

The Singularity of the Human Hive Mind

James Sirois gives us a strong warning about overusing the net.

The internet has become so all-pervading that even the word seems a little old-fashioned now. No-one really uses it much anymore. We ask each other for wifi, or talk of going online, or complain about a lack of data, but rarely do we talk of ‘the internet’ as an entity; it has become too ubiquitous, too intrinsic to our lives, for that to be a very useful term. This prompts me to wonder: *what are we becoming?* Could the internet lead us to become more than individuals and disparate communities?

I believe we’re entering an era when the words ‘individual’ and ‘community’ take on new definitions or meanings as we increasingly become interconnected in what I think of as a ‘hive mind’. I also believe that a hive-minded process could itself be a transition towards a singularity in consciousness across the Earth. Is that desirable, or even possible? Are we in the process of creating it? Is it inevitable? Can it be controlled? What does it even *mean*?

Before addressing these questions, however, we’ll need definitions of the words ‘Hive’ and ‘Mind’ and the phrase ‘Hive Mind’. What is a ‘hive mind’, exactly?

Mind

An awareness of existence with experiential content, referring both to what is outside itself and to its own existence.

Hive

Multiple entities sharing an element of awareness not unique to any individual but present to each, and experienced by all as some awareness of their collective existence.

Hive Mind

An awareness formed from the communication of individual minds but different from each of its individual minds, and so not defined by the separateness of the individual minds which compose it.

Let’s consider the possibility of hive-mindedness through the framework of free will, under the assumption that a loss of individual free will is undesirable.

The Inevitability of the Hive Mind

Basic human survival has always depended on some kinds of cooperation. By extending their abilities through cooperation in pursuit of common goals, individuals secure for themselves and each other a basic or minimum state of well-being. To a degree this could be said to result in a shared will, although we usually refer to it as ‘group psychology’. In this basic sense, humanity certainly depends on ‘hive-mindedness’. We’re clearly not as hive-minded as the birds, bees or ants but nevertheless, cooperation in a sense extends the consciousness of the individual. This is evident in our historical evolution, all the way up to the information technology (IT) we have recently devel-

oped.

The internet encourages and makes possible more types of collaboration involving larger groups and faster, more intimate sharing of ideas, and this takes us ever further in the direction of a hive mind, in an accelerating process not subject to any central plan. Is a hive-minded type of thought inevitable? At any rate it seems safe to assume that, so long as no catastrophe deprives us of electricity, we will increasingly lose our sense of individuality.

If we think about the internet as a *brain-to-brain connection interface*, we might easily see that isolated thinking becomes increasingly difficult to sustain due to the quickening rate at which we’re socially encouraged to share our thoughts. Somewhere along the way, an individual brain starts to act more like a neuron to the synapses of the internet brain than a self-contained unit. This is starting to become evident as we generally begin to mimic much more information than we create, especially with sharing, reposting and retweeting. Across a range of industries and activities highly complex content is now being created by online groups rather than individuals, because it is quicker to achieve richer content that way. In addition, it’s easy and fast to capture our experiences through photos and videos, and pass them through filters which generically impress a sense of quality but in actuality only reduce diversity and therefore individuality.

If we consider the speed at which we’re evolving our connections in the virtual world, it seems safe to assume that hive-mindedness is starting to happen. Our brains no longer seem to differentiate between dealing with information from the real world, and dealing with information from an artificial world. Emotionally and intellectually, we respond to social situations online as if we’re part of a physical community.

The Process

Neuroscientists and psychologists keep revealing that the human mind is less centralized than we thought. The philosopher David Hume argued as far back as the eighteenth century that the unity of consciousness is an illusion, and each mind consists of a bundle of perceptions and experiences. It seems to me that for any awareness made up of multiple entities, it’s a matter of perspective that a singularity of identity is felt to exist at all. Technology being researched now will soon be sophisticated enough to connect our minds to a degree beyond anything we can currently imagine. For example, a non-invasive mind to internet network demonstrated in 2019 allowed three widely separated individuals to play a collaborative Tetris-like game using only their thoughts. A singular consciousness emerging from this technological revolution must be considered possible because singular consciousnesses arisen from multiple processes already exist – namely us. But if the internet began to consider itself aware and integrated, in the same sort of way that we do, I wonder if we could ever detect that? Will

we know if the net becomes conscious – or perhaps more plausibly to many, coordinates a singular human mind-set?

We are undeniably in a process of increasing interconnectivity. Are we just improving our social and professional lives as individuals, or are we beginning to create ‘one mind’? Comparing our online selves to the neurons in a brain, can our individual minds be rightly called ‘one mind’, or is it more like a hive of ‘mini-minds’? Perhaps we will fracture into several hive-minds before any singular global consciousness can be formed, and even eventually revert back into individualism.

We must also ask whether this process could be controlled or limited in some way. For instance, could a hive mind like the internet in the future be compartmentalized enough to preserve a sense of individuality for its users? We cannot know the answer to this now, but I believe that in order to remain individuals and exercise individual freedom we would eventually need to reject the cyberconnection altogether. This seems very unlikely to happen. This leads to a sharp question: how much control do we have even *now*?

Control over the hive would require there to be a widely shared desire for individual control. But if individual control is dependent on the desire of the collective, this is tantamount to saying that *we have no control as individuals*. The question is, will the hive relinquish some of its power and tolerate dissent among the units that compose it? Maybe not. We already see this drama being played out with massive mobbing on platforms such as Twitter of individuals felt to have transgressed against the values of the online community. It seems as if the connectedness of the mob erodes the awareness of individual voices even being necessary, therefore eliminating the basis for a desire for individuality to begin with. In short, if any rebellion against the hive mind were possible, we probably would not even know it. This could take us all the way up to the point where individual thinking would be completely consumed by a new singular awareness, surpassing the idea of a ‘hive mind’, and instead simply becoming a mind. In this situation, control becomes a matter of *self*-control: that is, control by *the* Self.

As for the *morality* of such a singular mind, we can only reflect that a single mind, even if composed of what used to be individuals, would be utterly alone. It might be morally pure and absolute, therefore ‘divine’, if you wish; or perhaps it would mean morality would no longer exist or be applicable. Until then we’re left with the same old difficult questions about the risks to individuality and its freedoms: *At what point does societal organization become tyrannical? What is freedom anyway? How free should we be? How can we be moral?* and so on. These questions are always over us while we simultaneously try to establish what a human really is – right up until ‘we’ are no longer simply human, and have become the ‘I’ of the collective individual.

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James Sirois is what?