

No Truth

Curtin 939

Panel Chair: Ivan Ascher

Bill Martin (DePaul University)

“Making a “non-” of Christianity, Marxism, and Buddhism: Engaging Badiou and Laruelle”

Laruelle is well-known as the philosopher of the "non-," which may or may not be the same as being as a philosopher of the "no." Clearly, to apply the "non-" to Christianity and Marxism, as Laruelle does, is not to say "no" to them, exactly. Instead, Laruelle's goal is to recognize the power of heresy; it might even be said that this power is one of finding again the absolute affirmation that is within the original "One-in-person 'subtracted-without-subtraction' from the World and its system of philosophical harassments (meaning, the One-in-person never even "enters" that world-space, but because it is not "of" it, it can go to it "for" it, etc...)." (This is from Laruelle scholar Timothy Lavenz.) One might argue that only "no," in the form of "the nothing," can be "subtracted without subtraction." But that conclusion would seem to run up against Laruelle's critique of the "ontology of the void" (OV) in Badiou.

Meanwhile, Badiou has his own relationship with Christianity and Marxism, and while it is not a relationship of "non-" in Laruelle's sense, one could say it is not-unrelated to an interpretation that could be called "heretical." Here I mention this only to build two bridges. One bridge is built in showing Badiou's engagement with certain terms from Christianity, especially "incarnation," "resurrection," and "grace," and of course with St. Paul--and not really with "Christ" or Jesus except in the most abstract sense. Little or no engagement even with the notion of messianism, which, it could be said, Laruelle does engage with. The second bridge has to do with the ontology of the void, which is not that of Christianity or non-Christianity (or Marxism or non-Marxism), but instead is that of Buddhism, in the form of "sunyata" as void, nothing, nothingness, emptiness. The void, or empty set, in Badiou also fits well with Buddhism in the sense that it is not theological and not supposed to become theological (so, in that sense, we have the "secular void," as Badiou would have it).

I only mean these "bridges" as points on which to compare Badiou and Laruelle. The second "bridge" is filled out further by the scholar of Buddhism Glenn Wallis, who makes an argument for "Speculative Non-Buddhism," drawing on both Laruelle and Badiou. Meanwhile, however, Laruelle seems to be largely critical of Asian thought, precisely

because it often centers on the ontology of the void--and surely Buddhism more than any other Asian philosophy/religion.

Beyond these questions, the point is to ask about resources both of negativity and "that affirmation that is beyond the alternation of yes and no," which is a common aim of Adorno, Derrida, and Badiou. For all three there remains inspiration to be taken from Christianity, though with the significant caveat that this mostly means a version of Judaism for Adorno and Derrida, and St. Paul without much of Jesus and his movement (or the rest of the movement apart from the other apostles) for Badiou. What is the status of *this* no (or these particular versions of "no") in light of Laruelle's critique. What is the status of Laruelle's "non-" in light of these other versions of not only the void and negation, but also what are the possible forms of affirmation. My larger aim is to show the greater critical possibilities of Buddhism rather than Christianity, in a comparison of the logic of awakening and the logic of redemption.

David L. Seim (UW-Stout)

“Refusing To Be Thwarted: Mad Science and the Denial of Validity of Failure”

Such a remarkable popular image a person called a “mad scientist” is. Oftentimes we explore mad scientists for their unique personality foibles. Sometimes, especially with fictionalized versions, it is manic motion, disheveled appearance, and hubris of a creator complex come to the foreground. In real cases, typically we find persons simply cheating on data or proceeding to experiment on living beings in ways that they know they are not to. When studying any scientist committing wrongdoing, whether fictional or real, some philosophical attention deservedly should turn to what we can learn about human nature in general: whether any universal susceptibilities, to which anyone can fall prey, are simply played out more acutely in the role of scientist.

Refusing rejection by the scientific method. Potentially the deepest issue we find, perhaps in every variant of mad science, is some stubborn denial of the reality that failure happens – maybe ignoring how an ethics board (IRB) would say that a proposed experiment cannot be allowed, or ignoring the fact that some other scientist reached a discovery first, or ignoring a null result as an experimental outcome. Yet at the same time, such a deep cultural value it is to persist against obstruction, with all determination to accomplish something great. My argument: “mad science” can be a finer line than even commonly understood, when we see it as culturally sanctioned refusal to be thwarted by any “no” responses along the way, to a point of pathological failure to comprehend validity and reality of null results.