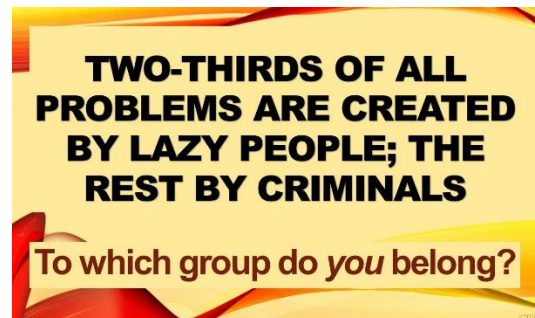


# The Problem of “Stupidity” and Intellectual Rigor

## A Challenge to all Institutions of Higher Learning

**Note:** Stupidity is not the same thing as being ignorant, or the inability to be knowledgeable; rather, it is a symptom of two things working together *intellectual laziness* coupled with a lack of *professionalism*. Some questions for you to ponder:

- Does social media help to encourage stupidity because it allows stupid people from all across the world to hang out together?
- Do lazy teachers encourage stupidity by not demanding intellectual rigor from their students and by not compelling them to engage in critical thinking?
- This, probably, is the only country in the world that teaches people that there is no such thing as a stupid question; so what kind of questions do stupid people ask?
- Do stupid people (also known as the *ignorantsia*) vote in elections? If so, do they vote for stupid politicians?
- Does this reading apply to you? If not how do you know?



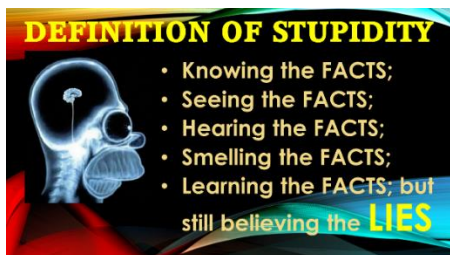
**Yes,** you must also study all images in this entire document. Hello...?

## SECTION ONE

### Definitions of Stupidity (from the Urban Dictionary)

Source: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Stupidity>

“The perpetual trademark of our species. The random and unpredictable state of mind that causes and governs wars, unwanted pregnancies, political actions, divorces, ripoffs, reality TV shows, [copycat](#) crimes, cults, [self-injury](#), and lawsuits.”



“Since the stupid in our midst are breeding uncontrollably while the intelligent minority are dying out, one can easily predict that our stupidity will far outpace our technological progress within a few decades, and propel us back to the [Stone Age](#) or extinction with in a few centuries.”

“You can never go [broke](#) by underestimating the [stupidity](#) of [the human race](#).”

## SECTION TWO

# We Are All Getting Dumber, New Science Proves, and No One Is Sure Why

Are our terrible diets, bad schools, tech obsession, or even increasingly trashy media to blame?

By [Jessica Stillman](#)

Source: <https://www.inc.com/jessica-stillman/we-are-all-getting-dumber-new-science-proves-no-one-is-sure-why.html>

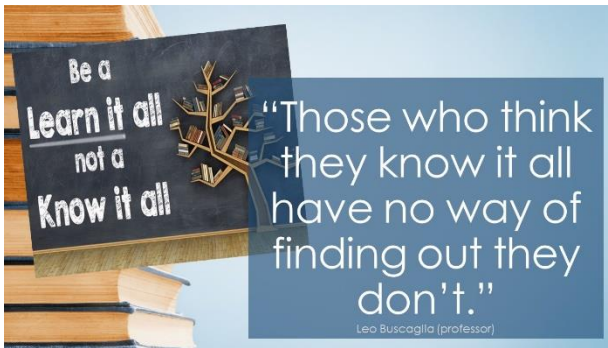
Whatever incredibly dumb things humanity got up to in the 20th century (and there were, as you know, some doozies), we all had at least one thing to crow about: as measured by IQ tests humans were at least steadily [getting smarter](#).

The steady uptick in average IQ scores is known as [the Flynn effect](#), and it lasted for decades. Basically wherever scientists looked they found a rise of intelligence of about three IQ points per decade.

But recent research has worrying news: [this trend appears to be reversing](#).

## Humanity is now officially getting dumber.

It probably shouldn't worry us if some pocket of the population saw a decline in IQ as things like education and diet affect IQ and these factors can vary from one group or time to another. But according to this new study it doesn't appear to be some small segment of the population whose IQ is going down. It appears to be the entire nation of Norway.



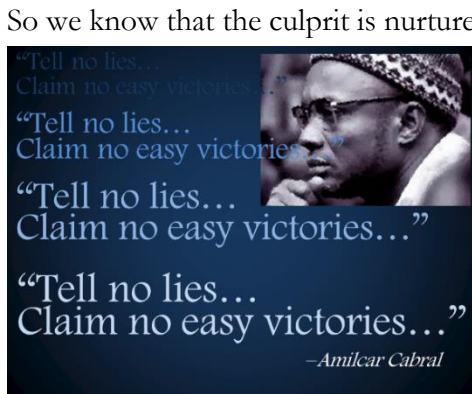
When scientists from the Norway's Ragnar Frisch Centre for Economic Research analyzed some 730,000 IQ tests given to Norwegian men before their compulsory military service from 1970 to 2009, they found that average IQ scores were actually sinking. And not just by some miniscule amount. Each generation of Norwegian men appear to be getting around seven IQ points dumber.

And [as PsyBlog points out](#), this isn't even the first study to find that the Flynn Effect has reversed, though it may be the most convincing to date.

## The million dollar question: why?

That's pretty horrifying news for fans of progress, but it also begs one incredibly important question: Why? What's causing IQ scores to start heading in the wrong direction?

You might first wonder if it's genetic. Maybe some change in the makeup of a particular group being studied has caused the decline (crudely, you could call this the 'dumb people have more babies' hypothesis). But that seems to be ruled out by the new research, which shows that even within single families IQ has declined. [Marginal Revolution blogger economist Tyler Cowen sums up](#) what that means: "In other words, we have started building a more stupidity-inducing environment."



So we know that the culprit is nurture rather than nature (or, sorry xenophobes, migration), but scientists are still baffled as to what exact aspect of modern life is driving the decline. Some have proposed that [our tech obsession](#) might be to blame, but as the decline started in the 1970s, well before everyone spent their days staring at screens, that can't be the whole story.

Other proposed explanations are unhealthy modern diets, increasingly trashy media, or a decline in the quality of schooling or [the prevalence of reading](#).

The issue could even be down to a technical detail of IQ tests. [Scientists make a distinction](#) between crystallized intelligence (all the stuff you've been taught and remember) and fluid intelligence (your ability to learn new stuff). IQ tests generally measure crystallized intelligence more, so changes in

schooling that de-emphasize memorization might be driving a decline in scores. If this explanation is true, students remain as smart as ever (just way more reliant on Google).

The bottom line, however, is that the cause of the decline remains a mystery. Whatever it turns out to be, however, we should all probably start worrying about what our [sedentary](#), screen addicted, junk food-munching lifestyles might be doing to our brains.

*Place your bets: what do you think is behind the recent mental decline of humanity?*

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## SECTION THREE

### 5 Habits of Stupid People that Smart People Don't Have

SOURCE: <https://www.businessinsider.de/5-habits-of-stupid-people-that-smart-people-dont-have-2017-3?IR=T>

[Lisa Schönhaar](#) and [Gisela Wolf](#)

Our world is populated by all kinds of people with hugely varying levels of intelligence. Almost anyone would consider themselves to be intelligent, of course, and it can be very hard to get an accurate assessment of our own intelligence. After all, our thoughts always tend to sound smart in our own head, don't they?

And intelligence is very important. Especially in a professional context, a smart and agile mind can be your best asset. But people who are less smart often have habits that out them as stupid and can also be quite catastrophic in a number of circumstances.

These are the five most fundamental differences between smart and stupid people.

**"IGNORANCE OFTEN BREEDS ARROGANCE, WHICH IN TURN BREEDS A PROFOUND ABSENCE OF CIVILITY"**

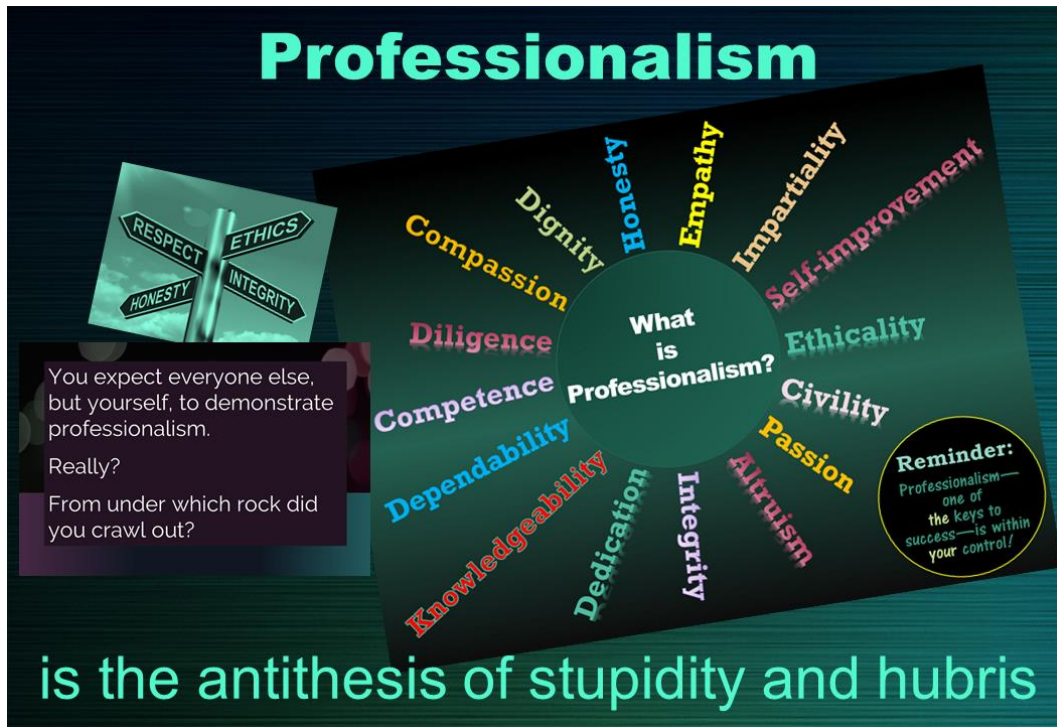
It is most ironic, and even tragic, that there is probably no other setting besides the classrooms and hallways of academia where this axiom holds so true.

#### 1. Stupid people blame others for their own mistakes

It's very noticeable, unprofessional, and something a smart person would never do. If you consistently try to foist your mistakes off on others, you demonstrate to everyone that you can't be the sharpest tool in the shed.



Stupid people don't like taking responsibility for their mistakes. They prefer to wallow in self-pity or just go straight to playing the blame game.



Travis Bradberry, author of the bestseller ["Emotional Intelligence 2.0."](#), knows how telling this behavior really is.

"It's never a good idea to cast blame. Be accountable. If you had any role — no matter how small — in whatever went wrong, own it," Bradbury advises in a guest contribution for ["Inc."](#). "The moment you start pointing fingers is the moment people start seeing you as someone who lacks accountability for his or her actions."

Smart people also know that every mistake is a chance to learn to do better next time.

A [neurological study](#) conducted by Jason S. Moser of Michigan State University has shown that the brains of smart people actually react differently to mistakes.

## 2. Stupid people always have to be right

In a situation of conflict, smart people have an easier time empathizing with the other person and understanding their arguments. They are also able to integrate these arguments into their own chain of thought and to reconsider their opinions accordingly.

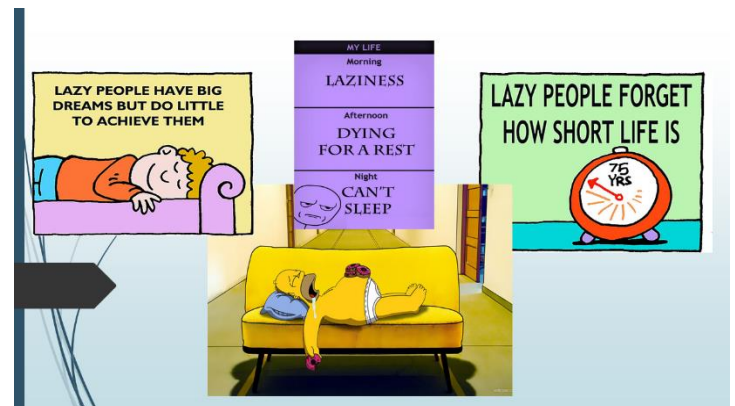
A sure sign of intelligence is the ability to look at and understand things from a different point of view, and intelligent people are open minded towards new information and changing parameters.

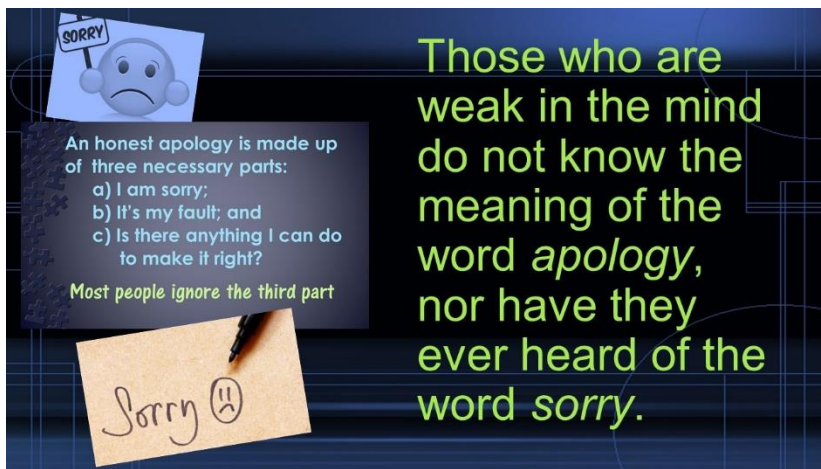
Stupid people on the other hand will continue arguing forever and will not budge from their position, regardless of any valid arguments brought against them. That also means they will not notice if the other person happens to be more intelligent and competent.

This overestimation is called the Dunning-Kruger effect. It is the cognitive bias that makes less competent people overestimate their own skills while underestimating the competence of others.

The term was coined in 1999 in the publication of [David Dunning and Justin Kruger](#). The psychologists had noticed in prior studies that in areas like reading comprehension, playing chess or driving a car, ignorance leads to confidence more often than knowledge does.

At Cornell University they conducted more experiments on this effect and showed that less competent people don't just overestimate their own skills, they also don't recognize when someone else's skills are superior.





Dunning writes: "If you're incompetent, you can't know you're incompetent.... [T]he skills you need to produce a right answer are exactly the skills you need to recognize what a right answer is."

Of course this does not mean that smart people always think everyone else is right. But they listen attentively and consider all arguments before making their decisions.

### 3. Stupid people react to conflicts with anger and aggression

Obviously even the smartest people can get really angry from time to time. But for less intelligent people this is the go-to reaction whenever things aren't going their way. When they feel like they don't have control over a situation as much as they would like, they tend to use anger and aggressive behavior to secure their position.

Researchers of the University of Michigan conducted a [study on 600 participants](#) with their parents and children, over the span of 22 years. They found a distinct correlation between aggressive behavior and a lower IQ-score.

The researchers wrote in their elaboration: "We hypothesized that low intelligence makes the learning of aggressive responses more likely at an early age, and this aggressive behavior makes continued intellectual development more difficult."

### 4. Stupid people ignore the needs and feelings of other people

Intelligent people tend to be very good at empathizing with others. This makes it easy for them to understand another person's point of view.

Russel James of the Texas Tech University conducted a [representative study](#) with thousands of Americans and found out that people with a higher IQ are more inclined to give without expecting anything in return. [As it turns out](#), an intelligent person is better at assessing the needs of other people and also more likely to want to help them.

"People with higher cognitive ability are better able to understand and fulfill the needs of distant others."

People who are less smart have a hard time imagining that people could think differently than they do and would therefore disagree with them. Also the concept of doing something for someone without expecting a favor in return is more foreign to them.

Everyone is selfish now and again, it's completely normal and human. But it's important that we keep the balance between the need to pursue our own goals and the need to consider other people's feelings.



### 5. Stupid people think they are better than everyone else

Intelligent people try to motivate and help others. They do this because they are not afraid of being overshadowed. They have a healthy level of confidence and are smart enough to accurately assess their own competence.

**"The pathological inability to express gratitude is an unforgiveable sin."**



## What is the Dunning-Kruger Effect?

It refers to "being ignorant of one's own ignorance." That is, "the Dunning-Kruger effect [is where] poor performers in many social and intellectual domains seem largely unaware of just how deficient their expertise is. Their deficits leave them with a double burden—not only does their incomplete and misguided knowledge lead them to make mistakes but those exact same deficits also prevent them from recognizing when they are making mistakes and other people choosing more wisely."

SOURCE: "The Dunning-Kruger Effect: On Being Ignorant of One's Own Ignorance," by David Dunning. Published in *Advances in Experimental Psychology* 44 (2011): 247-296.

Stupid people on the other hand tend to badmouth others in order to look better themselves. They believe themselves to be above everyone else and are always quick to judge. Prejudice is very much not a sign of intelligence.

In a Canadian study published by "[Psychological Science](#)", two scientists of the Brock University of Ontario found that "people with low IQs tend to be more in favour of harsh punishments, more homophobic and more likely to be racist."

Many biologists believe that the human ability to cooperate has been instrumental to our overall development. That could mean that the most important signifier of intelligence is being good at working with others.

## SECTION FOUR

### Alan Caron: America Is Suffering From a Dangerous Knowledge Deficit

**This year, join a movement against stupidity.**

By Alan Caron

SOURCE: <https://www.pressherald.com/2017/01/01/alan-caron-america-is-suffering-from-a-dangerous-knowledge-deficit/>

The country is drowning in a rising tide of stupidity. It represents a far greater threat to our future than a thousand Islamic State cells or all the nuclear missiles aimed at us from Russia.

The Stupid Movement has been on the rise in America since the mid-1950s. But it's now becoming a mainstream force in our society, with the election of the first truly stupid president.

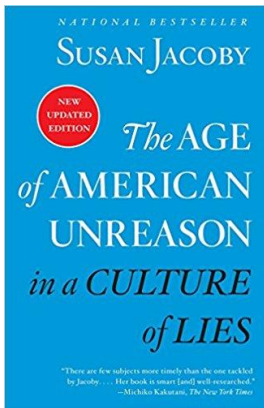
Here's how low we've sunk: The president-elect recently backed off a promise to produce the largest infrastructure-repair program in history.

"That's not a very Republican thing to do. I didn't even know that, frankly," he said, acknowledging that he hadn't realized during the campaign that such initiatives might conflict with his party's small-government philosophy.

That was followed by massive changes in American foreign policy and a new nuclear arms race announced in 140-character tweets. Fittingly, 15 shopping malls

**"Lazy Teachers Make Lazy Students"**





last week exploded into mob violence and fistfights because people were tweeting about gunshots while running and screaming in fear. There were no gunshots.

From both American and world history, we know where the dictatorship of the stupid takes a society: to autocracy, mediocrity and strife. And to the enrichment of a few over the many and a general collapse of civil society.

Let's be careful not to confuse stupidity with ignorance or lack of education, although they generally expand together. There are lots of people who lack education but who have great natural intelligence and a desire to learn, including most of the people I grew up with.

Stupid is different. To win a degree in stupid, you have to willfully reject facts in favor of superstitions, myths, fears and conspiracy theories. And then get all your news from fake or biased news sites targeted at the stupid.

As Susan Jacoby, author of "The Age of American Unreason," wrote: "Every shortcoming of American governance is related in some fashion to the knowledge deficit of the public." And our knowledge deficit is growing:

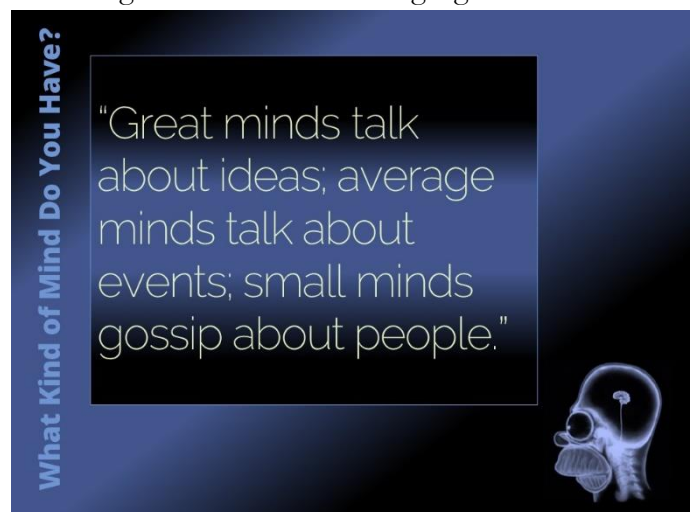
- For the first time in America's history, this generation will be less educated than the last.
- Sixty-eight percent of public school third-graders cannot read proficiently.
- We're 19th among young people with a high school or associate degree.
- Where we once led the world in the number of young people with college degrees, we're now in 12th place.
- We're 52nd in the quality of university math and science instruction.
- Reading among all ages is declining rapidly. Forty percent of Americans under 44 haven't read a book this year. Growing numbers of young people read nothing except required school assignments.
- Nearly 50 percent of all graduate students in the sciences in the U.S. are foreigners, most of whom will return to their home countries.

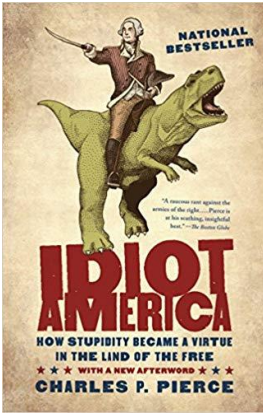
That's taken a toll on our understanding of civics and politics:

- Two-thirds of Americans can't name the three branches of our federal government.
- Only 40 percent know we have 100 senators in the U.S. Congress.
- Over 35 percent cannot name any rights granted by the First Amendment aside from free speech.
- Forty-two percent think that the Constitution established English as our national language.
- Twenty-five percent believe the Constitution also established Christianity as our national religion.

Our scientific knowledge is abysmal:

- Forty-two percent of Americans believe God created human beings less than 10,000 years ago.
- Eighteen percent of Americans believe that the sun revolves around the Earth.
- Only 28 percent of high school science teachers follow recommended guidelines on teaching evolution.
- Three out of four Republicans in the U.S. Senate and half of those in the House deny the validity of [climate change](#), despite the warnings of virtually every major significant scientific organization in the world.





- American schools regularly undervalue intelligence while celebrating athletes and pretty cheerleaders. Schools in Europe and other economic competitors do nothing of the sort. Most don't even have athletics in their schools.

Mark Bauerlein, author of “The Dumbest Generation,” places part of the blame on the decline of professional media and the numbers of young people who are “learning” from social media. Many of their parents are hardly better, learning primarily from “news” channels that aren’t in the news business at all and that primarily reinforce what they already believe or don’t know.

Charles Pierce, author of “Idiot America,” speaks to a new phenomenon that is taking hold in the country, which is “the ascendancy of the notion that the people whom we should trust the least are the people who best know what they are talking about.”

Against this backdrop, we should hardly be surprised that people are becoming increasingly susceptible to exploitation by politicians and fake news sites that are spewing fiction and fears as “honest,” “blunt” and “revealing.”

What are Americans to do? Make some New Year’s resolutions for your country.

- Never succumb to discouragement.
- Raise the bar on what we expect from ourselves and our children on learning.
- Demand that voters do their homework or stay home.
- Call out stupidity wherever it raises its empty head. Don’t be overly polite.
- Join a movement to renew American intelligence. The country and the world need you.

*Alan Caron is owner of Caron Communications and author of “Maine’s Next Economy” and “Reinventing Maine Government.”*

## SECTION FIVE

### The Case for Professors of Stupidity

Posted by Posted by Brian Gallagher, 2019

SOURCE: <http://nautil.us/blog/the-case-for-professors-of-stupidity>

On this past International Holocaust Remembrance Day, I reread a bit of Bertrand Russell. In 1933, dismayed at the Nazification of Germany, the philosopher wrote “The Triumph of Stupidity,” attributing the rise of Adolf Hitler to the organized fervor of stupid and brutal people—two qualities, he noted, that “usually go together.” He went on to make one of his most famous observations, that the “fundamental cause of the trouble is that in the modern world the stupid are cocksure while the intelligent are full of doubt.”

Russell’s quip prefigured the scientific discovery of a cognitive bias—the Dunning–Kruger effect—that has been so resonant that it has penetrated popular culture, inspiring, for example, [an opera song](#) (from Harvard’s annual Ig Nobel Award Ceremony): “Some people’s own incompetence somehow gives them a stupid sense that anything they do is first rate. They think it’s great.” No surprise, then, that psychologist [Joyce Ehrlinger](#) prefaced a 2008 [paper](#) she wrote with David Dunning and Justin Kruger, among others, with Russell’s comment—the one he later



made in his 1951 book, *New Hopes for a Changing World*: “One of the painful things about our time is that those who feel certainty are stupid, and those with any imagination and understanding are filled with doubt and indecision.” “By now,” Ehrlinger noted in that paper, “this phenomenon has been demonstrated even for everyday tasks, about which individuals have likely received substantial feedback regarding their level of knowledge and skill.” Humans have shown a tendency, in other words, to be a bit thick about even the most mundane things, like how well they drive.

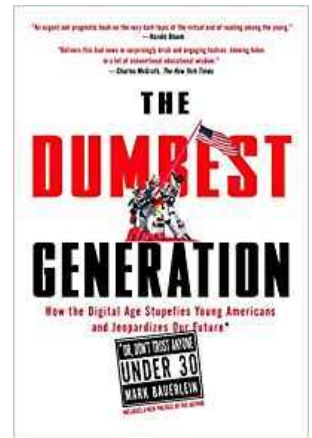
## Stupidity is not simply the opposite of intelligence.

Russell, who died in 1970 at 97 years of age, probably would not be surprised to hear news of this new [study](#), published in *Nature Human Behaviour*: “Extreme opponents of genetically modified foods know the least but think they know the most.” The researchers, led by Philip Fernbach, cognitive scientist and co-author of *The Knowledge Illusion: Why We Never Think Alone*, analyzed survey responses from a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults. They obtained similar results, they write, “in a parallel study with representative samples from the United States, France and Germany, and in a study testing attitudes about a medical application of genetic engineering technology (gene therapy).”

Fernbach called their result “perverse.” It was nevertheless consistent with prior work exploring the Dunning–Kruger effect and the psychology of extremism, he [said](#). “Extreme views often stem from people feeling they understand complex topics better than they do.” Now as ever, societies need to know how to combat this.

But what exactly is stupidity? David Krakauer, the President of the Santa Fe Institute, [told](#) interviewer Steve Paulson, for *Nautilus*, stupidity is not simply the opposite of intelligence. “Stupidity is using a rule where adding more data doesn’t improve your chances of getting [a problem] right,” Krakauer said. “In fact, it makes it more likely you’ll get it wrong.” Intelligence, on the other hand, is using a rule that allows you to solve complex problems with simple, elegant solutions. “Stupidity is a very interesting class of phenomena in human history, and it has to do with rule systems that have made it harder for us to arrive at the truth,” he said. “It’s an interesting fact that, whilst there are numerous individuals who study intelligence—there are whole departments that are interested in it—if you were to ask yourself what’s the greatest problem facing the world today, I would say it would be stupidity. So we

should have professors of stupidity—it would just be embarrassing to be called the stupid professor.”



### “The Triumph of Stupidity”

“The fundamental cause of the trouble in the modern world today is that the stupid are cocksure while the intelligent are full of doubt.

“A stupid man's report of what a clever man says can never be accurate, because he unconsciously translates what he hears into something he can understand.

—Bertrand Russell (British mathematician and philosopher)

