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Political stupidity

Toward ontological anarchism against the intelligence regime

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Summaries

English Summary:

My project challenges conventional accounts of democracy by investigating the administrative presumptions that engender these conceptualizations. Its aim is to demonstrate that what is portrayed as democratic is to a large extent undemocratic. And, moreover, the project attempts to provide an account of what could be democratic by exploring the way stupidity's disruptive power of intelligence is a form of democratic intervention.

An assessment of mainstream political theories unveils a deeper repressive and undemocratic tendency inherent in political philosophy: the assumption that the polis is the public realm of intelligence where those capable of making decisions grounded on reason are free while those lacking the capacity to participate [the idios] are to be safeguarded in the private realm. Against this posture, my project aims to demonstrate that it is possible to conceptualize politics without an administrative axiom and therefore surpass the presupposition that politics concerns the government of those who cannot govern themselves.

The first revision I propose is an alternative understanding of stupidity. Rather than presenting it as a limitation or an external disruption to intelligence, I demonstrate that stupidity is a condition of thought. I draw on a possible relationship between philosophical lack of knowledge and stupidity to construct the idea that stupidity can be viewed as form of intellectual curiosity. This is constructed via an assessment of Heideggerian philosophy, more specifically via Reiner Schürmann's (1982) idea of anarchy as an ontological principle.

My second revision focuses on democracy as the possibility of the people's self-government. The project highlights that this conception of 'self-government' is conditioned on the possibility of proper agency: on determining proper political rationality and more importantly on avoiding the improper ones. I show that government exists exclusively as the administration of those who are unable to govern themselves by those who are self-governing and require no government. This administration is simultaneously overabundant, since the intelligent do not require it and it only restrains their self-sufficiency, and never sufficient, since it never manages to fully control stupidity as the masses insist on making themselves present and, hence endangering the status quo.

The final argument of my project employs this corruptive power of stupidity to argue that it can serve as a counter-hegemonic posture. Stupidity is not a refusal or an alternative model of knowledge, it is constructed as the possibility of indeterminacy/non-knowledge turning into a revolutionary position. I will then link it to Walter Benjamin's idea abolishing the law where he explores the possibility of a poverty of experience. This account of poverty is then connected Roberto Esposito construction of community as a form of common debt, and Fred Moten & Stefano Harney's idea of debt which is

developed in Denise Ferreira da Silva's idea of an unpayable debt. This is further connected to Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's notion of *ch'ixi* as a form of non-subjectivity.

In Chapter 1, I propose an alternative understanding of stupidity. Rather than considering it a limitation or an external disruption to intelligence, I demonstrate that stupidity is a condition of thought. I draw on a possible relationship between a philosophical lack of knowledge and stupidity to show that stupidity is a form of intellectual curiosity. This is based on an assessment of Heideggerian philosophy, particularly his engagements with the limitations of thinking in *What is Called Thinking?* (1968) and *Introduction to Metaphysics* (2000). I also engage with wider continental philosophical traditions, including Giorgio Agamben (2014), Jean-Luc Nancy (1991b, 2001), and Elliot Wolfson (2019).

This theoretical engagement with stupidity is then developed into a conceptualization of anarchism in Chapter 2. This applies Reiner Schürmann's (1987) idea of anarchy as an ontological principle. This conceptualization is linked to the notion of precarity as described by Isabell Lorey (2015) and Angela Mitropoulos (2006, 2009). This establishes a distinction between precarity as absence and precarity as existence without property or ontological security. The core argument is that this distinction parallels the explanation that stupidity is not an absence of intelligence but being without intelligence.

Chapter 3 challenges the idea that democracy involves autonomy or self-government. This builds on the concept of the "smartness mandate" developed by Orit Halpern and Robert Mitchell (2023). It demonstrates that the concept of "self-determination" is based on the possibility of proper agency—determining proper political rationality and, more importantly, avoiding the improper ones. Key authors informing this work include Silvia Federici (2004), Wendy Brown (1988), C. L. R. James (2001), and Roberto Esposito (2011). It links the smartness mandate to a larger political configuration. Therefore, I show that government exists exclusively to administer those who are unable to govern by those who are self-governing and require no government. As such, a vicious cycle forms in which administration is simultaneously overabundant (because the intelligent do not require it and it restrains their self-determination) and never sufficient (because it never manages to fully control stupidity as it is constantly present), which endangers the status quo. This danger is then used to legitimize further administration despite its inherent inefficiency.

Chapter 4 then considers the final argument of my investigation, using stupidity's corruptive power to argue that it can serve as a counterhegemonic attitude. This shows that stupidity is not a refusal or an alternative model of knowledge. The argument links stupidity as the possibility of indeterminate non-knowledge with a politically revolutionary position. This initially relies on Jacques Derrida's (2011) and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1994) engagements with the concept of stupidity. I link these constructs to Walter Benjamin's (2021) idea of abolishing the law in which he explores a poverty of experience. This account is connected to Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's (2013) notion of debt, which is developed in Denise Ferreira da Silva's (2022) idea of unpayable debt. It is further connected to Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's (2021) notion of *ch'ixi* as a form of nonsubjectivity.

My overall conclusion is that stupidity is a form of ungovernable being. The conceptualization of stupidity defies the double meaning of subjectification—that is, stupidity is a form of being that is not subject (submissive or dominated) to anything because it is not a subject (an agent or individual). As such, by presenting stupidity as ungovernable, the investigation shows that it is a form of desubjectification. This attempts to delineate the possibility of an anarchic political subject, one that does not work or could not work toward anything. This comes from nowhere and goes nowhere, an accidental coincidental form of being that is itself but is not a robust form of subjectivity or agency. Thus, this understanding of stupidity can establish a liberating form of uncertainty.

This overarching goal is shared by several theories of political revolution. Some of these are considered in this analysis of what stupidity offers. Charting stupidity as a challenge to capitalist logic places it within Marxist and anarchist traditions. Despite sharing some of the basic motivations and even analytical perceptions of these traditions, the implicit perspective motivating this construction of stupidity is that it moves beyond the disruption inherent in these theoretical frameworks. Stupidity emerges from the intersection of the Benjaminian and decolonial approaches to politics. Aligning Benjamin's argument that 'the enemy has not ceased to be victorious' (2007, p. 255) with the decolonial perception that colonial structures are still reproduced today, making our reality the product of colonial subjugation, I argue that theories of political change have not yet successfully overcome the mechanisms of oppression that they criticize. This argument engages with several interlocutors, but most of them are rejected to some extent in favor of a political position that emerges from the intersection of Benjamin and decoloniality.

Therefore, I engage with the field of critical theory selectively, taking specific contentions to refine my argument. Discussion on whether these appropriations are consistent with the original theory is not relevant here, and to avoid such a discussion, my analysis typically mentions these arguments rather than profoundly engaging with them.

English Title:

Political Stupidity: Toward ontological anarchism against the intelligence regime

Dutch Summary:

Mijn project daagt conventionele opvattingen over democratie uit door de bestuurlijke veronderstellingen te onderzoeken die aan deze conceptualiseringen ten grondslag liggen. Het doel is aan te tonen dat wat als democratisch wordt afgeschilderd, in grote mate ondemocratisch is. Bovendien probeert het project een beeld te schetsen van wat democratisch zou kunnen zijn door te onderzoeken hoe de verstorende intelligentie van domheid een vorm van democratische interventie is.

Een evaluatie van gangbare politieke theorieën onthult een diepere repressieve en ondemocratische tendens die inherent is aan de politieke filosofie: de aanname dat de polis het publieke domein van intelligentie is waar degenen die in staat zijn om beslissingen te nemen op basis van rede vrij zijn, terwijl degenen die niet in staat zijn om te participeren [de *ideos*] beschermd moeten worden

in de privésfeer. Tegen deze achtergrond wil mijn project aantonen dat het mogelijk is om politiek te conceptualiseren zonder een bestuurlijk axioma en daarmee de veronderstelling te overstijgen dat politiek zich bezighoudt met het besturen van degenen die zichzelf niet kunnen besturen.

De eerste herziening die ik voorstel, is een alternatieve interpretatie van domheid. In plaats van het te presenteren als een beperking of een externe verstoring van intelligentie, laat ik zien dat domheid een voorwaarde is voor het denken. Ik baseer me op een mogelijke relatie tussen filosofisch gebrek aan kennis en domheid om het idee te construeren dat domheid kan worden beschouwd als een vorm van intellectuele nieuwsgierigheid. Dit doe ik via een beoordeling van de Heideggeriaanse filosofie, meer specifiek via Reiner Schürmanns (1982) idee van anarchie als ontologisch principe.

Mijn tweede revisie richt zich op democratie als de mogelijkheid van zelfbestuur van het volk. Het project benadrukt dat deze opvatting van 'zelfbestuur' afhankelijk is van de mogelijkheid van een gepaste handelingsbekwaamheid: van het bepalen van gepaste politieke rationaliteit en, belangrijker nog, van het vermijden van ongepaste rationaliteit. Ik laat zien dat de overheid uitsluitend bestaat als het bestuur van degenen die niet in staat zijn zichzelf te besturen door degenen die zelfbestuur hebben en geen overheid nodig hebben. Dit bestuur is tegelijkertijd overvloedig, omdat de intelligente mensen het niet nodig hebben en het hun zelfredzaamheid alleen maar beperkt, en nooit voldoende, omdat het er nooit in slaagt de domheid volledig te beheersen, omdat de massa's erop staan zich aanwezig te stellen en zo de status quo in gevaar brengen.

Het laatste argument van mijn project gebruikt deze corrumperende kracht van domheid om te beargumenteren dat het kan dienen als een tegen-hegemonische houding. Domheid is geen weigering of een alternatief model van kennis, het wordt geconstrueerd als de mogelijkheid dat onbepaaldheid/niet-kennis uitmondt in een revolutionaire positie. Ik zal het vervolgens koppelen aan Walter Benjamins idee om de wet af te schaffen, waar hij de mogelijkheid van ervaringsarmoede onderzoekt. Deze visie op armoede wordt vervolgens gekoppeld aan Roberto Esposito's constructie van gemeenschap als een vorm van gemeenschappelijke schuld, en Fred Moten & Stefano Harney's idee van schuld, dat wordt ontwikkeld in Denise Ferreira da Silva's idee van een onbetaalbare schuld. Dit hangt samen met Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's idee van *ch'ixi* als een vorm van non-subjectiviteit.

In hoofdstuk 1 stel ik een alternatieve interpretatie van domheid voor. In plaats van het te beschouwen als een beperking of een externe verstoring van intelligentie, laat ik zien dat domheid een toestand van denken is. Ik baseer me op een mogelijke relatie tussen een filosofisch gebrek aan kennis en domheid om aan te tonen dat domheid een vorm van intellectuele nieuwsgierigheid is. Dit is gebaseerd op een evaluatie van de Heideggeriaanse filosofie, met name zijn beschouwingen over de beperkingen van het denken in *What is Called Thinking* (1968) en *Introduction to Metaphysics* (2000). Ik houd me ook bezig met bredere continentale filosofische tradities, waaronder Giorgio Agamben (2014), Jean-Luc Nancy (1991b, 2001) en Elliot Wolfson (2019).

Deze theoretische betrokkenheid bij domheid wordt vervolgens in hoofdstuk 2 ontwikkeld tot een conceptualisering van anarchisme. Dit past Reiner Schürmanns (1987) idee van anarchie als ontologisch

principe toe. Deze conceptualisering is gekoppeld aan het begrip precariteit zoals beschreven door Isabell Lorey (2015) en Angela Mitropoulos (2006, 2009). Dit creëert een onderscheid tussen precariteit als afwezigheid en precariteit als bestaan zonder eigendom of ontologische zekerheid. De kern van het betoog is dat dit onderscheid parallel loopt met de verklaring dat domheid niet de afwezigheid van intelligentie is, maar een zijn zonder intelligentie.

Hoofdstuk 3 daagt het idee uit dat democratie autonomie of zelfbestuur inhoudt. Dit bouwt voort op het concept van het "smartness mandate" ontwikkeld door Orit Halpern en Robert Mitchell (2023). Het toont aan dat het concept van "zelfbeschikking" gebaseerd is op de mogelijkheid van een gepaste agency – het bepalen van de juiste politieke rationaliteit en, belangrijker nog, het vermijden van de onjuiste. Belangrijke auteurs die dit werk informeren zijn onder andere Silvia Federici (2004), Wendy Brown (1988), C. L. R. James (2001) en Roberto Esposito (2011). Het verbindt het slimheidsmandaat met een grotere politieke configuratie. Daarom toon ik aan dat de overheid uitsluitend bestaat om degenen die niet in staat zijn te besturen te besturen door degenen die zelfbesturend zijn en geen overheid nodig hebben. Zo ontstaat er een vicieuze cirkel waarin bestuur tegelijkertijd overvloedig is (omdat de intelligenten het niet nodig hebben en het hun zelfbeschikking beperkt) en nooit voldoende (omdat het er nooit in slaagt domheid volledig te beheersen omdat het constant aanwezig is), wat de status quo in gevaar brengt. Dit gevaar wordt vervolgens gebruikt om verder bestuur te legitimeren, ondanks de inherente inefficiëntie ervan.

Hoofdstuk 4 behandelt vervolgens het laatste argument van mijn onderzoek, waarbij ik de corrumperende kracht van domheid gebruik om te beargumenteren dat het kan dienen als een tegenhegemonische houding. Dit toont aan dat domheid geen weigering of alternatief kennismodel is. Het argument verbindt domheid als de mogelijkheid van onbepaalde niet-kennis met een politiek revolutionaire positie. Dit baseert zich in eerste instantie op de betrokkenheid van Jacques Derrida (2011), Gilles Deleuze en Félix Guattari (1994) bij het concept domheid. Ik verbind deze constructies met Walter Benjamins (2021) idee van het afschaffen van de wet, waarin hij een armoede aan ervaring onderzoekt. Deze theorie is verbonden met Fred Moten en Stefano Harney's (2013) notie van schuld, die verder wordt uitgewerkt in Denise Ferreira da Silva's (2022) idee van onbetaalbare schuld. Het is verder verbonden met Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's (2021) notie van *ch'ixi* als een vorm van non-subjectiviteit.

Mijn algemene conclusie is dat domheid een vorm van onbestuurbaar zijn is. De conceptualisering van domheid tart de dubbele betekenis van subjectivering – dat wil zeggen, domheid is een vorm van zijn die nergens aan onderworpen (onderworpen of gedomineerd) is, omdat het geen subject is (een handelend persoon of individu). Door domheid als onbestuurbaar te presenteren, toont het onderzoek aan dat het een vorm van desubjectivering is. Dit probeert de mogelijkheid van een anarchistisch politiek subject af te bakenen, een subject dat nergens naartoe werkt of zou kunnen werken. Dit komt nergens vandaan en gaat nergens heen, een toevallige, toevallige vorm van zijn die

zichzelf is, maar geen robuuste vorm van subjectiviteit of handelen is. Dit begrip van domheid kan dus een bevrijdende vorm van onzekerheid creëren.

Dit overkoepelende doel wordt gedeeld door verschillende theorieën over politieke revolutie. Enkele daarvan worden besproken in deze analyse van wat domheid te bieden heeft. Door domheid in kaart te brengen als een uitdaging voor de kapitalistische logica, plaatst men het binnen de marxistische en anarchistische tradities. Hoewel ze enkele basismotivaties en zelfs analytische percepties van deze tradities delen, is het impliciete perspectief dat deze constructie van domheid motiveert, dat ze verder gaat dan de versterking die inherent is aan deze theoretische kaders. Domheid ontstaat op het snijvlak van de Benjaminiaanse en dekoloniale benaderingen van politiek. Door Benjamins argument dat 'de vijand niet heeft opgehouden te zegevieren' te (2007, p. 255) koppelen aan de dekoloniale perceptie dat koloniale structuren nog steeds worden gereproduceerd, waardoor onze realiteit het product is van koloniale onderwerping, betoog ik dat theorieën over politieke verandering de onderdrukingsmechanismen die ze bekritisieren nog niet succesvol hebben overwonnen. Dit argument betreft verschillende gesprekspartners, maar de meeste ervan worden tot op zekere hoogte verworpen ten gunste van een politieke positie die voortkomt uit het snijvlak van Benjamin en dekoloniale benaderingen.

Daarom betrek ik het vakgebied van de kritische theorie selectief en gebruik ik specifieke argumenten om mijn argumentatie te verfijnen. Discussie over de vraag of deze toe-eigeningen consistent zijn met de oorspronkelijke theorie is hier niet relevant, en om een dergelijke discussie te vermijden, vermeld ik deze argumenten in mijn analyse doorgaans in plaats van er diepgaand op in te gaan.

Dutch Title:

Politieke Domheid: Op weg naar ontologisch anarchisme tegen het inlichtingenregime