

# Disabling Philosophy

Mark Pingree

---

**Abstract:** Drawing on a Laruellean symptomatology, this paper proposes a non-philosophical theory of disability that exposes and explores the relationship between debility, illness and the biopolitics of environmental contamination. The traumatic etiology at the basis of this relation – which can be traced through the slow violence of Anthropocene politics everywhere from Flint, Michigan to the nuclear disaster at Fukushima – is now ever more pressing as we find ourselves in the midst of a global pandemic. With these end times in mind, and inspired by Laruelle’s theory of philosophical decision, the essay argues for a “disabling-(of)-philosophy” that places thought under the condition of the disabled victim-in-person, a condition that demands a radical rethinking of our species-being in response to the inherent violence of the philosophical world and its catastrophic organization of the planet. The essay presents severe cognitive disability as a paradigmatic case of a non-philosophical “radical concept” where the immanent object (the disabled body) becomes the occasion for its own non-philosophical theory, one that by necessity and out of the urge for survival must reject all forms of philosophical decision. As a non-philosophical posture of thought cloned from the Real and effectuated by symptoms in the body, the disabling-(of)-philosophy proposed here can be mobilized as a radical political position, a “weapon of last defense” geared toward disabling the capitalist forces of biospheric annihilation.

Mark Pingree is a PhD Candidate in comparative literature at Stony Brook University writing a dissertation provisionally titled “Disability and Ecology at the End Times of Philosophy.” Drawing on insights from his experience as a cancer survivor, this research project exposes and explores the relationship between ecological collapse and disability through the theoretical lens of François Laruelle’s non-philosophy.

[mark.pingree@stonybrook.edu](mailto:mark.pingree@stonybrook.edu)

**Keywords:** Non-philosophy, François Laruelle, Disability studies, Environmental Humanities, Ecology, The Anthropocene

In some, it is their weaknesses that philosophize; in others, their riches and strengths. The former *need* their philosophy, be it as a prop, a sedative, medicine, redemption, elevation, or self-alienation; for the latter, it is only a beautiful luxury, in the best case the voluptuousness of a triumphant gratitude that eventually has to inscribe itself in cosmic capital letters on the heaven of concepts. In the former, more common case, however, when it is distress that philosophizes, as in all sick thinkers – and perhaps sick thinkers are in the majority in the history of philosophy – *what will become of the thought that is itself subjected to the pressure of illness?* – Nietzsche<sup>1</sup>

Let there be a law that no deformed child shall live. – Aristotle<sup>2</sup>

A debate broke out at a 2008 philosophy conference between philosophers Peter Singer and Jeff McMahan and philosopher of disability Eva Kittay. Addressing the monumental challenges severe intellectual disability poses to philosophy, Professor Kittay presented a “report from the battlefield” as the mother of Sesha, a daughter born without the capacity to walk or speak. Kittay’s journey as philosopher-mother has often proved contradictory, at times nearly leading her to abandon philosophy altogether, so she was not surprised when McMahan argued for a two-tiered morality for persons and non-persons, or when Singer compared persons with intellectual disabilities to chimpanzees and concluded with the importance of the occasional euthanization of a child.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2, 119.

<sup>3</sup> Eva Kittay and Licia Carlson, *Cognitive Disability and its Challenge to Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), ch. 19-20.

Kittay, horrified that these philosophers “in all seriousness and with philosophical authority” were comparing her daughter “to a dog, pig, rat, and most flatteringly a chimp,” spoke out in defense of Sesha as a full human being, claiming “there is *so much* to being human. There’s the touch, there’s the feel, there’s the hug, there’s the smile... there are so many ways of interacting;” then, after a pause she added, “I don’t think you need philosophy for this.”<sup>4</sup>

One can almost hear the voice of François Laruelle in the margins of this debate. Philosophy follows a “hierarchical order,” he writes in *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, “inegalitarian and authoritarian, an order without democracy which speaks of democracy without doing what it says, and which is moreover conflictual in its essence.”<sup>5</sup> The history of feminist and critical race studies provide ample evidence of this hierarchical order, yet disability, Licia Carlson argues, presents the most fundamental of all challenges to philosophy insofar as the disabled, particularly the intellectually disabled, “are consistently defined as lacking capacities that would render them ‘knowing subjects’ in any sense.”<sup>6</sup> From positivist notions like cognitive ability to a faith in language as the “house of being,” philosophy is a practice rooted in ableist epistemology with historically violent consequences. From “defective infants” worthy of abandonment in Plato’s *Republic*, to “idiots” and “lunatics” unworthy of personhood or justice in Locke, to those incapable of either reason or morality in Kant, the disabled body represents what Carlson calls “the philosopher’s nightmare.”<sup>7</sup> Let us follow Carlson

<sup>4</sup> Eva Kittay, “The Personal is Political: A Philosopher and Mother of a Cognitively Disabled Person Sends Notes from the Battlefield,” in *Cognitive Disability and its Challenge to Moral Philosophy*, ed. Eva Kittay and Licia Carlson (Blackwell, 2010), 397-408.

<sup>5</sup> François Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Nicola Rubczak and Anthony Paul Smith (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Licia Carlson, “Philosophers of Intellectual Disability: A Taxonomy,” in *Cognitive Disability*, 320.

<sup>7</sup> Kittay and Carlson, *Cognitive Disability*, 6.

and go one step further: *there can be no philosophy of disability*.

This opening provocation constitutes a provisional thesis toward the following investigation into what we can call a non-philosophy of disability. Toward this end, I argue for a Laruellean symptomatology of disability that works to demystify philosophical assumptions about the disabled by presenting intellectual disability as a paradigmatic case of a non-philosophical “radical concept” where the immanent object (the disabled body) becomes the cause of its own theory, one that by necessity and out of the urge for survival must reject philosophical decision. Because standard philosophy can only come into conflict with disability studies (an example of what Laruelle would call a “regional knowledge”), non-philosophy is poised to form a democratic alliance with disability theory through a reciprocity implicitly foreclosed to philosophy. This reciprocal alliance offers disability studies a way to radicalize its non-philosophical content, which is always already implicit in disability discourse, while demonstrating the ethical and political stakes of Laruelle’s central notion of philosophical decision, the suspension of which clears a way for thinking disability in a new way by dismantling philosophy’s hierarchical prejudice. In place of a philosophy of disability, we will consider the merits of a non-philosophy of disability – a transcendently diminished epistemology cloned from the Real that attempts to think *with* or *according to* disability rather than *for* or *on behalf of* the disabled.

The urgent stakes of the non-philosophy of disability addressed here must be located in the alarming context of capitalism-induced ecological collapse, a planetary eco-political event that even now perpetuates intentional, endemic forms of slow violence against the marginalized everywhere from Flint to Fukushima. In this context, disability emerges as a question of and for the end of the world. Following Jasbir Puar’s *The Right to Maim*, I argue against the false

assumption that disability is the result of some genetic or metaphysical misfortune and instead demonstrate how the debilitating effects of this ecological necropolitics specifically and intentionally targets the global poor. In response to the capitalist forces of extinction, I read the bodily symptoms of the climate victim through a Laruellean lens, turning to his figure of the “stranger” (or stranger-subject) as an example of who we might become in a future after the end of this world. Laruelle’s stranger, I claim, is a non-abled, non-reflective, and non-cognitive subject who can be mobilized as a non-philosophical force-(of)-thought against the violent forces of biospheric annihilation. This movement demands that we form political and epistemic alliances with the wor(l)dless to bring about the end of the World *on behalf* of the planet. Thus, this stylistic usage of an apocalypticism must not be mistaken for another tributary feeding into the rising tide of passive nihilism that threatens to engulf contemporary ecological thought. After all, to bring about the end of the World, according to Laruelle, is to actively bring about the end of the hegemonic philosophical World(-order), the thought-World of philosophy, which for our purposes will be shown to be ableist all the way down. This utopian gesture echoes Laruelle’s call in *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy* to “make a tabula rasa out of the future,” which is accomplished in and through the figure of the stranger understood here as the disabled climate-victim-in-person. As Anthony Paul Smith writes, “to live in the light of the end of this world is to live in the non-future as the modality of a certain kind of heretical subject.”<sup>8</sup> Foreign to philosophy, this heretical stranger subject is a stranger kind of victim, one who in the very (f)act of her non-becoming opens new possibilities for a future beyond philosophical capture.

### Disabling-(of)-Philosophy

As the task of this essay is not to offer another in depth exegesis on the “first names” of

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle: A Stranger Thought* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 173.

non-philosophy but rather to put non-philosophy to work in the service of disability studies, we will only briefly review some central axioms of non-philosophy in order to demonstrate its efficacy vis-à-vis disability in order to bring philosophy's standard model into greater relief. I use the term efficacy to indicate that non-philosophy is first and foremost a practical methodology. The good news of non-philosophy, paradoxically perhaps, is that it *fails* to present any novel (philosophical) content. But if its novelty can be located in its methodology rather than its content, this methodology – as is the case with all methodology – is inseparable from the field of vision it enables. In this sense, we might understand non-philosophy as a kind of epistemic technology, a “posture of thought” or a conversion of the gaze that *en-ables* a field of vision which has otherwise been foreclosed, or even *disabled* by philosophy. This converted gaze is radically foreign to philosophy and carries a specific name in non-philosophy, what Laruelle calls “Vision-in-One” but which goes by many names (the One, the Real, the Real-One to name a few). Non-philosophy, in other words, entails an implicit methodological *disabling-(of)-philosophy* which is, in the last instance, inseparable from its effectuations in the Real.

Rather than attempt to end or overcome philosophy, non-philosophy affirms all previous philosophies and claims to only overcome philosophy's *faith* in its own self-sufficiency to make hegemonic truth claims about the Real. In other words, non-philosophy deliberately mis-uses philosophy in a formal way by generalizing and suspending its central maneuver, what Laruelle calls “philosophical decision.” In refusing to make the (philosophical) decision, non-philosophy is not motivated by the disapproval of any philosophy in particular, nor does non-philosophy declare the death of philosophy, for “the ‘death of philosophy’ is the “principal affect” proper to philosophy itself,” as Laruelle puts

it.<sup>9</sup> How does philosophical decision work? In his *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, Laruelle describes the philosophical decision as “a structure combining a Dyad and an immanent *and* transcendent unity in the Dyad,”<sup>10</sup> it “is the Idea of a *relative-absolute whole*... a structure in 2/3 terms, as a Dyad + One, as an empirico-transcendental mixture, a quasi-circular and topological doublet, etc.,” where the + One comes to stand for the non-philosophical One, the Real without relation which philosophy invokes only provisionally in various forms before insisting on the transcendental unity, the suture, in short, the relation itself.<sup>11</sup> Preparing for a series of cuts and stitches, standard philosophy “auto-positions” itself by shifting registers from empirical to transcendental, from the particular to the conceptual (being to Being, ontic to ontological, presentation to representation, body to mind, etc.). This transcendental shift is followed by an attempt to ground its concept through the construction of a “plane” (often of immanence), which then forms a dyad, also called a “philosophical admixture” or “amphibology,” which in the last step is overcome through a transcendental unification or dialectical synthesis through a third term. To participate in standard philosophy is to have always already participated in philosophical decision, thus the “auto” of auto-position rightly suggests that philosophical decision is not simply philosophy's enabling mechanism granting it authority to legislate authoritatively over other knowledge claims, it is its *disabling* mechanism preventing it from doing anything else.

Exposing philosophical decision, non-philosophy resists capture through the imposition of axioms (rather than philosophical theories or arguments) geared toward a democratic mode of thought by methodologically suspending philosophical decision, which simultaneously suspends philosophy's attempts to convert and

<sup>9</sup> Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

safeguard all knowledge claims under its own power-language. This move diminishes philosophy's rhetorical universalism making non-philosophy in its turn "the style of radicality enacted against the absolute," a style that reduces philosophy to the status of a simple material in the science of non-philosophy.<sup>12</sup> Suspending philosophical decision, then, does not refuse philosophy a *relative autonomy* in the economy of thought, a relative autonomy that can be put to work toward opening a truly democratic epistemology, one determined in the last instance by the Real rather than the philosopher, that aims at preserving "the heterogeneity of realms of experience... against the unitary and often totalitarian claims of philosophy."<sup>13</sup>

Disability exemplifies and, indeed, radicalizes non-philosophy's defense of heterogeneous realms of experience but if non-philosophy presents a challenge to philosophical anthropocentrism, it does not do so in the service of a post-humanism. The non-philosophical problematic is not that we need to transcend philosophy to overcome humanism, the problem is rather that standard philosophy's implicit human-*ism* (a notion derived from philosophical decision) can only *misidentify* what it attempts to name: the generic human being stripped of philosophical determination. Philosophy, in other words, tries to name the human, but because it hallucinates its attributes (white, male, abled) it has failed and *can only fail* to identify the rather more generic Lived instance of what Laruelle calls the Human-in-Person. Thus, Laruelle's defense of heterogenous realms of experience opens a margin of maneuverability for non-philosophy to non-cognitively "think" the Real, but not through the positive construction of another realist philosophy of immanence, nor through the negative construction of the Real

as gap, split or void; nor through a transcendental/immanent unity or synthesis, for all of these procedures only ever serve a larger transcendental project of philosophical world building. While non-philosophy concerns itself with "radical immanence," Laruelle's immanence, Alexander Galloway explains, "is an immanence *within methodology* – a rather startling and unprecedented undertaking to be sure – not simply an immanence of nature (Spinoza, Deleuze) or an immanence of the self (Fichte, Henry)."<sup>14</sup> As an immanence within methodology, non-philosophy does not claim to bypass signification, rather it admits a "diminished" usage of philosophy's transcendental materials but axiomatically intervenes before philosophical decision can carry out its encroachment. Non-philosophy, therefore, simply imposes "final and minimal conditions" Laruelle states, but "for there to be what?" he asks, anticipating the philosophical reflex, "Something rather than nothing? Humanism rather than barbarism? No, a rigorous and liberating knowing rather than philosophical hallucinations."<sup>15</sup>

Rather than a conceptual hallucination, the non-philosophical category of the Real is a notion of the Real-without-realism, it is not the realm of Being-qua-Being but generic-existence-*without*-Being/Nothingness/Alterity, it is pure Identity without relation to thought or even, in the last instance, to itself. Unlike Deleuze's plane of immanence, Laruelle's One is not the One-All or the All-One, it cannot form a whole or a totality. Instead of a philosophical real-*ism*, the non-philosophical Real-One is a generalized Identity through which we are always already gripped prior to thought or language, a Real which is radically autonomous and indifferent to philosophy, the State, and the World (synonymous terms for Laruelle). It is this indifference of the One vis-à-vis

<sup>12</sup> François Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*, trans. Drew S. Burke and Anthony Paul Smith (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2012), 13.

<sup>13</sup> Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander R. Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 33.

<sup>15</sup> Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia*, 13.

the thought-world of philosophy that relativizes and diminishes philosophy's attempts to subordinate or control it. The sole Real of non-philosophy, in other words, is not a metaphysical or ontological notion of the Real, it is simply the individual human being who is nevertheless *foreign* to philosophy. Contra contemporary theory's fascination with a speculative or ontological turn, Laruelle echoes Lacan's suggestion that "ontology implies 'being at someone's heel,' 'being at someone's beck and call.'"<sup>16</sup> Psychoanalysis provides a helpful analogy here as it does not concern itself with all-encompassing ontological or metaphysical claims, but instead offers a methodology that may draw from philosophy but in the last instance must attend to the singular, radically immanent experience of an individual human being (the analysand). This immanent experience of the Real, what Laruelle calls "the Lived," subtends all representation let alone ontological formulation. The Lived implies a non-conceptual immanence that precedes philosophical determination and radically resists philosophical capture insofar as the Lived is ultimately co-incident with the One itself. "Let us assume now that the Real is not this objective identity, this sameness," Laruelle explains, "but that it is Identity in flesh and blood, Identity as such in its in-objective immanence; this is the sole Real which can undo the claims of philosophy."<sup>17</sup> Thus, Laruelle would agree that ontology implies being under someone's heel and a very particular heel at that, according to Anthony Paul Smith, insofar as non-philosophy aims to disempower philosophy's "internal Eurocentrism and make of it a material that can be taken up outside of the European colonialism that philosophy has served for centuries, even in its radical forms."<sup>18</sup>

This challenge to Eurocentrism calls attention to the ethics and politics of non-philosophy

while bringing us full circle to the question of disability. With disability in mind, let us speak plainly about the effects of philosophy's internal Eurocentrism. After all, who in the auto-positioned world of Eurocentric philosophy stands as a subject? Who qualifies for personhood in the Republic? Surely, not the disabled who the philosopher deems incapable of reason, speech, self-reflection or participation in the symbolic. If reason is the glory of philosophy, it is the scandal of non-philosophy.<sup>19</sup> It is a groundless ground that Hegel has called the "slaughter-bench" of history, and from the perspective of non-philosophy, reason is no less than the bloody knife-edge of philosophical decision. Reason is that which violently demarcates subjects from objects, the animate from the inanimate, and in terms of the disabled, the human from "the face of the beast." And while philosophy is aware of this violence, it attempts a resolution that only further demonstrates standard philosophy's (bad) faith in its own solutions. The philosopher's solution, after all, entails extending the category of reason to those it formerly abandoned (women, racial minorities, etc.), but while the marginalized have always been falsely accused of lacking a sufficient threshold for rational thought, extending this capacity to others only serves to legitimate the specious philosophical notion in the first place. Slowly expanding the net of philosophical reason to enclose the marginalized is a trap, a false framing of the problem that only conceals power by decentralizing it rather than offering a radical alternative. James Baldwin already laid waste to this kind of neoliberal integrationism by asking, "Do I really want to be integrated into a burning house?"<sup>20</sup> Authoritarian philosophy may console itself by attempting to offer the intellectually impoverished the riches it once safeguarded for itself, but the very nature of its historical privilege

<sup>16</sup> In Alenka Zupančič, *What Is Sex?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 7-8.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *Laruelle: A Stranger Thought*, 29.

<sup>19</sup> This is a play on C.D. Broad's well-known claim "induction is the glory of science and the scandal of philosophy."

<sup>20</sup> James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 94.



renders it constitutively ignorant to the illusory nature of the currency it conjured up in the first place. This is how the philosophical hierarchy reproduces its dyadic structure ensuring ever more violence.

The violence of philosophical decision, in other words, will not be solved by more philosophical decision(s), but through the axiomatic suspension of decision itself. In this way, disability dramatically demonstrates the stakes of this non-philosophical gesture, since disability entails new ways of “thinking” that may challenge everything we know and have inherited from philosophy about thinking itself. As Lennard Davis argues, “in thinking of disability, we have to consider the *disability of thinking*. Thought and modes of thought will necessarily contain within them their own disincentives to theorize disability;” thus, in theorizing disability “we must develop a different way of conceptualizing the visual field, of thinking about seeing, of perceiving thinking.”<sup>21</sup> Toward this end, and in solidarity with the disabled, let us make explicit what is already implicit in non-philosophy and assert that philosophical decision has a real world analog in what is crudely named cognitive ability, the physical capacity for self-reflection or what we might call building on Laruelle’s language, the *physiological principle of sufficient philosophy*. This principle not only sets the baseline for who counts as a philosopher, but also for who counts as a subject or even a person. Philosophical decision and cognitive ability are therefore in a very real sense mutually reinforcing, or co-constitutive. They are both implicit conditions of standard philosophy as there can be no philosophy without self-reflection any more than there can be philosophy without decision. The democratic alliance forged between non-philosophy and disability lends the former a powerful demonstration of the political and ethical consequences of philosophical decision while lending the

latter a potentially powerful mode of thought it can wield against philosophy’s tyranny over the disabled.

Understood abstractly, philosophers are sometimes tempted to charge Laruelle with hypocrisy, to dismiss his project as all too philosophical, but disability proves the stakes of his claim in the *Principles* that philosophical decision must be understood in terms of *philosophical de-scission* insofar as the work of philosophy “*cuts its own body into a dead part and a healthy part*” chasing “away confusion only to establish it elsewhere.”<sup>22</sup> In the very suspension of philosophical decision, standard philosophy is exposed as a mode of thought delimited by and in accordance to an exclusionary ableism. A non-philosophy of disability, by contrast, manifests as a mode of thought in accordance to disability, and in a sense, it is *dis-ability thinking itself* since the axiomatic suspension of philosophical decision is nothing less than a disabling-(of)-philosophy. It is simultaneously the non-philosophical suspension of philosophy (the literal act of dis-abling it) and a “disabling philosophy,” understood as non-philosophy itself. A non-philosophy of disability refuses to let philosophy legislate over the validity of its truth claims, but it does not do so through a philosophical game of logical refutation of premises or by attempting to overcome philosophy itself as a whole. Instead, non-philosophical disability studies asks that we bracket philosophy to clear the way for a more humble and rigorous mode of knowledge, one that draws from philosophy without succumbing to epistemological subordination. This is a form of refusal irreducible to negation and the antithetical contortions of the dialectic, a refusal irreducible to the stacked deck of philosophical auto-criticism. For while these gestures may push Western thought to its breaking point, they remain auto-positional gestures lying in wait to further the empowerment of philosophy. Thinking intellectual disability rigorously according to

<sup>21</sup> Lennard Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso 1995), 15.

<sup>22</sup> Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 21.

the non-philosophical project reveals the depths of non-philosophical refusal, a refusal worthy of Melville's *Bartleby* as it is a refusal that appears *non-sensical* to the powers of philosophy. Absolute refusal as philosophical heresy, a stranger thought – in short, a disabling-(of)-philosophy.

## Stranger Subjects

If non-philosophy pulls the rug on the (physiological) principle of sufficient philosophy, it simultaneously rejects standard philosophy's exclusionary ableism and its corresponding interpretation of the subject. Who, then, is the subject of this disabling-(of)-philosophy? The framing of the question "who is the subject?" risks capture by philosophy for two reasons: first, because the notion of the "subject" is already (philosophically) incomprehensible without some version of self-reflection, and second, because the question relies on the tacit foreordination of a philosophical authority who inevitably makes man appear as a material *for philosophy* rather than philosophy as material *for man*. Thus, as we unpack the figure of the stranger-subject, we must maintain a fidelity to the strangeness of the stranger, a commitment to her status as foreign(er) to philosophy. Laruelle develops his figure of the stranger by emptying the traditionally "barred" or "split" subject of its transcendental content in order to locate and affirm the unitary (rather than transcendentially unified), non-dualistic Reality of lived experience. Speaking of anything but the nonunitary subject in contemporary theory today may tempt the reader into mistaking Laruelle for something of a naïve realist. But even the most ardent social constructionist is (allegedly) not a substance dualist. She will admit, for example, that in the last instance the split subject is not *actually* split into two qualitatively distinct essences or substances. From this perspective, Laruelle's commitment to the unitary subject is simply a radicalization of what social constructionist philosophers already

themselves hold to be the case *in-the-last-instance*. As we know, there are crucial political stakes in preserving the notion of the split subject. Disability studies itself draws on these advantages in the "social model" of disability, for example, which goes beyond the naïve realism of the medical model and argues that there is no pure essence, no such thing as a defective body only defective socio-political systems, the effects of which can be seen in institutional ableism. The social model, therefore, attempts to escape biopolitical enclosure in part by drawing on the split, or discursive subject as this mode of subjectivity offers greater flexibility in defining the human beyond the hegemonic discourse of the medical model. But if the social model privileges the discursive, it must confront the difficulty that this discursive space is itself built on ableist qualifications like cognitive disability. The social model, in other words, is a discourse built and rebuilt by and for traditional subjects whose interpellation depends on the physical capacity for self-reflection. In this way, the social model runs the risk of acting against its interests through the implicit exclusion of intellectual disability.

A non-philosophical intervention in the debate does not subordinate disability discourse to non-philosophy. On the contrary, it only makes explicit what is implicit in disability studies while also bringing Laruelle's stranger-subject into greater relief by exposing the subtle work of philosophical decision in the construction of these binaries. We can see the work of philosophical decision, for example, in the medical/social model binary, and again in the corresponding body metaphors these models favor: the biocentric, reductionist image of the empirical body, on the one hand, and the dualistic (split) image of the discursive body on the other. What appears lost on all sides of the debate to a non-philosophical observer is the *actual real body itself*, the real body stripped of philosophical determination – both empirical *and* discursive – a



body that, therefore, challenges philosophy by challenging its representations of the disabled body on all sides. For Laruelle, staging a challenge to philosophy by staging a fundamental challenge to representation amounts to the same thing; thus, non-philosophy finds an ally in Tobin Siebers who argues that “the disabled body *changes the process of representation itself*” before adding, “recent body theory, whatever its claims, has never confronted the disabled body.”<sup>23</sup> The disabled body is a stranger kind of body that resists philosophical representation at every turn, a body without the sex appeal of life-affirmative vitalist philosophies of immanence, or the perverse romance of jouissance theory. Where we do find the disabled body, we often find it cast as a “subhuman” body, an animal body or perhaps in the best of the worst cases, a site of potential superhuman powers as in the image of the cyborg. Resisting these characterizations of disability, however, is not to fall back on an anthropocentric humanism out of fear of anthropomorphizing the non-human; after all, standard philosophy is also guilty of anthropomorphizing the human. According to John Ó Maoilearca, the standard model “philosophomorphizes” both the human *and* the non-human, morphing both into its own hallucinated image, whereas Laruelle’s anthropomorphism “is one that also mutates the human and the animal, not in a metaphysics of becoming, but in a continual ‘indefiniton’ of both human and animal that allows both to escape philosophical domination.”<sup>24</sup> In this sense, non-philosophy can think disability without philosophomorphizing according to an image of the (dis)abled body. Strictly speaking, in fact, there can be no non-philosophical image of the

body precisely because the body is (as opaque as) the Real itself, which is to say beyond philosophical determination, foreclosed to thought.<sup>25</sup>

The point to reiterate here is that the Lived body of the stranger is nothing less than the non-philosophical Real itself. Thus, the stranger-subject of non-philosophy is the unitary individual human being no longer estranged, alienated or erased by philosophy. A real immanent instance of the Lived, yes, but a more “generic orientation, human but not humanist or philosophical,” as Laruelle puts it, an orientation which “is centered on the notions of ‘Man-in-Person’ and ‘Victim-in-Person,’ *notions meant to avoid the classic definitions of man such as ‘rational animal,’ ‘political animal,’ ‘metaphysical animal’ and so on.*”<sup>26</sup> Unlike the traditional subject of philosophy, Laruelle’s Man-in-Person is utterly devoid of qualifying characteristics such as cognitive ability or the capacity for self-reflection. She is a stranger, a refugee of philosophy, the unitary “excess” prior to philosophical distinction, the lived-without-remainder who does not look at her reflection in the mirror. As Katerina Kolozova explains, “the Lived is the Experience. The pure Lived is anterior to Language: it is the *mute* experience before it takes recourse to transposing itself onto the Transcendental Plane, prior to the

<sup>25</sup> To be absolutely clear, we must insist here that the disabled are fully human in all senses of the term. The point is not to surreptitiously equate disability with animality through the destruction of all distinctions. Indeed, as Ó Maoilearca quotes Laruelle, “the identity of the Victim absolutely does not amount to this natural or bestial state” (188). The target of criticism here is philosophy’s latent anthropocentrism *after* it has been extended to both the abled and the disabled alike. Ó Maoilearca writes that Laruellean nonhumanism rests a “good deal more on a non-philosophical imperfectability than on man’s approximation to the divine, the infinite, and the perfect... the identity of the human is that of the Real – the simplicity of this statement belying the complexity of the thought behind it” (189).

This opens onto a larger discussion of Laruelle’s non-humanism, which cannot be exhausted here but is dealt with at length in Ó Maoilearca’s seminal work on the topic.

<sup>26</sup> François Laruelle, *General Theory of Victims*, trans. Alex Dubilet and Jessie Hock (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), xiv.

<sup>23</sup> Tobin Siebers, “Disability in Theory: From Social Constructionism to the New Realism of the Body,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard Davis (New York: Routledge Press 2006), 173-175.

<sup>24</sup> John Ó Maoilearca, *All Thoughts Are Equal: Laruelle and Nonhuman Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 183-185.

effort of making sense.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, the stranger is a “radical subjectivity” rather than a transcendental person/individual, a concrete body in flesh and blood, but one which does not and cannot form an empirico-metaphysical doublet. Laruelle evades decisional philosophy, according to Kolozova, by arguing “for the rendering *chora*” of such philosophical admixtures which opens the way for non-philosophy to put to use the “unorganized, sheer transcendental material... in ways which are not doctrinally permitted but rather ‘succumb to the authority’ of the unpredictable, unruly Real.”<sup>28</sup> The “essence” of this Real is non-essential, it does not form a Whole or a metaphysics. Unrepresentable by philosophy and devoid of ableist qualifications for either personhood or subjectivity, the stranger is the solitary immanence of the Lived which can offer a rudimentary description of itself without forming an identity or attempting to reflect the Real in its totality.

### Stranger Victims

Anthony Paul Smith might as well be writing of the intellectually disabled when he writes, “what we need in order to deliver on the wager of non-philosophical ethics, are ‘stranger victims’: victims who are foreign to the philosophical scene and impossible to capture philosophically.”<sup>29</sup> Because there can be no philosophy of disability, the disabled represent an exemplary case of these stranger victims while demonstrating what’s ethically at stake in the figure of the stranger. In his ethical works, Laruelle refrains from naming or otherwise overdetermining the identity of the stranger. Strangeness, after all, is an attribute of the non-philosophical. Should

the stranger lose something of her strangeness to familiarity, she would surely find herself at risk of philosophical capture. For this reason, in *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*, Laruelle looks past the more popular victims often taken up by philosophers and addresses the radically forgotten of history as a heuristic for thinking the stranger. The erasure of the figure of the gnostic heretic offers one such heuristic. As Anthony Paul Smith observes, “by virtue of being forgotten, the gnostic heretics produce nothing. Since they are not exchanged, they do not circulate within the economy of ethical thought.”<sup>30</sup> They are the invisible victims of history, Smith argues, their historic and symbolic erasure offering very little by way of ashes and cinders which might otherwise preserve their memory. As stranger victims, the radical invisibility of the gnostic heretics shares something with the radical invisibility of the disabled, for the disabled are the invisible victims of each historical present. Invisibility, in fact, is largely a defining characteristic of disability, one which is more pronounced than any other marginalized identity. The disabled are uniquely confined to private spaces, for example, singled out for exclusion from public and civic life. They comprise the blank pages of the archive, the radically forgotten of history. More than this, the disabled are the forgotten also of the present, they are the invisible ghosts the abled overlook while racing up the stairs.

Of course, to think disability in relation to strangeness is not to pathologize disability. The disabled are not “strange Others,” for this is a designation which is always already thrust upon them by philosophy. Laruelle’s stranger, moreover, is not an other to be feared or fetishized, indeed, she is not, in the last instance, “an Other” at all. For if the disabled are stranger *subjects* vis-à-vis philosophy, they are also necessarily the stranger *victims* of the hegemonic discourse of the State-(philosophy). The stranger, there-

<sup>27</sup> Katerina Kolozova, *The Lived Revolution: Solidarity With the Body in Pain as the New Political Universal* (Skopje: Evro-Balkan Press, 2010), 33.

<sup>28</sup> Katerina Kolozova, “Figure of the Stranger: A Possibility for Transcendental Minimalism or Radical Subjectivity” in *The Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 11 no. 3 (Fall 2001): 61.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, *Laruelle: A Stranger Thought*, 100.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, *Laruelle: A Stranger Thought*, 105.

fore, must not be confused for another fictionalized or idealized notion of the victim, for these approaches, on Laruelle's account, falsely present reality as "deep, high, and hidden, and minorities as crushed by the State... individuals as a remainder, as a game, or as an effect of a game."<sup>31</sup> This is a game staged by philosophy, particularly by what Laruelle calls "dominant intellectuals," those philosophers responsible for managing philosophy's "stato-minoritarian thought." These dominant intellectuals conjure up an idealized figure of the minority who appears only as a commodified image of the haggard victim awaiting rescue from the very Western benefactor complicit in the conditions of her haggardization.

Rather than seek the real individual person beneath the façade, however, the dominant intellectual perpetually carries out her erasure either through a process of mistaking her real identity for its commodified image, or through the philosophical mechanics of burying the individual in world history, dialectics, the State, etc. Because non-philosophy is unwilling to sacrifice the individual human person on the chopping block of philosophical decision, it looks beneath the fiction and locates the "Victim-in-Person." As Smith reads Laruelle, "the victim is not to be pitied, but co-suffered with (the literal sense of *compassion*)." These compassionate ethics do not result in a quietist politics, however, as Smith demonstrates, quoting from *General Theory of Victims*: "Laruelle tells us thought must come to think under the condition of the victim: 'For us the Gnostics and us-the-generics, this is the role of the ["determined" rather than "dominant"] intellectual: to help victims in this uprising, to imitate and prolong this uprising in the human dimensions of thought."<sup>32</sup> Thinking under the condition of the *disabled* victim is one

way we might summarize the political stakes of a non-philosophy of disability. For the imperative to think under the condition of the disabled victim is to describe the ethical and political dimensions of the disabling-(of)-philosophy outlined above. According to this logic, philosophy *cannot* think under the conditions of the disabled victim, a claim we can only grasp non-philosophically, it can only pity the disabled and is incapable of prolonging the uprising precisely because it cannot find the compassion necessary to locate and maintain a fidelity to a non-philosophical, non-ableist dimension of thought that must extend, in the last instance, to all of generic humanity as the stranger subjects non-philosophy attempts to awaken in us all.

## Disability at the End Times of Philosophy

Because Laruelle takes for granted, as do most philosophers, that all philosophy is always already political (philosophy), he synonymizes the World with the State and with philosophy itself. As we have shown, to occupy the subject position of the stranger is to be in a position of distinction (without relation) to the hegemonic thought-World of philosophy. Perhaps the most destructive element of this hegemonic discourse today comes in the form of capitalogenic climate change and its accompanying forms of climate change denialism. From a non-philosophical perspective, standard philosophy is incapable of grasping ecological collapse, in part because of the Heideggerian legacy that falsely assumes "science cannot think," but also because philosophy appears unable to think under the condition of the climate victim. The reason for this, as I've argued elsewhere, is that philosophy shifts registers away from a real instance of destruction (ecological collapse) to the supposedly more horrifying realization that "the worst has always already happened."<sup>33</sup> This totalizing de-

<sup>31</sup> François Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man: On Authorities and Minorities*, trans. Alex Dubilet and Jessie Hock (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 39.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, *Laruelle: A Stranger Thought*, 106.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Pingree, "Geohistorical Materialism and the End After the End," in *Provocations 1* (2017): 18-26.

structive event is confirmed only by philosophy itself as the inescapable, transcendental mode of thought that comes onto the scene too late and can only *reflect back* on (primordial) destruction itself. What a peculiar moment, a critical moment without precedent in the history of the species, to emphasize that the worst has always already happened – peculiar not only because we face an unfolding extinction event, but because the notion that the worst has always already happened is quickly becoming the official ideology of the State.<sup>34</sup> Would we be so naïve to observe in this situation a pernicious climate change denialism at work in contemporary philosophy? Are we wrong to raise an eyebrow at the philosopher who speaks of primordial destruction even as the rising tide laps against his lips?

Perhaps there's another way to think the crisis, a less philosophical and more grounded approach that fits our purposes here by exposing the relation between disability and ecological collapse. To think disability from a political perspective is to always already think the question of environment(s), it is to think that "it is not so much the person who needs fixing but the *environment* that needs adaptation."<sup>35</sup> In light of capitalism-induced ecological collapse, the demand to reform our environment must be expanded beyond questions of access to include *the environment* as such, after all, changes to the environment cannot be separated from changes to the human body. As Jason Moore, Rob Nixon and others have argued, the main driver of ecological collapse is not the human species, but the debilitating politics of the Capitalocene. Moore argues that capitalism is perhaps better defined

<sup>34</sup> Juliet Eilperin, Brady Dennis, and Chris Mooney, "Trump Sees a 7-Degree Rise in Global Temperatures by 2100," *The Washington Post* (September 28, 2018), [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com). The Trump administration's own Environmental Impact Statement includes an admission that fossil fuel consumption at current rates will lead to a 7-degree temperature rise by the end of the century. The report admits the dire implications but asserts it is too late to do anything about it.

<sup>35</sup> Kittay and Carlson, *Cognitive Disability*, 5.

as a grand experiment in terraforming, a political mode of organizing and exploiting nature itself. Building on Moore, and because human bodies are a part of nature, we must read the poisoned, radiated, plastic-infused, debilitated bodies produced by metabolic rift as legible symptoms of ecological collapse.<sup>36</sup> As Rob Nixon makes clear, "climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermath of wars, acidifying the oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes," are intentional forms of "slow violence" occurring "gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."<sup>37</sup> Slow violence is not instantaneous, spectacular or explosive, its end is not to kill so much as to maim by enacting a slow form of necropolitics Jasbir Puar calls "slow death." This process amounts to a deliberate strategy to debilitate and disable. Thinking debility as both a physical condition and a political strategy, Puar's *The Right to Maim* demonstrates that debility is not only endemic, but "perhaps even normative to disenfranchised communities: not nonnormative, not exceptional, not that which is to come or can be avoided, but a banal feature of quotidian existence that is already definitive of the precarity of that existence."<sup>38</sup> Debility is therefore a strategic *end in itself* of an intentional violence directed primarily against the local and global poor. From poisoned drinking water saturated with lead and microplastics to radioactive fallout, from polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) to Monsanto-manufactured glyphosates – all of which have infiltrated both (non)human bodies

<sup>36</sup> Jason Moore's definition of nature in his *Capitalism in the Web of Life* (London: Verso, 2015) defines capitalism as a mode of organizing nature itself, where the term nature is expanded to evade naïve nature/culture dualisms and necessarily includes human bodies as part of this catastrophic organization.

<sup>37</sup> Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>38</sup> Jasbir Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 16.

and stratigraphic layers in the geologic record at a nearly ubiquitous scale – this violence confirms that we, and the global poor in particular, are the political targets of a form of illness and debilitation which is rising with the seas.

One rather shocking conclusion we can draw from this is that ecological collapse is a question of disability, and disability a question of the end of the World. Non-philosophy, as it turns out, offers an intriguing political symptomatology for this dramatic situation. As Katerina Kolozova explains, the non-philosophical response to the tyranny of philosophy's hegemonic discourse requires that one establish "a posture of thought in accordance with the Real which manifests itself as a symptom and is verified through the sheer experience (of trauma). One is called upon establishing a map of symptoms displayed by the body(/ies) of Multitude(s) in its (their) reaction to the power exercised by way of the ruling discourses of our times, and produce a thought (of) force responding to the cry of this body (or, these bodies)."<sup>39</sup> This force-(of)-thought is the final political aim of non-philosophy where in fidelity to the symptom, one becomes an aroused body, an unending force of opposition to the tyranny of the dominant order. To understand the scope of these bodily cries, we need only consider that the vast majority of disabilities are not congenital and that we are, as disability studies reminds us, only ever "temporarily abled." The ruling class would have us believe that all disabilities are either caused by spontaneous accidents or "natural disasters," but climate change has implicitly forced the realization that these disasters are not altogether as "natural" as we once thought. From this perspective, the disabled body provides a map of bodily symptoms as the result of slow violence under the watch of the philosophical World-order that even today struggles to overcome the delusional belief that the environment is nothing but a passive background the transcendental subject has left behind once and for all.

<sup>39</sup> Kolozova, *The Lived Revolution*, 26.

The problem for Laruelle is not that human beings are truly little more than indistinct objects in a flattened ontological mélange, but that "man really exists and he is really distinct from the World – a thesis that contradicts nearly every philosophy."<sup>40</sup> The task of locating the stranger-subject as the Victim-in-Person of the philosophical World is to discover our generic humanity for the first time. This process of (de)subjectivation is at once an ethical and political imperative, for in becoming stranger-subjects our task is nothing less than to bring about the end of the World, a task which takes on a heightened sense of urgency as the planet itself today appears to have become the Victim-in-Person of the philosophical World. But the strangeness of non-philosophy is concealed in this formulation and we are tempted by philosophical thinking to assume that bringing about the end of the World means bringing about the end of the planet, on the one hand, or ushering in yet another philosophical World, on the other. To avoid this temptation, we must recall that non-philosophy does not reject philosophy itself, as Rocco Gangle explains, "but only philosophy's self-legitimizing and hence thoroughly relative circumscriptions of its Other(s). The stranger thus does not opt out of the real world, but instead sees that the world itself as defined a priori by philosophy as a form of contest and enclosure (however infinite or horizontal in principle) in fact opts out of the ordinary human Real."<sup>41</sup> This explains why non-philosophical withdrawal is not apolitical or monastic, for it is radically committed to real human beings while forcing philosophy to admit that its self-appointed definition of the human opts *out* of generic humanity.

## Conclusion

We have covered a lot of ground in these pages and still managed only to sketch the surface of a non-philosophy of disability, an ambitious proj-

<sup>40</sup> Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Rocco Gangle, "Laruelle and Ordinary Life," in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, eds. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2012), 78.



ect perhaps, and one we surely cannot exhaust here. What I hope to have offered is an example of a kind of Laruellean “philo-fiction” that offers a novel way to think common themes and goals that non-philosophy and disability theory hold in common without recourse to philosophical authority. The conditions of possibility for this philofiction are rendered legible in the present geohistorical epoch of the Anthropocene. In these precarious end times, thought must not hide itself in the hallucinated nostalgia of pristine nature, nor must it submit to the pervasive climate denialism at the heart of standard philosophy which assumes that the worst has always already happened. In contrast to these common eco-critical approaches, the non-philosophy of disability I call for here emerges as a consequence of the climate crisis and emphatically sides with the climate-victim-in-person, suggesting that environmental thought might begin not from nostalgic fantasies of health and wellness – positions rendered impossible by contemporary ecological science despite their persistence in both humanist philosophies and eugenicist narratives alike – but from the political reality of illness, debility and disability. In proposing such a theory, we have uncovered a stranger thought that thinks with or according to disability through the suspension of philosophical decision, identifying along the way an analog for what we have called the physiological principle of sufficient philosophy in the specious but thoroughly philosophical notion of cognitive ability. We have also uncovered a stranger kind of subject, one who avoids the ableist qualifications of decisional philosophy, and one who in herself becomes, as Katerina Kolozova puts it, an “inexhaustible source of unending rebellion against the all-encompassing Orthodoxy” of philosophy.<sup>42</sup> This utopian subject is synonymous with a Laruellean force-(of)-thought of and for the end times, one who in

the act of her non-becoming mobilizes against the capitalist forces of extinction. In this way, the disabling-(of)-philosophy outlined here can be put to work in the service of generic humanity, a multitude without qualification who not only refuses the authority discourse of standard philosophy but wills the destruction of its catastrophic thought-world.

In conclusion, I would like to propose a response to the profound and enigmatic question raised by Nietzsche in the epigraph. For if the desire of standard philosophy, according to Nietzsche, is to “luxuriate in its own voluptuousness,” the apotheosis of this desire in light of catastrophic climate change is nothing less than to “inscribe itself in cosmic capital letters on the heavens” of the atmosphere itself. As a result of this philosophical violence, we the sick and the weak, we wor(l)dless strangers crushed by “healthy” philosophy’s cosmic destruction, *we* are the ones who need our non-philosophy “as a prop or a sedative, medicine, redemption, elevation, or self-alienation,” as a salve for the tyranny of philosophy.<sup>43</sup> “What will become of the thought that is itself subjected to the pressure of illness?” One intriguing possibility is that it will become a disabling-(of)-philosophy.

<sup>42</sup> Katerina Kolozova, “Theories of the Immanent Rebellion: Non-Marxism and Non-Christianity,” in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, 222.

<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 33-34.