common cause. For example, it was suggested hypertension might make one prone to disease (by lowering systemic resistance) and given to smoking cigarettes merely for the release of tension provided by oral gratification.

FREEDOM

Of all the myths which thrive in the face of scientific encroachments, however, "Free will" is the most fundamental [78]. Although study after study confirms that human behavior is caused by the interactions of the environment and people on each other, the Western belief in freedom cannot be laid to rest because Catholicism was based on freedom [79]. Although every successful experiment in the behavioral sciences theoretically undercuts the notion of freedom, there is no great soul searching confrontation developing on this issue. Just as God adapted to Charles Darwin, freedom is adapting to Skinner and his behaviorist colleagues so that our traditional schema may be retained. In this great unacknowledged battle between science and our favorite secular religion, our cultural priests play "Mindguards", ignoring and interpreting accumulating evidence so as to minimize our awareness and anxiety as to just who and what we are. In this sense, the concept of human freedom is to the contemporary Western world what the Ptolemaic planetary system was to medieval culture an idea that makes us feel important although it makes no sense whatsoever.

This myth is sustained not only by Spinozans, who hype understanding as freedom [80] and those who revel in the limitations of statistical analysis but also by the Existential-Humanists. These are behavioral philosophers who sort of play the sad clowns in the circus of psychology. They are very much in love with the illusion of human freedom and feel the behaviorists' assertion that humans respond predictably to combinations of internal and environmental factors robs people of their dignity. They prefer to view people as creative and inherently good beings who are striving to fulfill their potential [81]. According to them, Adolf and Attila the Huns were essentially good people just trying to realize themselves. [m] Collectively, Existential-Humanists constitute the "Aw, shucks..." school of psychology, and if there ever was a religious myth masquerading as philosophical idiocy, this is it.

By way of sympathy, it should be noted that the existential philosophical movement developed not as an attempt to understand how people, during the horrors of World War II, could "Rise above themselves" and find meaning in their lives but actually as a rationale for how France rolled over and dropped dead when the Germans invaded [82]. Following in the mind prints of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and

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[m] The operative moral salve implicit in the question WwJd? May make the asker feel smugly humble. However, it will not make him rich; nor will it make him famous–but it will make him interesting and a lot of pious enemies.

Heidegger, Marxist Sartre made a career of finding catchy ways to tell people what they wanted to hear, thought they knew and already believed. As the scientific equivalent of spam, he emphasized the standard bromides of self-determination, choice and responsibility for rising above one's immediate circumstances [83] - in his case, those of a swivel-eyed gnome [84]. The first sound bite philosopher [85], his maxim was "We are our choices", as not only existence but meaning was in our own minds. We alone are sup-posed to decide freely what our attitudes and behavior will be based presumably on our own, individual life-determining experiences [86]. Fortunately for him, he spouted his supraintellectual nonsense in an age when the great philosophical minds were falling all over themselves and each other trying and failing to explain the inexplicable war psyche.

Specifically, his nonsense was nonscientific, subjective nonsense. It may have made good religion, but it was lousy philosophy and no kind of psychology at all. The phrase "Rise above themselves" may sound better in French, but it is meaningless in any language. Self-control, choice and responsibility are elements of a conceptual schema people can learn, and it may be awesome but not totally surprising that some people clung to them during their desperate experiences during the war [87] in their determination to rise above their circumstances. In toto, the Holocaust, the world's poverty, starvation, sickness and cruelty led theologian Jackie Mason to conclude that if there is a God, he is an idiot [88]. As for people, a pat on their collective heads by Humanists might make them feel good, but it will not help anyone understand anything other than man's alienation from alienation and that God thinks of man as slime [89].

The one thing we do not want to understand is that our self-control is so patently superficial. Self-control is the ability to change behavior by consciously directing actions to achieve specific goals. However, this whole notion is rendered irrelevant by the realization that the selection of the specific goals is predetermined by a person's cultural background and individual experience. As Tolstoy noted in an historical context, "Every action [of great men], that seems to them an act of their own free will, is in an historical sense not free at all, but in bondage to the whole course of previous history, and predestined from all eternity" [90], i.e., caused by one's behavioral milieu and history, although *it pleases him/her to think otherwise*.

Although self-control may be illusionary if not impossible, belief in it and in personal freedom have been, are and probably will continue to be major contributing factors to the normal malfunctioning of Western society. This belief-as opposed to a fatalistic belief in determinism-is easy for us to accept because the English language is so implicitly moral in connotation: e.g. courage, pride, innocence and guilt, and countless other words imply a sense of "Free responsibility"

[91]. However, the concept of guilt, for example, is generally inappropriate in our legal system. We may punish those who break laws, but we should leave it at that – that their backgrounds, education, cultural values, personal development and circumstances made them rule breakers. In such cases, a coercive penal system may act to the benefit of society in general by being conducive to civil behavior, but the concept of guilt is irrelevant and unnecessary even in cases where intent is an essential factor.

Put the other way, determinism and amorality would be easy to accept if we lived in a simple universe in which A causes B and C causes D each and every time, and that is all there is to it. However, we live in incredibly complex multiverses which are so complicated that it is easy to slip in the notion that we are free to control ourselves. Nevertheless, the complexity of multiverses does not change their essential causal nature; it just makes figuring out causal relationships so difficult that we take preferential refuge in the smoke of probability.

More important, determinism invalidates an essential criterion for determining stupidity. "Knowing" and "Mal-adaptiveness" are much too subjective to be reliable guides to stupidity. Now we find that people cannot even choose to be stupid: they just are or are not stupid, depending on circumstances with which they interact but cannot control. Further, people usually are and wish to remain unaware of them and thus may unwittingly create more problems than they solve while trying deliberately to achieve their subconsciously determined goals [92]. One of the major problems with people, of course, is the selection of their subconscious goal of finding meaning in their lives. As apologist Jackie Mason (mentioned above) so catologically put it, "Subconsciously, [n] you know you're full of shit" [93] Oy!

MORALITY

Nevertheless, and as nonsensical as it seems, there remains a moral dimension to Western stupidity simply because of our ability-imperfect though it may be-to anticipate results of our actions. We must accept responsibility for our behavior, regard-less of external and subconscious factors, when we knowingly, wit-tingly and consciously direct our behavior toward certain ends. *That places a moral burden on us to be accountable for the future because our actions cause actions of people affected by or aware of them* [94]. We must transcend our past in order to promote a better future for everyone.

The Western ethic based on individual responsibility is simply our specific form of the universal human requisite for

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[n] The profound tragedy for many is in knowing their plight– as if being poor is not bad enough, it is made that much worse when people know how destitute they are. This kind of knowledge hurts (Sheldon. 256).

a moral code. Although the particular code will differ from group to group, within the microcosm of a given society, its system of ethics has significance and meaning. Every group has behavioral guidelines-both formal laws and informal norms and morals. All of these systems reflect the cultural imperative of people to pass judgment upon each other and their id-driven selves.

The odd thing is that we are so often "Wrong"-that is, we are stupid according to our own standards of judgment. Often, we are wrong because we really cannot perceive what is right or wrong when we are actively and emotionally involved in a situation. The cause of this perceptual difficulty obviously is that we have schemas which guide the misapplication of misinformation by misconstruing our behavioral context.

It is all too human to know better but still do something wrong sometimes just to get away with it. The drug addict knows what his habit costs him day to day, just as we all know the price of deficit spending in terms of both personal credit cards and the national debt. Nevertheless, to the extent that personal and official stupidity of the future will be the result of conscious, unethical efforts on our part to permit our schemas to keep us unaware of the dangers our behavior pose for us, we will be stupid for the worst of all reasons-because we want to be.

One of the reasons people seem to want to be stupid is that they are trying to achieve inappropriate goals rather than those defined by society. For example, a public official may indulge in graft for his own short-term best interest and counter to his role of public trustee. Likewise, your "Pig" policeman may eschew law and order for the immediate satisfaction of pushing around some hapless soul. On the other hand and a grander scale, the Watergate and Vietnam debacles might not have occurred had the irresponsible megalomaniacs involved restricted themselves to acts which were both legal and conscionable.

More to the point, the presidents and their advisors would have fared better had they limited their behavior to what the average American considered conscionable. The real problem with the insiders of both the Johnson and Nixon administrations – as well as those involved in the Irangate scandal under Reagan, who had great difficulty admitting what happened [95] – was that they considered their actions conscionable. According to their standards of evaluation (covered by such catch labels as "National security" and "Executive privilege"), their behavior was at least acceptable if not correct. Even more telling, in the case of the Watergate cover-up, acts known to be illegal were not considered illegal. Instead, they were simply deemed political tricks or public relations ploys [96]. Somehow, the country managed to survive those leaders who considered their acts to be both legal and moral and was sure no one would catch them anyway.

Not so with 43 and the abuses of human rights which characterize our war on terror. America had indeed always stood for something – justice. In particular, Washington, D.C. had led the fight for freedom of slaves and promoted civil rights for minorities. After 9/11, that changed. To our shame we abandoned our commitment to human rights, embraced torture [o] and made a mockery of the principle of habeus corpus – the right of a detainee to appear before a judge. We abandoned that legal principle by unlawfully detaining suspects indefinitely, without charge and without recourse to our legal system. In this context, if we stand for anything, it is hypocrisy [97].

In their sordid way, Nixon's advisors and 43's advisors were simply striking examples of people who let loyalty to a person or reference group replace intellectual honesty as a higher form of morality. Followers and members may prove their loyalty and gain the immediate social reward of group support by inventing, falsifying and distorting information. In such cases, personal integrity is not so much sacrificed as it is redefined by group values, which become the standards for judging everyone and everything. Members may come to believe in their leader or reference group with religious devotion to the point that even attempts to improve him or it may be construed as attacks. [p] Of course, anyone who questions group assumptions or actually subscribes to the explicit values of the general culture is regarded as a heretic and treated as an outsider. A whistle blower who asserts that any leader or organization that suppresses truth and punishes virtue is not worthy of loyalty is rare enough, but rarer still is the whistle blower who insists the community leaders abide by the rules and laws they are supposed to be embodying, living by and, in the case of the police, enforcing.

Those who simply get fed up with the whole scene and process [q] should appreciate the timeless comment "I have become tired of hypocrisy, stupidity, gross arbitrariness, and of our bowing and scraping, dodging and hair-splitting over words" made by capitalist Karl Marx [98] as he departed over-regulated Germany eventually for overrated Britain. Alternatively, the current non-debate contrasting virtue with vice calls to mind an argument between two color blind people about red and green. The sad fact is, republics thrive on virtuous citizens and leaders and are currently getting few and fewer of either/both.

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[o] Torture was so objectionable that we had to relabel it "Enhanced interrogation techniques" (Rooney, 206).

[p] The president and military personal take an oath to defend the Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic. This put "Conscientious eavesdroppers" at the NSA in a quandary when spying on Americans for the Cheney/Bush administration (Bamford, 2008. 149).

[q] Fans of social dissonance should feel comfortable with a paraphrase: 18th century London – 'virtue is a vice' (Dickinson J). It was so corrupt, doing 'Right' created problems for the virtuous.

HUMANITY

It is sad enough that stupidity is built into the human condition by language and social reinforcement. Much of this is effected subconsciously and must be accepted as a given of human life. However, if we have contributed anything to the cosmic design of stupidity, it is that we have converted innocent animal stupidity into conscious immorality. In the zoological kingdom, concentrated neural systems (i.e., brains) have always blocked relevancies and some have paired irrelevancies. We have compounded subjective stupidity with rational, arbitrary invented irrelevancies as we engage in calculated efforts to be unfair and dishonest. When lying and distorting information became a conscious, witting effort, stupidity became a problem with a moral dimension. [r] We became the first and only species to take pride in and credit for knowingly blundering into disaster after disaster. If we can survive ourselves, stupidity is all but assured of a bright future by leaders who insult our intelligence in order to gain support for their nefarious schemes by making themselves appear sanctified and righteous while being vague about dysfunctional specifics.

TECHNOLOGY

As disturbing as it is that any leader presumes to play God, but it is all the more disturbing in a culture which has coupled the most awesome technology with a general indifference toward the human problems that technology creates. In the simple world of the! Kung tribes, the technology of bows and arrows and spears are complemented by knowledge of the total environment [99]. In the sophisticated world of modern, computerized stupidity, technology is the environment. We have created an artificial, shallow cyber verse grounded in instantaneous appeal. We no longer need wisdom, com-munity or enlightenment: all we need is information [100] in predigestible bytes. We believe culture floats above and independent of nature: Telephones call each other up, machines talk to each other, computers amuse themselves with chess matches, and the robots are delighted, as evidenced by canned laughter.

While we glory in our fallible hardware, what has become of people? They starve by the millions in Africa while we marvel at the focused, technical quality of the pictures of their misery [s] on newscasts. Our slums are accepted as

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[r] There is, of course, always an element of ambiguity in judging behavior, so to the extent that cheats and frauds are successful, they may be considered shrewd, canny and intelligent. Only when their adaptive successes lead via the neurotic paradox to obvious, maladaptive excesses are they deemed stupid.

[s] Although the relief efforts engendered by awareness of the victims' plight are very much to the credit of everyone

givens, our prisons are filled beyond capacity, and our children are spaced out on drugs and idiotic 'puter games. Only fools like I believe the truth will save us in an age when fake news can be tweeted or twittered or whatever [101].

These are but some examples of a general and disturbing trend in the world today. Clearly, our cultural compromise between technology and humanology is imbalanced. Not only the individual but humanity itself is obsolete. [t] In the American political tradition, there is an amusing myth that the government exists for the people. In our technological tradition, we do not even have such a myth. We exist for our machines-not the other way around. We do not have computers, they have us.

As a cultural force, technology is narrowing and dehumanizing in its methodology. Ironically, the "Transhuman" movement aims at embracing technology to the extent that we transcend our humanity [102] and in one sense it is already triumphant. We call it "A robot.", and as engineers are creating robots, we are culturally becoming them.

Generally, however, technology is very effective in its limited range, but computers tend to limit the range of those devoted to them. Although the scientific method in the form of the social sciences has been successfully applied to human affairs, this success has been confined to what we can learn about ourselves-which is all science can and should do anyway. What we do with the knowledge we gain from science is another matter entirely and it is on this point that we are floundering. The problem is that all our scientific and technological know-how and knowledge, all our machines and computers cannot tell us what we *should* do. Scientific methods may project what results we can expect if we select a particular course of action, but that is not the same as indicating whether we should or should not do it, meaning science is not a directing religion [103].

ETHICS

Thus, our faith in and commitment to scientific research are misplaced because no amount of information will make us better people. No amount of data would have made Hitler or Nixon better leaders: more knowledge might have made them more efficient but not better. Hence, at the most basic and general level, *the crisis in Western Civilization is due not to a need for more knowledge and research data but to a failure of our ethics of action and shortcomings of our*

informational morality, i.e., our stupidity. This problem reveals the limitations inherent in game theory, which explicitly ignores non-quantifiable values and ethics but can predict what one can get and how to get it [104].

As for our ethics of action, there is good news and bad news. Currently, we are in a phase of consolidating, organizing and institutionalizing stupidity–concentrating it in a technoelitist computer/communication complex whose effects are broadly distributed democratically to the long suffering public. Even if, as Bronx philosopher Lawrence Berra posited, "The future ain't what it used to be" [105] (and probably never was), we should expect more and more planned stupidity, as centralized, standardized bureaucrats base blunders and design disasters upon our ever deepening foundation of amorality and for an ever expanding base of dependent victims. If this is not to be, if this prognosis proves false, it will be because we finally recognize that science and technology are ethically barren and morally neutral. That is the good news.

The bad news is that through poverty, disease, illiteracy and stupidity, our used and abused moral values have provided the ethical guidelines, rationalizations and justifications for all the political corruption, social ills and idiotic wars we have forced ourselves to endure [106]. If the past is any guide, it will not be much of a guide for the future. Nazis aside, if our past (im)morality brought us to the brink of nuclear war, created slums, fostered crime, starvation and misery, how will those values help us cope with the new challenges technology imposes upon us? Now that we can transplant organs, someone has to decide when the donor is "Ready". Euthanasia will become more common as an alternative release from the lingering suffering of those afflicted with incurable but non-fatal conditions which modern medicine can prolong indefinitely. Unfortunately, none of the advances of modern science have reduced poverty or even provided a basic safety net for the poor and needy [107].

If we are to maintain our historic tradition of stupidity, we are going to have to devote more time and energy to planning our immorality. Further, we will have to develop new forms of stupidity to prevent us from coping with the problems we are creating, i.e., our worshiping of money as the standard of judging success, special interests, sensationalist media and ideological attack groups [108] pop to mind. Futurists should note that stupidity will be one of the more dynamic fields in our coming cultural development, but one of our great saving hopes will be that we avoid programming our cultural biases into objective computers.

Nevertheless, genetic engineering and eugenics are but two fields which will pose increasing problems for society. For years, people have selectively bred birds, dogs, horses and cattle and peas, beans and melons. Is it or is it not stupid to improve our own species by similar methods? Whatever the

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concerned, how much better it might have been had the disaster been prevented by birth control.

[t] At the end of Max Weber's **The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism**, he despaired about the future dominance of the faceless, soulless bureaucracy. Everything he then said could now be taken as descriptive of the role computers have come to play in our lives.

answer, it is based on morality, if not intelligence. Historically, the answer has been "No" to the suggestion of selective human breeding. It is considered immoral to use the knowledge we possess in this field to improve ourselves by deliberate planning. The basic problem is that of finding broad agreement as to just what would constitute "Improvement" other than the universally accepted "More people like me". While this is a difficult matter, it should be possible to find some general principles to which everyone would agree, if we were to but try.

Such principles will themselves be determined by the values used when we judge the application of knowledge in the cause of humanity. Unfortunately, "Sci-tech" will not be much help in this regard and, as suggested earlier, may even be limiting the ethical development of Western culture by its very success with "Quantitative reductionism" [109] Science helps us learn about nature by breaking down complex phenomena into measurable units. However, all the essential complexities of biological and social systems do not lend themselves to being reduced to quantifiable bits of information. Nor do these complexities of life readily lend themselves to the stepwise logic of linear analysis by logical extension. Computers which can help analyze simultaneous interactions of phenomena help overcome this limitation of dealing with, at most, one thing at a time, but they are limited to handling information which can be reduced to computers. Nerds are understandably unable to grasp the importance of the human element which cannot be translated into their language.

A tragic example of this was the failure of the American military to calculate morale as a factor in the Vietnam War. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was the consummate computer man-the avatar of the Harvard Business School and Rand Corporation approach to war [110] as "Rational gamesmanship" [111] and everything that could be was measured and analyzed: number of troops, amount of equipment, tons of supplies, etc. Further, every quantitative measure from 1962 on showed we were winning. Not only on print-outs but in reality as well, the government forces enjoyed a ten to one ratio in everything calculable over the Vietcong. However, all this was outweighed by the fact that the North Vietnamese were more than ten times willing to fight the war than the American public was to support it. The inability of the Pentagon to appreciate this unquantifiable but crucial element of motivation and incorporate it into its intensely statistical schema was a major contributing cause of the American loss of the conflict [112]. Worse yet, the objective/bean counting school of intelligence concluded that such human factors like motivation and determination should be excluded from military evaluations because including them can lead to false conclusions: But so can excluding them. [u] The basic problem

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[u] In addition, McNamara indulged in linguistic distortions to deny the obvious. Thus, an escalation in 1966 was "An

with including intangibles is that the analysts tend to make judgments about them which confirm their beliefs [113]. In a nutshell, we are pretty good at knowing what potential adversaries can do but not at knowing what they will do [114].

Looking forward in more general terms, it is with discouraged resignation that we must accept our fate of a future shaped by all kinds of stupidity, with the specific dominant form depending primarily on the evolving relationship of technology to the society it creates. As life becomes reduced from DNA to a silicon chip, knowledge will become an end in itself to the point that society is dehumanized. The best that we might hope for is that scientists will honor their own ethics for gathering information and secondarily, promote a humane technology when applying knowledge to the creation of problems. In any event, stupidity will be an integral part of the compromise condition of social life in the future, with its precise role and style being shaped by what we expect of and can accept from ourselves.

QUESTIONS

If we want to make our expectations a bit more realistic, there are a number of questions we can ask when analyzing our stupid behavior. Was it an individual or group effort? Who made the crucial decision? Did he know what he was doing? Was he trying to find out? What made it a defective decision? Did external conditions contribute to make it stupid?

ANSWERS

For such clear-cut questions, there are ambiguous answers. To the extent that stupidity is behavioral irrelevance, one source may be found in the subjectivity of decision makers. They may be excessively concerned with their own status (maintaining or advancing it), the social cohesion of their reference group or denigrating the opposition. An example of this last point was Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels somewhat biased assessment of Winston Churchill as belonging "To that category of criminals who in their stupid brutality are unteachable" [115]. On the other hand, one can be stupid by pushing objectivity to the point of social disruption, as when pointing out the silliness of someone else's religion. Normally, stupidity tailored to enhance a leader's status or a group's cohesion tends to be conservative, with relief provided when some crackpot devises a new and better way to be idiotic.

To the extent that future stupidity will be caused by individuals making defective decisions, an understanding of

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incremental adjustment to meet a new stimulus level" (Nat. Review). In this regard, he outdid Ambassador Maxwell Taylor, who had wanted the first American combat troops placed in Nam for "Flood relief". Maybe a flood of Charlies?

individual stupidity will help us appreciate the irrationality of the years ahead. Unlike corporations and institutions, which are incapable of feelings, a person may be emotionally subjective. Further, an individual invariably has developed blind spots due to the specifics of his particular life experiences. In that regard, we might pay heed to the self-insight of a Jane Austin character who realized the way to overcome folly was to compensate for prejudice, avoid ignorance and apply logic [116]. Finally, shortcomings of information processing by any single mind prevent an individual from comprehending all the complexities of any but the simplest decisions [117].

Unfortunately, the growing trend toward institutionalized stupidity will not change the essential fact that it will still be stupidity. Only the type will change somewhat as the past predominance of individual idiocy created by enthusiastic bursts of brilliant lunacy will be overshadowed by plodding committees which can draw upon the collective and compounded drawbacks and limitations of their members. While being unemotional may encourage institutional logic, the resultant rationality may run over people's feelings and moral sensibilities. Finally, perceiving the complexities of a situation could lead to no decision at all. After all, very few polices are pleasing to everyone. At some point, action must be taken and it is stupefying to analyze and debate every possible ramification of each and every possible act under all possible contingencies.

Nor will computers really help us avoid stupidity in the future. First, much of the human experience cannot be programmed. Feelings, hopes and emotions are not reducible to quantified bits of computerese. Neither can any program work out all possible costs and benefits of contemplated actions. Worse yet, although computers can help us deal accurately with the data we deem relevant to a given problem, these suffer deification once they are entered. Computers have become our sacred cows, and their contents and pronouncements are now holy beyond critique. Disputes are considered settled when the computer speaks and to many priests in the field, the "Garbage in-garbage out" problem is secondary to the systematic processing of garbage. Indeed, a variant of Gresham's Law is taking hold in data processing as good info on the net is being rendered suspect if not driven out by that which is dubious if not bad. [v] Seldom do we find computer operators enthusiastically

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[v] This point was undercut somewhat by the realization that computers too can be stupid. When asked the stumper, "What do grasshoppers eat?" IBM's supercomputer Watson kicked back, "Kosher", (Auerbach) which is of course true for Jewish grasshoppers. ☺ As for the brain as a computer if you bought a computer which functioned as your brain does to maintain its short-term self, you would return it immediately to the store where you purchased it and demand a refund. Alternatively the cyber verse can be seen as another layer of reason over the reptilian brain.

rushing to make corrections of either input or programs so that they can improve the quality of their faster and faster garbage. Electronic garbage clearly poses a true threat to democracy [118] by converting it into an idiocracy via invalidity promoted by anonymity: that is, invalidity varies directly with anonymity, while Ethics × Anonymity=K. Just as the ethical controls of small town 19th century America were overcome by PR imagery of the big city of the 20th century, they will be all but eliminated by the anonymity of the internet of the 21st. [w] So in the future, we can expect more, higher quality stupidity as the vagueness of the net promotes invalidity by and reduces ethical constraints on all too human users who become more emotional, irrational, mobbish and susceptible to nonsense [119].

Those humans who use language will find it will also make its contribution to stupidity in the future. That is, as long as we communicate by language and use it to construct our cognitive schemas, we will misperceive events, misinterpret data and misapply principles. After all, that is what being human is all about, and, ultimately, like it or not, we must confront ourselves.

If computers and language need an ally in frustrating informational morality, the basic commitment of people to preserve, protect and defend their self-images and reference groups all but guarantees stupidity a rosy future. While there is no iron law of stupidity which dictates that people have to wreck their own civilizations, it just always turns out they always do, and nothing in the contemporary world indicates that we are going to be exceptions to this rule. It might help we established an "Information ethic" (i.e., let the facts speak), but society probably could not stand the strain of cognitive consistency and cultural honesty. In this vein, Auguste Comte proposed objectivity as the antidote to bias [120], but it is a difficult if not impossible ideal to achieve. A demand for intellectual integrity might reduce the establishment's abusive application of information possessed, but no one can claim to be objective: every schema is a composite synthesis of the obliquely interrelated worlds of factual data [121], social cohesion and political power, so any information ethic must be intrinsically compromised by our inherent subjectivity. We are becoming detached from reality as facts become overwhelmed by image and spin.

Although philosopher Ron White has opined, "You can't fix stupid" [122] we can try. The devout can ask God for wisdom, and it will be given to them [123]. For all others, at the personal level, idiocy often will result from misguided efforts of people trying to avoid the psychic discomfort of cognitive consonance, e.g. a whistle blower expecting to be

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[w] At the same time, there was the divergent development of science directed to the understanding of reality but ethically, appearance has won out.

rewarded for telling the truth. [x] It is unfortunate that an adopted strategy of deliberate ignorance usually results in a maladaptive schema being preserved at the expense of crucial, adaptive information about the environment. An unfortunate, specific example of this occurred in the White House during the depths of the Lewinsky scandal when Hillary Clinton stopped reading the newspapers and watching TV. Her rationale was that the stories were written by hacks trashing her beloved Bill. The result of this emotion-saving tactic was that she knew less about what was going on than did her staff, friends and enemies [124].

While induced ignorance may reduce cognitive dissonance it is hardly an effective coping strategy: When warnings go unheeded and facts are ignored, behavior becomes less and less relevant to reality. Alternatively, there may be a Descratian duality of mind and behavior with an action program at odds with an individual's philosophy of life. [y] The two exist side by side with no attendant emotional tension whatsoever. People quite comfortably do one thing and believe another. An emotional conflict comes, however, when someone else points out the mismatch between creed and deed or, worst of all, lives up to the creed. That can really get true believers bent out of shape.

Although education should and could be a way to develop in people effective ways for dealing with such challenges to their schemas, the history of modern science indicates that academic training as currently practiced is no guarantee against stupidity. In fact, most educational institutions seem to inculcate specific belief systems rather than train people to find their own when traditional schemas bring themselves and their devotees into intellectual disrepute. This process is even more pronounced in the social sciences, which make a point of informing students the way society is not [125] but someone wishes it were – with all democratic subgroups being presumably equal in ability.

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[x] For individuals one simple if indirect way to prevent stupidity is exercise. Keeping fit maintains a proper balance of dopamine and serotonin, which reduces impulsive reactions and promotes wise, rational thinking (Dugald, 247). Just think–if only Einstein had exercised more; he might have come up with the unified field theory. ☺

[y] This is an oxymoron. There is philosophy, and there is life: the two do not meet. If a philosopher were an engineer, he would endeavor to build the perfect machine which is 100% efficient and produces nothing. It would have no purpose, but it would be very good at it. The problem is, we never overcame Plato. Philosophy remains an ethereal system in the sky and it is of cursory interest in the way human minds attempt to build logical systems of thought. There is some value in studying it, in that, it helps one pick up on mental errors but it tells no one anything about reality and the meaning of life. We have psychobiological science for that, although psychologists are often more scientific than insightful. ☺

However, once one's schema is created, it should always be subject to confirmation, revision or refutation, but when a positive feedback system takes insulation to an extreme, the belief system is beyond reach: it is then a case of terminal stupidity immune to correction. Those who wish to fix Mr. White's stupid should bear in mind the apocryphal epitaph of a prescient if unlucky, fictional, late skydiver whose final observation was, "A parachute is like the human mind, it functions best when open" [126]. However, the best guideline for preventing stupidity is: *The more you want something to be true, the harder you should check to see that it is.* <u>*Beware wishful thinking*</u> [z] because the easiest person to fool is you [127]. As Eleanor Roosevelt noted, "It is funny how hard it is to be honest with yourself and not be swayed by your own wishes..." [128].

Another way to inhibit individual stupidity is for a person to anticipate what other would think of him/her if they knew what (s)he was about to do. If someone is trying to get away with something, it probably is something (s)he should not be thinking about much less doing in the first place.

In institutions, stupidity can be inhibited by breaking down the isolation and compensating for the bias which contribute so much to the idiocy of groupthink as was exemplified by FDR's management style: he usually reached decisions via huddles and bull sessions in which he welcomed opposing views, encouraged dissent and deliberately brought outsiders into the mix [129]. However decisions are reached, they can be corrected if someone in the power web [aa] will recognize the advisability of so doing and act accordingly [130]. Unfortunately, egos often trip on images, as devotees become so committed to a course of action blessed by the leader that perception of any obviously negative consequences are inhibited to the degree that mere knowledge of unexpected problems cannot induce a reconsideration of the matter.

The well-known Peter Principle, whereby people are promoted one grade above their ability to function

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[z] In developing "Pragmatism", William James felt a rational warning against wishful thinking would suffice to produce a successful philosophy of life, i.e., a schema (Richard White, p. 447). I do not. It might be possible but unlikely. Life experience makes one biased and it is extremely difficult to compensate for one's built-in biases. Most people do not want nor even try to. Science may help a bit in this regard but is no guarantee. Scientists are human enough to favor their own ideas over those of competitors or often even over factual evidence they gather. .In matters emotional, "Neither facts nor logic made any impression" Catton, 232).

[aa] For anyone interested in a reconsideration of or prevention of groupthink, a listing of measures is presented in the last chapter of **Groupthink** and a "Balance Sheet" approach is presented in Chapter 6 of **Decision Making**, by Janis and Mann (Green A). **Overcoming Stupidity**.

effectively [131], is another example of institutional stupidity which can be corrected if options remain open. If promotions were made provisional for a short period of time so that performance could be evaluated, there might be fewer people put permanently into positions beyond their abilities to cope. (The military's "Brevet" promotional system is a step in this direction, but it is usually used to save money by paying a person the salary of his lower rank while he assumes greater responsibilities). There would be, of course, some loss of face for any workers who were returned to their earlier positions after provisional trials, but their short-term disappointment would be the price paid for finding the level at which they could function effectively. In the long run, this probably would be best for everyone-the more efficient institution as well as the crestfallen individuals.

The likelihood of institutional stupidity can also be reduced if decision makers acknowledge the dangers or negative consequences which may result from their actions [132]. There often is a tendency to minimize risks (and maximize possible rewards) inherent in a given policy. This penchant to ignore risks can be an open invitation to disaster. Risks should not be neither minimized nor maximized—just recognized. They should be given probability and severity ratings which then should be multiplied, with the product granted due consideration in ensuing deliberations.

In addition, an explicit discussion of the morality of a contemplated act might also prevent stupid behavior. [bb] Along with the legal, political, economic and social consequences of an act, its morality should be considered as well [133] Morality is an underlying, defining factor in any controversial endeavor and anyone who ignores it may well wish (s)he had not.

[bb] In this context, an unnerving principle was indicated by the description of presidential science advisor James Killian as being so powerful, he was not required to tell the truth to Congress (Jacobsen. 360). In the same vein, lower-level CIA employees are required to take periodic lie-detector tests, but those in the upper echelons are not, meaning, presumably, that is OK for them to lie (Nelson P, 2014. 292). Is this not bass backwards? Just how high up in the organization do you have to get in order to be qualified to lie? What a goal to aspire to–to be qualified to lie to Congress. Would it not better for society if the more powerful people were required to be even more truthful than their underlings? How about tell the truth to the people?
By the way, the same principle was applied in the court-martial of Charles Gran-er at Fort Hood, in January, 2004, for abuse of prisoners/detainees Abu Ghraib. The trail was Judgment at Neuremberg upside down. After WWII, we went after the higher-ups who gave the orders to their underlings. In Graner's trial, his lawyer was not permitted to say which officers knew of abuse or what orders they had given (Rich. 155).

In fact, many people might have profited from the advice a former country lawyer gave a young man starting out in the legal profession. "Strive to be an honest lawyer," he said. "If you can't be an honest lawyer, be honest." The former country lawyer was, of course, Abraham Lincoln, who made something of a career out of embodying the mores of society beyond petty role playing.

At the institutional level, the best way to promote honesty is publicity. As awkward as it would be for major political and corporate figures to conduct their business in goldfish bowls, steps in that direction would induce them to behave responsibly when considering the ethically gathered data at hand and attendant options. Certainly, we would not have had the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam fiascos or the Watergate and the Iran-Contra scandals had our politicos been required to plan their policies under public scrutiny.

As idealistic as it is to suggest our leaders abide by God's first words "Let there be light" [134], it is reasonable to contend there exists an inverse correlation between public knowledge and their immorality if not stupidity and it is called "Secrecy": It allows intelligent people to continue counter-productivity unabated because it is undetectable. The less known about what they are doing, the more likely they are to indulge in corruption. Conversely, the more known, the less likely they will do something naughty. ☺ To put it a third way, you will have corruption to the same degree which you permit secrecy. Although an information ethic may not be a cure all for stupidity, it could be a first line of defense against public malfeasance: It should start with the people's right to know what their governments are doing and end by promoting official responsibility and efficiency via accountability.

Finally, although we must use language, jargon should be avoided or at least minimized. The use of loaded terms can distort judgment by inducing a sense of self-righteous overconfidence in one's cause. On the other hand, when referring to an enemy, use of respectful labels may prevent an underestimation of the opponents' capacities and abilities.

While it is nice to have a list of strategies for reducing the role of stupidity in the future, it is appropriate to ask whether it is really possible for any organization to protect itself from something so characteristically human. Is it possible, for example, to have an intelligent, enlightened government? The answer is, apparently, "Not really" –although Ashoka came pretty close to being the ideal philosopher-king in India in the third century B.C. He ruled benevolently by per-suasion rather than coercion, helped the weak and poor, encouraged religious and ethnic diversity and protected the rights of animals [135]. Muslims claim Mohammed led one [136] and the enlightened Frederick the Great of 18th century Prussia deserves honorable mention as the nearest Europe ever saw to this laudable but apparently unobtainable ideal [137]. Hitler, inter alia, thought himself one [138] Oy!

More broadly, Plato's ideal of breeding and nurturing an elite of rational and wise leaders for government service was never tried in its purest form, although he gave it an aborted shot in Syracuse and the Roman emperors in the second century [139] took steps in that direction. Indeed, Emperor Gallienus (ca. 250) agreed to help pagan philosopher and court favorite Plotinus establish an ideal Platonopolis to be governed on the principles of the Republic, but he later withdrew his consent, perhaps to prevent a failure [140]. Later, the medieval Catholic Church came pretty close to the order Plato envisaged [141] and China's Mandarins were justly noted primarily for their platonic stability coupled with intellectual sterility. However, their failure to deal with the novelties of science, technology and industry (combined with corruption and inefficiency) contributed to their eventual deterioration and demise in decadent, effete incompetence [142]. (By way of pragmatic contrast, Plato is faintly alive if ill in contemporary China, North Korea and the Cuba, all of which owe their ideological foundation to Marx and Engels, who promulgated the perfect, centralized society).

If we are justly concerned with how to reduce stupidity, we must also consider by how much it should be reduced. After all, stupidity lets us live together and express ourselves through our influence on others while making it difficult for us to live with each other. The stupidest thing of all would be to eliminate it completely, as we would soon be breaking down and/or at each other's' throats in rages of realism, rationality and cognitive consonance.

Thus, future reformers who aspire to get people to live up to or (in the idiotic terms of the Existentialists) transcend their potential would do well to bear in mind the plight of Nietzsche's Superman as well as that of Nietzsche himself. In order to be happy, his Superman had to overcome his Will to Power-that obsession with dominance and control which usually nets disdain and resentment. [cc] In short, he had to overcome himself [143]. As the mighty rarely chose to exercise this option, idealists may have to accept that, for better and worse, people are going to be themselves.

The question for Americans in the 21st century is which "Self" will we be? In answering this question, we should bear in mind an observation, made in 1835, that the source of genius and power is righteousness which we are great to the degree that we are good and *if America ceases to be good, it will cease to be great* [144].

As for Nietzsche, he was happiest when he was clearly insane -thus calling into question "Happiness" as the goal of enlightenment. The Will to Truth was for him and still is

something of a terrifying, destructive principle [145] to disturbed or distracted minds because we in such cases do not want to know who, what and why we are. Generally, like the physicists who create the phenomena they want to observe, we create the perceptions we want to hold. Thus, we then have to ask whether a self-induced myth could be better for society than the truth [146]. Be it to our advantage or not, in this context, we must bear in mind we can create anything we want out of human nature because it is and **we are so subjective** [147].

It is this subjectivity which makes operational definitions of stupidity (and so many other behavioral attributes-aggression, intelligence, etc.) so elusive. While there is a temptation to throw up our hands in dismay at the confusion inherent in the ambiguity of subjective phenomena, we must realize that this is not an end point for us but a beginning. It is our subjectivity which makes it not only possible but probable that we can and will be stupid, since it permits us to rationalize our behavior with unlikely explanations which are psychologically gratifying and socially acceptable. In our relativistic culture, both our abstract art and absurd theater indicate that the answer to the human riddle is not that there is no answer but that there is any answer we want.

The questions are rather simple and clear: what is the purpose of life? Why are we here? Who are we? What are we? Why are we? The answer we need is not framed in terms of material progress but an acknowledgment of our moral obligation to bring comfort to the human soul. In the presence of scientific advancements, our commitment must be to match technological progress with concomitant developments in moral philosophy and spiritual evolution [148], both of which appear to be on hold for lack of a recognized standard of judgment. For philosophy in general, the best system is the one which helps us learn better than any of the others. Generally, we learn enough not to repeat the exact same mistake, but we rarely learn enough to avoid making similar (i.e., new) mistakes [149].

Overall, the bottom line is that there is no bottom line—just a number of fuzzy borders, each of which provides a suitable perspective for a given person or reference group. Subjectivity has triumphed, and all things being considered equal (whether they are or not), humanity will both flourish and fail, and knowing how will not matter a bit any more than knowing about gravity will keep one from falling.

As for stupidity, we may as well accept it as a limitation language and society place on our intellect. Like death, which clears away the old for the new, stupidity is an incongruity inherent in life. Humans have certainly developed, expanded and promoted it. We do so each time we endeavor to construct yet another flimsy utopia while doing our worst to keep the power structure evermore entrenched within itself. What we cannot acknowledge is that ideals are the rainbows of life—only the pursuit of illusion is real. It is an ultimate of human stupidity that we

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[cc] One thing no one wants is for someone to say we have to be happy in his way. Likewise, we may also note many human problems are generated when people who insist on imposing their not-so-happy values on others (Butler-Bowdon. p. 5).

must seek what we cannot attain in a manner which prevents us from attaining it. Essentially, culture is Lamarckian, with competing factors selected not by nature but by the prevailing culture itself, which acts in its short-term best interest at the expense of long-term adaptability. Specifically, it prevents us from recognizing that there are eternal things that matter and that we can know what they are [150].

In **The Ascent of Man** (1973), Bronowski expands upon what he calls "The human dilemma". He laments our "Deliberate deafness to suffering" and "The betrayal of the human spirit: the assertion of dogma which closes the mind..." Unfortunately, "Deliberate deafness" does not cover the efforts by terrorists and military maniacs to cause murder and mayhem among civilian populations of cultures with whom they differ. Further, "The assertion of dogma which closes the mind" is not a betrayal of the human spirit: *It is the human spirit*. The human dilemma is that we have to overcome ourselves–our psychic desire to be unique and our social need to belong.

What we need in order to survive are systems which are not too systematic. They must be both functional and credible. This is the great human trade off. A functional system is unacceptable to super ego standards which require inspiring beliefs. On the other hand, trying to live according to a static moral system leads to insurmountable, pragmatic problems. Fortunately, stupidity permits us a com-promise blending so that we can entertain beliefs in all kinds of self-contradictory, conflicting but cognitively consonant systems while coping with some problems and creating others while ignoring our essence. dd

While we are capable of all kinds of compromise blending's, that needed for survival is fortunately not one of trading off the conflicting opposites of nihilists and realists. Nihilists aver there exist no eternal standard by which to judge and live, while traditional realists have argued society must be based on some universal, absolute truth which invariably turns out to be a subjective viewpoint at best. What we all need is an eternal moral compounded from a respect for intellectual ethics and a commitment to human rights [151]. Such a moral would be compatible with academic integrity,

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dd The morality/success of a civilization may be judged by assessing its treatment of the elderly (Butler-Bowdon. 194) and the poor. I would like to see a society in which everyone has enough to eat before anyone has too much to eat, but that means less freedom in order to have a minimal base of (i.e., more) economic justice (JFW). For those who aspire to fix a broken world for their children, I suggest they prepared their children to inherit a broken world. At best, each generation fixes the world it inherited but introduces new problems in doing so. That is the human pattern: The specifics change, but the stupid pattern remains. May we break the pattern and fix the art of fixing?

consistent with individual dignity and based on the compelling need for people to find meaning in their lives [152]. The search for this moral can unify the scientist, theologian, politician, artist and conscientious citizen [153] and *it will lead to a schema which so broad as to include moderation within itself*.

Equally compelling as the search for a universal moral is the need to find meaning for the deaths squandered in all the bloody crusades of the past and the lives wasted in the quiet despair of our ghettos. If experience gives us the opportunity and wisdom the ability to recognize mistakes when we repeat them, we must be very stupid indeed to have been party to so much carnage and indifference so that we can create more. Part of this is what we make difficult for ourselves to learn, part is what we do not want to know [154]. In honor of all those who have been sacrificed so pointlessly at the altar of stupidity, we can resurrect meaning by reflecting on our behavior and re-examining ourselves. There is no shame in admitting that our basic flaw is our need to belong-that our greatest fault is our need to be loved.

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