

~~here. Non philosophy, then, attempts to reorient (rather than oppose) philosophy understood as a material tendency, vector, or orientation.~~

~~In this introductory chapter, we look at Laruelle's general non philosophical approach (his attitude toward philosophical representation, performative consistency, material thought, decision, "posture," and science), his unusual treatment of the human (anthropomorphism and extended definitions of thought), and the methodology adopted for this study (non philosophy's artistic source material, the use of cinema to inform our approach, the horror of the nonhuman, and an outline of the argument's structure). Lengthy though it is, covering this material now will save us some time later.~~

## **ALL THOUGHTS ARE EQUAL, BUT SOME THOUGHTS APPEAR MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS: FROM POSITION TO REPRESENTATION**

François Laruelle (b. 1937) is Professor Emeritus in Philosophy at the University of Nanterre, Paris, the inventor of "non-standard philosophy" (or just "non-philosophy"), and the author of more than twenty-five books on this topic. His project, as he sees it, is the attempt to envision philosophy as a material and to study it from a genuinely nonpartisan point of view. The ideas of philosophy are no longer positions to be argued with, critiqued, accepted, or promoted but raw material to be utilized: it is not a question any more of how we should study philosophy "philosophically" but rather one of "what should we make of *Philosophy* itself?"<sup>15</sup> As he also writes, "*there is a body of philosophy, a philosophical materiality, a conceptual and lived material, and one can treat philosophy as a part of physical nature.*"<sup>16</sup> In pursuing this task, then, we must first avoid the circular method of "treating philosophy philosophically" and instead propose a "means of causing thought to function otherwise than philosophically."<sup>17</sup> This is neither to reject philosophy nor to surpass it in any recognizably philosophical terms: such an approach "only claims to succeed the faith and authority of philosophy, never to deny its reality, nor to refuse it at least a 'relative' autonomy."<sup>18</sup> Non-philosophy negates "*only that part of it that can be negated—its sufficiency.*"<sup>19</sup> Instead, Laruelle wishes to utilize philosophy and will do so employing models from both the sciences, like biology and physics, as well as the arts, such as photography and music.

Taking this view of philosophy and thought also brings about an expansion of the definitions of both *indefinitely* (which, as we will see, is ultimately to refuse to define either). Laruelle aims to deauthorize philosophy, to democratize it: “as soon as I give a definition it is a failure. We have to refuse the temptation or appearance of definition.”<sup>20</sup> However, this gesture goes beyond merely relativizing thought within a pluralism that is actually indifferent to philosophy (“all opinions are valid”) or anarchizing knowledge as part of a methodology where “anything goes.” Rather, the “flat” thought Laruelle strives for is democratic because it is materialized in *different* ways, some of them “scientific” (quantum physics, biology, geometry), some of them aesthetic (photography, performance art, music). *Standard* philosophy—the positioning of authority over thought—does not have a monopoly on what counts as thought or even “philosophy.” What might look like relativism, then, is always expansion, an inclusivity of thought. Moreover, non-standard philosophy also refuses any fixed definition of the Real or the Human. Whether this inclusivity might also extend to the nonhuman, to a thought and philosophy that is not the right of *Homo sapiens* alone, is, therefore, a further question for this work.

One thing we must be clear about from the start is that non-philosophy is *not* an antiphilosophy. Laruelle is not heralding another “end of philosophy” nor the kind of internal critique of philosophy common in much post-Kantian European thought. His use of the term *non-philosophy* is neither a dialectical negation nor even something contrary to philosophy: “while non-philosophy has overtones of anti-philosophy, it cannot recognize itself in current anti-philosophy, whose origins are predominantly philosophical.”<sup>21</sup> As we will see later, the “death” of philosophy is more often than not only a botched suicide attempt, a cry for help (or demand for attention) rather than a genuine thirst for annihilation: “*there is indeed a suicide of philosophy, but it has lasted as long as philosophy’s own history.*”<sup>22</sup> Rather, modeling the name “non-philosophy” on an analogy with “non-Euclidean geometry,” Laruelle proposes a broadened, pluralistic science of thought and philosophy as well as a major reworking of philosophical concepts. Crucially, the *non-* in *non-Euclidean* is not a negative: non-Euclidean geometries do not negate the principles of Euclid’s *Elements* but affirm them within a broader or amplified paradigm that allows other, apparently opposed geometries to coexist,

while also explaining where and in what respects they are still relevant.

Similarly, non-philosophy attempts a transformation that locates philosophy as one instance in a larger set of theoretical forms.<sup>23</sup> It is a *positive* act: “the ‘non’ is therefore not an all-powerful negation. It has a status or function only at a level that is no longer dialectical, no longer at the level of signifier and sense, but that of usage; it is a ‘non’ that affects the usage of terms, a lived that transforms them.”<sup>24</sup> Non-philosophy is a conception of philosophy (and all forms of thought) that allows us to see them as equivalent according to a broader explanatory paradigm.<sup>25</sup> It enlarges the set of things that can count as thoughtful, a set that includes existing philosophy but also a host of what are often presently deemed (by standard philosophy) to be non-philosophical (art, technology, natural science). In addition, Laruelle integrates present examples of philosophy with instances of what *those same philosophies* regard as their “opposites” within philosophy. In this democracy of thinking, all thought is equalized when regarded as raw material for non-philosophy, that is, as part of the Real, or “One” (as it is also called), rather than as “representations” of it.

We now need to introduce the connection between non-philosophy and *representation* in some detail. Each method of philosophical thought (“philosophical” being understood once again as a phase-state of thought), because it *occupies* itself with representing the whole exclusively, misses its target in part—it is partial (just *one* method).<sup>26</sup> Yet this is not to say that each and every philosophy misses it entirely, that they all *misrepresent*. Laruelle is *not* saying that method “X” is “wrong” and that it can be improved upon or replaced with a truer method “Y.” The Real is indifferent to every attempt at representing it. This is because every thought, *when regarded as* a physical body, is already a part of it (and a part cannot be the whole, even through the magic of “representation,” which always fails to capture its quarry complete). Separated from each of their claims to exclusive truth, philosophical positions becomes a question of precisely that, *positions* in space, a question of physics and the material coexistence of different thoughts.

Alternatively, what makes the arguments of the philosophers *circular* is due to their representational form. Philosophical reasoning is tautological, privileging one piece of empirical evidence by raising its status to the transcendent or representational (creating what Michel Foucault called

“empirico-transcendental” doublets). Philosophical practice “mixes” the Real with a predecided representational schema—be it substance and accident, actual and virtual, being and nothingness, phenomenal and noumenal, and so on—that attempts to transcend the Real (through these philosophical concepts). The resulting worldview, however, is entirely relative to this decisive starting point. Hence, we have what Laruelle describes as all the “great circles” of philosophy: “‘Unity of experience’ (Kant), ‘*Lebenswelt*’ (Husserl), ‘Being-in-the-world’ and ‘Care’ (Heidegger), ‘General Perception’ of ‘Flesh’ (Merleau-Ponty), etc.”<sup>27</sup> And as we saw, each philosophy’s transcendent form leaves no room for alternative positions. As a consequence of their attempts to exhaust all explanatory space, each philosophy—be it phenomenology, deconstruction, Platonism, or any other—cannot explain its rivals’ existence as anything other than illusion or error (or *misrepresentation*). Nor can it justify the grounds of such illusions or errors without again presupposing what a “proper” representation and a “proper” ground might be. Even pluralism—ostensibly affirming all other views (or at worst being indifferent to them)—still *occupies a position* and must thereby elbow out both nonpluralist and other kinds of pluralist positions to make room for itself.

In all of this, Laruelle may appear rather unoriginal. For some, his ideas will sound like a version of Kant’s critical philosophy: metaphysics cannot *represent* the “thing in itself,” for its “truths” are the result of the “manifold” *after* it has been reconfigured through the mind’s structure of knowing. The (human) mind refracts rather than reflects reality. Indeed, long before even Kant, Francis Bacon had already written in his *Novum Organum* that human understanding is like “a false mirror, which receiving rays irregularly, distorts and discolours the nature of things by mingling its own nature with it.”<sup>28</sup> In fact, Laruelle would be the first to admit that the “intraphilosophical critique of the mirror and reflection is almost universal,” being also found in Fichte, Husserl, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Lévinas.<sup>29</sup> His own work, however, concerns *the reality of the reflection* within a philosophy of immanence as well as an extension of the critique of (human) metaphysics to *all thought of the Real*. It is not just metaphysics that is asked to forgo its supposed power to represent reality but any philosophy that would hope to represent things in their essence, that believes that it can capture reality through its own putative powers

(of questioning, wonder, deduction, induction, intuition, will to power, affective encounter, sympathy, selfless attention, pluralist affirmation, and so on). Kant's critique needs to be generalized from one of metaphysics to one of philosophy as such. As a result, Laruelle's accusations concern *all* self-styled philosophical thought, metaphysical *and* nonmetaphysical. Ironically, Kantian transcendental deduction must be included in this lineup too in as much as it also believes that reality can be thought, even if only through *inference*, as this is defined and understood according to its own method.

In short, at no time is a *representationalist* critique being offered by Laruelle, that is, one that judges philosophies according to epistemic values—*his is not an attempt to improve upon other philosophies' "failed" pictures of the Real:*

non-philosophy does not draw its motivation from philosophy's failure but from the positive necessity of explaining it, of elaborating the reasons of this inability within the Real itself or the Ego that forces every thought to its foreclosure, philosophy on the other hand ignores this foreclosure and claims or wants to know the Real.<sup>30</sup>

The function of a non-philosophy is to integrate (rather than reduce, replace, or eliminate) philosophical views back into the Real by surveying them together in a democratic, immanent, revision where no one view is superior to or transcends the other. At the same time, such a real integration shows their *physical* limits: the fact that they are seen to share a space (that their one theory is never as total as it hopes to be) indicates that they cannot occupy the entirety of that space alone ("what the Real really is"). Yet philosophical views are not dismissed thereby as failed representations. Rather, they and their "limits" (irreducible remainders, *aporias*, even circularities—all the usual tools of "critique") are made Real, they are physicalized as parts of the Real. (What such an affirmation entails for a *non-philosophical* pluralism like this, *in its own position*—such that it does not enter into a new form of authority—remains to be seen.)

Taken individually, each philosophy is as arbitrary and circular as the other: though some will be more complex, such complexity only serves to occlude their ultimately tautological grounding. This is

especially true of those philosophies of philosophy that offer definitions of “proper” thought. The fact is that the various forms of thinking privileged by different philosophies is always done by *fiat* (stemming from a “position”). The history of philosophy is a litany of different baptisms: thinking descriptively, poetically, mathematically, affectively, embodiedly, analogically, syllogistically, fuzzily, paraconsistently; thinking through a method of questions, of problems, of dialogue, of dialectic, of genealogy, of historicism, of deconstruction, and so on. Taken on their own, though, each of these exemplary cases restricts the idea of thinking in a presumptive manner, either by positing what could count as thinking *per se* or by positing what counts as “good,” “proper,” or “true” thinking. Even Badiou’s apparent egalitarianism toward art, science, politics, and love, as forms of thinking, masks a demand—says Laruelle—that “philosophy define their essence and itself be their excellent form and their ultimate type, whether the thought of thought, or what totalizes or simply gathers thought, picks it up as a last resort, etc.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, philosophy always remains King: it “auto-presents itself as titleholder of thought.”<sup>32</sup>

Non-philosophy, on the contrary, is “the manner of thinking that does not know *a priori* what it is to think or to think the One.”<sup>33</sup> And in practice, this means that it is “essential,” as Laruelle constantly reiterates, “to remodel ‘thought’ or the cogitative in terms of the autonomy of the Real”; or again, “what is necessary is to change the paradigm of thinking” (and what counts as thinking).<sup>34</sup> And this change of paradigm, which he also calls a “mutation,” must be continually reperformed (in case it should fall into one position). The work of non-philosophy, therefore, is an ongoing experiment in what results from seeing philosophical thought in a non-philosophical way—thought as just one other (real) thing rather than thought as *the* (irreal) representation of “All” things. This is what Laruelle dubs a thinking “according to” or “alongside” the Real.<sup>35</sup>

## **~~PERFORMATIVE INCONSISTENCY~~**

~~To examine better the means by which non philosophy tries to avoid becoming another “position,” we must return to the question of what makes Laruelle’s non philosophy different, only now in terms of its activity. What it attempts, he says, is “not a new philosophical paradigm” but the~~