s, inequality is now very much more in our faces than it used to be. We are confronted by a near-neverending stream of gold-plated ostentation in both broadcast and social media. And while this provides inspiration to some and cheerful gossip for others, it also generates the kind of resentments that, historically, inspired revolutions. And while the large-scale 'communist' experiment in egalitarianism was a failure, it is possible that technology might well provide an organic spur to creating the kind of envy-attuned self-awareness that sustained the fierce egalitarianism typical of hunter-gatherer societies, and that in turn ensured that they thrived for such an extraordinarily long period of time.

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ONE Follow-Up:

Is the following argument sound? If so, why? If not, why not?

1. Envy is normally thought to be a moral vice, and therefore a socially bad thing.

2. But in social contexts, envy very often operates as a sense of social inequality, even independently of relative poverty or wealth.

3. Moreover in some societies, the social institution of expressing envy and publicly criticizing those who have saliently more social achievement (for example, education), opportunity, status, power, or wealth (aka *elites*), produces significant egalitarian outcomes across those societies.

4. Therefore, since in certain neoliberal democratic states like the USA and the UK there is still endemic and even widening inequality, those societies should institutionalize envy and publicly criticize elites, in order to move towards greater equality across those societies.

ONE Link:

"World's eight richest people have same wealth as poorest 50%"
URL = https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/jan/16/worlds-eight-richest-people-have-same-wealth-as-poorest-50

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4. “The Strange Failure of the Educated Elite”

By David Brooks

The New York Times, 28 MAY 2018

URL = https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/28/opinion/failure-educated-elite.html

Bryan Sneider/Reuters

Once upon a time, white male Protestants ruled the roost. You got into a fancy school if your father had gone to the fancy school. You got a job at a white-shoe law firm or climbed the corporate ladder if you golfed at the right club.

Then we smashed all that. We replaced a system based on birth with a fairer system based on talent. We opened up the universities and the workplace to Jews, women and minorities. University attendance surged, creating the most educated generation in history. We created a new boomer ethos, which was egalitarian (bluejeans everywhere!), socially conscious (recycling!) and deeply committed to ending bigotry.

You’d think all this would have made the U.S. the best governed nation in history. Instead, inequality rose. Faith in institutions plummeted. Social trust declined. The federal government became dysfunctional and society bitterly divided.

The older establishment won World War II and built the American Century. We, on the other hand, led to Donald Trump. The chief accomplishment of the current educated elite is that it has produced a bipartisan revolt against itself.

What happened? How has so much amazing talent produced such poor results?

A narrative is emerging. It is that the new meritocratic aristocracy has come to look like every other aristocracy. The members of the educated class use their intellectual, financial and social advantages to pass down privilege to their children, creating a hereditary elite that is ever more insulated from the rest of society. We need to build a meritocracy that is true to its values, truly open to all.

I'm among the many who have been telling this story for 20 years. And I enjoy books that fill in compelling details, like Steven Brill's "Tailspin," which is being released Tuesday.

But the narrative is insufficient. The real problem with the modern meritocracy can be found in the ideology of meritocracy itself. Meritocracy is a system built on the maximization of individual talent, and that system unwittingly encourages several ruinous beliefs:

Exaggerated faith in intelligence. Today's educated establishment is still basically selected on the basis of I.Q. High I.Q. correlates with career success but is not the crucial quality required for civic leadership. Many of the great failures of the last 50 years, from Vietnam to Watergate to the financial crisis, were caused by extremely intelligent people who didn't care about the civic consequences of their actions.

Misplaced faith in autonomy. The meritocracy is based on the metaphor that life is a journey. On graduation days, members for the educated class give their young Dr. Seuss' "Oh, the Places You'll Go!" which shows a main character, "you," who goes on a solitary, unencumbered journey through life toward success. If you build a society upon this metaphor you will wind up with a society high in narcissism and low in social connection. Life is not really an individual journey. Life is more like settling a sequence of villages. You help build a community at home, at work, in your town and then you go off and settle more villages.

Misplaced notion of the self. Instead of seeing the self as the seat of the soul, the meritocracy sees the self as a vessel of human capital, a series of talents to be cultivated and accomplishments to be celebrated. If you base a society on a conception of self that is about achievement, not character, you will wind up with a society that is demoralized; that puts little emphasis on the sorts of moral systems that create harmony within people, harmony between people and harmony between people and their ultimate purpose.

Inability to think institutionally. Previous elites poured themselves into institutions and were pretty good at maintaining existing institutions, like the U.S. Congress, and building new ones, like the postwar global order. The current generation sees institutions as things they pass through on the way to individual success. Some institutions, like Congress and the political parties, have decayed to the point of uselessness, while others, like corporations, lose their generational consciousness and become obsessed with the short term.

Misplaced idolization of diversity. The great achievement of the meritocracy is that it has widened opportunities to those who were formerly oppressed. But diversity is a midpoint, not an endpoint. Just as a mind has to be opened so that it can close on something, an organization has to be diverse so that different perspectives can serve some end. Diversity for its own sake, without a common telos, is infinitely centrifugal, and leads to social fragmentation.

The essential point is this: Those dimwitted, stuck up blue bloods in the old establishment had something we meritocrats lack — a civic consciousness, a sense that we live life embedded in community and nation, that we owe a debt to community and nation and that the essence of the admirable life is community before self.

The meritocracy is here to stay, thank goodness, but we probably need a new ethos to reconfigure it — to redefine how people are seen, how applicants are selected, how social roles are understood and how we narrate a common national purpose.

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ONE Follow-Up:

Is the following argument sound? If so, why? If not, why not?

> 1. Contemporary neoliberal democratic states like the USA have encountered a paradox: as they have increased equality inside certain disadvantaged or oppressed groups, by compensating some specially selected members of those groups with greater education, opportunity, social status, power, and wealth (aka "meritocratic social justice"), they have also produced even greater and widening inequality across the very same groups in particular and across society in general.
>
> 2. This in turn is because those who have been compensated for their groups' disadvantage or oppression have simply joined the very same social elites that were originally producing the disadvantages and oppression, thereby effectively perpetuating and even strengthening the very same overall system of inequality.
>
> 3. Therefore the classical and current system of meritocratic social justice should simply be *ended*, and replaced with a radically different system that instead provides universal, non-meritocratic, non-identity-group-based benefits like UBI, universal healthcare, universal free public and higher education, and so-on.

ONE Link:

Utopia for Realists
URL = http://www.basinkomstpartiet.org/uploads/5/3/4/7/53471687/utopia-for-realists-by-rutger-bregman.pdf

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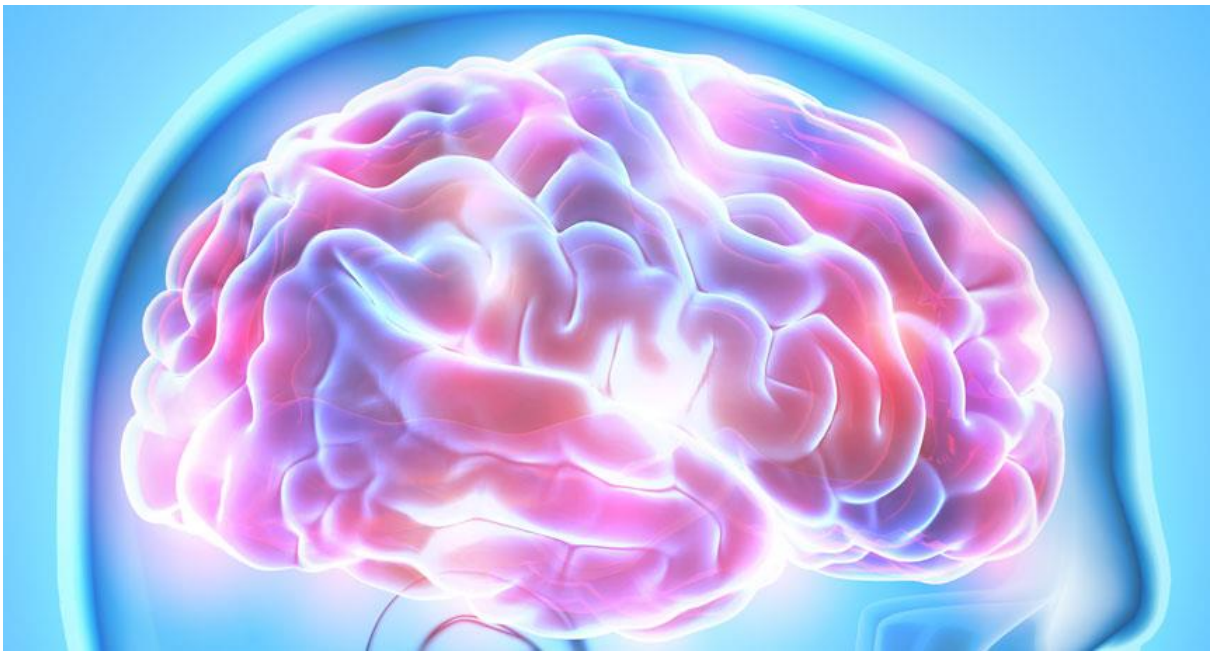
5. “The Cerebral Mystique: Why We Are More Than Our Brains”

By Alan Jasanoff

Aeon, 8 MAY 2018

URL = https://aeon.co/essays/we-are-more-than-our-brains-on-neuroscience-and-being-human



yodiyim/iStockphoto

More than 2,000 years ago, the semi-mythical father of medicine, Hippocrates of Kos, challenged the spiritualists of his time with a bold claim about the nature of the human mind. In response to supernatural explanations of mental phenomena, Hippocrates insisted that ‘from nothing else but the brain come joys, delights, laughter and sports, and sorrows, griefs, despondency, and lamentations’. In the modern age, Hippocrates’ words have been distilled into a Twitter-friendly pop-neuroscience slogan: ‘We are our brains.’ This message resonates with recent trends to blame criminality on the brain, to redefine mental illness as brain disease and, in futuristic-technological circles, to imagine enhancing or preserving our lives by enhancing or preserving our brains. From creativity to drug addiction, there is barely an aspect of human behaviour that has not been attributed to brain function. To many people today, the brain seems like a contemporary surrogate for the soul.

But lost in the public’s romance with the brain is the most fundamental lesson neuroscience has to teach us: that the organ of our minds is a purely physical entity, conceptually and causally embedded in the natural world. Although the brain is required for almost everything we do, it never works alone. Instead, its function is inextricably linked to the body and to the environment around it. The interdependence of these factors is masked however by a cultural phenomenon I

call the ‘cerebral mystique’ – a pervasive idealisation of the brain and its singular importance, which protects traditional conceptions about differences between mind and body, the freedom of will and the nature of thought itself.

The mystique is expressed in multiple forms, ranging from ubiquitous depictions of supernatural, ultra-sophisticated brains in science fiction and the popular media to more sober, scientifically supported conceptions of cognitive function that emphasise inorganic qualities or confine mental processes to neural structures. This idealisation is almost reflexively adopted by laypeople and scientists alike (including me!) and it is compatible with both materialist and spiritual world views. The cerebral mystique might help to increase enthusiasm for neuroscience – a valued consequence – but it drastically limits our ability to analyse human behaviour and address important social problems.

The widespread analogy of the brain to a computer contributes powerfully to the cerebral mystique by distancing the brain from the rest of the biology. The contrast between a machine-like brain and the wet, chaotic mess we have throughout the rest of our bodies sets up a brain-body distinction that parallels the historical mind-body distinction drawn by early philosophers such as René Descartes. In keeping with Western religious notions of the soul, Descartes in the 17th century postulated that the mind is an ethereal entity that interacts with the body but does not join with it. With his timeless axiom ‘I think, therefore I am’ Descartes placed the mind in its own universe, autonomous of the material world.

To the extent that the brain resembles a machine, we can more easily imagine removing it from our heads, preserving it for eternity, cloning it or sending it through space. The digital brain thus seems separable from the body in both its substance and causal relations, much like Descartes’s detached spirit. It might be no accident that some of the most influential inorganic analogies to the brain were introduced by physical scientists who in their later years took to the problem of consciousness in the way that elderly people sometimes take to religion. John von Neumann, the computer pioneer, was the best-known of these; he wrote the influential book *The Computer and the Brain* (1958) shortly before his death in 1957, inaugurating this enduring analogy at the very dawn of the digital age.

Brains are undoubtedly somewhat computer-like – computers, after all, were invented to perform brain-like functions – but brains are also much more than bundles of wiry neurons and the electrical impulses they are famous for propagating. The function of each neuroelectrical signal is to release a little flood of chemicals that helps to stimulate or suppress brain cells, in much the way that chemicals activate or suppress functions such as glucose production by liver cells or immune responses by white blood cells. Even the brain’s electrical signals themselves are the products of chemicals called ions that move in and out of cells, causing tiny ripples that can spread independently of neurons.

Also distinct from neurons are the relatively passive brain cells called *glia* (Greek for glue) that are roughly equal in number to the neurons but do not conduct electrical signals in the same way. Recent experiments in mice have shown that manipulating these uncharismatic cells can produce dramatic effects on behaviour. In one experiment, a research group in Japan showed that direct stimulation of glia in a brain region called the cerebellum could cause a behavioural response

analogous to changes more commonly evoked by stimulation of neurons. Another remarkable study showed that transplantation of human glial cells into mouse brains boosted the animals' performance in learning tests, again demonstrating the importance of glia in shaping brain function. Chemicals and glue are as integral to brain function as wiring and electricity. With these moist elements factored in, the brain seems much more like an organic part of the body than the idealised prosthetic many people imagine.

Stereotypes about brain complexity also contribute to the mystique of the brain and its distinction from the body. It has become a cliché to refer to the brain as 'the most complex thing in the known Universe'. This saying is inspired by the finding that human brains contain something on the order of 100,000,000,000 neurons, each of which makes about 10,000 connections (synapses) to other neurons. The daunting nature of such numbers provides cover for people who argue that neuroscience will never decipher consciousness, or that free will lurks somehow among the billions and billions.

Crows' brains are less than 1 per cent the size of humans' but perform feats of cognition comparable to gorillas

But the sheer number of cells in the human brain is unlikely to explain its extraordinary capabilities. Human livers have roughly the same number of cells as brains, but certainly don't generate the same results. Brains themselves vary in size over a considerable range – by around 50 per cent in mass and likely number of brain cells. Radical removal of half of the brain is sometimes performed as a treatment for epilepsy in children. Commenting on a cohort of more than 50 patients who underwent this procedure, a team at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore wrote that they were 'awed by the apparent retention of memory after removal of half of the brain, either half, and by the retention of the child's personality and sense of humour'. Clearly not every brain cell is sacred.

If one looks out into the animal kingdom, vast ranges in brain size fail to correlate with apparent cognitive power at all. Some of the most perspicacious animals are the corvids – crows, ravens, and rooks – which have brains less than 1 per cent the size of a human brain, but still perform feats of cognition comparable to chimpanzees and gorillas. Behavioural studies have shown that these birds can make and use tools, and recognise people on the street, feats that even many primates are not known to achieve. Within individual orders, animals with similar characteristics also display huge differences in brain size. Among rodents, for instance, we can find the 80-gram capybara brain with 1.6 billion neurons and the 0.3-gram pygmy mouse brain with probably fewer than 60 million neurons. Despite a greater than 100-fold difference in brain size, these species live in similar habitats, display similarly social lifestyles, and do not display obvious differences in intelligence. Although neuroscience is only beginning to parse brain function even in small animals, such reference points show that it is mistaken to mystify the brain because of its sheer number of components.

Playing up the machine-like qualities of the brain or its unbelievable complexity distances it from the rest of the biological world in terms of its *composition*. But a related form of brain-body distinction exaggerates how the brain stands apart in terms of its *autonomy* from body and environment. This flavour of dualism contributes to the cerebral mystique by enhancing the

brain's reputation as a control centre, receptive to bodily and environmental input but still in charge.

Contrary to this idea, our brains themselves are perpetually influenced by torrents of sensory input. The environment shoots many megabytes of sensory data into the brain every second, enough information to disable many computers. The brain has no firewall against this onslaught. Brain-imaging studies show that even subtle sensory stimuli influence regions of the brain, ranging from low-level sensory regions where input enters the brain to parts of the frontal lobe, the high-level brain area that is expanded in humans compared with many other primates.

Many of these stimuli seem to take direct control of us. For instance, when we view illustrations, visual features often seem to grab our eyes and steer our gaze around in spatial patterns that are largely reproducible from person to person. If we see a face, our focus darts reflexively among eyes, nose and mouth, subconsciously taking in key features. When we walk down the street, our minds are similarly manipulated by stimuli in the surroundings – the honk of a car's horn, the flashing of a neon light, the smell of pizza – each of which guides our thoughts and actions even if we don't realise that anything has happened.

Even further below our radar are environmental features that act on a slower timescale to influence our mood and emotions. Seasonal low light levels are famous for their correlation with depression, a phenomenon first described by the South African physician Norman Rosenthal soon after he moved from sunny Johannesburg to the grey northeastern United States in the 1970s. Colours in our surroundings also affect us. Although the idea that colours have psychic power evokes New Age mysticism, careful experiments have repeatedly linked cold colours such as blue and green to positive emotional responses, and hot red hues to negative responses. In one example, researchers showed that participants performed worse on IQ tests labelled with red marks than on tests labelled with green or grey; another study found that subjects performed better on computerised creativity tests delivered on a blue background than on a red background.

Signals from within the body influence behaviour just as powerfully as influences from the environment, again usurping the brain's command and challenging idealised conceptions of its supremacy. A particularly powerful pathway for reciprocal brain-body interactions is the so-called hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, named for a set of structures both inside and outside the brain that together coordinate the storied fight-or-flight response. Activation of the HPA axis is often triggered by fear-related brain signals that lead to secretion of cortisol and adrenalin from a gland that sits on top of the kidneys. These hormones lead to a range of bodily changes that affect breathing, heartrate, sensory acuity and many other variables, providing feedback to the brain and closing a circuit of mutual brain-body interaction. In some cases, the HPA axis can be engaged from outside the brain, as in pregnancy, when a surge of cortisol originates on its own from the placenta.

The HPA axis provides one of the routes by which our emotional states more generally are coupled to body-wide changes that extend far beyond the brain. Monitoring of externally observable physiological parameters such as skin conductance and respiration has long supported the idea that various emotions produce distinct responses relevant to how emotions are perceived. In a 2014 study, a group of researchers led by Lauri Nummenmaa at Aalto University

in Finland asked participants to describe bodily sensations that they associate with 14 distinct emotions. The result was a stunning set of 'bodily maps' of the emotions, revealing variegated patterns of increased and decreased sensitivity associated with feelings of anger, fear, happiness, depression, love and so on. The subjects' ability to report their sensations emphasises that bodily changes are part of how the emotions are experienced, and not just passive, downstream consequences of emotion-related brain activity.

An amazing finding of recent years is the fact that microbes living in the intestines are also part of the physiological network that determines our emotions. Changing the gut microbial population by eating bacteria-rich foods or undergoing an off-putting procedure called a faecal transplant can alter characteristics such as anxiety and aggression. A key experiment was performed in mice, where a two-way exchange of gut microbes between the normally shy BALB/c mouse strain and the more outgoing NIH Swiss strain was enough to flip the two personalities. In human organ-transplant patients, both cognitive and emotional effects are also commonplace. Some of these have to do with correcting the medical condition that required the transplant in the first place. For instance, liver or kidney failure causes a buildup of toxins such as ammonia in the blood; this in turn causes cognitive difficulties that can be corrected by replacing the diseased organ. But even procedures such as stomach stitching, which does not cure a disease, are said to cause personality shifts in about 50 per cent of patients.

Such examples illustrate the extent to which what happens in the brain is interwoven with what goes on in the body and the environment. There is no causal or conceptual boundary between the brain and its surroundings. Aspects of the cerebral mystique – idealised views of the brain as inorganic, hypercomplex, self-contained and autonomous – fail when we look more closely at what the brain is made of and how it operates. The integrated involvement of brain, body and environment is precisely what makes having a biological mind different from having a soul, and the implications of this difference are tremendous.

Most importantly, the cerebral mystique fosters a misleading sense that the brain is the prime mover of our thoughts and actions. As we seek to understand human conduct, the mystique prompts us to think first of brain-related causes, and pay less attention to factors outside the head. This leads us to overemphasise the role of individuals and underemphasise the role of contexts across a range of cultural phenomena.

In the arena of criminal justice, for instance, some writers suggest that the perpetrator's brain should be blamed for transgressions. This argument often invokes the case of Charles Whitman, who in 1966 committed one of the first mass shootings in the US, at the University of Texas. Whitman had reported psychological disturbances in the months leading up to the crime, and an autopsy later revealed that a large tumour had been growing near a part of his brain called the amygdala, which is involved in stress and emotional regulation. But although advocates of blaming the brain would argue that Whitman's brain tumour might have caused his crime, the larger reality is that Whitman's act occurred against a background of many other predisposing factors: growing up with a violent father, the recent divorce of his parents, Whitman's repeated career rejection and court martial from the army, his substance abuse, great physical stature, and access to high-powered weaponry. Even the high temperature on the day of the crime – 99

degrees Fahrenheit (37 degrees Celsius) – might have contributed to Whitman's aggressive behaviour on the fateful day.

Blaming the brain for criminal behaviour offers an escape from outmoded principles of morality and retribution, but it still neglects the extended network of influences likely to contribute to any given situation. In the current discussion about the causes of violence in the US, it is more important than ever to maintain a broad view of how multiple factors work together in and around each individual; mental problems, gun access, media influences and social alienation can all play their parts. In other contexts, we miss analogous factors when we attribute drug addiction or adolescent misbehaviour to the brain, or when we credit the brain for creativity and intelligence. In each case, an idealised view that simply locates good and bad personal qualities in the brain is remarkably similar to old-fashioned perspectives that assigned virtue and vice to the metaphysical soul. An updated view should instead accept that any act of brilliance or depravity arises from a combination of brain, body and environment working together.

The cerebral mystique has particular significance for the way that our society grapples with the problem of mental illness. This is because of the widespread drive to redefine mental illnesses as brain disorders. Proponents argue that doing this places psychological problems in the same category as influenza or cancer – sicknesses that don't evoke the social stigma commonly associated with psychiatric disorders. There is some evidence that using the language of brain disorders in fact lowers the barrier for mental-health patients to seek treatment, an important benefit.

In other respects, however, reclassifying mental illnesses as brain disorders can be highly problematic. For patients, attributing mental problems to intrinsic neurological defects incurs a stigma of its own. Although people with 'broken brains' might not be held morally accountable or told to 'just get over it', the sense that they are irredeemably flawed can be just as damaging. Biological flaws can be harder to fix than moral lapses, and people with brain dysfunction can be seen as dangerous or even less than fully human. This attitude reached extremes under the Nazis, who murdered thousands of mental-health patients as part of their 'euthanasia' programme during the Second World War, but it persists in more subtle forms today. A large analysis of changing attitudes to mental illness in 2012 found that there was no increase in social acceptance of patients with depression or schizophrenia, despite increasing awareness of neurobiological contributions to these conditions.

Regardless of its social implications, blaming the brain for mental illnesses might be scientifically inaccurate in many cases. Although all mental problems involve the brain, the underlying causal factors can be elsewhere. In the 19th century, the sexually transmitted bacterial disease syphilis and the vitamin-B deficiency pellagra were among the greatest contributors to insane-asylum populations in Europe and the US. A more recent study estimated that as many as 20 per cent of psychiatric patients have a bodily disorder that might be producing or worsening their mental condition; the maladies include heart, lung and endocrine problems, all of which have cognitive side effects. Epidemiological surveys have found remarkable correlations between incidence of mental illness and factors such as ethnic minority status, being born in a city, and being born at certain times of year. Although these correlations are not well-explained, they emphasise the likely role of environmental factors well beyond the brain in bringing about

psychiatric problems. We must be sensitive to such factors if we want effective treatment and prevention of mental disorders.

At an even deeper level, cultural conventions circumscribe the notion of mental illness in the first place. Just 50 years ago, homosexuality was classified as a pathology in the American Psychiatric Association's authoritative compendium of mental disorders. In Soviet Russia, political dissidents were sometimes confined on the basis of psychiatric diagnoses that would horrify most observers today. Nevertheless, sexual preference or failure to bow to authority in pursuit of a righteous cause are both psychological traits for which we could imagine finding biological correlates. That does not mean that homosexuality and political dissidence are brain diseases. Society rather than neurobiology ultimately defines the bounds of normality that determine mental-health categories.

The cerebral mystique exaggerates the brain's contribution to human behaviour, and for some it also prompts remarkable visions of the brain's role in the future of humanity itself. In technophilic circles, there is increasing talk of 'hacking the brain' to improve human cognition. This notion evokes the kind of sophisticated but semi-subversive intervention one might make into a fancy smartphone or a government server, but the reality is usually more like the type of hacking one would perform with a machete. Some of the earliest brain hacks involved the purposeful destruction of parts of the brain, famously as part of the now-extinct psychosurgery procedures that inspired Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962). The most advanced of today's brain hacks involve surgically implanting electrodes for direct stimulation or recording of brain tissue. These interventions can restore basic function to patients with severe movement disorders or paralysis – an incredibly impressive feat, but still a world away from enhancements to normal abilities. This distance has not stopped entrepreneurs such as Elon Musk or the US defence agency DARPA from investing heavily in technology that they hope will one day routinely hardwire healthy human brains to computers.

But this exuberance is largely the product of an artificial distinction between what goes on inside versus outside the brain. The philosopher Nick Bostrom of the Future of Humanity Institute in Oxford points out that 'most of the benefits you could imagine achieving through [brain implants] you could achieve by having the same device outside of you, and then using your natural interfaces like your eyeballs, which can project 100 million bits per second straight into your brain'. Indeed, most of us are familiar with the kind of cognitive-enhancement aids that live in our desks, pockets and handbags, boosting our memory and communication capabilities without touching a neuron. It is debatable whether connecting smartphone-like devices more directly to brains would add much except annoyance and distraction.

The more we feel that our brains encapsulate our essence, the less sensitive we'll be to the role of environment

In the medical realm, early efforts to restore vision in blind people using brain implants quickly gave way to much less invasive approaches involving retinal prostheses, which leverage the body's natural physiology for early processing of visual information. Cochlear implants that restore hearing in deaf patients rely on the similar strategy of interfacing with the auditory nerve in the ear, rather than the brain itself. Except in the most impaired patients, prostheses for

restoring or enhancing movement also benefit from interfaces to the body. To give amputees control over mechanised artificial limbs, a technique called ‘targeted muscle reinnervation’ allows physicians to connect loose peripheral nerves from the missing original limb to new muscle groups that in turn communicate with the device. For enhancing motor function in healthy people, powered exoskeletons developed by companies such as Cyberdyne in Japan communicate with the wearer through skin-surface electrodes, also accepting input from the brain through indirect but evolutionarily honed channels. In each of these examples, the brain’s natural interactions with the body help the person use the prosthetic, leveraging rather than denying the continuity between brain and body.

The most extreme direction in futuristic brain technology is the drive to achieve immortality through the postmortem preservation of human brains. Two companies now offer to extract and preserve the brains of dying ‘clients’, who do not wish to go gentle into the good night. The organs will be stored in liquid nitrogen until technology advances to the point (now nowhere in sight) where the brain can be restored to function in some form or analysed in sufficient detail to ‘upload’ the mind into a computer. This venture takes the cerebral mystique to its logical endpoint, fully embracing the fallacy that human life is reducible to brain function and that the brain is just a physical embodiment of the soul.

Although seeking immortality through brain preservation does little harm to anything other than a few people’s bank accounts, this fringe pursuit also epitomises why demystifying the brain is so important. The more we feel that our brains encapsulate our essence as individuals, and the more we believe that our thoughts and actions simply emanate from the bundle of flesh in our heads, the less sensitive we will be to the role of the society and environment around us, and the less we will do to nurture our shared culture and resources – whether in the context of criminal behaviour, creativity, mental illness or any other aspect of human life.

The brain is special because it does not distil us to an essence, it unites us to our surroundings in a way a soul never could. If we value our own experiences, we must protect and strengthen the many factors that enrich our lives from both inside and outside, so that as many people as possible can benefit from them now and in the time to come. We must realise that we are much more than our brains.

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ONE Follow-Up:

Is the following argument sound? If so, why? If not, why not?

> 1. Although the human brain is obviously causally and computationally important for human cognition, human action, and human life more generally, it does not follow that the brain is uniquely essential for us and our lives (aka “we are our brains”).

2. On the contrary, mental and biological processes and systems that operate throughout our living animal bodies significantly causally affect and partially constitute our cognition, action, and lives.

3. And the ongoing interaction between the whole minded human animal and its physical and social environment also significantly causally affects and partially constitutes our cognition, action, and lives.

4. The obsessive scientific, philosophical, and cultural focus on the brain (aka "the cerebral mystique") is not only theoretically mistaken but also produces significantly bad moral and social effects in our personal lives, the treatment of mental illness, and education.

5. Therefore we should give up the cerebral mystique and replace it with a saner, truer approach to human cognition, action, and life that emphasizes embodiment, holistic mental and biological processes, and the interactivity between embodied minds and their physical and social environments.

ONE Link:

Embodied Minds in Action
URL = https://www.academia.edu/21620839/Embodied_Minds_in_Action

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