

François Laruelle. *A Biography of Ordinary Man: On Authorities and Minorities*. Ed. Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet. Cambridge: Polity Books, 2018. 331 pp. ISBN 978-1-509-509-959.

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To think minorities as ‘difference’ is to reduce them to their fusion with...their difference from the State, conceiving of them as statominoritarian mixtures, as modes or projections of power relations, profits and losses of an indefatigable grind – history. The other thought, properly minoritarian and no longer statominoritarian, radicalizes the conditions of the problem. It asks what would minorities be who would not form an additional universal – the intersection of the great authoritarian universals, Language, Sex, Culture, Desire, Power? Who would be par excellence real or formed of individuals as they are? (33)

François Laruelle has rightfully earned the title of contemporary French philosophy’s archetypical heretic, having fostered the “non-standard” method of univocal genericity and spurred an altogether radical praxis, inciting a new generation of loyal followers that include Jason Barker and Ray Brassier. Laruelle’s method, often referred to as “non-philosophy” (though “non-philosophy” is an abbreviation of “non-standard philosophy”), withdraws from the metaphysical precept of separating the world into binarisms, perhaps epitomized by the formative division between “universals” and “particulars” in Kant’s Transcendental Deduction. Laruelle’s method also rejects the “evental” nature of Being described by Heidegger as the foundation for philosophy’s “standard model,” which Heidegger termed *Ereignis* (often translated as “the event of Appropriation”). In its immanence, Laruelle’s “One” is understood as generic identity - an identity/commonality that reverses the classical metaphysics found in philosophy’s bastion thinkers (a lineage that runs from Plato to Badiou), where the transcendental is upheld as a necessary precondition for grounding reality. Instead, Laruelle asserts the “One” as the immanent real: generic, non-philosophical and axiomatic.

Drawing on *The Minority Principle* (1981) and *Struggle and Utopia: At the End Times of Philosophy* (2012), Laruelle further cultivates his project on generic ethics and axiomatic principles with his latest text, *A Biography of an Ordinary Man: On Authorities and Minorities*

(2018). From the very beginning of the book, Laruelle stakes a “revolt against philosophers” (1) and, in particular, against philosophy’s historical hostage of the “ethical Other” – staking a cause against philosophy’s “warp and weft of games of power,” which all too often reduce marginalized individuals and collectives to terms of “difference” (32).

Laruelle, with great detailed prowess, surveys the *excesses* shoring the discipline of philosophy. Captivated with “revealing” and “reflection,” Laruelle charges philosophy with increasingly moving towards a dominion stilted on dialectics, metaphysics, and Derridian *différance* at the expense of the Real. Where immanence does transpire in philosophical discourse, it is almost always tied to the Deleuzian plane of multiplicitous immanence. For Laruelle, this is far too weak. With the exception of speculative realism and object-oriented ontology, a quick canvas of contemporary philosophy evinces the terms of Laruelle’s polemics: Slavoj Žižek’s dialectic approach is indebted to Hegelian synthesis; Catherine Malabou’s work on plasticity is contingent on Kantian “correlationism”; Michel Serres and Bernard Stiegler both rely on the aperture of transcendence.

Thus, not only is Kant’s transcendental deduction looming in Laruelle’s foreground but so, too, is Deleuze’s ethics (of “becoming-minor”). In *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, Laruelle tasks “non-ethics” with devolving “individual causality,” the sole content of the “Real essence” (225). With one swift move, Laruelle’s univocal immanence superimposes the (Kantian) analytic *a priori* as the Real before moving on to confront the true subject of this book – to poise a more precise and rigid means of working with science within the interior of philosophy. Laruelle proposes a terrain whereby science ceases to be a “techno-political fantasy” and becomes “a real science,” whereby “man must be irreducible in his multiplicity if he is no longer to be this anthropological fetish” (2). Consequentially, Laruellean ethics is radically de-anthropocentrized, fundamentally directed towards a universalized, auto-effective set of generic conditions.

Laruelle takes up the responsibility of describing socio-political relations between minority and the state via causality and politico-logical terms, rather than traditional ontological terms of Foucauldian power. For those initiated within the structuralist discourse of Foucault and Althusser, Laruelle’s theses on “Authority” and “the State” are riveting reversals that upend post-structuralist proclivities: Laruelle transfigures Foucault’s “conditions of possibility for knowledge” by directing them towards the generic conditions of the *a priori*. Rather than the hackneyed platitude “we are (configured by) the State,” Laruelle offers that “We are minorities, they are us.... Thinking is beginning with real individuals in order to go towards the State.... It is necessary to ‘invert’ or rather unilateralize the World and the State...so that thought finds its real basis” (40-41). For Laruelle, “Authorities” are the aprioristic structures predicating experience in the “World, History, and State” via “Games of power,” which pose “real essences” and “onto-logical” content. A generic world – a truly Laruellean world – is conditioned by immanence of identity rather than ontological difference.

Laruelle's use of "science" is unconventional and possibly perplexing for readers devoid of a primer. For Laruelle, the domain of "Absolute science" belongs to "ordinary man rather than to the philosopher" (151), where "minority" or "ordinary" indexes that which pervades the world and individual (the fold of the general condition). Laruelle's text is undoubtedly political but, for those readers expecting the utilitarian Marxism of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, they will not find "the Revolution" here; rather, *A Biography of Ordinary Man* prefigures resistance - it is, as Laruelle notes, essentially a "pre-revolutionary, pre-activist, anterior to struggles" (25).

This is not to insinuate that Laruelle's book is composed of nebulous postulates - non-philosophy's foes are taken up in full. In addition to Deleuze and Kant, Laruelle complicates "being-in-the-world" as described in Heidegger's "phenomenologico-existential sense" (127), which privileges the methodologies of hermeneutics and interpretation. Laruelle's principle of "the One," rather than some decision or identity, is a postural withdrawal from the philosophical "auto-position" of distance between the Real and Being - instead, the two are interminably folded over one-another. Laruelle's "One" is diametrically opposed to Heidegger's "world of authentic presence" and "unconcealment," where truth is stilted on exchange.

What uniquely colors *A Biography of Ordinary Man* from Laruelle's prolific output over the last few decades is that this project is framed not only in epistemic terms but, primarily, through the ethical lens that invigorates the "non" in "non-philosophy." Laruelle's unilateral "One" resists any concentration of power by affect, genealogy, or history; unlike Foucault's project, which - in the structuralist-archaeological tradition - opposes and exchanges animal madness (*folie*) with human madness (*déraison*), Laruelle pitches the "nonstandard human" to underscore the quantum nature of a generic primary of pure immanence. Such radical immanence is "no longer exactly a relation, that is, a reciprocity or a reversibility, or even a relativity" (17) - in fact, it could be said that Laruelle opposes what we conceive of as "the political" with "the *purely* ethical" as, for Laruelle, that which is ethical is not a system of laws but, rather, axiomatic genericity. Thus, Laruelle refuses to revitalize the minority discourse proffered by the State, in favor of a trans-species generic category (hence, Laruelle's penchant for lifting algebraic principles and plucking quantum mechanics).

By problematizing what he terms "The Statist Ideal," or the "Unitary Illusion" - be it negative (Hegel) or positive (Nietzsche) - Laruelle interrogates the "scission" of the minority subject, which he contends is a "symptom" of the Western dialectic practice (64). In opposition to the Kantian first principles upon which both Continental and Analytic philosophy rest, Laruelle attempts to sketch a "real Critique of Reason" that is determined in itself and through itself; insofar as this involves Laruellean "non-ethics," this involves breaking from the long-situated practice of studying the State from the paralogism of the State view, itself.

Laruelle's *A Biography of Ordinary Man* is systematically split into four subsections: "Who Are Minorities?," "Who are Authorities?," "Ordinary Mysticism," and, lastly,

“Ordinary Pragmatics.” Throughout, Laruelle proposes a unique system of “non-ethics,” as philosophical ethics has undermined the negotiation of morality by insisting on a preliminary *a priori* recognition of “philosophical positioning,” authoritatively rendering ethics under history, world, or state. For Laruelle, ethics is (improperly) philosophically founded in “Greek ontological prejudices” (6), “mystico-religious” dualisms, and Christian “gnoses,” which orient “experience as a quasispatial insertion into the World and as a topography” (80).

What alternative, then, does Laruelle pose? *A Biography of Ordinary Man* furthers Laruelle’s post-Althusserian Marxism and, consequently, his long-spanning literature on the “determination in the last instance” (DLI), Laruelle’s uniquely unidirectional and rigorously irreversible causality, which he also terms “cloning.” Thus, before further explaining Laruelle’s idiosyncratic verbiage, I ought to note that *A Biography of Ordinary Man* is a book that unforgivingly makes use of the terms Laruelle has collectively accumulated throughout his philosophical career. To those approaching Laruelle for the first time, I advise beginning elsewhere, such as with *Principles of Non-Philosophy* (1996) and *Future Christ* (2002), while complementing these preliminary readings with those of secondary commentators including Alexander Galloway’s brilliant monogram, *Laruelle: Beyond the Digital* (2014), and John Ó Maoilearca’s non-philosophy primer *All Thoughts Are Equal* (2015). Otherwise, the neophyte reader will not only be weighed by seemingly obscure Laruellean language but also risk glossing over otherwise truly exhilarating minutiae.

Categorizing Laruelle as a Marxist may, also, seem folly - after all, Laruelle’s project is to unmoor the “fully accounted” capture of history from the “bastard sciences” (4) of mytho-philosophical ambition, as exemplified by ethnology, linguistics, biology, Greco-Christian anthropology, psychoanalysis and even Marx’s “science of history” (1). For Laruelle, identifying with any genealogy of the “Sciences of Man” evinces that they stem from the same archaic, metaphysical presuppositions. Laruelle seeks to establish a rigorous “science of man” that no longer borrows from other sciences, refuting the “purely passive and static genesis” of Marxist structuralism (112). Nonetheless, Laruelle *is* a Marxist, despite what one may glean from any surface-level review; in *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, his anticapitalist project appropriates Althusserian “determination in the last instance” so as to prohibit the necessity of “relations of exchange” (136).

Laruelle’s tactical use of Althusser’s DLI is perhaps best elaborated in his “Theorem 2. Minorities determine Authorities in the last instance, who do not determine them in return.” While Laruelle’s book makes liberal use of such edicts and theorems, this is quite possibly the most important, for it preconfigures Laruelle’s “Minority Principle,” which requires that the “authentic minority, that is individuality, be laid bare and decide to think through itself” (33). Thus, unlike Deleuze - who has traditionally appointed cinema and the arts with the responsibility to facilitate the representation of a “missing people,” Laruelle’s ethical position posits “The ordinary individual experiences his reality and thinks for himself, in the radical finitude of his essence as inherent (to) himself: he is

for himself an immediate given” (76). Laruelle advocates for creative and inventive auto-impression, devoid of mediation, be it interpersonal or intertextual.

While Laruelle’s “non-philosophy” (and, in this book, “non-ethics”) certainly commits to a mutiny of past methodology, it would be blindsided to claim that Laruelle’s book is unrelated to the late Michel Henry’s notion of “auto-affective Life” and to the Nietzschean sensibility of “active forces.” However, Laruelle radicalizes Henry by elbowing auto-affection towards the non-human terrain, effectively universalizing it and reconfiguring the concept from the transcendental by transubstantiating it as constant mutation.

Laruelle's past approaches materialized science via the aporetics of “anti-philosophy” with utopic vigor - his newest book is no exception. Whereas ethics traditionally disorients itself from the real and philosophy is based on spatial distance, Laruelle’s “non-ethics” is confrontational in its compressive tactility, unwrenching these tenets from their histories. For those interested in animal ethics, cyborg theory, and the anthropocene, I highly recommend this text as Laruelle deftly displaces any notion of a “Humanity Principle,” equating it with the “Power Principle, the Language Principle, the Pleasure Principle” (10).

For Laruelle, all philosophy is performance and, consequently, under philosophy the domain of political ethics is derived from a point of extension and the Other, within the scope of “Pragmatic Reason” (184). One could say that, as Althusser once professed that *Reading Capital* could be best understood by those precariat workers in the factory, thereby expanding theory’s “knowledge effects,” Laruelle’s non-ethics - in its polemic proposition - seeks to broaden philosophy by mutating ethics in the hands of the generic. It is mirthless to seek a revolutionary ethos in Laruelle – his critique solely provides us with the appropriate tools and, in this case, the ethics with which to problematize philosophy. Laruelle’s contemporaries, such as his anarcho-Maoist student, Gilles Grelet, have weaponized Laruelle to radicalize non-philosophy and pose an anti-phenomenological practice. *A Biography of Ordinary Man* furthers the conversation towards an ethical terrain, allotting a unique admixture of non-humanist interventions – how to apply these “non-ethics” is now within the reader’s sphere.