

HUMAN STUPIDITY IN A HYPERCONNECTED SOCIETY – AN URGENCY, A WARNING

A ESTUPIDEZ HUMANA NA SOCIEDADE HIPERCONECTADA – UMA URGÊNCIA, UM ALERTA

LA ESTUPIDEZ HUMANA EN LA SOCIEDAD HIPERCONECTADA – UNA URGENCIA, UNA ALERTA



Sebastião de Souza LEMES¹
e-mail: ss.lemes2@gmail.com



José Anderson SANTOS CRUZ²
e-mail: andersoncruz@editoraiberoamericana.com

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¹ São Paulo State University “Júlio de Mesquita Filho”, Araraquara – SP – Brazil. Postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Education of the University of Lisbon. Professor in the Graduate Program in School Education at FCLAr/UNESP, where he teaches and conducts research in the areas of Assessment, Curriculum, Technology, and Public Policy.

² Editora Ibero-Americana. Ph.D. in School Education from the School of Sciences and Letters (FCLAr). Professor, Editor, and Editorial Consultant for academic journals. Researcher in the fields of Editorial Management and Policies, Journal Indexing, Open Access, Open Science, Editorial Processes, Knowledge Management, and Editorial Management.

We have never had so much access to information and, paradoxically, we have never been so vulnerable to its antithesis: stupidity. This does not refer to a lack of formal education or to a low intelligence quotient; rather, it concerns stupidity as a social, moral, and systemic phenomenon. If it once functioned as background noise, it has now become the conductor of the global orchestra, amplified by algorithms and processed at industrial scale by Artificial Intelligence (AI).

There are periods in which history appears to advance through discoveries, inventions, and intellectual revolutions; there are others in which technical progress coexists with a silent regression of thought itself. In my view, our time embodies this paradox, marked by intense tension between the era of AI, hyperconnectivity, information, and immediate communication and, simultaneously, the proliferation of a social form of stupidity that threatens to erode the foundations of public life, moral discernment, and even the very idea of truth. As some of the most important observers of the twentieth century have warned, human stupidity cannot be reduced to a mere cognitive deficiency. It constitutes a collective phenomenon, a psychic and social condition that permeates the structures of everyday life, producing devastating political, cultural, and moral effects. Far from being an individual problem, it manifests as a historical force—often invisible, yet profoundly effective.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1997) grasped this phenomenon with rare clarity. In 1943, while imprisoned by the Nazi regime, he formulated deeply unsettling reflections on the nature of human stupidity. For Bonhoeffer (1997), the true danger to good is not deliberate evil, but stupidity. Evil can be confronted; stupidity cannot. Against it, arguments fail, facts become irrelevant, and evidence is dismissed. While evil may be opposed and denounced, the stupid person is impervious to reason, for stupidity is not an intellectual deficit but a moral defect. It flourishes where the individual relinquishes inner autonomy in order to merge with the mass. It is a broad moral failure rather than intellectual ignorance—the voluntary abandonment of inner autonomy, which thrives particularly under conditions of power. When individuals dissolve into political, ideological, or religious masses, they become susceptible to a kind of moral anesthesia. In this state, they cease to think for themselves and begin to function as instruments of external forces. In this sense, the stupid person is not necessarily incapable of reasoning; rather, they renounce the responsibility to do so.

The historian Carlo Cipolla (1988; 2011; 2018) offered a more pragmatic warning: a stupid individual is one who causes harm to others without deriving any benefit for themselves and often harms themselves in the process. This figure embodies a form of destructive

irrationality, spreading disinformation that corrodes the social fabric, attacking institutions upon which they themselves depend, and generating a net loss for humanity—often in exchange for the fleeting gratification of tribal validation.

From another analytical perspective, the essayist Robert Musil (1990; 2006) identifies a form of stupidity disguised as progress, practiced by technicians and specialists who, constrained by dogmas or rigid metrics, lose sight of totality and humanity. It is a profoundly limited rationality that drives the contemporary world. Musil (1937) warns that stupidity is not the opposite of intelligence, but rather the obscurity of its shadow. This becomes evident in the uncritical dependence on and blind trust in information disseminated through social media and AI systems, which, although capable of processing data at superhuman speed, often lack sound judgment, depth, and contextual discernment. Such systems mimic intelligence but may, in fact, automate error or transform technology from a digital tool into a pathological catalyst that randomly propagates stupidity, rendering human error (a moral defect) technically flawless and seemingly unquestionable. They generate content that appears true but is merely a synthetic reflection of our own collective mediocrity.

In this sense, stupidity is not the absence of thought nor a loose or random mode of thinking; rather, it is an impoverished form of reasoning—one that operates confidently within a narrow field yet is incapable of recognizing its own limits. This is precisely why it can thrive in highly developed and technologically advanced societies. The Italian semiotician Umberto Eco (1979) observed that its most intense expression unfolds within the sphere of contemporary communication, particularly through social media. According to Eco (2018), these platforms have created an environment of validation that has given voice to a legion immersed in imbecility—voices that, in earlier times, would have remained confined to private conversations and thus lacked communicative reach. Through the digital environment, social media, and AI, an ecosystem of immersion in imbecility has emerged, in which the distinction between knowledge and opinion dissolves. Unfounded opinions acquire the appearance of consensus and mutually reinforce one another as such. Complexity is replaced by slogans and clichés; public debate by immediate reactions; truth by emotionally convenient narratives. In this way, stupidity becomes a communicational phenomenon amplified by technology.

AI systems, digital platforms, and recommendation algorithms have exponentially expanded the reach of ideas, but not necessarily the quality of thought. On the contrary, these systems often reward what is most simplistic, emotional, and polarizing, giving rise to a civilizational paradox: the more sophisticated cognitive technologies become, the more evident

the risk of human cognitive obsolescence. Machines learn; humans, by contrast, often seem to unlearn. The problem—or danger, as Bonhoeffer (2003) warned—lies not merely in the existence of stupidity, but in its capacity to align itself with power. When technological systems, political interests, and misinformed masses converge within this ecosystem, stupidity ceases to be merely a human defect and becomes a historical and social force. In such a context, the veracity of facts becomes irrelevant in the face of their capacity to shock, and the complexity of reality is disregarded in order to sustain confirmation bubbles. As suggested by Eco's metaphor (2018), this is the sacrifice of the complexity of reality on the altar of easy answers and convenient prophets.

The stupid individual thrives on social media, carried along by waves of engagement algorithms and incessant flows of information that create environments in which slow reflection becomes rare and critical thinking is displaced by the speed of reaction demanded. The convergence of these perspectives outlines a troubling scenario: stupidity ceases to be an individual flaw and becomes structurally embedded in the dynamics of society, generating a growing wave of intellectual impoverishment. From this standpoint, one must recognize that one of the greatest threats to contemporary societies is not the lack of data or information to solve problems and meet human needs, but rather our increasing—and comfortable—inability to interpret them with rigor and critical discernment. This scenario points to a civilizational urgency: stupidity is not merely an individual moral defect, but a structural and algorithmic pathology that may lead humanity toward one of the greatest dangers in its history—the domination of stupidity.

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