

Controversy over the Possibility of a Science of Philosophy.

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Translated by Robin Mackay (<http://blog.urbanomic.com/dread/>). Work in progress. 22 February 2005.

This debate followed a conference on "The Community of Researchers", held under the auspices of the Forum of the *College International de Philosophie*. Jacques Derrida had agreed to open the discussion. For which we thank him. The citations are taken from that conference. (F.L.)

Jacques Derrida:

Mine is not an easy task. After what you've just heard, you can see what a risk I took in speaking of the François Laruelle's "polemos".

You have spoken to us in the name of a certain peace. It is true that, in regard to *polemos* and of terror, there were moments I must say I have sometimes been tempted to recognize in the description that you give of philosophical terror, as transcendental constituent of philosophy, etc., a rigorous analysis of what you have done here. At moments – because I haven't succumbed to the temptation. I shall nevertheless try to say something else. I am obliged to play the role of devil's advocate here.

Amongst all the questions that I would have liked to have asked you, slowly, patiently, text in hand, as in a philosophical society or in a scientific community, from among all these questions, it seems natural for me to select a few and formulate them in a schematic fashion, since we haven't much time, and to refrain, at least for the time being, from referring to your latest book¹.

I am going to state in a word or two, bluntly, the questions that occurred to me whilst you were speaking, and my perplexities.

Would you say that the scientific community, the community of science, of the new science which you have described, is a community without a *socius*, in the sense in which you have defined the *socius*?

The question is not about whether you have shown adequate caution, but rather about the manner in which your precautions run riot and counteract one other. When you speak of the essence of science, being careful to say that what is at stake is this essence apart from its political and social appropriations, that is to say prior to what one calls its effectivity, its effectivity rather than its reality, where are we to find this essence of science, which science in its effectivity always falls short of? What is it apart from of its effectivity, its political and social appropriations? This is a very general question, which I will naturally try to expand upon with the other questions which I have prepared.

¹ *Les philosophies de la différence*, Paris: P.U.F., 1986.

My first question – and it is a massive one – concerns the reality of the real which you constantly evoked in your talk, or, and it comes down to the same thing, the scientificity of this science, the new science, since they are related one to the other. You oppose reality to a number of things; you oppose it to the totality: it is not the whole, beings as a whole; you have distinguished it, most insistently, from effectivity and from possibility. The distinction between reality and possibility doesn't seem all that surprising. What is more surprising is when you oppose reality, on the other hand, to philosophy. If we ask you in a classical manner or in what you call the ontologico-heideggerian manner, "what is the reality of this real", and whether it is a specification of being, you would I suppose dismiss this type of question, which belongs still to the regime of philosophico-ontological discourse, and even to its deconstruction, since one can so easily assimilate the latter to the former. Such a question would still be governed by this law of philosophical society to which you oppose the real, the new science, the community.

What makes it difficult to go along with the movement I would like to accompany you in, is that it sometimes appears to consist in operating a sort of violent shuffling of cards in a game whose rules are known to you alone... I mean to say that ultimately the hand is totally reshuffled. The only thing I seem to detect – and this is probably a philosophical illusion on my part, one I ask you to disabuse me of – is a philosophical and real programme which is already tried-and-tested. For example, when you say the following:

"By way of contrast, one can pose another question, that of [science's] conditions of reality. I am careful not to say its 'conditions of possibility', these being the metaphysical and the State combined together with the metaphysical and philosophical interpretation of science, but rather its transcendental conditions of reality..."

On what condition is research a real activity rather than a social illusion? This is all the more crucial given that you go on to state:

"The problem is therefore that of a critique of reason [let us say heuristical]; of a real and not merely philosophical critique."

Is this distinction pertinent for a transcendental philosophy? Can a transcendental philosophy distinguish between the possible and real in the way that you do?

I have to say that I often find myself in agreement with you. For example, your initial description of the researcher, of research such that in effect it would seem to follow a certain Heideggerian logic, in the description you gave of the principle of reason, and what you have said about programming and about non-goal-oriented research, which in fact reinstitutes a goal..., all this, I was ready to subscribe to. And then you went on to oppose this new science distinguished from its social, political, etc., appropriations, and there, obviously, I got the impression that you were reintroducing in this description, in this concept of the new science, of the One, of the real, etc., certain philosophemes, that of the transcendental being only one of them. There, all of a sudden, I said to myself: he is once again trying to pull the trick of the transcendental, of auto-foundation, of auto-

legitimation, at the same time he claims to have radically broken with it. So if, for example, the distinction "possible/real" is pertinent outside philosophies of the transcendental type, then another hypothesis arises, which I immediately have to dismiss along with you: isn't this distinction already characteristic of marxist or neomarxist type of programme? Real and no longer philosophical: at least insofar as the philosophical is restricted to a theoretical rather than transformational interpretation and hence would remain confined within what we call the social illusion. But you rule out this hypothesis by telling us that when you say *real*, you are not referring to material structures. So I understood that this type of marxist-style interpretation is among the things that you want to rule out.

You claim that:

"This amphiboly of the philosophy of the real, which is the secret of the philosophical decision, can only be discovered in accordance with another, generally non-philosophical experience of the real."

There I would have liked you to have said very pedagogically what you meant by a 'generally non-philosophical experience of the real'.

You also claim that:

"Philosophy and unconstrained research are the abundant forgetting of their real essence, not of their conditions of possibility but of their conditions of reality. There is no forgetting of philosophy, on the other hand there is a forgetting by philosophy, as principle of sufficient philosophy, of its own real essence."

And a little further on we encounter this notion of 'force' concerning which I will have many questions to ask you:

"It is this latter thesis that must be radically contested in order to found a critique that would be more forceful than all the deconstructions of philosophical sufficiency."

This motif of force reoccurs even more forcefully, but associated this time with a project of auto-foundation, of transcendental legitimation – these are the words you use, with inverted commas, and my question relates to the inverted commas, in the end. I could have been very brief and simply asked you: what is the status of inverted commas in your texts?

For example, when you say:

"This instance must be real rather than material; it must be of a cognitive order in order to measure up to philosophy and to research, finally it must find its foundation and legitimation in itself, without requiring the mediation of philosophy, which is to say that it must be transcendental in its own way";

My question, my perplexity and the point I ask you to elucidate is: what a transcendental project of auto-foundation, of non-philosophical auto-legitimation, when it is non-philosophical? And when you go on to attribute this non-philosophical project of auto-foundation, auto-legitimation, to a science, to what you call science as distinct from all its appropriations, which you also call the force of thought (you yourself underline the "the"), my question, then, is: What is it in this force, this science, that is not philosophical, etc?

This force will be a force capable, I don't want to go too far by saying capable of imposing peace, but ultimately it is a force in the name of which the peace proper to the community of this new science will be possible. What is this force belonging to a subject whose undivided identity, without identification, anterior to division, will ultimately found a community? When one knows, after having read you, that the One to which you refer in your discourse and on the basis of which you critique – you prefer "critique" to "deconstruct" – or rather, send philosophy packing; when this force, this subject, this science, this undivided subject, is a One which you specify in your book is not the identical, must not be understood in the classically philosophical sense of the One, what then is the difference between this One and the entire chain that accompanies it, i.e. science, the real, the entire community, the enforced peace, free peace?

What, then, is the difference between this One and what others call 'difference', since it is not identity?

Ultimately, all the questions that I want to ask come down to this schema: why do you reduce – and isn't there a violence here of the type you denounce in philosophical society? – so many gestures which could accompany you along the path you wish to pursue? To take just one example among many, the gesture of proposing scientific approaches which no longer conform to the conception of current practices, to the philosophical concept of science; of interrogating certain discourses which claim to be scientific, of helping science making critical progress through movements which would no longer conform to what is understood in those appropriations you have spoken of?

Why ignore the existence of this gesture in the various deconstructions which you evoked in passing?

Why, when this or that approach advances propositions very similar to yours – for example, with regard to constitution, since you have said that some things are unconstituted – why class these gestures with everything else you dismiss? It is obvious that amongst the movements of the deconstructive type, which you have thought about and whose analysis you have developed at greater length in your book, there is among other things a movement to deconstruct the model of constitution, to avoid that constitutive or constitutional schema that you have identified with everything you want to reject.

Why proceed thus if not on account of a gesture tantamount to sociophilosophic war?

Here, rather bluntly put, are all the questions that I would have liked to have been able to formulate better, in a situation other than one of improvisation and haste.

To what do you tie your concept of democracy, what does 'democracy' mean, if you empty this concept of all its philosophemes?

François Laruelle:

I notice that all your questions are interrelated, obviously; they form a coherent whole, just as one might expect. These questions are indicative of the resistance of the Principle of sufficient philosophy.

Jacques Derrida:

No surprise there, needless to say...

François Laruelle:

Which is to say that your questions had a very particular style, which I found very interesting, that of retortion: "You are just like those you criticize", "You're doing just what you claim to abhor". You taught me in your work that one must be wary of retortion. So I would like to suggest that to the extent that you are making a certain use of retortion, and this is a theme that recurred throughout, right up to the end via the accusation of socio-philosophical war, then necessarily the case that some of your objections say, in a certain sense, precisely the opposite of what I said.

I take the first of your questions. You tell me that I am practicing terror.

[protestations from Jacques Derrida]

Am I practicing terror? There are two readings of my text, obviously. There is a philosophical reading, one in which I do practice terror. And there is a non-philosophical reading, which is obviously my reading. And from the latter point of view, I am reluctant to concede that I am practicing terror. I would like to suggest to you why not.

I was very careful to say that terror is bound up with overturning. I only used the word "terror" in contexts that related it to overturning.

So, are the relations I have described between science and philosophy relations of overturning?

Absolutely not. The whole problem for me, having studied your work along with that of other contemporary philosophers, lies in defining a point of view that would not be acquired philosophically; which is to say, a point of view that would not be acquired via philosophical operations, be they those of doubt, controversy, or overturning as principal philosophical operation, and even displacement insofar as it is of a piece with overturning. From science to philosophy, because I return to this point – and it is this direction that governs everything I write – there is no overturning. There is merely a

delimitation but one that does not take the form of an overturning. However, maybe it should be made more explicit, there is a limitation of philosophy by science, that is all. But above all I do not overturn philosophy; were I claiming to overthrow it, then that would be pointless gesture, a zero-sum game. The entire enterprise would then be contradictory.

Jacques Derrida:

When you say that you are calling into question the sufficiency of philosophy, in what way is this gesture different from a host of others, mine among them? Why erase the latter gesture and consign it to the realm of sufficiency?

François Laruelle:

You often say that I conjoin ontology and deconstruction. Obviously I only conjoin them under certain conditions, I do not put conflate them in general terms, and I have sufficiently emphasized in other works how seriously I take the difference between certain forms of metaphysics and your work on and in metaphysics. But if I allow myself to conjoin them, it is in the name of the struggle against the Principle of sufficient philosophy, and in that regard alone. What is more, I do call any philosophy into question, since I posit the equivalence of all philosophical decisions.

What is probably wounding for philosophers is the fact that, from the point of view I have adopted, I am obliged to posit that there is no principle of choice between a classical type of ontology and the deconstruction of that ontology. There is no reason to choose one rather than the other. This is a problem that I have discussed at great length in my work (*Les philosophies de la différence*), whether there can be a principle of choice between philosophies. Ultimately, it is the problem of the philosophical decision. And I sought a point of view – one can query the manner in which I arrived at it, or constituted it – which implies the equivalence of all philosophical decisions, or in other words, what I call democracy and peace.

Obviously, I only defined democracy and peace insofar as these might be pertinent to a community of philosophers, and within that context. So I am not at all conflating your work with a classical ontology, not at all. But in the name of the principle of sufficient philosophy, and since I adopt a point of view which allows one to discover that principle, I am obliged to stipulate that equivalence. Because the principle of sufficient philosophy cannot be discovered from within philosophy. It can only be discovered from elsewhere.

But I would like all the same to return to the problem of terror because it is really close to my heart.

There is no overturning of philosophy. There is not even a reduction in the Husserlian sense or a bracketing of philosophical decision. There is, if one wants to take up the term reduction – but you will challenge me on the use of philosophical terms so I will come back to this presently – there is what I call an already-accomplished reduction, an already present reduction of the philosophical decision by science. Because science is precisely not constituted in the same way in which a philosophy is constituted, through a set of operations certain of which might be transcendental reductions; science is already a

transcendental reduction in act. And this is why the order that I follow, the real order, is the order that proceeds from science to philosophy. If you follow the opposite trajectory – and as a philosopher who is in a certain sense governed by the principle of sufficient philosophy, you cannot but follow the opposite trajectory – then you will necessarily experience my gesture as a particularly aggressive one. But I am bound to tell you – and this is the consistency proper to my position – that your impression of terrorism and aggression is an impression that is internal to philosophical resistance, a mechanism of philosophical self-defence.

So, on to the second problem: the new science. It seems to me that, unless I made a mistake, I did not speak of a "new science"?

Jacques Derrida:

I am absolutely sure of it.

François Laruelle:

If I did, then it is, in a certain sense, a philosophical lapse, precisely. Philosophy is always stronger than one imagines. In no way do I want to speak of a "new" science: precisely because what I mean by science, is just what everyone else means by science. What I don't want to do is to reiterate the philosophical distinction between the so-called empirical sciences, and transcendental science. This is precisely the distinction I don't want to make because to do so would be to reconstitute a hierarchy whereby philosophy can characterize itself as thinking whilst relegating science to the status of a mere blind technical production of various kinds of knowledge.

Since my concept of the transcendental differs from the use to which philosophy puts it, my concept of the empirical will also be different from its use in philosophy. For me all sciences, even those which philosophy degrades by calling them 'empirical', all these sciences partake of transcendental structures. They are already consistent in themselves, they already have access to the real. On the other hand, what is possible is a science, perhaps "new" – one might call it new insofar as it has yet to be constructed – a science that I will call transcendental science and whose goal will consist simply of describing the transcendental constitution of the sciences which philosophy calls "empirical". But this transcendental science is not superior to the empirical sciences, since it no longer relates to them in the ways in which philosophy related to them. It is a science that is absolutely side-by-side with the others. In a certain sense, there is a community, a kind of equivalence among all sciences, whether ordinary or transcendental. I wanted to break the relation of domination which philosophy enjoys over the other sciences.

Jacques Derrida:

This is what you wrote:

"Thus a community of researchers in philosophy will be democratic and peaceable only if it refrains from founding itself upon the principle of sufficient philosophy, in order to consider itself as the subject of science. And if it then

contents itself with treating philosophy simply as the object of a new science and with new practices elaborated on that basis..."

François Laruelle:

What I describe with the term 'essence of science', are the structures of any science whatsoever. Once these transcendental structures have been elaborated, or rather once these already existing structures have been described (it is not my description that creates them) it then becomes possible to envisage a specific science *for* philosophy and, to some extent, so to speak, scientificity such as I understand it to the study of philosophy itself. In this sense, yes, there is a new science to create, but the science I describe, this is the most banal, the most ordinary kind of science.

You have also asked me: Is there not a *socius* within science? Yes, obviously: I have alluded to it in when I said, with regard to the politics of science, that the latter are an overdetermination of transcendental structures, which I have not analysed here. I left them on one side precisely because it is an overdetermination. But obviously, the sociological, political, economic intrications of science need to be analysed, and its transcendental structures include or may be affected by the effective conditions of production of forms of knowledge. I do not deny this.

You also asked the question: where do we find the essence of science?

It's obviously the principal question in a sense, because it means: from where do you derive what you are telling us? There are two ways of answering this question: a philosophical answer, which I don't want to give, and a rigorously transcendental answer. The philosophical response would be to say: having reflected upon the philosophical decision and the ultimate prerequisites for transcendence, for the mixture of transcendence and immanence, I concluded that philosophy assumed something like the One and that the One had always been presupposed by philosophy but the essence of the latter had never been elucidated by philosophy.

But I have to say that this response didn't satisfy me at all because it entailed my taking a position in your territory, which is that of philosophy, and having to give a "false" (the term is perhaps not quite right) description of what is at stake. The true answer that I must make to you – maybe it seem appear a little cavalier to you – but ultimately it is as simple as the question itself:

"Where do I get this from?"

I get it from the thing itself. There is as rigorous an answer as I am able to give. Because the criteria for my discourse was a rigorously immanent or transcendental criterion, there is no other answer I can give without placing myself on the terrain of effectivity, and I neither can nor want to think science on the basis of transcendental effectivity.

Jacques Derrida:

I don't understand what is meant by "transcendental" outside of philosophy. But when

you tell us: my response, it is the thing itself, then, I want to put two questions to you: isn't this a philosophical move here: the appeal to the thing itself? What, which, *what is the thing itself?*

François Laruelle:

The One is the thing itself.

Jacques Derrida:

You think that the relation to the One as the thing itself is an experience that is non-philosophical?

François Laruelle:

Yes, precisely because it is not a relation. This is the crux of the misunderstanding, which is to say that you persist in wanting to make a philosophical reading through the prism or the optic of the philosophical decision, albeit a decision which has been worked upon, you persist in wanting to read what I do through the medium of philosophy.

No doubt you will object: "but you constantly use philosophy. In whose name do you use the term 'transcendental' or the term 'One' if not in the name of philosophy?"

I have to tell you that this is an absolutely normal, common, standard objection; it is always the one people put to me first: "you use philosophy to talk about something you pretend is not philosophical". Listen...the objection is so fundamental that it is tantamount to indicting me of a primitive, rudimentary self-contradiction, in my terms. It is entirely obvious that I allow myself the right, the legitimate right, to use philosophical vocabulary non-philosophically.

It is the defining characteristic of philosophy, of the principle of sufficient philosophy, and its unitary will, to believe that all use of language is ultimately philosophical, sooner or later. Philosophy, which I characterize as a "unitary" mode of thought, cannot imagine for a single instant that there are language can be used in two ways: there is the use of language in science, which is not at all philosophical, contrary to what philosophy itself postulates in order to establish itself as a fundamental ontology or epistemology of science; and the use of language in philosophy. Philosophy postulates that every use of language is a use with a view to the *logos* or that which I call a use-of-the-*logos*, language being taken as constitutive of the being of things. From this point of view, if there were the only possible use of language, then obviously, there is no question of escaping from philosophy. But I postulate – in reality I do not postulate, since I begin by taking them as indissociably given from the outset, *the bloc of real as One and a certain use of language which corresponds to this particular conception of the real*. Since I take as indissociably given from the outset a certain use of language, which is not that of the *logos*, and the One that founds it, I do not contradict myself, I do not relapse into philosophical contradiction. Philosophy has a very deeply ingrained fetishism, which is obviously that of metaphysics but which may not be entirely destroyed by the philosophical critiques of metaphysics; and this is the ultimate belief that ultimately every use of language is carried out with a view to being, in order to grant being, or to open

being, etc., that every usage of language is "positional".

Now science – I don't have time to develop this here – makes a non-positional, non-thetic use of language. There is an entire theory of scientific representation waiting to be elaborated, because it doesn't have at all the same "ontological" structure as philosophical representation. I think that most of the objections put to me are a consequence of this belief that there is only one use of language, and that not only does being speak through language, but as soon as you speak, it is ultimately being that speaks and you are no more than an intermediary. It is this belief that science extirpates. That is why I allow myself to use the word 'transcendental' under conditions which are no longer ontological, my only problem then being to display a requisite degree of internal rigour or consistency, that is to say to transform the word 'transcendental' so as to render it better suited to describe this non-thetic experience that the One is. So, if I continually oppose the One of science, which from my point of view explains scientific thought's profoundly realist character, its blind aspect, its deafness to the *logos*, its unbearable character for philosophy; if I distinguish this particular One from philosophical unity, this is for reasons that are relatively precise, ones which provided the starting point for these investigations. It seems to me that philosophy cannot help but deploy itself in a hybrid structure that combines transcendence and immanence. Whatever their modes, however varied these two coordinates, philosophical space is a space with two coordinates, transcendence and immanence. It may be that metaphysical transcendence has a kind of tain or lining of alterity; that may well be possible, in which case there would no longer be just two dimensions, but three or four, one could try to discover them. But it seems to be a defining characteristic of philosophy to combine something like a position with something like a decision, and hence to deploy unity, but to always deploy unity along with its opposite. This opposite may not always be given immediately, one may have the impression that it has been expelled from immanent unity, but, in reality, transcendence returns in the form of a pedagogy: you are told that the soul must identify itself with the One...Philosophy thereby shifts to a pedagogical stance which reintroduces transcendence, and as a result the One of philosophy...(there is no doubt that the subject is obliged to identify with the One) simultaneously transcends the subject.

But I claim that science's paradoxical nature for philosophy, its fundamentally obscure and unreflective character from the viewpoint of philosophy – which explains why philosophy has denigrated it throughout the centuries, since Plato at least, and right up through to Heidegger ("science does not think") follows from the fact that with science immanence is given from the from the outset in itself and solely by itself. "Absolutely immanent data," Husserl used to say, are without "the slightest fragment of world". I am in fact very close to Husserl, of course, but with a difference that is truly the crucial non-philosophical difference, which is that in Husserl, in spite of everything, a transcendental reduction is required in order to actualise the transcendental ego. But I claim that in science, no preliminary transcendental reduction is required: we already start from the One. Which obviously seems rather odd, this is not where we expected to find science!

We start from the One, rather than arriving at it. We start from the One, which is to say that if we go anywhere, it will be toward the World, toward Being. And I frequently use

a formulation which is obviously shocking to philosophers and particularly those of a Platonist or Plotinian bent: it's not the One that is beyond Being, it is Being that is beyond the One. It is Being that is the other of the One.

Hence this great upheaval, this seismic shift in philosophical concepts, which philosophy is in a certain sense obliged to suppress. But as I have often repeated, it is neither a permutation or an overturning.

As to the distinction between the possible and the real, obviously, it is initially a philosophical distinction. But in philosophy one distinguishes the empirical real and the possible (the *a priori*), and then the real of possibility; one envisages a synthesis or a mixture of possibility and the real. All I am saying, is that science is a type of thinking that is realist in the last instance and that is exclusively realist. At least initially, or in the last instance, because obviously I haven't developed the analysis of science, particularly the problem of objectivity which would have complicated matters a little. But science in its principle or absolute foundation does not acknowledge the possible, it knows only the real. Obviously, it will make use of the possible and effectivity, but it will make use of them only on this basis, which is to say that contrary to philosophy, which very often starts from the empirical in order to pose the possible or *a priori* in opposition to the empirical – you know all the problems this generated for Kantianism, and how the NeoKantians tried to overcome this problem of the *a priori* posed in opposition to the empirical; it is a problem that the disciples of Kant and by Fichte were already aware of –, science starts directly from the One, that is to say from the most radical experience there could be. It is necessary to start from the real, otherwise you will never get to it.

Who *wants* the real? Philosophy. And wanting the real, it never gets it, which is to say that it has *realization* instead: in other words, war...

The force in the name of which peace is imposed?

If I grant myself this force as One, through a use of language which corresponds to this anteriority of the real over representation, then I am quite straightforwardly obliged to deduce peace from it, a non-divisive peace, as I said; I must deduce it from science, I cannot do otherwise, it is simply a matter of rigour. So either you're saying that this whole project is an act of force, in which case, obviously, all of its details are also acts of force; or we have to start from this One and this real.

As for the interpretation in terms of an 'act of force' I am perfectly willing to acknowledge its plausibility one I position myself on the terrain of philosophy. But I think that once one has, not made the leap, because it's precisely not a matter of a leap, but rather realized the 'stance' proper to science, there is no act of force. I did not claim to be exiting philosophy, that's not my project at all...My project is quasi-scientific and science has not governed by any practical end, at least not to my knowledge. In this regard, I am very Spinozistic: we must absolutely eliminate all teleology. Science contents itself with description and my attitude is purely descriptive. In reality, science contents itself with describing the order of the real, and the order of the real is that which

goes from science toward philosophy. It is philosophy which transcends science; science is not some sort of black block or black transcendence for philosophy, contrary to what some claim.

I understand why one may have a impression of terror or of a totally uncompromising set of demands. I think that in theory there can be no compromise, unless compromise is constitutive of the real. But since I don't think that compromise is constitutive of the real, I make none, I remain content with being consistent, which is to say that I try to elaborate a rigorous science.