
Clandestine Theology: A Non-Philosopher's Confession of Faith. François Laruelle. Translated by Andrew Sackin-Poll. London: Bloomsbury, 2021. Pp. xlix + 240
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Clandestine Theology: A Non-Philosopher's Confession of Faith is the latest translation of French philosopher François Laruelle, published originally in Paris in 2019 from Éditions Kimé. This text is one of the few texts in Laruelle's oeuvre addressing the themes of Christology, theology, mysticism, Gnosis, and heresy, elaborating on what he calls non-theology.¹

Clandestine Theology contains five chapters, with its introduction as a complementary coda in the original. As a personal text, akin to that of Pierre Bourdieu's *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*,² Laruelle's confession is a sketch or outline for a non-philosophical confession from a determined intellectual, one who expresses his fidelity to the generic human stripped of theological and religious overdeterminations: those without-religion. The original text's "Invocation" is omitted, where Laruelle humbly attests that "[on] what I do not know, whether the history and dogmas of religions (Christian or not), I will be silent...But I will speak in the words of what I know a bit, the Christian religion, with some concepts, dogmas, and historical events that it provides me."³

1. See, for instance, François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur* (Paris: Exils Éditeur, 2002), translated by Anthony Paul Smith as *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2010); *Christo-fiction: les ruines d'Athènes et de Jérusalem* (Paris: Fayard, 2014), translated by Robin Mackay as *Christo-Fiction: The Ruins of Athens and Jerusalem* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); *Éthique de l'étranger: du crime contre l'humanité* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2000).

2. Pierre Bourdieu, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*, trans. Richard Nice (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

3. François Laruelle, *Théologie clandestine pour les sans-religion: une*

The first chapter distinguishes faith from belief, grounding concepts – Man-in-person, Lived-without-Life, True-without-Truth, and the genericized notion of faith, denuded of theological and Worldly overdeterminations – that appear throughout the text. The second chapter develops a form of non-Christian practice of Christianity through a reading of the Gospels. The third chapter analyzes the distinction between surviving scripture and glorious scripture, finding in the latter a generalized form of deconstruction which produces theo- and philo-fictions that are transformative from their restrictive, onto-theo-(Greco/Judaic)-logical enclosures. The fourth, continuing on the theme of non-Christianity, performs a dualysis of the Trinity, dualysis being a method endemic to non-philosophy which places two symptoms in proximal relation to the last instance of the One.⁴ Lastly, the fifth chapter constructs a theory of clandestine non-religion, moving from original or radical sin to that of radical evil, developing themes from Laruelle’s oeuvre.

Given my reading of the reviewer’s copy, I find the translation by Andrew Sackin-Poll unsound in comparison to previous ones, even those published by Bloomsbury. Multiple errors – many of which skew the original – must be explored. Some are miniscule, such as translating Laruelle’s neologisms *formal* and *matériel* to “formal” and “material” in English (17), contrary to the now-standard usage of the latter introduced by Nicola Rubczak and

confession de foi du non-philosophe (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2019), 7: “Sur ce que je sais ne pas savoir, soit l’histoire et les dogmes des religions, chrétiennes ou non, je me tairai. . . . Mais je parlerai dans les mots de ce que je sais un peu, la religion chrétienne, avec les quelques concepts, dogmes et évènements historiques qu’elle me fournit.” My translation.

4. Note that portions of this chapter also appear in another text. See François Laruelle, *Mystique non-philosophique à l’usage des contemporains* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2007), 201–204.

Anthony Paul Smith as “matériel.”⁵ In this instance, formal would be translated as “formel” in English. Other examples are more compromising, such as translating the French *clonage* as “clonage” rather than “cloning” (25, 99, 101, 123, 124, 134, 135, 139, 163, 173). The translator also omits the use of brackets for translated words, a recognized practice used to contextualize the original French. Phrases that appear in the original, such as *réalisation* or *Déconvertissez-vous* do not appear in brackets alongside the clunky “real-lation” (22)⁶ or “Un-covert [sic] yourselves” (31).⁷

While the above examples are egregious, they by no means undermine the text as a whole. However, there are more damning errors. On two separate occasions in his translation, Sackin-Poll makes substantial alterations. In the original French, Laruelle writes:

Le protestantisme est la plus judaïque des confessions chrétiennes, il radicalize ou immanentise, mais sur le mode d’une intériorité donc encore d’une transcendance, toujours pas d’une véritable immanence, à la fois la médiation christique qui permet de se passer de Dieu et du monde, et l’essence immédiate de cette médiation sous la forme non plus de la transcendance judaïque exacerbée mais d’une intériorité

5. See François Laruelle, *Théologie clandestine*, 20–21: “Ce doit être un a priori spécial ni substantiel ni formel, matériel plutôt que matériel, formel plutôt que formel, *pour* la philosophie et la théologie, donnant ou manifestant sous une forme simplifiée leur nature duplice initiale.” (Emphases in original). Compare to François Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Nicola Rubczak and Anthony Paul Smith (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 305n2.

6. I would render this as “realiation” akin to a type of realization that cannot be done within the philosophical register.

7. I would render this as a declaration, “deconvert!” and relate it to Laruelle’s interest in degrowth around the same time of this text’s original writing. See his essay, “The Degrowth of Philosophy: Toward a Generic Ecology (2012),” in François Laruelle, *From Decision to Heresy: Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*, ed. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2012), 327–349.

exacerbée. *Si l'on peut dire*, le protestantisme est la judaïsation de la médiation comme intériorité.⁸

Compare to Sackin-Poll:

Protestantism is the most Judaic of all Christian confessions. The Protestant reformation makes confession more radical and immanent through interiority, which remains a mode of transcendence, always one step away from real immanence. The mediation of Christ at once permits the passage from God to the World and the immediate essence of mediation, no longer through an exacerbated Judaic transcendence but an exacerbated interiority. *Protestantism makes the mediation of Christ Jewish in terms of interiority* (164, emphasis mine).

This passage is rife with confusions. Sackin-Poll chooses “mediation of Christ” rather than the standard “Christic mediation” and misuses the negative *pas* as “step” rather than contrasting transcendental interiority with veritable immanence. The phrase “de se passer de Dieu et du monde” should be translated as “doing without God and the world,” not, as Sackin-Poll renders, “permits the passage from God to the World.” Furthermore, one wonders why Laruelle’s humble statement “si l’on peut dire” (which could be translated as “so to speak” or “if I may say so”) is removed, instead rendered as a bold antisemitic statement. Even without nuance and explanation, the French original is more ambiguous in its approach than in this translation. If the original accompanied the translation, it may have saved the reader from this jarring translation.

Let us consider a second example. In the original Laruelle states: “L’insurrection de la foi foreclose à toute croyance oppose

8. Laruelle, *Théologie clandestine*, 156. Emphases mine.

maintenant la «résurrection» glorieuse du Christ à la cadavérisation du Dieu juif survivant.”⁹ Compare to Sackin-Poll:

The insurrection of faith, foreclosed or forbidden in advance to every belief, now sets the Glorious ‘Resurrection’ of Christ in opposition to the *vampire-like* [sic] cadaverization of the surviving Jewish God (54, emphasis mine).

The original does not include “vampire-like,” a change that is not only erroneous but dangerous. Anglophone reception of Laruelle’s critique of Jewish thinkers like Lévinas and Derrida and the Judaic component of the philosophical decision has been generally misunderstood,¹⁰ and this translation acts to exacerbate the misunderstanding. As these alterations ventriloquize Laruelle as seemingly antisemitic without any explanation, I am led to question the veracity of Sackin-Poll’s translation.

What is non-philosophy? It is a practice with and from the materials of philosophy (more specifically) and the multiplicity and unity of worlds or disciplines (more generally) divested of authoritative legislation over the Real, the One, and/or the human and redistributed to the human in order to fashion weapons, and defense, against these dominating and abasing universals. Fundamentally, the five human theorems in *A Biography of Ordinary Man*¹¹ explain the immediate givens of non-philosophical

9. Laruelle, *Théologie clandestine*, 54.

10. For an account and rebuttal to this charge of antisemitism in Laruelle’s work, see Anthony Paul Smith, *François Laruelle’s Principles of Non-Philosophy: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 87–93.

11. François Laruelle, *Une biographie de l’homme ordinaire: des Autorités et des Minorités* (Paris: Aubier, 1985), translated by Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet as *A Biography of Ordinary Man: On Authorities and Minorities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018).

rebellion: the human really exists and is really distinct from the world; the human is a mystical living being condemned to action and doomed to practice; the human is condemned a second time to philosophy; these condemnations organize the human's destiny into authorities such as World, History, Language, Sexuality and Power; and that a rigorous science of the ordinary human is possible.¹² Further still, non-philosophy is not only a *possible* practice of philosophical thought, it is also *real*: it asymmetrically unfolds in a democratic "politics of invention" towards a future world and a future for thought where everyone and no one is and can be a philosopher without becoming one, to use philosophy for one's needs foreclosed to philosophical sufficiency and its circularity.¹³

As *Clandestine Theology* dates back to 2012, it is wise to position the text alongside others from that period (typically referred to as Philosophie V).¹⁴ *Introduction aux sciences génériques* (2008),¹⁵ *Philosophie non-standard* (2010),¹⁶ *Anti-Badiou* (2011),¹⁷ and *Théorie générale des victimes* (2012)¹⁸ are

12. Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, 1. Translation is modified.

13. For politics of invention, please see: François Laruelle, *Tétralogos: un opéra de philosophies* (Paris: Cerf, 2018), 54. For a more programmatic explanation of non-philosophy, I recommend that the reader consult François Laruelle, "Ne faites pas comme les philosophes: inventez la philosophie!" in *En tant qu'un: la «non-philosophie» expliquée aux philosophes* (Paris: Aubier, 1991), 145–171.

14. Anne-Françoise Schmid, "Foreword," in *Clandestine Theology*, xi. Though as noted earlier, some of this content may in fact appear as early as 2007.

15. François Laruelle, *Introduction aux sciences génériques* (Paris: Éditions Pétra, 2008).

16. François Laruelle, *Philosophie non-standard: générique, quantique, philo-fiction* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2010).

17. François Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou: sur l'introduction du maoïsme dans la philosophie* (Paris: Kimé, 2011), translated by Robin Mackay as *Anti-Badiou: The Introduction of Maoism into Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

18. François Laruelle, *Théorie générale des victimes* (Paris: Fayard, 2012),

situated within the milieu of *Clandestine Theology*, yet Sackin-Poll's "Translator's Note" fails to note this. These texts are marked with the introduction of the notion of the generic, defined in *Introduction aux sciences génériques* as a "type of sufficiently neutral sciences or knowledges [*connaissances*] that are deprived of particularity, to be able to add themselves to more determined sciences and co-operate with them, and transforming these sciences without destroying them or negating their scientific character...to transform understanding without philosophically destroying it."¹⁹ It is a period where Laruelle is heavily invested in questions of the victim: a multitude or "our ordinary messiahs" who need defense against the thought-world through the solution of "[de-Christianizing] Christian notions, [de-Judaizing] Jewish notions, [de-Islamicizing] Islamic notions...[to ensure] their mutation into materials and thus also into models of the new ethics."²⁰ This focus on the victim runs through the heart of *Anti-Badiou*, as it regards the status of the *sans-papiers* in France (the undocumented migrant workers and surplus populations) as strangers. Even the philosopher cannot come to the aid of the stranger, "instead [playing] the role of the Bad Shepherd."²¹ In all of these texts, the determined intellectual, the non-philosopher, genericizes all of these harassing worldly forces to become material non-reconfigured by, for, and from the human being in-the-last-instance, who "is a superposition of vicious circles."²²

Clandestine Theology is, in my reading, a personal text. It is Laruelle's confession, as a non-philosopher, of his faith in-Man [*en-*

translated by Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet as *General Theory of Victims* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015).

19. Laruelle, *Introduction aux sciences génériques*, 9. My translation.

20. François Laruelle, *General Theory of Victims*, 124.

21. François Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou*, 231.

22. François Laruelle, *Philosophie non-standard*, 9. My translation.

Homme]. Non-philosophical confession can be done by anyone, at any point, though done under a plurality of conjunctures. That is, not just Christianity, but one can conceive of the Christic that Laruelle describes, as Anthony Paul Smith notes, in Judaism and Islam, or Hinduism; in short, there are a plurality of non-theological approaches, potentially and actually.²³ As it is a clandestine theology for those without religion, this confession is the hidden secret that is (of or from) unreflective immanence, a heresy that undoes the plane of salvation, making of it, like the future,²⁴ a *tabula rasa*. *Clandestine Theology* is only but *one* confession of a non-philosopher: there are many to be done, many to be expected. One wonders what happens when Laruelle's mere faith happens to be a faith shared amongst other strangers who are equally harassed by this world qua hell.

In this review, I have sought to issue a warning to active consumers of contemporary French philosophy, and to test out a summary of non-philosophy, applying that to the situatedness of the text in relation to what the reader may expect, to make them eager to experiment with and experience Non-philosophy. Non-philosophy strives to grip the masses, not by way of a Christocentric colonized-colonizing mission, but by way of the Good News that each and every One is a stranger to each and every religion and their theodicies. *Clandestine Theology* leaves one wanting for a future of non-philosophy and its translations beyond the standardized translation model.

23. See Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle: A Stranger Thought* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 147.

24. See François Laruelle, *La lutte et l'utopie à la fin des temps philosophiques* (Paris: Kimé, 2004), 117–126, translated by Drew S. Burk and Anthony Paul Smith as *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy* (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2012), 137–149.