



Stupidity

By Avital Ronell

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Stupidity By Avital Ronell

Nietzsche, Einstein and Deleuze agree: the question of stupidity, its unremitting sway, needs to be dealt with. This book explores the urgency of stupidity, its hiding places as well as its everyday public appearances. It maps areas of thought in which stupidity has been traditionally concealed or repressed and tunes into stupidity's static in the realms of literature, philosophy and politics. Neither a moral default nor a pathology, stupidity has no duty to truth yet nonetheless bears ethical consequences. At the same time there is something about stupidity -- what Musil and Deleuze locate as "transcendental stupidity" -- that is untrackable; it evades our cognitive scanners and turns up as the uncanny double of mastery or intelligence. A major phobia in the lexicon of learning, stupidity opens up new unintelligibilities, as Schlegel might have said -- an unexpected range of explosive stammers -- marking at times a new beginning, the philosophical primal scene of stupor. Stupidity points to what has been historically inappropriate -- the banality and stupidity of evil, as Hannah Arendt says of Eichmann. On some level stupidity is a "feminine" problem, or has been evicted from philosophical premises to occupy what is marked as feminine incertitude. Still, poets such as Holderlin and Rilke claimed the predicament of stupidity (or sheer idiocy) as reflecting the true nature of poetic origination. The work studies the modulation of stupidity into idiocy, puerility, and the figure of the ridiculous philosopher, instituted by Kant. Investigating ignorance, dumb-foundedness, and the limits of reason, it probes the pervasive practice of theory-bashing in supposedly intelligent social sectors. A section on prolonged and debilitating illness pushes the text to an edge of corporeal understanding, "at the limits of what the body knows and tells."

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Editorial Review

Review

"The foremost thinker of the repressed conditions of knowledge, Avital Ronell, with the Nietzschean audacity characteristic of her thought, probes the philosophical no-man's land of stupidity."

"[An] energetic book ... [Ronell's] fifth and perhaps most accomplished.... Stupidity as Ronell understands it is a kind of black hole devouring the light of rationality itself."

"In the face of the Enlightenment, stupidity disrupts, disturbs, or dissents. . . . Disrupt, disturb, and dissent--that is just what Ronell means to do in this book."

"[Ronell] proves herself yet again to be one of the most original and exciting of contemporary critics. . . . If you at all suspect that you might be intelligent, do not avoid Stupidity--embrace it."

From the Inside Flap

"The foremost thinker of the repressed conditions of knowledge, Avital Ronell, with the Nietzschean audacity characteristic of her thought, probes the philosophical no-man's land of stupidity. With dazzling readings of Musil, Schlegel, Dostoevsky, and Wordsworth, Ronell conjures a figure of non-knowledge whose sovereign failures of cognition constitute a radical challenge to the philosophical, political and ethical premises of the discourses of modernity." -- Jean-Luc Nancy, author of *The Sense of the World* "Avital Ronell has dared to approach a topic that effectively undoes any knowing or analytic posture, even any questioning stance. Advancing in full awareness of her vulnerability (and demonstrating constantly how this vulnerability exceeds awareness), she confronts the philosophical, psychosomatic, and ethico-political effects of her non-object through brilliant readings of a host of writers for whom stupidity (or idiocy) has become a haunting obsession or a kind of ambiguous promise. And throughout this process, she pursues a stunning meditation on the act of writing itself." -- Christopher Fynsk, author of *Infant Figures: The Death of the Infans and other Scenes of Origin*

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