Tommaso Ostillio, PhD
Assistant Professor
Department of Economics
Room C/9
Kozminski University
Ul. Jagiellońska 57/59
03-301, Warsaw, Poland
+48 22 51 92 153
tostillio@kozminski.edu.pl

The Philosophy of Dumbness: A Philosophical Romance about Rationality

Abstract: In this work, I investigate the implications of reversing the common assumption of rationality on behalf of human agents typically underlying philosophical research. Instead, I assume that human agents can become rational only if they learn to edge against their dumbness. Specifically, I show that intelligence cannot be considered the opposite of dumbness. To this end, I embrace the difference among System 1, System 2, and System 1.5. On these grounds, I argue that System 2 can be considered the system of intelligence, whereas Systems 1 and 1.5 can be viewed as the systems of rationality. More precisely, I argue that System 2 concerns theoretical reasoning, whereas System 1 and 1.5 concern practical reasoning. Accordingly, I show that people are dumber whenever they fail to have rational control over System 1 via System 1.5, whereas people become more rational whenever they manage to have rational control over System 1 via System 1.5. Interestingly, both cases can be considered the causes of two distinct social processes. On one side, when dumbness increases among individuals, social groups achieve coordination that detriments general welfare. On the other, when dumbness decreases among individuals, social groups achieve coordination that maximizes general welfare.

Keywords: rationality; cognitive bias; functional stupidity; decision; system 1; system 1.5; system 2; practical reasoning.

Introduction

Several years ago, while I was lecturing on Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641 [2017]), one of my students asked me a question that—at that time—sounded philosophically irrelevant, i.e., *what would Descartes say about all those people who do not think and still do exist?* Of course, my student only wanted to revive a boring class on *Early Modern Philosophy* with some genuine humor. Thus, I just answered back with a big laugh and continued to lecture. Nonetheless, as the years passed, I realized that my student had a point, and his question was philosophically insightful. As a result, I grew convinced that

my student's question could become the main research question of a philosophical investigation into the nuances of human *stupidity* (or *dumbness*, as we call it herein).

Surprisingly, human dumbness has received little attention in the exceptionally vast philosophical literature on rationality, rational cognition, and the like. That is probably because philosophers, like anybody else inside and outside academia, dismiss dumbness as a lack of intelligence or brightness. Concurrently, the term *foolosophy* usually connotes pie-in-the-sky (or silly) philosophizing rather than a philosophy of stupidity. For this reason, *foolosophy* has no positive meaning among philosophers. Accordingly, in this work, I attempt to provide a credible philosophical definition of dumbness and discuss the good and bad effects of dumb behavior.

More precisely, my primary claim is that dumbness has little to do with intelligence, regardless of how intelligence is defined. Instead, as I argue below, it concerns people's tendency to make hasty inferences from contextual information and evidence, leading to equally hasty decisions and actions. In other words, I claim that dumbness does not result from a lack of intelligence on behalf of individuals but concerns a lack of rational control over one's beliefs, decisions, and actions. Moreover, I maintain that dumbness can be the driver of two diametrically opposite types of hasty decisions: those decisions resulting in fortuitous success and those decisions bearing detrimental failure. In this regard, I show that both decisions are attributable to definable social and psychological mechanisms whose activation is the subject of the discussion below.

What is dumbness?

Our journey into the philosophical nuances of dumbness shall start from the famous distinction between system 1 (i.e., the system of intuition) and system 2 (i.e., the system of reasoning), which cognitive psychologists commonly accept. In a nutshell, the first system encompasses all those mental mechanisms allowing us to process environmental information automatically, e.g., perceptions. In contrast, the second system regards all those mental mechanisms involving the cognitive representation of complex or abstract, e.g., an arithmetic operation. Importantly, system 1 is liable for much of our cognitive blunders because system 2 has no control over the hasty inferences of system 1. Specifically, system 2 can correct the errors of system 1 only after system 1 has performed a wrong inference from contextual information (Kahneman, 2003).

Moreover, system 2 can correct the wrong inferences of system 1 because humans are capable of self-reflection. Accordingly—as Boghossian (2019) proposes—it is arguably true that there exists an intermediate system between systems 1 and 2, i.e., system 1.5, allowing system 2 to access the mistakes of system 1 and correct them via self-reflection. If we apply these definitions to our initial claim (i.e., the view that dumbness concerns a lack of rationality rather than a lack of intelligence), we may claim that dumbness is rooted in System 1, whereas intelligence is rooted in System 2. Indeed, while intelligence concerns our reasoning skills and our general ability to represent and understand complex abstract information, dumbness concerns our inability to make correct inferences from the contextual data that is immediately available to us.

Concurrently, the critical difference between dumbness and intelligence is that someone's intelligence tends to stay close to its initial value throughout their lives. In contrast, someone's dumbness can increase or decrease throughout their lives. Namely, if dumbness were measured like intelligence and produced a normal curve like a standard IQ test, we could certainly see that some people are dumber than average, whereas others are less dumb than average. In this regard, one undoubtedly good thing about being a human being is that humans can change their minds for the better (McRaney, 2022). Thus, if someone makes good use of system 1.5 and, thus, increases their self-reflection skills, they can move from right to left under the bell-shaped curve.

Notably, these remarks indicate that it might be incorrect to consider dumbness the opposite of intelligence. That is because—as we shall see below—when system 1.5 functions correctly on the individual level, agents coordinate most efficiently on the group level. Instead, when system 1.5 does not function properly on the individual level, agents coordinate in the least efficient way on the group level. Expressed otherwise, a sharp reduction in dumbness on the individual level dramatically reduces dumbness on the group level. Conversely, widespread dumbness on the individual level dramatically increases dumbness on the group level. Therefore, if dumbness must be defined in one line, we might state that dumbness is one's inability to properly use intuition (i.e., system 1) and self-reflection (i.e., system 1.5).

Utmost dumbness

Because this volume concerns reason and its locality, the reader may now ask what dumbness has to do with reason and its locality if dumbness has much to do with intuition and self-reflection. The most tempting answer would be a resounding "Nothing!" Nonetheless, if—as we claim—dumbness indicates a lack of rationality on behalf of individuals, it must have something to do with reason, too. A credible justification for this claim is available in a famous story from Jewish popular humor whose narration goes as follows. During the times of the USSR, a policeman detained a Russian rabbi for interrogation. Yet, before the interrogation begins, the rabbi tells the policeman that he will answer any question only if the policeman helps him resolve a doubt that has been tormenting him for days. Namely, if two men fall into a chimney simultaneously, and one gets dirty but the other does not, who takes a shower first?[1]

Having heard the rabbi's question, the policeman does not hesitate to answer that the dirty man takes a shower first. Yet the rabbi immediately retorts that the answer is wrong because the clean man sees his fellow dirty and—thinking he is dirty, too—takes a shower first. So, the rabbi asks the policeman the same question again, and the policeman immediately replies that the clean man takes a shower first. But the rabbi retorts that the answer is wrong because the clean man points out to his fellow that he is very dirty and—thus—should go take a shower first. So, the rabbi asks the policeman the same question for the last time, and the policeman replies that the dirty fellow takes a shower first. Upon receiving the policeman's third answer, the rabbi stands up and says he has nothing to say to a man who believes two men can fall into a chimney.

Now, there are two good take-homes from this story. Firstly, if someone is adequately manipulated (like the policeman by the rabbi), they can buy into absurd beliefs, such as the belief that two men can fall into a chimney. Secondly, framing information in a particular way can force system 1 to misuse the available information. As we shall see below, these two problems lie at the foundations of the heuristics and biases program, which analyzes how system 1 can produce wrong beliefs. Yet, for now, we shall bother ourselves with a much more fundamental question, i.e., *what does the above story tell us about reason and its locality?* Hence, let us analyze the three possible answers to the rabbi's riddle philosophically, i.e., as if they were philosophical arguments.

[1] This aphorism is a readaptation of the aphorism presented by Telushkin (1988).

The first possibility has much to do with reason—as we commonly understand reason in philosophy. Indeed, it is a straightforward logical deduction, i.e., $\varphi \rightarrow \psi, \varphi \therefore \psi$ (by modus ponens). More precisely, given that combustion causes any chimney to become dirty, if someone falls into it, they shall be dirty, too, and must shower afterward. In contrast, the second possibility is philosophical but requires a more abstract consideration, i.e., a modal consideration. In fact, the rabbi is correct in pointing out that there might be a possible world where someone comes out clean after falling into the chimney. Namely, we may claim that—in a possible world—if someone falls into a chimney that has never been used, they shall come out clean and need not shower afterward. Eventually, the third possibility is the most tempting: why should we even discuss a much unlikely case?

Therefore, based on the initial information in our guiding example, the first two cases concern two possible beliefs that anyone capable of abstract reasoning (i.e., of using System 2 correctly) could produce. On this basis, we might mistakenly conclude that no one capable of sound reasoning would buy into such a riddle as the rabbi's. Yet—and this is of tremendous importance—such a conclusion would be as fallacious as it is easy to reach. In this regard, the third case shows us how easily System 1 can feed our minds with beliefs unlikely to be justifiable. Specifically, reasoning errors like the one shown in the story above can produce dumb beliefs that spread like wildfire among individuals. In our digital lives, we see many such cases. Indeed, many pieces of rough evidence from social media reveal that some people can find rational justifications to uphold beliefs as absurd as the belief that two men can fall into a chimney.

For example, there are entire online communities whose members uphold that the Earth is flat, while the opposite belief is a conspiracy of acclaimed scientists against humanity. Furthermore, there are online communities whose members maintain that vaccines are a conspiracy of Big Pharma to make people sick and enrich themselves. Finally, some online users openly oppose the introduction of Arabic numerals into Western school programs (see below). These three cases are also remarkable examples of what happens when system 2 loses control over system 1. More precisely, while system 2 correctly functions when it follows defined laws (i.e., the rules of logic), dumbness results from definable systematic deviations from those laws, i.e., from wrong inference performed by system 1. Analogously, while rational behavior on the level of social groups occurs within the boundaries of those social rules maximizing general welfare, widespread dumbness results from definable processes that cross those boundaries and detriment general welfare.

These remarks are essential to sustain our primary claim: reasoning and cognitive skills are indeed associated with intelligence. Yet reasoning is not only theoretical. It can be practical, too. Thus, wrong beliefs have consequences on actions, regardless of whether they are individual or group actions. For this reason, dumbness can also be considered the dark side of reason on both the individual and the group levels. Hence, if reason can be located on both levels, dumbness can too. Particularly, extreme forms of utmost dumbness, like the ones in the abovementioned cases, directly result from definable cognitive blunders caused by system 1.

Thus, we might claim that dumbness is of two types: the first concerns the devastating effects of a lack of rational control over one's beliefs; the second concerns the behavior of groups whose members have fallen victim to the first type of dumbness. In fact, when dumbness hits hard on the individual level, people easily herd around biased beliefs that can later become cornerstones of polarized groups whose behavior can affect society at large, e.g., the QAnon community and the sad assault of Capital Hill on Jan 6th, 2021. These considerations have received much investigation by Cipolla (2011), who has established five laws governing stupid human behavior:

(1) "*Always and inevitably everyone underestimates the number of stupid individuals in circulation*" (Cipolla, 2011: p. 19).

(2) "*The probability that a certain person be stupid is independent of any other characteristic of that person*" (Cipolla, 2011: p. 24).

(3) "*A stupid person is a person who causes losses to another person or to a group of persons while himself deriving no gain and even possibly incurring losses*" (Cipolla, 2011: p. 36).

(4) "*Non-stupid people always underestimate the damaging power of stupid individuals. In particular non-stupid people constantly forget that at all times and places and under any circumstances to deal and/or associate with stupid people infallibly turns out to be a costly mistake*" (Cipolla, 2011: p. 56).

(5) "*A stupid person is more dangerous than a bandit*" (Cipolla, 2011: p. 59).

As concerns (1)—and consistently with our thesis—several pieces of evidence prove Cipolla (2011) right. In this respect, before dying, Umberto Eco famously stated that social media are amplifiers for the voices of imbeciles. For instance, Figure 1 shows the results of a Twitter survey about the abovementioned Arabic numerals. Interestingly, if we code YES as 1 and NO as 0 for the 270 respondents and perform a Chi-square test χ^2 on the

data with $df = 1$, we find that the span between YES (29%) and NO (71%) is statistically significant because $p < 0.05$ and the size of the statistical effect φ is well above 30% ($\chi^2(1) = 48.133$ ($p = 0.000$) with $\varphi = 0.42$).

[Figure 1]

As for (2), Cipolla's (2011) law can be considered a broad consequence of the *dysrationalia* problem (Stanovich, 1993). The latter problem highlights a substantial mismatch (i.e., a surprisingly low correlation) between the scores of those tests predicting high intelligence (e.g., the SAT score) and the scores of those indicating high rationality (e.g., the cognitive reflection test). Namely, the *dysrationalia* problem involves the idea that one can be very intelligent and hold very irrational beliefs. For instance, the brilliant French virologist and Nobel Prize recipient Luc Montagnier pioneered the research on HIV but was a staunch supporter of the conspiracy theories about the origins of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the purpose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Analogously, Kary Mullis—also a Nobel Prize recipient and the most brilliant physician of the 20th Century—denied the existence of AIDS and claimed to have been abducted by UFO (Robson, 2019).

On the other hand, as for (3), when the traditional media provides excessive coverage of conspiracy theories circulating online, those watching and listening to traditional media can infer wrong conclusions from that information and take extreme actions. For instance, the excessive coverage of conspiracy theories locating the origin of the COVID-19 virus in the 5G antennas has pushed some people across Europe to burn 5G antennas down. Even more absurdly, some people in Maddaloni—in the Italian province of Caserta—preemptively burnt the local phone and internet antennas, leaving Maddaloni's inhabitants without phone and internet coverage for about two weeks.[2]

Importantly, the available rough evidence suggests that even well-educated people (i.e., people with a degree) can buy into conspiracy theories. In fact, as for (4), the anti-vaxxer movements have a significant follow-up even among well-educated people. For instance, Roberto Burioni—an internationally acknowledged Italian virologist who's been fighting against anti-vaxxers for years—recounts that he once confronted a well-educated anti-vaxxer who insisted that Burioni defended Big Pharma because—as a physician—it was

[2] < https://napoli.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/04/22/news/maddaloni_antenne_bruciate_per_la_paura_del_g5-254706941/ > accessed on May 9th, 2022, at 01:14 pm.

in interest. Besides, Burioni's contender argued that Big Pharma devises vaccines to make people sicker. To this statement, Burioni retorted that Big Pharma would significantly increase if vaccines were unavailable. Yet Burioni's contender—a holder of a degree in economics—retorted that Burioni had to be wrong because everyone in his anti-vaxxer circle contended the opposite of Burioni's statements (Burioni, 2016).

Finally, the abovementioned pieces of rough evidence from social media provide a terrific verification of (5). One example is undoubtedly of the Capitol Hill assault. Yet there are equally sad cases. For instance, we might recall Luca Traini, who fell victim to Matto Salvini's propaganda and—as a result—felt entitled to open fire on a group of African immigrants in Italy's Macerata to vindicate a young Italian woman who had been murdered by a drug dealer of Nigerian origins. Similarly, Edgar Maddison Welch embraced his assault rifle and attacked a pizzeria in Washington, D.C., because he had read online that Hillary Clinton was running a child abuse scheme in the pizzeria's basement (where, for the records, there was no basement).

It is now imperative to remark that these cases do not only provide an empirical verification of Cipolla's (2011) five laws. These cases also show how dumbness can increase among groups of individuals when it spreads among individuals like wildfire. In this respect, conspiracy theorists and the like constitute a spectacular confirmation of the claim that dumbness, like reason, can be located on both the individual and the group level. Furthermore, the abovementioned cases show us the effects on practical reasoning resulting from a deep dive into the dark side of reason, which is, in fact, dumbness—as we claim. As such cases are extreme cases of dumbness, we shall now ask whether individual dumbness can positively affect the behavior of groups of individuals.

Dumbness for the best

In this section, we shall now ask ourselves a much deeper question: *can dumbness also lead to maximizing outcomes that enhance general welfare?* If we only consider our examples above and Cipolla's (2011) laws, our answer would undoubtedly be negative. Such a stance is nonetheless as incorrect as easy to take. This point in our discussion is crucial because it concerns the claim that dumbness is not the contrary of intelligence. In fact, although we have no measure of dumbness and many criteria for measuring intelligence, we can nonetheless claim that if dumbness were measured like intelligence and produced a bell-shape (i.e., a normal) curve, the examples mentioned would result from the actions of individuals whose dumbness is below the right-hand tail of the normal curve. In other words, the cases of utmost dumbness can be considered extreme values under the right-hand tail of the normal curve.

Hence, we shall instead ask ourselves: *what about those people whose dumbness is close to or less than average?* This question has tremendous implications for our discussion because if—as we claim—dumbness has much to do with rationality and little to do with intelligence, those whose dumbness is average can find some rational control over the dumb beliefs that can influence their decisions and actions. In other words, system 1.5 can function as a reducer of dumbness because it can moderate the effects of the hasty inferences of system 1 on practical reasoning. This claim finds a valid justification in the popular distinction between the constructivist and the ecological approaches to economic rationality (Smith, 2007). In a nutshell, the first approach assumes omniscience and sound rational thinking on behalf of the homo oeconomicus. In contrast, the second approach assumes that the homo oeconomicus isn't always rational but can improve his rationality as he learns to deal with different challenging situations (Hayek, 1973). No one has expressed this difference better than Aumann (1985: pp. 11-12):

> "[homo oeconomicus] *is the species that always acts both purposefully and logically, has well-defined goals, is motivated solely by the desire to approach these goals as closely as possible, and has the calculating ability required to do so* [In contrast] *his real-life cousin, homo sapiens, is often guided by subconscious psychological drives, or even by conscious ones, that are totally irrational; herd instincts play a large role in his behavior; even when his goals are well-defined, which isn't often, his motivation to achieve them may be less than complete; far from possessing infinite calculating ability, he is often downright stupid; and even when intelligent, he may be tired or hungry or distracted or*

cross or drunk or stoned, unable to think under pressure, able to think only under pressure, or guided more by his emotions than his brains."

Interestingly, Aumann (1985) tells us—from a theoretical perspective—the assumption of constructive rationality on behalf of the homo oeconomicus is needed to ensure that the homo oeconomicus behaves in the way economic models predict. Expressed otherwise, the assumption of constructive rationality involves ensuring that the homo oeconomicus behaves rationally because his behavior is overall coherently with the assumptions (or axioms) of an economic model representing it. For instance, consumers always spend an amount of money that is less than or equal to their budget, maximizing their utility accordingly. In contrast, producers always earn a profit because their total revenue is high enough to cover the expenses related to producing an additional unit of product. For economists, these rules—also known as maximization rules—underlie much of our economic behavior.

However, as Aumann (1985) correctly points out, there exists a significant difference between the homo oeconomicus and the homo sapiens. That is why economic models seldom reflect the actual behavior of economic agents. Yet relaxing the assumption of perfect rationality bears remarkable benefits regarding prediction. Indeed, the ecological approach to economic behavior explains how economic agents learn from their mistakes and improve their rational control over their beliefs—consistently with our claim that a properly functioning system 1.5 enhances one's practical reasoning. Specifically, the ecological approach to economic behavior is reducible to the view that human action results from decisions taken under information, time, and cognitive constraints, i.e., the bounded rationality model (Simon, 1957).

In this regard, Smith (1962) has famously proven that boundedly rational traders can produce the wealth-maximizing outcomes predicted by economic models in experimental markets even if the assumptions about their rationality are relaxed. More precisely, clueless agents who trade following trial-and-error strategies can make markets for perishable goods efficient (Gjerstad & Smith, 2014). Analogously, when clueless agents sell re-tradable assets in experimental markets, they often cause the market to bubble (Porter & Smith, 1994). Yet, as their experience and expertise grow, or agents find some valid justification for their expectations, experimental financial markets can function efficiently, at least for some time (Smith, 2007). In other words, when system 1.5 does its job, one’s rationality improves.

Accordingly, the available evidence suggests that random behavior resulting from rules of thumb and rudimental heuristics can make markets efficient through some time-lapse. Namely, dispersed dumb behavior can have some positive side effects. But that is not all. The authors of the Norwegian TV show Økonomiekspertene ran a fascinating experiment with two stock analysts, an astrologist, a beauty blogger, and five cows. Each was given 10,000 NOK (a bit more than $1,200) to be invested in stocks listed in the OBX index, i.e., the Oslo Stock Exchange's top 25 firms.

Given that the cows could not make an intentional decision, Økonomiekspertene drew a 5×5 square on the lawn where the cows grazed. Each square 1×1 represented one of the 25 stocks listed on the OBX index. So, the cows chose stocks by randomly defecating on one of the 1×1 squares. Astonishingly, the performance of the cows (7.26% ROI)[3] closely matched the performance of the stock analysts (7.28% ROI), who used complicated computations to estimate the future values of the stocks. Instead, the beauty blogger followed her gut feeling and obtained a 10% ROI, while the astrologist linked their decision to the astral movements, getting a -5% ROI.[4]

How did it happen? It happened because, as the great American Lebanese Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2006: p. 246) puts it, "*no matter how sophisticated our choices, how good we are at dominating the odds, randomness will* [always] *have the last word*." This claim is not an aphorism. It is instead backed by research. In fact, Gigerenzer & Goldstein (1996) have shown that much human decision-making under uncertainty follows specific heuristics bearing tremendous success. Particularly, Gigerenzer & Goldstein (1996) have coined the term take-the-best heuristic, which concerns those decisions that rely upon cue-based discrimination between mutually exclusive alternatives. Importantly, Gigerenzer & Goldstein (1996) report that the take-the-best heuristic outperforms any other substitute for decision-making based on more complicated computations. Thus, people whose dumbness is on the left of the mean under a normal curve can make maximizing decisions, regardless of their initial cluelessness.

Thus—once more—when system 1.5 does its job and someone's rational control over their decisions increases, things improve. In this regard, Gigerenzer & Goldstein (1996) find that decisions based on the take-the-best heuristic easily outperform complicated multiple-regression-based simulations for decision-making. In other words, Gigerenzer &

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[3] ROI = Return on Investment.

[4] < https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-7922601/Cows-match-performance-human-stock-analysts-Norwegian-experiment.html > accessed on July 21st, 2021, at 14:40.

Goldstein (1996) show that people can make fast, effective decisions despite the information, cognitive, and time constraints. For the same reason, as Gigerenzer (2008) demonstrated, one good reason to invest in a stock, e.g., a gut feeling, is a powerful heuristic that can often overperform even the most complicated financial models. Thus, our rationality—bounded as it may be—can become the most powerful tool for dealing with randomness. Expressed otherwise, when System 1.5 properly moderates the hasty inferences of System 1, agents can make maximizing decisions.

It follows that—contrary to common wisdom among philosophers—rationality is not always concerned with forming sound beliefs that logically follow other sound beliefs because people's beliefs, decisions, and actions can be influenced by the information their surrounding environment transmits. That is why—in cases of high uncertainty and randomness—a gut feeling (or an intuition) might offer a good reason to issue a decision that eventually bears success. Analogously, in other cases of high uncertainty and randomness, people rely on contextual information as a valid justification to issue a decision or take an action that may eventually be successful.

For example, when we do not know how to find a room at a conference venue, we assume that other people are looking for the same room, follow them, and eventually find the room without exchanging a word with them. Instead, when we do not know what laptop to buy, we might base our purchase decision on a few conversations with some trusted acquaintances, eventually making a good purchase. Accordingly, it seems that—in many cases—people can be aware of their cluelessness and hedge against dumbness. It follows that rationality concerns much of the process through which people trade off less rational (or dumber) beliefs for better (or less dumb) beliefs that maximize their overall well-being (Sowell, 1980). For this reason, if people become less dumb (or more rational) when system 1.5 functions correctly, it is arguably true that one's dumbness can move from the center or the right-hand tail of a normal distribution curve to its left. More specifically, if contextual information can activate the learning processes that lead individuals and social groups to reject dumb beliefs for better ones, a decrease in dumbness on both the individual and social levels involves an increase in rationality on both levels.

Notably, the latter learning processes have two fundamental implications. On the one hand, such strategies enable society to create markets whose internal rules allow coordination among market participants who use the price system as their preferred way of communication with one another (Hayek, 1937). On the other hand, and for the same

reason, humans can create shared sociolinguistic and social institutions that allow them to live together (Guala, 2016). In other words, trading a dumb belief for a more rational belief grants that human socio-institutions can evolve and progress. For instance, when Edward Jenner discovered that inoculation could reduce the circulation of smallpox infections, his fellow citizens rejected his claims on religious grounds. Yet, as time passed and inoculation proved effective, his fellow citizens accepted inoculation as a shared practice maximizing general well-being.

Dumbness for the worse

It is time to make our considerations about dumbness less optimistic and understand why people can sometimes dive into the dark side of reason. To this end, let us imagine what the world would be like if everyone were gifted with constructive rationality in the same way as the homo oeconomicus. On one side, our minds would be infallible mathematical calculators that always compute the correct odds that a specific action or decision bears success. On the other side, constructive rationality would enable us to live in a world where randomness does not affect the course of human life because everyone would be able to predict the correct odds associated with the occurrence of any event. Of course, these suppositions are as imaginative as the belief that Santa Claus exists or that two men can fall into a chimney.

In contrast, the truth we must accept is that the ability of our minds to deal with odds and randomness is limited. Particularly—as Pinker (2021) explains—one's knowledge and acceptance of base rates improves reasoning abilities. In this regard, rationality and intelligence diverge the most: while the first can improve as we learn to deal with information correctly, our cognitive abilities are somewhat stable (Robson, 2019). For this reason, making the most of our cognitive abilities in our actions is up to us. Namely, while we can improve the functioning of System 1 and System 1.5 over time, the overall skills of System 2 cannot be boosted throughout the course of our lives. Thus, we can only live with the fact that "*it takes considerable knowledge just to realize the extent of your own ignorance*"—as Thomas Sowell once said.

In this regard, it is worth noting that memory—as a justifier of one's belief—is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is a valid justifier of our beliefs, e.g., we might recall the name of our mothers or where we were born. On the other hand, memory distorts our

assessment of probabilities and weakens our ability to properly deal with randomness. More precisely, given that our minds are largely unable to deal with complex computations involving real numbers, our minds use memories as belief validators by distorting the odds that a belief is correct. This claim lies at the bottom of the so-called heuristics and biases program pioneered by Tversky & Kahneman (1974), who were the first to show that—under uncertainty—our minds justify judgments based on memories rather than hard evidence.

Tversky & Kahneman's (1974) can be summed up as the easier something is to recall, the more we see it as a valid justification for our beliefs. In the digital world, this process of judgment validation can become pernicious because the algorithms running social media feeds and search engine hits provide us with information that fits our overall preferences and tastes (Quintarelli, 2019). Therefore, in the digital world, our constant interaction with data that fits our beliefs spoils the process of belief validation based on memories even further. On one side, it becomes a potent enabler of dumbness both on the individual and the social group levels because it boosts the likelihood that System 1 makes blunders. On the other side, it reduces the probability that System 1.5 can have some control over the cognitive errors of System 1.

This problem has received much investigation by Stanovich (2021), who argues that online algorithms are enablers of two powerful cognitive biases: the belief bias and the confirmation bias. The former bias concerns our tendency to consider the conclusion of an argument plausible because it fits our pre-existing beliefs, whereas the latter bias concerns our inclination to consider a belief valid because we can recall plenty of information that confirms it, regardless of whether that information is reliable or not. More precisely, Stanovich (2021) claims that—in the digital world—the belief and confirmation biases merge into a third and more detrimental bias, i.e., the myside bias.

The latter concerns considering an argument valid because it fits one's and everyone else's beliefs in their social circle. Thus, my side bias is not only cognitive. It is also behavioral because it affects behavior by shaping the beliefs and decisions of individuals and social groups. In other words, it links biased practical reasoning to dumb decisions and actions. Consequently, given that online algorithms bring people with similar views and opinions together, the myside bias becomes an enabler of dumb behavior that tends to increase rather than decrease. Simply put, the myside bias reduces the likelihood that someone or a social group might trade off a dumb belief for a more rational one. Accordingly, when

the myside bias activates within filter bubbles, the likelihood of buying into an absurd belief increases, and cases like those mentioned above occur.

Concurrently, when the myside bias activates within filter bubbles, availability cascades can force people to herd around dumb beliefs and form opposite and strongly polarized factions, e.g., the pro and anti-COVID-19 vaccines. Analogously, when the myside bias activates within filter bubbles, people are driven away from rationality and become reluctant to justify beliefs based on evidence rather than preconceptions. Eventually, the activation of the myside bias leads people to create inefficient social institutions and undertake behavior detrimental to general social welfare. Hence, the myside bias is an excellent proxy to explain why someone can shift from the left or center of a normal curve representing dumbness to its right. Particularly, the myside bias can be considered the root-cause of what Alvesson & Spicer (2016) call functional stupidity, i.e., people's tendency to consider a belief true because everyone else upholds it.

More importantly, function stupidity resulting from the myside bias does not only involve a general increase in dumbness among the members of a social group. It also and overall involves higher group polarization impacting how people participate in the sociopolitical and socioeconomic spheres of their lives. In this regard, Stanovich (2021) remarks that the myside bias predominantly affects people's capacity to achieve compromise and stipulate binding agreements that protect the interests of the parties involved. Moreover, when the myside bias causes functional stupidity to obtain, people reject those values lying at the core of Western democracies, such as freedom of speech and diversity of opinions. Consequently, the myside bias and the functional stupidity problems reveal that when people diverge from truth and objectivity because their beliefs force them to do so, people become unable to reach those compromises granting social coordination and social progress. In other words, the functional stupidity problem enables social mechanisms contrary to those described in the previous section.

Conclusion: is dumbness a new philosophical category?

In this work, I analyzed the implications of reversing the common assumption of rationality on behalf of human agents underlying much philosophical research. Namely, I assumed that people have some reasoning and cognitive skills that are stable and unevenly distributed among them (i.e., some level of intelligence). In this regard, I

observed that embracing the standard distinction between theoretical and practical reasoning leads to the appalling conclusion that one can be tremendously intelligence (i.e., good at using system 2) but also tremendously dumb in their behavior (i.e., bad at using system 1 and 1.5). In other words, our conclusion is that sound theoretical reasoning does not necessarily imply sound practical reasoning. That is because rationality is not a given. It is rather something that someone can or cannot achieve depending on whether they are good at using system 1.5 to moderate the blunders of system 1.

Therefore, when human agents manage to do so, their dumbness decreases. Instead, when human agents fail to do so, dumbness increases. Analogously, social groups are better off when they manage to trade dumb beliefs for more rational beliefs. Particularly, functional social institutions maximizing general welfare emerge from the behavior of agents whose dumbness decreases. Instead, functional stupidity emerges from the behavior of agents who have fallen victims of the myside bias. In this case, human agents create institutions that fail to maximize general welfare. Given that we live in a digital society in which cases of functional stupidity is under our attention every day, a good question is what philosophers can do to reduce this trend. Perhaps, philosophers might take dumbness for what is (i.e., a serious human problem) and start analyzing the implications of the hypothesis that human agents are not always rational, as I did in this work.

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