

FRANÇOIS LARUELLE, *A DICTIONARY OF NON-PHILOSOPHY*
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In his preface to the original French edition of the *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, François Laruelle writes that its intention is to ‘summarize the theoretical acquisitions’ and to ‘present the essentials of the technique’ of non-philosophy. Given Laruelle’s reputation as a thinker whose writing can be enormously difficult to access, the presentation of his non-philosophical approach in a dictionary format should be a welcome contribution to the wider reception of this highly original body of thought. It is undoubtedly fair to say that, barring notable exceptions, Laruillian non-philosophy has not been as widely disseminated and engaged with to date as it might have been, with perhaps his most important works, *Philosophy and Non-philosophy* and *Principles of Non-philosophy* being translated into English only last year, at the same time as this dictionary (by Univocal and Bloomsbury respectively). It might be expected, therefore, that the dictionary format would clarify the theoretical and technical essentials of non-philosophy, as Laruelle claims, and aid the uninitiated in relation to its more difficult or opaque aspects and in relation to what Laruelle himself terms ‘non-philosophy’s unique style’.

Yet, necessarily perhaps, things cannot be quite so straightforward in relation to Laruillian thought. This is because the dictionary of non-philosophy must itself be rigorously non-philosophical in its operation as a dictionary, and therefore it must, in a certain sense, function as a ‘non-dictionary’. In this context the non-philosophical dictionary, just as much as Laruelle’s other writing, is performative and functions from the perspective of a certain suspension of the operations of determinate conceptuality, of the sense, meaning or identity of terms that would be presented in a traditional philosophical dictionary. Any reader expecting a straightforward and more or less pedagogical presentation and clarification of the key terms of Laruillian thought in this volume should therefore beware.

This means that, in practice, some prior knowledge of the theoretical acquisitions and technique of non-philosophy is of great help when it comes to reading the very dictionary which would seek to summarize those acquisitions and techniques. Laruelle’s opening essay ‘Theory of the Non-Philosophical Dictionary’ orientates the reader to a certain extent, but draws heavily on terms and arguments that are given in far more detail elsewhere,

most notably the two works cited above, *Philosophy and Non-philosophy* and *Principles of Non-philosophy*. It might therefore be worthwhile recapping some of the central tenets or axioms of Laruelle's thinking. It could be noted, for instance, that non-philosophy, for Laruelle, is never to be understood as the negation or destruction of philosophy, but rather as a *science* or theory of philosophy. Non-philosophy can be understood as a science in the structuralist sense insofar as it seeks to offer a rigorously formal definition of the structure of philosophy itself, and with this, a formal means of engaging with the materials of philosophy by way of a different structural gesture. Non-philosophy would be to philosophy, Laruelle tells us, what non-Euclidean geometries (Lobachevskian or Riemannian) would be to Euclidean geometries. The difficulty and complexity of Laruelle's thinking lie in the means by which he seeks to accomplish this different structural gesture and thereby to achieve the 'non-' of non-philosophy. Necessarily, therefore, this different structural gesture would inform or underpin the practice of a non-philosophical dictionary.

The mutation of non-philosophical thinking, and the practice to which this mutation gives rise, is derived from the founding axiom of Laruellian thought: namely that the Real be understood in terms of radical or absolute immanence and as an indivisible and autonomous One. According to what Laruelle comes to call the 'Vision-in-One', the absolute autonomy and indivisibility of the immanent Real dictate that it is always irreducible to, and in excess of, any and all operations of conceptual determination, of phenomenalisation, or of the transcendence of consciousness and world. Yet this axiomatic vision also dictates that, at the very same time, the real is necessarily *immanent to* all these instances as their cause or determination in the last instance. As a science or theory, non-philosophy understands philosophy itself as being always, in one way or another, engaged in operations of conceptual transcendence which supervene upon the immanence of the Real. This would be true structurally for all philosophy of whatever kind, whether it be ontology, epistemology, logic, or the modes of idealism, empiricism, of phenomenology, realism, or any other position, including recent French philosophies of difference. The constant or invariant structure that Laruelle identifies is one in which immanence and transcendence are first posed by philosophy and then immanence is subjected to a form of 'capture' by the transcendence of conceptual determination. In this way immanence and transcendence are 'mixed', and this mixture is 'synthesized' into a whole. This whole would be philosophy's determination of being taken together with its concomitant determination of the means by which being can be grounded or known, that is, its determination of truth, reason, logic and so on. Put differently philosophy poses 'being' or existence on the one hand and its representation in concepts or categories on the other, and it then constructs, or legislates for, the equivalence, identity, or unity of these in the universality of philosophical truths and foundations. Philosophy thus positions itself as the unifying transcendent principle which governs the original division or opposition. In this way it also founds its own authority (in a very circular manner, Laruelle argues) at the very same moment that it founds the 'truth' of being and existence.

From the Laruellian perspective, however, all philosophies necessarily exist on a plane of equivalence in relation to the One of the Real, that is to say, they all and equally have no purchase upon it whatsoever, and the foundations philosophy purports to offer are always entirely illusory. Divergent philosophical approaches or traditions may have stark differences in relation to the way they configure the instances of being, world, consciousness, truth etc. and their interrelation, but the vision-in-One necessarily poses them as equivalent in relation to absolute immanence. In this context, then, non-philosophical thought and practice emerges as a specific use of the materials of philosophy from the perspective of the Vision-in-One, and according to the axiom of the absolute immanence, autonomy and indivisibility of the Real. The affirmative goal here is a freeing of thought from the authority and, Laruelle would argue, authoritarianism of philosophical determination and from the hierarchies of truth, value, and reason that the authority of different philosophies would seek to impose. Non-philosophy sets itself up as a democratisation of thought and of its freeing in the name of a certain creativity and production of as yet undetermined future thought forms and practices.

The non-philosophical dictionary needs therefore to be understood as a *non*-dictionary insofar as it treats its entries according to non-philosophical axioms and insofar as it, in Laruelle's own words, 'reduces the secret claim of every dictionary [...] to project the totality of sense and exhaust the real' (31). This has the direct

consequence, of course, that any reader who approaches the dictionary as means of gaining a clear idea of the identity, sense or determinate meaning of Laruelle's non-philosophical terminology will find that it is precisely the identity or non-identity of its terms in relation to the real and the effect of this upon sense that is at stake or in question in the pages of this work. On the positive side, the dictionary enacts a further affirmation of Laruelle's democratisation of thought. All the terms treated are treated with respect to a 'democratic equality of terms' and their equality or equivalence in relation to the Real. This, it should be noted, is not exactly a relativism in which every term or concept is equally true or levelled in its specificity, since in a sense all terms retain their specificities, their distinctive traits and the legacy of their respective philosophical contexts. All the terms in this dictionary are treated as equal or equivalent in relation to the Real only, that is, in relation to that which determines them 'in-the-last-instance'. So the terms presented in the dictionary are given their full philosophical specificity but also articulated in their new function as non-philosophical materials which are placed or 'emplaced' in relation to an immanent Real upon which they can have no purchase at all.

On a less positive note there is always the possibility that, in its ambition to summarize the theoretical acquisitions and techniques of non-philosophy, the (non-)dictionary necessarily pre-supposes those acquisitions and techniques and, in a somewhat circular and obscure manner, performs itself as yet another difficult and hard to access modification or mutation of philosophical practice in which the integrity of the non-philosophical gesture is preserved at the expense of the very ambition which gives the dictionary its purpose. That said, the structure of each entry mitigates this problem somewhat insofar as the term in hand is given a summary definition and commentary, is then followed by a short paragraph detailing significant points in the philosophical history of the term, and is then followed by an explication of the term in the light of its non-philosophical usage or its status as non-philosophical material. A wide variety of philosophical and distinctively non-philosophical terms are covered and some of the most important entries, for instance those on the 'Vision-in-One' and 'Determination-in-the-last-instance' are genuinely helpful and illuminating.

At the heart of Laruelian thinking, and despite its difficulty of access and 'unique style', there is a highly original account of the way in which all concepts, philosophies, thought-forms, and all modes of lived existence, consciousness and experience are determined or caused by the immanent Real. In a way this is an ultra-realism rather than an extreme relativism since it is a matter, for Laruelle, of thought dispensing with the illusory foundations of philosophical determination in order to align itself axiomatically with, and in favour of, the only real base of thought, that of the immanent Real itself. There is arguably a reversal of Kantianism here which is comparable to the similar but different reversals of Kantianism sought by thinkers such as Alain Badiou and Quentin Meillassoux and, more broadly, by those bodies of contemporary thought which have gathered themselves under the banner of speculative realism. The effectivity of the Laruelian non-philosophical gesture will no doubt have to be judged by the future forms of thought that his thinking engenders or allows in its freeing or democratizing of philosophical materials and practice. And this, as Laruelle himself affirms, is arguably the main purpose and interest of the *Dictionary of Non-philosophy*, which functions less as a vehicle for the clarification or pedagogical presentation of the identity of its terms, and far more as a means of inciting or engendering the 'non-philosophy to come' (19).