

## **Errare Humanum Est...**

### **On Psychoanalysis as Morosophy**

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What does it mean for something or someone to be (called) stupid? Were this to be a stupid question, the answer would probably be glaringly self-evident, yet since the answer is everything but straightforward, the question may easily result in the designated replier feeling stupefied, dumbfounded and thus rather stupid, so that the very lack or deferral of a clear answer effectively provides the answer one was looking for all along. Since time out of mind, stupidity has been employed with reference to an existence *in defectu*—as the absence, loss, or omission of a certain cognitive, affective and/or conative quality, a level of functioning below a certain average, or a state of being that is inferior to an agreed standard of normality, in short a failure to be in possession of a capability that is considered to be ubiquitously present. Stupidity is what falls outside, and generally below the boundaries of common sense and what quite literally stands out as such, because it cannot be recuperated within them. What was once accepted as wise may subsequently become stupid when the paradigms of wisdom shift towards new empirical or discursive truths, and what was once regarded as stupid may turn out to be wise when epistemic conditions, intellectual matrices, belief

systems and power balances shift. Even though it was universally accepted for centuries as an undisputed fact, and continued to be enforced in the face of scientific evidence appearing to prove the contrary, the Ptolemaic geocentric perspective on the heavenly spheres has now been relegated to the dustbin of human stupidities.<sup>1</sup> Whereas persistent, seemingly excessive hand-washing was once perceived as distinctly stupid and possibly symptomatic of an underlying mental health condition, in times of a global, devastating pandemic, it might turn out to be one of the wisest things human beings can do in order to protect themselves and others against sickness and disease.

Maybe in order to avoid coming across as totally stupid, many clever people have of course examined this peculiar 'defective existence' more closely, generating more detailed descriptions and more careful distinctions, which has often resulted in fairly sophisticated theories of stupidity. When I was an undergraduate student during the mid-1980s, an eminent Professor of Psychiatry explained to us that, when it occurs in human beings, stupidity is not a uniform, monolithic condition, but a multi-faceted state, with a rich, complex and diversified phenomenology. In sum, he posited that there is a well-established hierarchy of human stupidity—also known as 'mental retardation'—and that scientists had identified no less than four different types of stupidity, which are qualitatively similar yet quantitatively different in terms of their positioning on the intelligence scale. At the very bottom of the hierarchy, then, there is a state called 'idiocy', which is synonymous with profound mental retardation. All idiots allegedly have an intelligence quotient (IQ) below twenty. On the next level of the hierarchy we find those who are slightly less stupid than the idiots and who generally have an IQ between twenty and fifty. These types of stupid people still suffer from severe mental retardation and are classified as imbeciles. The next bracket, which includes those human beings with a moderate mental retardation, represents IQ-scores between fifty-

one and seventy, and is commonly referred to as the category of the morons. Finally, the least stupid of all the stupid people are those with an IQ between seventy and (the normal, average score of) one hundred. In their case, there is only evidence of a mild mental retardation, which is also designated as debility. I do not recall any one of us questioning, let alone protesting against this classification and nomenclature, perhaps because we were only university students and therefore undoubtedly intelligent yet also still deeply ignorant, but more importantly because the Professor's distinctions and the associated terminology had effectively been adapted from the ninth edition of the *International Classification of Diseases (ICD-9)*, which had been published by the World Health Organisation in 1979.<sup>2</sup> It struck me, and maybe it struck other students too, that one should not argue with the scientific results of years of research conducted under the aegis of the world's most authoritative governing body on health and disease, at the risk of being perceived as being utterly stupid.

Many years later, I discovered to my surprise that the 'scientific' names given to the four different categories of human stupidity actually have a very long history and were, with one exception, originally not in common usage at all as descriptors of 'mental retardation', but rather as more generic terms for a condition or occurrence of frailty, defect or impairment. For example, in his moral essay *De Constantia Sapientis*, the first century Roman Stoic philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca asserted that the wise man may occasionally be burdened by "bodily pain and infirmity [*dolor corporis et debilitas*]", but that he is never overthrown by these events (*si non pervertunt*).<sup>3</sup> When, in one of his *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, Seneca addressed the nature and source of human courage, he described the virtue as "the impregnable fortification for human weakness [*Munimentum humanae imbecillitas inexpugnabile*]"<sup>4</sup> Both in ancient and in modern Greek, the word ιδιώτης primarily refers to an individual with no official title, someone who is not involved in public affairs, or merely

acts in a personal capacity. In a similar vein, ιδιωτικός connotes privacy and could be used for someone who mainly keeps himself to himself. Only in a secondary sense was the meaning of ιδιώτης and ιδιωτικός extrapolated to include people whose profound lack of social engagement must indicate a certain degree of foolishness and stupidity. It is in this, auxiliary sense that the word appears, *bis repetita placent*, in the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, where it is generally translated into English as ‘unlearned’. For instance, in *1 Corinthians 14:16*, Paul proclaims: “ἐπεὶ ἐὰν εὐλογῆς πνεύματι, ὁ ἀναπληρῶν τὸν τόπον τοῦ ιδιώτου πῶς ἔρεῖ τὸ Ἀμήν ἐπὶ τῇ σῆ εὐχαριστίᾳ; ἐπειδὴ τί λέγεις οὐκ οἶδεν.” In the King James version of *The Bible*, the phrase is translated as: “Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned [τόπον τοῦ ιδιώτου] say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?”<sup>5</sup> The only word in the twentieth century taxonomy of human stupidity that was originally reserved for foolishness, stupidity, sluggishness and placidity is μωρός, which also resonates with the Sanskrit मूर् (muura), indicating the (human) characteristic of being dull, slow and dumb. This word appears in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians as well, in one of the most influential and controversial Christian axioms of all time. In *1 Corinthians 4:10*, Paul describes himself and his fellow workers as μωροὶ διὰ Χριστόν, which the King James Bible renders as “fools for Christ’s sake”, but which could perhaps be translated more accurately as ‘fools through Christ’, ‘fools by means of Christ’, or even ‘fools via Christ’s example’.<sup>6</sup> Paul’s point is not that true Christians should be self-deprecating in honour of Christ’s sanctity, but that Christ’s earthly existence of persistent marginalisation and humiliation accords spiritual value to foolishness and that the only true Christians are those who follow Christ’s example.<sup>7</sup>

The specific, variegated terminology associated with (human) stupidity is thus of a relatively recent coinage and the same holds for the terms’ connotations as diagnoses of

(human) reason and intelligence. However, it goes without saying that these classifications are purely descriptive and do not provide any indication as to how some members of the human species may have ended up being as stupid as they are, and even less whether stupid people could be treated and cured. Yet here too, some of the world's cleverest individuals have sometimes tried to come to the rescue. In 2003, the American molecular biologist James D. Watson, then President of the world-renowned Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory and co-discoverer, with Francis Crick, of the double helix structure of DNA, argued that stupidity is really a genetic (and therefore inherited) disease, for which bespoke screening programmes should be developed and rolled out, and which may eventually be cured with biotechnological tools.<sup>8</sup> For all I know, nobody went so far as to suggest that an incontestable genius is clearly also capable of committing stupidities, but Watson's statements on the matter elicited a violent backlash and eventually led to Cold Spring Harbor severing all ties with him in January 2019.<sup>9</sup> Although Watson's proposition of a possible genetic basis for stupidity in a sense only extended materialistic hypotheses that have become a staple of contemporary (biological) psychiatry, the mere suggestion that stupidity might run in families and that people might one day be cured of it through gene therapy was evidently a hypothesis too far.

Perhaps the key issue is not that we should avoid trying to identify the cause(s) of (human) stupidity, but that stupidity, as a measure of intelligence, is an extremely unstable category, so much so that a demonstrably stupid creature may very well be capable of the highest achievements and that the paragon of genius is by no means immune to intermittent bouts of stupidity. The first paradox was an important feature of Renaissance thought, in which it was most often epitomised by the trope of the donkey, as the quintessentially stubborn, stupid, servile and lowly animal. In this respect, the German Renaissance polymath

Cornelius Agrippa declared, in the final chapter of his 1526 treatise *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum*, that “there is no other animal than the ass which is so capable of divinity [nullum animal tam esse divinitatis capax, quam asinum]” and that “nobody who has not first looked into an ass can ever be a philosopher [ni primus è philosopho versus fuisset in asinum].”<sup>10</sup> The extraordinary value of asininity, as the unique vehicle of divine revelation, was extolled along similar lines, yet even more strongly by Giordano Bruno, in his 1585 dialogues *The Cabala of Pegasus*, in which it is argued that “the ass or asininity is the symbol of wisdom”, so that the best human beings can hope for is that God proves willing to grant them this amazing privilege: “Pray, pray to God, O dear friends, if you are not yet asses that he make you become asses.”<sup>11</sup> Drawing on the elucubrations of another important Renaissance figure, the superbly christened Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, who was more commonly known as Paracelsus, Carl Gustav Jung subsequently averred: “Stupidity is the mother of the wise, but cleverness never.”<sup>12</sup> The latter point amplifies the second paradox mentioned above: being knowledgeable does not preclude profound stupidity, and self-identified or assigned genius may very well be directly proportional to relentless (accidental, unintended) flashes of it. The Austrian writer Robert Musil termed this condition ‘intelligent stupidity’ and James Watson’s aforementioned views on the biological basis of stupidity would constitute an excellent instance of its occurrence.<sup>13</sup> Although it must have been known for centuries, Musil also offers the best description of it, in two lectures delivered before the ‘Austrian Werkbund’ in March 1937: “[I]ntelligent stupidity is what participates in the agitation of intellectual life, especially in its inconstancy and lack of results . . . The stupidity this addresses is no mental illness, yet it is most lethal; a dangerous disease of the mind that endangers life itself.”<sup>14</sup>

At the beginning of his lecture, Musil very wisely conceded that he did not know what stupidity is, but he also admitted that he could not think of an “investigation that has taken stupidity as its subject.”<sup>15</sup> Given his immersion in Viennese culture and his scholarly interests, it is a strange observation, because Musil would have been perfectly placed to appreciate the significance of the first, and in many ways the only discipline that had taken (intelligent) stupidity seriously until then—so seriously that it had advanced a revolutionary explanation for its multifarious occurrences and even articulated the foundational principles for its treatment. Maybe Musil’s own ambivalence vis-à-vis some of the central tenets of this discipline prevented him from properly acknowledging its contributions.<sup>16</sup> In any case, he failed to ascertain what another Viennese citizen had so carefully laid out in his innovative account of the seemingly limitless scope of human (intelligent) stupidity. The man was called Sigmund Freud and he had endowed his theory and treatment of stupidity with the name psychoanalysis. Indeed, I wish to argue here that psychoanalysis was born through and developed alongside consecutive encounters with human stupidity and that, whatever else he may have been, Sigmund Freud was also the world’s first Professor of Stupidity. I would even go so far as to say that psychoanalysis constitutes a genuine ‘morosophy’, i.e. a wisdom of stupidity, which is not only represented at the level of its theoretical understanding of the human mind, but more dramatically in its clinical *modus operandi*, where it features on two distinct levels: the analytic act and the direction of the analytic treatment.<sup>17</sup>

At the risk of invalidating an argument before it has even been properly formulated, I should immediately concede that psychoanalysts have contributed relatively little to our understanding of stupidity if the latter term is confined to what would currently be designated as ‘learning difficulties’. In 1909, the German psychiatrist and neuropathologist Leopold Löwenfeld published the only, psychoanalytically informed monograph on the issue, which

hardly received any attention from Freud and his circle of followers.<sup>18</sup> During the mid-1890s, Freud and Löwenfeld had clashed over the nosology of anxiety neurosis, which had resulted in the two men becoming friends, Freud writing a précis of *The Interpretation of Dreams* for a book series edited by Löwenfeld, and him also contributing two papers at Löwenfeld's request to a comprehensive volume on obsessional neurosis and a collection on the influence of sexuality on nervous disorders.<sup>19</sup> Apparently, Löwenfeld did not think that Freud would have anything valuable to say on stupidity, or Freud himself declined the offer. During the 1920s and 30s, the only psychoanalytic studies of what was also referred to as 'mental deficiency' and 'feeble-mindedness' were by the American psychiatrist L. Pierce Clark and the German physician Karl Landauer.<sup>20</sup> I think it is fair to say that none of these papers stand out for their originality, or the brilliance of the ideas that are exposed therein. Perhaps the only contribution of note to the study of stupidity *qua* 'learning difficulty' that psychoanalysts made during those years concerns the identification and explanation of what was alternatively termed 'pseudo-debility' and the 'flight into stupidity'.<sup>21</sup> This peculiar condition was included by Otto Fenichel in his seminal 1945 treatise *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*, as "people [who] become stupid *ad hoc*, that is, when they do not want to understand, where understanding would cause anxiety or guilt feeling, or would endanger an existing neurotic equilibrium."<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere in his book, Fenichel may have also captured the main reason as to why psychoanalysts were never particularly forthcoming in their approach to stupidity: "Since analysis consists of making the ego face its conflicts, cases in which the capacity to do so is lacking cannot be analyzed. Feeble-mindedness is a contraindication [to analysis]."<sup>23</sup>

However, if stupidity is not reduced to the clinical spectrum of 'learning difficulties' and extended to encompass the intentional or inadvertent enactment of an uncommon



thought process, the unexpected occurrence of a bodily or psychic event that defies epistemic conventions, the seemingly inexplicable eruption of a matter that challenges common sense, the theory and practice of psychoanalysis would not exist without it. More concretely, psychoanalysis would not have come into being had it not been for someone called Sigmund Freud refusing to dismiss these stupidities as meaningless imperfections of the human mind, or insignificant corollaries of the human mind playing tricks on itself. As I shall show, Freud also came to realise that relieving the human condition of the most disruptive and painful of these stupidities required something else than the profession of knowledge. Utterly stupid as it may have seemed, including to himself, Freud was gradually forced to admit that ignorance is a better treatment for stupidity than any kind of expert reliance on established wisdom. Finally, with a little help from Jacques Lacan, it can even be argued that the overall purpose of treating stupidities psychoanalytically with ignorance is not to replace them with better, more rational or more realistic knowledge, but to render the epistemic background against which they appear stupid too. In other words, the very acknowledgement of knowledge as intrinsically littered with stupidities is deemed more analytically productive than any attempt at exorcising stupidity by expanding the realm of conscious cognition.

Trained in neurology, Freud witnessed stupidity first hand when he started attending the lectures and demonstrations of Jean-Martin Charcot in Paris during the Autumn of 1885, where he saw to his astonishment how hysterical men and women displayed symptoms that could not possibly be accounted for with the physiological and neuropathological theories of his day.<sup>24</sup> As he wrote in his obituary of the great French clinician, Freud learnt there the importance of carefully scrutinizing those clinical phenomena that do not fit into the established conceptual paradigms and steering away from uncritically reinforcing existing models of medical knowledge.<sup>25</sup> Confronted with the baffling clinical picture of one of

Charcot's patients, Freud objected by saying: "But that can't be true . . . it contradicts the Young-Helmholtz theory."<sup>26</sup> It would have been an entirely reasonable comment to make, if only because what Freud observed was probably indeed incompatible with the theory in question, yet Charcot allegedly responded with a sentence that stayed with Freud for the rest of his life: "*La théorie, c'est bon, mais ça n'empêche pas d'exister*" (Theory is fine, but it doesn't preclude certain things from existing).<sup>27</sup> Stupidity already manifested itself at two different levels here. First, there was a whole range of bodily and psychic symptoms that simply did not make sense in terms of what was known about the operational mechanisms of the human body. And to add insult to injury, these nonsensical ailments were sufficiently debilitating for patients to be admitted to hospitals, where their clinical nonsensicality had been substantiated and existing therapeutic methods had been stretched to breaking point. One could certainly have been forgiven for thinking that the patients presenting with these symptoms were ingenious malingerers who had somehow succeeded in persuading the medical establishment that there was something seriously wrong with them, merely in order to escape the drudgery of everyday life. However, Charcot taught Freud that these bizarre conditions deserved to be taken seriously and that their scrupulous examination might generate new explanatory hypotheses on their source and origin.<sup>28</sup> Second, there was the ever-present temptation to hold on to what was already known, to reaffirm the validity of epistemic frameworks, taxonomies, diagnostic systems and causal connections, even though the clinical observations seemed to point in a different direction. There was always the inclination to ignore the exceptions in favour of the preservation of the rule, or to reduce the exceptionality of the clinical picture in such a way that the rule could still apply. In this respect, Charcot suggested that consolidating a body of knowledge in the face of empirical contradictions was as nonsensical as the appearance of the contradictions themselves.

More importantly though, hysteria was not just a stupidity because it undermined the very foundations of human physiology. Hysterical patients also purported to demonstrate that the human mind can be responsible for precipitating and perpetuating all kinds of (sometimes literally) crippling physical symptoms. We all know that the human body seems to have a mind of its own and that it can 'malfunction' to the point where its inhabitant is afflicted with a multitude of life-limiting and life-threatening diseases whose precise cause remains completely unknown. But why would anyone who is right in their mind make themselves ill? How can we explain that there is no objectifiable reason for some disorders at all, the only remaining option being that the ailment and the associated suffering must be psychological or psychosomatic?<sup>29</sup> How can a distinctly healthy body become dysfunctional for no other reason than the person's own state of mind? How stupid must one be to allow this to happen?

Within the space of this essay, I cannot reconstruct in full how, during the 1890s, Freud crucially relied on his experiences in Paris for developing the theory and practice of psychoanalysis, which was as much an innovative clinical approach to the neurotic stupidities of the human mind as it was an account of the limitless expressions of human self-deceit. But before long, various other stupidities became the focus of Freud's attention—dreams, slips of the tongue, bungled actions and (stupid) jokes.<sup>30</sup> To many a contemporary scientist, these formations of the human mind are still as nonsensical and meaningless as they were to most of Freud's colleagues, yet Freud himself believed otherwise. Much like he had done with the puzzling symptoms of hysteria, he took them seriously, granted them meaning, attempted to explain them as manifestations of the unconscious, and endeavoured to treat their disruptive occurrence with the technical tools of psychoanalysis. With the birth of psychoanalysis, these strange phenomena gradually became less stupid, more acceptable, less illogical, more

common, less irrational, more normal. Freud never went so far as to claim that he had invented a technique to relieve the human mind of these stupidities for once and for all—as if anyone would even want to stop dreaming altogether—but that he had at least come up with a solid explanation for their emergence and an effective treatment for their most troubling varieties.<sup>31</sup>

At this point, the reader may accuse me of colonising the Freudian text with my own lexicon, injecting stupidity into the psychoanalytic vocabulary in those places where what is at stake is effectively something else—repressed knowledge, unconscious representations, or the return of the repressed—with a view to substantiating a thesis (psychoanalysis as morosophy) that is highly questionable at best and arguably stupid at worst. And indeed, I would have to admit that, for all their ostensible nonsensicality, Freud himself never explicitly referred to the formations of the unconscious that constitute the subject matter of his early psychoanalytic works as stupidities. But look, in January 1908, there came a five-year-old boy called Herbert Graf, whose father Max was a loyal participant in Freud’s Wednesday seminars and whose mother Olga Hönig had been in analysis with Freud in 1897.<sup>32</sup> Freud had known “this delightful little boy”, whom he dubbed Little Hans, for quite some time and he had already mentioned his sexual developments in two previous papers.<sup>33</sup> Now he was consulted by the boy’s father, because the child had recently developed a phobia for horses, more specifically a fear that he would be bitten by a horse in the street.<sup>34</sup> For a period of five months, Freud conducted his analysis of the boy’s phobia almost exclusively by proxy, the boy’s father acting as his clinical intermediary. Over the years, much has been written about this case-study, but there is one aspect of Freud’s interventions that has been almost completely overlooked and which is both relevant for my argument and instructive as regards the direction of the psychoanalytic treatment.<sup>35</sup> Relatively early on in the father’s vicarious

analysis of his son, Freud intervened in a way that would prove highly momentous: “I arranged with Hans’s father that he should tell the boy that all this business about horses was a piece of nonsense and nothing more [*das mit den Pferden sei eine Dummheit, weiter nichts*].”<sup>36</sup> Freud did not provide a rationale for his intervention, which comes across as rather trivial, yet after Hans’s father dutifully executed Freud’s orders the young boy readily adopted ‘*die Dummheit*’ (the stupidity) as a name for his fear.<sup>37</sup> When Max Graf suggested to his son that they consult with Freud in person, the eminent clinician was even presented as the Professor who can take the *Dummheit* away, and the entire subsequent analytic process could be seen as a treatment of Hans’s stupidity.

I would venture the hypothesis, here, that Freud knew very well that, in rebranding Little Hans’s phobia as a stupidity, the name would strike a chord in the young boy’s mind. Realistically speaking, Hans’s phobia was of course a stupidity, because he would not have had any good ‘objective’ reason to be afraid of horses (biting him). As an irrational fear, the phobia was not conditioned by any known organic, anatomical lesion or physiological imbalance, and so from a strictly medical perspective too it could only be interpreted as a developmental anomaly. Furthermore, the young boy was sufficiently clever to realise that his phobia was senseless and illogical. In other words, he would have had the ‘presence of mind’ to acknowledge that his fear of (being bitten by) horses was totally absurd, much like most patients presenting with ‘hysterical’ or obsessional symptoms are quite willing to accept that their pathology really does not make sense.<sup>38</sup> Hence, in calling the phobia a stupidity Freud merely rendered explicit what would have been already obvious to everyone, including to Little Hans himself. However, in designating the boy’s fear as stupid and hoping that he would embrace the word as a new name for his problem, he also endowed it with a new meaning and indirectly appealed to Little Hans’s own knowledge and self-image. It is as if

Freud whispered into his ears that clever young boys may have phobias, but that they should not allow themselves to perform stupidities, let alone to be stupid. In translating the phobia into a stupidity, it would not only have been easier for Little Hans to acknowledge, position and relate to his fear, but also to start investigating why and how a clever boy like him could have contracted this stupidity in the first place, and how he could possibly get rid of it.<sup>39</sup> Maybe it sounds a bit stupid to call a phobia a stupidity, but I think the effect was much more beneficial than anything that could have been achieved by calling it an equinophobia or a hippodaknophobia.

In 1908, when he was called upon as the eminent Professor of Stupidity, Freud very much adopted the position of a wise (old) man and did not hesitate to verbalise his precious wisdom to his young patient, much as he had done in the case of the Rat Man, whose obsessional neurosis he was trying to alleviate during the same period.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, it slowly dawned upon him that explaining to patients the repressed unconscious motives behind their stupidities, professing (psychoanalytic) knowledge, sharing expertise, offering 'intellectualist' interpretations and rendering representations conscious by articulating them for the patient rarely generates (immediate) effects. In some cases patients' symptoms even exacerbate as a result. For example, during his analysis of the 'Wolf Man', Freud noticed that "he [the 'Wolf Man'] showed a habit of producing transitory 'negative reactions'; every time something had been conclusively cleared up, he attempted to contradict the effect for a short while by an aggravation of the symptom which had been cleared up."<sup>41</sup> At the end of his technical paper 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through', which was written during the time of the Wolf Man's analysis, Freud argued that "giving the [patient's] resistance a name could not result in its immediate cessation."<sup>42</sup> For the resistance to dissolve, he continued, the patient needs to engage in a process of 'working-through' (*durcharbeiten*),

which requires time and which may test the analyst's patience. The problem was that Freud could not really explain what exactly this 'working-through' entails and whether it could have been facilitated, or even expedited without the analyst's active intervention of naming the resistance. The patients' adverse reactions to the analyst's knowledge continued to bother Freud, even after he had revised his general outlook on the structure of the human mind with the introduction of the second topography (the distinction between the Ego, the Id and the Superego) in 1923. In the very same essay in which he first presented this distinction, he wrote: "There are certain people who behave in a quite peculiar fashion during the work of analysis. When one speaks hopefully to them or expresses satisfaction with the progress of the treatment, they show signs of discontent and their condition invariably becomes worse."<sup>43</sup> In a subsequent paper, he ascribed these paradoxical effects to the patients' unconscious sense of guilt and designated them as 'negative therapeutic reactions', yet the unconscious motive would not disappear as a result of the analyst's explanations of it: "Patients do not easily believe us when we tell them about the unconscious sense of guilt."<sup>44</sup> More annoyingly, over and above some patients' unconscious sense of guilt there was also a more generic 'refusal to know' at work, which not only extends the duration of the analytic treatment, but curbs the overall clinical impact of the analyst's knowledge. Towards the end of a long psychoanalytic career, Freud stated in 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable': "We tell the patient about possibilities of other instinctual conflicts, and we arouse his expectation that such conflicts may occur in him. What we hope is that this information and this warning will have the effect of activating in him one of the conflicts we have indicated, in a modest degree and yet sufficient for treatment. But this time experience speaks with no uncertain voice. The expected result does not come about. The patient hears our message, but there is

no response. He may think to himself: 'This is very interesting, but I feel no trace of it.' We have increased his knowledge, but altered nothing else in him."<sup>45</sup>

Apart from the fact that the analyst's professed knowledge of the patient's condition is not nearly as therapeutically effective as might be expected, and could even elicit an exacerbation of stupidity, there is at least one other reason as to why analysts must guard themselves against relying on their knowledge as a clinical tool. The principle follows directly from Charcot's *bon mot* that even the finest of theories never prevents certain things from existing and that it would therefore be foolish to hold on to a theoretical proposition if a clinical reality seems to prove the contrary. Knowledge should not make one blind to divergent empirical observations and alternative perspectives. Indeed, there is no reason why the patient's 'refusal to know' or 'not wanting to know' would not obtain equally for the clinician, even if the latter is not struggling to overcome disturbing unconscious conflicts. Despite his admiration for Charcot, Freud himself sometimes displayed symptoms of this type of stupidity, especially when it came to defending the universality of conceptual cornerstones such as the Oedipus complex, yet sometimes also with regard to postulates and ideas of which he knew very well that they were entirely speculative.<sup>46</sup>

Clinically, however, Freud insisted that psychoanalytic technique should never become entrenched into a rigid set of rules, that patients should never be reduced to clinical instances of an established type of condition, and that each and every psychoanalytic treatment process should also present the clinician with an opportunity to acquire new knowledge. The first of these guidelines was formulated in the 1913 technical paper 'On Beginning the Treatment', in which Freud suggested that the "extraordinary diversity of the [patients'] psychical constellations. . . , the plasticity of all mental processes and the wealth of determining factors oppose any mechanization of the [psychoanalytic] technique."<sup>47</sup> A



psychoanalytic treatment, he maintained, is like playing chess: the opening moves and the endgame may be exhaustively described in clear, concrete strategies, but the “infinite variety of moves” during the central part of the game far exceeds the boundaries of a generic rulebook.<sup>48</sup> The second guideline is implied in another technical paper from the same period, in which Freud divulged that the “most successful cases are those in which one proceeds, as it were, without any purpose in view, allows oneself to be taken by surprise by a new turn in them, and always meets them with an open mind, free from any presuppositions.”<sup>49</sup> “[W]e ought not to cut ourselves from the possibility of testing what we have already learnt,” Freud continued, “and of extending our knowledge further.”<sup>50</sup> The third guideline is an extension of the previous one and appeared most poignantly in Freud’s 1927 postscript to ‘The Question of Lay Analysis’. After having proclaimed, rather duplicitously, that psychoanalytic knowledge had invariably resulted in therapeutic success, Freud went on to say: “It was impossible to treat a patient without learning something new; it was impossible to gain fresh insight without perceiving its beneficent results. Our analytic procedure is the only one in which this precious conjunction [between cure and research] is assured.”<sup>51</sup> In sum, however knowledgeable psychoanalysts may have become on account of their theoretical instruction and clinical experience, when treating patients they should continuously guard themselves against becoming teachers and instead see themselves as lifelong learners. Taken together, patients’ negative therapeutic reactions to the analyst’s knowledge, their obstinate refusal to know, and the analysts’ own duty and responsibility to suspend their acquired knowledge so that they can be surprised by the provocations and challenges of a new clinical encounter can only lead to one conclusion. Rather than supplanting the patients’ stupidities with their own wisdom, it is considerably better for psychoanalysts to play dumb or, better still, to accept

their own dumbness. The Professor of Stupidity must also allow himself to be a stupid professor.

From the early 1950s, Lacan formalised the analyst's 'dumb' position in the treatment under the aegis of what he termed—with a little nod to the Indian Buddhist tradition of the *Dharmadhātustava*—'the passion of ignorance'.<sup>52</sup> Contrary to what this notion may invoke, it should not be interpreted as an injunction for psychoanalysts to actively steer away from all sources of knowledge and to regard all theoretical schooling as superfluous, but rather as a professional commitment to acknowledging the intrinsic fractures of knowledge, the inherent stupidity of all forms of (doctrinal) knowing, and a concurrent appreciation for the (clinical) value of not-knowing. Even though Lacan's outlook on the conceptualisation of the analytic position changed dramatically over the years, he never compromised on the axiom of the psychoanalyst as one of the most advanced figurations of nonknowledge. At the very end of his first public seminar, he described the analyst's position in this respect as an *ignorantia docta*, a wise or learned ignorance, a conscious knowledge of the partiality of all knowledge, an acknowledgement that some things exist—despite, Charcot would have said, all the fine theories we have at our disposal—without these things being already known and perhaps also without them ever being fully knowable.<sup>53</sup> The analyst's knowledge, Lacan asserted elsewhere, is but "the symptom of his own ignorance" and this pathological manifestation of 'intelligent stupidity'—my term rather than Lacan's, here—can only be transformed into something valuable if the analyst is prepared to embrace the passion of ignorance, which "must give meaning to all of analytic training."<sup>54</sup> Lacan therefore also emphasized that it befalls those responsible for the transmission of psychoanalytic knowledge in vocational training programmes to ensure that analytic trainees are taught accordingly: "The positive fruit of the revelation of ignorance is nonknowledge [*non-savoir*], which is not a negation of

knowledge but rather its most elaborate form. The candidate's training cannot be completed without some action on the part of the master or masters who train him in this nonknowledge—failing which he will never be more than a robotic [read: an 'intelligently stupid'] analyst."<sup>55</sup> When, during the 1969-'70 academic year, Lacan introduced the discourse of the analyst as a unique social bond that is based on a distinct interconnection between four places and four functions—as opposed to the customary understanding of the 'analytic situation' as a dual relation between two people (the clinician and the patient)—he characterised the function of the analyst's knowledge (represented as  $S_2$ ) as operating in the place of truth.<sup>56</sup> This is the only location from which it can be heard and employed as stupid, because the truth can only ever be approximated, never fully relayed in words without something of its truthfulness getting lost. For Lacan, it was another way of saying that, in order to preserve their position as psychoanalysts, clinicians must not think that their knowledge will ever be complete and act as if it is. Instead, they must approach their knowledge *qua* truth, accept that it will never be more than a fundamentally fractured body of ideas—in short, render it stupid.

So far, I have outlined two reasons as to why the theory and practice of psychoanalysis encapsulate a morosophy: psychoanalysis takes human stupidity as its main object of study (research and treatment)—all the more so as it attributes the stupid expressions of the human mind to repressed, unconscious motives—and in presenting a suitable treatment option for these stupidities it effectively requires clinicians to keep their knowledge in a perennial state of failure.<sup>57</sup> To some, these two reasons may already suffice, yet I believe that, in psychoanalysis, there is a third pillar of stupidity at work, which clearly sets it apart from other (psycho)therapeutic modalities and which should seal the fate of Freud's brainchild as a morosophic creature for once and for all. Indeed, one might argue that psychoanalysis may

very well have been (one of) the first discipline(s) to take human stupidity seriously, but that, in the endlessly proliferating therapy industry, it is by no means the only discourse in which stupidities have been recognised and given pride of place, and that a decent number of therapists out there may occasionally also enjoy playing dumb, irrespective of their professional denominations.<sup>58</sup> If we accept that these arguments are not totally stupid, then the two aforementioned reasons will probably be necessary, but evidently insufficient. The third reason, however, should take away any lingering doubt that psychoanalysis constitutes the one and only, genuine morosophy. Because unlike any other treatment paradigm it does not only aim *at* stupidity, but also *for* stupidity. Whereas the mainstream cognitive-behavioural therapist would try hard to exchange the client's cognitive distortions for better (more rational, more realistic, more acceptable and more 'intelligent') patterns of thought, the psychoanalyst would endeavour to accomplish exactly the opposite: turn the patient's epistemic narratives, against which the formations of the unconscious emerge as (painful, disruptive or even debilitating) stupidities, into a more stupid symbolic network of thoughts and representations.

I do not expect every reader (or indeed every psychoanalyst) to agree with me, yet the rationale for the psychoanalytic focus on stupidity as a clinical aim is exceedingly simple. Knowledge does not preclude the eruption of stupidities and even the knowledge of stupidity cannot protect anyone against committing stupidities.<sup>59</sup> To be clear: the knowledge that generates stupidity is not inherently flawed, illogical or inadequate. If anything, it might be ubiquitously acknowledged as a staple of robust, solid knowledge. After all, it is precisely because knowledgeable people continue to commit lots of stupidities that Musil invented the category of 'intelligent stupidity'. But if knowledge does not protect against stupidity, and excellent knowledge might even be directly proportional to excessive stupidity, how could

anyone conclude that the latter could be reduced if the power of the former is progressively increased?

This is the question Lacan asked, albeit implicitly, in his 1972-'73 seminar *Encore*. Introducing François Recanati, a young French philosophy student, as the guest speaker on 12 December 1972, Lacan rekindled his formula of the analyst's discourse, in order to wonder aloud what this discourse might produce on the side of the subject, i.e. for the patient who enters the social bond as an analysand.<sup>60</sup> "[T]here is a status to be granted," he posited, "to this new discourse [the analyst's discourse] and to its approach to stupidity [*la bêtise*]. Surely it comes closer, since in other discourses stupidity is what one flees . . . Where, in analytic discourse, is the sublimity of stupidity?"<sup>61</sup> As so often, Lacan did not provide an answer to his own question, yet the formula of the analyst's discourse he had constructed three years earlier indicates unambiguously what Lacan was alluding to: the fact that in the analyst's discourse the place of the (discursive) product is occupied by a master signifier ( $S_1$ ).<sup>62</sup> What does it mean, then, for the discourse of the analyst to result in the product of a master signifier? How are we to understand the function of a master signifier in the place of the discursive product? Counter-intuitively, Lacan was not suggesting, here, that the prolonged process of a psychoanalytic treatment crystallises, on the side of the analysand, into the conscious appearance of the ultimate thought, the cardinal word-representation, or the central sound image (signifier) that may be held responsible for all the stupidities that led the patient to start the process in the first place, even less that this 'entering into consciousness' of the master key would unlock the mystery of all the patient's trials and tribulations. If anything, he was insinuating that it was exactly the opposite. Like all human stupidities, the patient's symptoms are conditioned by an intricate symbolic network of representations (signifiers), a firmly established body of (repressed, unconscious) knowledge ( $S_2$ ), which is

controlled by a master signifier ( $S_1$ ). The place of the product in the discourse of the analyst is simultaneously an instance of gains and a locus of loss; what patients stand to gain from the process is tantamount to what the process allows them to lose. Insofar as the master signifier occupies the place of product/gain *qua* loss in the analyst's discourse, patients are thus not being given the key to unlock their secrets and the key to their destiny, but relieved (delivered) from the injunction that has been keeping their secret under lock and key. Put differently, by situating the master signifier in the place of the product in the analyst's discourse, Lacan intimated that whatever power and meaning would have been accorded to a core representation in the patient's mind, the analytic process results in a gradual evaporation of the representation's authoritative, controlling force. Accordingly, the master signifier does not become more meaningful, but the overpowering meaning that had been attached to it becomes more and more nonsensical.<sup>63</sup> This is why Lacan could say that the analyst's discourse hangs together "by basing itself on the dimension of stupidity."<sup>64</sup> And when the master signifier is rendered stupid, the body of knowledge it has been ruling, organising and structuring also becomes newly stupid, in the sense that its semantic spectrum becomes more creatively elastic, less disturbingly constrained, more inherently open-ended and less ponderously formulaic.

So what does it mean for something or someone to be (called) stupid? For all that psychoanalysis has contributed, as morosophy, to our understanding of stupidity, the question remains as astute as it has ever been. But one additional, multi-layered answer has imposed itself since the day Freud questioned Charcot about the nonsensicality of the hysterical symptoms the French master was demonstrating in his patients at the Salpêtrière. Stupidity is what drives people to consult psychoanalysts, especially after they have heard that the medical discourse cannot clarify the nature and identify the cause of their ailments,

'symptom-googling' has made them more addled and upset, and they themselves and/or their loved ones have reached the end of their tether. Stupidity is what psychoanalysts take seriously, even if they are not explicitly addressed as, or presenting themselves as professors of stupidity who are capable of taking the stupidities away with a quick, ingenious sleight of hand. Stupidity is what psychoanalysts themselves epitomize, and are expected to maintain, all the more so as most of their patients employ their own stupidities, and their ostensible lack of knowledge about what could have possibly triggered them, as a pretext for seeing their psychoanalysts as very knowledgeable people, expert clinicians, highly qualified practitioners, or (as Lacan would have called them) subjects supposed to know.<sup>65</sup> Stupidity is another name for the position the psychoanalyst occupies in the treatment. Stupidity is what analysts in training should be taught by the hoary eminences in psychoanalytic training institutions. Most importantly, though, when they decide to initiate a clinical process, stupidity is what analysts aim for in the final instance. Stupidity is the best a patient may expect from a psychoanalytic treatment, at its end.

## NOTES

1. On Galileo's famous recantation of heliocentrism before the Roman Inquisition, which refused to compromise on the absolute truth of the Holy Scriptures, see for example Thomas F. Mayer, *The Trial of Galileo, 1612-1633* (Toronto-Buffalo-London: The University of Toronto Press, 2012); Maurice A. Finocchiaro, *On Trial For Reason: Science, Religion, and Culture in the Galileo Affair* (Oxford-New York NY: Oxford University Press, 2019).

2. World Health Organisation (Ed.), *International Classification of Diseases*, Vols 1 & 2 (Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1979). Following the initial release of these volumes, various revised editions of the general classification were issued under the heading 'Clinical Modification' (CM) and in quite a few cases the volumes were also reissued with 'amendments and extensions' for specific countries. However, for all I have been able to establish, no substantive changes were made to the 'mental retardation' category in any of these revisions. The label was also retained in the tenth revision of the *ICD*, which was first released in 1994, as well as in the simultaneously published, fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)* and in the *DSM-IV Text Revision* of 2000, both courtesy of the American Psychiatric Association. However, two years after the publication of the *ICD-10*, the World Health Organisation published a separate *ICD-10 Guide for Mental Retardation (sic)*, in which it was stated at the bottom of each of the document's eighty-two pages that the terms 'retardation' and 'retarded' were "under consideration for a change in *ICD-11*". When the *ICD-11* was published in 2019, mental retardation was indeed replaced with 'disorders of intellectual development', yet the debate continues whether these particular disorders should be classified as a health condition, which is what is being implied by their inclusion in the *ICD*, or as a disability. The latter term is employed in the fifth edition of the *DSM*, originally published in 2013, alongside 'Intellectual Developmental Disorder'. For 'mental retardation' in the *ICD-10*, see <https://www.who.int/classifications/icd/icdonlineversions/en/> For the 'disorders of intellectual development' in the *ICD-11*, see <https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en#/http://id.who.int/icd/entity/605267007>. See also: World Health Organisation (Ed.), *ICD-10 Guide for Mental Retardation* (Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1996); American Psychiatric Association (Ed.), *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (*DSM-IV*) (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), 39-46; American Psychiatric Association (Ed.), *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Text Revision (*DSM-IV TR*) (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000), 41-49; American Psychiatric Association (Ed.), *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (*DSM-V*) (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 33-41. For background information on the replacement of 'mental retardation' in the *ICD-11* and the ongoing debate as to the precise status of 'disorders of intellectual development', see Luis Salvador-Carulla and Marco Bertelli, "'Mental Retardation' or 'Intellectual Disability': Time for a Conceptual Change," *Psychopathology* 41, no. 1 (2008): 10-16; Marco O. Bertelli, Kerim Munir, James Harris and Luis Salvador-Carulla, "'Intellectual Developmental Disorders': Reflections on the International Consensus Document for Redefining 'Mental Retardation-Intellectual Disability' in *ICD-11*," *Advances in Mental Health and Intellectual Disabilities* 10, no. 1 (2016): 36-58; Luis Salvador-Carulla, Marco Bertelli and Rafael Martínez-Leal, "The Road to 11<sup>th</sup> Edition of the *International Classification of Diseases*: Trajectories of Scientific Consensus and Contested Science in the Classification of Intellectual



Disability/Intellectual Developmental Disorders,” *Current Opinion in Psychiatry* 31, no. 2 (2018): 79-87.

3. Lucius Annaeus Seneca, “To Serenus on the Firmness of the Wise Man,” in *Moral Essays*, Vol. 1. Trans. John W. Basore (Cambridge MA-London: Harvard University Press, 1928), 80-1.

4. Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Letters on Ethics*. Trans. Margaret Graver and A. A. Long (Chicago IL-London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 449.

5. “The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians”, in *The Bible, Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha* (Oxford-New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 218. Without entering into a debate on Christian stupidity and the kingdom of heaven, Paul’s statement appears to contradict Jesus’ maxim in Matthew 5:3, where it is stated: “Μακάριοι οι πτωχοί τω πνεύματι, ότι αυτών εστί η βασιλεία των ουρανών” (Blessed are the poor in spirit [πτωχοί τω πνεύματι]: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” See “The Gospel According to St. Matthew,” in *The Bible, Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha* (Oxford-New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6. My thanks to Nektaria Pouli for alerting me to the passage from Matthew and for discussing the resonances of the πτωχοί τω πνεύματι with me.

6. “The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians”, 209.

7. The scholarly literature on Paul’s paradigm of the ‘holy fool’ and the spiritual value of ‘foolishness for Christ’, which constituted the foundation for various religious orders and impacted upon the teachings of Francis of Assisi, Erasmus and Ignatius of Loyola, amongst others, is so vast that no selection could ever do justice to the embarrassment of riches. However, readers interested in pursuing the principle’s ramifications will definitely benefit from John Saward, *Perfect Fools: Folly for Christ’s Sake in Catholic and Orthodox Spirituality* (Oxford-New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1980) and Sergey A. Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*. Trans. Simon Franklin (Oxford-New York NY: Oxford University Press, 2006).

8. Shaoni Bhattacharya, “Stupidity should be cured, says DNA discoverer,” *New Scientist* 28 February 2003, available at <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn3451-stupidity-should-be-cured-says-dna-discoverer/>, accessed on 14 September 2020. Shocking as Watson’s claims may have been, especially since they came from the mouth of an alleged genius, his hereditarian view on stupidity and intelligence was everything but new, because it simply rekindled perspectives first advocated by the American psychologist Henry Herbert Goddard during the early twentieth century. Apart from being credited with the rather dubious honour of having introduced the term ‘moron’ in the scientific vocabulary of intelligence testing, Goddard popularised the Binet IQ scale in the US and championed large-scale eugenics programmes for removing morons from the gene-pool, which subsequently informed American restrictions upon immigration and compulsory sterilization of the mentally unfit. See Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York NY-London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 146-233; Stephen Jay Gould, “Carrie Buck’s Daughter”, in *The Flamingo’s Smile: Reflections in Natural History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 306-318; Paul Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell* (Baltimore MD-London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

9. Marilyn Simmons and Bruce Stillman, “Statement by Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory addressing Remarks by Dr James D. Watson in ‘American Masters: Decoding Watson’,”

<https://www.cshl.edu/statement-by-cold-spring-harbor-laboratory-addressing-remarks-by-dr-james-d-watson-in-american-masters-decoding-watson/>, accessed on 9 September 2020.

10. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, “Ad encomium asini digressio”, in *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum declamatio invectiva* (The Hague: Adriaen Vlacq, 1662), cc4—my translation. For more detailed readings of Agrippa’s encomium of the ass, see for example Barbara C. Bowen, “Cornelius Agrippa’s *De Vanitate*: Polemic or Paradox?”, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 23, no. 2 (1972): 249-56; Frances A. Yates, “The Occult Philosophy and Magic: Henry Cornelius Agrippa,” in *Selected Works, Vol. VII: The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London-New York NY: Routledge, 1979), 37-47; Marc van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa: The Humanist Theologian and his Declamations* (Leiden: Brill, 1997): 99-102.

11. Giordano Bruno, *The Cabala of Pegasus*, Trans. Sidney L. Sondergard and Madison U. Sowell (New Haven CT-London: Yale University Press, 2002), 39 and 26. For excellent disquisitions on Bruno’s theory of asininity, see Vincenzo Spampinato, *Giordano Bruno e la letteratura dell’asino* (Portici: Premiato Stab. Tip. Vesuvio di E. della Torre, 1904); Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 285-326; Nuccio Ordine, *Giordano Bruno and the Philosophy of the Ass*, Trans. Henryk Baranski and Arielle Saiber (New Haven CT-London: Yale University Press, 1996). In 1584, Bruno had already composed a *Sonnet in Praise of the Ass*, whose first lines ran as follows: “Blest asininity, blest ignorance,/o blest stupidity, pious devotion,/Able alone to set good souls in motion/That human wit and study can’t advance”, cited in Ingrid D. Rowland, *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher/Heretic* (Chicago IL-London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 81. As Rowland points out, asininity in Bruno’s works did not have the same resonances as *asinità*, which “incorporated both the stubborn stupidity of pure ego and the divine simplicity of pure ignorance” and which was generally employed in a derogatory sense as the standard epithet of incorrigible pedantic figures occupying positions of power. See Rowland, *Giordano Bruno*, 79-80.

12. Carl Gustav Jung, “Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon,” in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Vol. 13: Alchemical Studies*. Ed. William McGuire. Trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 180. For an excellent, recent study of the life and works of Paracelsus, see Bruce T. Moran, *Paracelsus: An Alchemical Life* (London: Reaktion Books, 2019).

13. Robert Musil, “On Stupidity”, in *Precision and Soul: Essays and Addresses*. Trans. Burton Pike and David S. Luft (Chicago IL-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 268-86.

14. Musil, *On Stupidity*, 284. Musil’s ‘intelligent stupidity’ comes very close to Bruno’s *asinità*, although it simultaneously reflects the gradual restriction of stupidity to measures of intelligence during the nineteenth century. Five years before Musil’s lecture, in what is widely considered to be the first serious study of human stupidity in English, the American psychologist Walter B. Pitkin also stated that “high abilities are often linked with serious stupidity” and this paradoxical confluence of genius and stupidity has now become a commonplace. See Walter B. Pitkin, *A Short Introduction to the History of Human Stupidity* (New York NY: Simon & Schuster, 1932), 8; Robert J. Sternberg (Ed.), *Why Smart People Can Be So Stupid* (New Haven CT-London: Yale University Press, 2002); Mario Livio, *Brilliant Blunders: From Darwin to Einstein—Colossal Mistakes by Great Scientists that Changed our*

*Understanding of Life and the Universe* (New York NY-London: Simon & Schuster, 2013); Theodore Dalrymple, *In Praise of Folly: The Blind-Spots of Our Mind* (London: Gibson Square Books, 2019). The title of Pitkin's book is sublimely ironic, because it comes in at six-hundred, densely printed pages. If I also wanted to draw the reader's attention to the volume by the arch-conservative psychiatrist *cum* critic Dalrymple here, it is mainly because its cover is adorned with the image of a sweet donkey, which demonstrates that the trope of the ass as an emblem of (wise) stupidity remains prevalent to this day. Other than that, his book focuses almost exclusively on the bizarre ideas of rather obscure authors of volumes Dalrymple himself picked up in some second-hand bookstores whilst on a trip to South-West Wales. In fact, without acknowledging that he 'borrowed' his title from Erasmus and without elaborating on the donkey, the book is primarily about and in praise of himself, although his own blind-spots clearly prevented him from recognising the autobiographical nature of his work. See Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Trans. Clarence H. Miller (New Haven CT-London, Yale University Press, 2003). For a fascinating historical exploration of changing conceptions of stupidity in the Western world, from the early eighteenth century until the present time, see Simon Jarrett, *Those They Called Idiots: The Idea of the Disabled Mind from 1700 to the Present Day* (London: Reaktion Books, 2020).

15. Musil, *On Stupidity*, 270.

16. See, for example, Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser, "A Conversation with Robert Musil", *The Transatlantic Review* no. 8 (1961): 9-24. Wilkins and Kaiser clarify in their preface to the transcript that theirs is an imaginary conversation, but that all the words spoken by Musil were taken from his published writings and manuscripts.

17. I am borrowing the term 'morosophy' from Matthijs van Boxsel, the world's leading expert on all things stupid, although van Boxsel never uses it with reference to psychoanalysis. The word also appears in a recent book by Steven Connor, yet Connor glosses it as "the logos of the illogical, . . . a wise foolishness and a foolish or duncical philosophy", in his attempt to make sense of the  $\mu\omega\pi\omicron\iota$  διὰ Χριστόν. See Matthijs van Boxsel, *Morosofie. Dwaze wijzen en wijze dwazen in Nederland en Vlaanderen* (Amsterdam: Querido, 2001); Matthijs van Boxsel, *The Encyclopaedia of Stupidity*. Trans. Arnold and Erica Pomerans (London: Reaktion Books, 2003); Steven Connor, *The Madness of Knowledge: On Wisdom, Ignorance and Fantasies of Knowing* (London: Reaktion Books, 2019), 261.

18. Leopold Löwenfeld, *Über die Dummheit. Eine Umschau im Gebiete menschlicher Unzulänglichkeit* (Wiesbaden: Verlag von J. F. Bergmann, 1909).

19. In 1895, Freud published 'On the Grounds for Detaching a Particular Syndrome from Neurasthenia under the Description "Anxiety Neurosis"' in the *Neurologisches Centralblatt*. Shortly afterwards, Löwenfeld criticised Freud's views in a paper for the *Münchener Medicinische Wochenschrift*, to which Freud in turn replied in an article in the *Wiener klinische Rundschau* titled 'A Reply to Criticisms of my Paper on Anxiety Neurosis'. The synopsis of *The Interpretation of Dreams* entitled 'On Dreams' was originally written for *Grenzfragen des Nerven- und Seelenlebens*, a book series edited by Löwenfeld and Hans Kurella. In 1904, Freud contributed 'Freud's Psycho-Analytic Procedure' to Löwenfeld's *Die psychischen Zwangerscheinungen*, a volume which Freud later described as an "exhaustive study" and "the standard work" on obsessional neurosis, in a footnote to his case-study of the Rat Man. One year later, Freud wrote 'My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses' for the fourth edition of Löwenfeld's *Sexualleben und*

*Nervenleiden*. See Sigmund Freud, "On the Grounds for Detaching a Particular Syndrome from Neurasthenia under the Description 'Anxiety Neurosis'", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 3*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1962), 85-115; Leopold Löwenfeld, "Ueber die Verknüpfung neurasthenischer und hysterischer Symptome in Anfallsform nebst Bemerkungen über die Freud'sche 'Angstneurose'," *Münchener Medicinische Wochenschrift* 42, no. 13 (1895): 282-5; Sigmund Freud, "A Reply to Criticisms of my Paper on Anxiety Neurosis," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 3*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1962), 121-39; Sigmund Freud, "On Dreams," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 5*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1958), 629-86; Sigmund Freud, "Freud's Psycho-Analytic Procedure," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 7*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953), 247-54; Sigmund Freud, "My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 7*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953), 269-79; Sigmund Freud, "Notes Upon A Case of Obsessional Neurosis," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 10*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), 221—footnote 2. For Freud's own recollection of his public dispute with Löwenfeld, see Sigmund Freud, "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. Lecture XVI: Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 16*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1963), 245. For an obituary of Löwenfeld and his significance within the psychoanalytic community, see R., "Hofrat Leopold Löwenfeld," *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* 10, no. 1 (1924): 103.

20. See L. Pierce Clark and T. E. Uniker, "A Psychological Study of the Nature of the Idiot," *Archives of Psychoanalysis* 1 (1926): 93-137; L. Pierce Clark, "The Psychology of Idiocy," *The Psychoanalytic Review* 19, no. 3 (1932): 257-69; L. Pierce Clark, "Psychoanalysis and Mental Arrest," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Association for the Study of the Feeble-Minded* 37 (1932): 316-25; Karl Landauer, "Zur psychosexuellen Genese der Dummheit," *Zeitschrift für Sexualwissenschaft und Sexualpolitik* 16 (1929): 12-22 and 87-96; Karl Landauer, "Intelligenz und Dummheit," in Paul Federn and Heinrich Meng (Eds), *Das psychoanalytische Volksbuch* (Bern: Huber, 1939), 160-74.

21. See Berta Bornstein, "Zur Psychogenese der Pseudodebilität," *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* 16, nos. 3-4 (1930): 378-99; Edmund Bergler, "Zur Problematik der Pseudodebilität," *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* 18, no. 4 (1932): 528-38; Sandor S. Feldman, "Flucht in die Dummheit. Eine psychoanalytische Studie," *Psychoanalytische Praxis: Vierteljahrsschrift für die aktive Methode der Psychoanalyse* 2 (1932): 186-95. In *The Natural History of Stupidity*, Paul Tabori credited Alexander Feldmann (*sic*) as the only psychoanalyst who "looked fearlessly upon stupidity". Be that as it may, Feldman is now mainly remembered for his rather dubious, and demonstrably dumb views on the aetiology and psychoanalytic treatment of homosexuality. See Paul Tabori, *The Natural*

*History of Stupidity* (New York NY: Barnes & Noble Books, 1993): 2; Sandor S. Feldman, "On Homosexuality," in Sandor Lorand and Michael Balint (Eds), *Perversions: Psychodynamics and Therapy* (New York NY: Gramercy Books, 1956): 71-96; Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 171-3.

22. Otto Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*, 50th Anniversary Edition (New York NY-London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 181

23. Otto Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*, 576.

24. The most detailed record of Freud's stay in Paris, from 13 October 1885 until 26 February 1886, is contained in his almost daily letters to his fiancée Martha Bernays, which are preserved in the Sigmund Freud Papers at the Library of Congress in Washington DC. The letters covering the period of Freud's Parisian studies are forthcoming in German as the fifth and final volume in the complete edition of these '*Brautbriefe*'. For an excellent discussion of this episode in Freud's life, see Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (New York NY-London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 47-53. For a more wide-ranging study of the Parisian origins of Freud's outlook on hysteria and neurosis in general, see André Bolzinger, *Freud et les Parisiens* (Paris: Campagne Première/, 2002).

25. Sigmund Freud, "Charcot," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 3*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1962), 7-23.

26. Sigmund Freud, Charcot, 13. In his obituary, Freud attributed the remark to "one of us [students]", yet in a footnote to his translation of Charcot's *Leçons du mardi*, he seemed to take full responsibility for it. See Jean-Martin Charcot, *Poliklinische Vorträge. I. Band: Schuljahr 1887-1888*. Trans. with notes Sigmund Freud (Leipzig-Wien: Franz Deuticke, 1894), 210 footnote 1.

27. Sigmund Freud, Charcot, 13. The aphorism re-appeared in Sigmund Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 7*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953), 115; Sigmund Freud, "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. Lecture IX: The Censorship of Dreams," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 15*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1963), 145; Sigmund Freud, "An Autobiographical Study," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 20*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1962), 13.

28. For Charcot's own changing conceptions of hysteria, see Marcel Gauchet and Gladys Swain, *Le vrai Charcot. Les chemins imprévus de l'inconscient* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1997). For broader studies of Charcot's life and ideas, see Jacques Gasser, *Aux origines du cerveau moderne. Localisations, langage et mémoire dans l'œuvre de Charcot* (Paris: Fayard, 1999); Catherine Bouchara, *Charcot. Une vie avec l'image* (Paris: Philippe Rey, 2013).

29. Hysteria has long since been removed from the medical classifications. Patients presenting with medically inexplicable, mental and bodily symptoms are now routinely diagnosed as suffering from a 'functional neurological disorder' and referred to a mental health care professional on that basis.

30. Speaking to the French journalist Raymond Recouly in 1923, Freud stated: "The starting-point [for psychoanalysis] . . . is to be found in Charcot's lessons at the Salpêtrière".

See Raymond Recouly, "A Visit to Freud," in Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek (Ed.), *Freud As We Knew Him* (Detroit MI: Wayne State University Press, 1973), 58. For dreams, slips of the tongue, bungled actions and jokes, see Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vols. 4/5*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1958); Sigmund Freud, "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 6*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1960); Sigmund Freud, "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 8*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1960).

31. In the final paragraph of *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud already conceded that psychoanalysis can probably do no more than transform hysterical misery into the unhappiness of everyday life. Even though the technique of psychoanalysis was revised and fine-tuned over the years, he never compromised on this initial belief. If anything, as he gained more clinical experience and his theoretical views progressed, he became even more sceptical as to the overall effectiveness of the psychoanalytic treatment, culminating in the pervasive therapeutic pessimism of the 1937 essay 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable'. See Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, "Studies on Hysteria," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 2*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), 305; Sigmund Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 23*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1964), 209-53.

32. On Olga Hönig, see Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Les patients de Freud. Destins* (Auxerre: Sciences Humaines Éditions, 2011), 74-9.

33. See Sigmund Freud, "The Sexual Enlightenment of Children (An Open Letter to Dr. M. Fürst)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 9*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1959), 129-39 and 134-5 in particular; Sigmund Freud, "On the Sexual Theories of Children," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 9*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1959), 205-26.

34. Sigmund Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 10*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), 1-149.

35. For critical commentaries on Freud's case-study, its impact on the development of child analysis and biographical information on Herbert Graf, who would go on to become a famous opera producer, see Joseph William Slap, "Little Hans's Tonsillectomy," *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1961): 259-61; Martin A. Silverman, "A Fresh Look at the Case of Little Hans," in Mark Kanzer and Jules Glenn (Eds), *Freud and His Patients* (New York NY: Jason Aronson Inc., 1980), 95-120; Jules Glenn, "Freud's Advice to Hans' Father: The First Supervisory Sessions," in Mark Kanzer and Jules Glenn (Eds), *Freud and His Patients* (New York NY: Jason Aronson Inc., 1980), 121-34; Josiane Praz, "Le Petit Hans et sa famille. Données historiques et biographiques," in Jean Bergeret and Marcel Houser (Eds.), *La sexualité*

*infantile et ses mythes* (Paris: Dunod, 2001), 121-39; Jean-Michel Quinodoz, "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy ('Little Hans')," in *Reading Freud: A Chronological Exploration of Freud's Writings*. Trans. David Alcorn (London-New York NY: Routledge, 2005), 78-87; Harold P. Blum, "Little Hans: A Centennial Review and Reconsideration," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 55, no. 3 (2007): 749-65; Jerome C. Wakefield, "Max Graf's 'Reminiscences of Professor Sigmund Freud' Revisited: New Evidence from the Freud Archives," *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (2007): 149-92; Jean-Michel Vives, "'Little Hans': From His Phobic Episode to Becoming an Opera Director," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 93, no. 4 (2012): 863-78. By far the most detailed analysis of the case-study is to be found in Lacan's 1956-'57 seminar on object-relations: Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre IV: La relation d'objet*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: du Seuil, 1994): 197-435.

36. Sigmund Freud, Analysis of a Phobia, 28. Although the German word '*Dummheit*' means stupidity, Strachey has translated it as 'nonsense', which would render the German word '*Unsinn*'. In the more recent English translation of Freud's case-study by Louise Adey Huish, '*Dummheit*' is translated inconsistently as 'silly', 'silly nonsense' and 'silly business', a decision that is all the more puzzling since the translator herself writes in her introduction that "Freud's terms are deceptively simple." See Sigmund Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy ['Little Hans']," in *The 'Wolfman' and Other Cases*. Trans. Louise Adey Huish (London: Penguin Books, 2002), xxix, 21 and 46.

37. Sigmund Freud, Analysis of a Phobia, 30.

38. This principle does not apply in cases of psychosis, where the problem is exactly the opposite, notably that everything makes (too much) sense. As Daniel Paul Schreber wrote on three occasions in his *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*: "All nonsense cancels itself out" (*Aller Unsinn hebt sich auf*). See Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*. Trans. and Ed. Ida Macalpine and Richard A. Hunter (New York NY: New York Review Books, 2000), 168, 273 and 286.

39. Without entering into the clinical details of the case, it is noteworthy how it is only after Hans has re-branded his fear as a stupidity that he becomes interested in discovering how he 'got it' (*gekriegt hat*), in the sense of receiving or contracting it. At that point, Freud also becomes the Professor who can take it away (*der dir die Dummheit wegnehmen kann*), as if the stupidity became an object in itself that could be part of an exchange and delivery process. In his *Seminar IV*, Lacan did not pay much attention to the term *Dummheit* as such, but noted how, at least in the French translation of Freud's case-study, 'getting the stupidity' is rendered as '*attraper la bêtise*', whereby the verb '*attraper*' also invokes 'getting pregnant' (*attraper un enfant*), and thus at some stage of 'delivering' it. See Sigmund Freud, Analysis of a Phobia, 59 and 33; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre IV*, 316-20 and 380.

40. The only time Freud saw Little Hans in person, during the afternoon of Monday, 30 March 1908, he effectively gave him a short lecture on the Oedipus complex, which ended with the words: "Long before he was in the world . . . I [Professor Sigmund Freud] had known that a Little Hans would come who would be so fond of his mother that he would be bound to feel afraid of his father because of it . . ." Returning from Berggasse 19, Little Hans asked his father: "Does the Professor talk to God . . . as he can tell all that beforehand?" See Sigmund Freud, Analysis of a Phobia, 42-3. In the case of the Rat Man, Freud lectured his patient on the psychoanalytic theory of the displacement of affect as early as the fourth session. See Sigmund Freud, "Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," in *The Standard Edition of the*

*Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 10.* Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), 151-249.

41. Sigmund Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 10.* Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), 69.

42. Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 12.* Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1958), 155.

43. Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 19.* Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1961), 49.

44. Sigmund Freud, "The Economic Problem of Masochism," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 19.* Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1961), 166. A similar point appears in Lecture 32 of Freud's *New Introductory Lectures*: "People in whom this unconscious sense of guilt is excessively strong betray themselves in analytic treatment by the negative therapeutic reaction which is so disagreeable from the prognostic point of view. When one has *given them* the solution of a symptom, which should normally be followed by at least its temporary disappearance, what they produce instead is a momentary exacerbation of the symptom and of the illness." Sigmund Freud, "New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. Lecture XXXII: Anxiety and Instinctual Life," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 22.* Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1960), 109-10.

45. Sigmund Freud, *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*, 233. The sentence in quotation marks alludes to a line from Goethe's *Faust*, in which the protagonist responds to the angels' chorus with the words '*Die Botschaft hör ich wohl, allein mir fehlt der Glaube*'. Stuart Atkins has translated it as 'Although I hear your gospel, I lack your faith'. See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust I & II.* Ed. and Trans. Stuart Atkins (Princeton NJ-London: Princeton University Press, 1994), 22.

46. On Freud's unshakeable belief in the universality of the Oedipus complex, in spite of Malinowski's evidence to the contrary, see for example Patrick S. Rivera, "'Freud's Speculations in Ethnology': A Reflection on Anthropology's Encounter with Psychoanalysis," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 98, no. 3 (2017): 755-78. Given the topic of my essay, it might also be useful to mention that, on the occasion of a conference at New York University in March 1958, the American pragmatist philosopher Sidney Hook told the audience that he had once asked psychoanalysts what kind of evidence they would be "prepared to accept which would lead them to declare in any specific case that a child did not have an Oedipus complex", and that the esteemed psychoanalyst Ernst Kris had responded to the question by saying that such a child "would be one who acted like an idiot." See Sidney Hook (Ed.), *Psychoanalysis, Scientific Method, and Philosophy* (New York NY: New York University Press, 1959), 214; Murray L. Wax, "Oedipus as Normative? Freud's Complex, Hook's Query, Malinowski's Trobrianders, Stoller's Anomalies," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 28, no. 1 (2000): 117-32. One of Freud's most bizarre justifications for refusing to abandon an idea, in this case his entirely speculative proposal of the death



drive, occurs at the end of 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', where he unapologetically declared: "[P]eople are seldom impartial where ultimate things, the great problems of science and life, are concerned. Each of us is governed in such cases by deep-rooted internal prejudices, into whose hands our speculation unwittingly plays. Since we have such good grounds for being distrustful, our attitude towards the results of our deliberations cannot well be other than one of cool benevolence [*ein kühles Wohlwollen*]. I hasten to add, however, that self-criticism such as this is far from binding one to any special tolerance towards dissentient opinions. It is perfectly legitimate to reject remorselessly [*unerbittlich*] theories which are contradicted by the very first steps in the analysis of observed facts, while yet being aware at the same time that the validity of one's own theory is only a provisional one." See Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 18*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), 59-60.

47. Sigmund Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psychoanalysis I)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 12*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1958), 123.

48. Sigmund Freud, On Beginning the Treatment, 123.

49. Sigmund Freud, "Recommendations to Physicians Practising Psycho-Analysis," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 12*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1958), 114.

50. Sigmund Freud, Recommendations to Physicians, 115. Freud made a similar point in Lecture 35 of the *New Introductory Lectures*, See Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, 174.

51. Sigmund Freud, "Postscript to 'The Question of Lay Analysis'," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 20*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1959), 256. For an in-depth discussion of Freud's 'conjunction' and its implications for psychoanalytic research, see Anna Ursula Dreher, *Foundations for Conceptual Research in Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Eva Ristl (London-New York NY: Karnac Books, 2000), 37-64.

52. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique (1953-'54)*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. John Forrester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 271 and 275. In his famous 'Rome discourse', Lacan indicated explicitly that he had adopted the passion of ignorance from the Buddhist tradition: Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits*. Trans. Bruce Fink (New York NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 254. For a detailed consideration of ignorance in the *Dharmadhātustava* and other Indian spiritual treatises, see Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Do Śrāvakas Understand Emptiness?," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 16 (1988): 65-105. For discussions of the significance of the passion of ignorance in Lacan's work, see for example: Alain Vanier, "Passion de l'ignorance," *Clinique Méditerranéennes* 70, no. 2 (2004): 59-66; Dany Nobus and Malcolm Quinn, *Knowing Nothing, Staying Stupid: Elements for a Psychoanalytic Epistemology* (London-New York NY: Routledge, 2005), 20-35; Béatrice Gaillard, "Passion de l'ignorance. L'ignorance consentie ouvre les voies d'accès au (pas tout) savoir," *Essaim* 41, no. 2 (2018): 165-172.

53. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique*, 278. As Lacan himself pointed out in a lecture at Sainte-Anne Hospital in Paris on 4 November 1971, he had borrowed the term *ignorantia docta* (or *docta ignorantia*) from the Renaissance theologian and philosopher Nicolaus Cusanus, who had introduced it in an eponymous 1440 book with reference to human beings' limited comprehension of the infinity of God and the determination of the universe. See Jacques Lacan, *Talking To Brick Walls*. Trans. Adrian R. Price (Medford MA-Cambridge, 2017), 5; Nicolaus Cusanus, *On Learned Ignorance*. Trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis MN: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1985). For a more detailed explanation of Cusanus' doctrine, including instructive comparisons with Buddhist thought, see Andrew Martin, *The Knowledge of Ignorance: From Genesis to Jules Verne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 29-42. Throughout his seminars and writings, Lacan continued to underscore the non-negotiable importance of learned ignorance for the analyst's work. See, for example: Jacques Lacan, "Note italienne," in *Autres Écrits* (Paris: du Seuil, 2001), 309; Jacques Lacan, "De Rome 53 à Rome 67: La psychanalyse. Raison d'un échec," in *Autres Écrits* (Paris: du Seuil, 2001), 343; Jacques Lacan, "Introduction à l'édition allemande d'un premier volume des *Écrits*," in *Autres Écrits* (Paris: du Seuil, 2001), 558.

54. Jacques Lacan, "Variations on the Standard Treatment," in *Écrits*. Trans. Bruce Fink (New York NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 297.

55. Jacques Lacan, *Variations on the Standard Treatment*, 297. Much like the previous quotation, this passage appears in a section of the paper entitled 'What the Psychoanalyst Must Know: How to Ignore What He Knows'. As Lacan also disclosed in his 1971 lecture at Sainte-Anne, the idea of nonknowledge (*non-savoir*) had already benefited from the attention of Georges Bataille in quite a few of his writings. See Jacques Lacan, *Talking To Brick Walls*, 9; Georges Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*. Ed. Stuart Kendall. Trans. Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall (Minneapolis MN-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

56. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis (1969-'70)*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Russell Grigg (New York NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 35. Within the space of this essay, I cannot elaborate on Lacan's entire 'matheme' for the discourse of the analyst, let alone explain his theory of the four discourses. The secondary literature on Lacan's discourse theory, and the analyst's discourse in particular, is enormous, yet the uninitiated reader may start with Julien Quackelbeen, "The Psychoanalytic Discourse Theory of Jacques Lacan: Introduction and Application," *Studies in Psychoanalytic Theory* 3, no. 1 (1994): 21-43 and Paul Verhaeghe, "From Impossibility to Inability: Lacan's Theory of the Four Discourses," *The Letter: Lacanian Perspectives on Psychoanalysis* 4 (1995): 76-99. A general overview of Lacan's changing views on the analyst's position in the treatment and his formalisation of the analyst's discourse in *Seminar XVII* can be found in Dany Nobus, *Jacques Lacan and the Freudian Practice of Psychoanalysis* (London-New York NY: Brunner-Routledge, 2000), 56-105.

57. In the opening session of his 1976-'77 seminar, Lacan made a translinguistic pun by suggesting that the German term for the unconscious (*das Unbewußte*) could be rendered in French as '*l'une-bévue*', which may be re-translated into English as 'the one-blunder'. In doing so, he condensed an argument he had already made in *Seminar XI*, when he changed the ancient medical maxim '*ablata causa tollitur effectus*' (the effects disappear when the cause is removed) into '*ablata cause tolluntur effectus*' (the absence of a cause only enhances the effects). See Jacques Lacan, "L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue s'aile à mourre," *Ornicar?*

12/13 (1977): 4-16; Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 128. For a highly entertaining survey of the unconscious as a 'mental blunderbuss', see the posthumously published book by the Austrian-American psychoanalyst Edmund Bergler, *A Talent for Stupidity: The Psychology of the Bungler, the Incompetent and the Ineffectual* (New York NY: International Universities Press, 1999). For the notion of 'knowledge in failure', see also Jacques Lacan, "Lituraterre," Trans. Dany Nobus, *Continental Philosophy Review* 46, no. 2 (2013), 329.

58. In the context of human stupidities being recognised, I cannot resist reminding the reader of the annual Darwin awards, even though they do not exactly count as 'therapeutic interventions'. Since roughly the mid-1980s, the American Darwin Awards Association has annually rewarded a small number of people around the world whose stupidity has been proven to be of an exceptionally high standard. In doing so, the organisation intends to "salute the improvement of the human genome by honouring those who accidentally remove themselves from it," whereby it is explicitly stated that all nominees should be "free of mental defect". One of the most notorious winners was the Brazilian priest Adelir Antônio de Carli, aka Padre Baloeiro. Rather than describing his accomplishments here, I shall leave it up to the readers to discover what earned him the coveted accolade. See <https://darwinawards.com>

59. Because the entire debacle is now in the public domain, I shall not be accused of entering into a polemic when I say that the most sublime example of how knowledge of stupidity does not erect a barrier against it has been offered by Avital Ronell, one of the leading academic experts on stupidity. After having written a seminal treatise on stupidity, Ronell was suspended from her professorship at New York University for the academic year 2018-'19, because she was found guilty of stalking and sexually harassing a male graduate student over a period of three years, during which time she had acted as his advisor. In her defence, many of her most illustrious academic friends then signed a letter in which it was stated that she should be exonerated owing to the significance of her academic contributions. In this particular case, one person's stupidity was clearly tackled with repeated salvos of additional stupidity—one of her supporters, who shall remain nameless here, even went so far as to apologise for the utter stupidity of defending Ronell's stupidity on the grounds of her academic reputation—yet evidently not in a psychoanalytic sense. See Avital Ronell, *Stupidity* (Urbana/Chicago IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Slavoj Žižek, "Is Avital Ronell Really Toxic?", in *A Left That Dares to Speak Its Name: Untimely Interventions* (Cambridge-Medford MA: Polity, 2020), 265-70.

60. Recanati's intervention was not included when the text of Lacan's seminar was published in 1975, but released as a stand-alone essay the same year: François Recanati, "Prédication et ordination," *Scilicet* 5 (1975): 61-87.

61. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, 13.

62. In a footnote to this section of the seminar, Bruce Fink has helpfully included the full formula of the analyst's discourse, also providing the gloss that "Lacan is suggesting here that the  $S_1$  produced by analytic discourse is equivalent to stupidity or nonsense (*la bêtise*)." See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, 13—footnote 47. Because the French word for stupidity (*bêtise*) also connotes animality, *bête* also meaning beast or animal, Jacques Derrida devoted a substantial portion

of his 2001-2003 seminars on *The Beast and the Sovereign* to a deconstructive reading of it, also paying attention to Lacan's comments on *bêtise*. See Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. 1*. Eds. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet and Ginette Michaud, Trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago IL-London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. 2*. Eds. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet and Ginette Michaud, Trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago IL-London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

63. Lacan had made a similar remark in *Seminar XI*, yet the meaning of the sentence in which he did so is turned into its opposite in the English translation of it. In the original French text, Lacan comments: "*L'interprétation ne vise pas tellement le sens que de réduire les signifiants dans leur non-sens pour que nous puissions retrouver les déterminants de toute la conduite du sujet*". Whereas Alan Sheridan has translated this phrase as "Interpretation is directed not so much at the meaning as towards reducing the non-meaning of the signifiers, so that we may rediscover the determinants of the subject's entire behaviour," it should have been rendered as: "Interpretation is not so much directed at meaning, but at reducing the signifiers into their nonsensicality, in order for us to rediscover the determinants of the subject's entire behaviour." See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre XI: Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse (1964)*, Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: du Seuil, 1973), 192; Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 212.

64. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, 12.

65. 'Subject supposed to know' (*sujet supposé savoir*), which could also be rendered as 'supposed subject of knowing' is Lacan's formula for transference. See, for example Jacques Lacan, "Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School," Trans. Russell Grigg, *analysis 6* (1995): 1-13. For 'supposed subject of knowing' as a translation of Lacan's concept, see Stuart Schneiderman, "Translator's Preface," in *Returning to Freud: Clinical Psychoanalysis in the School of Lacan*, Ed. and Trans. Stuart Schneiderman (New Haven CT-London: Yale University Press, 1980), vii. At one point, Lacan referred to the attribution of the 'supposed subject of knowing' as a mishap, or a bungled action in itself: Jacques Lacan, "La méprise du sujet supposé savoir," in *Autres Écrits* (Paris: du Seuil, 2001), 329-39.