"President Bush's most senior aides — the ones who hold the coveted title of "assistant to the president" — recently received a $4,200 cost-of-living bump-up in compensation and now earn a top pay rate of $165,200, according to an internal White House list of staff salaries. The list was compiled by the administration for the year that ended June 30 and is displayed both alphabetically, and by dollar ranking, below. Those at the bottom of the White House staff pay scale — the folks answering phones and responding to the president’s mail, for example — remain stuck at last year’s pay floor of $30,000, according to a year-to-year comparison of White House data obtained by National Journal.

At that level, the White House aide who keeps a log of the gifts sent to the president makes about as much as the average starting pay for a public school teacher. At $15 an hour, that’s almost three times the national minimum wage of $5.15. (Congress is debating this summer whether to raise the minimum wage, while the administration prefers to leave it where it is).

White House salaries and job titles are largely controlled at the discretion of the president, within the confines of the overall budget approved by Congress for the Executive Office of the President. For example, Anita McBride, chief of staff to the first lady, earns $149,000 this year, which is a jump of $16,000 above her listed pay rate in 2005 — with no change in title. In 2005, the peak of the White House pay scale was $161,000 for 19 heavyweight job titles.

On this year’s list, the White House omitted Bush aides who left the White House payroll in recent weeks, even if the president intends to fill the posts at this year’s rate of pay. One anomaly: Unlike predecessor I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, David Addington, the chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney, was not included on the White House roster, even though he holds a dual title as assistant to the president.

Employees on loan to the White House from their home agencies appear on the list in italics; one intelligence operative was not identified by the White House by name. And there are other curiosities: a General Electric security specialist (and retired Air Force general) is listed as an “employee” and member of the president’s Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, at a per diem rate of $548. The White House is not required by law to make public any complete accounting of staff or individual salaries.

The list of 433 positions excludes White House residence employees, Office of Management and Budget personnel, and the staff members working in the Office of the Vice President who are on the payroll of the U.S. Senate by virtue of the vice president’s role as Senate president. By law, President Bush’s salary is $400,000. The vice president’s compensation in 2006 is $212,100.
COMMIE HUMOR FUNNIER THAN EXPECTED

From the archive, originally posted by: [ spectre ]

http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/article_details.php?id=7412
http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/usr/Essay_Lewis.gif

HAMMER & TICKLE

Communism is the only political system to have created its own international brand of comedy. The standard interpretation is that communist jokes were a form of resistance. But they were also a safety valve for the regimes and jokes were told by the rulers as well as the ruled—even Stalin told some good ones.

BY Ben Lewis

A man dies and goes to hell. There he discovers that he has a choice: he can go to capitalist hell or to communist hell. Naturally, he wants to compare the two, so he goes over to capitalist hell. There outside the door is the devil, who looks a bit like Ronald Reagan. “What’s it like in there?” asks the visitor. “Well,” the devil replies, “in capitalist hell, they flay you alive, then they boil you in oil and then they cut you up into small pieces with sharp knives.”

“That’s terrible!” he gasps. “I’m going to check out communist hell!” He goes over to communist hell, where he discovers a huge queue of people waiting to get in. He waits in line. Eventually he gets to the front and there at the door to communist hell is a little old man who looks a bit like Karl Marx. “I’m still in the free world, Karl,” he says, “and before I come in, I want to know what it’s like in there.”

“In communist hell,” says Marx impatiently, “they flay you alive, then they boil you in oil, and then they cut you up into small pieces with sharp knives.”

“But… but that’s the same as capitalist hell!” protests the visitor, “Why such a long queue?”

“Well,” sighs Marx, “Sometimes we’re out of oil, sometimes we don’t have knives, sometimes no hot water…”
It was in Romania, while making a film about Ceausescu, that I first stumbled across the historical legacy of the communist joke. There I learned that a clerk from the Bucharest transport system, Călin Bogdan Stefanescu, had spent the last ten years of Ceausescu’s regime collecting political jokes. He noted down joke he heard and when, and analysed his total of over 900 jokes statistically. He measured the time gap between a political event and a joke about that event, and then drew up a graph measuring the varying velocity of Romanian communist jokes. He was also able to assert-somewhat tenuously—that there was a link between jokes and the fall of Ceausescu, since jokes about the leader doubled in the last three years of the regime. The story of Stefanescu, the statistician of jokes, was, ironically, much funnier than the jokes themselves. It seemed to capture the prosaic reality of the little man struggling against the communist universe.

I was charmed. Soon my volume of Stefanescu’s Ten Years of Romanian Black Humour was joined by 30 or so other collections of communist jokes-such as Reinhard Wagner’s Jokes of East Germany Volume 1-2 (1994/96), and Hammer and Tickle (1980) by Petr Beckmann. The earliest volume I found, Humour Behind the Iron Curtain, was published in 1962 by the Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal, under the pseudonym Mischka Kukin. I wondered if Wiesenthal found communist jokes a diversion from the business of tracking down Nazis, or if they represented to him another struggle against injustice. I also came across a wonderfully overwritten PhD thesis by the Stanford anthropologist Seth Benedict Graham: A Cultural Analysis of the Russo-Soviet Anekdot (anekdot is the Russian word for a political joke). Graham’s earnest academic language suggests the standard theory of the joke as a tool of subversion: “An important reason for the anekdot’s pre-eminence was its capacity to outflank, mimic, debunk, deconstruct, and otherwise critically engage with other genres and texts of all stripes and at all presumed points on the spectrum from resistance to complicity.”

Graham gestures towards the Orwellian notion of the joke as “a tiny revolution.” Jokes were an essential part of the communist experience because the monopoly of state power meant that any act of non-conformity, down to a simple turn of phrase, could be construed as a form of dissent. By the same token, a joke about any facet of life became a joke about communism. There have been political and anti-authority jokes in every era, but nowhere else did political jokes cohere into an anonymous body of folk literature as they did under communism. With the creation of the Soviet bloc after the war, communism exposed itself to Czech and Jewish traditions of humour-mutating viruses to which the system never developed the right antibodies. Some jokes that were traceable back to the Austro-Hungarian empire found their apotheosis under communism-like this one about the Hungarian communist leader Matyas Rakosi: Two friends are walking down the street. One asks the other “What do you think of Rakosi?” “I can’t tell you here,” he replies. “Follow me.” They disappear down a side street. “Now tell me what you think of Rakosi,” says the friend. “No, not here,” says the other, leading him into the hallway of an apartment block. “OK, now you can tell me what you think of our president.” “Well,” says the other, looking around nervously, “actually I quite like him.”

There’s another factor that reinforces the mode of covert protest in communist jokes-the way former citizens of the communist countries felt about them. I suggested to each interviewee that most of these jokes weren’t actually very funny, or at least had dated badly. How could they laugh at so many mediocre and repetitive jokes? They were outraged by the question. “Every week there was another great new joke. The strange thing is that you always asked: where do they come from? You never knew. The author was a collective-the people,” said Ernst Röhl, one of East Germany’s leading satirists. “I remember, as a student, when we had to gather the harvest and we told jokes incessantly,” I was told by Stefan Wolle, the author of Back in the GDR. “Then we sat in the pub until midnight telling jokes. Everyone had his special collection.” “Some of these jokes are minor masterpieces,” said Doina Doru, a Romanian proofreader who spent ten years checking that Ceausescu’s name was spelt correctly in the daily newspaper. “What is colder in a Romanian winter than cold water?” she continued by way of illustration, “Hot water!”

So far as I know, no one was executed for telling a joke. But people routinely went to prison. The archives of the Hungarian secret police are full of the dossiers of people arrested for telling them. Day in, day out, officers of the state were taking the time and trouble to
Everyone told jokes, even the apparatchiks. Guenter Schabowski, the popular mood to the ministry of the interior. A senior member of the Romanian Securitate, said that he used to file jokes could be used as an early warning system; problems indicated socialism, before the communist utopia arrived. They also imagined that jokes were a harmless way for people to let off steam. They believed that jokes in this new era, political leaders took the view that the jokes were a way to criticise and outmanoeuvre the system, but they were also something more than this. They comprised a secret language between citizens-membership of a club to which the government was not invited (or so they thought).

The first jokes about the Russian revolution surfaced immediately after October 1917. In one, an old woman visits Moscow zoo and sees a camel for the first time. “Look what the Bolsheviks have done to that horse!” she exclaims. As the system became harsher, a distinctive communist sense of humour emerged-pithy, dark and surreal-but so did the legal machinery for repressing it. Historian Roy Medvedev looked through the files of Stalin’s political prisoners and concluded that 200,000 people were imprisoned for telling jokes, such as this: Three prisoners in the gulag get to talking about why they are there. “I am here because I always got to work five minutes late, and they charged me with spying,” says the second. “I am here because I got to work on time every day,” says the third, “and they charged me with owning a western watch.”

Yet there is an obvious problem with the idea that communist jokes represented an act of revolt: it wasn’t just opponents of the regime who told them. Stalin himself cracked them, including this one about a visit from a Georgian delegation: They come, they talk to Stalin, and then they go, heading off down the Kremlin’s corridors. Stalin starts looking for his pipe. He can’t find it. He calls in Beria, the dreaded head of his secret police. “Go after the delegation, and find out which one took my pipe,” he says. Beria scuttles off down the corridor. Five minutes later Stalin finds his pipe under a pile of papers. He calls Beria—“Look, I’ve found my pipe.” “It’s too late,” Beria says, “half the delegation admitted they took your pipe, and the other half died during questioning.”

Stalin’s laughter underlines the cynicism of the Soviet enterprise. But after his death the joke trials petered out. One of Khrushchev’s first acts was to release all those imprisoned for minor political crimes, which included telling jokes. In his famous secret speech to the 20th party congress, Khrushchev cracked one too. He said that Stalin would have liked to have deported all the Ukrainians, but didn’t know where to track down joke-tellers, or going out of their way to add the evidence of joke-telling to other charges, and then handing out short sentences.

Perhaps the most emblematic story of the joke-as-resistance is a report of the prosecution of a joke-teller in Czechoslovakia in 1967. The story was found in the archives of Radio Free Europe, the anti-communist cold war broadcaster. An arriving refugee brought the news that a worker in a liquor factory had been arrested for telling the following joke: Why is the price of lard not going up in Hungary? So that the workers can have lard on bread for their Sunday lunch.

The joke had been overheard by the party secretary of the factory, who immediately reported the worker. The joke-teller was arrested on charges of “incitement and defamation against the People’s Democracy.” After six hearings, the employee was fired. The sentence was relatively lenient because the co-workers all stood by the employee, saying that the party secretary did not hear the introductory words of the joke-teller: I heard a very stupid joke yesterday…

The joke wasn’t very funny-the implication is that since there is no meat in the shops, Sunday roasts have been replaced by lard sandwiches. But the real story produces its own punchline. Communism was a humour-producing machine. Its economic theories and system of repression created inherently funny situations. There were jokes under fascism and the Nazis too, but those systems did not create an absurd, laugh-a-minute reality like communism.

Communist jokes were a way to criticise and outmanoeuvre the system, but they were also something more than this. They comprised a secret language between citizens-membership of a club to which the government was not invited (or so they thought).
What ultimately defined the genre was less the purpose it served than a pan-communist umbrella of comedy that stood above national meanwhile, tended to be touchingly self-deprecating. And yet there was encapsulated a type of national resilience. East German jokes, Jokes under communism were shaped by the cultures that produced them, told me proudly.

Friends. “We showed our intellectual superiority,” one former dissident Russians our brothers or our friends? Our brothers—we can choose our doesn’t even interfere in its own internal affairs. And: Are the Czechoslovakia the most neutral country in the world? Because it Children—End-of-Term Outing.” People cracked jokes: Why is attractions!” and “Soviet School for Special Needs

This is not to deny that the communist joke was often at its best in its dissident form. When Russian tanks rolled into Prague in 1968, the population fought back with wit. Every night graffiti appeared in Wenceslas Square with lines like “Socialist State Circus back in town! New attractions!” and “Soviet School for Special Needs Children—End-of-Term Outing.” People cracked jokes: Why is Czechoslovakia the most neutral country in the world? Because it doesn’t even interfere in its own internal affairs. And: Are the Russians our brothers or our friends? Our brothers—we can choose our friends. “We showed our intellectual superiority,” one former dissident told me proudly.

Jokes under communism were shaped by the cultures that produced them, as they are anywhere else. For the Czechs, a sense of humour encapsulated a type of national resilience. East German jokes, meanwhile, tended to be touchingly self-deprecating. And yet there was a pan-communist umbrella of comedy that stood above national distinctions, just as the international socialist project itself did. What ultimately defined the genre was less the purpose it served than

Dear Sir, Ten days ago I went to our savings bank. In front of the clerk’s window there were five people waiting for their turn. And while standing there I heard too much. There were two of them in front of me, well fed, healthy, and really well dressed…and in a public place and with an insolent casualness they were trying to outdo each other, swapping their “best” political jokes… How can I restrain myself in front of these “jokers,” who tell me mockingly a “new anecdote”? Nothing is sacred to them. They spit on everything!… We have to fight them; it is necessary to discredit, shame and dishonour them in front of honest people.

With deep respect, Nikolay Kuritsin, external student, Kadykchan village.

In the 1960s, the Soviet bloc was deluged by a flood of new jokes. There were around 20 subcategories. The most popular theme was the economy: One housewife to another: “I hear there’ll be snow tomorrow.”—“Well, I’m not queuing for that.” There were jokes about Soviet propaganda: The capitalists are standing at the edge of the abyss. Soon communism will overtake capitalism. There were gags about Marxist-Leninist theory: Why is the individual placed in the centre of socialism? So it’s easy to kick him from all sides. There were jokes about communist art: What is the difference between painters of the naturalist, impressionist and the socialist realist schools? The naturalists paint as they see, the impressionists as they feel, the socialist realists as they are told. There were jokes about communist-style democracy: When was the first Russian election? The time that God put Eve in front of Adam and said, “Go ahead, choose your wife.” And, of course, there were Jewish communist jokes: “Hey Hymie, how’s your brother Joseph?” “He’s living in Prague and building socialism.” “And didn’t you have a sister, Judith—how’s she doing?” “She’s well too—living in Budapest and creating a communist future.” “And your older brother Bernie?” “Oh he moved to Israel.” “And is he building socialism there too?” “What, are you crazy? Do you think he’d do that in his own country?”

The point of this last gag seems to be not just to have a laugh at communism, but to shift the blame for it away from the central committees to the Jews. In other words, jokes could aid the system as well as undermine it. This, it seems, is what Gramsci’s thesis on the meaning of the aneddot was grasping for when it described a “spectrum from resistance to complicity.” A joke could be told about Stalin, or by Stalin; it could mock both the makers of the system and its victims. A joke could be an act of rebellion or a safety valve, an expression of revulsion against the system or of familiarity, even warmth towards it.

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its style. The communist joke was by nature deadpan and absurdist—because it was born of an absurd system which created a yawning gap between everyday experience and propaganda. Yet sometimes, through jokes, both communists and their opponents could carry on a debate about the failings of communism.

The logic of this discourse led to the strangest coded conflict, as the pages of the East German satirical magazine Eulenspiegel reveal. Eulenspiegel was founded in 1954 as the state’s official organ of humour. There were no censorship laws, as the East Germans were so proud of telling the west. Instead the editors had to guess what kind of jokes were permissible. Every week the magazine carried three or four pages of anti-imperialist humour, in which capitalists in top hats counted their money, GIs enslaved Africans and doves sat atop hammers and sickles. Eulenspiegel could also print parody comic critiques of daily life in East Germany, as long as they didn’t incriminate the politburo. Ernst Röhl was able to write things like this: Man doesn’t live from bread and ham alone. He needs something green. And green things have been in short supply for a long time. Cabbage has been more the subject of discussion than digestion. And the Adam’s apple is the closest one gets to fruit at the dinner table. But this year Mother Nature has been particularly green. Cucumbers are no longer the shoemaker’s bit. Onions no longer raise laughs in cabaret sketches…

People like Röhl saw themselves, rather self-indulgently, as fifth columnists, eating away at the regime from the inside. But there were limits to permissible satire. Once the cover featured “young pioneers” with long hair—a decadent western fashion. The politburo was livid, but the magazine had already been sent out, so the police reclaimed all the copies they could from newstands and post offices. Eulenspiegel once tried to make common cause with Pardon, its West German left-wing counterpart. After all, Pardon also attacked Adenauer and American imperialism. But the editors of Eulenspiegel were stung when Pardon rebuffed their advances, on the grounds that the communist satirists should criticise their own leader, Walter Ulbricht, the same way the capitalist ones went for theirs. The editors of Eulenspiegel printed a rebuttal entitled “How do we write about Walter Ulbricht?” in 1963: “We know from various reliable sources that President Ulbricht has a terrific sense of humour… [but] the transparency and virtue of our state makes it not only difficult but simply impossible to write a satire about its representatives. Where there is nothing to uncover, the satirist will find no material. So how do we satirists write about Walter Ulbricht?… We send our greetings and best wishes to the first secretary of the central committee. We wish comrade Ulbricht health, stamina and a long life.”

This article could have been satirical, but wasn’t. Rather, it occupies the strange socialist space where the serious and the humorous are identical. Eulenspiegel was the only place where serious criticism of the state could be published. Readers wrote in with complaints about their leaking prefab apartments and so on, and there was a column called Erledigt (Dealt With) which celebrated the grievances that the Eulenspiegel had managed to redress, and often came with printed apologies from factory managers and landlords. Nothing illustrates better the inverted reality of communism: real problems could only be presented in a context of laughter, presumably so that one could always claim one was only joking. In this realm, where humour turns out to be a complex social dance, the idea of the joke as simply subversive breaks down.

But on this side of the iron curtain, communist jokes were only interpreted as evidence of anti-communism; their wider significance was lost. In 1950-51, a group of Harvard anthropologists undertook one of the most influential research projects of the postwar era. The US government wanted to find out how Soviet citizens might react if the US invaded Russia. So the academics interviewed thousands of displaced Russian citizens living in camps in Germany. When asked to describe what Soviet society was like, the refugees told jokes: “Did you hear the one about the sheep who tried to leave the USSR? They were stopped at the border by a guard…” “Why do you wish to leave Russia?” the guard asked. “It’s the secret police,” replied the sheep. “Stalin has ordered them to arrest all the elephants.” “But you aren’t elephants.” “Try telling that to the secret police.”

In the 1950s, the New York Times Magazine would devote the odd page to jokes from the Harvard project. From the 1960s onwards, volumes of communist jokes were published in paperback form in Europe and North America. Willy Brandt was a renowned communist joke-teller, but there was one western politician who took the jokes more seriously than
anyone else: Ronald Reagan. He ordered the state department to collect
the jokes and send them to him in weekly memos. As a result, Paul
Goble, head of the Balkan desk in the 1980s, assembled a collection of
15,000 communist jokes. Reagan often used Goble’s gags in his speeches
and negotiations. When Gorbachev came to Washington, Reagan told him a
communist joke, later boasting at a press conference that he had
laughed. The joke, which made fun of the communist theory that a
transitional era of socialism was preceding the communist utopia, went
like this: Two men are walking down a street in Moscow. One asks the
other, “Is this full communism? Have we really passed through socialism
and reached full communism?” The other answers “Hell, no. It’s gonna
get a lot worse first.”

Communism ground on into the 1970s. Brezhnev and his geriatric cronies
gave rise to some new jokes (Brezhnev reads a speech at the Winter
Olympics “O-O-O-O-O.” “No,” his aide whispers to him, “that’s the
Olympic logo.”) And the technology gap gave rise to others: The latest
achievements of the East German electronics company Robotron were
celebrated—they built the world’s largest microchip. Meanwhile the
state was seemingly less worried by the jokes. In Poland, the most
liberal regime of them all, they even permitted communist jokes on
television.

Jokes did not bring down communism. That was achieved by the nonsense
of its economic policies, and by the decisions of the leaders of the
superpowers, east and west-in the case of Reagan, by pricing the
Soviets out of the arms race; in the case of Gorbachev by glasnost and
perestroika. This much is well-known what isn’t the significance
both leaders attached to communist jokes. Gorbachev knew the jokes, and
like his predecessors, he told them. You can’t imagine Stalin or
Khrushchev telling a joke about his own unpopularity, but Gorbachev
did. In 1996 he appeared on the Clive Anderson show in Britain and told
this one, whose lineage can be traced back through the 20th century: A
man is queuing for food in Moscow. Finally he’s had enough. He turns
round to his friend and says “That’s it. It’s gonna
get a lot worse first.”

Gorbachev and his aides talked openly about the jokes. In 1989 he told
a crowd of workers, “political jokes were our salvation,” a reference
to the way the jokes let out frustrations and debunked propaganda. As
the first reforms faltered, one of his ministers warned him that if the
new laws didn’t work “the people would return to the bottle and the
political joke.” One could even argue that Gorbachev’s policies
liberalising the economy, press and politics were addressing the implicit
complaints of decades of jokes.

Exactly how communist jokes functioned politically, socially or
psychologically is a question as complex as the meaning of works of
art. What is self-evident, however, is that since the fall of the wall
the jokes have dried up. Life just isn’t as funny any more. The vast
enterprise of communism gave a universal quality to the meaning of the
jokes that hasn’t been replicated since its collapse. They subverted
and they supported; they undermined and they prolonged. As Gorbachev’s
respect for the jokes and Reagan’s obsession with them show, they were
intrinsically to the whole communist experience. Jokes were to communism
what myths were to ancient Greece: anonymous, oral stories which both
represented and shaped people’s views and actions.

Jokes may not have carried the weight of the great forces which ended
communism, but they were more than mere figures of speech. Jokes kept
alive in the minds of the citizens of the Soviet bloc the idea of an
alternative reality, and they made light of four decades of occupation
of eastern and central Europe. They may even explain why the end of
communism was so sudden and so bloodless. No point anyone getting hurt
over a little joke, right?

Ben Lewis’s film, “Hammer and Tickle: the communist joke book” shows on
BBC4 “Storyville” in September.
Japanese gadget records, replicates odor
By HANS GREIMEL, Associated Press Writer

TOKYO — People stopping to smell the roses can now take that sweet floral fragrance home with them or even send it to a faraway grandmother thanks to a new gadget in Japan that records and replicates the world’s odors.

The new device, developed by scientists at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, analyzes smells through 15 sensors, records the odor’s recipe in digital format and then reproduces the scent by mixing 96 chemicals and vaporizing the result.

Creator Takamichi Nakamoto says the technology will have applications in food and fragrance industries where companies want to replicate odors. But it could also be a boon for the digital world, allowing smells can be recorded in one place & by sensors in a mobile phone, for instance & transmitted to appreciative noses halfway around the world.

It could also aid online shoppers by letting people check out perfumes or flowers before they buy.

“The sensitivity of the human nose is very good,” Nakamoto said. “But to some extent we can replicate the performance.”

Nakamoto says his machine, in the works since 1999, is the most advance of its kind in the world, though a similar project is also underway at Keio University, also in Japan.

But so far, the machine is too big to be portable & it measures about the 1 meter by 3 feet by 2 feet.

Still, the breakthrough follows on the heels of a Japanese smellovision project that synchronized smells to movie scenes. That odorous endeavor was undertaken by NTT Communications Corp. and emitted smells from under seats in two movie theaters to accompany parts of the film “The New World,” a Hollywood adventure film.

Nakamoto’s smell recorder has successfully recreated a range of fruit smells, including oranges, apples, bananas and lemons, but can be reprogrammed to produce almost any odor & from old fish to gasoline, he said.

Making the 15 sensor chips, which pick up aromas and convert them to a digital formula, was the hardest part, Nakamoto added.

But the unit’s large size is also limitation because the 96 odor-forming chemicals are contained in separate glass bottles. A more compact version, which includes only the sensors, can record smells but must be hooked up to the blender to regenerate them.

“We also want extend the range of smells, and then we can think about commercializing the system,” Nakamoto said.

Nakamoto’s team of 12 scientists have been collaborating with a Japanese perfume company that produces the raw ingredients for fragrances and with electronics companies interested in the sensor chip technology.
Frans de Waal’s laboratory monkeys won’t work for unequal pay. If a partner monkey gets a grape (big bucks) for little or no work (trading a token), a monkey will reject her mealy cucumber pay from her human “boss.” And she makes her disdain known, hurling her cucumber or token out of her cubicle—even though she would happily gobble down cucumbers in other circumstances.

De Waal’s work at the Yerkes Primate Center at Emory University in Atlanta has shown an aversion to inequality in non-human primates (Figure 1), drawing an evolutionary link between how humans and monkeys make decisions. Humans reject inequality, too, even if it means walking away empty-handed. This behavior cannot be explained by classical economic theory that says both monkeys and humans should take whatever reward they are offered to maximize gain. But in species like de Waal’s monkeys and humans that rely heavily on cooperation for survival, evolution has favored a complex calculus for even simple decisions.

In a simplified way, de Waal’s experiments and others blend neurobiologists’ ability to track behavior and brain processes with economists’ models of the cost-benefit analyses behind every decision made by an animal. The two fields have each been working toward explaining decision-making behavior, using widely different approaches for decades. Recently, researchers in both fields have recognized that using tools from the other trade might speed their own work along, resulting in the emerging field of neuroeconomics.

Teaming Up

The principle of Expected Utility says that a person facing uncertainty will rank the possible payoffs or outcomes as a function of their expected values and probabilities of happening. Using this principle, experimental economists tested the idea that humans should interact with a self-interest that gives the highest possible gain. In the Ultimatum game, one person is given a sum of money and must decide how much of that sum to share with a second person. The second person can then decide to accept or reject the offer, but the catch is that if he rejects the offer, neither player gets any money.

Although rational-decision theory predicts that the first player should make a low offer and the second player should accept because it would maximize how much each player leaves with, the results were resoundingly irrational. Most first players offered close to half of the money and most second players rejected sums lower than half. Economists were stumped when their models fell far short of explaining human decision-making.

“Standard economic theory uses models where players are calculating complicated numbers, thinking far ahead to figure out what the other person will do, and there are no temptations,” explains Colin Camerer, a behavioral economist at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena. Those models tended to be mathematically simple, but realistically hard on the players, he says. “People aren’t that smart. An 18-year-old doesn’t plan out his entire lifetime savings.”

Camerer has teamed up with neurobiologists looking at brain scans of people while they play games like Ultimatum. The results of such experiments should reveal new mechanisms at play in the brain during decisions, like aversion to inequality, that economists can add to their models to reflect the sophistication of human choices more accurately.

On the other side of the decision-making fence, neurobiologists in the last decade had begun to look beyond mapping how the brain processed sensory input or motor output and began asking questions about what was happening in between those two systems. Once they turned away from simple experiments in which a single stimulus elicits a uniform response, giving meaning to neural activity was no longer easy. For example, Paul Glimcher and his colleagues at New York University in New York City gave monkeys a visual cue indicating that a gaze shift either to the left or right would result in some level of juice reward. All things being equal, monkeys had no reason to favor one side or the other. However, when the experimenters increased the amount of juice reward for one side on random trials, the same visual cue now elicited a very different pattern of movement, favoring that side. And the neural activity they recorded appeared to reflect the monkeys’ sense of how they could get the most reward, rather than any clear association with sensation or action.

To account for these results, Glimcher and others turned to economic models of decision-making that took into account the probability of a
reward, the size or value of the reward, and the cost of work to get the reward. These variables, the neuroscientists hypothesized, might lie between environmental stimulus and action and be the link between sensory neurons and motor neurons in the brain.

“We know that to make efficient decisions, you have to know the utility of the decision,” says Glimcher. “Economists had beautiful computational models to describe all of these processes used to calculate utility. Now, he says, the next step is to look for these variables in the brain at a cellular level.

Cell Decisions

One laboratory has shown that neurons can indeed “code” for some of the variables weighed during simple decisions or choices. Wolfram Schultz and his colleagues at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom studied dopamine-releasing neurons in the ventral midbrain of monkeys. Dopamine neurons have long been implicated in reward-seeking behavior and are targets of highly addictive drugs like nicotine and cocaine.

In their experiment, monkeys responded to five distinct visual stimuli that matched the probability of the juice reward. Each cue represented either a probability of 0 (no reward), 0.25, 0.50, 0.75, or 1 (certain reward). Because uncertainty and probability are inherently linked—that is, uncertainty is highest at a probability of 0.50 and lowest at 0 and 1—the researchers could then look for neuronal responses to both variables.

What they found were two distinct ways in which the same dopamine neurons code for probability and uncertainty. With decreasing probability of reward, the monkey’s dopamine neurons fired stronger bursts at the time of the reward delivery. At the same time, with greater uncertainty of reward, a sustained increase in activity occurred between the flashing of the visual cue and the reward delivery. In other words, this intervening activity was not seen when the probability equaled 0 or 1 and was greatest when the probability of getting a reward was 50/50, the highest level of uncertainty.

“To make decisions about rewards or money, a person has to make predictions about the future, and in any prediction there is some uncertainty that is critical,” says Christopher Fiorillo, a neurophysiologist in Schultz’ lab who led the study. “This is the first demonstration of a single neuron coding uncertainty.” Fiorillo says there are probably many other types of neurons in the brain that can code uncertainty, but the fact that dopamine neurons do it adds another intriguing layer to decision-making behavior.

Dopamine neurons, he explains, have been shown to have a reinforcing effect, so that an animal will seek out stimuli or actions that are followed by a release of dopamine. So, Fiorillo says, he was surprised to see the activity of dopamine neurons increased by uncertainty about a reward, as if uncertainty itself were rewarding in some way. The finding might help explain why people are drawn to gambling even though they tend to lose money on average. Fiorillo and his colleagues speculate that outside the artificial conditions of a laboratory or a casino, an uncertain situation presents a learning opportunity that may help the decision-makers “beat the odds” the next time they face it. And so evolution would favor paying attention to highly uncertain scenarios.

In another experiment, Glimcher and colleagues had monkeys play a “game” in which there were two ways of getting juice, with each choice having a different probability of reward. After 100 trials, the probabilities were changed.

“Basically, he’s playing a two-armed slot machine whose payoff rates are constantly switched on him,” says Glimcher. “His behavior looks pretty erratic, but he’s getting it about right. He spends two-thirds more time on the one that is two-thirds more likely to give him juice.” And, he says, an economic model of this choice predicts the monkey’s behavior with 90% accuracy. This might indicate that, subconsciously, humans tally probabilities, expected gain, and the cost of the work to get the reward in all manner of simple choice decisions. At the level of neurons, we might all be math-whizzes.

But game-theory work has shown that humans rarely think ahead in complex interactions far enough to arrive at the most rewarding decision. Glimcher, by applying the principles of the utility decision theory of maximal gain, has found neurons that may code the variables...
that go into such a decision. But, others say, since humans do not always act in a way that maximizes their gain, other computational models may give a better answer to how we make decisions in more complex contexts.

“The difference is a question of perspective, since we're really all interested in the same issues,” says Joshua Gold, a neuroscientist at University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. He and his collaborators have used a mathematical framework called Banburismus to model decision-making in monkeys performing a difficult visual task.

British codebreakers used Banburismus in World War II to break the German navy’s Enigma code (Figure 2). It consists of three components: a method to quantify the weight of evidence, a method to update this quantity with additional evidence, and a decision rule that determines when there is enough evidence to make a decision. Gold and his colleagues apply the framework to monkeys watching a cluster of dots moving across a screen of randomly moving dots. The monkeys earn juice by shifting their gaze in the same direction as the dot cluster. By increasing the number of randomly moving background dots, they can push the monkeys' visual system to its limits.

Alan Turing and colleagues at Bletchley Park broke the German Navy’s unbreakable Enigma code with the help of a mathematical framework they called “Banburismus.” Some neuroscientists think this framework could also help to break the neural code. (Image modified from the National Cryptologic Museum of the National Security Agency; http://www.nsa.gov/museum/enigma.html.)

It is at this point, Gold says, that other factors besides visual cues come into play as the monkey decides how to answer. “By getting the monkey to work in a regime where he’s coming close to guessing, then we see much more influence by extraneous factors such as bias [i.e., the monkey’s previous experiences] and size of reward,” says Gold. The computational model gives a way to represent these factors mathematically and can also predict the error rates and reaction times of the monkeys’ decisions.

“If it really does explain behavior mathematically,” adds Gold, “it will be a nice way of studying how those variables predict behavior.” These models, whether based in economic decision theory or statistics like Banburismus, give physiologists good candidates in their search for decision-making functions in neuronal circuits. Neurobiologists chasing the perfect model that can incorporate all the factors that go into a decision say it will show how humans calculate the mental "currency" that allows us to literally compare apples to oranges and decide which to buy.

Some biologists, however, are cautious about translating what happens in an economics-based neurobiology experiment in the lab to more complicated human behavior in business or courtroom decisions. “We don’t want to say things that are wrong, incomplete, or could be misconstrued,” says Jeff Schall, a vision researcher at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. “And we don’t need to, to make scientific progress.”

His lab has found two sets of neurons in the anterior cingulate cortex that respond when a monkey shifts his gaze to a target-those that signal success and those that signal mistakes. He has also recorded similar signals from electrodes placed on humans performing the same task. These signals can be thought of as the "oops" or "high-five" feeling that tells an animal how to proceed in the next trial. Both humans and monkeys slow down on the next trial after an "oops" signal. Schall says his work shows another aspect of decision-making, adaptation, not accounted for in classical economic views of reward influences.

"Neuroeconomics is just part of the bigger picture of goal-directed action," he says. Others say economic theories lack another critical component-how to calculate how much value the reward has to the decision-maker.

“There’s a lot of emphasis on game theory and it’s very exciting, but there’s one flaw that everyone recognizes,” says Barry Richmond, a systems neuroscientist at the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda, Maryland. “How do you measure value at any given moment when it is changing both because of personal situation and because of external things?” Richmond sees that monkeys, like humans, exhibit different levels of aversiveness to work.
Richmond's monkeys have been trained to learn a visual cue, a brightness bar, that indicates how much work is left before getting the reward. As the reward gets closer, its “value” appears to go up, because the monkeys work harder (by making fewer errors) in the last trials before the reward. Obviously, value pivots on the timing of the reward, among many other considerations.

It is easy to see a little bit of ourselves in this monkey business. Students study furiously the night before an exam to be rewarded with a grade. As a project deadline looms, employees put in longer hours in order to keep their job. But some experimentalists have gone even further in making connections between neurons firing in a monkey’s brain and what’s going on in ours.

Let Me Pick Your Brain

Kevin McCabe, a neuroeconomist at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, was among the first social scientists to set up a neurobiology experiment to answer his questions about how humans make decisions. His early work showed that if you changed the Ultimatum Game into the Dictator Game, where the first person simply dictated how much the second person got, then humans still gave a fairly large sum away, about one-third of the total. Only when the experimenter and the second person could not see the decision of the dictator did the dictator begin acting in the rational, self-serving manner of giving away tiny amounts. Only in the socially isolated context did the dictator follow economic principles.

“We wanted to design an imaging experiment to demonstrate that when people reciprocate, brain processing is different than when they are not cooperating,” says McCabe. The subsequent experiment, where people played the Ultimatum Game inside a scanner that takes a functional magnetic resonance image (fMRI), showed that blood flow and, by proxy, neuronal activation increased in the frontal brain areas of cooperators. These areas included human homologs of the lateral intraparietal area that Glimcher had seen activated by reward size and probability and the anterior cingulate cortex that Schall found to send success or failure messages (Figure 3).

The ventral midbrain is active when humans receive an unpredictable juice reward. Monetary rewards, although defined by cultural agreement, also engage the same subcortical reward processing structures. (fMRI image courtesy of P. Read Montague.)

McCabe’s experiment hints that humans are wired to cooperate. “We’re biologically endowed to engage in personal exchange,” he says. “And what makes economies run so well is not personal exchange per se, but our ability to trade with people we don’t even know-to buy food at the grocery store from a farmer we’ve never met.”

Another group, led by Read Montague, director of the Human Neuroimaging Laboratory at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas, has also looked at brains of cooperators in the Trust Game. Here, an investor decides to trust a trustee with some of her money. The investment is increased by the experimenter and then the trustee decides how much to give back to the investor. This game is played out ten times by two people who meet each other at the beginning and whose brains are scanned simultaneously as they play.

The researchers wanted to see what happens in each player’s brain when the trustee’s decision is revealed to both on a computer screen. “The trustee’s brain shows the visual cortical activity only of seeing the screen,” Montague explains. “But the investor’s brain goes haywire, with both emotional and cognitive reactions to what they see.” Presumably, the activity represents the investor trying to assimilate the information into her decision of how much to invest in the next round.

Montague, a physicist by training, says he’s found a home in the computational nature of neuroeconomics, which adds a “fresh look at a bunch of problems that were previously only at the margins of behavioral psychology.” But he also sees the advantages that the field brings to economists by shoring up their models with physical evidence: “Let’s face it, they don’t have good models now or they could tell you what’s going to happen [in the stock market] tomorrow. This is starting to give economists a way to loop back into experiments-they realized they’ve got to crack the head open.”

Montague’s collaborator Camerer agrees that knowing how individual humans make decisions could certainly improve our understanding of larger markets. After all, global trade institutions are still run by...
individuals who draw on their own ability to trade and make decisions. Unraveling the decision-making code would open windows on economic questions ranging from the global (Why do certain countries enjoy economic growth?) to the very personal (What causes compulsive behavior when reward systems go bad?).

Camerer sees neuroeconomics as trying to “make a one-to-one mapping from economic theory to the brain. We have a head start, but it’s very difficult to produce clear neuroscience that also has economic significance.” In just a few decades, he envisions that economic theory may look very different, perhaps throwing out utility altogether and instead having a system of mechanisms found in the brain that interact to help a shopper decide, “What’s for dinner?”

And the knowledge coming out of the fledgling field-how the brain codes motivation and reward value-could be used to increase work output, promote more effective addictive drug rehab programs, and stabilize economies. Camerer adds, “This work can really go from synapses seen in brain imaging to explaining the most important thing in the world—why is Africa poor and Singapore rich?”

Kendall Powell is a freelance science writer, living in Broomfield, Colorado, United States of America. E-mail: kendall2 [at] nasw [dot] org

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Further Reading

DOLLARS, NOT SENSE
Posted by santa under spectre | Tags: corruption, governance, money | 1 Comment

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GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING UNDER THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

REPORT FROM THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

“Under the Bush Administration, the "shadow government" of private companies working under federal contract has exploded in size. Between 2000 and 2005, procurement spending increased by over $175 billion
dollars, making federal contracts the fastest growing component of federal discretionary spending. … Federal spending on Halliburton contracts increased over 600% between 2000 and 2005.”

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ONE PAGE SUMMARY

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PROBLEM CONTRACTS DATABASE
http://www.democrats.reform.house.gov/contracts.asp

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07/12/2006 MILITARY GEOGRAPHY FOR PROFESSIONALS AND THE PUBLIC
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From the archive, originally posted by: [spectre]

http://www.ndu.edu/inss/books/Books%20-%201998/Military%20Geography%20March%2098/milgeocontents.html

This book will arguably become the most comprehensive treatment of military geography in print. The author presents a sweeping, sophisticated interpretation of the term “geography,” covering not just the lay of the land, but the human beings who live on the land, change it, and are shaped by it. He relates virtually every aspect of the physical world we live in to every imaginable endeavor in the military realm, from reading a tactical map to conducting a major campaign in some far-flung corner of the Earth. He considers military operations in every geographical environment, while taking into account ever-changing strategies, tactics, and technologies on all levels. He enriches his text with many practical examples that span recorded history. Finally, he writes in plain, direct language to reach the widest possible audience.

The dearth of consolidated studies on the discipline of military geography came to John Collins’ attention early in his long and distinguished career as a soldier and scholar. Thus he began and kept up an interest in the subject for more than 40 years, amassing voluminous files on the subject. Finally afforded the opportunity to research and write on his avocation at the National Defense University, he spent 2 years as a Visiting Fellow, tapping not only his own wealth of data and experience but a wide variety of well-informed opinions on every facet of military geography.

The resultant volume, the culmination of a life-long career, fills a gap in the professional and technical literature. The National Defense University is pleased to have hosted John Collins and to publish his work. No other book, to our knowledge, marries military art with that of the geographer so deftly and completely. The volume seems destined to meet its stated purposes for years to come, namely, to provide a textbook for students, a handbook for military professionals, and an enlightening survey for any appreciative lay reader.

RICHARD A. CHILCOAT
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army
President, National Defense University

The Armed Forces of the United States have been, and will continue to be, committed to every conceivable type of military operation in every conceivable geographic environment. Whether for war-fighting, war-preventing, or peacekeeping operations, they must prepare to excel wherever they are sent—all too commonly on short notice. Military Geography for Professionals and the Public, a textbook and handbook written in simple, straightforward terms that tie relevant factors together in a fashion understandable to lay readers as well as the uniformed professionals of all military services, is a rare, if not unique, survey of relationships between geography and military affairs. It ought to be required reading for policymakers, military planners, commanders, and staff officers at all levels. It also will be a very useful reference for political leaders, educators, members of the news
media, and concerned citizens in the “Information age.” I wish it had been in my knapsack for the past 55 years.

JOHN W. VESSEY, JR.
General, U.S. Army (Ret.)
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1982-1985

NO SAVANT EVER TAUGHT MILITARY GEOGRAPHY TO PERSIAN MONARCHS
CYRUS, CAMBYSES, DARIUS, AND Xerxes, who assembled the world’s first sprawling empire that by 480 B. C. stretched from the Indus River to the Aegean Sea. Teenage Alexander learned a lot at Aristotle’s knee before he conquered even larger territories 150 years later, but military geography was not one of his tutor’s strong points. Ghenghis Khan, who ran roughshod across Eurasia in the 13th century A. D., established the record for seizing real estate by force of arms without resort to any book about military geography in his saddlebags.

Modern warfare, however, is so complex that commanders at every level must consistently manipulate geographic influences advantageously to gain a decisive edge. Most soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines unfortunately learn painful lessons mainly from the school of hard knocks, because few schools and colleges conduct courses in military geography, none confers a degree, instructional materials seldom emphasize fundamentals, and most service manuals have tunnel vision. The four-volume bibliography compiled at West Point, which is 4 inches thick and totals several thousand citations on 1,059 pages, addresses an admirable scope but is minimally useful to most uniformed practitioners of military art, their civilian supervisors, concerned citizens, and members of the news media, because many of them lack easy access to the sources cited while others are too busy to bother.

My contacts in the Pentagon and Congress were bemused when I began to write this book, because they had never heard of a discipline called “military geography.” That reaction came as no surprise; after all, members of the Association of American Geographers at their 92nd annual meeting in April 1996 debated heatedly before they finally decided to establish a military geography specialty group. This consolidated guide, designed to fill undesirable gaps, has a threefold purpose:

* To provide a textbook for academic use
* To provide a handbook for use by political-military professionals
* To enhance public appreciation for the impact of geography on military affairs.

Parts One and Two, both of which are primers, view physical and cultural geography from military perspectives. Part Three probes the influence of political-military geography on service roles and missions, geographic causes of conflict, and complex factors that affect military areas of responsibility. Part Four describes analytical techniques that relate geography to sensible courses of military action, then puts principles into practice with two dissimilar case studies—one emphasizes geographic influences on combat operations, while the other stresses logistics. Each chapter terminates with key points, which final reflections reinforce and relate to time-tested Principles of War.

The text at no time tells readers what to think. It simply tells them how, in jargon-free terms that disregard technical details (neither British Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig nor corporals who led his squads through Flanders fields in 1917 cared a whit whether Passchendaele Ridge was a product of tectonic upheaval or glacial depositions). Concise historical examples and the probable influence of technological trends help illuminate past, present, and future relationships between geography and military affairs. Notes at the end of each chapter encourage students of the subject to pursue topics of particular interest in greater breadth and depth. Maps and figures are plentiful throughout, but readers nevertheless should keep a world atlas handy.

Military Geography for Professionals and the Public, which considers every form of warfare and every military service at strategic, operational, and tactical levels, is intended for audiences abroad as well as in the United States, and therefore is generally couched in generic terms. Consequently, its contents should be almost as sound at the end of the 21st century as at the beginning, regardless of political, military, economic, social, scientific, technological, and other changes in this volatile world that inevitably will occur during the next ten decades.

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WHEN SHE’S TEN FEET TALL

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GO ASK ALICE

Mushroom Drug Is Studied Anew
By RON WINSLOW
July 11, 2006

In a study that could revive interest in researching the effects of psychedelic drugs, scientists said a substance in certain mushrooms induced powerful, mind-altering experiences among a group of well-educated, middle-age men and women. Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions
Participants were given the drug in individual sessions in a living-room environment with two lasts for about as long. It also takes effect at about the same time and similar to those of psilocybin, researchers said. It was widespread abuse in the 1960s that led to hallucinogens becoming illegal, effectively shutting down then-burgeoning corporate and academic research programs that had suggested the agents might be valuable research and therapeutic tools. One of the last influential studies was the Good Friday Experiment in 1962 in which 20 seminary students were given either psilocybin or nicotinic acid during a religious service. The 10 who got psilocybin reported intense spiritual experiences with positive benefits; one follow-up study suggested those effects lasted 25 years.

"It's remarkable that we have a class of compounds that has sat in the deep freeze for 40 years," Dr. Griffiths said. "It seemed to me scientifically it was high time to look again" at psychedelic agents. Known colloquially by such names as magic mushroom or sacred mushroom, psilocybin is considered a Schedule I substance under the U.S. Controlled Substances Act. That puts it in the same class as heroin and LSD, drugs that have a high potential for abuse and no known medical use. It isn't considered addictive. The psilocybin used in the study was synthesized by David E. Nichols, a professor of medicinal chemistry at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind., under a special permit.

After getting approval from the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Food and Drug Administration and an institutional review board at Hopkins, Dr. Griffiths and his colleagues circulated a flier seeking volunteers for a "study of states of consciousness brought about by a naturally occurring psychoactive substance used sacramentally in some cultures." From among the 135 people who responded, 36 were eventually selected, based in part on their lack of a history of psychedelic drug use or family history of serious psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia. The 36 — 14 men and 22 women — ranged in age from 24 to 64 years old, with an average age of 46; 97% were college graduates, and 56% had post-graduate degrees. All 36 participated at least occasionally in religious or spiritual activities. (Dr. Griffiths declined to make any participants available for interviews, citing privacy issues.)

Thirty of the participants were randomly assigned to receive either psilocybin or Ritalin (known generically as methylphenidate) as a control for the first eight-hour session; two months later, they were given the other drug in another session. Neither the participants nor the monitors who were present during their sessions knew which agent was being taken. To further reduce chances that participant responses would be affected by expectations they were getting psilocybin, a third group of six participants was randomly assigned to receive Ritalin in both sessions, followed by a third session when they knew they were getting the psychedelic agent. Ritalin was selected as the control agent in part because it can cause mood-changing effects similar to those of psilocybin, researchers said. It also takes effect at about the same time and lasts for about as long.

Researchers acknowledge that the study's positive findings may encourage inappropriate use of the agents. Roland Griffiths, the Hopkins neuroscientist who headed the research, warned against viewing the results as a green light for consuming the mushrooms. "We don't know all their dark sides," he said. "I wouldn't in any way want to underestimate the potential risks" of indiscriminate use of the drugs.

The National Institute for Drug Abuse, which co-sponsored the study as part of its support for research into drugs of abuse, also warned against eating psilocybin mushrooms. They "act on serotonin receptors in the brain to profoundly distort a person's perception of reality," the institute said, possibly triggering psychosis, paranoia and anxiety.

"It seemed to me scientifically it was high time to look again" at psychedelic agents. Known colloquially by such names as magic mushroom or sacred mushroom, psilocybin is considered a Schedule I substance under the U.S. Controlled Substances Act. That puts it in the same class as heroin and LSD, drugs that have a high potential for abuse and no known medical use. It isn't considered addictive. The psilocybin used in the study was synthesized by David E. Nichols, a professor of medicinal chemistry at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind., under a special permit.
They were blindfolded, given headphones to listen to classical music and encouraged to lie down and direct their thoughts inward.

Researchers provided participants with a battery of questionnaires and mysticism scales, some of which were developed based on research from more than four decades ago, to measure their impressions of their experience at the end of the session and again two months later.

A third of the participants said the experience with psilocybin was the single most significant experience of their lives, and an additional 38% rated it among their top five such experiences — akin to, say, the birth of a first child or the death of a parent. Just 8% of the Ritalin episodes were reported to be among the top five meaningful occurrences. Two months after the sessions, 79% of the participants indicated in questionnaires that their sense of well-being and satisfaction increased after the psilocybin episodes, compared with 21% for Ritalin.

Researchers hope the findings will spur other studies that will, for instance, compare the effects of other hallucinogens and use MRIs to observe how such drugs affect the human brain. Other efforts are expected to test the value of psilocybin as a therapy. Charles Grob, a researcher at UCLA, is heading a small study to see if the drug relieves anxiety, depression and pain among patients with advanced cancer.

Dr. Griffiths said another goal is to understand the consequences of spiritual experiences — both drug-induced and spontaneous — and to determine how long they last and whether they lead to personality changes.

(Write to Ron Winslow at ron [dot] winslow [at] wsj [dot] com)

ABSTRACT

Psilocybin can occasion mystical-type experiences having substantial and sustained personal meaning and spiritual significance

R. R. Griffiths1, 2 Contact Information, W. A. Richards3, 4, U. McCann1 and R. Jesse4

(1) Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, 5510, Nathan Shock Drive, Baltimore, MD 21224-6823, USA
Email: rgriff [at] jhmi [dot] edu Phone: +1-410-5500034 Fax: +1-410-5500030

(2) Department of Neuroscience, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, 5510 Nathan Shock Drive, Baltimore, MD 21224-6823, USA

(3) Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center, 2516 Talbot Road, Baltimore, MD 21216-2032, USA

(4) Council on Spiritual Practices, Box 460220, San Francisco, CA 94146-0220, USA

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Abstract

Rationale Although psilocybin has been used for centuries for religious purposes, little is known scientifically about its acute and persisting effects.

Objectives This double-blind study evaluated the acute and longer-term psychological effects of a high dose of psilocybin relative to a comparison compound administered under comfortable, supportive conditions.

Materials and methods The participants were hallucinogen-naive adults reporting regular participation in religious or spiritual activities. Two or three sessions were conducted at 2-month intervals. Thirty volunteers received orally administered psilocybin (30 mg/70 kg) and methylphenidate hydrochloride (40 mg/70 kg) in counterbalanced order. To obscure the study design, six additional volunteers received methylphenidate in the first two sessions and unblinded psilocybin in a third session. The 8-h sessions were conducted individually. Volunteers were encouraged to close their eyes and direct their attention inward. Study monitors rated volunteers’ behavior during sessions. Volunteers completed questionnaires assessing drug effects and mystical experience immediately after and 2 months after sessions. Community observers rated changes in the volunteer’s attitudes and behavior.

Results Psilocybin produced a range of acute perceptual changes, subjective experiences, and labile moods including anxiety. Psilocybin also increased measures of mystical experience. At 2 months, the volunteers rated the psilocybin experience as having substantial personal meaning and spiritual significance and attributed to the experience sustained positive changes in attitudes and behavior consistent with changes rated by community observers.
Conclusions  When administered under supportive conditions, psilocybin	oncasioned experiences similar to spontaneously occurring mystical
texperiences. The ability to occasion such experiences prospectively
will allow rigorous scientific investigations of their causes and
consequences.

Electronic Supplementary Material  Supplementary material is available
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