

Hive Psychology, Happiness, and Public Policy

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ABSTRACT

We consider three hypotheses about relatedness and well-being including the hive hypothesis, which says people need to lose themselves occasionally by becoming part of an emergent social organism in order to reach the highest levels of human flourishing. We discuss recent evolutionary thinking about multilevel selection, which offers a distal reason why the hive hypothesis might be true. We next consider psychological phenomena such as the joy of synchronized movement and the ecstatic joy of self-loss, which might be proximal mechanisms underlying the extraordinary pleasures people get from hive-type activities. We suggest that if the hive hypothesis turns out to be true, it has implications for public policy. We suggest that the hive hypothesis points to new ways to increase social capital and encourages a new focus on happy groups as being more than collections of happy individuals.

Question: What is the difference between society and the sun? Answer: If you really want to, you can stare directly at the sun. But to see society, you must use special glasses. Social scientists generally use one of two kinds: glasses that reveal atoms (individuals) and glasses that reveal networks (groups of connected individuals). Psychologists and some economists seem to prefer looking at individuals. We model people as agents who have beliefs and desires and who act to maximize the satisfaction of their desires given their beliefs. We revel in demonstrations that people sometimes do not maximize, and we advance our sciences by bringing in unconscious desires, discounting curves, and errors in the reasoning processes by which people make inferences from their beliefs.

When we put on the atomizing glasses, a research agenda and a humanitarian project appear before us: we must fully understand the

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[*Journal of Legal Studies*, vol. 37 (June 2008)]
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workings of the human mind in order to engineer environments (through legislation, education, and other policy levers) that will maximize the happiness of individuals and that will protect people from the occasional traps of a free society in which people sometimes choose badly. We ask questions such as, How should we compensate people to maximize their satisfaction after a loss, knowing as we do that people adapt quickly to most losses? And how can we encourage people to make choices that will benefit themselves most in the long run, knowing as we do that people tend to overweigh present utility and to take no action when faced with too many choices or a lack of social consensus?

Many sociologists, anthropologists and economists, however, prefer the “network” glasses, which help them see groups as organic entities. Groups are composed of individuals, but you cannot study those individuals in isolation. You look at the emergent properties of the group; you identify the links between individuals; you show how a culture is rooted in events of the past and how it is shaped by its economic, environmental, and intergroup context. When looking through these glasses, the complexity of society and the interdependence of its parts are so apparent that many viewers develop contempt for the reductionism often practiced by psychologists. When looking through these glasses, social engineering often seems foolish. Societies are chaotic systems. Parameters can be changed, but efforts to intervene directly, particularly by changing individuals through therapy or education, seem naïve.

Of course, both pairs of glasses are essential for the social sciences, and many of the best practitioners use both. However, empirical research on happiness and well-being to date has been conducted overwhelmingly by psychologists, now joined by some economists, who rely upon the atomizing glasses. In this paper we will put on the group-vision glasses and try to report on a few phenomena that might be relevant to discussions of law, public policy, and happiness. In particular, we will make the case that human beings evolved by a process of multilevel selection, including group-level selection, and that it is useful to see people as being (in a metaphorical sense) hive creatures like bees. Human lives do not make sense without some discussion of human hives. If we want to increase human happiness, we must go beyond simple conceptions of sociality (in which people need and are affected by relationships) and examine humanity’s communal, tribal, and religious needs as well.

1. THREE HYPOTHESES ABOUT RELATEDNESS

You do not need special glasses to know that relatedness is important for well-being. Many surveys confirm that social support, in the form of friendships and marriage, is one of the biggest environmental contributors to well-being (Myers 2000). We shall call this claim the dyadic hypothesis, which states that people need relationships to flourish. The hypothesis is about dyads: one individual tied to another. It does not claim that people need groups to flourish, only that they need friends, lovers, and other individuals who are responsive to their needs. We consider this to be among the best-supported hypotheses in the scientific study of well-being, and we will say no more about it (see Baumeister and Leary [1995] for a review).

A stronger and more controversial hypothesis is the moral community hypothesis, which states that people need to be bound into a community that shares norms and values in order to flourish. This hypothesis was stated forcefully by Emile Durkheim, whose pioneering study of suicide concluded that the suicide rate in European countries “varies inversely with the degree of integration of the social groups of which the individual forms a part” (Durkheim [1897] 1951, p. 208). Factors that increased social integration (having a large family, being Catholic or Jewish rather than Protestant, being in a nation at war) decreased suicide rates; factors that increased self-sufficiency (for example, wealth and education) were associated with higher rates of suicide. Durkheim believed that marriage protects against suicide not because of the dyadic conjugal bond but because it creates a domestic society.

Durkheim gave us the concept of anomie, or normlessness, the condition of a society in which there is no clear and agreed-upon set of rules for behavior, and people are freed—or forced—to follow their own desires. Complete freedom to pursue one’s preferences may seem self-evidently good to many economists, but for Durkheim it is a recipe for misery and social decay. Durkheim thought that when people are left to their own devices, they can never satisfy their limitless acquisitiveness. Only by being a member of a group that imposes limits and sets standards for good behavior can people achieve their desires and find satisfaction.

Durkheim’s early findings about suicide rates appear to hold true today (Eckersley and Dear 2002), and a modern Durkheimian can easily explain why well-being has remained flat and depression rates have risen as Western nations have doubled or tripled their wealth per capita in

recent decades (Diener and Seligman 2004; Twenge 2000). The moral community hypothesis also helps explain why regular participation in religious worship is a strong predictor of well-being and of charitable giving (Brooks 2006; Diener and Clifton 2002; Diener et al. 1999; Myers 2000). Religion (in general) makes people depend less upon themselves and more upon God and each other. It makes them less atomic and more networked or hivish. We believe that the moral community hypothesis is probably true, although it requires more caveats than does the dyadic hypothesis. For example: when groups become too binding, suicide rates go up, driven in part by the shame of those who do not live up to the group's standards. (Durkheim called this kind of suicide "altruistic suicide.") Furthermore, there are probably individual differences in personality, which Durkheim did not consider, that moderate the benefits people derive from being bound tightly into a group. People who score high on the trait of openness to experience, for example, are likely to chafe more at restraint and to enjoy the anomie, variety, and creativity of life in big cities (McCrae 1996).

An even stronger relatedness hypothesis is the hive hypothesis, which says that the self can be an obstacle to happiness, so people need to lose their selves occasionally by becoming part of an emergent social organism in order to reach the highest levels of human flourishing. This hypothesis is essentially the moral community hypothesis with the additional claim that the most effective moral communities (from a well-being perspective) are those that offer occasional experiences in which self-consciousness is greatly reduced and one feels merged with or part of something greater than the self. We acknowledge that this hypothesis is speculative. There is research on the "curse of the self" (Leary 2004), but we know of no research that directly compares groups that vary on the degree of self-loss they afford. We are inspired, however, by two recent books that review the historical and anthropological evidence on dance, drill, and the joys of synchronized movement and conclude that the loss of self in group ritual is generally beneficial (Ehrenreich 2006; McNeill 1995). In the rest of this paper we will suggest that the hive hypothesis is plausible enough to merit serious scientific scrutiny. We further suggest that if it is true, it has important implications for legal and policy interventions aimed at increasing happiness.

2. MULTILEVEL SELECTION AND HAPPINESS

Economists care about preference satisfaction, but where do these preferences come from? Evolutionary psychology offers what is arguably the most comprehensive explanation: we want things that helped our ancestors succeed at leaving surviving offspring in the environments in which the human mind was shaped by natural selection (Barkow, Cosmides, and Tooby 1992). Our love of sweet and fatty foods, even when we know that we now eat too much of them; the desire for prestige and our concern for the opinions of others, even when we wish not to care; the desperate passion to protect our own children and the rapidly declining concern we show for more distantly related children—all of these human preferences flow readily from an analysis of the preferences that led early hunter-gatherers to succeed as individuals. David Buss (2000) has even offered a catalog of evolutionarily informed methods for increasing human happiness in the modern environments we now inhabit. But nearly all analyses of happiness from evolutionary psychology, such as those from economics, focus on individuals and their preferences. Might there be group-level preferences too? Might individuals be happiest when their groups are doing things that led, over eons of evolution, to group success?

Evolution works at multiple levels simultaneously. Genes jockey with other genes during meiosis to get on to the very few trains (eggs and sperm) that will make it into the next generation. Individuals compete with other individuals for the resources and mates that will enable them to leave more and better-provisioned offspring. And groups compete with other groups for land, hunting rights, or larger shares of the pie generated by cooperation in large-scale societies. Darwin ([1871] 1998, p. 166) believed that morality evolved in part by natural selection working at the group level: “A tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to aid one another, and to sacrifice themselves for the common good would be victorious over most other tribes; and this would be natural selection.”

For the next hundred years, many writers on evolution followed Darwin's lead and assumed that cooperative traits in humans and other animals evolved for the good of the group, or even the good of the species. But in 1966 George Williams demolished such arguments by analyzing many cases of adaptations that had been claimed to be adaptations at the group level, such as restraints on fertility and con-

sumption when food supplies are limited. He argued that in all cases these behaviors can be better explained by the natural selection of alternative alleles (gene variants) as individuals competed with other individuals. Donning the atomizing glasses, he concluded that a fleet herd of deer is really just a herd of fleet deer; nothing is gained by talking about groups because the fitness of a group is just the “summation of the adaptations of its members” (Williams 1966, p. 17). The free-rider problem appeared to be insoluble: any gene that created self-sacrificing altruists would be replaced in the population by genes that created individuals who benefited from the acts of altruists without incurring costs themselves. In 1976 Richard Dawkins’s book *The Selfish Gene* brought Williams’s ideas to the masses, including the masses of young researchers being trained in biology and the human sciences, and group selection was declared not only dead but an outright heresy for the next generation (Dawkins 1976).

But Williams looked in the wrong places. He examined behaviors in dozens of species that are not adept at solving the free-rider problem. Solutions to free riding are indeed rare in nature, but when they happen, the results can be profound. In fact, they are called “major evolutionary transitions” (Maynard Smith and Szathmary 1997), and there is good reason to believe that one or more such transitions occurred for humans, who are very good at solving free-rider problems.

Several such transitions are now widely accepted: replicating molecules joined together to form chromosomes, prokaryotes merged together to form eukaryotic cells, single-cell eukaryotes stayed together after division to form multicellular organisms, and some multicellular organisms stayed together after birth to form hives, colonies, and societies (Maynard Smith and Szathmary 1997). In each of these cases, cooperation by entities at one level led to enormous gains for the emergent group, largely through division of labor. These gains are so vast that the superorganisms produced by group-level selection tend to spread rapidly, transforming ecosystems by taking the richest environmental niches and relegating closely related species to the margins (as the close relatives of bees, ants, and humans can attest). Group-level analyses are no longer heretical; in a sense, all life forms are now understood to be groups, or even groups of groups (for state-of-the-art reviews, see Wilson, Van Vugt, and O’Gorman 2008; Wilson and Wilson 2007).¹

1. Some biologists claim that group selection is still controversial (for example, Dawkins 2006), but these authors are for the most part still relying on Williams’s analysis from

To identify a major transition, one must find the mechanisms that suppressed free riding at the lower level and allowed individual units to cohere into a superorganism. For bees and ants, the mechanisms involve the suppression of breeding by individuals and the concentration of breeding in a queen. For humans, those mechanisms are generally thought to involve cultural and biological adaptations such as religion and religiously inclined minds (Wilson 2002) or practices of shaming, gossip, and other low-cost control techniques that coevolved with minds prone to shame and reputational concerns (Richerson and Boyd 2005). Both McNeill (1995) and Ehrenreich (2006) suggest that one cooperation-enhancing biological mechanism that has been exploited by most cultures, often as part of religious practice, is synchronous movement.

An important fact about major transitions is that they are never complete. The advantages of free riding by lower-level units are always present (for example, intragenomic conflict, worker bees that lay their own eggs, and warriors who hold back and let others take the risks), and so groups at each level (genomes, individuals, hives) exist in a continual state of tension and can survive only as long as they have mechanisms that continually suppress selfishness by lower-level units. In this paper we follow those who suggest that social and religious practices that increase “hiving” are such mechanisms (Wilson 2002). We suggest that putting on the group-vision glasses can help social scientists to see the interlocking biological, psychological, and cultural innovations that enable large human groups to stay together and act in a coordinated fashion.

In the next section we discuss a few of these interlocking innovations, particularly rhythm, synchronous movement, and festivals. Consistent with the hive hypothesis, we suggest that some of the most intense and long-lasting forms of happiness come about when people do the sorts of things and experience the sorts of feelings that helped their ancestors' groups be successful.

3. MOVEMENT AND JOY

One of the first things you see through the group-vision glasses is the extraordinary measures many groups take to create and maintain their cohesiveness. Ecstatic group rituals, for example, were a regular and

1966 and have not addressed newer theories in which cultural and genetic traits coevolve. See Borello (2005) for a review of the history of the debate.

nearly universal practice among tribal societies at the time of European contact (Ehrenreich 2006). These celebrations were usually held to mark life transitions (that is, births, deaths, weddings, successes) or historical or astronomical events that were practically or symbolically relevant to the group. They typically involved feasts, special costumes, masks, drumming, chanting, and dancing to the point of exhaustion. A common feature of these rituals was that some or all members of the group transcended ordinary consciousness, often achieving a trance state. A related goal was for all members of the group to merge with the group. “As the dancer loses himself in the dance,” wrote the anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown ([1922] 1964, pp. 251–52), “he reaches a state of elation in which he feels himself filled with an energy beyond his ordinary state . . . at the same time finding himself in complete and ecstatic harmony with all of the fellow members of his community.”

Durkheim ([1915] 1965) coined the term “collective effervescence” to describe ecstatic group rituals and their effects. He considered the intense passion and joy generated by these periodic events to be essential to the long-term maintenance of a cohesive group. The anthropologist Victor Turner ([1969] 1995) proposed the Latin word *communitas* to describe the inspiration and revitalization experienced by those who participate in ecstatic group rituals. Turner believed that all societies went through an eternal oscillation between structure, in which the hierarchical relationships among roles and positions is affirmed, and *communitas*, in which structure is temporarily abolished and the relationships among people are affirmed.

Durkheim and Turner can help us understand many of the most joyful human celebrations. Whether we look at initiation rites in New Guinea, carnivals in medieval Europe, or Halloween in San Francisco, we find many common elements, including costuming, dancing, the mocking of authority, and the gleeful switching of roles (for example, dressing as though one were of another sex, caste, or class). Boundaries are dissolved, equality rules, and people celebrate with those of all ranks and social positions. Turner believed that these temporally limited periods of antistructure are not just safety valves for the oppressed to vent resentment; rather, they bond and humanize all members of the group, making the structures they later return to more humane and stable. Turner thought there was a necessary dialectic between structure and *communitas*: “[T]he immediacy of *communitas* gives way to the mediacy of structure, while . . . men are released from structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by their experiences of com-

munitas. What is certain is that no society can function adequately without this dialectic” (p. 129). It should be noted, however, that because *communitas* is both subversive and regenerative, people in positions of power sometimes feel threatened by it and resist it. Turner saw the hippie movement of his own time, and the violent reaction against it, in this light.

Although a variety of “techniques of ecstasy” (Eliade 1964) appear across cultures, McNeill (1995) and Ehrenreich (2006) maintain that rhythmic drumming and moving together in time are the most widespread and perhaps powerful methods used in pursuit of *communitas*. Both authors speculate that these cultural innovations played a role in human evolution. These techniques have been around long enough (millennia, and perhaps tens of millennia), and they have such powerful effects on individuals, that it would be hard to imagine that there were no adaptive consequences, no reduction in the Darwinian success of individuals who were unwilling or unable to participate. The human love of rhythm, dance, parades, cheerleading, yoga classes, and other kinds of moving together in time may be like our love of sweets, prestige, and our own children: they are pleasures for us now (in part) because ancient people who had a heritable tendency to enjoy synchronized movement were more likely to participate in such activities, reap the benefits of closer social ties, and leave more surviving offspring than those who did not.

The recent discovery of mirror neurons, which are much more extensive in human brains than in those of other primates, may be relevant here. Mirror neurons are an unusual class of neurons that fire either when a person performs an action or when the person simply sees another person performing the action (Iacoboni et al. 1999). In other words, when the person next to us moves in a particular way, motor systems in our brains begin reacting as though we were moving that way, making it easier for us to match the motor patterns of others. The phrase “monkey see, monkey do” is a mischaracterization of monkeys, who do not imitate, but it is apt for humans (Tomasello, Kruger, and Rater 1993). The great expansion of mirror neurons in human brains probably predates cultural practices of synchronization, so this expansion may be seen as a preadaptation (Mayr 1960)—a feature that arose under one selection pressure (such as improved learning through imitation) but was then available as a substrate for newer traits (such as group synchronous movement) that were shaped by other selection pressures.

If synchronous collective activities provide such potent and pleasurable ways to foster group connections and commitments, and if such activities were practiced in nearly every culture, why do we make so little use of them in the modern West? Ehrenreich (2006) shows that early European explorers generally reacted with disgust to the wild abandon of ecstatic group rituals, which they often misperceived as sexual or orgiastic in nature. These rituals were seen to be pointless, animalistic, and antithetical to the Western ideal of autonomous, rational selves that had emerged in Europe during the early modern period. McNeill (1995) and Ehrenreich (2006) also review research showing that early and medieval Christian worship included collective dancing within churches, but such dancing and other forms of exuberance were gradually pushed out of churches and into public squares beginning in the thirteenth century as the church became more hierarchical and dogmatic. These celebrations mutated into profane festivals and carnivals. As cities and festivals grew in subsequent centuries, public festivities became more characterized by drunkenness and criminal activity, making it ever easier for church and secular authorities to justify limiting them or shutting them down. The Reformation (especially Calvinism, which outlawed dancing and many other sources of pleasure) and the industrial revolution both encouraged virtues and social structures that were antithetical to such ecstatic practices and collective, egalitarian celebrations.

In spite of attempts to suppress them, vestiges of these ancient practices remain. Carnival celebrations in Catholic countries are direct descendants of these practices. Some African-American forms of worship may be direct descendants too, a kind of pipeline bringing ancient African practices into modern Christianity, particularly charismatic forms such as Pentecostalism (Ehrenreich 2006). Other practices are new inventions, suggesting that people, even Westerners, will find ways to satisfy their need for *communitas*. Ehrenreich argues that audiences at musical and sporting events are now more physically active and synchronized than they were 50 years ago when police enforced “no dancing” rules at concert halls. The scene inside and outside of many sport and musical events now often has a variety of carnivalesque elements, including face painting and body decoration. And “ravers” in the 1990s created their own version of ecstatic communal ritual when they found a drug (not coincidentally nicknamed Ecstasy) that increases feelings of love, even toward strangers, and combined it with new forms of music that were beat heavy and repetitive, to which they danced to exhaustion. “There is no question,” writes sociologist Tim Olavson, “that they

[Durkheim and Turner] would not be surprised to witness the rave phenomenon were they alive today; nor would they wonder, as so many politicians, anxious parents, and even social scientists currently do, why the rave experience so strongly attracts contemporary youth” (Olavson 2004, p. 96). The motivation to seek periodic experiences of intense joy and connection through synchronous movement with others may be a fundamental human need that modern Western societies fail to acknowledge and satisfy.

4. HIVES AND EMERGENT ORGANISMS

The idea of society as an organism is a recurring theme in the history of social thought. Herbert Spencer ([1896] 1975) popularized the term “super-organism” to refer to human societies. Drawing a direct analogy between societies and biological organisms, he wrote about the sustaining, distributing, and regulating systems of a society. Like Spencer, many of the early psychologists, including Wundt (1911), Le Bon ([1896] 1920), McDougall (1920), and Freud (1922), thought of groups as something more than just collections of individuals. With regard to the emergence of group behavior Le Bon ([1896] 1920, p. 30) wrote, “The psychological crowd is a provisional being formed of heterogeneous elements, which for a moment are combined, exactly as the cells which constitute a living body form by their reunion a new being which displays characteristics very different from those possessed by each of the cells singly.”

These early psychologists were interested in the psychology of people in groups, which they envisioned as something emergent, something that came into being only when individuals were in the right spatial and psychological configuration. Yet group psychology did not fare well in the coming decades, partly because of overstatements by some proponents that bordered on the metaphysical. Floyd Allport (1924, p. 4) wrote, “There is no psychology of groups which is not essentially and entirely a psychology of individuals. Social psychology must not be placed in contradistinction to the psychology of the individual; it is a part of the psychology of the individual, whose behavior it studies in relation to that sector of his environment comprised by his fellows.”

Much like the idea of group selection, the idea of a group mind was declared scientifically dead and placed off-limits. The scientific study of groups (without group minds) continued in psychology, but it never

achieved the importance that the early psychologists had envisioned (see Forsyth and Burnette [2005] for a review).

This rejection of the group-vision glasses marked the beginning of the nearly exclusive focus on the individual that was to be the hallmark of social psychology for the rest of the twentieth century. Don Campbell (1994, p. 23) wrote, "Methodological individualism dominates our neighboring fields of economics, much of sociology, and all of psychology's excursions into organizational theory. This is the dogma that all human social group processes are to be explained by laws of individual behavior." This unfortunate turn in the history of psychology leaves us now ill equipped to understand and respond to many mass phenomena.

The commitment to individualism may be one reason why the joy and happiness that flows from merging with a group is rarely mentioned in psychology. As Ehrenreich (2006) points out, if homosexual love is "the love that dare not speak its name," group love is the love that has no name at all, except for obscure terms such as *communitas*. Yet many of us have felt it at some point in our lives, perhaps while playing a team sport, singing in a choir, marching and chanting at a protest rally, or working closely with friends to achieve a noble goal. We lose ourselves, forget our petty concerns, and feel suffused with energy and purpose. Such memories often stand out as peak moments of happiness when people reflect on their lives, so even if such experiences are rare, these peaks may be important for the study of well-being (Kahneman 1999).

A further reason to study such experiences is that if they really do increase group cohesiveness, then they may increase well-being indirectly as well as directly. For example, strong social ties and mutual trust within a community, referred to as "social capital" (Coleman 1988), has many salutary societal effects. Social capital contributes to economic growth, positive health outcomes, greater subjective well-being, and lower crime and mortality rates (Folland 2007; Helliwell 2003; Putnam 2000). Similarly, people often derive satisfaction from their collective identities. Researchers have consistently found that being part of a group with which one strongly identifies is associated with greater well-being. A positive relationship has been found between group identification and indicators of mental well-being for people who are deaf (Bat-Chava 1994), people who attend group therapy (Marmarosh and Corazzini 1997), religious people (Diener and Clifton 2002), members of ethnic minorities (Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey 1999; Goodstein and Ponterotto 1997; Munford 1994), and members of stigmatized groups

(Crocker and Major 1989). Participation on sports teams as a leisure activity and identification with a sports team have also been found to predict well-being (Wann 2006). These findings strongly suggest that people derive satisfaction from the sense of being a part of something larger than themselves. As for whether these groups are more effective at increasing well-being when they are as cohesive as hives, we cannot yet say. But there are good reasons to think that the periodic loss of self, in the company of others with whom one shares an identity, would have many beneficial effects.

5. THE BENEFITS OF TRANSCENDING THE SELF

Ehrenreich (2006) traces the Western loss of openness to collective joy to the profound changes in selfhood that began to occur in early modern Europe. It was during this period that people came to believe “that the essence of the Western mind, and particularly the Western male, upper-class mind, was its ability to resist the contagious rhythm of the drums; to wall itself up in a fortress of ego and rationality against the seductive wildness of the world” (p. 9) (on the related contrast between independent and interdependent construals of the self, which is the foundation of modern cultural psychology, see Markus and Kitayama 1991). This adaptation was highly functional in the new capitalist economy, but it came with certain costs. One of the largest may have been an increased tendency for people to experience depression and anxiety. Clinical depression is not a modern invention; clear cases can be found in letters, poems, and other texts from the ancient world. But the prevalence of depression may have increased in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; many commentators from that era, but not earlier ones, described epidemics of “melancholy” sweeping the continent (Ehrenreich 2006, chap. 7). Now that we have better records, we can say with more confidence that rates of depression in Western nations rose during the twentieth century (Diener and Seligman 2004; Twenge 2000), even as those nations grew vastly richer. Wealth is weakly correlated with happiness (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2002), but isolation and separation, which are characteristic of modern ways of living, are strongly correlated with depression (on the dyadic relatedness hypothesis, see Baumeister and Leary 1995).

The social psychologist Mark Leary supports Ehrenreich’s analysis in his book *The Curse of the Self* (Leary 2004). Leary maintains that

our goal-focused, judgmental, worry-prone, internally chattering self is a modern creation that often sabotages our well-being and renders us blind to our greater potentials. Indeed, he proposes that one of the most important things we can do to improve our well-being is to learn techniques for quieting the self. “Had the human self been installed with a mute button or off switch,” Leary (2004, p. 46) writes, “the self would not be the curse to happiness that it often is.”

People attempt to switch off the self in a variety of ways, which may be placed on a continuum from short-term distractions to those that produce sustained and sometimes life-changing effects. On the short-term end of the spectrum we find some techniques that are generally beneficial, such as transportation into narrative worlds via television, books, movies, or video games (see, for example, Green, Brock, and Kaufman 2004). But we also find activities that entice people into making myopic trade-offs: a brief period of escape from the self is paid for, with interest, later on. For example, millions of people abuse alcohol, drugs, and food (for example, binge eating) as methods of escape from the self (Baumeister 1991). The guilt and anxiety they feel afterward only increases their motivation to escape the self again, often through the same means.

At the other end of the continuum are behaviors and experiences that can potentially bring about sustained transcendence or modification of the self. Included here are skills of mental and bodily control such as meditation and yoga. Also included here are the fruits of some educational practices, such as some Christian educational methods in which children and young adults are taught to be more like Jesus and less like their materialistic, self-absorbed, secular peers. As explained in the opening line of the Christian bestseller *The Purpose Driven Life*, “It’s not all about you” (Warren 2002). Given that highly religious people are happier than secular people (Myers 2000), it is worth asking if the benefits of religion derive not just from participation in religious communities but from the successful alteration of the self.

And finally, many people experience a “quantum change” (Miller and C’de Baca 2001) after a “peak experience” (Maslow [1964] 1964) or a moment of intense awe (Keltner and Haidt 2003). Whether induced by rhythmic movement, hallucinogenic drugs, or in many cases by no known trigger, many people have experienced a profound psychological state involving a loss of concern about the self, transcendence of dichotomies, and overwhelming positivity including feelings that the world is good and desirable. These experiences have much in common with

the religious conversion experiences described by William James ([1902] 1961) in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. James reviewed hundreds of first-hand accounts from Christian and Islamic sources and identified what he called the “state of assurance,” characterized by overwhelmingly positive feelings including “the loss of all the worry, the sense that all is ultimately well with one, the peace, the harmony, the willingness to be, even though the outer conditions should remain the same” (p. 248). Such turning points, epiphanies, and conversions are often reported to enrich lives for many years afterward. The long duration of the benefits of these experiences, in comparison to the rapid adaptation that people usually make to pleasures and successes (Frederick and Loewenstein 1999), should make such phenomena of great interest to social scientists interested in well-being.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

We have argued (along with all other evolutionists) that human minds were shaped by natural selection to enjoy doing things that increased our ancestors’ Darwinian fitness. We have further argued (along with some but not all other evolutionists) that natural selection works at multiple levels, including the group level, and that it shaped human minds to enjoy doing things that increased the success of our ancestors’ groups. Selfishness, greed, and competition within groups can never be eliminated, but groups vary in the degree to which they succeed in suppressing selfishness and creating esprit de corps. Under some circumstances, human groups can be quite successful in suppressing selfishness and eliciting a willingness to sacrifice, and even to die, for the good of the group.

If group selection played a role in shaping our minds and pleasures, then it can be expected to have led to a shift in the nature of cooperation and conflict. As with bees and ants, group selection reduces conflict within groups, but it generally increases conflict across groups. And as technological innovations enabled human groups to better kill their opponents and oppress their own ranks, the dark side of this trade-off has gotten ever darker. Hive psychology can be dangerous. The images of Fascist spectacles at Nuremberg and Rome, with acres of uniformed men moving in lockstep, still haunt us. Many social scientists now have a visceral disgust at any hivelike social formation and will likely recoil

from our suggestion that anything good can come from exploring these ancient capacities of the human mind.

We see two crucial distinctions, however, between traditional hiving and fascism. First, we must distinguish between small and large hives. If hiving comes naturally to us, then it is hiving or bonding with dozens or hundreds of other people, not with tens of thousands. The cost/benefit ratio of having many small hives within one's nation is probably very positive, leading to increased trust, cooperation, love, and interdependence at a local level.² When nations or ethnic groups become hives, however, the calculus is radically different, and the potential for violence, internal repression, and even genocide becomes so great that no set of benefits could outweigh the risks. If fostering thousands of local hives was a likely precursor to national hivishness, then we would not advocate playing with fire. We suspect, however, that just the opposite may be true. An anomic nation in which individuals are hungry for connection and meaning may be ripe for takeover by a nationalistic demagogue, whereas a nation composed of strong communities with high levels of social capital in which people are tightly bound into many crosscutting groups may be less likely to succumb to such seduction.

A second distinction that must be drawn is between festivals and spectacles. Fascist rallies and parades were designed to awe passive on-lookers and reinforce hierarchy and subservience. They fostered unity around the godlike figure of the leader. They had little in common with the techniques of ecstasy used by most traditional societies to bond members as equals, and they certainly did not dissolve structure in *communitas*, as Turner had described. It may be that massive social super-organisms forged through spectacle to serve the will of a leader are always dangerous, whereas smaller social organisms that emerge spontaneously from the actions of people who want to love and trust each other are generally safe.

We note a third distinction: a hive is not the same as a mob. Groups that form spontaneously in response to a perceived moral outrage are often dangerous, as individuals become more willing to commit violent actions that they would be unlikely to commit on their own. The psy-

2. We acknowledge that some small hivish groups, particularly those composed of adolescent males, can be quite destructive, particularly if they compete for territory as happens with urban street gangs. But when groups are more mixed by age and sex, and when people participate in multiple crosscutting nonnested groups so that they have multiple identities, the dangers of small hives may be minimal compared to their benefits. See Berreby (2005) for an exploration of these trade-offs.

chology of a mob seems to draw on well-studied mechanisms of deindividuation that release people from the moral constraints of ordinary life and make violent and selfish behavior more likely (Diener 1979). Hives of the sort we have been discussing clearly involve a kind of deindividuation as well, but when deindividuation is in the service of communion and celebration, rather than collective social action, the predominant emotion seems to be love, not anger.

We therefore take the view that hivishness is a basic aspect of human nature that can be used for good or for evil. When hives are small, egalitarian, and communally oriented, they are likely to be harmless to others and beneficial to the participants. When hives are large, hierarchical, and united by the goal of taking what the members believe to be morally corrective action, they are likely to pose a grave danger to others. What, then, are the implications of hive psychology for public policy? We offer three.

6.1. Encourage Local Festivals and Dances

If the hive hypothesis is true, then an increase in the availability of music, dance, and street festivals should increase happiness and trust while decreasing alienation and crime. A less obvious prediction is that synchronized or line dancing should be more beneficial than freestyle dances in which each person moves as she pleases.

Any legal or policy changes would have to meet the definition of “libertarian paternalism” (Thaler and Sunstein 2003). Options can be made available and defaults can be set, but people must be able to opt out easily from new policies. A high rate of opting out should be taken as a rejection of a policy. But with that said, it may be possible for urban planners, local governments, and even schools to make it easier for beneficial festivities to arise. Through tax policies and zoning regulations, localities can increase the number of venues for live music and can take other steps to help local musicians. By building an outdoor amphitheater and putting on a free weekly concert featuring the most popular local bands, a town can encourage its citizens to dance together (as happens on Friday evenings in our town of Charlottesville, Virginia). By making it easy for local groups to close off city streets, towns can increase the frequency of residential block parties featuring music and dancing.

Thinking small and trying to catalyze the efforts of local entrepreneurs might pay off handsomely in terms of social capital and well-being. Thinking big and exerting central control may backfire. For example, large citywide and city-sponsored events may easily spiral out of

control, leading to violence and increasing distrust. Large civic projects such as museums, opera houses, and monuments may encourage spectacle rather than festival: participants are passive, save for a bit of clapping and walking, and they attend to the object or performer; they do not come away feeling closer to each other.

Synchronous movement may also be effective in corporations and other business settings. In some Japanese companies (and even some small rural towns) there are morning or midday exercises in which all members participate. Members of Japanese police and fire departments similarly exercise, moving together in sync every morning. Organizational researchers have argued that the main function of these exercises is team building and evoking a group orientation (Tayeb 2005). To our knowledge no causal relations between synchronous movement and employee morale has yet been proved, but we predict that experimental studies would show such an effect, particularly if the activities are led by employees and if managers participate in them as equals.

6.2. Think about Happy Groups, Not Just Happy Individuals

Sometimes aiming directly at a goal can cause you to miss it. Some have argued that direct attempts to increase one's own happiness fall into this category (Schooler, Ariely, and Loewenstein 2003). An instructive example can be found in a surprising place: poultry science. Muir (1996) showed that to maximize egg production in a large multihen cage, it was not a good idea to selectively breed the hens that lay the most eggs. Those egg champions were also the most aggressive birds, so when a number of such chickens shared a cage, they spent their time fighting. Cagewide fertility dropped substantially. The better way of maximizing individual productivity, it turned out, was to selectively breed the cages that collectively produced the most eggs. This is in fact a form of artificial group selection. Predictably, it leads to the spread of genes that suppress aggression and competition within groups.

Recent wisdom from organizational science suggests that the same processes may apply to human groups. Robert Sutton (2007) argues that the best organizations are those that strictly enforce the "no asshole rule," which says that if star performers make others feel belittled and demoralized, they should either change their ways or be fired. As with those cages of chickens, rewarding individual performance at the expense of a civilized work environment can be counterproductive. More generally, given the complex interdependencies that characterize each human group, a focus on individual-level variables may lead to unexpected and

unwelcome consequences at the group level. Starting at the group level instead may be the wiser strategy.

This strategy may be particularly useful for increasing well-being. Many of the goods that are known to contribute to well-being, such as wealth and high status, are positional goods: relative position matters more than absolute levels, so competitors are trapped in a zero-sum game (Frank 1999). Increasing the average per capita income in a nation over time seems to have no effect on the subjective well-being of its citizens (Diener and Seligman 2004). But participation in hives is not like this. One person's ability to enjoy the ecstatic loss of self is, if anything, increased by the success of those around her. And the trust and cooperation engendered by such practices is a public good. As Robert Putnam (2007) points out, he and his wife get to enjoy the fruits of living in a town with high social capital even though they never participate in the social clubs and civic events that build that capital.

6.3. Reexamine Diversity

There are good moral reasons for celebrating diversity in order to encourage inclusiveness. But there are good empirical reasons for warning that emphasizing differences, rather than commonalities, can be harmful (Haidt, Rosenberg, and Hom 2003). Social psychological research on minimal groups shows that people can easily be divided and turned against each other when socially meaningless differences (such as being an overestimator versus underestimator of the number of dots on a page) are made salient (Tajfel et al. 1971). When socially meaningful differences such as race, religion, and language are emphasized, division and distrust seem inevitable. A recent study by Putnam (2007) confirms that residential diversity does indeed decrease trust and social ties (or bridging capital) among members of different groups. Surprisingly, however, Putnam found that diversity reduced social capital within groups (or bonding capital) as well. Putnam (2007, p. 149) summarizes his findings as follows: "Diversity seems to trigger not in-group/out-group division, but anomie or social isolation. In colloquial language, people living in ethnically diverse settings appear to 'hunker down'—that is, to pull in like a turtle." Turtling is the exact opposite of hiving. We therefore believe that the unquestioning celebration of diversity should give way to more careful scrutiny and to a full cost-benefit analysis. It may be that diverse democracies such as the United States can best accommodate immigration and racial diversity by emphasizing similarities and shared citizenship, as Putnam (2007) suggests. We add a more speculative suggestion:

the turtling effects of diversity may be muted if people from diverse backgrounds can take advantage of the ancient and universal bonding mechanisms we have discussed in this paper.

7. CONCLUSION

When bank robber Willie Sutton was asked why he robbed banks, he is reputed to have replied, "Because that's where the money is." Social scientists seem to have taken Sutton's (mythical) comment a bit too literally. When studying happiness and well-being, we value money as much as Sutton did. We invest a great deal of effort in quantifying relationships between well-being and gains or losses of money. But if we were to step back and identify the sources of people's greatest joys, we would rebalance our research portfolios. We would invest much more in the study of collective pleasures, group love, and experiences of ecstatic self-loss, because that's where the joy is.

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