

## **A Stumbling Block to the Jews and Folly to the Greeks: Non-Philosophy and Philosophy's Absolutes**

*Anthony Paul Smith*

Christianity used to be a heresy. This was before it became the imperial religion of Rome, before it was translated into the unified language of Jewish monotheism and Greek philosophy, before it became codified creeds and liturgies or philosophical problems of spirit on the way to absolute knowledge or the Kingdom of God. Perhaps not at its origin, but at some point prior to these events, Christianity was a heresy summed up by St. Paul when he writes, “we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to [the Greeks]” (1 Corinthians 1:23 NSRV). François Laruelle’s non-philosophy shares the heretical spirit of St. Paul, though of course without then being a Christian philosophy itself or even, like Žižek and Badiou, privileging the Pauline-Christian experience. Rather, it is heresy itself that is privileged by non-philosophy and in a new spirit of heresy non-philosophers, those without philosophy and without religion, proclaim God-without-Being and the Future Christ as a stumbling block to philosophers of Alterity and foolishness to philosophers of Being.

Certainly the tone of the preceding paragraph, with its sweeping historical statements and impious casting of St. Paul and the philosophers, is its own stumbling block for sober readers and may suggest more than enough foolishness on the part of its author. So, stepping back from this non-philosophical performance, allow me to present the essay in a more acceptable academic presentation before returning again to the heretical whirlwind of Laruelle’s thought. The purpose of this essay is to introduce Laruelle into a conversation about the absolute in order to elucidate his own project through a translation of that project in more familiar philosophical terms. I will begin by outlining the structure of Laruelle’s theory of the philosophical Decision. I contextualize this structure as a response to the criticisms towards Laruelle made by another contemporary thinker who refuses relationality a place in any proper thought of the absolute, Quentin Meillassoux. Meillassoux locates several common misconceptions about Laruelle’s non-philosophy, which will be dissolved in reference to the first stage of non-philosophy’s development (the philosophical Decision). Then we will examine how his theory of the philosophical Decision applies to philosophies of God regardless of their first philosophy, that is regardless of if they begin from Being or Alterity. Finally, we discuss the concepts God-

without-Being and Future Christ as examples of the content produced by non-philosophy's axiomatic operation on philosophical material.

### Neither Greek nor Jew: The Non-Philosophical Problem

Quentin Meillassoux proffered a critique of non-philosophy at an event called "Speculative Realism" held at Goldsmiths, University of London, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 2007, the transcript of which was published by the independent journal *Collapse*.<sup>1</sup> In the critique put forth at this event Meillassoux comes to confuse Laruelle's project with his own, in part because he is following and responding to Ray Brassier's claim, in his *Nil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*, that, while Meillassoux identifies more clearly and rigorously the inherent anti-realism of continental post-Kantian philosophy (which he calls "correlationism"), it is Laruelle's axiomatic stance regarding the Real that grounds any non-correlationist realist philosophy. Brassier holds this because, in his view, Laruelle's axiomatic method of non-philosophy avoids any recourse to "intellectual intuition" while Meillassoux has to posit it in his own philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Meillassoux says that his project consists "in trying to understand how thought is able to access the uncorrelated, which is to say a world capable of subsisting without being given. But to say this is just to say that we must grasp how thought is able to access *an absolute*."<sup>3</sup> In this essay I am unconcerned with setting in conflict Meillassoux's speculative materialism or Brassier's transcendental nihilism against Laruelle's non-philosophy. I focus only on Meillassoux's critique and contextualize Brassier's reading with the ultimate aim of illuminating non-philosophy's method as well as the content developed using that method upon the material found in philosophies of the absolute.<sup>4</sup>

Meillassoux's own critique of post-Kantian philosophy locates a correlation between thought and being that is unable to account for a time anterior to the conditions for thought, that is to say it is unable to think being

---

<sup>1</sup> Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman, and Quentin Meillassoux, "Speculative Realism," *Collapse III* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2007), 307-449. The transcript includes the four individual presentations by Brassier, Grant, Harman, and Meillassoux, and the discussion after each. Hereafter we will simply refer to "Meillassoux, „Speculative Realism.""

<sup>2</sup> See Ray Brassier, *Nil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 118.

<sup>3</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (New York: Continuum, 2008), 28.

<sup>4</sup> I note in passing Brassier's characteristically harsh appraisal of Laruelle where he claims, "Laruelle's writings have yet to inspire anything beyond uncritical emulation or exasperated dismissal" (Brassier, 118). Brassier places the reader of Laruelle in a gilded cage here perhaps to present his own reading of Laruelle as a critical use of non-philosophy, but this forecloses the third possibility of attempting to understand and use non-philosophy. To one who is hostile to Laruelle's non-philosophy this may already look like "uncritical emulation," and though Brassier himself is passing judgment here, he does not provide us with any metaphilosophy for judging what uncritical emulation looks like. It is important to keep in mind, as I will try to show later in the essay, that there is a difference here between method and content. One can "emulate" the method of non-philosophy and reject, even on non-philosophical grounds, the content Laruelle constructs much as Brassier himself does, albeit on philosophical grounds. My own positive non-philosophical project would, for instance, take a very different form from Laruelle's humanism (or, rather, non-humanism) on the basis of an understanding of nature that is neither Greek (cosmos, physis) nor Jew (creation).

separate from thought. Further to this, the correlationist thus must either explicitly or implicitly, in a weak or strong form, claim that thought determines being. This leads, in part, to anti-realism, but not primarily. Meillassoux says, “Correlationism is not, in my definition, an anti-realism but an anti-*absolutism*.”<sup>5</sup> Correlationism is challenged by Meillassoux’s own speculative materialism, which confronts correlationism with an aporia in its inability to think a real ancestral event outside any possibility of thought and builds a metaphysics of the absolute that focuses on primary qualities as the object in itself.<sup>6</sup> Correlationism is also challenged by speculative idealism, which includes for him panpsychism and vitalism, which claims that the absolute is the correlation itself and is thus dependent on the structure of correlationism. Thus, Meillassoux’s goal is to champion one philosophy, an anti-correlationist speculative materialism that develops a metaphysics of Being from primary qualities, over against other philosophies. His problem, then, is a philosophical one and completely oriented towards questions about the Being of things. This should not be confused with Laruelle’s problem.

In an interview with Philippe Petit entitled “Peace to the Philosophers!” Laruelle responds to a question regarding how peace can be had between the antagonistic positions of philosophers saying, “My problem: how to be neither Greek nor Jew? Only science can render all philosophies equivalent.”<sup>7</sup> In addition to striking out on very different ground than the one Meillassoux suggested, this enigmatic statement raises a number of questions for those unfamiliar with Laruelle’s non-philosophy. First, what is the meaning of science and philosophy for Laruelle? Second, how does science render all philosophies equivalent? Third, for what purpose does non-philosophy, as “a science of philosophy,” so render all philosophies? Finally, what does being neither Greek nor Jew have to do with this operation?

To answer these questions it is important to first note that we are discussing a complex method of thinking that has developed over the last 39 years. Laruelle himself has separated aspects of his thought according to shifts in its main axioms by designating periods ranging from Philosophy I to Philosophy IV.<sup>8</sup> His understanding of science undergoes an important change between Philosophy II and Philosophy III, where in Philosophy II there is a primacy of science over philosophy in Philosophy III there is a primacy of the unified theory of science and philosophy over any single authority.<sup>9</sup> This leads to the more exciting aspects of Laruelle’s work, where he engages with his own particular project of thinking Man or Humanity and where he develops the underlying positive method of non-philosophy beyond a

<sup>5</sup> Meillassoux, “Speculative Realism,” 427.

<sup>6</sup> Meillassoux defines the thing-in-itself as the thing “independently of its relation to me” Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 1. He goes on from here to say “all those aspects of the object that can be formulated in mathematical terms can be meaningfully conceived as properties of the object in itself” (Meillassoux, 3).

<sup>7</sup> François Laruelle, *En tant qu’Un: La « non-philosophie » expliquée aux philosophes* (Paris: Aubier, 1991), 253. [All translations are mine unless noted.]

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this history in English see my “Philosophy and Ecosystem: Towards a Transcendental Ecology,” *Polygraph* 22 (2010): 65-82 and for François Laruelle’s own casting of the history of Philosophy I-III see his *Principes de la non-philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 1995), 38-42.

<sup>9</sup> Laruelle, *Principes*, 40.

“science of philosophy” towards new constructions with philosophical material.<sup>10</sup> Yet, to get to his collection of “unified theories,” which bring together philosophy and some regional knowledge (science, religion, poetry, art, erotics, etc.) instead of creating a philosophy-of-some-X, Laruelle first had to break philosophy’s narcissism by deflating its own sense of importance.

To bring about that deflation so that philosophy becomes what he calls a “simple material,” Laruelle reverses the philosophical judgment from Plato to Heidegger that “science does not think.”<sup>11</sup> What is meant is that science does not think *Being* and therefore does not think the very conditions of thought, but the primacy of Being for all thought is brought into serious question with the critique of metaphysics carried out by the Jewish challenge to and transformation of philosophy. Rather than entering this war between philosophers of Being or philosophers of Alterity, Laruelle returns to the original dualism between science and philosophy to ask what science thinks if it does not think Being. For this to make sense, to remain at the same transcendental level and yet still overcome the conflict between philosophers of Being and Alterity, it must be a question of what science thinks transcendently and not a confusion of science with its empirical findings (a confusion that goes by the philosophical name of empiricism, according to Laruelle). Science, the very essence of science, thinks the One according to the Real. “Science,” Laruelle says, “is irreducible to the knowledge of object that it produces . . . it is first a manner of thinking or a processes characterized by immanence with that theory which relates it to the real-One and, from there, to the experience, to its *data*: an immanence of its theoretical and experimental criteria.”<sup>12</sup>

The practice of science, at its essence, knows the One according to the Real. What this ultimately means, though, is that this essential science thinks the real identity of real actualities immanent to them and without any illusion of co-constituting that identity. Philosophy, however, is characterized by a mixture of transcendence and immanence, which confuses its own practices with the Real itself or as determining the Real. In other words,

---

<sup>10</sup> It is important at this early stage of the English-language reception of Laruelle’s thought to distinguish between his project and his method. The two main thinkers that English-language readers have had to help guide them through Laruelle’s work, Ray Brassier and John Mullarkey, have focused on the method and with good reason as this method has proven useful for their own projects. However, Laruelle has his own project that attempts to think the human (Man, if one understands this analogous to species-being, rather than gendered essentially) “between the whole of humanity and the individual. . . . All my work is centered on this notion of Man, which is not in fact a centre, or a margin, but a Last Instance which overdetermines philosophical sufficiency” (François Laruelle, personal communication 3 November 2009). For Brassier’s and Mullarkey’s secondary works see Ray Brassier, “Axiomatic Heresy: The Non-Philosophy of François Laruelle,” *Radical Philosophy* 121 (2003): 24-35 and John Mullarkey, “From Philosophy to Non-Philosophy,” in *Post-Continental Philosophy: An Outline* (New York: Continuum Press, 2006). For Brassier’s own critical evaluation and use of non-philosophy see Ray Brassier, “Being Nothing,” in *Nihil Unbound* and for Mullarkey’s use of non-philosophy to rethink film and philosophy see John Mullarkey, *Refractions of Reality: Philosophy and the Moving Image* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Laruelle, *En tant qu’Un*, 35, 251.

<sup>12</sup> Laruelle, 25.

Philosophy is not only a set of categories and objects, syntax and experiences, operations of decision and position: it is animated and traversed by a faith or belief in itself as if in an absolute reality, by an intentionality or reference to the real that it claims to describe and even constitute, or to itself as if the real.<sup>13</sup>

This faith in the philosophical, or “fundamental self-position” of philosophy, is called the “Principle of Sufficient Philosophy” and it simply makes the claim that everything is philosophizable. Everything can be united (as opposed to unified) with some transcendent thought like Being or Alterity. Philosophy is a unitary thinking of reality, confusing at different intensities its own practices with the Real. It is here, in this attempt and belief in a unitary thinking, where we see how all philosophies are equivalent.

Before explaining in more depth how non-philosophy’s science of philosophy renders all philosophies equivalent, let us return again to the more familiar philosophical ground of Meillassoux’s critique. Meillassoux seems to think that Laruelle’s “non-philosophy is supposed to think the relation of thinking with a Real which precedes philosophy,” but this, Meillassoux says, exposes a contradiction in Laruelle, for “the name „non-philosophy“ can only be constructed from the name „philosophy“ together with a negation. Philosophy precedes non-philosophy in nomination, as in the acts of thinking.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, Meillassoux is claiming that the Real, which is supposed to be autonomous and prior to philosophy, is only thought in non-philosophy after the negation of philosophy. This is a misunderstanding of Laruelle’s project and brings to the fore the major differences between their projects. First, the “non” in non-philosophy is not a negation of philosophy, it is a mutation of philosophical practice which takes its posture from non-Euclidean geometry (which, of course, is not a negation of geometry!).<sup>15</sup> Laruelle has been clear about this throughout the development of non-philosophy. Even at his most polemical, he has held that non-philosophy is not a new philosophy but a new practice that uses philosophy. In *Philosophie et non-philosophie* he writes:

Non-philosophy is not the mass negation of philosophy, its (impossible) destruction, but another use of it, *the only one which is able to be defined outside of its spontaneous belief in itself; a practice of philosophy which is no longer founded and enclosed within philosophical faith, but that establishes itself in a positive way within the limits given by placing that faith between parentheses.*<sup>16</sup>

The point of non-philosophy is not simply to think the Real. It does not aim at reviving a prior philosophy or constructing a realist philosophy that grounds science or that protects philosophy from embarrassment before science. Laruelle aims to make all philosophies equivalent, to take up a scientific posture towards philosophy, in order to leave the war between

---

<sup>13</sup> François Laruelle, *Philosophie et non-philosophie* (Mardaga: Liege-Bruxelles, 1989), 17.

<sup>14</sup> Meillassoux, “Speculative Realism,” 419.

<sup>15</sup> See Laruelle, *En tant qu’Un*, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Laruelle, *Philosophie et non-philosophie*, 16.

philosophers, using them as simple material in an autonomous exercise that is thought *from* the Real.

This aspect of Meillassoux's critique, in its confusion with itself, does not really touch on non-philosophy. Its weakness arises partly as confusion of the order of Laruelle's thought. The first task is to posit an axiom that states that the Real is radically autonomous to philosophy. This axiom is arrived at by copying the posture of scientific thought. Being analogous to the phenomenological suspension of the natural attitude, it can be called a suspension of the philosophical attitude which suspends the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy. From this axiom non-philosophy aims to think from the Real, giving this act the name of "vision-in-One." All philosophers ask what the philosophical act consists in, but this change of posture aims at a more radical answer to the question, for when philosophers pose this meta-philosophical question they can only pose it within philosophy itself, they are unable to ask the question from outside of the very essence of philosophy.<sup>17</sup> By taking the scientific stance, the stance from the One (as a first name of the Real), one can render all philosophies equivalent in their posture towards the Real and accountable to the Real as dependent upon it.

### **The Philosophical Decision and Philosophies of God**

From this posture, the science of philosophy, Laruelle claims to have located the essence of philosophy in what he calls the "philosophical Decision." Brassier traces the structure of this Decision, which Meillassoux repeats in his critique, by focusing on its analogue with the Kantian transcendental deduction. In Brassier's helpful synthetic reconstruction of the formal structure of the Decision he focuses on the mixture of transcendence and immanence in philosophy, where there is an initial separation of the empirical and a priori, of datum and faktum, that is then "gathered together" and united again under some absolute transcendental authority (Descartes' "I think," Kant's faculties, Husserl's ego), which, Laruelle notes, is ultimately also some reified empirical thing and a final moment of unification where the conditioned and the unconditioned are "mixed" and shown to co-constitute one another. It is this whole process, taken to expose the transcendental conditions for being, which is co-extensive with philosophy and leads to the confusion that it is thereby co-constituting of the Real.<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that what Brassier traces is the structure, but may take on different forms from the Kantian ones discussed in his reconstruction. Thus Laruelle says of the datum and the faktum that they are "invariants and not . . . entities or essences."<sup>19</sup> The point being that the structure may take a different form, that the same Kantian aspects may not be found in every philosophy, but that this invariant structure will be that which defines philosophical practice and leads

---

<sup>17</sup> See François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence. Introduction critique* (Paris: PUF, 1986), 169-172.

<sup>18</sup> Brassier, *Nil Unbound*, 122-127. See François Laruelle, ed., *Dictionnaire de la non-philosophie* (Paris: Kime, 1998), 40. See also Taylor Adkins, ed., draft translation of this passage and the rest of the *Dictionnaire* available online:

<<http://nsmnicek.googlepages.com/DictionaryNonPhilosophy.pdf>>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

it to confuse itself for any X it claims to be Real. It seems a sweeping statement, and there is little doubt that this transcendental description of philosophy has led many to frustrated rejection of Laruelle's philosophy, but is it true? While a completely satisfactory answer would require at the very least two other essays, this structure can be located and traced in the philosophies of Hegel and Levinas with regard to God.

In Hegel's 1824 lectures on the philosophy of religion we see an almost pure example of the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy when he discusses the metaphysical concept of God:

The metaphysical concept is the concept of God and the unity of that concept with reality. In the form of the proof of God's being [*Sein*], of the determinate being [*Dasein*] of God, of the existence [*Existenz*] of God, what we have is a proof which is just this transition or mediation: that God's being follows from his concept. This is what is called the *ontological proof*.<sup>20</sup>

Here the ambiguity between the identity of God and the dialectic of thought and being, in three modes united in one thought, is celebrated as the very essence of Western philosophy's ability to account for religious experience metaphysically. This particular decision takes on a decidedly nefarious character as Hegel develops this particular philosophy from Western Christianity, thereby making non-Western cultures a philosophical challenge as they appeared religious, but could not be placed within a properly Occidental history. Thus, the ontological proof for the existence of God, and a culture's capability for thinking it, is made central to a properly philosophical and historical (phenomenological) understanding of religion.<sup>21</sup> From such a position he was able to judge the various world religions as either primitive or advanced, in bondage or free. Though this is arguably an immanent move, as Hegel presents this as thought meeting reality, it is an immanence mixed with transcendent judgment. This mixture of transcendence and immanence is seen most clearly in his making reality relative to a Christian philosophical history that unifies both metaphysical opposites and cultural opposites under a mixture of a religion and philosophy of spirit.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, for Hegel, religion has a „highest“ type as found in a philosophical Christianity, the religion that constitutes the final *telos* of all

---

<sup>20</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, trans. R.F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson, J.M. Stewart and with the assistance of J.P. Fitzer and H.S. Harris, vol. 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 174-175.

<sup>21</sup> Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, "What if *Religio* Remained Untranslatable?" in *Difference in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Philip Goodchild (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), 94-

5. See "Religion (is) defined generally as the consciousness of God, of God the absolute object" (Hegel, 62). With regard to Indic religions Mandair says that, "It was now possible to classify Hinduism under the category „religion“ (the idea of divinity was clearly there) but still outside history. The Hindu idea of divinity was as yet „confused,“ „monstrous,“ „terrifying,“ idolatrous,“ „absurd,“ „erroneous,“ clear evidence for Hegel that Hindu thinking was limited to thinking nothingness" (Mandair, 94).

<sup>22</sup> This is pithily put by Hegel scholar Peter C. Hodgson, "Spirit unifies opposites in a pantheism of love." Peter C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.

religion. Hegel calls Christianity the “consummate religion” and defines it “as the [religion] in which the *concept* of religion has become *objective* to itself,” in other words, this philosophical casting of Christianity is where thought and being are mixed in the name of God.<sup>23</sup>

Hegel’s culmination of the ontological proof for the existence of God rather straightforwardly fits the philosophical Decision. It is more difficult to show how it fits philosophies of Alterity, like that of Levinas, and their discussions of God. Laruelle’s non-philosophical project shares much in common with Levinas’ attempt to take leave of philosophy, which for him is characterized not be a Decision but by the priority of ontology over ethics, but Laruelle ultimately follows Derrida’s deconstructive tracing of the limits of Levinas found in “Violence and Metaphysics.”<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, for Derrida and Laruelle following him, Levinas’ attempt to overturn philosophy is compromised by using phenomenological methods. It never, therefore, secures him a thought outside of the philosophical act. If this is true, then the place of God in his thought will have a similar ambiguous character as it did in Hegel, though ambiguous with something otherwise than Being.

As in Hegel, the name of God stands in for something else, a confusion of God with philosophy. For Hegel it was a confusion of the ground of philosophy, but in the case of Levinas it is a confusion of what philosophy is hostage to. It is possible to trace the structure of Levinas’ ethical thought along the lines presented by Laruelle: the empirical other as neighbor (datum), the transcendental a priori of the face’s ethical command that thou shall not kill (faktum), and their unity in the trace as a mélange of the absolute past (and thus absent) and time as presence. So, while Levinas nevertheless claims that “God is not simply the „first other,” or the „other *par excellence*,” or the „absolutely other,”<sup>25</sup> he does not provide an identity of God separate from his own ethical philosophy.<sup>25</sup> This can be seen as he continues saying that God’s Alterity remains “other than the other, other otherwise, and other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other, prior to the ethical obligation to the other and difference from every neighbor, transcendent to the point of absence, to the point of his possible confusion with the agitation of the *there is*.”<sup>26</sup> There is an ambiguity here between the Alterity given in the other, and the radically transcendent Alterity of God. Here we see an instance of the Decision taking on an undecidable character, for one is only held hostage as responsible before this radical transcendence that breaks the philosophical *I think*.<sup>27</sup> Here, the identity of God is mixed with the Jewish, though still philosophical, responsibility of for-the-other. We are not told

---

<sup>23</sup> Hegel, 61-65. Hegel goes on to describe philosophy’s act as that which unifies opposites: “. . . the process of thinking consists in carrying through this opposition until it arrives at reconciliation. This reconciliation is philosophy. Philosophy is to this extent theology. It presents the reconciliation of God with himself and nature. . . . This reconciliation is the peace of God, which does not „surpass all reason,” but is rather the peace that *through* reason is first known and thought and is recognized as what is true” (Hegel, 346-347).

<sup>24</sup> See Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence*, 124-125.

<sup>25</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 69.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>27</sup> See Ibid., 71.

about God but instead about Alterity, which is the very basis for the philosophy claiming to speak of God separate from philosophy.

In science the posture *from* the Real leads to a location of identities, locating the unilateral cause of reality, separating out the identity from the chaos of some transcendent Being or Otherness (thus a thing's "minority" identity), but philosophy's posture is ultimately about itself. John Mullarkey characterizes it this way: "all philosophical thought is really about itself, it is auto-sufficient. Its so-called world—*x*—is actually a mirror of itself."<sup>28</sup> This narcissistic reflection of itself is due, Laruelle claims, to the forgetting of the One (without Being), which in turn allows for the mixed thinking of Being: "The forgetting of the One is the condition for thinking Being, but also for thinking the forgetting of Being."<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, it is this unitary mixture that claims to be the final discourse on the Real that Laruelle resists, regardless if it is called philosophy or takes a local form in the "sciences of man."<sup>30</sup> Thus, when philosophy aims to think something like Man as Man, it is diverted by its structure and begins to think itself first, as first philosophy, and from there to think of Man through some transcendent aspect found in itself (Being or the Other). In neither case is the identity from the Real ultimately or consistently thought in philosophy and thus the anti-realist stance of these philosophies is ultimately not found in their anthropocentrism nor in their incipient idealism, but in their myopia and specular confusion of their thought, whether that be Being or Alterity, with the Real. Their anti-realism is caught up in an anti-actualism. Thus, to be neither Greek nor Jew, to escape from "double tradition of Transcendence," means to think from the Real, to think heretically and mutate the material of traditions.<sup>31</sup>

### One Prior to the Amphibology of Being and Alterity

While we located a weak criticism in Meillassoux's confusion of the name "non-philosophy" and the order of operations in non-philosophy's methodology, there is another aspect of Meillassoux's criticism that seems to be more damning. The criticism is directed at the axiomatic nature of non-philosophy, which is its positing of the Real "prior to philosophy" (this is Meillassoux's language, while it is more non-philosophical to say "autonomous to thought"). Without going into detail that would require further elucidation, Meillassoux's criticism claims that Laruelle does not prove the existence of this Real, but merely posits it—meaning that the Real is a posited Real.<sup>32</sup> The non-philosophical response can only be frustrating to the philosopher of the absolute whose aim is get to the Real=X beyond the X that is thought. While Meillassoux attempts to argue with the correlationist on philosophical grounds, the scientific posture of non-philosophy completely ignores the arguments of philosophy on the basis of a realist

---

<sup>28</sup> Mullarkey, 140.

<sup>29</sup> Laruelle, *Philosophie et non-philosophie*, 37-38.

<sup>30</sup> See Laruelle, *Dictionnaire*, 40; Mullarkey, *Post-Continental*, 149.

<sup>31</sup> Laruelle, *Philosophie et non-philosophie*, 212.

<sup>32</sup> Meillassoux, 417-419. The argument appears popular and convincing amongst readers of Meillassoux. See Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: repress, 2009), 177-178.

suspension. The question then isn't about "argument," the rules of which appear to be known only to the particular philosopher or school of philosophers, it becomes one of practice.

In non-philosophy, then, there is no hiding the fact that the Real is posited for the pretension that assumes there to be a unitary discourse is what characterizes philosophy, but instead boldly claims to clone the Real from the thing itself by naming it. The privileged name given to the Real throughout non-philosophy is that of the One. When considering the philosophical Decision under the vision-in-One (the realist suspension in our terminology) it treats it as Real and in so doing locates its radical contingency before the Real. Its contingency is not related to an empirical fact or to a transcendental law, but simply to the unilateral relationship of the Real to any philosophical Decision.<sup>33</sup> What then is found in the philosophical Decision by non-philosophy? The content derived from each philosophical Decision will differ based on the particular philosophy, but structurally what is pulled from the Decision and cast non-philosophically is the (non-)One. The (non-)One is not the Real, nor is it the One or an attribute of the One, but it is derived from the One as its effect, or its "weak negation," on the philosophical Decision.<sup>34</sup> Consequently the (non-)One "is not real in the strict sense, that is to say not by its essence."<sup>35</sup> In other words the (non-)One is formally the real identity derived from every instance of transcendence located in a philosophical Decision and thus describes formally what is called the absolute in philosophical theology. The significance here is particularly actualist. The Real, under the first name of the One, is not privileged above transcendence, for that would be an operation within thought, but is really autonomous from any transcendence and thus any identity that takes the claim of transcendence must be recast under the realist suspension as "non-thetic (of) self" (signaling the influence of Fichte on Laruelle's non-philosophy) or not self-sufficient. Transcendence is dependent upon the Real, which is given the name One.

At this point some readers may question if non-philosophy is not in fact another instance of philosophy taking up a secularized *via negativa*, this time as a negative henology. Laruelle himself responds to that criticism in *Philosophie et non-philosophie* claiming that it is actually impossible to understand non-philosophy in this way for two reasons. The first reason is related to the understanding of the "non" of non-philosophy already discussed above, namely that the "non" is not a negation and is utterly unrelated to the philosophical discourses of non-being, nothingness, destruction, scission, etc. Further, in the instance of the (non-)One as the name of every transcendence, it is more akin to the Althusserian superstructure in relation to an infrastructure.<sup>36</sup> The second reason is because the (non-) One does not, in any sense, affect the One itself: "It is nothing more than an irreversible static *effect* of the One, a unilateralized dyad."<sup>37</sup> Laruelle does not begin with the idea that language is inadequate to describe some ineffable One, but that language is contingent upon the One,

---

<sup>33</sup> Laruelle, *Philosophies de la Différence*, 215-216.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>36</sup> Laruelle, *Philosophie et non-philosophie*, 176.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 176.

determined by it in the last instance. Making any illusory transcendence found in philosophy contingent upon the positivity of the radical immanence of the One takes away any pretension of philosophy to a “unitary discourse” of the Real (or any other regional knowledge, including science). Those instances in philosophy of the (non-) One, of which its various absolutes are an example, are thus required to be thought through the Real which is positive and actual, and cannot hide behind the obfuscatory language of negation. Moving from the onto-theological thinking of philosophical absolutes as transcendent to language, to the non-philosophical thinking of language as sufficient but contingent on the One, is how non-philosophy

escapes any fears of speaking about that common name for the absolute, God.<sup>38</sup>

### **Non-Philosophical Names for God**

The preceding sections may perhaps appear to be a kind of “uncritical emulation” of Laruelle but its aim was only to accurately differentiate the non-philosophical project from that of the philosophies of the absolute as represented by Meillassoux, towards the greater goal of knowing what non-philosophy does with the material found in those philosophies of the absolute such as Hegel and Levinas. To summarize, Meillassoux aims to think the absolute, which he takes to mean the thing independent of its relations to any human subject, through the use of a philosophical privileging of primary qualities that he defines as those aspects of a thing that are mathematically describable. Laruelle aims to locate real identities (which we take to be the non-philosophical mutation of *philosophical instances* of the absolute), specifically the real identity of Man, using the unified material of philosophy and science, but not united or unitary, in a posture that locates itself relative to the Real. Thus far, we have only traced the structure of non-philosophy as it relates to philosophies of the absolute given the name God by philosophical theology, but we have not touched on its content. In this concluding section we will discuss the content of non-philosophy, showing how it has “cloned” material from philosophical theology regarding God and Christ and used it to develop a non-philosophical identity of God and Christ within the non-philosophical task of manifesting the essence and actuality of “ordinary man.”<sup>39</sup>

### **God-without-Being, Future Christ, and the Non-Theological Trinity**

Questions raised by religious practice and given attention in philosophical theology are clearly important to Laruelle as he has now written two books related to religious material with a third planned. In the preface to his 2002 *Le Christ futur. Une leçon d'hérésie*, he outlines the three works, which he

---

<sup>38</sup> “The One of the vision-in-One is not, as in certain onto-theological forms, transcendent to language, its ineffable Other, it is language which is the contingent Other of the One and is therefore bound to describe it, but only to describe it in the last instance” (Laruelle, 177).

<sup>39</sup> Ordinary man is the name Laruelle gives to the axiomatic conception of man as opposed to the philosophical conception which wants the “inhuman, the pre-human, the all-too-human, the over-human” (Laruelle, *Dictionnaire*, 85).

calls his Triptych, the first of which explores the non-philosophical conception of Christ and the practice of heresy. The second is a sustained interaction with and practice of mysticism, a theme that runs throughout the development of non-philosophy but here freed from the shape given it by Wittgenstein as Laruelle turns to Meister Eckhart and the Eastern Orthodox hesychasts. The third is promised to focus on the question of love and eroticism.<sup>40</sup> The first two, and most likely the third if it ever appears, are united by their concern with the future [*futur*] use of this material through the creation of a unified theory of philosophy and religious practice and thought. To separate out the religious material from the philosophical, and to begin to locate the real identity of religious material he begins with the name of God and its amphibology in the philosophical Decision, for by locating the real identity of this name Laruelle will then be able to unravel the whole philosophical and theological apparatus founded both by theological and philosophical claims to self-sufficiency.

Laruelle does this in the entry for “God-without-Being” in the *Dictionnaire de la non-philosophie*, where he traces in condensed form the amphibology of Being and Alterity we elaborated above. The notion of God-without-Being, following its original formulation in Jean-Luc Marion’s *God without Being*, begins first by rejecting the philosophical amphibology of God where he appears as “the difference of the identity and difference of Being and beings, pure amphibology.”<sup>41</sup> But he rejects the contemporary attempts by Marion and Levinas to identify God with the Other because they retain the very Decisional structure that their content seeks to overcome. Laruelle himself would repeat this mistake if he attempted to think God as One, but instead he subjects the name of God-without-Being to the vision-in-One both to declare the radical autonomy of the Real (even from God) and to give sense to God’s identity transcendent to philosophy (and thus transcendent to Being, existence, or Alterity) which he calls God’s “being-given-without-giveness,” meaning the name of God freed of any dialectic of Being (thus Being-given, rather than Being as such) and Otherness (thus without-giveness, rather than the Other-as-giveness or God as gift).<sup>42</sup> This is then the mystical name of God and not the philosophical one, but the mystical name of God known neither theologically nor philosophically. It knows God radically “in-person,” that is through the immanence of the name itself. While Laruelle suggests that this avoids the Hegelian and Feuerbachian dialectic of God and Man, he nevertheless holds to a unilateralization of that dialectic, stating that “man is the measure of God himself.”<sup>43</sup>

Thus God must be treated as a symptom when subjected to the measure of humanity, to a science of God that is non-theological in the same manner that non-philosophy is a science of philosophy. This is simply to treat God as the (non-)One already spoken of.<sup>44</sup> Laruelle claims this (non-)One

---

<sup>40</sup> François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur. Une leçon d'hérésie* (Paris: Exils Éditeur, 2002), 5-6.

<sup>41</sup> Laruelle, *Dictionnaire*, 53.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 54.

<sup>44</sup> See François Laruelle, *Mystique non-philosophique à l'usage des contemporains* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), 93. This work is the second of his triptych and is difficult to comment upon because it is written largely in the style of mystics like Meister Eckhart. While many of

character of God allows the non-philosopher to proceed with constructing a heretical and radically human solution to the problem of God without having to fall into the philosophical question of whether or not God exists or the religious question of whether or not one believes in God. For the non-philosopher has a radical gnosis of God as a radical identity and symptom and provides a solution to the question of God's existence from the Real itself. Laruelle outlines seven "non-Eckhartian" axioms from this position. First, the Deity is God-in-God, that is, God understood as non-absolute or from the radical immanence of in-God (analogous to in-Person). This cuts off the name of God from philosophical and theological melanges. Secondly, the "in-God" is foreclosed to God, meaning that the name of God has no sense outside of this radical identity. Thirdly, the immanence of the Deity is beyond any interior dialectic, even beyond the terms of dialectic (extension, interiority, will, love, etc.), and devoid of essence or being. This leads to the fourth axiom, where it would appear Laruelle gives ground to the philosophies of the absolute as he claims, "the Deity is the "ground-without-ground," except he goes on to challenge this very notion of ground saying "or more precisely the "ground-without-the-melange-of-ground-and-Being."<sup>45</sup> Fifthly, the Deity is "given-without-giveness," meaning it is given without recourse to philosophical reflection or dialectic, or even the negation of negation of the mystics, but instead becomes the organon within thought that determines these very attributes in-the-last-identity. God, in the non-theological form of the Deity, becomes something akin to a fiction or a kind of personage of thought, but understood within the syntax and structure of the non-philosophical method. Sixthly, the Deity is the immanent Ego (of and for) God that determines the mission of the Future Christ (discussed below). Finally, the seventh axiom unilateralizes the convertibility of the *Deus sive homo* of mysticism, seen most clearly in doctrines of theosis or in atheistic philosophies like Feuerbach. It simply locates in this axiom the very possibility of a unilateral identity from the implied duality of Man and God. It is this very axiom that allows non-philosophy to take Man as the final measure of God.<sup>46</sup>

In his first book of his Triptych, *Le Christ futur*, Laruelle develops a heretical notion of the Son of God, Christ, within the wider project of thinking Man freed from the philosophical and theological name of God. For Laruelle the identity of Man and subject are not the same in their immanence. But there is something about the identity of Christ, the practice of a life "in-Christ," that reveals the heretical core of Man and the subject-in-struggle. Heresy is here that struggle to form an identity of Man immanent to Man, Man-in-Man, and separated from any kind of confusion with or alienation within transcendence. Struggle, Laruelle says, is the essence of the subject,

---

his works often overstep the line that separates acceptable academic prose from esoteric forms of writing, this work completely disengages with the academic style to take up the very form of discourse that he takes the mystical material from (Eckhart, Eastern Orthodox hesychasts). Yet, for all that, the text holds together and should lend itself to a more sustained dialogue and development. Though that remains outside the remit of this article it is my hope that more introductory essays like this one will soon give way to deeper engagements with Laruelle's corpus.

<sup>45</sup>Laruelle, 96.

<sup>46</sup>These seven axioms are developed in *ibid.*, 95-97.

but not of Man in its immanence (which Laruelle calls Man-in-person).<sup>47</sup> Instead, Man is the cause of struggle while remaining outside that struggle in its essence. But when struggle is considered from its cause, Man, then the primacy of struggle is shown over and above Worldly notions like war or rebellion. Christ is taken as a radical identity for the Man-in-person that takes struggle against and for the world as primary over agonistic war or rebellion.<sup>48</sup> This heretical radicality is challenged by the philosophical World because the philosophical World is where confusions are created that are “concentrated in the philosophical and religious *Absolute*, the great adversary of heretical radicality.”<sup>49</sup> But Christ did not exist for himself, just as a heretical radicality does not exist for itself, it does not promote struggle for the sake of struggle, but renders rebellion as a human means to a human end, rather than as self-sufficient unto itself by modelling it upon a transcendental understanding of Christ taken to be an instance of a subject which may bring about the future through a resistance of and for the World.<sup>50</sup>

This unilateralization of the material thrown up in the pursuit of the absolute is seen most clearly in his “critique of the Trinity,” where the doctrine is mutated by placing it before the “in-Person” (the identity of man from the One). The Christian Trinity, a favourite religious trope that philosophy will often play with and use as a model for their own philosophy (Hegel), becomes here a model but one that gives up any pretence at providing a unitary discourse on the Christian Trinity. Instead, Laruelle owns up to the fact that he is taking it as a model and using it outside of its Christian context, to “clone” the material for the sake of a non-philosophical construction. Taking Christ as the model of a subject-in-struggle, as that subject produced by the World for and against it, means that all human beings are potential Christ-subjects. This gives way to his experimental thinking of Man along Trinitarian lines:

Thus we will differentiate three instances indicated by “in-Person”:

1. Man, Uncreated-in-person *par excellence* as cause of two other “in-Persons” (and not of their being-in-the-world),
2. The Son of Man as Future Christ, who is the subject, that is to say the World in-Person just given-in-Man rather than in-World and delivered from the Principle of Sufficient World,
3. Holy Love as erotic unition of Christ-subjects.<sup>51</sup>

While the experiment may seem strange at first, it locates the actuality of Christ as lived, rather than Christ as thought through dogmatic or philosophical categories. For Christ is not the model of Man, he is not the “final divine man,” but Christ is the model for a particular heretical subject

---

<sup>47</sup> Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, 16.

<sup>48</sup> Laruelle, 18-19.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>50</sup> For a more constructive development of this notion, that largely makes use of the method of Laruelle without, as I have here, reproducing the syntax, see Daniel Colucciello Barber and Anthony Paul Smith, “Too Poor for Measure: Working with Negri on Poverty and Fabulation,” *Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory* 10.3 (2010) (<http://www.jcrt.org/archives/10.3/index.shtml>).

<sup>51</sup> Laruelle, 41.

within the World as constituted by philosophy and its other forms (law, politics, morality, etc.). The fact that this is a *Christ futur* and not a Christ to come indicates the actuality of this form. Laruelle uses the French *futur* as opposed to the deconstructive *avenir*. *Futur* may be used to designate something like a “Bride-to-be,” which is to say it does not refer to any kind of deconstructive deferral, but to an imminent advent. This form as lived is the actuality of a future world, rather than a world to-come.

To close this essay where we began by tracing the outlines of Laruelle’s system as they relate to contemporary philosophical attempts to think the absolute, we have ended by expounding on some of the content developed within the structure and bounds of the non-philosophical problem of being neither Greek nor Jew. While Laruelle has recently taken a more sustained look at religious ideas, it has from the start of his project been a form of thought he would have to meet head on, and he does so in a way decidedly different from figures in the theological turn like Marion or Henry. What is interesting about Laruelle is that when he does sustain his encounter with that religious material he resists confusing the material with his project; he resists being a propagandist for religion. At the same time he does not intend to create another philosophy-of-X, in this case, Christianity, to describe the truth of something that only philosophy can uncover. Instead, he rejects the structures and attempts to radicalize the material, unleashing within thought what is already actual within it and allowing that radicalized material to mutate the philosophical material. We therefore disagree with John Milbank’s hasty assessment that in the face of certain philosophical gaps,

. . . the atheistic can seem curiously akin to the theological, and, in the case of Hegel, Badiou, Laruelle, and Žižek, it is forced to take even a Christological shape—Christ is the final, divine man, precisely because he elevates free personality beyond essence or even existence (also beyond law, physical and political, and beyond even the concealed founding axioms of philosophy that require a prior determination of the determinate) into an absolute, and exhibits this as fully present in his finite existence alone.<sup>52</sup>

The historical Christ is not taken as to be this absolute, but *material taken from a particular religion* that actually resists subsuming Man into the absolute. Christ is not some model *par excellence* but an occasion of Man. Laruelle, perhaps owing to some ignorance of other religious traditions, does choose Christianity, but this is as contingent as his choice of philosophers. One can create a unified theory of philosophy and Islam too within the method of non-philosophy, for the sake of Man rather than the sake of philosophy or Islam. This is not philosophy playing at theology, philosophy as theology manqué, but a positive critique of theology under a realist

---

<sup>52</sup> John Milbank, “The Double Glory, or Paradox versus Dialectic: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Žižek” in *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?*, ed., Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 154-155. Milbank does not reference any texts by Hegel, Badiou, or Žižek here, only Laruelle’s *Le Christ futur* and specifically the same sections we discuss above.

suspension. The religious register, as we have tried to show, is mutated by non-philosophy as “theoretical-without-theoreticism, whose essence is practical or unilateral, liberating a Christ-subject. Axioms and theorems, these are our methods, us men-without-philosophy, so that we can appropriate religion and adapt the divine mysteries to our humanity rather than to our understanding.”<sup>53</sup> This is the task, to excise ourselves from the theoretical circle in order to expand our humanity. The non-philosophical gamble is that it is worth losing the absolute in order to gain humanity.

---

<sup>53</sup>Laruelle, 31.