



The Reality of Stupidity in the Current Social, Collective and Political Spheres

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Abstract: Everyone sees, hears, and reads about idiotic actions every day. At the same time, we are all guilty for generating it, thinking about it, repeating over it in our minds, and expressing it out loud. Stupidity will always have the upper hand. If there are various types of intelligence, as psychologist argue, there must also be wide range of stupidity. This paper aims to understand why people describe some actions stupid, regardless of their cognitive capacity, through an integrative study of articles, media blogs, and books on the theory and laws of stupidity. Also attempt has been made, to find out what people want to say when they call stupidity in social, collective, and political arenas, as well as whether stupidity has become more prevalent in the modern day. Relevant published documents and articles examined for the purpose through online search of open access documents. The paper's composition is simple i.e. beginning with set of definitions given by the philosophical canon in recent centuries, briefly discussing the Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theory of stupidity with five laws of stupidity as Carlo M Cipolla, and then discerning the ascending levels of stupidity in social collective and political spheres.

Keywords: Stupidity, Idiotic Actions, Social, Collective, Political, Arena

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Introduction

In his opus- A history of western philosophy, Bertrand Russel remarked: "A stupid man's report of what a smart man says can never be precise, in light of the fact that he unwittingly makes an interpretation of what he hears into something he can comprehend." The socialist Einstein famously remarked, "Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity. And I'm not sure about the universe." Another fun quotation of his is, "The difference between stupidity and genius is that genius

has its limits.” Martin Luther King, Jr., the American Civil Rights Leader and Pastor commented in the book named “Love in Action”, “Nothing in all the world is more risky than genuine obliviousness and scrupulous idiocy”. The assertion was essentially utilized by him with regards to abuse, and attack of African Americans by the white local area. Every day, everyone witnesses, hears, and reads about idiotic actions. At the same time, we are all guilty of generating it, thinking about that, thinking it over, and expressing it loud. The daily demonstrations of human folly form a Gordian knot that may be beyond human comprehension, let alone resolution.

Overview

The stupidity may be explained with reference to people, events, or results made as “stupid,” the same implies that they lack wits, knowledge, or logical reasoning. Dictionary entries list 127 synonyms for stupidity. Philosophers’ defining stupidity may be notable. In a footnote to his Critique of Pure Reason, Immanuel Kant defines idiocy as a lack in the capacities of one’s capacity of reasons ⁽¹⁾. Horkheimer and Adorno give a brief account of stupidity in the notes and sketches under headings ‘Against Knowingness’ and ‘Postscript’ appendixes in Dialectic of Enlightenment ⁽²⁾. Gilles Deleuze defines stupidity from a transcendental approach in Difference and Repetition (chapters three and five) ⁽³⁾. In the late 1970s lecture series Birth of Biopolitics, Michel Foucault alludes to a historical concept of ignorance (in accordance with his genealogical histories of truth-telling, and had also written an essay (Theatrum Philosophicum) on Deleuze in which he covered the latter’s concept and early works ⁽⁴⁾. Derrida has also written on stupidity (as with all French thinkers mentioned, this comes down to the word ‘betise’, meaning stupidity, animality, and beastliness) in The Beast and the Sovereign ⁽⁵⁾. Besides, American academic, Avital Ronell in her book made references to the sacred idiot, to the epic idiot, also idiocy in Kant, Nietzsche, Kafka, Paul De Man, Emmanuel Levinas, Schlegel, Musil, Wordsworth; and left stupidity as a pervasive element of knowledge and culture ⁽⁶⁾. Sheppard & Young ⁽⁷⁾ have categorized stupidity, as identifiable stupidity, functional stupidity, and the stress-stupidity system. Few years ago, scientists claimed to have revealed the three different types of stupidity in a new study. The research team collected news stories, from publications university students to keep a diary for five days recording any instances of people acting stupidly. The research showed that there were three main categories of stupid behavior as (i) confident ignorance, involved people who undertook risky acts for which they did not have the skills, such as burglars stealing GPS tracking devices thinking they were mobile phones; (ii) lack of control

results from obsessive behavior was considered to be in the middle-range of stupidity, and (iii) absentmindedness was found to be caused by a lack of practicality. These results let to the understanding people's conception of unintelligent behaviour while emphasising the broader psychological perspectives of studying the attribute of stupid in everyday life ⁽⁸⁾.

In the context of theory and law of stupidity, the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer argued in his *Theory of Stupidity* ⁽⁹⁾ that "Stupidity is a more dangerous enemy of the good than evil," Carlo M. Cipolla, a leading economic historian from Italy, went on defining the five "laws of stupidity" as 1) Everyone, without fail, underestimates the amount of foolish people in the world. 2) The likelihood of a person being stupid is unrelated to any other attribute of that individual, 3) A stupid person is someone who causes losses to another person or to a group of persons while himself earning zero and perhaps losing money, 4) Non-stupid people still underestimate the destructive potential of stupid people, and 5) the most dangerous type of human is a stupid person ⁽¹⁰⁾. Experimental psychologist Balazs Aczel ⁽¹¹⁾ and his colleagues, conducted research to find out what people believe to be stupid behavior. Confident ignorance, lack of control and absentmindedness were identified to be three primary kinds of foolish behavior in the study. Studies of behavioral scripts ⁽¹²⁾ show that most of the time people do not analyze their environment deeply before they act. They depend on familiar, habitual routine actions, which they execute automatically in response to internal or environmental factors.

This paper aims to understand why people describe some actions stupid, independently from their intrapersonal abilities, through an integrative study of essays, articles, media blogs, and books on the theory and laws of stupidity through internet search of open access documents. There appeared limited study dedicated to stupidity, and search of history of stupidity research revealed scarcity of information on the topic. However, there are either collections of essays on various forms of weak intellects and judgments including not only stupidity but also idiocy and folly ⁽¹³⁾, journalistic criticisms of our stupidity ⁽¹⁴⁾, and psychological surveys ⁽¹⁵⁾. Except for the third category of books, there are few scholarly studies. Literature is the central discipline for those studies on stupidity in humanities. Also, the author attempted to find out what people ascribe when they call stupidity in social, collective, and political arenas, as well as attempt to understand whether stupidity is on the rise currently. The composition of the paper is simple i.e. starting with the philosophical canon's variety of definitions within recent centuries, briefly discussing the theory and five laws of stupidity.

Analysis

Within the context of presence of Stupidity in social, collective, and political spheres, it is observed that the present universe of communication enhances and slows down this age's stupidity. Adorno and Horkheimer have clearly shown that this critical reason often becomes the opposite of itself ⁽¹⁶⁾. The rise of social networking in the 1990s provided us with the ability to interact with others, but its click-baiting algorithms and lack of accountability enabled trolls, senseless noise, and cat videos to reign over. In his studies on group norms ⁽¹⁷⁾, the psychologist Solomon Asch long ago addressed many well-known instances of this phenomenon. Rather than study the idiot as an object, psychological research focuses on understanding why people act like idiots sometimes. Studies of behavioral scripts ⁽¹⁸⁾ show that most of the time people do not analyze their environment deeply before they act. This was witnessed recently in West Bengal state in India, where the ruling dispensations' actions, soon after the brutal rape and murder of a junior resident female doctor at a medical college and hospital in Kolkata city in August 2024, with the obtuse announcements fueled the initial doctors' protest turning into massive public agitation ⁽¹⁹⁾.

Stupidity have also become the law of political discourse, as an order, a diktat, in the text and talk of professional politician or political institution. According to French philosopher Sartre, stupidity functions as phrases which nobody wishes nor is able to justify, as ideas assumed by all to be true ⁽²⁰⁾. Another philosopher Stengers, had referred to a political dimension of stupidity, namely that it enables those in authority to retain power without ever feeling shame, and that stupidities are sometimes required for consensus ⁽²¹⁾. Philosopher Robert Musil ⁽²²⁾ separated two types of stupidity: stupidity defined as a lack of intelligence and stupidity defined as a rejection of intelligence. Affective stupidity, which is tied to the realm of emotions, now has tremendous weapons of empathy at its disposal, allowing it to spread in social arena. Among these, television stands out as a tool for empathic torture. Many viewers reproduce, imitate or experience what they assume to be a character's mental state and mental activity in this way ⁽²³⁾. Laszlo and Smogyvari ⁽²⁴⁾ studied the relationship between reader's and characters' group identities influences narrative empathy

Sentiments used to be seldom communicated outside of the private circle. But of late, it has been seen compelling enthusiastic responses from public states, ideological groups, nongovernmental associations in open arena. Loaded with feeling ineptitude, Musil compares to: Kitsch- as "the component of evil in the worth arrangement of craftsmanship"⁽²⁵⁾. As "smart cities" are being constructed, there is the contrary

development of the stupidification of urban communities ⁽²⁶⁾. For instance, as seen through ongoing media reports, free Wi-Fi accessibility is being utilized by greater part of individuals to impact out music and watch sexual entertainment.

To find out the sense of stupidity there are enough reported incidences that tend to indicate that Stupidity is on the rise in modern age of enlightenment. People, societies, countries and governments all may have many justifications for their stupid behavior. In the past 20 years, commentary has become a true growth. It is very often awful because the pure volume of irritable, uninformed “sensational opinions” the same creates, as American writer and journalist Dave Holmes recently put it, “kind of smart that is indistinguishable from stupid.” ⁽²⁷⁾ The American war in Afghanistan decades ago and abrupt recent withdrawal without mission achieved ⁽²⁸⁾ or in spite of evidences indicating gender diversity improves good governance, and Asian countries championing women empowerment, but they continue to have under-representation of women, ranging from 5-22 per cent in power ⁽²⁹⁾, or growing pluralistic ignorance that is blamed for exacerbating support for racial segregation in the United States ⁽³⁰⁾- one of many. People’s behavior towards Climate change is peculiar. Stupid actions by some richer nations by way of weakening green norms and yet lecturing about ‘saving the environment’ and making the public mindless to grasp what was going to happen to humans breathing toxic air helplessly, yet not knowing how to save themselves and future generations. According to a 2013 poll, a higher number of minorities believe global warming is occurring and wanted US President to act to solve the problem ⁽³¹⁾. A typical cause and symptom of stupidity and irrationality is a concentration on words rather than substance.

Clearly, the entrance level of stupidity is simple, a Facebook status update will suffice. Facebook reportedly has 60 million false news engagements per month ⁽³²⁾. In 2020, Twitter on record added 319 new members per minute, while YouTube uploaded 500 hours of videos in the same period of time ⁽³³⁾. According to a research published by the Guardian, less than 1 per cent of all readers leave a comment. More than 20 per cent of those comments originate from a tiny fraction- the 0.0037 per cent who try to dominate the conversation by shouting down everyone else ⁽³⁴⁾. Our collective intelligence, has devolved into what can only be described as rising tide of collective stupidity. The eventual consequence, on the other hand, can be disastrous. It can take the form of horned men attacking the Capitol in Washington ⁽³⁵⁾, or enormous anti-lockdown, anti-vax protests in Central London by people who believe the BBC is to blame for the coronavirus ⁽³⁶⁾ or the new Indian currency notes carry the micro-chips

to detect black money⁽³⁷⁾. Similarly, one of the most striking aspects of the SARS Cov-2 pandemic has been the proliferation infodemic. COVID and India's Kumbh Mela provide testing room conditions for determining why social initiatives fail⁽³⁸⁾ or top politicians in India were promoting cow urine as a COVID-19 medication, while celebrity news broadcasters reassured the public that cows exhale oxygen⁽³⁹⁾ or A research study on European crisis narration in relation to Italy's response to COVID-19 found the country incredibly stupid⁽⁴⁰⁾ to cite some instances.

People have always been told that they are intellectual, modern, and progressive people who are guided by science and reasoning. However, the COVID-19 outbreak demonstrated other important and innate characteristics in mankind, namely anxiety, ignorance, and swagger, but most significantly, stupidity. Doctors and scientists suggested that everyone wear masks when the pandemic began, but media organizations reported that the president of the 'most sophisticated country' the US, British Prime Minister, his Brazilian counterpart exhibited peculiar defiance of precautionary norms and indulged in ignorant actions plunging their citizens into pandemic severity situation. India enforced the strictest lockdown, and the country's collective response to Covid-19 were guided to 'clever' lighting of candles, clapping hands loudly, ringing bells, and also to 'honor' health workers they flashed mobile torchlights⁽⁴¹⁾. But, a year later, the country was back to square one, with a second wave that had become extremely serious with each passing day, followed by the third wave. Stupid actions got better of scientific logic, as incidences began coming out in the media from across the country. The unwillingness of tens of millions of individuals to get vaccinated against the novel coronavirus will be studied as an example of mass ignorance. People were not quite people anymore; they are cartoons and categories. They engage in what amounts to an Oedipal rebellion⁽⁴²⁾ against reality itself. To summarize, when business has virtual monopoly over government and the media, as universally observed currently, the kind of information, entertainment, commentary, ideologies, and educational policies available will not promote rationality – rather stupid outcomes will prevail⁽⁴³⁾.

Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman's colleague Amos Tversky noted that most people research natural stupidity rather than artificial intelligence⁽⁴⁴⁾. Human cognition, subject to biases, errors, and limited processing capacity, is colloquially termed "natural stupidity." Artificial Intelligence (AI), designed by humans through natural intelligence as well as natural stupidity, aims to emulate or surpass certain aspects of human intelligence. AI relies on algorithms, data, and computational

power to perform specific tasks. However, paradoxically humans- built systems that can predict natural disasters with remarkable accuracy, but they fail to take preventive measures. The march of technology with its myriad participatory platforms, have given rise to fake news, doctored videos, unsubstantiated inflammatory news content that further divide and polarize our society. The 2024 Physics Nobel for Geoffrey Hinton and John Hopfield is acknowledgement of AI's potential to human life. But in their moment of glory, the two scientists also highlighted the risk posed by advanced tech ⁽⁴⁵⁾.

In this modern world, the many stupidities that appear on a regular basis can be divided in two categories. The first is to believe that humans are completely devoid of knowledge and that only scientific guidance can save them. The second travels in the opposite way, and holds that people's choices are sacred, even sacrosanct, and that disregarding them would be erroneous, if not unethical. Both these mistakes are indeed the result of 'rapid thinking'.

Summing up

Notwithstanding that stupidity has remained in the discourse of human behavior with its current ascend noticeable, probably the lone antidote to stupidity is humility. To arrest the epidemic of stupidity, we all need to recognize our shortcomings and collectively agree that we cannot know everything. One can either accept one's ignorance, or be doomed by it. Chances favor stupidity over intellect. A new trend has emerged for these reasons. The idea of choosing citizen councils by random selection is being experimented with by some small western democracies. In today's political systems, the use of representative samples in decision-making given an opportunity to re-establish sortition (making decisions or filling offices by drawing lots). Sortition adds variation to political procedures, which serves to strengthen democratic legitimacy. These entities operate as shadow governments, advisors or tail twisters, and possessed the power to encourage people at acting sensibly and logical overcoming external influences.

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