

Freedom's View

A Commentary on Government from Atop the Capitol

Vol. 1 "All the other alternative facts you need to know" No. 22



"The doctor sees all the weakness of mankind; the lawyer all the wickedness, the theologian all the stupidity."
~ Arthur Schopenhauer

Page 1

MAKING AMERICA GREAT AGAIN: BACK WARD NATION

Part I

Ah, if only we could go back in time: back to when it was "Morning in America." Mr. Trump promised to take us back there: he would make America great . . . *again*. No matter what you think about whether he is keeping that promise, you have to admit that he is certainly taking us back . . . back . . . backwards to 1969.

That is the year that *Monty Python*, in its first season, rolled out their iconic "Dead Parrot" sketch." In the sketch, John Cleese is a customer who returns to the pet shop that has just sold him a dead "Norwegian Blue" parrot.



Cleese registers his complaint with the owner, played by Michael Palin, who repeatedly denies the parrot is dead. Cleese offers evidence upon evidence in support of his complaint. To the mounting frustration of Cleese, one improbable denial, excuse and reinterpretation of the evidence follows another. After a deliberate *non-sequitur* (involving a British Rail agent) there's a visit to yet another pet shop for a replacement parrot. The actors then agree that

the whole sketch has become "too silly" to continue. With jarring improbability, the sketch concludes with the actors stepping, into yet another sketch where they are all costumed as Mounties and Lumberjacks who sing an outrageous, macho-spoofing song.¹

What made *Monty Python's Flying Circus* so appealing was that you could voluntarily tune-in and be entertained by people you knew were actors engaging in absurdist, mind-bending humor. It provided a half-hour of *very welcome laughter*, airing as it did in the midst of history's first televised war, the traumatizing Vietnam conflict.

The problem of course, is that Donald Trump has taken us *involuntarily* back into an absurd, mind-bending political freak show *indistinguishable* from the "Dead Parrot" sketch in its absurdity, contempt for facts, and chicanery. The President airs his cruel, soul-less, reality-denying, twittery nonsense in the midst of what is now an *even more dangerous and traumatizing* world, brought to us 24/7 courtesy of CNN.

Just as in the *Python's* sketch, many of us are concluding that Trump's sketchy act is "too silly"² to continue. Purveyors of a *bunch* of dead parrots, them.

¹ No description can do their inspired insanity justice. To view The Dead Parrot sketch go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vuW6tQ0218

² We wish to apologize to the word *silly* for using it instead of *atrocious, barbaric* or *rotten*.

Part II

Douglas Adams, author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, posed this scenario: "Imagine a puddle waking up one morning and thinking, "This is an interesting world I find myself in — an interesting hole I find myself in — fits me rather neatly, doesn't it? In fact, it fits me staggeringly well - must have been made to have me in it!" This is such a powerful idea that as the sun rises in the sky and the air heats up and as, gradually, the puddle gets smaller and smaller, it's still frantically hanging on to the notion that everything's going to be alright, because this world was meant to have him in it, was built to have him in it; so the moment he disappears catches him rather by surprise."

Whatever situation You find yourself in, the first advice of *The Guide* is always the same: "Don't Panic."



Trump is making America The Great Puddle and, as Friedrich Schiller wrote, "Against (such) stupidity the very gods themselves contend in vain." Yet contend we must. On the next page, we present some reflections on stupidity. Yes, we know *you will simply have to tolerate and read some sensible, informative material here, for a change*. We regret the inconvenience. So, practice it now:

Don't Panic!

STUPIDITY CONTINUED PAGE 2



MAKING AMERICA GREAT AGAIN: BACK WARD NATION

STUPIDITY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Part III

That some of Trump's actions (done and proposed) will be evil in their outcomes is fairly obvious. Less so is this wisdom from Louise Bogan, perhaps the 20th century's greatest woman poet: "Stupidity always accompanies evil. Or evil, stupidity."

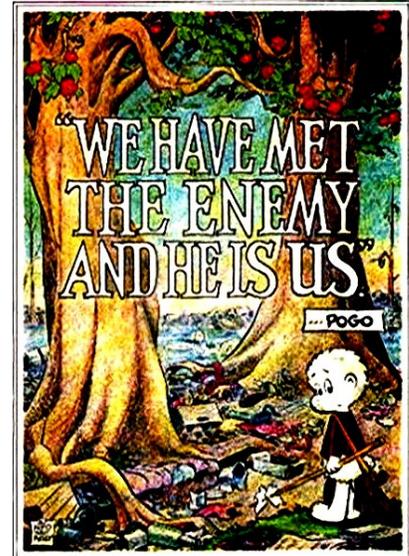
In the context of the evil that was overtaking Germany in the person of Adolph Hitler, theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about the meaning of stupidity. In a letter to his three friends and co-workers who plotted to assassinate Hitler, Bonhoeffer wrote:

"Stupidity is a more dangerous enemy of the good than malice. . . . Neither protests nor the use of force accomplish anything here; reasons fall on deaf ears; facts that contradict one's prejudgment simply need not be believed - in such moments the stupid person even becomes critical - and when facts are irrefutable they are just pushed aside as inconsequential, as incidental. In all this the stupid person, in contrast to the malicious one, is utterly self-satisfied and, being easily irritated, becomes dangerous by going on the attack. For that reason, greater caution is called for than with a malicious one. . . . If we want to know how to get the better of stupidity, we must seek to understand its nature. . . . *The impression one gains is not so much that stupidity is a congenital defect, but that, under certain circumstances, people are made stupid or that they allow this to happen to them. . . .*

He continued: "Upon closer observation, it becomes apparent that every strong upsurge of power in the public sphere, be it of a political or of a religious nature, infects a large part of humankind with stupidity. . . . The power of the one needs the stupidity of the other. The process at work here is not that particular human capacities, for instance, the intellect, suddenly atrophy or fail. Instead, it seems that *under the overwhelming impact of rising power, humans are deprived of their inner independence, and, more or less consciously, give up establishing an autonomous position toward the emerging circumstances. . . .* In conversation with (the stupid person), one virtually feels that one is dealing not at all with a person, but with slogans, catchwords and the like that have taken possession of him. *He is under a spell, blinded, misused, and abused in his very being. Having thus become a mindless tool, the stupid person will also be capable of any evil and at the same time incapable of seeing that it is evil.* This is where the danger of the diabolical misuse (of power) lurks, for it is this that can once and for all destroy human beings. . . . But these thoughts about stupidity also offer consolation in that they utterly forbid us to consider the majority of people to be stupid in every circumstance. *It really will depend on whether those in power expect more from peoples' stupidity than from their inner independence and wisdom.*"³

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'After Ten Years' in *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works/English, vol. 8) Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010. *Italics added.* For the complete article see link on Edition 22 page of www.FreedomsView.org.

Part IV



Fellow citizens, *this is the hard part*: Bonhoeffer's study concluded that what made Hitler's rise possible was the "stupidity" of too many German citizens. They had *allowed* stupidity to happen to them. His comments should not be read as being mainly about Trump: they are about us.

Mr. Trump's removal of the United States from international leadership on protecting the planet makes it fitting that we feature, above, the anti-pollution poster featuring Pogo that Walt Kelly drew for the very first Earth Day observance in 1970.

On so many similar issues of concern today, *stupidity makes us our own worst enemies*. This should alarm but not surprise us for, as the philosopher Frank Zappa sagely observed: "There is more stupidity than hydrogen in the universe, and it has a longer shelf life." With Trump (and Bannon) in the White House, protecting our freedom requires that we tend first to our own stupidity, and only then to that of others.

STUPIDITY CONTINUED PAGE 3



MAKING AMERICA GREAT AGAIN: BACK WARD NATION

STUPIDITY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Part V

But how to do that? How do we contend with stupidity? One thing is clear: we must not cavalierly write off those (including us?) who exhibit stupidity. While doubtlessly complicit in becoming stupid, according to Bonhoeffer people have, more or less consciously, *fallen under a spell*.

Stupidity is, I think, what enters the vacuum caused by an absence or loss of internalized convictions that serve to acquaint us with "*the better angels of our nature*." That is, when we no longer have within us something above us, we succumb to that which is around us.

Sadly, we have around us an administration that is, by turns, incompetent, authoritarian, cruel, and nationalistic to the point of institutionalizing narcissism. As it has risen to power, it has seduced many Americans who are ill-prepared to resist their well-articulated, siren-like songs that beckon them to come just a little bit closer to the dangerous, jagged rocks of their toxic worldview.



Not a surprise. Too many Americans, are inculcated with an inner philosophy hardly more sophisticated than an amalgam of unexamined Facebook rumors, Hollywood tropes, the dog-whistle sloganeering of politicians, and their testosterone-poisoned radio talk show acolytes.

No wonder the always acerbic H. L. Mencken once wrote: "Democracy is a pathetic belief in the collective

wisdom of individual ignorance."

Well. We can do better than that. We *must*. We can vociferously challenge and expose as dangerous the purveyors of such toxic doctrine: be they elected officials; talk show bloviators; or, most especially, those idolatrous, smooth-talking preachers of the Gimme, Gimme Gospel of Prosperity Through Positive Thinking that, weekly, idolatrously conflates God with capitalism and country.



Stupidity can best be addressed by preventing it in the first place. We must *more effectively* offer ideas to the American people, from early childhood onward, which will inspire them to "be all they can be."

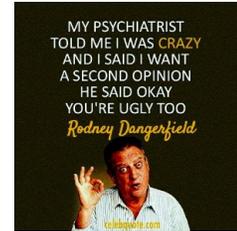
This will require teaching ideas that exult not only taking care of one's own needs, but thinking as well about the needs of others - sometimes even placing them above one's own. Unless such ideas take firm root once more, we will forever remain victims of those toxic but ego-massaging lies about getting something for nothing. "No new taxes!" will make us all complicit in the rape of planet earth and the economically disadvantaged.

Leave it to Frank Leahy, former football coach at Notre Dame to hold up the importance of such team values. "Egotism is the anesthetic that dulls the pain of stupidity."

It's time we face the fact that *if we care more* about, say, a 28% top tax bracket than we do about good,

equitable, universally affordable health care; or a sound infrastructure; or slowing the rate of carbon pollution -- *then how is it that our own narcissistic stupidity did not elect the most narcissistic president in our nation's history?*

Part VI



Virginia's Lt. Gov. Ralph Northam has made an interesting "diagnosis" of the President in his campaign ad to be Virginia's next Governor. Northam says he does a lot of listening as a physician. His ad concludes: "Now I'm listening carefully to Donald Trump, and I think he's a narcissistic maniac."

His making such a "medical" diagnosis (coupled with his own folksy language) has sparked controversy. So, on the next page, check out the diagnostic traits psychologists use to diagnose one as having a Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Decide for yourself if Northam is accurate about the President. *Use the list of narcissistic traits personally:* perhaps, as a gut-check for your own traits . . . or for seeing who you're often drawn to: romantically and/or politically.



MANIAC CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



MAKING AMERICA GREAT AGAIN: BACK WARD NATION

MANIAC CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

You might be a narcissist if . . .

Psychiatrists and psychologists look for these traits in diagnosing a person as having a Narcissistic Personality Disorder:

- Having an exaggerated sense of self-importance
- Expecting to be recognized as superior even without achievements that warrant it
- Exaggerating one's achievements and talents
- Being preoccupied with fantasies about success, power, brilliance, beauty or the perfect mate
- Belief that one is superior and can only be understood by or associate with equally special people
- Requiring constant admiration
- Having a sense of entitlement

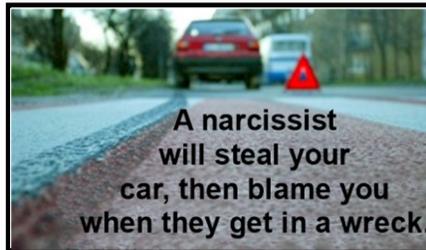
Expecting special favors and unquestioning compliance with one's expectations

- Taking advantage of others to get what one wants
- Having an inability or unwillingness to recognize the needs and feelings of others
- Being envious of others and believing one is the object of others' envy
- Behaving in an arrogant or haughty manner

People with such a disorder usually don't see their mindset as a problem: the world is out of step with *them!* Therefore, they see no reason for them to change, insisting instead that their critics are crazy. Although an unconscious sense of *inadequacy* usually underlies this disorder, such people usually cause *others* enormous pain and suffering.

PART VII

The Christian psychiatrist M. Scott Peck is best known for his book *The Road Less Travelled*. He also wrote a book on human evil called *People of the Lie* (Touchstone, 2nd edition, 1998). In it he identified extreme narcissists and sociopaths as those individuals who convincingly give the impression of being righteous and upstanding (the lie).



In fact, they are extremely manipulative and use others for their own incredibly self-involved ends. The they really don't care about anyone but themselves. Chilling, but worthwhile reading.

*Did you know that "narcissist" spelled backwards is "asshole"?
Hey, if they can make shit up, so can we.*

Before I say *adieu* and leave this locked back ward of America's stupid craziness, (I will have to go in search of something to improve my disposition), here are a few more thoughts - in visual form. In the meantime, be well my friends – and *stay away from stupidity!* ~ *Armed Freedom*



NON SEQUITUR BY WILEY



NON SEQUITUR © 2017 Wiley Ink, Inc.. Dist. By ANDREWS MCMEEL SYNDICATION. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

