

The Laws of Human Stupidity

- I Always and inevitably everyone underestimates the number of stupid individuals in circulation.
- II The probability that a certain person will be stupid is independent of any other characteristic of that person.
- III A stupid person is a person who causes losses to another person or to a group of persons while himself deriving no gain and even possibly incurring losses.
- IV Non-stupid people always underestimate the damaging power of stupid individuals. In particular non-stupid people constantly forget that at all times and places and under any circumstances to deal and/or associate with stupid people always turns out to be a costly mistake.
- V A stupid person is the most dangerous type of person.

Corollary: a stupid person is more dangerous than a pillager.

The Dual Factors of Human Behaviour (Self,Others)

Self Benefits and losses that an individual causes to him or herself.

Others Benefits and losses that an individual causes to others.

Lets represent the combinations 2x2 of factors (Self, Other) in quadrants as (win,win), (win, lose), (lose, win) and (lose, lose)

(win,win) Who contribute to society and who leverage their contributions into reciprocal benefits
Intelligent

(win,lose) Who pursue their own self-interest even when doing so poses a net detriment to societal welfare
Bandits

(lose,win) Who contribute to society but are taken advantage of by it (and especially by the "bandit" sector of it)
Helpless

The Dual Factors of Human Behaviour (Self,Others) (cont)

(lose,lose) Whose efforts are counterproductive to both their
Stupid people and others' interests

Note about (lose, win) Extreme altruists and pacifists may willingly and consciously (rather than helplessly) accept a place in this category for moral or ethical reasons.

There is a 5th category represented as (0,0) of ineffectual people.

Corollaries First Law, by Giancarlo Livraghi

- I In each of us there is a factor of stupidity, which is always larger than we suppose
- II When the stupidity of one person combines with the stupidity of others, the impact grows geometrically – i.e. by multiplication, not addition, of the individual stupidity factors
- III The combination of intelligence in different people is more difficult than the combination of stupidity

See Also: A Short Introduction to the History of Human Stupidity by Walter B. Pitkin

About Stupidity

Comes from the Latin verb *stupere*, for being numb or astonished, and is related to stupor.

Stupidity is a quality or state of being stupid, or an act or idea that exhibits properties of being stupid.

James F. Welles defines: *The term may be used to designate a mentality which is considered to be informed, deliberate and maladaptive*

Wilfred Bion considered that psychological projection created a barrier against learning anything new, and thus its own form of pseudo-stupidity

Otto Fenichel: *People become stupid ad hoc, that is, when they do not want to understand, where understanding would cause anxiety or guilt feeling, or would endanger an existing neurotic equilibrium*



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About Stupidity (cont)

Jung: *it requires no art to become stupid; the whole art lies in extracting wisdom from stupidity. Stupidity is the mother of the wise, but cleverness never*

Welles distinguishes stupidity from ignorance; one must know they are acting in their own worst interest. Secondly, it must be a choice, not a forced act or accident. Lastly, it requires the activity to be maladaptive, in that it is in the worst interest of the actor, and specifically done to prevent adaption to new data or existing circumstances

Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord

I divide my officers into four groups. There are clever, diligent, stupid, and lazy officers. Usually two characteristics are combined. Some are clever and diligent - their place is the General Staff. The next lot are stupid and lazy, they make up 90 percent of every army and are suited to routine duties. *Anyone who is both clever and lazy is qualified for the highest leadership duties, because he possesses the intellectual clarity and the composure necessary for difficult decisions. One must beware of anyone who is stupid and diligent - he must not be entrusted with any responsibility because he will always cause only mischief.*

Kurt Freiherr von Hammerstein-Equord (26 September 1878 – 24 April 1943) was a German general who served for a period as Commander-in-Chief of the German Army. He was an ardent opponent of Hitler and the Nazi regime.

The Three Friends of Stupidity

Ignorance · Fear · Habit

From Part Four of "The Power of Stupidity" by Giancarlo Livraghi 2002

Albert Einstein's Quote

Albert Einstein

Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the former quote in Gestalt Therapy Verbatim by Frederick S. Perls.

See the Spin-Off Cheat Sheet

<http://www.cheatography.com/jorgejuan007/cheat-sheets/quotes-about-stupidity/>

Carlo M. Cipolla

Carlo M. Cipolla (August 15, 1922 – September 5, 2000) Italian economic historian

Published (in Italian) the title *Allegro ma non troppo* (1988) The Basic Laws of Human Stupidity

Stupid people act as a group, more powerful by far than major organizations such as the mafia and the military industrial complex, which without regulations, leaders or manifesto nonetheless manages to operate to great effect and with incredible coordination

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo_M._Cipolla

Principles

Hanlon's razor	Never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity
Occam's razor	Among competing hypotheses, the one with the fewest assumptions should be selected
Dunning-Kruger effect	Occurs where people fail to adequately assess their level of competence — or specifically, their incompetence — at a task and thus consider themselves much more competent than everyone else. (people who are too stupid to know how stupid they are)
Impostor Syndrome	Competent people tend to underestimate their ability compared to others
Not Enough Know	A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. A small amount of knowledge can mislead a person into thinking that they're an expert because this small amount of knowledge isn't a well known fact
Ignorance Confidence	Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge
Poe's Law	Without a clear indication of the author's intent, it is difficult or impossible to tell the difference between an expression of sincere extremism and a parody of extremism.



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Principles (cont)

Peter's Principle Sometimes I wonder whether the world is being run by smart people who are putting us on or by imbeciles who really mean it (Laurence J. Peter)

Hatchett's Principle Real stupidity beats artificial intelligence every time

Hanlon's razor is essentially a special case of Occam's razor (or Lex Parsimoniae)

Recommended Lectures: <http://gandalf.it/stupid/stupid.htm>

Video John Cleese on Stupidity: <https://youtu.be/wvVPdyYeaQU>

How Not To Look Stupid

A study offers a scientific answer.

Balázs Aczél, a psychology professor at Eotvos Lorand University in Budapest is a co-author of a study, Aczél and his colleagues gathered 180 pieces of writing from the news, blog sites, and social media deemed as "stupid"

Researchers noticed 3 different types of behaviors most often deemed as stupid.

Their statistical analysis of the data found that people regard stupid action in three different categories:

- (1) not maintaining a balance between confidence and abilities
- (2) failures of attention
- (3) lack of control

Examples of the 3 categories:

1. Overconfidence

Aczél term is "confident ignorance," when someone is overconfident about their ability to do something. A driver refuses to ask for directions, and end up lost.

2. Lack of control

On a diet but buys cookies in the grocery store "just in case."

3. Absent-mindedness

Your mind is wandering or thinking in other thing. Crash!!!

Researchers noted that more is needed to determine how much of their findings are influenced by culture and shared expectations.

The level of observed stupidity was dependent on the level of responsibility and the consequences of the action.

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Bonhoeffer's Theory of Stupidity

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian under the Nazi regime. He spent in prison for speaking against the Nazi regime. Thinking about what was happening in Germany he came to the conclusion that "the root of the problem was not malice, but stupidity."

Evil can be exposed and fought against. Against stupidity we are defenseless.

"Stupidity is not an intellectual defect", says Bonhoeffer, "but a moral one. There are educated stupid people and wise uneducated people".

"We note further that people who have isolated themselves from others or who live in solitude manifest this defect less frequently than individuals or groups of people inclined or condemned to sociability. And so it would seem that stupidity is perhaps less a psychological than a sociological problem."

"It is a particular form of the impact of historical circumstances on human beings, a psychological concomitant of certain external conditions. Upon closer observation, it becomes apparent that every strong upsurge of power in the public sphere, be it of a political or of a religious nature, infects a large part of humankind with stupidity."

"Against stupidity we have no defense. Neither protests nor force can touch it. Reasoning is of no use. Facts that contradict personal prejudices can simply be disbelieved — indeed, the fool can counter by criticizing them, and if they are undeniable, they can just be pushed aside as trivial exceptions. So the fool, as distinct from the scoundrel, is completely self-satisfied. In fact, they can easily become dangerous, as it does not take much to make them aggressive. For that reason, greater caution is called for than with a malicious one. Never again will we try to persuade the stupid person with reasons, for it is senseless and dangerous."

We live in a world of endless stupidity

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God bless you with the gift of avoiding stupidity !



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