Cognitive Systems as Maladaptive

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Abstract

The failure of cognitive systems is examined as the inevitable result of the neurotic paradox (n-dox) shaping the schema-via positive feedback, as a malfunctioning belief system and eventually inappropriate behavioural program. Schemas provide a cognitive system (which pass for an understanding about the universe), a program for directing behaviour and, most importantly, a sense of identity. Further, as a guide for a person attempting to cope with an uncertain environment, the schema is adaptive until being oneself becomes too costly in terms of schematic values. Then, the attitudes which define the self must change, if the schema is to survive. The schema itself rather than the external environment is the selective factor, and hence it becomes a positive feedback system. This posfeed mechanism is an essential part of the process because it takes human systems to maladaptive excess. To the extent that the schema thus inhibits negative feedback and criticism, it inhibits effective adjustment to the environment and becomes maladaptive.

Keywords: Irrelevance; Perception; Image; Self; Criticism; Emotions; Mental Illness; Genius; Learning; Failure.

However adaptive a schema may be, it will also be maladaptive [1] to the extent that built-in biases compromise data so that, as prisoners of our beliefs [2], we will perceive in conformity with our desires at the expense of accuracy. In addition, a schema's behavioral program (presumably adaptive when formed) may become maladaptive as conditions change, leading to the comment, "I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas. I'm frightened of old ones" [3]. If fundamental conditions change significantly, maintaining a schema may be maladaptive. On the other hand, altering behavior to fit fantasies may also be maladaptive. Just when and how much change is needed are very subjective matters, and the schema is inherently biased about maintaining its integrity rather than its relevance.

Generally, schemas tend to be conservative, with norms organizing behavioral systems into rituals that prevent effective responses to significant change, which modern technology makes more frequent. Habits may originate as functional patterns of behavior but later may serve more to promote group complacence than competence. At worst, such rites become sacred and form the trappings of a religious system, with the devout satisfied just to repeat habitual responses [4]. The rituals may then serve as reinforcing rewards in and of themselves without reference or relevance to the environment.

Such rituals can be a major stumbling block in rapidly developing organizations in that new problems emerge which are unrecognized, so their solutions remain beyond the ritualized coping mechanisms of the establishment. A case in point was Henry Ford's car company in the 1930's [5] and early '40's. What it needed was a modern system of corporate administration which could guide it through the challenges induced by changes of styling in the marketplace, labor problems due to the Depression and the growth of government controls accompanying World War II: what it had was a leader who suffered from paranoia, bigotry and perhaps dementia [6] and who clung to an antiquated system which was totally unequal to the demands of the new era. The result was that Ford slid into third place in sales behind General Motors and Chrysler [7].

Some sixty years later, GM came up with its version of corporate stupidity when it turned to its advertising department to boost sales of its gas-guzzzzling SUV's. The idea was that if the public does not like the vehicles because they are expensive and dangerous due to roll-overs, do not improve or drop the car but turn loose an ad campaign to change the stupid public's mind. With the crash (punny image) of it's SUV market in 2007, that of the conformity-bound, "Process before product" company [8] was not far behind [9].

It is patently stupid to hang on to much less tout a dysfunctional schema while leaving obvious needs unattended. However, rather than dropping old schemas and creating new ones suited to emerging conditions, groups usually bend traditional schemas to new purposes. While this gives a society a sense of continuity, cultural identity may become confused as organizations and institutions take on new and perhaps incongruous roles. For example, capitalism does not feed the hungry; it feeds the monied; charity and welfare feed the destitute because "Hungry" is not a capitalist's word. Thus, it has been for relief efforts sponsored by both church and state to assume the social burdens created by an economic system indifferent to the human suffering it fosters and ignores [10].

Irrelevance: This process of adapting institutions to new purposes is a normal part of cultural life. Generally, people are disposed to use whatever is at hand (be it a tool, organization or idea) to deal with a problem. This approach may be effective in resolving an immediate problem, but it means that the item may come to have a function different from if not at odds with its original role. The resulting cognitive state may then become one of schematic dissonance, with language strained to match up altered behavior to established values. In the extreme, a system becomes irrelevant to not only the environment but itself.

As in the case of cognitive dissonance in an individual, tension may[a] occasionally motivate society to achieve consonance. In both cases, the schema will act to save itself, so if challenging data, disturbing perceptions or criticism cannot be ignored or rejected, words will be redefined so as to convert dissonance into confusion. The discrepancy between behavior and superego values may thus be reduced at the expense of identity, clarity and accuracy. While an appearance of continuity with the past is maintained, words are revalued to lend verbal support to prevailing behavioral norms and public image.

Thus, there are three methods by which we induce irrelevance: 1.) adhere to an obsolete verbal value system while adopting new behaviors; 2.) adhere to obsolete behavioral norms while professing new values; and 3.) devise a compromise conflict between necessary behavior and converted values. All three are maladaptive in their own ways, but the compromise conflict condition is by far more common than the two extremes, as it disperses stress over both fields.

The first method is the English mode of clinging to tradition while moving toward resolution of real problems. The history of the House of Lords is an admirable example of a traditional system retaining its tradition and little else while Commons tends to reality, with its efforts usually accompanied by loud noises to the effect that nothing new is being done-just the old being restored [11]. The second method is that of the phony liberal who agrees that change is necessary but never gets around to it. A folksy example would be the American who, in the 1960's, agreed that the schools would have to be integrated-someday. The third method (i.e., compromise) is one of virtuous pragmatism: one adapts as necessary and makes it appear to be ideal. An example of this process is found in the optimist who tries to convince himself and anyone who will listen that necessity is "Right on", this is the best of all worlds possible at this moment and current behavior is the realization of historic tradition and religious morality but tweeking the system is OK.

All three methods reduce dissonance by distorting information-by denying reality and/or inventing fantasy. This distortion is the mechanism by which the schema responds to induced dissonance, and it makes people inherently stupid. It is apparently impossible for any culture to be accurately adjusted to its past traditions, super-ego values, behavioral norms and external reality. Compromises are made somewhere and may shift around depending on conditions. Thus, society may be adjusted but not "Accurately", in that incoming

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[a]Or it may not. Consider the fate of a whistle blower. Does everyone rush up to him to thank him for pointing out the failures of the system and reward him for doing so? Cogdis works on unimportant matters.

information about how the system interacts with its environment will be distorted to favor the short-term survival advantage of the group in power. This is but another example of how the neurotic paradox contributes to stupidity.

This systematic distortion of information makes human societies characteristically self-deceptive, with people disposed to believe they are living up to their ideals although they are not. The existing schematic dissonance is usually subconscious due to the misleading nature of words, so society stumbles smugly along while at odds with itself, its environment and its equally stupid neighbors. In fact, the only really effective control of development comes not from inside but from physical limitations (what cannot be done) and competition with other groups which are also out of touch with themselves.

In general, internal criticism is of limited value as a control mechanism for growth and development of a social system. There usually tend to be few, if any, effective critics within any organization. When not dismissed out of hand as a crank or an outsider, anyone with valid criticism is made an outsider, as ostracism is the common reward for honesty, accuracy and integrity. Thus, criticism without power is largely wasted, producing little but woe for the critic him/herself.

Perhaps there are so few effective critics because anyone with any brains at all quickly finds that most human organizations are just not set up for effective criticism. The basic working assumption is that everything is just fine. Outside criticism is deflected and internal feedback is supposed to be positive reinforcement from sycophants promoting their careers by corrupting the mighty. At best, criticism has a place on the fringe, where cranks and comics can be tolerated as amusing diversions which require no adjustment by the establishment.

The resistance of organizations to criticism is inherent in the human condition. Criticism is invariably disruptive, since group spirit, if nothing else, is disrupted when unrecognized problems are made explicit. Such disturbances are un-welcome to those in power. While a critic may think he is performing a service by calling attention to an obvious problem, he is often treated as if he caused it[b]. Actually, critics should be considered society's early warning systems, sensing symptoms of problems before anyone else does and making coping easier than might be possible later. However, the need of the establishment to maintain the appearance of internal order and the image of competence among those in power is most compelling and makes appreciation of legitimate criticism difficult at best. Thus, opportunities for correction and improvement may be sacrificed for the sake of a pleasing facade.

Veritable proof of this phenomenon comes in the form of "Smedley's Syndrome"-a form of ethical honesty which often comes to the fore when an insider is freed from the cognitive constraints of an intellectually repressive organization. Such was the case of General Smedley Butler, who, as a dedicated marine, was awarded four Medals of Honor while playing muscle man for American imperial business interests. When he retired, he turned on those whom he had spent a lifetime serving and denounced them in very certain terms. He had presumably not done so earlier when he was still mentally and ethically owned by the organization he served. When his career was no longer defined by the military pecking order, his perceptual world opened up and he could see his place in a wider moral context [12].

Leaders can achieve a sense of order by providing all members of the reference group with a social milieu which distorts their cognitive world toward acceptance of the status quo. Being inversely proportional to the size of the group, the strength of this general phenomenon of misdirecting thinking by social support becomes most intense in a leader's own tightly knit coterie. The result is groupthink, which in its pure form is characterized by cognitive complacence and promoted by blissful ignorance. Actually, groupthinkers are only half ignorant-they ignore only contradictory information. Confirming data get all the attention which can be lavished upon them by sycophants, who have surrendered their independence of thought to the group karma or leader. The reluctance of members of the clique to voice objections to approved policies usually leads to an illusion of unanimity and a false consensus. Both of these are built less on raw data than on misinterpretations by members committed to the appearance of positive group image.

Whether in the concentrated form of groupthink or in the more diffuse forms of general stupidity, misinterpretation of data inhibits effective adjustment to problem situations. All situations are not created equal [13]: one may invite a favorable interpretation while another begs to be ignored. Situations which demand that the perceivers make psychic adjustments may be considered "Problems". These are solved if the adjustment is anticipated as being to the advantage of the adjustors.

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[b]In day to day terms, this would be like treating someone who reports a fire as an arsonist.

One of the main problems people have is that a schema which functions in solving a problem may hinder the solving of problems created by the initial solution. Thus, the very human catch phrase, "If you think we have a problem now, just wait until we solve it". This goes a long way toward explaining the dysfunctional attitude of America's mighty corporations toward pollution: the companies formed to exploit our natural resources are basically indifferent to the mess they create for everyone to live in because there really is no profit in cleaning it up. In a similar vein, America created a monumental mess for itself when getting rid of Saddam Hussein in the second Iraqi War: granted, in a way it is good he is gone, but replaced by what? [14].

This type of problem creating belies the basic assumption of behavioral scientists that behavior is adaptive. Maladaptive behavior is thought to be anomalous-some kind of breakdown of the normal adaptive mechanism. Along with the inevitability of death and the impressive predominance of extinction in the fossil record, the record of failure of human civilizations confronts us with an unsettling question: how can any mechanism which is supposed to be adaptive be so incredibly bad at its job? Much as we prefer to accentuate the positive and optimistic, it appears that life is characterized by mechanisms built-in for the demise of systems. Life goes on, but the individual organisms, societies and species are preprogrammed to pass away.

Perception: In vertebrates, incoming sensory data are picked up by the five major senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. However, even in monkeys, info picked up by the eyes does not go directly from the optic nerve to the visual cortex of the brain; it first passes through temporal lobe where it is edited and modified [15]. In the case of our own species, this process can lead to maladaptation through limited, distorted and/or inventive tinkering with data. It is a feature common to schematic systems and makes stupidity a normal part of the human experience, since stupidity is based on the subjective nature of perception, which requires the observer to be actively involved in the process [16].

First of all, people select information stupidly. Any individual or organization takes in only a fraction of the data available. Since information gathering must be limited, it might be ideal if it were selected at random, so that it would reflect accurately the general state of the environment. However, perception is a directed process, with certain elements in the surroundings receiving inordinate attention and others being ignored. At best, this can permit the system to function effectively in a limited milieu in which attention can be directed toward phenomena considered relevant to acknowledged problems or beckoning possibilities. At worst, the system puts itself out of touch with parts of the general environment.

If stimuli fit the perceiving schema, in that they conform to expectation, they barely register and are promptly dismissed. This accounts for the overwhelming majority of informational bits which are picked up by any system-they are simply too routine to warrant one's attention. A good ex-ample of this process is the oblivion of a driver to most of the stimuli continually bombarding him as he goes along. As long as everything fits expectation, with traffic patterns in the normal range and the road right where it belongs, the driver may be unaware of even his own presence [17].

However, the perceiver will immediately pick up on any aspect of the environment which does not quite fit the schema. Anything exceptional will be noticed and, if necessary and possible, adjustments made. In fact, the schema may adjust itself a little to allow for future variations similar to any experienced. Alternatively, incongruous data may be cognitively massaged to fit the schema in the way that if you are a hammer, everything starts looking like a nail [18].

Beyond this normal range of perception and adjustment, however, the schema can be a limiting and debilitating factor when it prevents appreciation of events which would be emotionally distressing if acknowledged. This is the basis for the fabled ostrich strategy for avoiding awareness of threats or other unpleasantries. Such selective ignorance of stimuli is characteristic of the schema as a mechanism for non/misperception and a program for stupidity.

This selective ignorance is the result of the schema's "Perceptual defense", which acts as a filter through which stimuli must pass. This defense protects us from the anxiety that would be aroused by perceiving threatening stimuli. The physiological basis for this phenomenon

is that the threshold level for threatening or anxiety-arousing stimuli is higher than that for neutral stimuli [19]. Of course, this kind of defense can be stupid, if knowing would help or permit coping: ignoring warnings is not much of a way to defend oneself.

In the mind of a paranoid, on the other hand, fear creates threats by substituting beliefs for reality. His language confirms his beliefs, and he strives to be free of knowledge [20]. This exemplifies the role the schema can play in creating misperceptions by projecting itself onto stimuli. The process of perception is not accomplished by analysis of discrete bits of information in independent isolation. It is affected by the building of a verbal picture of the environment. As one might suspect, the picture constructed is not based on the data, all the data and nothing but the data but is shaped according to the perceiver's experiences, preferences and goals [21]. As a result of "Focused screening", data which do not conform to the existing gestalt are screened out by a brain which fills in missing info, so modification becomes a positive feedback (posfeed) system based disproportionately on information which confirms the schema as well as invented data which make an experience easier to accept and retain [22]. Sad to say, President George W. Bush took advantage of this principle to further his Iraq-centered agenda after the attacks of 9/11 [23].

In general, paranoids are skillful dissemblers, so they often pass unnoticed. They may give themselves away, however, because they are nearly always consumed in unmasking enemies, which they see everywhere. They are endowed with the gift of seeing through masks, which they tear off, whether they are there or not [24].

Fantasy usually provides data to fit the schematic gestalt so as to improve a bit on reality. In the act of misperception, people routinely add their own knowledge to data they do receive from the environment [25] and compound the mixture with a bit of imagination. The movie and digital recording industries are based on a failure of perception to detect discrete stimuli as such but rather have the brain blend them together into cohesive wholes thus seeing or hearing something that is not there [26]. As many jurists have found, witnesses may testify to perceptions which are really more impressions created by their own schemas. In a light vein, this process provided the basis for Mark Twain's comment that he could remember everything that happened and some things that didn't. In a serious vein, conjured images of WMD were invented to rationalize invading Iraq in 2003 [27].

The verbal arm of the schema really is a cognitive construct which consistently contributes to perceptual misinterpretation. Incoming data are used to solidify or modify the schema so as to make it more refined if fundamentally unsound. Thus, the schema is inherently conservative, with conflicting data misinterpreted or blended with some fabricated facts to fit into existing definitions and patterns of thought [28]. If the discrepancy between the new stimulus and existing schema is too great, the data may be totally rejected. In extreme cases, the whole system may freeze, as when a rabbit is transfixed by headlights.

Along with contributing to misperceptions of the environment, the schema tends to limit expectations of behavioral results. A certain effect is usually desired when one undertakes a course of action. That desired end is commonly anticipated, and its perception is favored over other possible effects. This problem is particularly important when actions can have long-term, negative consequences. A prime example would be the difficulties created by the use of the insecticide DDT. True, the poison accomplished its intended purpose of killing agricultural pests and carriers of disease, but it had other, unanticipated con-sequences as well-it spread throughout the environment and concentration within predators as it passed up the food pyramid to the decided detriment of a number of species including our own. These results were as unexpected as perception of them was unwelcome.

This process of misperception in turn depends on associating stimuli and cognitions by constructing elaborate complexes which integrate incoming data with the existing schematic network of related elements. As entering information connects with known elements, it becomes part of the schema. In general, it is easier to learn material which is consistent with the schema, since the more elaborate the connections, the better the material will be remembered [29]. However, by categorizing perceptions via verbalization, limitations are placed on possible associations and general relevance of behavior.

Accordingly, as the schema develops, it becomes directional, bending incoming data to its own support, deflecting conflicting data, misinterpreting situations and generally making itself decreasingly accurate as a representation of the totality of reality and increasingly a source of self-gratification for the beholder. This means that human affairs do not tend to work out for the best; they tend to work themselves out according to their own natures, whatever they are [30]. Responses become less and less relevant to environmental stimuli and more and more reflections of inherent biases of the schema. In addition, even the initial successes of a schema may work against it if it is rigorously applied to situations beyond its range of definitions [31], thereby leading to reactions which are irrelevant. Thus, maladaptation is virtually inherent in any system which is committed to maintaining its integrity while imposing itself on reality. This is the basis for the general capacity of human organizations to self-destruct.

This self-destructive tendency is primarily a result of a failure of self-perception. People simply do not see in themselves traits they do not wish to see [32]. If specific acts must be performed, they may be misinterpreted by the agent into a favorable verbal context by convenient labeling so as to minimize embarrassment, shame or anxiety. People may also make themselves feel better by projecting their own problems or shortcomings on to others [33].

Image: In this process of promoting a positive self-image at the expense of accuracy, both negative and positive reinforcement systems are at work. There is ample experimental evidence that negative feedback lowers self-esteem making further confrontations with the self-aversive [34] and less likely, thus making further criticism less likely. On the other hand, positive feedback enhances self-esteem and promotes self-confrontation in situations where one excels. The net result of these two factors is that positive feedback is increased and criticism reduced, thus distorting the self-image toward one more favorable than warranted. Although this may make people feel better about themselves, it does not help them adjust their behavior to their overall environment. At best, image enhancement is accomplished and accompanied by specialization, so that people deliberately limit their experiences to situations with which they can cope effectively. Thus, a degree of success is achieved by circumscribing reality.

Of course, one of the great stumbling blocks to understanding is the presumption of the "Reality principle" [35]. This is a legacy of the rationalist tradition which posits that people live in a real world which they test to decide logically when and under what conditions they can safely satisfy their needs. If there ever was a fantasy, it is the reality principle. The schema keeps people ignorant toward and therefore uniformed about certain undesirable aspects of the environment. More important, negative feedback about oneself tends to be subverted or disrupted. Naturally, a certain amount of objective information passes through the perceptual and ideological filters so that people can cope with culturally approved problems. Finally, there is the element of fantasy in the schematic world which makes behavior potentially independent of actual circumstances. To the extent that the schema tests reality, reality often fails the test. As for logic, people usually resort to that only after an act or decision so as to rationalize an emotionally preferred, preselected response.

As misleading as the rationalists' reality principle is the liberals' principle of "Open-mindedness". The inhuman ideal that people are or should be equally open to all information presented to them must necessarily be compromised so that they can achieve some kind of balance between a decent exposure to potentially good ideas and a wasting of time. Not only may a system be too open or too closed to communication, but the compromise struck is usually more biased than balanced. Communication is a selective process with the schema ignoring offerings deemed irrelevant and snapping up pleasing material all before evaluation. There is something of a Catch-22 in this situation, in that one must, for example, waste time reading a book in order to determine that it was not worth reading. Worse yet, the prescreening techniques people commonly employ are usually based on irrelevant criteria-like the book cover. As for personal communications, people self-consciously committed to the pecking order of life are often prejudiced to ideas according to the status of the source: the higher-ups have good ideas; lower-downs do not.

When the ego interferes with effective learning, it serves itself poorly. Stupidity is a common result when the schema imposes itself on reality or disrupts contact with it. The problem is that these are things the schema routinely does. It sustains its integrity by distorting perceptions and selecting information according to maladaptive ideologies. If the brain is not a sewage system but a Darwinian ecosystem,

with groups of neurons competing to pass their messages on [36], the grand selector is not the external environment but the schema. The Development of such a semirational system of ideas for screening out data and inhibiting communication may be self-serving in an immediate sense, just as it may also be self-defeating over the long haul. When information is rejected by a schematic defense for being inconsistent with existing ideas or when its content is judged more by the communicator's prestige than its own inherent worth, a case of stupidity is probably in progress. A prime example of this phenomenon was the inability of Nazis to learn from what everyone else recognized as their mistakes: they did no perceive their conduct as mistaken [37]. They viewed themselves as ethical and idealistic [38].

Self: Another factor contributing to the development of stupidity is a false sense of the "Self" [39]. The theoretically ideal self is an organized, consistent set of perceptions and beliefs. Unfortunately for idealizing people, most selves are disorganized and inconsistent. This just happens to be the invariable result of the compromise nature of the schema. People live in a gritty world of real, immediate problems which must be solved pragmatically, and in coping, they are somewhat restricted in perception by the language of and in means by the norms of their reference group. When there is conflict among these interacting aspects of the human condition-when one perceives the necessity of acting in a manner not condoned by society, the self will blend short-term immediate survival with some kind of justification comprehensible to anyone concerned enough to care but not objective enough to be critical.

Along with the basic duality of the individual/social self is the duality of the static/dynamic self. The intrinsic compromise in the latter case is one of balancing self-preservation against self-seeking behavior [40]. Self-preservation is a basic, fundamental aspect of life: in human terms, it is expressed as a conservative dedication to the status quo. Self-seeking behavior, on the other hand, is directed toward self-enhancement by providing for the future. Many crucial decisions in life require a person to take a self-conscious risk in trading off security for opportunity. In general, younger people tend to be self-seekers; older people tend to be self-preservers, since their schema tends to favor its established ways as it becomes more entrenched through the years. At the moment of decision for an individual confronting a particular problem, the only thing clear to an observer is that this is but another of the very arbitrary/subjective dimensions of the human condition. Just which strategy will be employed or how much risk will be taken depends very much on who is making the decision and especially who is taking the risk.

Oddly enough, self-seeking is promoted by social support. Enhanced self-assurance encourages people to assert themselves as individuals, so when the reference group provides favorable reinforcement (approval) to members, it makes independence more likely. The self-confidence engendered by commonly perceived success makes one willing to attempt further endeavors [41]. This may in fact disrupt the group and can lead an individual to overreach his ability, but this is the price that must be paid for being open to the possibility of individual enhancement.

The motivation for such difficulty stems largely from the self-approval made possible by the biased structuring of the feedback system. Data contradictory to a flattering self-image are blocked or interpreted so that behavior can be viewed in an emotionally acceptable context [42]. It is noteworthy that one's emotional need sets the standard to which reality is molded. It is difficult to overestimate the role that such a mechanism can play in misdirecting behavior. Sustaining reinforcement can be generated internally so as to maintain the independence of a particular pattern of behavior from moderating influences of the environment, while much of the potential negative reinforcement from the environment simply does not penetrate the system [43].

The worst result of this disruption of feedback for the sake of self-image is that it really can motivate people to make errors. It separates people from their environment and makes them relatively independent so that they can pursue their own notions without regard for their relevance or the negative consequences engendered. A classic example of this process in action is the manner in which dissidents are suppressed by totalitarian regimes. Such tactics are usually simply denied by the establishment or, alternatively, justified because of the disruptive nature of the criticism. Policies of suppression may do nothing to solve existent social problems, may even promote internal hostility against the rulers but also may promote a positive image for leaders, so long as knowledge of such suppression can also be suppressed.

Criticism: If there is a simple rule of thumb for judging the stupidity of a system, it must be its reaction to valid criticism. The stupider people and institutions do not want criticism. If that includes everyone, it is because we are all a bit vain. More to the point, when negative feedback is suppressed, rejected, conveniently misinterpreted or referred to a committee, stupidity is in progress. If things are not working out, there is usually, unfortunately, the all too handy alternative explanation that problems are all someone else's fault. This is the scapegoat philosophy of life and perpetuates almost as much stupidity as is produced.

Fortunately for sensitive egos, people do not have to acknowledge criticism in order to react to it. Corrective reactions may be undertaken without anyone admitting anything was wrong. The accompanying verbal response to warranted but unwelcome criticism is usually to the effect that, "We have not done anything wrong and will not do it again".

On the other hand, we must also bear in mind the fact that hypersensitivity to criticism can also be debilitating. The process might be thought of as an intensification of the feedback loop, with fantasy perhaps adding some totally unwarranted criticisms. This type of stupidity is more common among individuals than organizations and may tend to shut a person off from participation in life.

By way of contrast, when in harmony with their own limitations, people can be happily stupid [44], preferring ignorance to the pain of learning. If people really do not want to know something, it probably is because they sense that learning it might be upsetting. In such instances, stupidity has reached its maximum potential for the system, which is as limited as it can be. As usual, a balanced appreciation of criticism and compliments is healthiest, with extreme biases either way tending toward stupefication.

For whatever purpose, to produce effective and enduring changes in thought and action, it is necessary to alter the self-identity of those involved. Major renovation of personalities, also known as brainwashing, can be accomplished by stress which undermines social relationships within a reference group. Consensual validation of norms, attitudes and values is thus disrupted, and established ways of thinking and acting are discarded [45]. This may be fine, if the original personality complex was so bad that it could be replaced by something clearly better. The reason why such a program is not routinely applied to inveterate criminals in penitentiaries must be that they have internalized their prevailing macho attitudes. The only thing to be gained by tinkering at this point would be emotional disruption inhibited by resistance to knowledge, accommodation and improvement.

In the case of powerful leaders, the sense of identity (value system) may be rendered immune to alteration by aides who insulate their mentor from reality. The strong man's attitudes may then become symptomatic of neurosis. When dictators revel in or deny their brutality, stupidity has gained both another victory and victim. Dealings with such leaders should be conducted not by ambassadors but by psychiatrists. Not only do tyrants have difficulty recognizing limitations of their power, they also have difficulty controlling their actions. Rather than adopting new attitudes or altering behavior, the mighty tend to place excessive reliance on the modes of thought and action which brought them to power: rather than being adjusted, these standby methods are usually extended, often making aggravated social and political conditions even worse. Finally, control becomes tenuous as unacknowledged forces build to the point that the leader can no longer remain oblivious to them.

The desire to be unconscious is very much underestimated in and by nearly everybody. Most people have their lives set into routines so that they do not have to be aware of themselves or anything else. Who really remembers last Thursday? Was there anything really distinctive about the trip to the office yesterday? If not amused, people get annoyed when a crank points out that the routine could be improved. Whether it could or could not be is secondary or even irrelevant. What really matters is that it could not be improved without changing it, which means people would have to adjust to something new. Usually, this would make them self-conscious and uncertain and probably make them feel a little awkward. In their public lives, most people do not like to feel like graffiti in motion, much preferring to feel nothing at all.

Emotions: Consistent with the desire to be unconscious is the desire to be unaware of contradictions between one's beliefs and behavior. Inconsistency in this context is apparently quite acceptable-much more so than would be the anxiety which might accompany self-revelation. Most people prefer to avoid the limelight of self-confrontation, going about their business as best they can without dwelling on their shortcomings. If their behavior can be misconstrued into a favorable context, good enough. In fact, humanity thrives on the difference between reality and its most acceptable interpretation. Precision is just too much to expect from people struggling in a world in which motivation is as important to success as accuracy in perceiving compromising situations. Thus, the schema which promotes successful coping also inhibits self-improvement. This is a contradiction inherent in the human condition. As Aristotle noted, "Anyone can become angry-that is the easy part, but to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way-that is not within everybody's power and is not easy" [46].

As the schema attempts to match the perceptual with the behavioral world, it perforce exists in an emotional setting which both defines and is defined by cognitive elements. This process of mutually defining interactions of facts and feelings provides a dynamic basis for interpreting events and evaluating behavior. Cognitions are interpreted according to a given emotional state which, in turn, may be altered by those or future ideas and actions. In fact, it is this emotional dimension which makes the schema so subjective in its assessment of incoming data. Certain objects and experiences elicit specific emotions-love, hate, fear, etc. which may promote biased reactions to many important impinging stimuli [47] as well as channel the responses by reducing them to a number manageable by whatever remains of the reasonable mind [48].

It is important to bear in mind that adjustments or maladjustments of the schema are usually determined as much by emotional factors as by any objective value of cognitions themselves [49]. Most minor adjustments are both easy and accurate in that there is little, or no emotion involved and they keep the schema, such as it is, attuned to slight alterations in the environment. However, there is invariably major emotional resistance to changing one's mind, as it really becomes a matter of changing oneself. This can be emotionally wrenching and is usually affected only as a last resort, after all other psychic tricks of refuting and misinterpreting data have been exhausted. Finally, there is the extreme when an experience is so totally bewildering in its unexpectedness and excessiveness that it "Blows your mind" right off the emotional/cognitive scale. An example of this might be a bad accident which leaves one physically untouched but mentally stunned beyond response.

It is largely the emotional vector attached by words to data which determines how perceptions and cognitions will interact to affect adjustment of the schema. The irrelevance of so much behavior is really an expression of the commitment of the schema to itself, since existing terminology defines the emotional context in which stimuli and responses are construed. This is really the foundation of stupidity-the emotional commitment to the schema. It inhibits objective "Reality testing" [50] because any emotionally disturbing discrepancy between expectation and perception is simply interpreted to mean reality failed. Needless to say, such an approach to life is as successful in creating as in solving problems.

Problems arise as the schema acts to maintain a subjective world which minimizes anxiety. Disturbing input is reduced and probably replaced with fictions and fantasies. As objectivity and anxiety are sacrificed for independence from reality, a degree of dysfunction is promoted. Improved group cohesion may compensate for loss of contact with the environment and even oneself, but all that means is that self-deluding people are all the more cooperative in effecting inefficient policies. At worst, stupidity can create or be characterized by delusions which produce anxieties and difficulties where none really needs exist. Once again, we find this duality of extremes, as when stupidity can prevent or cause anxiety by the schema under- or overreacting to reality.

Adverse conditions often create anxiety, in that people are not sure they can cope with the problems confronting them. Having or finding an explanation for their plight reduces their sense of helplessness and vulnerability by plausibly identifying the cause of their distress and providing a course of action for resolving the crisis [51]. It is important to note that the explanation does not have to have

much real effective value in terms of external conditions. If it makes people feel better about themselves and their situation, that is a lot. It may not be enough, but it provides a practical basis for a religious belief which, if it does not disrupt learning, may permit the development of a functional coping strategy.

Such beliefs shared by a reference group constitute their religion. It does not matter if verbal expressions are at odds with the behavioral norms of the group-as when the Crusaders killed for Christ. The functional value of the common schema is that it binds the group together. A positive feedback system comes into play as highly cohesive groups provide a source of security for members, reduce anxiety and heighten their self-esteem. As cohesion increases, so do the group's capacity to retain members and its power to bring about conformity to its norms [52]. All this can occur with an indifference to consistency and effective-ness. Just believing and belonging sustain each other quite efficiently. Of course, as mentioned above, the self-assurance derived from belonging may induce some group members to undertake self-seeking behavior that might disturb the group, but this is a distinct counter-current within the general trend of conformity for the sake of emotional security for the individual and coordination within the reference group.

Much as the feeling of belonging can act to reduce anxiety, it can also generate anxiety in individuals who feel compelled to maintain a false front for the benefit of members of their reference group [53]. The simple analysis of such a situation is that the person really is not a member of the group but for some extraneous reason feels obliged to conform to its norms. An example of this might be a homosexual who feels pressured to dress and act according to the dictates of the general, straight society. Groups often maintain irrelevant standards for their members' compliance, and intolerance for variation is itself taken as a sign of belonging, as when witch hunters wrapped themselves in the flag during America's periodic "Red scares". Most group members regard diversity as suspicious rather than as a source of strength, so cooperation is usually promoted by people playing their given roles without displaying their unsettling idiosyncrasies. Cohesion thus tends to make groups rather narrow and, for all their self-induced efficiency, limited in outlook.

Not only does group cohesion tend to narrow the schema, the belief systems of normal humans are also slightly off center, as objective accuracy has been sacrificed for enhanced esteem of members. This is why "Be realistic" and "Be yourself" are such dubious bits of advice for a person having difficulty relating to others. The assumption that normal society is reasonable and realistic is part of the Rationalists' legacy and is patently erroneous. For someone who is trying to adjust to society, the goal is not an ideal state of mental health but one of adapting to the particular quirks of a given reference group.

Mental Illness: The normal human condition is a state of compromise between two competing tendencies-one to test and the other to deny reality [54]. Actually, denying reality is an extreme; misconstruing it through the mis-interpretive power of words is the norm. Of course, a touch of fantasy can further reduce any anxiety which might be induced by accurate perceptions of the environment [55]. Thus, prevention of anxiety and promotion of group cohesion combine to produce a schema which is both more and less than a reflection of reality. Irrationality helps the slightly neurotic normal people adjust to each other even as it prevents them from knowing themselves or achieving a long-term adjustment to their limitations. If it is any consolation to the nearly insane, there is not a shred of evidence supporting the notion that life should be taken seriously [56].

In Freudian terms, stupidity is a defense mechanism which keeps culturally forbidden desires at a subconscious level. It is bad enough that the mechanism for informing us about our environment is disrupted, but stupidity also isolates us from ourselves. All we are likely to know about our society and ourselves is that which is culturally acceptable. Consequently, much conscious knowledge is only obliquely related to a restricted reality, being limited by subconscious biases and thus often irrelevant to the solution of existing problems.

In fact, all defense mechanisms appear to be stupid to the degree that they maladaptively distort reality [57] and may not be necessary relative to external conditions anyway. For example, the judgments paranoids make are commonly based on fear and may both justify and continue that emotional state rather than reducing a real threat. On the other hand, members of an overconfident, insulated group can become arrogant and careless when temperance and caution are in order, creating problems that otherwise would not exist. Stupidity really is due to a mismatch between the external demands of the environment and the internal imperatives of the schema.

Delusions are classic examples of psychic defenses which, in excess, can be stupefying. At any level of intensity, they provide a person with faulty interpretations of reality to which the victim will cling despite all kinds of contradictory evidence [58]. The schema becomes delusive through a combination of insensitivity and fantasy. Excessive insensitivity to the most obvious facts contrary to an egotist's plans and desires most often leads him to ruin [59]. Likewise, the fabrication of gratifying data can be immediately pleasing while serving to entrench a misleading schema. Of course, excessive amounts of energy may be used to impose delusions on facts, but this is usually, in the long run, a maladaptive strategy.

Even when a schema is inadequate, delusions may make it appear to be functional. A pointedly maladaptive schema may become firmly established as a delusive individual ignores signs of difficulty and conjures up rewarding signs of success. This intensification of self-identification is defensive in that the person is his schema. Ineffective as it may be, without it, the individual is lost. In such a case, the person is really in a losing situation, in that he cannot survive as such. To survive, he must adopt a new schema, since the one he has will not adapt. However, by doing so, he would no longer be himself.

The basic principles of ego defense which function and malfunction for individuals may also be applied to groups. The delusion of "Protective destruction" which shaped American conduct in the Vietnam conflict was an idiotic case in point: any time you have to destroy something in order to save it [60], it is time to back off and reevaluate the situation and yourself. In a more global sense, perhaps our collective epitaph will read, "In order to survive, they self-destructed", for we seem bent on creating an environment in which we will all achieve the perfect equality of extinction.

Such a headlong rush to do things, whatever they are and whatever the consequences, is characteristic of the manic, so we are all manic to the extent that we act without thinking. This impatience of leaping before or while looking is a combination of suspended thought and an inner drive to action. It is interesting to note that clinical manics are often hypersensitive, having acute senses of sight, hearing, etc [61]. It is as if being too sensitive induces stupidity in that the thought process is bypassed, and a direct if irrelevant connection is made between stimulus and response. If it is possible to have human life without a schema, this is it, and the possibilities for stupidity with a "Ready, fire, aim" mentality are boundless, as it is by definition always a case of sheer action without any guidance or control.

The chemical basis for such a mentality is the flooding of the brain with the narcotic-like dopamine, which is released when a new discovery is made. Such a positive stimulus all but assures that the individual will want to recreate the sensation through newer and more intense experiences–that is, (s)he is on a posfeed track toward excess. In extreme cases, abnormal dopamine levels are associated with drug addictions, schizophrenia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, which, in turn, are common among explorers and geniuses [62].

The opposite extreme of excessive control to the exclusion of action is the condition of repression, and it can be as stupid as mania-the one as quiet as the other is explosive. Just as denial is a defense against external threats, repression is a defense against internal threats [63]. The schema inhibits potentially threatening thoughts or feelings from reaching awareness by proscribing their verbal or behavioral expression. At the level of the individual, the Oedipus complex [64] was one of Freud's favorite repressions. A totalitarian society may also be repressive, as when it prohibits demonstrations which might call attention to problems. As the governor of Genoa commented after the arrest of "Thinker" Giuseppe Mazzini: "We don't like young people to think unless we know the subject of their thoughts." [65] Of course, repression is a great way to maintain order based on the appearance that all is well, and it reduces the demand to cope with any underlying problems. However, these may surface eventually, although often in forms unrecognizable to the conscience in individuals or to the leaders in society.

As a defense mechanism, repression can make us feel better by helping us forget disturbing events, or, to put in another way, as Robert Kennedy's convicted killer, Manchurian candidate Sirhan Sirhan did, "It helps not to remember" [66]. In extreme cases, this process produces the clinical condition of amnesia, which occurs when people cannot subconsciously accept reality and form memories of their

own circumstances and behavior [67]. A classic example occurred when Ted Sorensen, President Kennedy's speech writer, was dazed by grief and disbelief and all but blacked for several days after JFK's assassination. As he put it, "...the details of that awful weekend ...unreal ...unbelievable...a blur of pain and tears" [68]. Generally, if we ignore for the moment the possible complications of brain damage due to physical trauma, any great psychological shock-a bad traffic accident or combat experience-may be lost on the schema, which simply is not set up to process the data presented. The mind then can pick up normal functioning after the trauma has passed, to the exclusion of memories of everything that occurred before. The schema survives at the expense of knowledge, leaving the amnesiac functioning without knowing who he is.

While classical defense mechanisms may be, in moderation, effective means for coping with external stress, there are no defense mechanisms which reduce internally generated stress (e.g. when a paranoid perceives non-existent threats). When the schema becomes maladaptive to the point of being primarily self-sustaining or self-destructive rather than responsive to the environment, a condition of mental illness exists, as behavior is more likely to reinforce than reduce the source of stress. Such self-generated stress is produced when the schema motivates, misinforms and leads one to behavior which is irrelevant to the resolution of external problems or the improvement of internal mechanisms of reaction to and control of them.

Although all mental illnesses are stupid, stupidity itself is most similar to the clinical condition of neurosis-i.e. unrealistic behavior [69] which is maladaptive, self-defeating and frequently punished by society. The major difference is that stupidity is often rewarded by society. People usually engage in any form of behavior because of some sort of immediate reward, even if it is simply a smile or pat on the back. In the case of neurosis, social rejection and failure to attain goals may be the prices paid in order to be free from assumed emotional strain [70]. In the case of stupidity, social acceptance may cause the failure to attain important goals, this being the price paid for the psychic satisfaction of belonging to a group.

Sometimes, a schema may break down under routine conditions due to a lack of sustaining reinforcement [71]. This is the condition of depression, an extreme, debilitating case of "Doubt" induced by a failure of reality to live up to expectations. Oddly, the expectations of those suffering depression are in part based on more realistic self-appraisals those made by normal people [72].

Nevertheless, no one ever wrote a story about a little engine that was not sure or could not be bothered, but it would have been about saving energy until the apparent pointlessness of behavioral feedback could be constructed into some kind of sensible schema. In the meantime, a stupid passivity would have prevented effective responses to the environment.

In extreme clinical cases, fantasy may produce hallucinations to compensate for missing stimuli. This is often the experience of schizophrenics, whose schemas can provide emotionally required comfort and help [73] and/or terror and threats missing from the external world. In this sense, their subjective world is a decided distortion, for better or worse, of reality. Of course, their behavior takes on a degree of independence from and irrelevance to their surroundings, but that is the price paid for the creation of a far, far different world from that which most of us recognize [74]. In schizophrenics, the orthodox sensory channels break down [75] and input is created internally which both expresses and justifies the existing emotional state of the individual[c]. In extreme cases, the person will opt to go to prison or even be executed[d] rather than give up his delusional system [76]. In schizophrenic political systems, the orthodox channels of communication break down so that protests become messages transmitted from within to an establishment unreceptive to suggestions or criticisms. Such insulation simplifies the immediate world of the leaders but also promotes the accumulation of long-term discontent throughout the general society.

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[c]This calls to mind an exchange between a fictional schizoid and a psychiatrist, who opined, "You really prefer your world to reality, don't you?" To which the "Patient" replied, "I'd be crazy if I didn't". Or as another nameless psycho asked, "What's so great about reality?" The answer is that it is not necessarily great, but it is. Anyone can imagine a better world but making this one better is the challenge.
[d]E.g. religious zealots who have died rather than renounce their life defining faiths.

On the other hand, a system may generate responses or rewards to the gratification of those providing stimulants. An outrageous case occurred when detainees at Guantanamo, Cuba in late 2002 failed to provide desired answers linking themselves to terrorist organizations. The reaction of the interrogators to the lack of reward was to increase the stimulus [77]. The standard saw is that when a stimulus is not rewarded, it is dropped. Here, the response was not a reward to the interrogator, so the stimulus was intensified rather than abandoned. Perhaps classic stimulus/response/psychology should be re-examined.

To complicate matters, people/leaders may abandon basic considerations of stimulus-response/cost-benefit ratios and indulge in reckless behavior simply for the thrill of it. Even knowing a course of action is risky and not worth the potential monetary reward, a gambler may take the plunge for what might be oxymoronicly termed "Emotional reasons" [78]. Such conduct is difficult to analyze scientifically because it makes no sense, but that just demonstrates the limits of science when dealing rationally with insanity. In a similar but lesser manner, creative people, like actors and poets, may lose their souls when in a productive mode [79].

Nietzsche noted that madness[e] is the exception in individuals but the rule in groups[f] and certainly there is often something mindless in conformity. Freud noted people in a group may act like children-suspending both mature judgment and common sense when swept up in the mass psychosis of blindly following a charismatic leader [80]. Indeed, lack of vigilance and acceptance of excessive risks are common when members of a reference group band together to promote a mutual sense of overconfidence. In the inner circles of government, a leader may pressure advisers to rubber-stamp an ill-conceived pro-gram, or he might simply exert subtle influence to prevent them from exercising their critical judgment [81], with the net result in such instances usually being pointedly maladaptive.

The madness of a group, like that of those who followed Adolf Hitler or Charles Manson, derives much of its impetus from social support. Madness of the individual, like that of Hitler or Manson, often develops when a creative person is ostracized by general society but followed by a cult. Obviously, in the two examples mentioned, the individuals warranted ostracism not just for being different, but for being diabolical. However, society is not usually very discerning in its wariness of people who fail to conform to expectation. It is also worth noting that general creativity can develop in those ostracized. As they are estranged from a schema they never really identified with anyway, those on the fringe may develop self-reinforcing schemas of their own. Whether this leads to madness, genius or a mixture of the two is another matter for arbitrary/subjective judgment. To complicate the matter, bear in mind that the insane lack their own terminology and language to describe and define their condition. Everyone is obliged to use the labels of the presumably reasonable establishment to deal with insanity [82].

Genius: Inventive genius is due to the creative fantasy of introverts often incapable of grasping even the simplest precepts of social life [83]. Beethoven, for example, lost all effective contact with the social and business worlds before he was thirty years old. He was totally devoid of sympathetic insight and inhabited a world of his own into which no one else could penetrate. Except for a few disastrous occasions, he indifferently left others to live their own ways in their own pragmatic, atonal worlds [84]. To put it bluntly, Beethoven was pretty damned stupid in nonmusical matters, but that was the price he paid for his genius.

Sir Isaac Newton was likewise something of a freak/odd-ball. He was reclusive, mindless of personal cleanliness, taciturn and so obsessed with his all-consuming work he could forget to eat. He was also insensible to passion and rumored to have died a virgin [85].

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[e]Albert Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again while expecting different results. (Huffington. 202.) Well, sorry, Al. Stick to something simple like the unified field theory Conditions change; people change: So, repeating the same thing may have different results. You might say it is all relative. (Btw, the flip of this-that the same thing which worked once will work again is equally insane and for the same reason: things/people change. (Fawcett. 2012. 256-257.) In the early 1930's, Al opted to live in the USA because he would live only "......in a country where civil liberty, tolerance and equality of all citizens before the law prevail". (Gillon. 183.) Professor Einstein meet the Reverend Martin Luther King, jr.

[f]And Nietch was something of an expert on madness. It is not clear if he made this observation before or after he went happily insane but as it is a clear, concise, accurate statement, it must have been afterward.

Henry Ford had little in common with Beethoven or New-ton, except that all were totally inept in their interactions with ordinary people. Beethoven misunderstood people because he lived in a world of tones and emotions; Newton in equations and apples; Ford in a world of steel and overalls [86] outside of which he was all but lost-i.e., stupid [87]. This inability of the great to relate to ordinary minds shows up in sports as well: no great baseball player has been an effective manager. Such people do so much so naturally and well that they have difficulty relating professionally to those who are struggling to learn and to whom performing is a conscious effort[g].

Further, the development of creativity and genius seems to depend very much on such noncognitive factors as personality, motivation, upbringing, etc. Although a certain level of mental ability is necessary for mastery of a body of knowledge, independence of thought is really the factor which permits the creative person to move beyond mastery to inventive genius [88]. Napoleon opined that genius was an unlearnable artistic intuition [89]: learning might carry a person up to a point, but the genius would leap beyond what was learned to another level. The jump may be a logical extension of what is know, but it is still a leap into the unknown.

Most geniuses leap to greatest advantage when least embroiled in human society [90]. Mozart, for example, created best when completely himself [91], because excellence is a subjective, personal experience rather than a psychosocial phenomenon. It is not a commodity which can be bought or sold; nor is it a matter to be settled by arbitration or reached by mutual consent; nor can it be imposed on anyone by force. The genius provides an alternative perspective to that of the accepted schema [92], dispenses with the clutter of mythology, false belief and jargon which obscure clear perception of the facts [93] and reaches that pinnacle of creation by building faith in his own beliefs about a phenomenon in which he is totally absorbed. The inventive genius deliberately isolates himself so that he can deal exclusively with a limited amount of information in-dependently.

It is important to note the contribution of stupidity to genius [94]. For the creative person to achieve independence of thought, he must, to some degree, make himself oblivious of his surroundings, prevailing explanations and assumptions. One recipe for creative thinking is a peculiar blend of concentrated daydreaming and willful blindness [95]. The first step is to get the eyes out of focus so that disruptive external stimuli are reduced [96]. This reduced awareness of the environment gives imagination a chance to wander. Such was the mental state of nineteenth century architect John Root, as described by his partner Daniel Burnham: "He would grow abstract and silent. A faraway look would come into his eyes, and the building was there before him...." [97]. When, in such a state, the mind can fix upon a new idea and concentration on it, its ramifications can then be carried to logical or even absurd extremes. If this brings one closer to the solution of a problem or opens new vistas for personal or cultural advancement, then the brief detachment was well worthwhile.

French author Honoré Balzac was a classic example of this: He was a genius at creating fictional worlds by isolating himself from reality for twelve hours a day. However, he was a failure when his grandiose, Kramdenesque schemes for glory, power and riches came to less than naught in his dealings with the factuality of the business world [98]. Likewise, Thomas Edison saw what he wanted to see and ignored most of the rest of his perceptual field: that is, he was focused independent of conventional wisdom [99]. Edison, as an inventor, focused on practically useful items[h] in contrast to abstractive scientists like Ernest Rutherford-deducer of atomic structure-who in 1935 saw no practical application of nuclear physics [100]. In an institutional context, detachment is endemic as programs started to address a problem remain after the problem is resolved–an example being intelligence efforts set-up during the Cold War to combat a Communist threat remaining after the threat, like the smile of the Cheshire cat, was gone [101]. Such programs are, at best, simply wasteful but by a posfeed mechanism, they take on an enduring if functionless life of their own.

As implied, there are different kinds of genius. The sensational form is the schemabuster (like Beethoven or Ford) who breaks convention to redefine the world. Geniuses of this type are usually people of flair and great insight. By way of contrast, there is the conventional form of genius who really abides by the rules-the formal, stated standards-and makes them work. Louis Pasteur is an example of one who creatively applied the rigors of experimental investigation to unconventional assumptions. His results conclusively demonstrated basic principles of life and disease so convincingly that these replaced age-old myths with knowledge and understanding.

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[g]The only exception might be Rogers Hornsby, who was for a while, interestingly enough, a playing manager. Even his lifetime won/lost record, however, was under .500. (Btw the converse is also true: the great managers had been poor to mediocre players-Joe Torre, per-haps, excepted). On the general point, like Ford, James Watt felt he was out of his element when dealing with people and disliked doing so. (Dickinson. 79). In the same vein, Henry Cavendish, Marie Curie and Albert Einstein all exhibited characteristics of Asperenger's syndrom (Kalb. 282).

[h]At a glance, there seems to be a contradiction in Edison's make-up, in that, as a young man, he lost his job as a telegrapher for inatten-tion and lack of discipline. (Josephson. 33 - 64). He certainly was attentive and dedicated if not disciplined as an inventor, so the obvious explanation is that he was a devoted worker to his tasks–i.e. those jobs he selected and found interesting and perhaps profitable.

There are also different types of genius in another sense: those who work independently of people and those who get people to work for them. The first type is the artist/inventor; the second is the leader/messiah. The one frames a schema which more accurately reflects reality than that prevailing or creates an unforgettable character who embodies a near universal of the human condition, as does Cervantes' Don Quixote (psychosis)and Shakespeare's Hamlet (indecision) and Falstaff (obesity) [102]. The other offers his followers a schema which answers their needs and motivates them to live for the realization of their beliefs. Both Abraham Lincoln and Adolf Hitler were gifted in being able to articulate what many around them just felt. For whatever purpose such an ability is used, it must be recognized as a kind of genius.

It is hardly surprising that the decision to label a particular creative person a crackpot or genius is one of the more arbitrary judgments people make. In general, smart people may seem like crazy people to dumb people [103] and vice versa. Of course, since people usually use their own schema as the standard for evaluation, they tend to regard any deviation from expectation with a certain amount of humor or trepidation and interpret it irreverently. The general rule is that a crackpot is someone who makes a concerted effort to find a new way to be stupid, whereas a genius is a crackpot who just happened to be right. Oliver Evans (1755 - 1819) personified the first type. Never heard of him? That is because he tried to invent the Stanley[i] Steamer 100 years before Stanley [104]. The second type can be represented by Gutenberg, Watt, Whitney, Bell, Edison and Gustave Whitehead-Who? The man who was the first to fly in an airplane [105].

Learning: All such arbitrary judgments would be easier to make and there would be much more concurrence in them were we not so amazing in our ability to learn. This is one of those general animal capacities which humans have taken to a dubious extreme. We can learn almost anything. The problem is that we are not limited by reality to learning just what exists or occurs. Our schemas may not only keep us from learning what is but help us, by illogical extensions, learn things that are not-e.g., anyone else's religion.

The creative mind which invents new possible relationships among objects or combinations of them may be committing an act of genius or stupidity, depending on whether reality can be brought into congruence with the new ideas. However, that mind will be labeled "Genius" or "Stupid" according to its conformity to the demands and desires of the reference group. The act of reorganizing cognitions in itself is of no particular value, except that it expands and enhances our potential for understanding and perhaps controlling the environment. Just how efficiently we do this and whether for good or evil depends on our cognitive abilities and the morality of our standards for judging.

One very real drawback to this process of learning by evaluating new creations is that there are so many errors made along the way. Not only may new ideas or inventions be faulty, but the standards for evaluating them may be not only inherently biased toward the status quo but faulty (or inappropriate): ergo, the long human tradition of disasters born in the conditions of complacence, absurdity, vice and folly.

The emotional context of learning is difficult to overestimate because the cognitions accompanying various temperamental states are so fleeting-and thus difficult to pound into one's memory. Eternal values like truth, honor and integrity require long periods of incubation and are likely to fade without continual reinforcement [106].

In the context of learning, stupidity may be seen as the price paid for the benefits of imagination. The value gained by an occasional good idea by a mind wandering beyond immediacy more than compensates for the many useless, silly or even dangerous notions so common in our mental life. Imagination may thus be viewed as increasing the range of stupidity while providing options for cultural advancement. As mentioned earlier, some maladaptive behavior is simply inefficiency-noise in the system. However, maladaptive behavior may also be indicative of cognitions straying from the narrow confines of the conventional schema. While the initial reaction to any such deviation from the norm may be negative, every so often one such variation will catch on and be appreciated as a positive mutation in the cultural life of a reference group.

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[i]He had better luck with a steam powered mill for grinding grain, but, disgusted with the lack of protection afforded by the patent laws of the day, he eventually gave up inventing altogether (Klein. 34-39).

This method of adjustment permits social evolution in gradual steps when novel contributions are minor and perhaps limited to particular circumstances. The major leaps of genius are often cognitively as well as emotionally incomprehensible to the majority in a group. However, they can serve either as beacons for guiding future development (if they are constructive) or as sirens for luring the unwary into fruitless pursuits (if they are just alluring). Naturally, neither adopting novel modes of thought and behavior nor adhering to convention is in itself stupid. That evaluation is circumstantial, arbitrary and subjective.

That process of evaluation, however, is most biased toward conforming to the status quo. Language, tradition and norms all support the familiar and tend to make anything new suspect[j]. Traditions and norms further tend to stunt cultural development by way of the neurotic paradox, since the immediate, short-term rewards of conforming to expectation are usually most real and compelling. Language prejudices judgments by the nature of emotional values associated with certain terms. Accordingly, accepted behavior may be reinforced despite real, long-term detrimental consequences. The condition of a consistent, contented culture or, alternatively, one with balanced development might be ideal but not typically human. This is because the schema automatically favors itself, perverts the process of cultural evaluation into one of self-confirmation and tends to steer evolution toward conformity.

This is not to say progress is impossible or just illusionary, nor that we simply have to select among various forms of stupidity. There is change, and it can be for the better, if one can set a standard for judgment. The problem is that we do not set a standard for judgment; we set any number of standards which are very much conditioned if not determined by who we are. Perhaps the miracle is not that we have so much conflict and confusion in the world but that we have so little.

Failure: If we have so consistently failed in our efforts to establish a world of peace and plenty for all, it may be because we are not trying to do that. Most people and corporations are basically out for themselves and not much interested in improving the system. Although they may be unconsciously involved in cooperative, synergistic movements to construct more complex societies, this is, at best, half of the story. For ages, people have flattered themselves with the pleasing notion that we are intelligent, God's favorites, free, etc. Recently, analysts have carried on this tradition by emphasizing the anabolic aspects of civilization, and it is true, we can and do cooperate, and the whole can be greater than the sum of the sacrificing parts [107].

However, there is another side to the story, and it is not as flattering as that which emphasizes our constructive nature. It is a legacy of the cynics and their intellectual descendants who viewed humanity as mean, depraved, evil and stupid. Not surprisingly, scientists have been reluctant to carry on this tradition, and those who have not usually been well received. The shock and dismay that greeted Freud's revelations are representative of the reactions of both the public and professionals to theories about human behavior that are both sound and unsettling. He has been denounced for fabricating evidence, falsifying cures and being generally wrong (especially about women), but he gave meaning to individual lives in a culture of alienation created by Nietzsche [108].

As we all know, the sad fact of life is that there is a catabolic side to nature. Civilizations both rise and fall. The same schemas which promote social cohesion can and it seems invariably do corrupt learning and adaptation and thus lead to their own disintegration. The whole becomes less than the sum of its parts as it dominates to the point of preventing subgroups from carrying out their functions effectively. This is not only a cognitive but a moral failing, with people failing to do what they should, doing instead what they should, not-and the term "Should" denote a moral imperative [109]. Unfortunately, this process of self-corruption is inherent in human culture.

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[j]In this regard, it should be noted the contemporary American throwaway culture (Pavitt.) is a decided anomaly, in that businesses have convinced us that throwing things away just to throw them away is a virtue in itself. This is backhanded proof we have transcended our oft decried materialism: if we were still materialistic, we would keep what works-not throw it away just to throw it away (Williams, R. 2016).

Conclusion

The sad fact of life is that there is a catabolic side to nature. Civilizations both rise and fall. The same cognitive systems which promote social cohesion can and it seems invariably do corrupt learning and adaptation and thus lead to their own disintegration. The whole becomes less than the sum of its parts as it dominates to the point of preventing subgroups from carrying out their functions effectively. This is not only a cognitive but a moral failing, with people failing to do what they should, doing instead what they should not-and the term "Should" denotes a moral imperative. Unfortunately, this process of self-corruption is inherent in human nature.

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