

✧ What Does Evolutionary Biology Tell Us about Relationality as a Basis for Economics and Politics?

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This chapter was developed in the context of the 2020 Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquium, whose theme was the relationship between religion and economics, democratic politics, and environment. I begin with the premise that we cannot build an economics or politics for human flourishing until we know what sort of creature humans are, what contributes to our thriving in our ecological setting. The neurobiologist Darcia Narvaez writes, “To approach eudaimonia or human flourishing, one must have a concept of human nature, a realization of what constitutes a normal baseline, and an understanding of where humans are.”¹ In short, one needs to know the nature of humanity, its ontology, to create conditions for its *eudaimonia* or thriving. The Greeks thought similarly: one studies natural philosophy for the “religious” purpose of learning how the natural and human world works—Narvaez’s baseline—to live with it in harmony and near eudaimonia. “The nature of a thing,” Aristotle writes in Book I of *Politics*, “is its end.” To understand the nature of a thing is to understand its end, what counts as its specific form of flourishing.

What is our “baseline” or ontology so that we may develop an economics and politics to suit? Both Christian and Jewish traditions propose that it is relational, and it seems that evolutionary biology and developmental psychology are catching up to the idea. I’ll begin with a discussion of relationality, drawing on the concepts of covenant and Trinity, and continue with a look at recent biological research on human cooperativity in hopes of developing a “baseline” that could serve as a framework for an economics and politics.

AN ONTOLOGY OF RELATIONALITY

We might begin by noting that developing personal and societal practices grounded in ontology is the central biblical import. “There exists a law,” Yoram Hazony writes, “whose force is of a universal nature, because it derives from the way the world itself was made, and therefore from the natures of the men and nations in this world.”² This foundation, the “way the world itself was made,” is, in Jewish and Christian traditions, relational.

Relationality starts with the notion that Being, the possibility for existence, results from the source of all that is. There could be nothing, but there is something. The source of all “something”—items, thoughts, language, laws of physics—is what some people call God. Ian Barbour writes of God as a “structuring cause” or “designer of a self-organizing process.”³ Franz Rosenzweig called it “the eventfulness of the limitless possibilities that will come to exist, the not-nothing that is the ‘divine essence in all infinity’ prior to there being a distinct something or a distinct nothing.”⁴ After the kabbalist concept *Ein Sof* and F. W. J. Schelling, this source is not so much what precedes effects as what is realized as it yields effects. Existence, said briefly, is God’s self-expression.

On one hand, each particular is radically different from structuring cause—differences in materiality/immateriality, finitude/infinity, composite features/unitary simplicity—yet on the other, each particular partakes of it to exist at all. We are grounded by the source of existence in order to be, and that source grounds all particulars, essences, and features, be they past, present, or future. Yet, as Thomas Aquinas notes, we do not partake of the transcendent source identically or proportionally but rather analogically, as an analogy expresses its referent, with different features but an undergirding of-a-kindness. More specifically to Aristotle, analogical terms refer to *similarity of a feature that is present in both parties and accidental* to at least one of them. We are radically different from God yet with underlying of-a-kindness. The *b’tselem Elohim/imago* expresses this well: persons are radically different from incorporeal, imageless God; there are no features or divine physiognomy for humanity to partake of. Yet we partake analogically of the divine imageless “image.”

Radical difference from the transcendent yet unavoidable partaking/relation is the way anything comes to be. *The structure of existence is difference-amid-relation*. Aquinas writes, “God himself is properly the cause of universal being which is innermost in all things [beings] . . . in all things

God works intimately.”⁵ All existing things share the property of radical distinction from the transcendent amid foundational partaking. “The One,” in Catherine Keller’s words, “is to multiplicity as white light is to the spectrum of a rainbow.”⁶

As difference or distinction-amid-relation is the structure of existing, not only are persons distinct from God yet in intimate relation, but we are also distinct from each other yet in necessary relation. Aquinas understands it this way: we partake of God to exist, but we are not only distinct from God but from each other. Moreover, each one of us is a composite of various, distinct features or essences. Yet God, of whom we partake, is a simple unity and not various, neither a group of persons nor an aggregate of different essences. How is it that we, composites as individuals and distinct from each other, analogically partake of something simple, without components? It is possible, on Aquinas’s account, because we are not only composites and distinct from each other but at the same time part of the unity that is God’s self-expression.⁷ “Thus,” Mary Hirschfeld writes, “there must also be a unity to creation if creation is to give witness to the fact that God is one. God communicates this unity by ordering created beings to one another and all things to him. . . . These two features—the heterogeneity of created beings and their ordering to *one another* (and ultimately to God)—need to be respected.”⁸ This is our foundational, ontological relationality.

In the Jewish tradition, Emmanuel Levinas wrote, “My very uniqueness lies in the responsibility for the other man.”⁹ Echoing this, Martin Buber notes that “the individual is a fact of existence insofar as he steps into a living relation with other individuals.”¹⁰ In the Greek Orthodox tradition, John Zizioulas echoes, “The person cannot be conceived in itself as a static entity, but only as it *relates to* . . . [it is] in communion that this being is *itself* and thus *is at all*.”¹¹ Or in Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel’s words, “Life begins as life together.”¹² Kirk Wegter-McNelly, building on Wolfhart Pannenberg, summarizes: cosmos is “a place in which entangled independence-through-relationship is the fundamental characteristic of being.”¹³ Karl Rahner calls this “unity-in-difference,”¹⁴ Catherine Keller and Laurel Schneider “entangled” or “non-separable” differences.¹⁵

Relationality as distinction-amid-relation is not a binary between distinction on one hand and relation on the other. It is rather reciprocal constitution: each becomes the singular, unique person she is through layers

and networks of relations. It is the networks of interactions that constitute us. As that is our grammar or baseline, human flourishing entails that we see and *see to* the relations that are how we become who we are. At/tending to this baseline is the precondition for living in harmony in the world and nearing eudaimonia. The consequences of flouting it include cognitive and emotional impairment in children.¹⁶ Adults who become isolated suffer from increased risk of suicide, mortality,¹⁷ and morbidity, including depression and other emotional disorders.¹⁸ The distresses resulting from the COVID isolation are a recent testament to humanity's relational constitution.

We become our (distinct) selves through relations with those nearby and through relations that extend out in our paths of global connectedness, as our educational and economic opportunities, nutrition and health care, and the tensions we and our relations are under are formed by those who are not necessarily geographically proximate. Contra social contract theory, there is no a priori individual who later enters a social contract because (singular) persons don't occur other than through their relations. Contra Kant, there is no autonomous lawgiver who individually reasons her way to universal precepts as reason develops through engagement with the ideas, practice, and methodologies of thought of other persons and cultures (as Polanyi, Kuhn, and others explain). Finally, relationality as distinction-amid-relation means neither homogeneity of persons nor of cultures but rather reciprocal commitment and responsibility among those who are different.

RELATIONALITY, TRINITY

The Trinity is a wonderful teacher of this idea. Each trinitarian person is distinct, each with "its own particular distinguishing notes," as Gregory of Nyssa wrote.¹⁹ Yet each is who "he" is through relation to other trinitarian persons. Edith Stein, the German Jewish philosopher who became a Carmelite sister, notes that for the persons of the Trinity, "I am" is identical with "I am one with you" and with "we are."²⁰ The notion of *perichoresis*, as the Cappadocian fathers developed it, imagines the three trinitarian persons loosely "in a dance around," where the identity of each emerges from relation to the others. It is these relations that constitute the whole of the Godhead. "Person," John Milbank notes, is a relational term. "Yet this does not entirely collapse the persons into the relations, because 'person'

is here rather the point of equipoise between relation and substance . . . (ST [Summa Theologica] I, q. 29, a. 4 resp.).”²¹

As it is each trinitarian person, distinct yet in relation, that constitutes the Godhead, without both distinction and relation, each is not a person of the Trinity because, as an isolated person, there is no Trinity—no unity—to be part of. In the Trinity, however, donative relationality transforms each from isolation into a person of divine communion. “The deity of this God,” Wegter-McNelly writes, again building on Pannenberg, “resides not in the persons as distinct from one another but within and among the persons as they are related to one another, i.e., in the relationality that constitutes them and binds them.”²²

As God’s self-expression in creation allows for all existence, we may say that the distinct trinitarian persons in mutual constitution allow for our human existence. We partake analogically of the “image” of the trinitarian community. Humanity, analogically partaking of the triune God, partakes of distinct-persons-in-relation.²³ On one hand, the distinction-amid-relation nature of God in himself (Immanent Trinity) informs how humanity understands God (God in relation to us, the Economic Trinity). God makes his communal (trinitarian) self-known to us in scripture and revelation. These are communicative, relational acts. On the other, the Immanent Trinity also renders each human being, in God’s image, distinct-amid-relation (a creational and ontological act). As Aquinas held, the nature of the trinitarian God illuminates the human condition.²⁴

In Pannenberg’s elaboration, not only is the Trinity the ground for human relationality (a downstream flow, so to speak, from transcendent to humanity) but human relationality is inherent in the immanent Godhead (an upstream flow). After all, two of the three trinitarian persons, Son and Spirit, are who they are only in engagement with us. This makes our capacity for relation—with Son, Spirit, and each other—part of what it means for them to be Son and Spirit.²⁵ Indeed, part of what it means to be Trinity, for without the Son and Spirit, there is no Triune God. In a related reading of the triune *imago*, Jürgen Moltmann writes that the entire human community, not individual persons, is in the image of the communal God. It is not each person who is in God’s image but rather persons together. As God is the unity of multiplicities, it is the union of multiple persons that is in his image.²⁶

As each trinitarian person gives identity to the others, donation of a trinitarian type is without loss. Indeed, it is with repletion of identity. Thus,

each human person, in the image of this donative God, is also more herself in the act of giving—an idea with not insignificant consequence for economics and politics. Aaron Riches and Daniel Bell are right to follow Anselm in rejecting the binary between caring for oneself *or* for another. Following trinitarian logic, Bell proposes that one may “overcome” the “modern illusion of the isolated, alienated self (or postmodern dissolute self)” for life “lived as donation . . . life as participation in the dance of charity that is the Trinity.”²⁷

RELATIONALITY, COVENANT

My second illustration of relationality is the concept of covenant, a bond between distinct parties where each gives for the flourishing of the other. Covenant, Jean Lee writes, is the “promise with one or more counterparty under common pursuit of shared values for long-term cooperation and well-being of the community.” It is the promise, shared values, and *telos* of long-term communal well-being that distinguish covenant from other human transactions. Importantly, unlike contract, which protects interests, covenant protects relationship. Or, as Lee continues, “Contracts form the basis of the market while covenants form the basis of community.”²⁸ In the Judaic tradition, the source of human covenantality is threefold. Most basically, we exist in the distinction-amid-relation grammar of existence; second, we are in the image of a covenant-making God (this is our nature); and third, we are in covenantal relation with God (this is the kind of relating we do, our activity). Stephen Geller writes, the Hebrew Bible God is not so much a concept, an “ism,” as a relation.²⁹

It’s worth noting that while covenant creates community, it does not subsume the person, nor is the individual sacrifice-able for its sake (the point of the *Akedah*, the binding of Isaac narrative). In Lenn Goodman’s words, “The covenant itself . . . rests on (and thus cannot create) the freedom of the covenantors.”³⁰

Covenants of reciprocal commitment among equals are easily imagined, as are covenants with asymmetric terms between unequal parties. The innovations of the Hebrew Bible are two: (1) Covenants of *mutual* commitment are forged between unequals, between the divine and human and among persons of different status; and (2) Covenant is not between lord and a vassal, who represents the people in his domain (as ancient suzerainty treaties were) but between God and each person directly.

The consequences of this intimate God-person bond include removing values, morality, and practices from the aegis of human monarchs and understanding them as grounded in the transcendent, whose values one cannot tweak to suit reigning political powers. Indeed, ordinary persons know the moral law and may judge the king's adherence to it. The Hebraic covenant, Robert Bellah writes, is "a charter for a new kind of people, a people under God, not under a king . . . a people ruled by divine law, not the arbitrary rule of the state, and of a people composed of responsible individuals."³¹

In this God-person covenantal reciprocity, stipulative features might arise (as parents stipulate that a child clean her room), but covenant is not stipulative in motive or *telos* (one doesn't have children so that they clean their rooms).

One aspect of covenant between God and humanity is its inauguration and maintenance by gift, often of an item of little economic value. As Marcel Mauss and Lewis Hyde have observed,³² the spirit of the donor is given to the donee in the performative act of gift-giving. Donation of spirit makes the bond of trust, loyalty, and acknowledgment of a common future. This gift is neither contract nor *quid pro quo*. It does not imagine a transactional return, nor does it seek, however subtly, to coerce or manipulate. It is the mark of reciprocity for the sake of the other and shared horizons.

Covenantal donation of gift begins dyadically: God-Adam, God-Noah, God-patriarchs. The human partners in covenant are given the gifts of land and children, of survival in the world. In reciprocity, their children return a token of the land, of the harvest, to the Temple and God as a symbol of mutual commitment. Yet covenantal giving does not remain dyadic. Persons give to God also by giving in charity—in Hebrew, *hekdesh* (made holy). In this triangulation, one gives to God by giving to a third party, persons in need. These triune relations-of-giving are mutually constitutive: covenantal commitment to other persons constitutes covenant with God, and covenant with God sustains us in covenantal commitments to others. "Covenant is," Eric Mount explains, "a distinctively, though not exclusively, Hebraic metaphor and model that locates the relational self in a community of identity, promise, and obligation with God and neighbor."³³ The triangulated covenant is found in the Ten Commandments, the first three of which pertain to person and God, the rest, to life among persons. Amos

and Proverbs go so far as to denounce the hypocrisy of performing rituals while abandoning the afflicted, as if one could maintain bond with God absent bond with the needy³⁴—one of the most oft-repeated of biblical and rabbinic denunciations.

Covenantal giving thus extends from dyad to larger associations. Reciprocal giving becomes gift exchange network, as Mauss described it, where gift from God to person generates gift from person to person and on to the next person through the giving loop, thus sustaining it.³⁵ While gift-exchange networks exist within economic systems, they are the aspect of economic relations that marks mutual trust and shared fate, characterized by: (1) delay of return (immediate return feels like payment, not gift exchange); (2) nonidentical repetition (the returned item is never the same as the initial one); (3) recipient orientation, where the gift aims at benefiting not the giver but the recipient; and importantly, (4) asymmetrical reciprocity, wherein gift from A to B generates gift from B to C, etc. Person A receives a gift in return in the course of life and time after many gifts have traveled in multiple directions through the giving loop, thus maintaining it.³⁶

Who is in the loop? Consistent with the idea that covenant/relationality is the structure of all existence, the biblical answer is: all the nations. The covenant to the patriarchs, thrice repeated, is “for the blessing of all the nations” (Gn 12:3, 26:4, 28:14). God covenants with non-Israelites as all persons, made in God’s image, are capable of “moral correspondence” (*dmuth Elohim, similitudo*), of committing themselves to covenantal bonds and standards of relation. Such commitment undergirds the extensive biblical and rabbinic obligations to the enemy, stranger, as well as to the domestic poor.³⁷ The rabbinic *Mikhilta de-Shimon* (bar Yochai), commenting on Exodus 19:2, notes that the Torah was given not in any country but in the open desert to ensure access to all persons because its principles pertain to all. “The Torah speaks the language of human beings” (*b. Nedarim 3a, b. Berachot 31b*).

In the Christian Testament, the triangulation of covenantal commitment is seen in the famous passage in 1 John 4:20: “For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.” Absent love of persons, there is no love of God. But, John continues, love of God enables love of others: “We love because he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). Love by God enables and sustains our

love of other persons. Irenaeus put it concisely: “To love Him above all, and one’s neighbor . . . do reveal one and the same God.”³⁸ In Augustine’s theology, the “relic” of God in each person gives her the capacity to love other persons. In sum, God makes to humanity a triune gift in covenant: the gift of relational existence, of being in God’s (relational) image, and (in the Christian tradition) the gift of a relational being, himself in Jesus. In his image, we have the capacity (*similitudo*, *dmuth Elohim*) to respond in covenant to God and others.

The medieval period gives us one of the most soaring expressions of the triangulated covenant. The French-Jewish Bible commentator Rashi reads in Isaiah, “I cannot be God unless you are my witness,” and Rashi glosses, “I am the God who will be whenever you bear witness to love and justice in the world.” God can be God when persons are loving and just to each other. In the twentieth century, Levinas’s work on responsibility to the “face” of the other expounds on this idea. “To follow the Most-High is also to know that nothing is greater than to approach one’s neighbor.”³⁹ This for Levinas is not a “figure of speech” but a description of God, “who approaches precisely through this relay to the neighbor—binding men among one another with obligation.”⁴⁰ When Levinas writes that relationship with God “can be traced back to the love of one’s neighbor,”⁴¹ he does not start with God and derive responsibility to persons from covenant with the divine. Rather, the bond with God reaches back to commitment to neighbor. The philosopher Richard Kearney reprises: “This is a *deus capax* who in turn calls out to the *homo capax* of history in order to be made flesh, again and again—each moment we confront the face of the other, welcome the stranger.” Echoing Levinas and Rashi, Kearney concludes that “welcoming the stranger” is the site of our bond with God: “A capacitating God who is capable of all things cannot actually be or become incarnate until we say yes.”⁴²

RELATIONALITY, EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY, DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

What do the physical sciences tell us about relationality as a human “baseline”? In research on cognitive development and societal formation, evolutionary psychology and biology identify *H. sapiens* as a “hypercooperative” species.⁴³ Cooperative behaviors “are associated with a disadvantage or cost for the actor and a benefit for the recipient.”⁴⁴ While evolutionary

pressures yielded episodic aggression and opportunistic raiding where advantageous, cooperativity and egalitarianism (including communal property and childcare), along with robust fairness and sharing norms, were the *modus vivendi* of “modern” hunter-gatherers for 250,000 or so years, until roughly 8,000 BCE. Christopher Boehm describes the emergence of hunter-gatherer egalitarianism from our far less cooperative and more aggressive primate ancestors so that “over time, the apelike, fear-based, ancestral version of personal self-control would have been augmented, as there appeared some kind of a protoconscience that no other animal was likely to evolve.”⁴⁵

RELATIONALITY AND HUMAN COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Human cooperativity was evolutionarily advantageous not only for survival reasons, such as equitable resource distribution that allowed for greater longevity and thus increased chances to reproduce. It was also key to the species’ cognitive and emotional development. Development of the specifically human mind began in the playful exchange of gestures and facial expressions between human infants and their kin and non-kin caretakers. This exchange, Gallagher notes, “brings the infant into a direct relation with another person and starts them on a course of social interaction.”⁴⁶ We do not develop singly but within “the larger system of body-environment-intersubjectivity.”⁴⁷ This back-and-forth yields a “unified common intersubjective space”⁴⁸ with a wide variety of others that even infants know are different from themselves. It is not an undifferentiated we-space but an I-You space.⁴⁹ Each stage of human cognitive and emotional growth emerges from this interaction to arrive at what Sarah Hrdy calls “emotional modernity,”⁵⁰ the capacities to grasp and coordinate with (1) the attention of others, (2) the intention of others, and (3) the emotions of others in order to sustain relationships through which one feels safe and learns about the world. Importantly, learning and relating generalize non-kin strangers.

Michael Tomasello’s work on cognitive development adds that joint attention and intention created the basis for role reversal and recursive thinking. Role reversal entails understanding, for instance, that if I touch your arm, you touch not your arm but *my* arm; it’s touching the arm of the *other* that is the task. Role reversal allows tasks to be separated from the

actor and to be distributed to various persons. Recursive thinking involves understanding that the other person wants me to know that she knows that I know, etc. Together, these allow for complex, collaborative endeavors where each knows what the other's role is and, importantly, trusts that the other will do it. Even before *H. sapiens*, Bellah notes, the *H. erectus* evolved "an entirely new level of social organization beyond anything seen in nonhuman primates."⁵¹ In Tomasello's words, "The key novelties in human evolution were . . . adaptations for an especially cooperative, indeed hypercooperative, way of life."⁵²

In sum, interactive exchange bridges otherness. It emerges from and reinforces our hypercooperativity. "It isn't just," Alison Gopnik concludes, "that without mothering, humans would lack nurturance, warmth, and emotional security. They would also lack culture, history, morality, science, and literature."

RELATIONALITY, COOPERATIVITY, AGGRESSION INTRA-GROUP

In addition to the psychological argument, biology too notes that *H. sapiens* evolved toward "hypercooperativity" and "reciprocal altruism."⁵³ "Overall," Richard Wrangham notes, "physical aggression in humans happens at less than 1 percent of the frequency among either of our closest ape relatives . . . we really are a dramatically peaceful species."⁵⁴ Benefits of cooperativity included improved food gathering, protection from animal predators, and other collaborative projects as well as more equitable resource distribution yielding greater longevity for more people and thus greater chances at reproduction. Kappeler et al. add that,

individuals characterised by above-average frequencies of affinity, affiliation and mutual support, which are said to have strong social bonds, enjoy greater reproductive success, higher infant survival and greater longevity, and these effects are independent of dominance rank.⁵⁵

"Natural selection," Robert Seyfarth and Dorothy Cheney similarly write, "therefore appears to have favored individuals who are motivated to form long-term bonds *per se* not just bonds with kin."⁵⁶ Frans de Waal in turn observes, "We owe our sense of fairness to a long history of mutualistic cooperation," again, not just with kin.⁵⁷ When Donald Pfaff writes that we

are “wired for goodwill,”⁵⁸ he is not suggesting an absence of all competition and aggression among hunter-gatherers. Rather, he recognizes that episodic aggression occurred *amid* evolutionarily selected egalitarianism and cooperativity because the latter two were significantly advantageous within primary groups and often between groups, as well.

INTER-GROUP AGGRESSION

If intra-group cooperativity is high, it might be argued that aggression is more frequent inter-group owing to less need for cooperation and thus a lower bar to violence. Inter-group aggression ranges from one-on-one intimidation to raiding and war. Among hunter-gatherers, such aggression was episodic, and dependent on (1) rewards being sufficient to justify risks, (2) chances of success being high, and (3) risk of harm to oneself being low.⁵⁹ While low-risk raiding opportunities presented themselves, among hunter-gatherers, where stored goods were negligible, the risk-benefit analysis did not come out in favor of raiding consistently enough for raids to become systemic practice.

Indeed, among Pleistocene hunter-gatherers, food shortages may have led to cooperation. If, in a simple example, hunter-gatherer bands battle each other to be the sole group to hunt an animal, the winner may end with more food. But many will be downed in the inter-band fight, the capacity to overpower the animal will be diminished, and chances increase of becoming the animal’s meal rather than making it one’s own. Cooperation may be the better survival strategy as more people live (and may later reproduce) and chances of succeeding in the hunt rise. Moreover, the *value* of cooperation and food sharing becomes part of the *modus vivendi* in this long, 250,000 or so years of human development. Similarly, if one group raids the food cache of another, chances of retaliation are not trivial—not only with the motive of hunger but with added anger at the initial attack. Cooperation or at least non-engagement may be the more productive route. In both cases, “parochial altruism,” concern for the in-group, led to *non-aggressive* strategies between groups.

In sum, David Barash finds that war is not genetically hard-wired but rather “historically recent,” “erratic in worldwide distribution,” and “a capacity.” Capacities are “derivative traits that are unlikely to have been directly selected for but have developed through cultural processes . . . capacities are neither universal nor mandatory.”⁶⁰ R. Brian Ferguson,

Douglas Fry, Gary Schober, Kai Bjorkqvist, and Patrik Soderberg, among others, make a similar case that *systemic* raiding and war required specific ecologies and conditions not found among hunter-gatherers. Indeed, Clare et al. find “no conclusive evidence for intergroup fighting in the early Pre-Pottery Neolithic” and warn of the “‘bellicosification’ of prehistory.”⁶¹ Importantly, while we find, in fossil material before 8,000 BCE, evidence of cut marks on bones, arrowheads embedded in the body, and other marks of trauma, little can be identified as systemic inter-group aggression. Kissel and Kim, in their important literature review, note, “Such signatures alone are insufficient to indicate violence, much less organized violence, between groups.”⁶² Kissel and Kim agree with Keeley⁶³ and Fry, Schober, and Bjorkqvist that periods of the Holocene show “virtually no signs of violent conflict” intergroup, much less intra-group.⁶⁴

Finally, Kissel and Kim note that evidence of coalitional aggression (organized raiding and war) prior to 8,000 BCE, such as that cited by Steven Pinker,

overlooks much of the evolutionary pressures that affected our ancestors. Evidence from Nataruk, Jebel Sahaba, and other cemetery burials demonstrate violence, and perhaps collective violence. However, anthropologists need to be clear that this represents only a tiny portion of the human evolutionary record.

THE EMERGENCE OF SEVERE, SYSTEMIC AGGRESSION

With hypercooperativity as the hunter-gatherer *modus vivendi* prior to 8,000 BCE, what was responsible for the shift to the systemic practice of severe aggression found after that date? Severe, systemic aggression includes endemic raiding and warfare, the enslavement of captive populations, and the subjection of domestic populations to maiming, torture, imprisonment, impoverishment, enslavement, and conspecific killing (killing within the species).

One understanding of the shift looks at the effects of sedentarism and agriculture, among the most significant changes in human development. They allowed for regular surpluses ever-present as lures to plunder, which in turn led to resource monopolizability and the development of inequality and sociopolitical hierarchies. With the new agrarian surpluses, the

potential rewards of stealing by force, both intra- and inter-group, outweighed the risks far more often than they had under hunter-gatherer surplus-less mobility. “Hunters and gatherers,” Kappeler explains, “forage cooperatively, share what they hunt/collect, and consume it on the spot. Agriculturalists don’t rely on cooperation; they produce surplus stock for themselves which can be taken by force.” Fry’s large-scale study on present-day foragers, though limited in applicability to the Pleistocene, found that non-egalitarian societies engaged in warlike activity while the majority of (egalitarian) mobile foragers did not. Fry posits that the accumulation of stored goods and development of hierarchies in non-egalitarian societies meaningfully increase the likelihood of raiding or warfare.

The desire to grab what others have and the need to constrain those wanting to grab one’s own cache was a first prod to endemic inter- and intra-group violence. “A tiny ruling group that used coercive powers to augment its authority,” Bellah writes, “was sustained by agricultural surpluses and labor systematically appropriated from a much larger number of agricultural producers.”⁶⁵ A second prod to aggression, van Schaik and Michel note, was the resentment that emerged as coercive, monopolizing hierarchies violated evolution-bred cooperativity. Thus, protest and resistance added another layer of societal aggression to the monopolization of resources. Bellah describes a third prod in the lure not of goods but of politico-military power. While the first monopolizers grab resources, the next monopolizer has two things to grab: resources and the elite position in the hierarchy that the first monopolizer has. Bellah writes, “Large, prosperous societies are almost always in danger from the havenots at their fringe, or from other prosperous groups who would like to become even more prosperous. In a situation of endemic warfare, the successful warrior emanates a sense of mana or charisma, and can use it to establish a following” to take as much power and materièl as possible.⁶⁶

In sum, the manifold, radical changes that brought inequality and hierarchy to agrarian living may have been sufficient to violate longstanding hyper-cooperativity—to turn episodic aggression amid prevailing cooperation into systemic, violent practice.

CONCLUSION

If hypercooperativity with robust, mutual fairness and sharing norms was evolutionarily selected for 95 percent of human evolution, if—changing

discourses—relationality as reciprocal relations among distinct persons is the human ontology or baseline, we will flourish to the extent that we see to this cooperativity and relationality in the way we structure our modes of living. Should we not, we risk going against evolution and the structure of existence. And little good can come of that.

The emerging problems are two: on one hand, undue situatedness-in-relation, untempered by distinction, yields what Luigino Bruni calls the group as “gigantic I”⁶⁷—both oppressive top-down control and stultifying conformity riddled with prejudice. Within groups, such situatedness is a pretext to stanch political or socioeconomic change and a club for those who want to keep others—women, minorities—out of the club. It has dire consequences for freedom, innovation, and wealth creation. Between groups, it yields zero-sum calculations, “us vs. them” thinking, and often violence.

On the other hand, undue distinction, separability from relation, brings greed, self-absorption, abandonment, and anomie. Persistent focus on the separate self—on the *exit*, on evasion of reciprocal responsibility—yields what Charles Taylor and Glen Stassen call the buffered self⁶⁸ and Luke Bretherton calls “isolated choosers”⁶⁹ self-absorbedly concerned with “me, my firm, my portfolio”—as dramatized in tragi-comic, cinematic reflection: *The Wolf of Wall Street* (1929), *Wall Street* (1987), *Wall Street Warriors* (2006), *Margin Call* (2011), *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010), and *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), all explorations of the culture of self-interested avarice. In addition is the insidiousness of anomie. Undue emphasis on the separate person may leave one not freely flourishing but isolated and unmoored. Able to choose but with few choices that inspire or give meaning and energy to life, one becomes *not unsatisfied but unsatisfiable* and vulnerable to “deaths of despair.”⁷⁰

Given our relational nature, we cannot develop priorities and purposes on our own, and even if that were possible, we would lack the community networks and governmental policies and institutions to realize them. Yet in a society of undue separability, such support too is undermined, for with excessive separability comes also a fraught view of government. In a culture of exit, government, the largest agent of common effort, is a priori suspect, and so too its educational, health care, or economic programs that give citizens a leg up. As the enforcer of common responsibilities (taxes, labor and consumer protection, market and environmental regulation,

etc.), it is seen as the foe of individual freedom. Contempt for government becomes the political standard on which governmental programs for the common good must justify themselves.

Yet perhaps our long experience of hypercooperativity remains with us as a resource for greater cooperativity today—at least more so than if humanity had never lived in cooperative conditions. While there is a substantial library of economic proposals making the argument for a more relational economics,⁷¹ it is not much implemented in some measure owing to insufficient grasp of relationality and thus insufficient popular and political will. Thus, “while structural reforms may well be necessary,” Mary Hirschfeld writes, “the analysis suggests that we need to work on shifting the culture.”⁷² We must adjust the lenses through which we see the world toward the relationality that grounds and governs it. Though he is now touted as the guru of greed, Adam Smith understood the role of relationality in economics: in markets as in all of society, he wrote, each should “endeavor, as much as he can, to put himself in the situation of the other, and to bring home to himself every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer.”⁷³

NOTES

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