

Instead of Explaining Greta Thunberg, Debate Her Claims

What is Greta Thunberg's superpower?

She obviously has one, if not more. Your average sixteen-year-old doesn't start successful global activist movements, address UN Climate Action Summits, and have those addresses go viral as death metal videos.

Critics slam Thunberg as everything from "mentally ill" (a claim which got one Fox News guest blacklisted), to naive pawn in a well-funded propaganda operation, to just plain annoying teenager.

I think those critics miss the point. If they disagree on the facts, they should dispute those facts rather than focus on Thunberg at all. But since the focus IS on her, let's take a closer look.

Thunberg herself describes her autism-related diagnoses as among the aforementioned superpowers. "I was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, OCD and selective mutism," she said in a TEDx Talk. "That basically means I only speak when I think it's necessary. Now is one of those moments."

Thunberg as pawn isn't as dismissive as it sounds, but it doesn't ring very true either. Yes, she and her efforts enjoy support from well-funded organizations and individuals, but there's no reason to believe they randomly plucked her from the global mass of teenagers and set her in motion. She attracted their notice by taking action. They didn't make a winner, they saw a winner and decided to bet big on that winner.

As for her age, that's a double-edged sword. Her supporters can position her as wise beyond her years, her opponents as too young to yet possess wisdom at all.

Personally, I think Thunberg's superpower is that she's a great actor.

No, that's not intended as an insult. And no, I'm not just pulling the idea out of thin air.

She comes from a theatrical family. Her mother's an opera singer. Her father's an actor. Her grandfather's an actor and director. She's spent her entire life surrounded by the idea of performance as primary.

Formally trained or not, naturally gifted or not, she's clearly mastered the art of holding an audience's attention while she tells us what she thinks we need to hear.

So: IS what she's telling us what we need to hear? Does she have her facts straight? Is her understanding of the science accurate? Are the models she trusts for climate predictions sound?

With or without Greta Thunberg, those are the questions we need answers to.

Someone hand the lady her Oscar and let's get back to work.