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## The Complete Idiot's Guide to Idiocy. Or, what "oligophrenia" tells us

*Pietro Barbetta, Andrée Bella, Enrico Valtellina*

### Abstract

The Greek term *idiot* was used to indicate someone who looked after his or her own affairs without taking an interest in the management of the *polis*, and originally held none of the decidedly negative connotations we ascribe to it today. From the twentieth century onwards, various attempts have been made at *identifying and measuring* idiocy in the name of world *sanitization*, still a pervasive phenomenon at the present time, albeit with differing terminology. Following through from this, stories unravel of dramatic intolerance in the guise of research. Stories in which clinical and racist interests underlie the formulation of disturbing *scientific hypotheses*. Such accounts should not be considered simply in a historical context, as if such matters have now been superseded. They show, instead, that in one way or another those things that happened in the last century still take place today, although the modality may have changed. Coercion and authoritarianism, tenacity and instructions are iatrogenic. Due to a particular trait of the world of mental life, the reflective self, the mind may react in ways that are relentlessly paradoxical. Radically disobedient in the face of impositions, or, on the other hand, paradoxically understanding, able to drive the authoritarian principle to the most extreme consequences. The following work should be placed in the context of tendencies in research that have already produced interesting observations and noteworthy results (Carey, 2009; Carlson et al. 2010; Dale and Melling, 2006; Goodey, 2011; Johnson and Traustadóttir, 2005; McDonagh, 2009; Rapley, 2004; Wright, 2001).

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