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The Origins of Laruelle's Non-Philosophy in Ravaisson's Understanding of Metaphysics

Abstract

Laruelle's first book *Phenomenon and Difference: An Essay on Ravaisson's Ontology* (1971) is unanimously overlooked as having little relevance to his later non-philosophy. On the contrary, this paper analyses Laruelle's dissertation and Ravaisson's writings to show how Ravaisson enables Laruelle to develop non-philosophy's three central ideas of decision, radical immanence, and cloning. Firstly, Laruelle inherits Ravaisson's critique of Platonism and anti-Platonism as dividing the unity of being between two terms, of which one alone is conflated with being to the detriment of the other as non-being. Moreover, Laruelle follows Ravaisson's third way of envisioning being as a radical immanence, which philosophy presupposes to constitute its dualisms by dividing being into opposed terms. Finally, Laruelle's cloning adheres to Ravaisson's eclectic method of expressing being's true immanence through his cohering of all philosophies, as well as disciplines like art and religion, into a single narrative of one and the same being's self-unfolding.

Keywords: Laruelle, Ravaisson, non-philosophy, metaphysics, ontology

More than any other aspect of his oeuvre, Laruelle's untranslated dissertation and first published book, *Phenomenon and Difference: An Essay on Ravaisson's Ontology* (1971), is unanimously overlooked in Laruellian scholarship. This lack of attention is partly due to the fact that Laruelle's work on Ravaisson has yet to be translated into English. However, the fact that it has not been translated speaks to the implicit consensus that it is an idiosyncratic exception, which has little to do with Laruelle's subsequent development of a mature non-philosophy. Laruelle himself tacitly encourages this reading of his dissertation insofar as he never mentions Ravaisson again, and retroactively characterizes his non-philosophy as emerging out of his subsequent critiques of the philosophies of difference. Finally, the dissertation is not only overlooked because of its perceived irrelevance to Laru-

elle's mature non-philosophical thought, but also because of its subject matter of Ravaisson. Whereas translations of Laruelle's writings on Badiou, Derrida, Deleuze, Nietzsche and Heidegger have either been published or are forthcoming due to the immense interest in these other thinkers, there is relatively little interest in Ravaisson. Ravaisson's whole corpus has yet to even be published in French, and his selected writings have only recently been translated into English (Ravaisson 2016). Where Ravaisson is mentioned, it is almost always as a historical footnote to Bergson's theory of habit.[1] So, what ultimately emerges out of the secondary scholarship on Laruelle is the absence of any detailed discussion of his first work on Ravaisson, which is due to its perceived irrelevance for comprehending his non-philosophical science of philosophy that interests most commentators.

Contrary to this dominant (non-)reading of his first work, this paper shall analyse both Laruelle's dissertation and Ravaisson's own writings to show how Ravaisson first enables Laruelle to develop non-philosophy's three central ideas of philosophy as decision, the Real as radical immanence, and cloning as the staging of a vision-in-One. Firstly, Laruelle inherits Ravaisson's critique of both Platonism and various anti-Platonisms as dividing the unity of being between two terms, of which one alone is conflated with all of being to the detriment of the other as mere appearance or non-being. Moreover, Laruelle follows Ravaisson's third way of envisioning being or the Real as an originary radical immanence, which all philosophies presuppose to constitute their various dualisms by dividing being into two opposed terms. Finally, Laruelle's ideas of cloning and modelisation adheres to Ravaisson's eclectic method of expressing being's true immanence through his cohering of the diversity of philosophies, as well as other disciplines like art and religion, into a single historical narrative of one and the same being's self-unfolding. By tracing how Laruelle discovers the notions of decision, radical immanence and cloning in Ravaisson's ontology, we will see how non-philosophy is still providing an answer to philosophy's own fundamental question of being conceived as the Real, even as it rejects all historical philosophies' ideas of being understood as decisions.

1. Non-Philosophy in a Nutshell: Decision, Immanence, Cloning

Over the course of the works composing what he terms the Philosophy II and III periods of his corpus, Laruelle argues that all philosophy is constituted by a "decision" that divides the unity of the Real by arbitrarily privileging a mere part of it as exhausting all of

[1] The almost exclusive reception of Ravaisson's thought through Bergson has led to a focus on the former's concept of habit. See Bergson 2017. As we shall see, Laruelle goes against this grain by focusing on Ravaisson's more metaphysical writings.

the Real to the detriment of the opposite term as mere non-being or illusion. In what we will see is an appropriation of Ravaisson's critique of Platonism, Laruelle gives as an example of philosophical decision Plato's "Greek" gesture of identifying being with an ideal unity to the detriment of the sensible world of becoming as mere appearance:

> Philosophy is a manner of thinking that reduces all phenomena to the combination of two parameters relative to each other: Unity and Scission, or Identity and Difference. The Greeks, our contemporaries, could never surpass this mixture, and it is this invariant that forms our tradition through its innumerable variations (Laruelle 1991, 249).[2]

Although this decision is arbitrary in the sense that it is not based on what the Real is actually like in its totality, but merely on what the philosopher decides reality to be, it gains its aura of validity from the philosopher's own sense of its self-sufficiency, what Laruelle calls "the principle of sufficient philosophy" (Laruelle 1989, 17).

Of course, Laruelle is not the first to critique Plato; the philosophers of difference like Nietzsche and Deleuze also attempted to overcome Platonism. If Laruelle's critique of Platonism still holds for these anti-Platonists, however, it is because their attempt to surpass Plato simply makes the inverse mistake of deciding that the sensible world of becoming, multiplicity and difference is alone real to the detriment of the ideal, representation and unity as mere illusions of thought. So, although the anti-Platonists are able to bestow a reality to the sensible world where Plato saw only appearance, they still fall into the same trap of *deciding* that it alone is real. Laruelle continues: "difference does not give us the One but rather the Dyad, which is an ontological concept or peripheral to ontology [where ontology denotes philosophical decision]" (Laruelle 1991, 23). Whether philosophers decide that the Real is an ideal unity or sensible difference, for Laruelle, both rest on an arbitrary decision that fails to account for the opposite term that they denigrate as non-being.

Laruelle's own non-philosophy is designed to avoid making such decisions by exposing how all philosophies presuppose a greater Real which is indifferent to the dualisms that philosophical decisions create. For Laruelle, all decisions presuppose a "radical immanence" or "One-in-person" that philosophy cuts up into two falsely opposed terms, of which only one is granted an ontological stature. In reality, however, both terms are equally real in that they are immanent to the Real as a One anterior to all oppositions. It is crucial to delimit Laruelle's notion of the One, what he also calls "unary," from the Neo-Platonic concept of the One, or what Laruelle distinguishes as the "greco-unitary": "*the One is especially not the Unity with which Greco-Western thought regularly confounded it.* I insist: from the Greeks to the thinkers of difference, one has put the One at the service of the synthesis of

[2] All citations to French texts are my own translations unless otherwise stated.

opposites. (…) This confusion is the foundation of unitary or authoritarian thought" (Laruelle 1989, 25). On the one hand, the Neo-Platonic One is predicated as an ideal unity which thereby excludes sensible becoming from its ontological midst. Conversely, the Laruellian One is simply the name for the immanence of *both* the falsely opposed ideal and sensible terms, which the Neo-Platonic One presupposes in order to separate itself as the ideal from the sensible in the first place.

Since all philosophical decisions rest on attributing certain predicates to the Real to the exclusion of other terms not covered by those privileged predicates, it is not possible to positively think the Real in its radical immanence. To think the Real would be to describe it in terms of predicates. To attribute predicates to the Real, however, would be to exclude their opposite predicates, and thereby create an opposition between the Real and its contrary predicates. To grasp the Real *qua* the One is to instead think it as encompassing all predicates we can ever conceive, but without any one or number of them exhausting it. As Laruelle succinctly puts it, "the One is the immanent paradigm of the term and its specificity irreducible to all ideality or rapport" (Laruelle 1985, 52). Given that we can never directly describe the One, grasping it becomes a matter of indirectly alluding to it by showing how philosophy always presupposes an anterior immanence that it slices up to decide that which *is* and is not. Laruelle terms "cloning" this process of showing how philosophical decisions that constitute reality, or what Laruelle also calls the "world," presupposes the Real as a radical immanence: "because it is foreclosed to all knowledge, the vision-in-One can only clone its identity from the material of the mixed with which the capital-world furnishes it" (Laruelle 2000, 54). Termed differently, cloning stages a vision-in-One through the non-philosophical procedure of taking a philosophical decision as one's material, and revealing how it implies an original radical immanence to generate its world by separating it from the rest of the Real as an incompossible term.

Already in the later works of Philosophy III and evermore so in Philosophies IV and V, Laruelle develops the similar notion of "modelisation." Like cloning, modelisation amounts to a staging of a vision-in-One, albeit beyond philosophy in other practices, such as art, religion and science: "we can use diverse models, philosophical, theological, scientific, to interpret, and not to illustrate, this formalism" (Laruelle 2007, 23). While Laruelle had already been modelling other practices such as ethics and political theory before 2004, it is with that year's publication of *La Lutte et l'utopie à la fin des temps philosophiques* that he formalizes this procedure of modelling. There, Laruelle explains that not only philosophy, but all practices rest on certain decisions that split the immanence of their respective objects of study into contraries: "we pose that each practice, ordinarily called ‘regional,' possesses a specific quasi-ontology, an original conception of the real and procedures for

appropriating it for itself" (Laruelle 2004, 101). Since all practices make philosophical decisions, non-philosophy is not limited to cloning philosophy, but every practice by identifying their decision, subtracting it, and thereby making way for the vision-in-One. Here, Laruelle is quick to specify that non-philosophy does not decide the true essence of the objects of other practices, which remain autonomous. On the contrary, non-philosophy precisely bestows these practices their autonomy by extracting philosophy's infiltration of their methods and objects of inquiry: "non-philosophy only affects the sciences and arts as much as the philosophizable has infiltrated their meta-language, it has no effects on the practices themselves" (Laruelle 2004, 111-2). Laruelle envisions this subtraction of philosophical decisions from regional practices as the vocation of an "international non-philosophical organisation," or "ONPHI." The work of ONPHI consists in applying non-philosophy's conceptual tools to local practices by re-modelling those practices on a radical immanence to locally materialize a vision-in-One: "an ONPHI must be a manner of *modelling by way of the operatory practice of communicating the philosophizable and its appearance*" (Laruelle 2004, 141). The bulk of Laruellian scholarship that applies non-philosophical concepts to disciplinary fields like psychoanalysis, feminist theory, ecology, political theory and media studies can thus be seen as modelling the One's regional apparition in the world of decisions and predicative thought (see, for instance, Moulinier 1999; Smith 2013; Kolozova 2014 and 2015; Galloway 2014; Gangle, Rocco and Greve 2017).

Such are the essentials of Laruelle's non-philosophy: the critique of Platonism and anti-Platonisms for deciding the Real by dividing it into two opposed terms; the re-envisioning of the Real as the One of radical immanence; and the materialization of a vision-in-One by cloning or modelling philosophical materials and regional practices as diverse as art, science and religion.

2. Laruelle's Approach to Ravaisson: Phenomenon, Difference, Ontology

The best entry-point into Laruelle's *Phenomenon and Difference: An Essay on Ravaisson's Ontology* is by looking at the three keywords of its title: phenomenon, difference, and ontology. The subtitle clearly indicates that Laruelle is specifically interested in Ravaisson's writings on the history of metaphysics rather than the much more frequent interest in his theory of habit. The fact that Laruelle uses the word ontology instead of metaphysics as Ravaisson does also betrays Laruelle's intention to constantly update older conceptual paradigms with new terms. In this case, the change from metaphysics to ontology can be read in light of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics as distinct from a fundamental ontology (which Laruelle repeatedly links to Ravaisson's ontology). By referring to Ravaisson's met-

aphysics as ontology, then, Laruelle is positioning Ravaisson's thought as something to be advocated rather than abandoned as per the metaphysics of presence.

Laruelle opens the book by explaining that, although he will discuss difference, he is not seeking to rehabilitate difference against identity: "difference is only this essay's theme, not its thesis or concept" (Laruelle 1971, 9). It is crucial to avoid lopping in Laruelle's work with Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, Derrida's *Writing and Difference*, and other celebrations of difference in late 1960s France. Against this grain, Laruelle proposes to *critique* difference by drawing on Ravaisson's critique of anti-Platonic philosophies. While Ravaisson does not describe such anti-Platonic, pluralistic philosophies as "philosophies of difference" as Laruelle does, his target is nonetheless the same in that he takes aim at philosophers who cut up the unity of being in favour of a multiplicity of irremediably particular, individuated things. Here as with the term ontology, Laruelle updates Ravaisson's critique of anti-Platonism so as to transform it into a critique of the philosophies of difference that were all the rage in late 1960s and early 1970s Paris.

Finally, the first term of the title is phenomenon. This refers to the way that Laruelle uses Ravaisson to precisely save that which is precisely condemned as phenomenon or appearance from both Platonism and anti-Platonism's stripping it of all reality. On the one hand, Platonism cuts up being by deciding that only the ideal is real to the denigration of the sensible part of being as mere epiphenomena. On the other hand, philosophies of difference do link difference to what Plato called appearance, and thus seek to ontologize it. However, they then oppose this to unity, ideality and representation as a new phantasmic phenomenon. For Laruelle as for Ravaisson, any concept of being conceived as the Real has to include everything that there *is*, including even phenomena, be it the ideal *or* the sensible, if it is to seize the radical unity of all things without remainder.

3. Ravaisson's History of Metaphysics: Materialism, Idealism, Being

On Laruelle's reading, Ravaisson conceives of philosophy as *first* philosophy, ontology or metaphysics, which he in turn understands to be the study of the unity of being cohering the multiplicity of seemingly different things. It is by looking at Ravaisson's two-volume work on the historical reception of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that we can best grasp his own concept of being.[3] Ravaisson begins by arguing that the first pre-Socratic philosophers affirmed that the sensible world is what is real (water, air, fire, etc.). More precisely, Ravaisson focuses on Heraclites' idea of being as a fire of becoming. According to Ravais-

[3] Apart from Laruelle's monograph, the best overview of Ravaisson's thought is Boutroux 1900.

son, the idea that being is a constant flux of becoming paved the way for the sophists' belief that there is a multiplicity of different and even contradictory truths without any overarching unity to cohere them all:

> *Everything flows*; such is the formula where Heraclites, perhaps without realizing it, creates the germ of scepticism. (…) If the principles are opposites that exist together and mixed one with the other, everything is at once white and black; (…) the contradictory can be affirmed at once of the same thing; the true is confounded with the false. (…) Individual sensation is the only possible science: *man is the measure of all things* (Ravaisson 1963a, 274).[4]

On Ravaisson's reading, both the pre-Socratics and the sophists split being into infinite differences upon differences. What Socrates then did was to introduce the idea of a conceptual unity underlying the multiplicity of sensible things: "abandoning the search for a general explication of natural phenomena, Socrates attached himself to ethics, and he discovered therein the true object of science, independent of sensation, the universal" (Ravaisson 1963a, 276). Socrates' dialectical method thus involves moving from different and even contradictory ideas of what is good, virtuous, just or beautiful, to one unified Idea beyond all particular sensible instances: "the goal that he proposes for himself is to rediscover in particular existences an element of generality, and to bring the sensible diversity to the intelligible unity of the universal" (Ravaisson 1963a, 282). By seeking to cohere the sensible manifold around a unified Idea, Socrates tentatively grasped philosophy's true mission, a mission that Aristotle would later formalize, as the study of the unity of all things.

For Ravaisson, Plato marked a regression from Socrates' thought of the unity of being when he affirmed that the ideal unity was *alone* real, and hence transcendent and separate from particular, sensible things: "in itself, consequently, the idea, which gives particular things the unity of a general form, the idea is a thing apart, singular and individual" (Ravaisson 1963a, 292). The problem with Plato is that by conflating the ideal with all of reality, he thereby reduced the sensible world to a mere non-being, privation, or appearance: "there is thus a *non-being*, to which all participates, or rather which is mixed and scattered in everything" (Ravaisson 1963a, 312). By identifying the very sensible phenomena that we experience as non-being, Plato's concept of being as an *ideal* unity does not really capture all of being insofar as it excludes our very own experience. On the contrary, Plato divides the unity of being between two opposed terms of ideal unity and sensible multiplicity: "if the One, in a general manner, is the opposite of multiplicity, the first prin-

[4] I shall leave aside the question as to whether Ravaisson's readings of other philosophers are entirely accurate, since my present goal is to see how Ravaisson's understanding of the history of metaphysics informs Laruelle's non-philosophical thought.

ciple, God has his opposite, immortal, eternal like him" (Ravaisson 1963a, 342-3). Being thus loses the sense that it is supposed to be everything in favour of being only the ideal *part* of a greater Being, which is also sensible:

> All this occurs to the Platonists, because they (…) take opposites for principles, because they make of the One a principle, because they make numbers and ideas the first essences, and because they attribute to them an independent and separated existence. To these radical errors, from which derive all the absurd consequences that overwhelm Platonism, there is still a common root: it is the confusion of the logical order with the order of being (Ravaisson 1963a, 340-1).

Clearly, Ravaisson's critique of Platonism anticipates Laruelle's idea that Plato identifies the real with the unitary ideal to the detriment of sensible differences in a way which divides the unary One between two opposed terms.

For Ravaisson as for Laruelle, Platonism is wrong to conflate the ideal term with the totality of that which *is*. Instead, both the ideal unity and sensible diversity must be somehow united in a single structure, law, principle, cause or being. Ravaisson ultimately finds such a synthesis of these two terms through his reading of Aristotle. Contrary to Plato, Aristotle grants a certain reality to individual sensible things. Affirming the irremediable difference of all things alone, however, would merely recapitulate the sophists' philosophy of difference. Instead, Aristotle argues that all individuated things are so many actualisations to different degrees of a pure act or absolute potentiality, which they presuppose in order to differentiate themselves by moving from potency to act. For Ravaisson, Aristotle's idea of the pure act or prime mover thus grants a reality to individuated things while also maintaining their absolute unity as so many acceptations of one and the same being:

> The universe thus forms a continuous system of ascending progressions, ordered by one and the same term. It is not an assemblage of independent and detached principles, (…) it is a chain of successive potencies subordinated one to the other, (…) according to their common rapports with a same principle (Ravaisson 1963a, 59).

With Aristotle, Ravaisson holds that metaphysics found its proper ground in the idea of the unity of all things, a unity that does not disavow the brute fact of sensible becoming, but rather subsumes it into a larger whole.

In the second volume of his *Essay on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, however, Ravaisson argues that the stoics and epicureans mistook Aristotle for a pure empiricist without the idea of an overarching pure act. Consequently, they returned to an essentially pre-Socratic philosophy of sensible becoming and infinity diversity without any universalising principle: "from Aristotle's first successors to the first century of the Christian era, it is a common character to all the sects that dispute each other (…) to not suppose anything beyond na-

ture" (Ravaisson 1963b 64-5). Ravaisson sees what Laruelle calls the "anti-Platonists" as equally problematic as Plato insofar as they simply assert the opposite of Plato by holding that only sensible diversity is real to the detriment of the ideal unity of thought. While Ravaisson holds that the exclusion of the sensible from being was where Plato fell afoul, to oppose the sensible as alone real as the stoics and epicureans did equally strips the ideal of any reality. The anti-Platonists thus maintain Platonism's essential dualism that cuts up the unity of being by merely inverting what counts as real (now the sensible) and what is merely phenomenal (the ideal). As Laruelle reformulates Ravaisson's critique of anti-Platonism, "to think difference *in opposition* to identity, *in opposition* to the concept, to think *the simulacrum in opposition* to the model and to the Idea, this is to reintroduce in the act of thinking negativity that one endeavoured to dissociate from difference" (Laruelle 1971, 71). Although Ravaisson prefers to use proper names like stoicism and epicureanism, Laruelle generalises his critique of these philosophies as a critique of "anti-Platonisms" or "philosophies of post-factum difference" (Laruelle 1971, 37-8, 39). Here, Laruelle updates Ravaisson's critique of the stoics and epicureans to take aim at Deleuze, Derrida, Nietzsche and other more contemporary anti-Platonic philosophers of difference. We can thus see how Ravaisson's critique of Ancient Greek philosophies of difference first enables Laruelle to see the problem with the reigning anti-Platonism of his own time. It is not merely that Ravaisson's critique of anti-Platonism coincides with Laruelle's own critique of philosophies of difference; rather, Laruelle goes so far as to say it is *only* through Ravaisson that we can understand how philosophies of difference make the same, albeit inverted mistake as Platonism of dividing the unity of being: "it is only from the ravaissonian perspective that a thought of difference as transcendental principle falls into the abstraction equal to that of the Platonism that it pretends to overcome" (Laruelle 1971, 99). Clearly, Laruelle is deeply indebted to Ravaisson's critique of anti-Platonism, and of Platonism, as so many productions of oppositions, which tear a real unity asunder.

In his other works on the history of philosophy, Ravaisson traces how philosophy continues to be anchored in this battle between the Platonic ideal unity and anti-Platonic sensible becoming. In his *Philosophy in France in the 19th Century*, for instance, Ravaisson argues that 19th century French philosophy can be seen as a long civil war between Auguste Comte and the positivists' idea that there is nothing beyond the empirical world, and the spiritualists' notion of spirit as transcending the material body. While each favour the opposite term, both positivists and spiritualists share a mutual mind-body dualism that splits the world between supposedly incompossible terms of subject and object, spirit and nature (Ravaisson 1885, 258). Much as Aristotle had developed an armistice for the ancient battle between the Platonists and anti-Platonists, however, so does Ravaisson see Schelling as a

19th century foil for the excesses of both positivism and spiritualism.[5] On Ravaisson's account, Schelling provides another way to unify nature and spirit in one self-identical absolute, which is indifferent to all dualisms. In short, Schelling's whole project centred on uniting the I and the non-I, nature and subject, which had been falsely opposed by both Fichte's privileging of the ideal over the object on the one hand, and Spinoza's reduction of spirit to nature on the other (Schelling 1994, 111-2). To this end, Schelling argues that the I can only be itself *qua* self-consciousness by externalizing itself as an other or object of its own thought. Nature or the non-I is thus the absolute spirit's alienation of itself to paradoxically affirm its self-identity by coming to think itself. In Schelling's terms, "the self cannot intuit the real activity as identical with itself, without at once finding the *negative element* therein, which makes it nonideal, as something alien to itself"; and: "it is with it in order to have an Other through which it would be able to contemplate itself" (Schelling 2001, 53; and 2000, xxxvi). The paradox of self-consciousness is that it has to negate itself by becoming an other of itself to affirm itself as the thinking of itself. At times, Ravaisson characterizes his own concept of being in these Schellingian terms of an absolute that thinks itself via its alienation in nature in a way that unites the subject and object from the false opposition that had been set up between them in 19th century French philosophy: "in all the different degrees of the immense scale of things, there is everywhere one and the same thought, divided in some way from itself, dispersed in all directions into material multiplicity, but which, gradually retrieving itself, re-acknowledges itself" (Ravaisson 2016, 87). By combining Aristotle and Schelling, Ravaisson is able to show both how unity presupposes sensible diversity, and how sensible differences presuppose an ideal unity. On the one hand, unity needs difference insofar as it can only affirm its self-identity by becoming an object of itself as Schelling explains. On the other hand, difference only emerges as individuations of a unified, pure act as Aristotle has shown. As Laruelle reformulates it, "unity can only affirm itself by differences, movement, and differences can only suffer the Same in grace, which is thus the final ontological synthesis" (Laruelle 1971, 94-5).

We can see from Ravaisson's history of metaphysics that the fundamental failure of philosophers to achieve a properly unified concept of being is due to the way they set up oppositions between two terms, of which only one is purportedly real. On the one hand, Platonism and its spiritualist variants affirm the ideal as alone real contra the sensible multiplicity of things. On the other hand, anti-Platonisms, from the stoics to the positivists, affirm that sensible diversity is alone real against the fantasies of thought and representation. In both cases, we are confronted with the problem of how being can be said to be the

[5] For accounts of Schelling's influence on Ravaisson, see Courtine 1994; and Guibert 2007.

unity of all things given that there is a second term that exceeds its grasp. As Laruelle encapsulates Ravaisson's critique of philosophy, "Ravaisson searches Being in the falling short of metaphysical oppositions. All the oppositions are metaphysical, and in all opposition or scission, the excluded term continues to impregnate and govern the affirmed term" (Laruelle 1971, 37). Even if the excluded term is said to be merely appearance, phenomenon, or non-being, it nonetheless forcefully impresses itself on the affirmed term as its presupposition in a way, which shows the philosophical concept of being to be purely arbitrary, partial, and unitary rather than unary.

Drawing on Aristotle and Schelling, Ravaisson's positive project consists in reconciling these philosophical oppositions between sensible difference and "alterity," and identity and "assimilation," by developing a concept of being that is able to encompass both without relegating one to the realm of non-being. As Laruelle explains, "[Ravaisson's novelty] is, rather than creation, the experience of creation, the experience which is neither founded on radical alterity, nor on identification and assimilation – two symmetrical and twin hypotheses that Ravaisson will refuse –, the fusion in movement of subject and object" (Laruelle 1971, 33). Of course, Ravaisson's unified theory of being cannot be the One of the Platonists, which opposes itself to the difference of the outside. Instead, Ravaisson's being becomes an identity that is indifferent to oppositions insofar as it sees no oppositions between them, but only a unity, a reconciliation, or an immanence. Laruelle goes on: "the concept of *identity* must be modified. Identity interpreted as indifference of the opposed" (Laruelle 1971, 175). Notably, Laruelle first uses the term "radical immanence" that later denotes his own concept of the Real when describing Ravaisson's ontological concept of being as an absolute unity indifferent to all the opposites that it subsumes: "the problematic of ontologies of identity and radical immanence is only, more generally, the development of this post-Kantian principle: every opposition, whatever the content of its terms, must be founded on a synthetic substrate that is the presupposed identity of the two terms" (Laruelle 1971, 191). Although Laruelle later abandons the notion that radical immanence is the project of *philosophy*, we can see that it first emerges as a possible conception of being that is adequate to meet the demands of ontology understood as the study of the single structure, law, principle, or cause that unifies all things. While still a philosopher, Ravaisson's goal, and even his solution of radical immanence, is thus the same as that of Laruelle's non-philosophy: to develop a new, post-Platonic concept of the One that is able to incorporate that which Plato declared to be the difference of non-being in a radical unity without remainder.

4. From Eclecticism to Modelisation: The Philosophy of Art and the Art of Philosophy

Throughout his dissertation, Laruelle not only upholds the content but also the form of Ravaisson's writings as proffering a method for synthesizing opposed terms. Given that Ravaisson wants to unite the ideal and the sensible, syntax and being itself, it is crucial that his philosophical writing not be a thought *of* being that is distinct from being. Instead, his writing must somehow become one with being as its immanent self-expression. This is what Laruelle is getting at when he describes Ravaisson's method as "expressive" and "ambiguous" in the sense that it shows how ostensibly opposed or "paradoxical" terms are actually equivocal, blurred, and even one and the same: "what Ravaisson will propose is to renounce the scission of the concept and the sensed. (…) He substitutes *ambiguity* and *expression* for paradox, and aesthetic grace to the transcendental exercise of thought. Difference as ambiguity is more apt than paradox to operate representation's effective 'overcoming'" (Laruelle 1971, 75). Laruelle contends that Ravaisson's ambiguous or expressive method betrays the influence of both late Neo-Platonism and Victor Cousin's eclecticism. On Ravaisson and Laruelle's readings, both spiritualists and late Neo-Platonists attempted to encapsulate different philosophies and fields of culture by showing how they are all partial expressions of one and same unified reality. According to Laruelle, Ravaisson's own method adheres to this eclectic method of tracing how the diversity of different cultural practices and disciplines presuppose a universal object of inquiry: "like Neo-Platonism and Alexandrianism, he attempts a reconciliation of thoughts, philosophies and religions in all the dimensions of history and in a unique principle: the reading is inseparable from an attempt at unification" (Laruelle 1971, 45). Simply put, Ravaisson's eclectic method attempts to cohere the diversity of all particular objects of regional fields of inquiry as variations on a general theme. In this way, Ravaisson's hermeneutics should not be seen as thinking being from outside itself, but rather as being's immanent self-expression.

To see what Laruelle is getting at in more detail, we can classify Ravaisson's writings into two categories: the long book-length histories of philosophy, and the shorter essays on art, religion and particular philosophies in isolation from their larger historical context. Apropos the first class of writings, Ravaisson's studies of the history of philosophy seek to show that there is one, universal truth of being, which different philosophies "actualise" to varying degrees of success. Rather than see the history of philosophy as a plurality of discontinuous theoretical frameworks, Ravaisson unifies them as expressive to different levels of participation of one, monist reality. Although Ravaisson critiques Plato and favours Aristotle, this ought not therefore suggest that Platonic philosophy is completely false

or illusory. To oppose Platonism as outside the true thought of being as expressed in Aristotle would only set up a dualism at the heart of philosophical thought. While Platonism is therefore included in the history of true philosophical thinking, it only captures the ideal fragment of being's radical immanence while overlooking its sensible dimension. As Laruelle puts it:

> The history of philosophy is not of a dialectical nature. (…) All philosophy already manifests on condition of its own difference the final sense of philosophy, which is to say the expression of Being. The distribution operated between two methods, one that goes into the sense of the decomposition of the all into its elements—all philosophies that arise from the first method already participate in the manifestation of Being and the two between them can only be separated by a difference of degree in the expression of Being (Laruelle 1971, 53-4).

We can thus see how Ravaisson's very approach to developing his own metaphysics of radical immanence by tracing a history of other philosophies is crucial to revealing that radical immanence by cohering all philosophies around it as so many instantiations, whose differing degrees of emanation constitute their principle of individuation. Given that Laruelle appropriates Ravaisson's concept of being or the Real as a radical immanence, it is unsurprising that he also takes up Ravaisson's eclectic method when he proposes that the vision-in-One be staged by cloning philosophical decisions throughout the history of philosophy to show how they all presuppose the One.

The rest of Ravaisson's works are small, even fragmentary essays on "regional" subjects such as art and religion. If Ravaisson cannot simply privilege one field as the foci of his entire inquiry, it is because his concept of being as a radical immanence demands that he do otherwise. To focus on one field would amount to upholding it as the privileged discourse of being, thereby opposing it to other possible syntaxes. Instead, Ravaisson's understanding of being requires that he be a renaissance man and cohere the multiplicity of disciplines and their various objects of inquiry into one radical immanence without outlier. In Laruelle's terms: "rather than attribute to them too precise functions in a system of logical possibilities, (…) he searches, like true Neo-Platonism did, to derive them from a unique principle of which they reveal themselves to be historically finalised expressions and manifestations: this principle, this will be Being" (Laruelle 1971, 47). By demonstrating how a diversity of fields ultimately presuppose the same concept of one, all-encompassing essence, Laruelle contends that Ravaisson's eclectic method becomes one with his ontology of being as the pure act that all regions of reality more or less actualise: "the determination of the method thus drives to the heart of ontology, (…) for the method is only the being in movement or the process of Being manifesting itself" (Laruelle 1971, 30). Much as Ravais-

son expresses this immanence in other extra-philosophical disciplines such as art and religion, so, too, does the later Laruelle materialise the vision-in-One by subtracting decisions in other local practices, such as religion and art as well, but also politics, ethics, science, and especially quantum physics.[6] In what recalls his own characterization of Ravaisson's fragmentary, eclectic style of analysing many regional disciplines, the Laruelle of Philosophy V even goes so far as to say that to properly understand a figure or subject, we should not delve too deep into the details for fear of losing the sense of the whole of which they are a part: "to seize a doctrine's fundamental or ideal enunciations, it is even recommended to sometimes cease to read a too admired author" (Laruelle 2011, 29). In Laruelle's understanding of how Ravaisson expresses his concept of being through the very eclectic form of his thought, we can thus see in embryonic form Laruelle's mature idea of cloning and modelisation as the staging of a vision-in-One through philosophical, aesthetic, scientific, political and religious materials.

To give just one more concrete example, we shall look at Ravaisson's idea of the art of drawing.[7] For Ravaisson, there are two approaches drawing can take when representing figures. On the one hand, drawing can model itself on geometry by cutting figures up into their smaller parts and particular differences. On the other hand, drawing can take Ravaisson's preferred artistic approach and model itself on the naked eye's spontaneous intuition of how the parts of a figure cooperate together for the sake of the whole's greater harmony. So, whereas the geometrical approach divides figures into their parts, the artistic approach grasps the unity that the parts serve (Ravaisson 2016, 145).[8] As Laruelle explains Ravaisson's point here, "sight is not the object of a construction and is not discovered element by element, to which a mechanical juxtaposition would assure a factitious unity. Its coherence gives itself straightaway as such" (Laruelle 1971, 31). Ravaisson gives the specific example of how architects design buildings' particular rooms, doors and windows with an eye to serving the larger function of the whole: "a building, whatever it is exactly, should, like an animate being, be a whole whose parts cooperate, with the whole ensemble, in the pursuit of the same goal, and contribute to the expression of one and the same thought" (Ravaisson 2016, 147). By linking parts to a greater whole, a multiplicity to a unity, architecture, drawing and art more generally capture the harmony underlying all things beyond their individu-

[6] Laruelle stages the vision-in-One through many more disciplines than Ravaisson, such as science broadly speaking (1992; 2008); quantum physics (2010); ethics (2013; 2003; 2012); Marxist politics (2000); religion (2002; 2007; 2014); and photography (1996; 2014).
[7] For Ravaisson's writings on religion, see “Greek Funerary Monuments” and “Mysteries: Fragment of a Study of the History of Religions,” *Ravaisson* 2016.
[8] See also “On the Teaching of Drawing,” *Ravaisson* 2016.

ated particularities. Ravaisson affirms: "art (…) condenses what accidents have separated and what the spirit of nature gathers together" (Ravaisson 2016, 148). To the extent that art expresses the unity of being, it is not a separate mediation or discourse *of* being; rather, it immanently expresses being's self-manifestation. As Laruelle reformulates how art seizes the unity of radical immanence "in person": "aesthetics in Ravaisson's works is not mediating, art is not a derived expression of Being. (…) *The flowing movement is even grace or the 'in person'*" (Laruelle 1971, 32). Here, Laruelle makes his first use of the term "in person" to describe the way Ravaisson's eclectic method unveils a radical immanence behind all differences. While Laruelle will abandon much of the terminology he uses in his dissertation, he maintains this term (as well as radical immanence), both of which he initially uses to characterize Ravaisson's idea of being as a unity enveloping all things, a being that therefore closely resembles Laruelle's own idea of the Real as precisely a radical immanence, or the One-in-person.

5. Laruelle, A Philosopher?

I began by outlining non-philosophy's key concepts of philosophical decision, radical immanence, and cloning or modelisation. I then turned to Laruelle's first work to trace how he initially derived each of these concepts through his reading of Ravaisson's ontology. The critique of both Platonism and anti-Platonism as scissions of the Real, the need to synthesise them through a single concept of being as radical immanence, and the means of materialising the One-in-person through different regional practices, the germ of all of this can already be found in Laruelle's reading of Ravaisson.

What is most strikingly different in this early Laruelle compared to the later Laruelle is not that he lacks a concept of radical immanence that he clearly already possesses, but rather that he characterizes radical immanence as the object of study of *philosophy* or *ontology*. For the early Laruelle, the philosophies that divide the unity of the Real between two opposed terms do not mark the failure of philosophy *as such*, but merely that of all hitherto *historical* philosophies to achieve what remains philosophy's own mission to achieve a unified concept of all things, which radical immanence can alone provide. In his first book, then, Laruelle still holds that being and ontology have two significations: on the one hand, they denote a radical immanence at the root of all things whose study is the object of philosophy; on the other hand, they name only a part of immanence that all historical philosophies have separated off from the whole and falsely opposed to the rest of it *qua* mere phenomena: "being itself can thus be interpreted in two opposed manners, of which the opposition explains the duality of methods: either as being of a synthetic nature or as

reduced to given phenomena" (Laruelle 1971, 237). At this early stage, Laruelle is content to say that we can conceive of being as an opposition *or* as radical immanence where the later Laruelle will only associate being (and ontology) with the former.

By Philosophy II, Laruelle resolutely rejects that radical immanence is an answer to the question of being. Instead, being solely denotes Plato's Greco-unitary one rather than the unary One, which becomes the object of study for a *non*-philosophy or "science": "the One is not convertible with Being and must be described by itself outside of all functional requisition" (Laruelle 1991, 19). At the same time, Laruelle's notion in the dissertation that radical immanence is an answer to philosophy's project to uncover a unity of all things continues to betray itself whenever he repeatedly insists that non-philosophy, or what he has recently and tellingly referred to as "non-*standard* philosophy" is not the negation of philosophy, but its expansion (beyond decisional oppositions): "non-philosophy is not the absence or negation of philosophy, it is on the contrary its generalisation or its opening as correlate of the One rather than of Being" (Laruelle 1991, 20). What changes between Philosophy II and the dissertation on Ravaisson is thus not the fundamental concepts, but the semantics: Laruelle conflates being with the Greco-One as distinct from his unary One, as well as ontology and philosophy with their historical decisions about being as distinct from non-philosophy and science as a cloning and modelisation of the Real.[9] Ravaisson's critique of Platonic and anti-Platonic philosophies thus becomes Laruelle's critique of philosophy *tout court* as decisional. Ravaisson's post-Platonic ontology of the unity of being is translated as Laruelle's non-philosophical concept of radical immanence or the One-in-person. And Ravaisson's eclectic method reappears in the guise of Laruelle's notions of cloning and modelisation.

By looking at Laruelle's reading of Ravaisson, we can see that Laruelle's own project has the same goal as that of first philosophy: the study of being *qua* being or the Real understood as the radical immanence of all things. Given that at the very least Ravaisson would have to be excluded from Laruelle's critique of philosophy in Laruelle's own account of his ontology as expressing a radical immanence, it would seem that Ray Brassier is right to argue that Laruelle conflates *a certain kind* of philosophizing (by decisions) with philosophy *as such*: "Laruelle conflated the critique of a certain kind of philosophy with the critique of philosophy *tout court*" (Brassier 2007, 121). Along these lines, we can very well imagine philosophers objecting that Laruelle is wrong to distinguish philosophy from his

[9] Even here, a historical philosophical precedent connected to Ravaisson can be found when Schelling makes a distinction between other philosophies and his own, which is more of a "science," and even a "non-philosophy" in that it alone captures the absolute unifying all things (see Schelling 1980, 40; and 2010, 8).

own project, since he is committed to philosophy's basic mission of seizing the unity of all things, even as he departs from the historical solutions offered by philosophers hitherto as remaining too decisional.

Ultimately, whether Laruelle is justified in distinguishing his non-philosophy from philosophy *tout court*, on the grounds that it differs in its solution if not its aim, is a matter of semantics. What is really of interest is how not only ecologists, feminists, and media, political and art theorists, but also philosophers and metaphysicians can take up Laruelle's (and indeed Ravaisson's all too overlooked) critique of our own tradition, so as to immanently reform philosophy rather than oppose it from the outside.

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