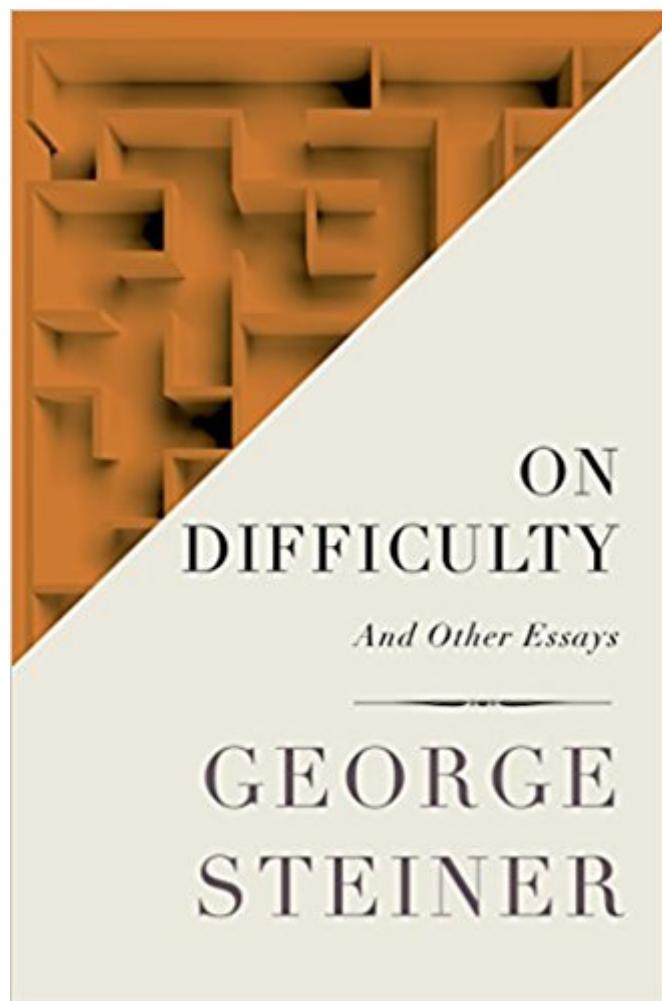


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# On Difficulty: And Other Essays



## Synopsis

A distinguished collection of essays on language, literature, and philosophy from acclaimed scholar and critic George Steiner. *On Difficulty* is as provocative and relevant today as when its essays were first published. Ranging from critical topics such as the understanding of language to the meaning of meaning, inward speech to the relationship between erotic sensibility and linguistic convention, these eight essays posit myriad topics for exploration and dialogue. George Steiner deals with considerations that are simultaneously literary and philosophical, exploring themes of linguistic privacy and the changing technical, physiological, and social statuses of the act of reading.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I am learning so much from these. Steiner seems to find vital centers that are consistently missed, even, especially, in issues and ideas most common and talked about. You may not agree, but these - you'll be better for reading them.

This is a collection of fascinating essays from the 1970s. Steiner is not only a

contemporary polymath; he is a seer, an anticipator. I always say that if you want to understand a current issue look at what Steiner said about it 30 years ago. There are eight essays, principally dealing with literature, linguistics and their cultural positions. They are accessible to a general reader but that reader should be warned that Steiner will be making forays into Latin, German, Italian and French texts and he will not always be translating. His ability to explore the generally unexplored is always exciting and engaging. In “The Distribution of Discourse,” e.g., he speculates on the volume of discourse (broadly conceived) that is actually generated within segments of human history. Do women talk more than men? Did the (stoic) Romans speak less than their modern counterparts? How much internal discourse is there and does it surpass the volume of external discourse? How should we think about it? In “Language and Psychoanalysis” he talks about the extent to which psychoanalysis is built of language (reinforcing Lacan) and the degree to which the language of Freud’s patients was constrained by gender, time period, European origins, religion, and so on. He takes on the Chomskians in “Whorf, Chomsky, and the Student of Literature” and indulges his love of Dante in “Dante Now: The Gossip of Eternity.” The loveliest essay may be the final essay here (but the one that was written first): “After the Book?” Steiner is always interesting; he is learned beyond all expectations and, as I said above, continuously relevant to our concerns. I would recommend all that he has written, though I have a special affection for his book *Real Presences* (1991). I would also recommend that Steiner readers check out his appearances on YouTube, particularly the two-hour, two-part interview in which (during the first hour) he discusses his early life, his education and his experiences at Chicago, Yale, Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge and the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. He is a wonderful, lucid speaker and has great stories to tell. He also has much to teach us concerning the position of the Humanities in modern life.

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