

WHY AIN'T YOU DUMB?

If you're so smart, we ask without thinking, why ain't you rich?

With thinking, we know the answer: many of the very smartest people, perhaps even most, find better things to do than making money.

The more interesting question is why so many of the very smartest people do such stupid things. Take Henry Kissinger.*

Mr. Kissinger has spent most of his life in the field of foreign affairs, rising from a poor immigrant boy to become Secretary of State and a co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. He must be one smart fellow.

And so he appears to be, until we look back to see just how well his policies have worked out over time. Not so well, actually. Most of them, in fact, turn out to have been moronic.

Here are a few picked from his eight disastrous years spent running the nation's foreign policy; the list could easily be doubled or tripled.

Mr. Kissinger's campaign to overthrow the elected government of Chile allowed General Pinochet to destroy democracy in Chile. The damage to Chilean freedom was great, and only now beginning to be repaired; the gain to the United States was negligible.

Mr. Kissinger's support of the Greek colonels caused similar damage to that country's democracy, with, once more, no measurable gain for us.

Mr. Kissinger backed the Shah against the Ayatollah Khomeini even when he no longer had an official voice in the matter: after leaving office he successfully lobbied President Carter to arrange a safe haven for the deposed emperor. This led directly to the assault on our embassy in Teheran and to twenty years of enmity, often exploding into terrorism, between Iran and the United States.

Mr. Kissinger's peace with honor in Vietnam brought neither. We wound up betraying our clients and weaseling out of our promise of postwar aid to Hanoi.

Mr. Nixon's and Mr. Kissinger's war, as it had become by then, was originally justified as necessary to keep noncommunist dominoes in the region from falling. When we surrendered, though, the dominoes did not fall. Instead they prospered while the communist states of China, Vietnam, and Cambodia made war on each other.

One of these wars led to the invasion of Cambodia by the Vietnamese, who drove the murderous Khmer Rouge into exile. Mr. Kissinger hurried to embrace the deposed Pol Pot, the most revolting butcher since Stalin.

This was on the theory that the friend of my enemy's enemy is my friend, China being Russia's enemy and Pol Pot's patron. China was so impressed by this exercise in *realpolitik* that it immediately permitted freedom of the press, open elections, private ownership of industry, and a nationwide chain of McDonalds. Or am I thinking of Russia?

Mr. Kissinger's policies often appeared so unrelated to the observable facts of the world that it seemed to many people, even at the time, that he must inhabit some alternative universe. What could lead so smart a man to act so stupidly?

IMAGINE YOUNG HENRY finding himself at the age of fourteen not in New York City, but in a cannibal village. Frightened, he seeks protection from the village elders by making himself useful to them. Energetic and intelligent, he succeeds.

Years pass and the small, weak, pale boy has made himself into the most important witch doctor in the tribe, using the traditional tools of flattery, lies, betrayal, cruelty, bullying of those below him, fulsome flattery of those above, and hard work.

Now his wisdom is sought in the highest cannibal councils. He is mentioned regularly by the talking drums, and his exploits are already being recited in the tribe's oral history. If intelligence consists in taking good care of yourself, this is surely one smart cannibal.

But the problems the eminent witch doctor has so successfully solved presented no particular intellectual challenge. The skills of the courtier are the same for all tribes, and are readily observable by anyone interested in acquiring them.

Nor would young Henry's triumphs among the cannibals have required him to deploy more than a fraction of his intelligence, and that fraction only in the exclusive service of his king. Creative and original thinking outside the royal box would likely have cost him his head.

Thus it would never have occurred to him, for instance, to ponder the ethics or morality of cannibalism. He would not have considered whether the practice promoted the general peace or happiness of his or the neighboring tribes. Indeed he would not be likely to believe that peace and happiness were practical or desirable goals, except for himself.

Cannibalism is all around him. He has practiced it personally since adolescence. He has spent his life ingratiating himself with the tribe's leaders by teaching the principles and practice of cannibalism to their children. He has offered encouragement to the other young men as they went out to slaughter enemies for the pot, and he has won the tribe's highest honors for all these services.

And yet an outsider arriving in the village would see instantly that cannibalism had certain drawbacks, visible even to the most permissive moral relativist. He might argue that the practice could infect the tribe with *kuru*, an invariably fatal variant of Mad Cow disease. He might point to the lack of solid evidence that an enemy's strength and courage will be absorbed by the tribe that eats him. The stranger might suggest that an alliance with the tribe next door would be a better way to make both of them stronger.

But if the visitor made these perfectly sensible points, he would not wind up as secretary of state. More than likely he would wind up as lunchmeat.

Who's the idiot now? Not the white witch doctor, certainly. He is a man who knows and practices brilliantly the secret of success in political life, which is to be wrong about the same things that everybody else in the tribe is wrong about.

* I pick on Mr. Kissinger not because he is unique, but because he is so nearly a perfect specimen of the type. All of his Cold War predecessors at the State Department and most of his successors, with one ineffectual exception, have followed policies just as fantastical. The exception was Warren Christopher, whose good advice was regularly undermined in the Carter White House by National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, a Kissinger wannabe.

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