

The Laws of Stupidity

In 1976, a professor of economic history at the University of California, Berkeley published an essay outlining the fundamental laws of a force he perceived as humanity's greatest existential threat.

Carlo M Cipolla postulates stupid people share several identifying traits: they are abundant, they are irrational and they cause problems for others without apparent benefit to themselves, thereby lowering society's total well-being. There are no defences against stupidity. The only way a society can avoid being crushed by the burden of its idiots is if the non-stupid work even harder to offset the losses of their stupid brethren.

Paraphrasing, Cipolla's five basic laws of human stupidity, they are

1st Law

Everyone underestimates the number of stupid people. We assume people are clever on purely circumstantial evidence and biases

2nd Law

The probability any individual is stupid is independent of any other characteristic. In any defined group the same proportion of people are stupid.

There is the same proportion of stupid people among Nobel Prize winners as there are among High School drop-outs. No one knows what this proportion might be but it's higher than you think.

3rd Law (The definition of Stupidity)

Stupid people cause losses to others without gains to themselves

This leads to the identification of 4 groups.

<i>Helpless people</i> contribute to society but are taken advantage of by it (and especially by the "bandit" sector of it); note, however, that extreme altruists and pacifists may willingly and consciously (rather than helplessly) accept a place in this category for moral or ethical reasons	<i>Intelligent people</i> contribute to society and who leverage their contributions into reciprocal benefits
<i>Stupid people</i> whose efforts are counterproductive to both their and others' interests	<i>Bandits</i> pursue their own self-interest even when doing so poses a net detriment to societal welfare

4th Law

Non stupid people underestimate the danger of stupid people.

5th Law

Stupid people are the most dangerous people on the planet.

eg Putin is the extreme example of a stupid person under these definitions.

Rhetorical Question

Does the universe now make more sense?

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