
THE TRUTH ACCORDING TO HERMES: THEOREMS ON THE SECRET AND COMMUNICATION¹

François Laruelle

Translated by Alexander R. Galloway

Translator's Note. "Philosophy needs a nonphilosophy that comprehends it," wrote Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari late in life.² By non-philosophy they point not simply to a general inversion of philosophical thought, but to the work of one particular compatriot, the author and self-proclaimed "non-philosopher" François Laruelle. Born in 1937 and former professor at the University of Paris X at Nanterre, Laruelle has elaborated over many years a project of "non-philosophy," which recently has begun to receive more attention in the English-speaking world.

Non-philosophy hinges on a rejection of what Laruelle calls the philosophical decision. To engage in the philosophical decision is to endorse the position that anything and everything is a candidate for philosophical reflection. Thus to do philosophy means to reflect on the world, and likewise if one is being philosophical, one is necessarily being reflective or meta-philosophical. Non-philosophy means simply to refuse such a decision. In other words non-philosophy refuses to reflect on things. Instead non-philosophy withdraws from the decision, and in doing so enters into a space of what Laruelle calls science. As John Mullarkey describes it, Laruelle is "abstaining from philosophy as such while simultaneously taking it as its own raw material."³

Given the flexible utility of Laruelle's non-philosophical method, he has engaged broadly across the spectrum of philosophical thought, replacing a number of discourses with their non-philosophical counterparts. Hence strewn across Laruelle's paper trail one discovers a non-Marx, a non-Deleuze, a non-Derrida, and so on.

While the present essay does not address non-philosophy directly, and thus stands nicely on its own, nevertheless important traces are evident of Laruelle's general approach. In particular one might reference Laruelle's interest in radical immanence, evident here in his evocation of a "pure" Hermes, that is, a Hermes unsullied by the sallies and wanderings of hermeneutics. Laruelle's Hermes is a non-Hermes, one who touches the truth as such, without any threat of deceit in exchange, without any metaphysical depth, and without the fog of semantic transfer. Laruelle's goal is to cut through the correlationist thinking associated with hermeneutics that forever breaks truth in half as: truth and its communication, or the secret and its manifestation. We must instead, as Laruelle writes here, "let the philosophers in on the secret," so that they may pursue a rigorous science of truth.



Peter Paul Rubens, *Mercury and a Sleeping Herdsman* (c1632–33)⁴

1. The unitary or dominant way of thinking is that of a *generalized hermeneutics*, a hermeto-logy. The economy of hermetology and its most general structure are both those of a “difference.” Hermeto-logical Difference is the indissoluble correlation, the undecidable coupling of truth *and* its communication. It postulates that truth needs meaning, that meaning and presence—as differentiated and sought after as they may be—belong to the essence of truth, that the secret and the *logos*, the secret and its manifestation are reciprocally necessary and are mutually determined.

THE TRUTH ACCORDING TO HERMES

2. The hermeto-logical circle is deeper and more original than the “hermeneutic circle.” Hermeto-logical Difference is a fundamental invariant, a matrix for what is called “metaphysics” in general. It is more powerful than its modalities or avatars, among which the hermeneutic conflict of interpretations, as well as the textual and signifying critique within hermeneutics, and all possible theories of communication. The conflict between Being and *Dasein*, between truth and the meaning of Being is itself one of the modalities of a more general conflict, that between the secret—the supposed secret—and *logos*. Hermeto-logical Difference programs, predraws, and teleologically orders all its modalities. It is their internal and external boundary, continually redrawn.

3. The hermeneutic critique of texts and culture is terminal. The textual and signifying critique within hermeneutics is also terminal. “Terminal” does not mean that these conflicts cease in fact—they are, rather, interminable—but that we now know them to be interminable in their essence. Hermeto-logical Difference in general is inhibited or mired by its own endless conflicts. The hermeto-logical conflict deteriorates within its own unlimited effectivity. And this leads to a general disinvestment, a growing indifference toward these interminable struggles, an indifference that combines with a passion for conflict that is the specific characteristic of unitary Hermes, however differentiated, differential, or differentialiel. This bad indifference is not yet the unilateralization of hermetology.

4. Next to the unitary and authoritarian Hermes, there is another Hermes. He defines the essence of truth as a secret, but as a secret that in order to exist and to be made known needs none of the light of *logos*, none of the tricks of meaning, the strategies of interpretation, the horizons of the World, or the transcendent forms of appearance. Truth as secret exists autonomously *prior to* the horizontality of appearance. The secret enjoys an absolute precedence over interpretation; it is itself the Uninterpretable from which an interpretation emerges. It is the invisible that has never been visible because it is known from the outset to be invisible. The essence of the secret does not reside in a rupture or redrawing that de-limits presence via some kind of withdrawal or “retrocession.” That the secret has never appeared in the horizon of presence is simply an effect, the effect of its positive essence.

5. The transcendental definition of the secret—that is, its real, and not even its nominal or ideal definition—is the following: the secret is the strictly unreflected upon form of truth that, given to itself, gives nothing of itself and receives nothing of itself except the modality in which it is given. This is only possible if it is the One or the Indivision, the Without-division, which is given to itself in its specific (that is, indivisible) modality. The secret is the *veritas transcendentalis* itself as finite.

6. The secret is truth when it no longer needs to go out of itself and be for itself, when it is itself by staying in itself. It is inalienable within a presence or a transcendence, within an alterity or a nothingness. The secret is *index sui* prior to any indication, it has never emerged into the light of a *logos*. It is an immediate transcendental given, an immediate that is absolutely pre-dialectical and pre-differential, pre-Hegelian or pre-Heideggerian. The secret is non-positional (of) itself, unreflected upon; it never reaches a consciousness, or vanishes when it does.

7. The secret as essence has never been the predicate to knowledge; it is an essence that has never been in general a predicate. The transcendental essence of the secret prevents it from being a part of either ignorance or empirical knowledge that one might then banish to the transcendence of silence or of darkness. Rather, it *is* this silence or this darkness—when they are absolutely deprived of transcendence, but not of positivity. The secret contains in it no fragment of the World, of History, of Meaning, etc.: it is radically finite and for this reason inalienable.

8. Occultism and hermetism are to truth what mysticism is to this “ordinary” mystic kernel: a falsification—rational in the last instance—of the essence of truth. It is hermeto-logy that has abandoned the secret to the shameful “occult sciences.” Because there is a secret, there is no mystery: the secret is ordinary or human

mystique, not mysticism. The discipline devoted to truth and to its essence-of-secret is “hermetics.” We oppose the finite hermetics of truth to its unitary hermetology.

9. One never discloses the secret, its inalienable essence: one only discloses its disclosure, a disclosure which gives itself up. This is the principle of a radical, dualist critique, of all thought that might present itself as phenomenology. There is no point in restoring hermeneutics or phenomenology to their conditions of possibility, to *aletheia* for example. These are but the surface effects of the system of hermeto-logical Difference. The essence of the secret knows nothing of the play of veiling and unveiling, of the structure of difference in general. It is the One, understood in an absolutely immanent and finite way; it excludes the play of Being and play in general.

10. To meditate on the essence of Being, on the forgetting of Being, is a task that has lost its sense of urgency. It has gotten stuck and is deteriorating within its own effectivity. What needs to be done now, rather, is to meditate on the essence of the One and the fact that it has been forgotten by the greco-Western Hermes, unitary and conflictual. But with this second mediation there is no longer the same kind of urgency or the same kind of forgetting as with Being.

11. To avoid charges of inconsistency and non-reality, of *real* nihilism, hermeneutics and (in general) hermetology postulate, without knowing or while denying it, the hermetic essence of truth, an absolute or finite experience of truth. They postulate it as something other than a simple limit of indivision or indecision to the strategy of meaning and to the play of interpretations, a limit that would be indistinguishable from the conflict of interpretations.

12. While postulating a finite truth, hermetology in general denies truth in its essence, a truth that it leaves indeterminate or unthought. This is because it considers the secret from the perspective, or through the prism, of meaning. The unitary and dominant hermetology abandons the essence of truth, an essence that it confuses with its truth effects, which it impresses into the service of Being, and which it consumes in various reflective, signifying, textual, or cultural tasks. The condition of possibility for the hermetological appropriation of truth is the active forgetting, the refusal, by ontology and the deconstructions of ontology, of the One in its essence.

13. It is not a question of introducing the notion of the secret into philosophy, but rather to introduce philosophy to the secret and to the hermetic experience of truth, and in so doing to overturn the presuppositions, the ends, the style, and the operations of philosophy: to let the philosophers in on the secret, to substitute for the hermeneuts and the hermetologists in general a new group whom we shall call the “hermeticians,” that is, finite or ordinary individuals and as such subjects (of) the rigorous science of truth.

14. The first Hermes represents the old alliance between truth and meaning. The second Hermes is hardly a new alliance. It is the affirmation that no alliance is possible, that truth does not need meaning, even if meaning needs truth, that the relations between them are strictly unilateral or irreversible, that they are not reversible as Difference postulates. Between the two Hermes there is no conflict, no war, perhaps not even a “dialogue.”

15. The secret does not need communication in order to be what it is, to be known and to be an “object” of a rigorous science. But communication needs the secret in order to be what it is. Between the secret and communication there only exist determinative relationships that are unilateral, asymmetrical, or irreversible. The secret, being radically finite, has its own mode of communication: through another secret, on the one hand; and on the other hand, insofar as the secret, in its radical finitude, determines the communicational games in the last instance. This determination is the only way in which the secret can be communicated to the World and act on the networks of communication without passing through them or borrowing their channels.

16. The unitary philosopher (the philosopher of Being, then of Difference) was always a representative, emissary, and civil servant of the Postal and Telecommunication Ministry; a transmitter and decoder of hermetological

THE TRUTH ACCORDING TO HERMES

Difference; an agent of postal ingenuity. He exploits confusion, the ambiguity of the secret and of censure. Nearly all philosophers were the mailmen of truth, and they diverted the truth for reasons less to do with the secret than with authoritarian censure. Meaning, always more meaning! Information, always more information! Such is the mantra of hermeto-logical Difference, which mixes together truth and communication, the real and information. The most extreme version of this hermeto-logical ambiguity is the Hegelian and Nietzschean principle: the real is communicational, the communicational is real. It is in the omnipresent effectivity of communication that hermeto-logy itself deteriorates.

17. If there is any urgency, it is not to try to enhance dialogue and the transparency of communication. With excess communication come opacity and inhibition, which are a perverse effect of hermetology. Rather, the task of the hermetician is to turn the communication decision, the meaning and interpretation decision, in the immediate data of the One or of the Non-interpretable, into a pre-hermetological experience that in the last instance determines communication.

François Laruelle is the director of the *Organisation Non-Philosophique Internationale*, and the author of more than a dozen books, including two texts in English translation *Philosophies of Difference: An Introduction to Non-Philosophy* and *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*, both with Continuum.

NOTES

1. TN: Originally published as François Laruelle, "La vérité selon Hermès: Théorèmes sur le secret et la communication," *Analecta Husserliana* 22 (1987): 397-401. Translation rights granted with kind permission from Springer Science and Business Media.
2. TN: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1991), 218.
3. TN: John Mullarkey, *Post-continental Philosophy: An Outline* (London: Continuum, 2006), 133.
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