



(Opinion) Deliberate Ignorance: **Why Stupid People Can't Handle the Truth**

Aren Jayanthan (I am not a professional and this has not been proofread, please do your own research.)

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Unreviewed, Subjectively Organized Opinion Paper (printer-friendly)

TOO LONG, DIDN'T READ

This is a subjective paper, I will probably update this in the future.

Why can't stupid people handle the truth? → they are stupid because they are ignorant (not ignorant because they are stupid) → not ignorant because of lack of information but avoidance of information (Deliberate Ignorance) → keep in mind every person is trying their best → when you or them are trying to understand something and interpersonal ignorance is present: *your interpretation of your perception of another's emotional fact is different than their interpretation of their perspective of their emotional fact* → don't stop being curious, keep asking questions, realize there is always more to learn about someone → control your thoughts and how you respond, especially with tone of voice and consideration (you're not perfect and neither are they, also don't have unreasonable or unrealistic expectations).

Your interpretation of your perception of another's emotional fact is different than their interpretation of their perspective of their emotional fact.

Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence. - John Adams

"These are only facts and nothing more," I would say: No, facts are precisely what is lacking, all that exists consists of interpretations. We cannot establish any fact "in itself": it may even be nonsense to desire to do such a thing. "Everything is subjective," ye say: but that in itself is interpretation. - Friedrich Nietzsche

The most dangerous form of blindness is believing your perspective is the only reality.

GROUND DEFINITIONS

→ **This is a reference section. Please skip if you want to get to the meat of this paper.** ←

Ignorance is used here as the roadblock to building the capacity to make educated and calculated risks, and is directly proportional to your ability and desire to handle both the gentle/kind truth and brutal/unkind truth.

- By definition¹: *destitute of knowledge or education; also: lacking knowledge or comprehension of the thing specified - often used with of or about; resulting from or showing lack of knowledge or intelligence; unaware, uninformed.*
- For this paper, willful ignorance and selective ignorance are all used as synonyms for Deliberate Ignorance.

Perspective is the vantage point from which you view something, while **perception** is the process of taking in and interpreting what you observe.

Your perspective often shapes your perception: two people witnessing the same event may perceive it quite differently based on their respective perspectives.²

- **Perspective**³: *a mental view or prospect; the interrelation in which a subject or its parts are mentally viewed; the capacity to view things in their true relations or relative importance. As an adjective: of, relating to, employing, or seen in perspective [noun].*

¹ Merriam-Webster: Definition of Ignorant

² Future paper: stress, grief, and the use of natural psychological defense to better cope with negative information and memories, affecting information retainment and selective memory. Refer to the "Media's Role in Broadcasting Acute Stress Following the Boston Marathon Bombings" in the Context Section for a bit about this.

³ Merriam-Webster: Definition of Perspective

⁴ Merriam-Webster: Definition of Perception

⁵ Merriam-Webster has a fantastic list of related synonyms, which is in the Context Section of this paper.

⁶ Merriam-Webster: Definition of Objective

⁷ Merriam-Webster: Definition of Subjective

- **Perception**⁴: *direct and intuitive recognition : understanding as accurate or real; a capacity for comprehension or understanding.*⁵

Objective⁶: *expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations; limited to choices of fixed alternatives and reducing subjective factors to a minimum; existing outside of the mind : existing in the real world; perceptible to persons other than the affected individual*

Subjective⁷: *characteristic of or belonging to reality as perceived rather than as independent of mind; arising from conditions within the brain or sense organs and not directly caused by external stimuli; arising out of or identified by means of one's perception of one's own states and processes*

Emotional fact (objective, first person perspective): The raw existence of a feeling. Someone feels hurt, anxious, or joyful, that state is undeniable as a fact of their experience, regardless of outside interpretation.

Emotional interpretation (subjective, third person perception): The meaning, cause, or explanation assigned to that feeling. This is where subjectivity enters.

- Also keep in mind situations like lying to yourself: where an emotional fact has a subjective interpretation (subjective, first person perception; self-deception). An emotional fact

can be seen from the third-person, just as emotional interpretation can be seen from the first person. Sorry if this is confusing, I'll make a separate paper on this later.

- Yay, more tangents:

- **Perception-Based Interpretation:** based on what might be best for this situation
- **Evidence-Based Interpretation:** based on what I have seen before and has happened in reality
- **Theory-based Interpretation:** based on "yeah that makes sense in theory" but also limited by the hard evidence of this specific circumstance.

Stupid⁸: *slow of mind; obtuse*⁹; *given to unintelligent decisions or acts; acting in an unintelligent or careless manner; lacking intelligence or reason; brutish; dulled in feeling or sensation; torpid; marked by or resulting from unreasoned thinking or acting; senseless; lacking interest or point; vexatious, exasperating.*

OVERSIMPLIFIED SUMMARY

There are many different types of Deliberate Ignorance, but essentially this paper is about having the awareness that:

- 1) we are human and have our own emotional facts,

- 2) how we interpret our own emotional facts is different from how others will interpret those same facts (and vice-versa)¹⁰,

- 3) *We judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their actions/behaviors*¹¹

Overall: the awareness of the existence of Deliberate Ignorance and making the mental space to ask questions so that someone else can better explain/articulate themselves when it comes to emotional problems and vulnerability.

And more importantly, **entertaining someone else's thoughts without accepting it.** It's not your responsibility to change them, but you can influence with kindness and understanding.

However, there is one caveat: **emotional immature conversations.** The level of awareness I'm covering may not apply to the drama-seeking, victim-mentality, rumination loops, hopes and dreams that cannot be sustained by reality, unrealistic expectations, and emotional validation seekers. In general, just insecure people with a evidence deficiency¹².

Editor Aren here: It is about five weeks and I overhauled this entire paper, for a second time. Sorry if the thoughts here are all over the place.

I might switch between ignorance from an general view to interpersonal ignorance (ignorance applied specifically to relationships).

Please keep that in mind because I am soooooo cognitively maxed out right now ugh.

Annnnnnd I just realized I haven't formally defined stupidity:

⁸ Merriam-Webster: Definition of Stupid

⁹ Obtuse: "slow to understand what is obvious or simple; difficult to comprehend : not clear or precise in thought or expression" Merriam-Webster: Definition of Obtuse

¹⁰ Similar to the idea that people will see different parts of your personality, maybe even just see one part of your personality and be completely surprised when their idea of who you are is flipped upside down.

¹¹ Covey, S. R. (1989)

¹² Evidence Needs, which I cover in another paper (The Blessing and Curse of an Overactive Imagination), is my own personal flaw. I am critical about unrealistic expectations because I have been there. It is such a waste of time.

Stupid¹³: *slow of mind: obtuse*¹⁴; *given to unintelligent decisions or acts: acting in an unintelligent or careless manner; lacking intelligence or reason: brutish; dulled in feeling or sensation: torpid; marked by or resulting from unreasoned thinking or acting: senseless; lacking interest or point; vexatious, exasperating.*

My original title, *Why Stupid People Can't Handle the Truth*, can be summed up: **they are stupid because they are ignorant, not ignorant because they are stupid.**

EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS AND LOGICAL SOLUTIONS

Originally, this paper was focused on why listening to other people explain their emotional problems has a high cost of trying to sort out their mess as the listener.

Mess is a strong word but it is what it is. Emotions and feelings are messy, but it gets worse when there is a misinterpretation of logical problem as emotional problem (solved with an emotional solution) or a emotional problem as a logical problem (solved with a logical solution).

Just not removing the emotions out of a situation, processing the problem itself, then see how the emotions cloud the judgement.

Side tangent: tone of voice and how something is said plays a huge role in this too. "YOU screwed up this entire relationship" vs "Hey, I feel like you've been distant over the last couple days and I'm feeling insecure that I might be the reason you are not happy." Two totally different tones resulting in two different responses.

Also the Solomon Paradox: The psychological phenomenon where people reason more wisely about other people's problems than their own.

The name comes from the biblical King Solomon, who was renowned for his wisdom in judging

others' disputes but made poor decisions in his personal life.

We tend to be more rational, balanced, and thoughtful when giving advice to friends or analyzing strangers' situations, but we struggle to apply that same wisdom to our own problem (emotions, ego, and personal stakes).

However, you can do everything you can to help, but you cannot control someone or make a decision for them.

There is also the perception of value and emotional investment: not everyone is worth investing in emotionally, financially, timely, etc. howeeeeeever, if they are worth the time, attention, and the cognitive resources to understand and listen, then by all means.

(This is closely tied to the "I can change him/her" crowd in the context of romantic relationships but that'll be a separate paper.)

Ignorance is ignorance. If they have never had a support network where they feel safe being vulnerable, you'll hear that loop of avoiding the pain point. Don't play God when you hear that, just ask (in a kind tone of voice, dude please be careful with your tone of voice).

IGNORANCE DEFINED

Refer to the corresponding definition in the Ground Definitions section.

IGNORANCE VS NESCIENCE

There is a difference between not wanting to learn vs the absence of information.

- **Ignorance** (privation of knowledge): lack of knowledge of those things that one has a natural aptitude to know. This is a willful disregard for knowledge or a refusal to learn,

¹³ Merriam-Webster: Definition of Stupid

¹⁴ Obtuse: "slow to understand what is obvious or simple; difficult to comprehend : not clear or precise in thought or expression" Merriam-Webster: Definition of Obtuse

actively rejecting knowledge rather than simply lacking it

- **Nescience** (absence of knowledge, latin for not to know): an **absence of accessibility to be capable** to see and integrate something as a known reality; someone cannot be held accountable for not knowing something

A couple realistic considerations about the absence of knowledge (maybe call this the Vulnerability Paradox?):

- 1) People will know as much as they are willing to tell you
- 2) We are willing to tell those who ask and we trust
- 3) The listener is just as important as the desire to feel heard
- 4) Convenience is important. Vulnerability is usually easier in person but the desired support network may not be available in person, there is a risk of telling the wrong person
- 5) But a paradox may form: if it never gets said, it can build up internally (suppression)

DELIBERATE IGNORANCE

There are more things, likely to frighten us than there are to crush us; we suffer more often in imagination than in reality. We are in the habit of exaggerating, or imagining, or anticipating, sorrow. - Seneca

For this paper, Deliberate Ignorance is around the idea: *I would rather keep my illusions for they are often kinder than the truth.*¹⁵ Deliberate Ignorance is used here in the context of healthy selfishness, not egotistical and selfish/self-serving¹⁶.

Deliberate Ignorance is tied to opportunity cost, social exchange theory, and behavioral economics: **that humans will weigh the costs and benefits of situations**, circumstances, relationships, goods, services, etc **and choose the most beneficial option.**

From **Cassandra's Regret**¹⁷: **The Psychology of Not Wanting to Know**¹⁸:

Ignorance is generally pictured as an unwanted state of mind, and the act of willful ignorance may raise eyebrows.

Yet people do not always want to know, demonstrating a lack of curiosity at odds with theories postulating a general need for certainty,

¹⁵ This is the opposite: "I would rather suffer knowing the truth than be happy in my delusions".

¹⁶ Refer to the Narcissism Breakdown paper for more information about narcissistic vs healthy selfishness

¹⁷ **Cassandra's Regret**: Cassandra was a Trojan princess, daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba of Troy. From Gilbert Murray's preface of his translation of Aeschylus' Agamemnon: "That daughter of Priam was beloved by Apollo, who gave her the power of true prophecy. In some way that we know not, she broke her promise to the God; and, since his gift could not be recalled, he added to it the curse that, while she should always foresee and foretell the truth, none should believe her."

¹⁸ Gigerenzer, G., & Garcia-Retamero, R. (2017)

*ambiguity aversion*¹⁹, or the *Bayesian principle*²⁰ of total evidence.

•••

Its prevalence is high: Between 85% and 90% of people would not want to know about upcoming negative events, and 40% to 70% prefer to remain ignorant of positive events. Only 1% of participants consistently wanted to know.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF DELIBERATE IGNORANCE

This is a list of personal/creative interpretations. Please make your own definitions as needed.

Beneficial Ignorance

Beneficial ignorance, is like not choosing to buy ice cream while shopping so you don't give yourself the choice later to eat ice cream. Do this enough times and poof, you don't even consider ice cream when shopping²¹.

Or this is especially true in close relationships where someone remembers your behaviors, what triggers you (positively or negatively), and acts on a stimulus to prevent an emotional cascading effect (such as panicking, feelings of regret, etc).

Ignorance by Choice and Ignorance by Requirement

This is more of the movie/tv show form ignorance, where it is obvious that real life people have a level of emotional intelligence that wouldn't cause a ten mile chase scene if that dumb passenger didn't try to play hero.

The main difference is intentions: **by choice**, the person wants to be ignorant (good cop breaks laws to remain undercover) vs **by requirement**, they have to be ignorant (good cop goes undercover in evil mob and has to hurt another cop to stay undercover).

Ignorance by Comfort Preference + Cognitive Load/Demand Avoidance

Also related to hedonic treadmill, ignorance by preference to be comfortable and knowing but not wanting to take time to understand/incurred the cognitive load of understanding.²²

Ignorance by Cognitive Demand will be addressed in Interpersonal Ignorance. TL;DR: because something is or perceived to require a high level or an unwanted level of cognitive load, ignorance occurs to mitigate the effort needs.

For the next two studies (Sayali & Badre (2019) study and the Wiehler et al. (2022)) are both about cognitive effort during controlled laboratory tasks (like switching between rule sets or making economic choices after a long workday).

I'm extending these findings to explain why people are emotionally avoidant in relationships, which is a very different domain. A person choosing not to engage with a partner's

¹⁹ **Ambiguity aversion** is a cognitive bias where people prefer known risks over unknown risks - even when the unknown option might be better. Also related to the Ellsberg Paradox.

²⁰ The **Bayesian Principle** is from mathematics; the core idea: your belief should change proportionally to how surprising the new evidence is. $P(H|E) = P(E|H) \times P(H) / P(E)$ where: $P(H|E)$ = Probability of **hypothesis H** given **evidence E** (what we want to know); $P(H)$ = Prior probability (what we believed before); $P(E|H)$ = Likelihood (how likely this evidence is if H is true); $P(E)$ = Probability of seeing this evidence under any circumstance

²¹ Irrelevant tangent: why do people go back to the fridge after checking if there is anything to eat? To see if they lowered their standards

²² Tied to the popularized version of the Dunning-Kruger Effect and to the inner-critic.

vulnerability isn't the same mechanism as someone avoiding a harder math problem after eight hours of cognitive work.

I'm more relating the subjects, not necessarily merging the concepts as empirical science.

From **Neural systems of cognitive demand avoidance**²³:

Cognitive effort is typically aversive, evident in people's tendency to avoid cognitively demanding tasks.

The 'cost of control' hypothesis suggests that engagement of cognitive control systems of the brain makes a task costly and the currency of that cost is a reduction in anticipated rewards.

As expected, fronto-parietal control network (FPN)²⁴ activity increased, and reward network activity decreased, as control demands increased across tasks.

By contrast, we unexpectedly observed that the deactivation of a task-negative brain network corresponding to the Default Mode Network (DMN)²⁵ across levels of the cognitive control manipulation predicted the change in avoidance.

From **A neuro-metabolic account of why daylong cognitive work alters the control of economic decisions**²⁶:

At the end of the day, high-demand cognitive work resulted in higher glutamate concentration and glutamate/glutamine diffusion²⁷ in a cognitive control brain region (lateral prefrontal cortex [IPFC]), relative to low-demand cognitive work and to a reference brain region (primary visual cortex [V1]).

²³ Sayali, C., & Badre, D. (2019)

²⁴ The FPN (aka central executive network) in the Intrinsic Connectivity Networks (ICNs)

²⁵ Expanded under the subsection in the Context Section

²⁶ Wiehler, A., Branzoli, F., Adanyeguh, I., Mochel, F., & Pessiglione, M. (2022)

²⁷ Glutamate Concentration and Glutamate-Glutamine Diffusion in the Context Section

²⁸ **Time-to-Event Hypothesis:** that for the regret-prone, deliberate ignorance is more likely the nearer the event approaches.

*Taken together with previous fMRI data, these results support a neuro-metabolic model in which **glutamate accumulation triggers a regulation mechanism that makes IPFC activation more costly, explaining why cognitive control is harder to mobilize after a strenuous workday.***

Ignorance by Perceived Negative Outcome, Expected Consequences, Experienced Collateral/Unexpected Damage + Plausible Deniability and Anticipating Regret

Related to regret avoidance, time-to-event hypothesis²⁸, avoiding accountability/ownership/responsibility, risk and loss aversion, and kinda to Cassandra's Regret.

This can be a mini paper on its own, essentially this is related to the core human desire to avoid fear.

Fear is a much bigger motivation than happiness. Sure, there is the question of "What about people who party or find ways of being happy?"

To that, yes, there is a difference between hedonic and eudaemonic happiness and lifestyles (which I have covered in other papers), but to those who see hedonic happiness (parties, workaholism, etc), is it really in pursuit of happiness or avoidance of pain?

The reality that they haven't looked at their insecurities and addressed that they have to change themselves to get what they want.

Again, this section can be a whole other paper. Negative outcomes, expected consequences

(either by logical reasoning or experienced unexpected damage), the plausible deniability because admission of mistakes is tough, and anticipating regretting decisions, I think would all be the opposite of taking ownership and holding responsibility.

Ignorance by Experienced Unexpected/Collateral Damage occurs from the reflection of directly related, or similar, past scenarios that had a unexpectedly negative and/or unexpected collateral damage, and being ignorant negates the possibility of a potentially unwanted problem to happen.

Plausible deniability is the ability to deny knowledge of or responsibility for something because there's no clear proof connecting you to it. The idea is that while something may have happened, you can credibly claim you didn't know about it or weren't involved.

This I find most in romantic flirting: due to the imperfection and misinterpretation of flirting²⁹, one party can "make the first move" without explicitly doing so BUT deny the responsibility/accountability if the other person's intent or quality of character is not what they (the original party) thought it was.

However, this also shows up in professional life ("What email? Uhhhhh yeahhhh idk what email that it is [lol, I saw it but they don't know that]") or personal ("Trash day? There's trash?").

From **Cassandra's Regret: The Psychology of Not Wanting to Know**³⁰:

We propose a regret theory of deliberate ignorance that covers both negative feelings that

²⁹ And the differences of value perception, where one person may value flowers and the other likes legos. Same idea, what someones finds as very valuable form of affection (eye contact) maybe be to another person a threat/non-verbal dominance behavior.

³⁰ Gigerenzer, G., & Garcia-Retamero, R. (2017)

³¹ Negative connotation, tone of voice, micromanagement, autonomy-based reactance (Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation), etc.

³² I absolutely love the meme that was like "Yoda, why are the Star Wars episodes numbered 3,4,5 and then 1,2,3?" Yoda: "In charge of order, I was."

³³ Song, H., Zhang, Y., Zuo, L., Chen, X., Cao, G., d'Oleire Uquillas, F., & Zhang, X. (2019)

may arise from foreknowledge of negative events, such as death and divorce, and positive feelings of surprise and suspense that may arise from foreknowledge of positive events, such as knowing the sex of an unborn child.

There is a **difference between deliberate ignorance and classical-conditioning-based negative feedback**: it may not be inherent avoidance but rather the negative emotional association³¹ associated with the task based on previous experience or just plain ol' "how do I feel about this?".

But every action or inaction progressively build over time - aware or not, deliberate or not - for better or for worse. Gotta love Star Wars: *fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering.*³²)

As much as I would love to go into all the related topics, this paper is already getting too long for my liking so I'll expand on them in future papers.

Ignorance by Positive Illusions

Avoiding the hard questions or self-lies/positive illusions to maintain an illusion or a false sense of safety

"I prefer my illusions, for they are often kinder than the truth."

From *Improving Relationships by Elevating Positive Illusion and the Underlying Psychological and Neural Mechanisms*³³:

Interestingly, higher levels of positive illusion between partners have been associated with a decreased risk for relationship dissolution, as well as higher satisfaction, and less conflict or doubt in relationships.

These findings indicate that elevating positive illusion amongst romantic partners may be of benefit and improve romantic relationships.

From A Leap of Faith? Positive Illusions in Romantic Relationships³⁴

Both members of dating and married couples completed a measure of relationship illusions, tapping idealized perceptions of the partners' attributes, exaggerated perceptions of control, and unrealistic optimism.

Results of concurrent analyses revealed that relationship illusions predicted greater satisfaction, love, and trust, and less conflict and ambivalence in both dating and marital relationships

I'm not supporting the need for "positive illusions" but just wanted to take it into consideration.

Ignorance by Contentment (Achievement-Contentment and Complacent-Contentment)

Ignorance by Contentment has two categories that I can think of:

- **Achievement-Contentment:** the contentment felt after achieving a desire or end result. This can apply from complete projects (such as finish knitting a hat) to slowing down an

ambitious career drive after marrying your dream partner.

- **Complacent-Contentment:** this is geared towards stagnation after contentment, that once a level of balance or a lack of fears are achieved, complacency sets in and the hedonic treadmill sets in.

Ignorance by Perception of Socially Acceptable

Ignorance by perception-of-what-is-considered-socially-acceptable (fantastic title lol, couldn't think of a better name), is pretty self-explanatory.

The more it appears to be socially accepted - such as someone ghosting³⁵ another person, situationships, if they wanted to, they would³⁶ - the more ignorance may occur that the other person has feeling too and explaining is the more mature action to do.

HANDLING THE TRUTH

In order to understand interpersonal ignorance, I have to define what handling truth is.

This section and will go back and forth between quotes and commentary. :D

From a Few Good Men³⁷:

Jessup: I'll answer the question. You want answers?

Kaffee: I think I'm entitled!

Jessup: You want answers?!

³⁴ Murray, S. L., & Holmes, J. G. (1997)

³⁵ **Ghosting:** "the act or practice of abruptly cutting off all contact with someone (such as a former romantic partner) usually without explanation by no longer accepting or responding to phone calls, instant messages, etc." Merriam-Webster: Definition of Ghosting

³⁶ I have to do a paper on "If they wanted to, they would because when I wanted to, I did." It has a lot of truth in it but I have seen some arguments that it doesn't take into consideration life happens, insecurities, kindness misapplication, etc HOWEVER I would have the counter-argument that the initial problem implies tenacity and aMCC related activities.

³⁷ Sorkin, Aaron. A Few Good Men. Directed by Rob Reiner, Columbia Pictures, 1992.

Kaffee: I want the truth!

Jessup: You can't handle the truth!

Son, we live in a world that has walls, and those walls have to be guarded by men with guns. Who's gonna do it? You?

I have a greater responsibility than you can possibly fathom. And my existence, while grotesque and incomprehensible to you, saves lives!

We use words like "honor", "code", "loyalty". We use these words as the backbone of a life spent defending something. You use them as a punchline.

Either way, I don't give a damn what you think you are entitled to!

This is related to the idea: *To offend a strong man, tell him a lie. To offend a weak man, tell him the truth.* However, this paper assumes you, the reader, are human and have a minimum level of emotional intelligence and awareness that people are complicated, not complex.³⁸

There are also a couple assumptions:

- 1) You will know as much as people are willing to tell them (as well as the opposite, others will know as much as we are willing to tell them)
- 2) There is a willingness to tell those who ask (implying openness to listening without a solution) and those we trust
- 3) However, for trust to be built, there has to be open communication and vulnerability

Honesty - and its related character trait, authenticity - is subjectively one of the most valued parts of humans, as it opens the door to

emotional vulnerability, loyalty, and human connection.

Honesty requires truth, not lies. *If you get what you want by telling a lie, then you are not smart enough to get it by telling the truth.*³⁹

But on the other hand it might not necessarily mean "people can't handle the truth" but rather as a self-defense mechanism. *The walls we build around us to keep sadness out also keeps out the joy.*

The next section is a comparison of facts and interpretations, which hopefully helps add context.

FACTS

From Adams' Argument for the Defense (1770)⁴⁰:

Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.

From David Porter:

Don't make me lose this. This is a part of who I am when you met me - and you like me for me, you might not like that part of me, but it's part of me - don't make me lose that, just because you don't like it.

Having that ability to say: "I give to you in the hopes that you give to me" and as long as that reciprocity is there and no one feels like they're being taken advantage of, trust gets built better that way. I'm showing you this as a token of trust, don't abuse it [or use it against me].

³⁸ Tied to tone of voice and how something is said matters (syntax, word choice, timing, pauses).

³⁹ I know Jordan Peterson said this on a podcast but I can't find the source.

⁴⁰ Adams, J. (1770)

INTERPRETATIONS

From Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* (1901)⁴¹:

In opposition to Positivism⁴², which halts at phenomena and says,

"These are only facts and nothing more,"

*I would say: No, **facts are precisely what is lacking, all that exists consists of interpretations.** We cannot establish any fact "in itself": it may even be nonsense to desire to do such a thing.*

"Everything is subjective," ye say: but that in itself is interpretation.

From 1776⁴³, on the subject of rebellion and the legality of it:

*You should know that rebellion is always legal in the **first person, such as "our rebellion."** It is only in the **third person - "their rebellion"** - that it is illegal.*

From Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals* (1913)⁴⁴:

There is only a seeing from a perspective, only a "knowing" from a perspective, and the more emotions we express over a thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we train on the same thing, the more complete will be our "idea" of that thing, our "objectivity."

But the elimination of the will altogether, the switching off of the emotions all and sundry,

granted that we could do so, what! would not that be called intellectual castration?

COMMENTARY

(Please refer to Ground Definitions section if some of the phrasing sounds confusing. As in anything, details matter.)

Your interpretation of another person's emotional fact/experience may differ from their own interpretation of that same emotional fact/experience (because you're perceiving it externally while they're experiencing it internally).

- Person B has an emotional fact (their actual feeling)
- Person B interprets it through their own perspective
- Person A perceives Person B's expression/communication of that emotion
- Person A interprets that perception through their own perspective

Result: Two layers of interpretation separate the original emotional fact from Person A's understanding.

As I stated in the General Definitions section: An emotional fact is objective but can be subjectively interpreted.

There is something someone finds to be true (an **emotional fact**), whether it stems from childhood trauma, a romantic separation, or just their way of viewing life⁴⁵, that is a fact of their emotional state.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Nietzsche, F. (1968) W. Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale, Translation

⁴² Positivism, aka Positive Philosophy, is briefly covered in the Context Section

⁴³ The Movie 1776 (1972) Hunt, P. H. (Director). (1972). 1776 [Film]. Columbia Pictures.

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, F. (1967) W. Kaufmann, Translation

⁴⁵ Which is based on an accumulation of their thoughts, perspectives, experiences, morals, ethics, expectations, desires, education, awareness, thought processes, etc.

⁴⁶ "When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion." - Dale Carnegie

It may not be a hundred percent accurate but it is their awareness of something at the present time. This can happen because of false memories, incomplete informations, misinterpretations, etc⁴⁷.

They might realize it later that the feeling or threat perception was on a different, unconscious feeling/threat but at this present moment, it is an emotional fact.

(Hopefully that makes sense.)

There is also the idea of ownership bias, that it **their** emotional fact and not your own, and trying to change their way of thinking⁴⁸ because you perceive yours to be better is just plain old delulu. I plan on covering ownership bias in another paper.

Anyways, if none of that makes sense, perfect. On to deliberate ignorance, which ties to Seneca's quote:

There are more things, likely to frighten us than there are to crush us; we suffer more often in imagination than in reality. We are in the habit of exaggerating, or imagining, or anticipating, sorrow.

INTERPERSONAL IGNORANCE

Interpersonal ignorance, for the purposes of this paper, is more of an idea than a solid definition.

(I guess that would make it more of a feeling than an objective concept.)

Thought experiment: you're talking to someone and you're going back and forth and it's productive at an emotional level.

They mention something like "oh yeah, my last relationship was crummy. I'm pretty sure they were a narcissist" then keep going on with the conversation⁴⁹.

That makes a connection in your head, that you're not happy with your current relationship and don't know if it is a you problem, them problem, or an us problem.

(Technically this is the kind of conversation you have with that person you are in a relationship with but I'm no therapist and this is still a hypothetical that I'm trying to turn into "huh, would this actually happen in reality and why" which takes me down another rabbit hole and I'm gonna shut up now.)

Ok ok, so you make that connection. You are now in a state of mind that wants to be vulnerable because of shared emotions, feelings, experiences, etc so you try to get back to that comment.

But every time you try, they keep going on the tangent they were already going on.

But you're too insecure to stop the conversation and just ask to change the subject.

So here is the loop, in this specific thought experiment: interpersonal ignorance. Due to the cost of being emotionally vulnerable with someone, you can't set your pride/ego to the side and they have no idea that you're in need of help because you're prioritizing harmony over honesty (not wanting to be a burden or being intrusive or a bother, etc).

Wait wait wait, lemme be clear: this is not a you problem.

⁴⁷ "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." - Attributed to Maya Angelou.

⁴⁸ Related to comparison is the thief of joy, the idea that everything is relative. Someone's first time experiencing something (broken love, friendship betrayal, etc) is relative to the amount of times they have experienced it before and their capability of handling it. Just because it's simple from the outside, doesn't mean it's easy. Take everyone's emotions with the fragility it deserves.

⁴⁹ I realized while writing this: "When the flip do people just make an off the cuff comment like that?" This is my hallucination disguised as a thought experiment. Lemme be happy for a sec.

Interpersonal ignorance occurs with the accounting/transactional mindset. Weighing the costs and benefits creates a balance/equilibrium not towards action, but inaction.

Think of it like this: many, many, many situations are towards a balance:

- "This apple is not ripe, this one is too ripe, ah this one is just perfect"
- "Should I get my car washed now or do it after work? Oh dam, that's a lot of people waiting to clean their cars, I'll do it after."
- "Workout now or after lunch? Well, I usually get brain fog after lunch (oxygen goes to stomach instead of brain/muscles) so ideally before so your body then uses the nutrients/protein/carbs where needed" (this is not fitness advice, I have no idea if this is true. I have, however, heard the your body can only process 30 grams of protein in an hour so have fun with that thought)

Everything is so dependent on that mental accounting system.

But that equilibrium works mostly because these are all logical/objective decisions. You will gain something emotionally by doing these logical actions (nice looking apple, clean car, healthier body).

What happens when there is nothing to gain or maybe even something to lose emotionally?

Maybe you'll get ridiculed, maybe the person will ignore it and say you're overthinking it, maybe they will give you such a stupid answer that you just lose faith that anyone wants to truly understand; or you just want to be heard and feel like someone sees you for who you see yourself to be.

This is tied to discretion of vulnerability but more than that, it is the cognitive load required for understanding.

INTERPERSONAL AND DELIBERATE IGNORANCE

How does this all tie together? Why go on a big tangent on Interpersonal Ignorance if this paper is about Deliberate Ignorance?

Why can't stupid people handle the truth? → they are stupid because they are ignorant (not ignorant because they are stupid) → not ignorant because of lack of information but avoidance of information (Deliberate Ignorance) → keep in mind every person is trying their best → when you or them are trying to understand something and interpersonal ignorance is present: *your interpretation of your perception of another's emotional fact is different than their interpretation of their perspective of their emotional fact* → don't stop being curious, keep asking questions, realize there is always more to learn about someone → control your thoughts and how you respond, especially with tone of voice and consideration (you're not perfect and neither are they, also don't have unreasonable or unrealistic expectations).

CURIOSITY, THOUGHT CONTROL, AND RESPONDING

(Tied to awareness of ignorance, empathy, responsibility within conversations, kindness, and reacting emotionally.)

(The gap is also understanding/being aware/discernment of whether the problem is an emotional or logical problem⁵⁰, where the former usually wants to be heard and the latter is more finding a solution. This is slightly expanded on in the Context section.)

Bit of commentary: I grew up watching Curious George on PBS Kids and he never stopped being curious. If he didn't know something, he'll ask and ask and ask, with different people, animals, or just by himself, until he figured out what the answer is.

⁵⁰ Many problems are a misinterpretation of an emotional solution to a logical problem or a logical solution to an emotional problem. The biggest difference is that the emotional problems can be tied to identity and by providing an logical solution, it can come off as being inconsiderate or criticizing.

Emotional curiosity is more about responding vs reacting.

- **React**⁵¹: *to exert a reciprocal or counteracting force or influence, often used with on or upon; to change in response to a stimulus; to act in opposition to a force or influence, usually used with against; to move or tend in a reverse direction*
- **Respond**⁵²: *to say something in return: make an answer; to react in response; to have a particular reaction; to show favorable reaction; to be answerable*

Emotional responding is tied to a couple quotes:

- *Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.*⁵³
- *The chronic kicker, even the most violent critic, will frequently soften and be subdued in the presence of a patient, sympathetic listener.*⁵⁴
- *A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.*⁵⁵
- *A wise man speaks because he has something to say; a fool speaks because he has to say something.*⁵⁶
- **"You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you."**

⁵¹ Merriam-Webster: Definition of React

⁵² Merriam-Webster: Definition of Respond

⁵³ Covey, S. R. (1989)

⁵⁴ Carnegie, D. (1936)

⁵⁵ Proverbs 18:2 (ESV)

⁵⁶ Attributed to Plato

⁵⁷ Eder, A. B. (2023)

⁵⁸ From earlier in the abstract, a cognitive feelings signal (I think) is: "Feelings of emotions are valued interoceptive signals from the body that become multimodally integrated with perceptual contents from registered and mentally simulated events."

Thought control: decreasing stimulus to action while not losing accuracy, respond not react, discretion on what thoughts are entertained, which of those thoughts are accepted, and of the ones accepted, which do I tolerate?

Within thought control is how **honest I am with myself**. Despite how much I might believe I'm honest, I still shy away from processing the genuine thoughts. This will lead to me feeling real with myself but also is blocked by the desire to fall in love with the idea and positive outcome (that cannot be sustained by reality).

And then within honesty is **knowing what is right and wrong**. It's not about doing the right thing, but knowing what is right.

From **A perceptual control theory of emotional action**⁵⁷:

Perceptual control theory states that behavior controls perception; we act against disturbances in the environment to align hierarchically organized perceived aspects of the self and the world with neurally specified reference values.

During the simulation of a perceptual change from one event to the next, a cognitive feeling signal⁵⁸ is created that codes for the wanting of a specific perceptual change.

A wanted perceptual change is weighted more strongly than alternatives, increasing its activation level on the cognitive level and that of associated

motor structures that produced this perceptual change in the past.

As a consequence, a tendency for action is generated that is directed at the production of the wanted perception.

(Kinda along the idea of some people just want to be heard and not want a solution, and that sometimes the listener is as important as the desire to be heard.)

Emotionally reacting can occur when someone else has a tone of voice is questioning your authority, you subconsciously process it and then escalate the situation by increasing your tone of voice.

Emotionally responding is listening to the other person and hearing the undertones and asking one more question.

The big difference is removing the emotions and understand the situation. Pride, ego, lack of recognition, unfounded criticism.

The main difference is that reacting is to be a opposing force - they get angry, you push back, they escalate, you get defensive and escalate even more - responding is understanding that the conversation is mutually controllable on an emotional level.

Responding is the active social tendency to reciprocate actions, behaviors, tone of voice, eye contact, conversational enthusiasm, building on their words, adding interesting tangents that increase the oxytocin/dopamine/serotonin release.

Person doesn't respond to a joke very well? Perfect, redirect and find what they like. They don't like that either? Screw it, end the conversation and move on to the next person.

Responding is active emotional control. There is no pride, ego, and power dynamic, it is for the love of the conversation, and letting go/disconnecting if the conversation is not worth loving.

Reacting is easy, it is just input → output. Responding is input → stimulus → personal feelings kept in check → build or break → speak or listen → timing for action → output. I'm oversimplifying this a lot but you get the idea.

Weird tangent: in either directly abusive or passively narcissistic relationships, it is basically the idea how people develop mental/emotional safeguards to regulate and suppress/compress their emotions but don't realize that they are doing this until after the threat of the harmful stimulus is removed, such as years later and/or with friends who they actually trust.

Side note: even if the knowledge of the past experience is mutually known, it may not be mutually aware in this present moment.

To respond, from the third person perspective, adds a level of consideration and intentional responding rather than automatic/impulsive/amygdala reacting.

Because of that, responding could be as simple as a comfortable pause in conversation:

Between stimulus and response there is space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom. - Attributed to Frankl⁵⁹.

From Thomas Galloway⁶⁰:

"Personality has three main parts:

- (1) *the receiving portion (receptors) that looks out on stimuli (attention and appreciation are its great functions);*

⁵⁹ According to the Viktor Frankl Institute, the quote's actual origin is somewhat nuanced. Stephen R. Covey recalled finding it in a library book and thought it captured Frankl's philosophy, but he never noted the book's author or title. Covey mentioned in 1994 that he found this passage in a university library in Hawaii around 1969, and despite later attempts, he couldn't locate the book again.

⁶⁰ The Use of Motives in Teaching Morals and Religion by Thomas Walton Galloway

- (2) a responding side (effectors) that looks toward behavior or response; and
- (3) that which lies between stimulus and response whose function is to correlate and adjust behavior to stimulus.

This third region is where our real personal values lie. This is where we grow most. We may possibly improve the reception of stimuli and certainly the skill of our responses; but our greatest gain is within."

From the abstract from *Empathic curiosity: resolving goal conflicts that generate emotional distress*:

The explanation is rooted in control theory, a theory that explains the link between our experiences and our goal-directed behaviour.

Empathic curiosity is underpinned by the core skills of empathic listening and maintaining a curious attitude.

From a control theory perspective, the value of this type of listening may be reinforced when speak to people about their salient concerns, as they perceive them in the current flow of their conscious thoughts.

This can be facilitated by linking curious questions to the non-verbal disruptions in their body posture and conversational flow.

This next quote from Chien-chih Seng-ts'an's *Verses on the Faith Mind* is mostly on not seeing cognitive load as something to resist but a function of inner peace and understanding the whole and not as an accumulation of the pieces.

From *Verses on the Faith Mind* by Chien-chih Seng-ts'an⁶¹:

The Great Way is not difficult for those who have no preferences. When love and hate are both absent everything becomes clear and undisguised. Make the smallest distinction,

however, and heaven and earth are set infinitely apart.

If you wish to see the truth then hold no opinions for or against anything. To set up what you like against what you dislike is the disease of the mind.

When the deep meaning of things is not understood the mind's essential peace is disturbed to no avail.

The Way is perfect like vast space where nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess. Indeed, it is due to our choosing to accept or reject that we do not see the true nature of things.

Live neither in the entanglements of outer things, nor in inner feelings of emptiness. Be serene in the oneness of things and such erroneous views will disappear by themselves.

From David Porter's Paper Clip Analogy⁶²:

Dave learned this from a marriage counselor at the VA who explained two different thought patterns:

- **Linear thinking (his style):** Thoughts are like paper clips arranged in a line, like a train - one thought leads directly to the next. Very structured and sequential.
- **Scattered thinking (more typical ADHD style):** Thoughts are like paper clips spread out all over, where you can jump between different thoughts without finishing them, and multiple thoughts can exist simultaneously.

It is about active listening and making mental space for others. He explains that when someone with linear thinking gets interrupted, they snap because "a rogue paperclip" has derailed their train of thought.

The solution: deliberately spread out your mental paper clips to leave space - so other people's thoughts can come in without causing a collision.

⁶¹ Jianzhi Sengcan. (n.d.). Hsin Hsin Ming [Multiple translations]

⁶² Podcast Episode David Porter 2

- Taking a breath or two after someone finishes speaking before responding
- Showing through intentional pause that you've "digested what they said and made space in your tracks for their thought"
- Not letting your preoccupation prevent you from being present for others

He also applies this to relationships. Telling partners they need to "separate your paper clips a little bit so I've got some space" to maintain individual identity and hobbies while being in a relationship.

— — —

All in all, if there is anything other than take away from this paper: regardless of how it feels, its about what is worth doing, and being emotional because someone doesn't understand is just a waste of energy.

Just treat everyone like they are trying their best.

— CONTEXT SECTION —

The following section consists of contextual knowledge.

PERCEPTION SYNONYMS⁶³

- *Discernment stresses accuracy (as in reading character or motives or appreciating art).*
- *Discrimination stresses the power to distinguish and select what is true or appropriate or excellent.*
- *Perception implies quick and often sympathetic discernment (as of shades of feeling).*
- *Penetration implies a searching mind that goes beyond what is obvious or superficial.*

⁶³ Merriam Webster: Perception

⁶⁴ Holman, E. Alison, Dana Rose Garfin, and Roxane Cohen Silver. "Media's Role in Broadcasting Acute Stress Following the Boston Marathon Bombings."

- *Insight suggests depth of discernment coupled with understanding sympathy.*
- *Acumen implies characteristic penetration combined with keen practical judgment.*

INTRINSIC CONNECTIVITY NETWORKS (ICNs)

ICNs are persistent and stable brain networks of functional nature that link patterns of resting state and task-related state connectivity. The term "intrinsic connectivity networks" expands upon the concept of resting state networks to include large-scale functionally connected brain networks that can be captured during both rest and task conditions.

Central Executive Network (CEN): Engaged during focused tasks, responsible for working memory, attention control, and goal-directed behavior. (Also known as the Fronto-Parietal Control Network (FPCN), lateral frontoparietal network (L-FPN), multiple-demand system, extrinsic mode network, domain-general system, and cognitive control network.)

Default Mode Network (DMN): Active during rest and internal thought, involved in self-referential thinking, memory, and mind-wandering.

Salience Network (SN): Monitors and detects important stimuli, switching attention between internal and external events to guide behavior.

(This is one of my first solo videos, I'll do a paper on this in the future.)

STRESS AND THE BOSTON MARATHON BOMBINGS

Media's Role in Broadcasting Acute Stress Following the Boston Marathon Bombings⁶⁴

(Future topic: stress, grief, and how psychological defense, to better cope with negative information and memories, affects information retainment and selective memory.)

The authors conclude that repeatedly engaging with trauma-related media content for several hours daily shortly after collective trauma may prolong acute stress experience and promote substantial stress-related symptoms.

Thus, mass media may become a means of spreading the negative consequences of community trauma beyond communities directly affected.

The authors advised that although it is important to stay informed, watching coverage of a traumatic event repeatedly may exacerbate psychological distress and impede the normal recovery process.

GLUTAMATE-GLUTAMINE DIFFUSION

Glutamate: An amino acid and the brain's primary excitatory neurotransmitter. Plays a major role in learning and memory, acts as an energy source for brain cells when glucose levels are low, allows chemical messages to be sent between nerve cells, and manages the sleep-wake cycle.

Glutamine: Also an amino acid, but NOT a neurotransmitter. Major role in the brain is that of a precursor of the neurotransmitter amino acids: the excitatory amino acids glutamate and aspartate, and the inhibitory amino acid GABA.

Glutamate Concentration: A static measurement of how much glutamate is present in brain tissue at a given time.

Glutamate-Glutamine Diffusion (The Glutamate-Glutamine Cycle): A dynamic process describing the continuous recycling of glutamate and a major metabolic pathway coupled to a large portion of the total energy demand of brain function.

- Neurons release glutamate for neurotransmission

- Glial cells (astrocytes) take up excess glutamate via transporters
- Astrocytes convert glutamate → glutamine (via glutamine synthetase)
- Glutamine diffuses back to neurons (it's membrane permeable)
- Neurons convert glutamine → glutamate (via glutaminase)
- The cycle repeats

EXPANDED QUOTES

Course on Positive Philosophy (1830-1842) by Auguste Comte laid out his vision of positivism - the idea that human thought progresses through three stages:

- Theological (explaining things through gods),
- Metaphysical (through abstract forces),
- and finally positive/scientific (through observable laws).

The object of all true Philosophy is to frame a system which shall comprehend human life under every aspect, social as well as individual. It embraces, therefore, the three kinds of phenomena of which our life consists, Thoughts, Feelings, and Actions.

Yet even during the time of its highest development, intellectually and socially, theology exercised no real control over practical life. It reacted, of course, upon it to some extent, but the effects of this were in most cases far more apparent than real.

There was a natural antagonism between them, which though at first hardly perceived, went on increasing till at last it brought about the entire destruction of the theological fabric. A system so purely subjective could not harmonize with the necessarily objective tendencies and stubborn realities of practical life.

The Will to Power is a posthumous compilation (1901) of Friedrich Nietzsche's notes, assembled by his sister.

The core concept suggests that the fundamental drive in all life isn't survival but the will to exert and expand one's power and influence.

Nietzsche saw this as the basis for creativity, achievement, and self-overcoming, while criticizing traditional morality as a tool the weak use to constrain the strong.

In opposition to Positivism [Positive Philosophy], which halts at phenomena and says, "These are only facts and nothing more," I would say: No, facts are precisely what is lacking, all that exists consists of interpretations. We cannot establish any fact "in itself": it may even be nonsense to desire to do such a thing. "Everything is subjective," ye say: but that in itself is interpretation.

To the extent to which knowledge has any sense at all, the world is knowable: but it may be interpreted differently, it has not one sense behind it, but hundreds of senses. — "Perspectivity."

It is our needs that interpret the world; our instincts and their impulses for and against. Every instinct is a sort of thirst for power; each has its point of view, which it would fain impose upon all the other instincts as their norm.

Of what alone can knowledge consist? — "Interpretation," the introduction of a sense into things, not "explanation" (in the majority of cases a new interpretation of an old interpretation which has grown incomprehensible and little more than a mere sign).

There is no such thing as an established fact, everything fluctuates, everything, is intangible, yielding; after all, the most lasting of all things are our opinions.

John Adams' Closing Arguments:

Despite enormous public pressure, John Adams argued that the mob had provoked the soldiers with threats and violence, creating reasonable fear for their lives. He famously insisted that

"Facts are stubborn things" and that the accused deserved fair treatment under law regardless of political sentiment. I would highly recommend HBO's John Adams or The Adams' Chronicles tv shows for more context around John Adams.

That precept of our holy religion which commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves doth not command us to love our neighbour better than ourselves, or so well, no Christian Divine hath given this interpretation.

The precept enjoins, that our benevolence to our fellow men, should be as real and sincere, as our affections to ourselves, not that it should be as great in degree.

A man is authorised therefore by common sense, and the laws of England, as well as those of nature, to love himself better than his fellow subject: If two persons are cast away at sea, and get on a plank, (a case put by Sir Francis Bacon,) and the plank is insufficient to hold them both, the one hath a right to push the other off to save himself.

The rules of the common law therefore, which authorize a man to preserve his own life at the expence of another's, are not contradicted by any divine or moral law.

Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence: nor is the law less stable than the fact; if an assault was made to endanger their lives, the law is clear, they had a right to kill in their own defence; if it was not so severe as to endanger their lives, yet if they were assaulted at all, struck and abused by blows of any sort, by snow-balls, oyster-shells, cinders, clubs, or sticks of any kind; this was a provocation, for which the law reduces the offence of killing, down to manslaughter, in consideration of those passions in our nature, which cannot be eradicated.

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RELATED TOPICS

- The emotional cost of emotional vulnerability, attention, and listening to emotional problems.
- Social Exchange Theory, Opportunity Cost, Cognitive Load Theory, Ownership Bias
- Intrinsic Connectivity Networks (ICNs)
- Intuition vs instinct
- The inner-critic
- Stress, grief, and how psychological defense, to better cope with negative information and memories, affects information retention and selective memory.
- Feelings vs emotions: usually when I ask people this question it's usually one is the initial stimulus and the other is the interpretation of that stimulus, kinda tied to facts vs interpretations
- The "I can change him/her" crowd in the context of romantic relationships
- Regret avoidance, plausible deniability, anticipatory regret, time-to-event hypothesis, accountability/ownership/responsibility, risk aversion
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