

“Homo stупiens” Reviewed by James F. Welles, Ph.D.

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“Homo stупiens” presents a new cognitive model for human behavior built on the original assumption that people are stupid. Evidence abounds for this assumption—see the evening news—but as it flies in the face of the Darwinian proposition that behavior is adaptive, some skepticism is in order.

Key words: stupidity; learning; schema; language; norms; neurotic paradox; positive feedback.

Introduction

For any objective critic, it is best to start with the author’s definition of stupidity. Stupidity is the learned inability to learn: That is—a normal, dysfunctional learning process which occurs when a schema formed by linguistic biases and social norms acts via the neurotic paradox to establish a positive feedback system which can render behavior irrelevant and carry detached actions to maladaptive excesses.

spying on each other and us.

Discussion

The article is an extended development of the above definition and is broken down into three sections: 1.) Epistemology; 2.) Social Factors; and 3.) Ethics.

The epistemological model is based on the schema—a cognitive construct which is shaped by life experiences modified by language. Language imparts values to experiences on a linear continuum from good to bad, and this process is identified as an inherent positive feedback mechanism which tends to promote maladaptive behavior due to the neurotic paradox. This, in turn, is a psychic mechanism which causes short-term, immediate positive reinforcement for behavior which is long-term detrimental to the individual and species: a drug addiction is a good example in that it satisfies the user’s immediate need on his/her path to destruction.

Social factors reinforce this cognitive model when parents and group leaders provide behavioral examples of successful conduct which may conflict with stated values: lying pops to mind as a convenient example of this process in that no large-scale, serious reference group is explicitly built on lying, but every group features it as an intrinsic part of the system. Groupthink is also enlisted as a means to destructive ends in that most people over the age of ten sense it is in their best interest politically to hone their thinking and behavior to the standard set by the powerful leaders of the community.

Oddly, ethics—the weak system of control systems—is enlisted in the cause of reducing stupidity, in that unethical behavior characterizes it in the first place. Put simply, the world would be an Eden of everyone behaved ethically, but too few do. The essence of humanity is on display in the fault line between what we say and do. Invariably, every civilization has a code of conduct which is mocked by its members—particularly in leaders. The human mind evolved to accept this discrepancy and thrive in the midst of inconsistency and self-induced confusion

Many conveniently placed example are scattered throughout the text provided unnecessary support for the presumption of human stupidity. One is the existence of special intelligence agents who skulk around

It is hardly necessary here to point out the obvious inconsistency of a culture based on Christian values which bestows on a group the license to kill. However, to prevail, we need to do so and do and glibly ignore the fact that stupidity makes it easy for us to kill for Christ when occasion calls for it.

On the intelligence front, another example provided is that of Union general George McClellan, who insisted the rebels facing him always greatly outnumbered him. His intelligence units obligingly provided reports which confirmed his views, facts to the contrary being conveniently omitted. The current penchant for dot gathering by contemporary analysts fits the model as well. Computers excel at processing dots. They can do all kinds of things with them, so we gather dots albeit to the detriment of building a multi-dimensional model of the world.

For the sake of clarity, there should be no doubt this article is a seminal work making the point that normal human behavior is not necessarily adaptive—indeed, it can be maladaptive. In an academic environment dominated by Darwinian thinking and analysis, this idea cannot be accessed anywhere else. At the risk of redundancy, stupidity is presented as a schematically generated, self-deceptive creation of an internal feedback mechanism which gradually and progressively

disrupts the monitoring of behavioral impact on the environment, thus leading to poor decision making as the belief system (i.e., schema) becomes increasingly out of kilter, at odds with and unaffected by available but unheeded evidence of its deleterious effects on and for those making the decisions.

Conclusion

The model of stupidity presented focuses primarily on the intellectual processing of information in organizations and institutions. In this context, it is disturbingly convincing. It definitely goes against the conventional, Darwinian grain of contemporary psychology that humans are adaptive to their natural environment—rather they ARE their psychological environment, which becomes dysfunctional as they drive it into the ground. The standard presented here is that we adapt to our own value system, which becomes a positive feedback mechanism leading us off to our own selected demise. The reader is left to provide examples from his/her own life experience—the shaping of American politics by lobbyists is a modern classic of this principle as is the overpopulation problem of Catholic Mexico. The stupidity in such cases is that it is impossible to correct the blatant errors in such situations, and we all have to live, as best we can, with that until we are replaced with another equally stupid system which, in turn, takes itself to its own maladaptive extremes.