

The Genius of Stupidity

James F Welles*

Department of Psychology, PO Box 17, East Marion, New York, USA

***Corresponding Author:** James F Welles, Department of Psychology, PO Box 17, East Marion, New York, USA.

Received: January 06, 2018; **Published:** February 18, 2019

Volume 3 Issue 2 February 2019

© All Copy Rights are Reserved by James F Welles.

Inventive genius is due to the creative fantasy of introverts often incapable of grasping even the simplest precepts of social life [1]. Beethoven, for example, lost all effective contact with the social and business worlds before he was thirty years old. He was totally devoid of sympathetic insight and inhabited a world of his own into which no one else could penetrate. Except for a few disastrous occasions, he indifferently left others to live their own ways in their own pragmatic, atonal worlds [2]. To put it bluntly, Beethoven was pretty damned stupid in nonmusical matters, but that was the price he paid for his genius.

Sir Isaac Newton was likewise something of a freak/odd-ball. He was reclusive, mindless of personal cleanliness, taciturn and so obsessed with his all-consuming work he could forget to eat. He was also insensible to passion and rumored to have died a virgin [3].

Henry Ford had little in common with Beethoven or Newton, except that all were totally inept in their interactions with ordinary people. Beethoven misunderstood people because he lived in a world of tones and emotions; Newton in equations and apples; Ford in a world of steel and overalls [4] outside of which he was all but lost—i.e., stupid [5]. This inability of the great to relate to ordinary minds shows up in sports as well: no great baseball player has been an effective manager. Such people do so much so naturally and well that they have difficulty relating professionally to those who are struggling to learn and to whom performing is a conscious effort [6].

Further, the development of creativity and genius seems to depend very much on such non cognitive factors as personality, motivation, upbringing, etc. Although a certain level of mental ability is necessary for mastery of a body of knowledge, independence of thought is really the factor which permits the creative person to move beyond mastery to inventive genius [7]. Napoleon opined that genius was an un-learnable art-stic intuition: [8] learning might carry a person up to a point, but the genius would leap beyond what was learned to another level. The jump may be a logical extension of what is known, but it is still a leap into the unknown.

Most geniuses leap to greatest advantage when least embroiled in human society [9]. Mozart, for example, created well when completely himself, [10] because excellence is a subjective, personal experience rather than a psychosocial phenomenon. It is not a commodity which can be bought or sold; nor is it a matter to be settled by arbitration or reached by mutual consent; nor can it be imposed on anyone by force. The genius provides an alternative perspective to that of the accepted schema, [11] dispenses with the clutter of mythology, false belief and jargon which obscure clear perception of the facts [12] and reaches that pinnacle of creation by building faith in his own beliefs about a phenomenon in which he is totally absorbed. The inventive genius deliberately isolates himself so that he can deal exclusively with a limited amount of information independently.

It is important to note the contribution of stupidity to genius [13]. For the creative person to achieve independence of thought, he must, to some degree, make himself oblivious of his surroundings, prevailing explanations and assumptions. One recipe for creative thinking is a peculiar blend of concentrated daydreaming and willful blindness [14]. The first step is to get the eyes out of focus so that disruptive external stimuli are reduced [15]. This reduced awareness of the environment gives imagination a chance to wander. Such was the mental state of nineteenth century architect John Root, as described by his partner Daniel Burnham: "He would grow abstract and silent. A faraway look would come into his eyes, and the building was there before him...." [16] When, in such a state, the mind can fix upon a new idea and concentration on it, its ramifications can then be carried to logical or even absurd extremes. If this brings one closer to the solution of a problem or opens new vistas for personal or cultural advancement, then the brief detachment was well worthwhile.

French author Honoré Balzac was a classic example of this: He was a genius at creating fictional worlds by isolating himself from reality for twelve hours a day. However, he was a failure when his grandiose, Kramdenesque schemes for glory, power and riches came to less than naught in his dealings with the factuality of the business world [17]. Likewise, Thomas Edison saw what he wanted to see and ignored most of the rest of his perceptual field: that is, he was focused independent of conventional wisdom [18] Edison, as an inventor, focused on practically useful items [19] in contrast to abstractive scientists like Ernest Rutherford—deducer of atomic structure—who in 1935 saw no practical application of nuclear physics [20]. In an institutional context, detachment is endemic as programs started to address a problem remain after the problem is resolved—an example being intelligence efforts set up during the Cold War to combat a Communist threat remaining after the threat, like the smile of the Cheshire cat, was gone [21]. Such programs are, at best, simply wasteful but by a posfeed mechanism, they take on an enduring if functionless life of their own.

As implied, there are different kinds of genius. The sensational form is the schema buster (like Beethoven or Ford) who breaks convention to redefine the world. Geniuses of this type are usually people of flair and great insight. By way of contrast, there is the conventional form of genius who really abides by the rules—the formal, stated standards—and makes them work. Louis Pasteur is an example of one who creatively applied the rigors of experimental investigation to unconventional assumptions. His results conclusively demonstrated basic principles of life and disease so convincingly that these replaced age-old myths with knowledge and understanding.

There are also different types of genius in another sense: those who work independently of people and those who get people to work for them. The first type is the artist/inventor; the second is the leader/messiah. The one frames a schema which more accurately reflects reality than that prevailing or creates an unforgettable character who embodies a near universal of the human condition, as does Cervantes' Don Quixote (psychosis) and Shakespeare's Hamlet (indecision) and Falstaff (obesity) [22]. The other offers his followers a schema which answers their needs and motivates them to live for the realization of their beliefs. Both Abraham Lincoln and Adolf Hitler were gifted in being able to articulate what many around them just felt. For whatever purpose such an ability is used, it must be recognized as a kind of genius.

It is hardly surprising that the decision to label a particular creative person a crackpot or genius is one of the more arbitrary judgments people make. In general, smart people may seem like crazy people to dumb people [23] and vice versa. Of course, since people usually use their own schema as the standard for evaluation, they tend to regard any deviation from expectation with a certain amount of humor or trepidation and interpret it irreverently.

The general rule is that a crackpot is someone who makes a concerted effort to find a new way to be stupid, whereas a genius is a crackpot who just happened to be right. Oliver Evans (1755-1819) personified the first type. Never heard of him? That is because he tried to invent the Stanley Steamer 100 years before Stanley [24]. [25] The second type can be represented by Gutenberg, Watt, Whitney, Bell, Edison and Gustave Whitehead—Who? The man who was the first to fly an airplane.

Notes

1. McMahon D. *Divine Fury*. Basic Books; New York (2013).
2. Pitkin W. "A Short Introduction to the History of Human Stupidity". Simon and Schuster; New York (1932): 367.
3. Newman, Jay. (Ed.) *Strange History*. Portable Press; San Diego, CA. 2016. 96.
4. *Ibid.* 222.
5. Nevins A and F Hill. 1954. *Ford: The Times, the Man, the Company*. Charles Scribner's Sons; New York.
6. The only exception might be Rogers Hornsby, who was for a while, interestingly enough, a playing manager. Even his lifetime won/lost record, however, was under .500. (By the way, the converse is also true: the great managers had been poor to mediocre players—Joe Torre perhaps except-ed.) On the general point, like Ford, James Watt felt he was out of his element when dealing with people and disliked doing so. (Dickinson. 79.) In the same vein, Henry Cavendish, Marie Curie and Albert Einstein all exhibited characteristics of Asperger's syndrom. (Kalb. 282.)
7. MacKinnon D. 1967. Assessing creative persons. *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 1, 291-304. Asperger, H. Undated quotation on p. 266 of Kalb.
8. Freedman L. *Strategy*. Oxford University Press; New York (2013).
9. Pitkin. *op. cit.* 368.
10. Holmes E. 1878. *The Life of Mozart, Including His Correspondence*. Chapman & Hall; London.
11. Cooper smith. *Op. cit.* 60.
12. Sabini J. Interview by T. Blass, Ph.D. Quoted in *The Man Who Shocked the World* by T. Blass, Ph.D. 2004. Basic Books; NY. 185 (1993).
13. Musil R. 1937. On Stupidity. In *Precision and Soul*. Edited by B. Pike and D. Luft University of Chicago Press; Chicago, IL. 1978. 275.
14. Levi P. *Survival in Auschwitz*. (Rosenbaum. *Explaining Hitler*. p. 265.)
15. Pope K and Singer J. The waking stream of consciousness. In *Human Consciousness and Its Transformations: A Psychological Perspective* edited by J. Davidson, E. Davidson and G. Schwartz. Plenum; New York. (1978).
16. Miller D. *City of the Century*. Simon & Schuster; New York (1996): 314-319.
17. Zweig S. *Balzac*. Viking; New York (1946): 238.
18. Josephson M. 1959. *Edison: A Biography*. New York. 1-33. Klein, M. 2008. *The Power Makers*. Bloomsbury Press; New York. 144.
19. At a glance, there seems to be a contradiction in Edison's make-up, in that, as a young man, he lost his job as a telegrapher for inattention and lack of discipline. (Josephson. 33-64.) He certainly was attentive and dedicated if not disciplined as an inventor, so the obvious explanation is that he was a devoted worker to his tasks—i.e., those jobs he selected and found interesting and perhaps profitable.
20. Roberts, J. 2003. *The New History of the World*. Oxford University Press; New York. 1013. See Chap. XVI for a bit on Rutherford.
21. Fullbright and Sen W. "We must not Fight Fire with Fire". *New York Times Magazine* (1967).
22. Bloom, H. *Genius*. Warner Books; NY (2002):18-40.
23. Hawking S. Quoted on p. 12 of *USMagazine.Com*. Dec. 8, 2014.
24. He had better luck with a steam powered mill for grinding grain, but, disgusted with the lack of protection afforded by the patent laws of the day, he eventually gave up inventing altogether. (Klein. 34-39)
25. Klein. *Op. cit.* 32.

Submit your next manuscript to Scientia Ricerca Open Access and benefit from:

- Prompt and fair double blinded peer review from experts
- Fast and efficient online submission
- Timely updates about your manuscript status
- Sharing Option: Social Networking Enabled
- Open access: articles available free online
- Global attainment for your research

Submit your manuscript at:

<https://scientiaricerca.com/submit-manuscript.php>