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## Religious Pluralism within the Limits of Thought<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

There is an *aporia* to finitude: if I am limited as a finite being, I cannot know what the limits of my finitude are, because if I knew what those limits are, then I would have transcended them. I refer to this *aporia* as the "hard problem of finitude," interpreted through Graham Priest's work on inclosure paradoxes. Here I offer an interpretation of François Laruelle's theory of the Philosophical Decision in terms of his attempt to resolve this *aporia* through his suspension of standard philosophy's form of ontological dualism. Next, I apply non-standard philosophy to the problem of religious pluralism, presenting a novel theory of "standard religion" and the "Hierophanic Decision" through a non-standard reading of Mircea Eliade's philosophy of religion, and end by pointing towards what a consistently performative and finite form of religious pluralism might look like from within the "democracy-of-thought," here rendered as the "parliament of religions."

**Keywords:** François Laruelle, Mircea Eliade, Graham Priest, religious pluralism, finitude

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"Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent" (Wittgenstein 2018, §7)  
"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one has just contradicted oneself" (Priest 2002, 233)  
"[The language of the One] speaks what we cannot say, or speaks  
the identity-in-the-last-instance of saying and silence" (Laruelle 2013b, 227)

There is an *aporia* to finitude: if I am limited as a finite being, I cannot know what the limits of my finitude are, because if I knew what those limits are, then I would have transcended them.<sup>2</sup> With apologies to David Chalmers (Chalmers 1995), we may refer to this *aporia* as "the hard problem of finitude." As understood here, the hard problem of

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<sup>2</sup> Both Hegel (1997, §60) and Wittgenstein (2018, §1) have offered formulations of this *aporia*.

finitude arises due to the transcendental fact that we always already presuppose something (let us call it "reality") prior to our conceptual determination of it. We find ourselves in the midst of the fact that anything is at all. But we do not even know what being "inside" of reality means since we do not have access to it as a whole as finite beings or, by definition, to anything *outside* of it. Our finitude therefore not only underdetermines our ability to conceptualize reality in a well-defined way, but it also underdetermines a complete account of finitude itself. In this sense, we might say that the limits of thought are boundaries that cannot be crossed, but we do not even know what they are.

This *aporia* also haunts religious pluralism. We may define religious pluralism as the idea that all religions are so many parts of a whole, whether in terms of reality, sacrality, and/or truth. In other words, religious pluralism amounts to the idea that all religions are equally real, equally true, and/or equally valuable parts of some whole. Religious pluralism is aporetic because, if I claim equality with others due to our shared finitude, then I cannot determine in terms of what we are equal to each other exactly, for such a knowledge would put me in a position of epistemic predominance over them. It would put me in a "meta-exclusive" position *outside* of the plane of finitude, thus rendering my religious pluralism logically inconsistent. This charge of inconsistency is, in a nutshell, Gavin D'Costa's critique of John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis (Hick 2004), which makes religious pluralism an apparent "impossibility" (D'Costa 1996).

Here we may remember the parable of the blind men and the elephant. In one version of the story, four blind men are wandering in the forest when they unexpectedly come across an elephant, which none of them has encountered before. Each of the four describe the elephant variously as being like a snake (one holds the trunk), a pillar (one grasps the leg), a smooth wall (one touches the side), and smooth, thin stone (one grips the tusk). After quarreling, the blind men conclude they must have each been touching different animals because their descriptions mismatch each other. Of course, we the readers know how misguided this conclusion is. In certain retellings of the story, this epistemic benefit is shared with a king who, in order to make a point to his court advisors about pointless bickering, asks the blind men to his court to describe an elephant. Here both us readers and the king benefit from an optic advantage over the blind men – a transcendent, royal knowledge.

Hick operates from this royal knowledge insofar as he uses the parable of the blind men and the elephant (Hick 1973, 37) to suggest religious exclusivism and inclusivism are false, and that all religions are really phenomenal conceptualizations of one noumenal

reality that transcends us all. But how can Hick claim both to be "blind" like everyone else and also to have an optic advantage? This is inconsistent.

There are two other ways to imagine this *aporia*. The first comes from William Irwin Thompson, who likens the human condition to being that of a fly crawling across the ceiling of Sistine Chapel – a fly that cannot comprehend the images of angels and gods under its own feet (Thompson quoted in Kripal 2010, 159). The second comes from William James, who invites us to wonder whether we are not as cats or dogs in a library, surrounded by books we are unable to comprehend (James 1977, 140). Both scenes present us with a difficulty as finite beings, for how could a finite being know the nature of its finitude or how it is finite? Neither the fly nor the cats and dogs could conceptualize their lack of comprehension, for then they would cease being flies, cats. And dogs. The *aporia*, then, is that we cannot know how we are finite precisely because we are finite. Any demand made that all knowledge is finite *inconsistently* contravenes those same posited limits of finitude. Every attempt to determine one's own position in finitude violates the very assertion of one's position therein. To determine one's immanence to finitude requires a transcendental perch, an "outside" of immanence, by which to determine as much.

We may understand this *aporia* by applying Graham Priest's work on "inclosure paradoxes." Let us posit  $\Omega$ , the totality of what is knowable, and  $x$ , religious knowledge, which is taken as a subset of  $\Omega$  (just in case all of the propositions in  $x$  are knowable). Next, let us apply an operator,  $\delta$ , to  $x$ , which is the contention that all religious knowledge is correctly construed pluralistically because all religious knowers are finite. However, if we say that the pluralist's contention belongs to the set of religious knowledge, then this demand should itself be understood pluralistically – as in  $\delta\{\delta(x)\}$  – which is a self-defeating proposition. So, in order to avoid this situation, an operation of Transcendence is required, which tells us that  $\delta(x)$  transcends  $x$ . In other words, the demand that religious knowledge be construed pluralistically is not contained within the set of religious knowledge itself. However, this demand still belongs to  $\Omega$  (as described by an operation of Closure). An inclosure paradox arises, however, insofar as we apply  $\delta(x)$  to  $\Omega$  itself, for then  $\delta(x)$  *both* is contained within (Closure) *and* transcendent of (Transcendence) the totality of what is knowable. Said differently, if religious knowledge is finite and a subset of the totality of what is knowable, then the demand that religious knowable be construed pluralistically transcends the set of religious knowledge while nonetheless being an element of  $\Omega$ . And yet, insofar as  $\Omega$  is understood to be itself finite,

then  $\Omega$  is subject to the demand of pluralization, dictating that such a demand is both within and beyond the limits of  $\Omega$ . This is, I claim, the inclosure paradox at the heart of standard forms of religious pluralism.<sup>3</sup>

As is well known, Priest himself *affirms* such inconsistency, declaring "the limits of thought are boundaries which cannot be crossed, but yet which are crossed" (Priest 2002, 3). Priest is a "dialetheist," that is, he affirms the existence of some true contradictions. However, if we are indeed like the blind men who, in the first telling of the parable, are wandering in the forest when they bump into an elephant, then we might say we do not even know what an elephant is in the first place. This means that both  $\Omega$  and  $x$  are undetermined variables. What an elephant is, is precisely what is under question, because here there is no king to tell us how it is we are blind or what we are all touching. In what follows, I offer a model of religious pluralism that operates from an axiomatic assumption that we do not have access to royal knowledge, which dictates that we must think like blind men in the forest, a fly on the ceiling, a cat or dog in the library.<sup>4</sup> I thus attempt to formulate a consistently incomplete (that is, finite) model of religious pluralism, which does not devolve into *aporia*.<sup>5</sup>

Given that some proponents of "polydoxy" present a theory of religious pluralism through Whiteheadian and/or Deleuzian models of formalized incompleteness (Keller and Schneider 2011), Elliot Wolfson's comment on polydoxy is relevant here. "Polydoxy is not superior to orthodoxy," he observes, "if the beliefs promulgated under the pretext of plurality regurgitate erroneous claims, as in the case of envisioning immanence from the standpoint of transcendence" (Wolfson 2014, 231). Wolfson here points to the constitutive inability of many religious pluralists, despite the posited consistent finitude of their theories, to theorize pluralism in a consistent manner. For even if they treat the elephant as ontologically pluralistic or immanent in constitution, reflexive knowledge of this circumstance is still an inconsistent exception to finitude. For to have made finitude transparent to conceptualization, to a transcendental knowledge of immanence, is a performa-

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix A, §1, for a visual representation of Priest's Inclosure Schema. I am indebted to Jon Cogburn for helping me formulate this presentation of religious pluralism's inclosure paradox.

<sup>4</sup> I do not employ the blind men as an ableist trope, nor the limitations of flies and cats or dogs in a speciesist way, but rather as figures emblematic of the universality of finitude.

<sup>5</sup> The term "consistent incompleteness," and its opposite, "inconsistent incompleteness," come from the work of Paul Livingston, and refer to the two options available to post-Gödelian thought insofar as Gödel demonstrated the impossibility of both a consistent and complete system of thought (see Livingston 2012).

tive contradiction. In this light, we may assert that regardless of whether a pluralist believes that the religions are so many blind men touching different parts of the same elephant, as for Hick (Hick 2004) or various forms of perennialism (see Ferrer 2002:71-114), or that there are many elephants (Cobb 1999; Ferrer 2008; Griffin 2005; Heim 2001), the pluralist nonetheless maintains a position of royal transcendence: the king who can see and so tells the blind men what is really going. So is religious pluralism a logical impossibility? My claim is that it is impossible to maintain from within a conceptual idiom of thought, but not from within a *performative* (or non-conceptual) idiom of thought. My goal, therefore, is to develop a model of religious pluralism in a consistently performative, pluralistic, and finite way.

### A Kantian Interlude

To think from within finitude: this is, essentially, a Kantian imperative, deriving from both a Kantian problem and a Kantian solution. The problem is that trying to determine the nature of reality as a whole leads to an antinomy. The solution to this problem is to be *empirical* about reality – to think from the *inside* of it. Kant himself proposes such a "empirical directive" (see Braver 2007, 53). He writes: the "I or he or it (the thing) which thinks... is known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatsoever" (Kant 1965, A346/B404).<sup>6</sup> Kant, however, cannot apply this directive to external reality, but only to the subject since the subject is transcendental for him. Reality is transcendently correlated to the subject, dictating that all experience is phenomenal and never experience of the noumenal thing-in-itself. This, of course, made Kantianism vulnerable to the Berkleyan/Fichtean argument against transcendence that it is impossible to think the unthinkable, and since the noumenal is unthinkable, we are not justified in positing it (see Cogburn 2017,7). This kind of argument ushered in German idealism, anti-realism, and then the supremacy of socio-linguistic constructivism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, what if we were able to bypass the Berkleyan/Fichtean argument? Then we would be free to apply Kant's empiri-

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<sup>6</sup> As Wilfrid Sellars describes it, "our concept of an I is the concept of *that which thinks*, in the various modes of thinking. The idea that concepts pertaining to thinking are essentially *functional* in character raises the question: What non-functional characterization can be given of the processes, which embody these functions. . . . We don't know these processes save as *processes which embody these functions*" (Sellars quoted in Braver 2007:55).

cal directive not only to the subject, but to external reality itself. And then we could, moreover, revise the empirical directive and assert: *reality, whatever it is, is known only through its effects, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept of reality whatsoever.*<sup>7</sup>

Arguably, it is precisely this kind of imperative that energizes the work of François Laruelle, which, as I reconstruct it, offers us the means by which to bypass the master argument and operate from within finitude in a performatively consistent manner.

### Non-Standard Philosophy

Laruelle himself does not describe his brand of "non-standard" philosophy specifically in terms of "the hard problem of finitude." But this is arguably one of the motivating conundrums underlying his project. For Laruelle takes as axiomatic that thought presupposes and is transcendently immanent to reality ("the Real"), prior to any determination of its essence from within a thought-world.<sup>8</sup> And this dictates that thought is immanent to the Real, and so the Real is underdetermined. In Priestian terms, Laruelle operates from a *presupposed* Domain ( $\Omega$ : the generic immanence of the Real) and Closure (thought's immanence to the Real), but rejects any operation of Transcendence by which one could make the Real a well-defined object of conceptualization.<sup>9</sup> To clarify, the term "Domain" is *not* here an ontological referent. The Real is not the "One-All," to borrow a term from Badiou's philosophy (Badiou 1988), and so is neither the totality of how everything is logically ("the One") nor the totality of what everything is ontologically ("the All"). The Real is underdetermined. Laruelle's ambition is thus to humble any attempt to treat the Real as an ultimate reality or totality, thus staging a "de-ultimatization" or "de-ontologization" of reality. Here Jon Cogburn's musings on metaphysics is illuminating. He comments:

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Rocco Gangle who asserts that immanence, "roughly, names then any metaphysical position or method rejecting the notion that the ultimate structure of reality may be investigated independently of its real content in the way that Kant's, for example, does" (Gangle 2016, 3).

<sup>8</sup> "The Real," like "the One," is just what Laruelle calls one of the "first names" of generic immanence, referring to that which resists signification in order "to evoke what is already-manifest for philosophy to even act" (Smith 2016, 43).

<sup>9</sup> See appendix A, §2, for more details.

Metaphysics tries to give us explanations of what reality must be like such that what we know about it is true. But suppose for argument that part of what we know about reality is the impossibility of providing an explanation of what reality must be like such that what we know about it is true. Then the metaphysician would have to provide an account of what reality is like such that metaphysics is impossible. (Cogburn 2017, 60)

*To provide an account of what reality is like such that metaphysics is impossible:* this is a useful starting point for understanding Laruelle, because he precisely attempts to offer an account of what immanence (Domain) is like from within finitude (Closure) such that a transcendental determination of what finite immanence is (Transcendence) is impossible. Of course, Laruelle is certainly not alone in such an effort.<sup>10</sup> However, what marks his project as qualitatively different than standard forms of philosophy is that he does not operate from a conceptual, but rather a performative idiom of thought, treating the Real aesthetically. This is precisely why his philosophy may be said to be "non-standard" or, as I put it, "non-dualistic."

Admittedly, Laruelle does not (as far I as know) use the term "ontological dualism" in his work, but this is just the sort of thing he describes in terms of the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy: that thought, in principle, is able to have knowledge of the Real as a conceptual object. Laruelle refers to this Principle as the "Parmenidean" heart of standard philosophy, since Parmenides assumes a pre-established harmony, or isomorphism, between ideality and the Real. For standard philosophy, there is a "cookie cutter" shape of, or "perforated lines" around, reality. Or as Raimon Panikkar puts it in his own diagnosis of Parmenides, the Real "is Thinking, that is, Intelligibility—not certainly for an individual mind, but as such" (Panikkar 2008, 119). In this way, standard philosophy functions in terms of what Laruelle refers to – riffing on René Girard – as "mimetic rivalry" (Laruelle 2015c, 29). Here, thoughts are treated as so many competing representations or approximations of the Real.

Of course, this Principle alone does not determine what the Real is. A Philosophical Decision is required, which may be understood as the *operationalization* of the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy. For if the latter tells us that the Real is, in principle, given to thought, then the Decision tells us *what* the Real specifically is given as conceptually in terms of *F*, and *how* it is given as much. "Givenness" is a phenomenological term,

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Cogburn on "object-oriented-ontology" (OOO) as operating from a suspension of the operation of Transcendence (Cogburn 2017, 60-90).

which points to the basic assumption of standard philosophy, namely, the Real appears. Specifically, the Real appears ontologically: as either being or its negation, non-being (Laruelle refers to this second term as "alterity"). Here "being" is synonymous with the conceptual object of what Heidegger refers to as "ontotheology" whereas non-being or alterity is the conceptual object of what Conor Cunningham refers to as "meontotheology" (Cunningham 2002). Ontotheology operates upon a determination of the Real as something (*a* being), while meontotheology operates upon a determination of the Real as nothing (non-being). We might also refer to this dualism in terms of "identity and difference," for whereas ontotheology operates upon the presupposition of a *univocal* identity between thought and the Real (qua *a* being), meontotheology operates upon the presupposition of an *equivocal* difference between thought and the Real (qua non-being).

Standard philosophers thus assume their sufficiency to determine what the Real is conceptually, in terms of univocity or equivocity, and how they are able to do so epistemologically. This combination of "what" and "how" constitutes a dualistic conditioning/conditioned schema. For instance, in realist philosophy, the Real (the object of knowledge: *ontos*) conditions how thought (the means of knowledge: *logos*) has access to the Real; whereas in anti-realist philosophy, thought becomes both its own object and means of knowledge without reference to a knowable external reality, thus overdetermining the Real and reducing it effectively to non-being. (Anti-realism is, remember, the upshot of the Berkleyan/Fichtean argument against the noumenal.) Regardless, then, whether one treats the Real as being or non-being, either way, one assumes thought can obtain dualistic distance by which to determine the Real and so turn it into an object of knowledge. Here, thoughts are treated as so many competing representations or approximations of the Real, as either being or non-being (see Laruelle 2013b, 1999, 2003; cf. Smith 2016, 13-34).<sup>11</sup>

Standard philosophers assume a dualistic, bilateral relationship between thought and reality: both that reality determines thought and that thought is able to determine an assumed previously existing, knowable reality back conceptually. In Priestian terms, thought is able to effect an operation of Transcendence by which to turn around, as it

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<sup>11</sup> Both John Milbank and Ray Brassier have critiqued the theory of the Philosophical Decision as only applicable to post-Kantian thought (Brassier 2007, 118-149; Milbank 2011; 2014, 101-2). Laruelle's schema is, indeed, not universal. However, Laruelle's significance is that he identifies the operational structure of philosophy *insofar as it is conceptually dualistic* – a structure that applies across many times and systems of thought.

were, and objectify the Real. As Laruelle puts it, philosophy "is always a *decision* or a transcendence" (Laruelle quoted in Smith 2016, 180; emphasis original). Or as he describes it elsewhere, "philosophy projects a reality in itself, which is to say, one that has been constructed in the realm of operational transcendence, within which it claims to intervene, and in terms of which it gauges all possible intervention" (Laruelle 2003, 183-4; emphasis original). However, such an operation of Transcendence is *inconsistent*, according to Laruelle. He protests:

The philosopher, legislating for reason, the life of the mind or social life, makes an exception even of the fact that he does not do what he says or does not say what he does, but, speaking the law, he makes an exception and enjoys the privilege of speaking about it and imposing it with his authority. (Laruelle 2012a, 230)

In other words, when thought makes a Philosophical Decision (that the Real is best approximated by thought-world  $x$ ), this constitutes an inconsistent operation of Transcendence by which thought both is and is not contained within the Real. For insofar as a Philosophical Decision determines that some posited thought-world accurately approximates the Real, this Decision inconsistently both belongs to and transcends the generic immanence of the Real. Laruelle rejects any and all determinations of this kind.

Laruelle is a non-Parmenidean, which means that the Real cannot be treated as ultimate reality. This is because the attempt to objectify the Real as an ultimate reality presupposes a dualistic difference between thought and the Real, and he denies such a possibility. We may therefore justifiably refer to Laruelle's position as a form of *generic non-dualism*. For Laruelle, thought and the Real constitute a non-duality (what he calls a "unilateral duality"), dictating that every attempt to determine the Real in terms of some distinguishable property is but a pipedream. Every Philosophical Decision, admittedly, creates the appearance of a conceptual duality between a thought-world and the Real, subject and object, but it is just that – an appearance. Raimon Panikkar, in his own writings, describes the problem of non-duality this way: "to ask about the 'meaning' of a thing is different when asking about reality because we cannot make reality an object that would leave the (asking) subject outside it" (Panikkar 2008, 3). Laruelle himself describes this kind of non-dual problematic in terms of thought's *radical immanence* to the Real.

We may understand radical immanence in terms of a phrase appropriated from Maurice Blondel's theology: the Real is "the beyond of thought" (Blondel quoted in Cun-

ningham 2002, xvii-iii; emphasis original).<sup>12</sup> This does not mean that thought has conceptual knowledge of what is *beyond* conceptualization – such a proposition would generate an inclosure paradox. How could thought conceptualization that which is beyond conceptualization? Rather, that the Real is the beyond of thought means that it is the transcendental *a priori* from which thought necessarily thinks. The Real is given to thought "prior-to-the-first" determination of what the Real is ontologically. Laruelle defines it as "given-without-giveness" (*don sans donation*). Said differently, the Real is given to thought without being given as being or non-being. It is presupposed without being conceptually posited since it is "*the* presupposed, *the* condition" of all thought-worlds (Laruelle 2015c, 38; emphasis original). The Real is, therefore, strictly non-phenomenological. It does not appear within the confines of a thought-world, and so every attempt to determine the Real *as* world *x* comes too late because the Real is "the strictly unreflected upon form of truth" without any definable form or content, the generic truth prior to conceptualization (Laruelle 2010d, 20). Inverting Cusanus' idea of "learned ignorance" (*docta ignorantia*), Laruelle therefore asserts that the Real is a kind of "unlearned knowledge" (*savoir indocte*). This sounds as though the Real operates like Kant's transcendental synthetic *a priori* categories of the mind, but the Real is non-thetic. Indeed, Laruelle may be said to take the road abandoned by Kant insofar as the Real may be understood as the transcendental analytical *a priori* of thought, that is, the necessary condition of thought, which not does not add to our knowledge in any way but is the generic tautology ( $A = A$ ) from which thought thinks (see Galloway 2014).<sup>13</sup> In this sense, the Real is a strictly non-conceptual form of knowledge. The implication of this is that one can articulate the transcendental *a priori* of thought without making recourse to empirical experience, pace Wilfrid Sellars (see Sellars 1997). The Real is non-inferential, immediate, and transcendently prior to any determination of what it is: the bare fact *that* there is anything at all.

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<sup>12</sup> As Anthony Paul Smith comments, non-standard philosophy "is formally similar to theology. . . . Theology thinks from God and not of God in the same way that philosophy would think of God," although the critical difference is that the Real is foreclosed to authority (Smith 2013, 95, 102). This formal similarity is unsurprising given that non-standard philosophy operates from a post-Cantorian model of consistent incompleteness, and thus shares with ontotheology, despite their divergences, the axiom that "some truth is beyond language" (Livingston 2012, 59).

<sup>13</sup> The proposition that "the Real = Real" is, of course, an iteration of the "Law of Identity." But unlike the Aristotelian version of this idea, which states that a thing is *what* it is, a non-standard Law of Identity generically states that *a thing is that it is*.

Ray Brassier, the fiercest Anglophone critic of Laruelle, dismisses non-standard philosophy precisely at this point, rejecting any appeal to intuition as unintelligible (Brassier 2012). I am sympathetic to Brassier insofar as Laruelle ties intuition specifically to the *experience* of the "human-in-person," though to what extent this identification is performative rather than decisional remains an open question. However, insofar as Brassier simply denies the very possibility of non-conceptual knowledge as but a manifestation of Wilfrid Sellars' "myth of the given" – thereby endorsing that an experience of something is a function of the *concept* of that thing – this is but dogmatic assertion. The demand that non-conceptual knowledge must be justified is incoherent, since if there is indeed such a thing as non-conceptual knowledge, it is unjustifiable, by definition, within the confines of conceptuality.

Specifically, we may understand this as a "digital" dogma. As Alexander Galloway defines it in his work on Laruelle, "the digital is the basic distinction that makes it possible to make any distinction at all" (Galloway 2014, xxix). This is another way to describe the assumption of conceptual dualism – that the Real (*s*) has some property (*F*) that makes it distinguishable from all other things, and that *F* is what allows *s* to be an object of ultimate knowledge. A digital representation of *s* bears the information that *s* is *F*, and no other information but this information (not including whatever is entailed by *s* being *F*). By contrast, an analog representation, besides the information that *s* is *F*, bears *additional* information with it that resists digital determination or systematic recombability (Dretske 1981). We might say, then, that what makes non-standard philosophy "non-standard" is what makes it *analog*, which Galloway defines in terms of "the two coming together as one" (Galloway 2014, xxix). In this sense, every conceptual determination of the Real in terms of some property bears additional information – the transcendental, non-conceptual knowledge of generic immanence – which is precisely what underdetermines the stability of every digital, conceptual duality. Every determination of *s* in terms of *F* is in "excess of itself" (Laruelle 2013b, 4). The Real is thus non-conceptual knowledge, which resists recombability to representation. However, it is not perceptual, computational, or even ontological knowledge. It is, rather, *real* knowledge of the noumenal thing-in-itself transcendently given prior-to-the-first determination of the thing-in-itself. Playing with a Derridean term, we might say that the unlearned knowledge of the Real is a *real trace*. And as a real trace, it describes precisely that which is the *relation*, which itself not relational or conceptualizable, between every-thing and its objectification as *F*. As "a subject for the relation of two signifiers" (Laruelle 2015c, 32), the

Real determines every conceptual dualism as immanent to itself "in-the-last-instance" (which is simply another way to refer to a thing's immanence to the Real).

The real trace stands in opposition to how conceptual dualism operates, which operates from the assumption that a reflexive procedure is possible whereby thought is able to obtain a transcendental viewpoint (Transcendence) by which it can conceptually determine the Real, and how it can know as much. Every dualism thus operates upon a model of conditioned datum (the domain of experience posited through an operation of Closure) and its conditioning faktum (the *a priori* of experience posited through an operation of Transcendence), which are together posited as being the givenness of the Real as a whole: a synthetic unity of datum and faktum (as posited through an operation of Domain). Standard philosophy thus treats the Real as a "relative-absolute whole" (Laruelle 2013b, 232), that is, the conceptual synthesis of *s* and *F*, transcendence and immanence, faktum and datum, ontology and epistemology. But how is such an appearance possible if thought is radically immanent to the Real? As the transcendental analytical *a priori* of thought, the Real is the *necessary* but *insufficient* condition of knowledge. What is therefore needed is a Philosophical Decision, which is the *occasional* cause that creates a thought-world. In other words, the Real is first given-without-givenness, from which then a "cut" is made. And it is this decisional cut – the *positing* of the Real as world *x* – that projects a reality, a thought-world, which then appears to stand in separation from the Real. It is a Decision that causes the Real to appear as a potential object of knowledge that has some property *F* that distinguishes it from other things. In this sense, the very distinguishability of the Real only appears in and through a Decision, that is, a Priestian operation of Transcendence.

This appearance is made possible by what Laruelle refers to as the "unilateral duality" of the Real, or what I refer to as the "non-duality" between the Real and thought. As the transcendental analytic *a priori* of thought from which thought thinks, the Real determines thought unilaterally. Unilaterality dictates that every thought-world is determined by the generic immanence of the Real without it being able to determinate the Real in return conceptually back. This one-way determination is why thought always comes "too late." Using a mixture of Laruellian and Priestian terms, we might say that from the "vision-in-One," that is, the purview of generic immanence, every Decision to determine the Real (an operation of Transcendence) is immanent to the Real in-the-last-instance (Closure). A Decision cannot objectify the Real successfully because the Real is precise-

ly that which is transcendently operational prior-to-the-first positing of the Real as anything whatsoever.<sup>14</sup>

Non-duality thus signifies if the equation of the Real is the transcendental, generic tautology of thought ( $a = a$ ), then a Decision does not add anything to the Real at all (a fact that be transcribed as  $1 + 1 = 1$ ).<sup>15</sup> From within the purview of the vision-in-One, then, the appearance of duality is explicable precisely as just that – an appearance. As Brassier puts it, this duality has "only one side" (Brassier 2007, 142). Compare this to Raimon Panikkar's observation that the appearance of duality "is the so-called *relation vel distinction rationis* (distinction of our mind, but not objective or real). It was the opinion of Śankara, Thomas Aquinas, and others that the link is only real from our side" (Panikkar 2008, 215). In this light, we may assert that standard philosophy's conceptual dualism is an operation of paradoxical "auto-entrapment." For every attempt to trap (to determine) the Real within any given thought-world only ends up trapping philosophers themselves in an inclosure paradox. This includes those who would posit the Real as incomplete and immanent, for this very positing constitutes thinking of "*immanence in the mode of transcendence*" (Laruelle 2010b, 31; emphasis original).<sup>16</sup> Inhabitants of a thought-world, insofar as they operate from the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy, trap themselves in inconsistency. And in this sense, we might go so far as to say that inclosure paradoxicality is the very essence of standard philosophy. Herein lies "the endless confusion" of thought insofar as it treats the Real as an object (Laruelle in Barber, et al 2013, 103).

Here we come full circle to the *aporia* of finitude. Insofar as we are like blind men in the forest who have never met an elephant, we truly do not know what an elephant is. Insofar as are like a fly, we cannot know we are on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Insofar as

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<sup>14</sup> I take this argument to be representative of what I call the "Openness Schema" (see appendix A, §2).

<sup>15</sup> This might sound like Laruelle is a monist of some indeterminate kind. This is, for instance, how John Milbank misreads him (Milbank 2011). However, insofar as Laruelle adheres to a kind of generic actualism, he is able to treat the plurality of thought-worlds as irreducibly pluralistic because since thought-worlds have been stripped of their representational sufficiency, and so bivalence no longer applies. Thoughts-worlds are not competing approximations of the Real, but differential spheres of performative *actualization*.

<sup>16</sup> This is why we may refer to models of the Real, even those that determine the Real *as* immanence, as models of transcendence (see appendix A).

we like a cat or dog, we cannot know the contents of the books around us. Otherwise we would cease to be finite. We would have taken an exit from immanence.

### Performance

Unlike ontological dualism, non-standard philosophy operates from a position of non-conceptual performance. Specifically, it operates from the presupposed, non-conceptual knowledge of the Real (Domain) and Closure (thought's radical immanence), while denying Transcendence (the sufficiency of thought to determine  $\Omega$ ). Laruelle is a *consistently* finite thinker who operates from an aesthetic rather than conceptual idiom of thought. Non-standard theory's consistency, is however, not logical in kind, but rigorously aesthetic and performative (cf. Ó Maoilearca 2015a, 97-140). Laruelle does what he says and says what he does in an open-ended performance without representing anything whatsoever. As performative, non-standard philosophy "exhausts itself as an immanent practice rather than as a programme," as he puts it (Laruelle 2003, 177). And this is because non-standard philosophy is theory that is inseparable from praxis, its content inseparable from form: all thoughts, as determined in-the-last-instance, are "art-thoughts" (Laruelle 2012b, 2).

We may refer to non-standard aesthetics in terms of the artificialization of thought. Laruelle has any number of terms for referring to thought-world's artificiality, foremost among them, "philo-fiction" (see Laruelle 2010c), which is a term used to designate the operations of a thought-world separated from its representational sufficiency. Specifically, we may define a thought-world, aesthetically, as a *differential sphere of performance*. For from within the "Non-Parmenidean Equation: Practice = Thought," performance "and thought are identical in-the-last-instance" (Laruelle 2012c, 114-15). A thought-world *is* its performance, it is as it does, and its "what" is its "how." We might say therefore that insofar as all thought-worlds are comprised of philo-fictions, every thought-world may be understood as a kind of "art-world." For since the Real is without appearance or presentation, there can be no "re-presenting" it; and since there is no way to re-present the Real, every philo-fiction is a kind of originary presentation of the Real (or what Laruelle sometimes refers to as a "clone"). Of course, the fictional status of philo-fictions does not mean they are somehow unreal. Indeed, given that Laruelle is an actualist (meaning that everything that is, is actual), this tells us that all philo-fictions are determined as real or actual in-the-last-instance (Del Bufalo 2003). They are real con-

structions. And what else is a "real construction" but a synonym for *techné*? – a technology, a craft, an organon, an artifice. So we may say that the artificialization of thought dictates its operationalization – that thoughts are to be *used* to perform, think, and create in new ways.<sup>17</sup> The Real is not an apophatic abyss, and non-standard philosophers do not take it as their highest vocation to stare senselessly into the opacity of immanence. Rather, non-standard philosophy is more like a cataphatic engine, that is, a means of innovation by which to create new art-worlds. As Laruelle himself declares, "Invent Philosophy!" (Laruelle quoted in Mullarkey 2012, 143).

Here we may think of another elephant other than the one we met earlier in the parable of the blind men. This elephant comes from the Buddhist Yogācārin philosopher Vasubandhu (c. 4th-5th). In *The Twenty Verses*, Vasubandhu asks us to imagine that we are seated at a magic show where a magician appears to make an elephant appear on stage. He tells us that insofar as we are unenlightened – that is, insofar as we have not realized the emptiness (*śūnya*) of the conceptual duality (*Dvaya*) of subject and object (*grāhyam grāhakaṃ ca*) – we naively believe that world is as it appears to us. In other words, we believe that the magician has actually conjured up an elephant. Yet through training and practice, we can understand how the illusion works, and enlightenment is nothing else but knowing that the elephant is an illusion. However, and this is the key point, despite our enlightenment, it still *appears* as if there is an elephant on stage. Even after enlightenment, the appearance of conceptual duality persists – it is just that one now apprehends it in a non-conceptual way (see Gold 2015, 244-8). In the same way, we might say that insofar as art-worlds are apprehended from within the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy, one believes that the elephant projected as *x* is the elephant in-itself. When one understands the hard problem of finitude, however, one suspends this Principle and is able to think non-dualistically, that is, according to the Real in-the-last-instance. Nevertheless, even after this suspension has been enacted, the appearance of a duality between thought and the Real, between one's projected elephant and the elephant in-itself persists. But this is not a problem for non-standard philosophy because it is precisely in and through such illusory elephants that we think, experiment, and perform the Real in-the-last-instance. So the goal is not to transcend the apprehension of duality, but specifically to transcend thought's supposed *sufficiency* to objectify the Real conceptually. In

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. this to Cogburn's reconstruction of OOO as a form of art, that is, "a way to make sense of things in new ways" (Cogburn 2017, 75).

this regard, the "blindness" of our finitude does not put us at distance from the Real but is precisely the transcendental condition for superpositioning and performing it. Here the "what" of reality is identical with "how" thought conceptualizes it in-the-last-instance.

In contrast to the conceptual idiom of thought, there is no onto-logical distance between the noumenal elephant (the Real) and the phenomenal elephant (philo-fiction). Every art-world is a kind of "phenomenal" performance of the Real (if one will excuse the neologism). Such a proposition stands in a repudiation of the Berkleyan/Fichtean prohibition upon thinking the unthinkable noumenal. As Laruelle declared in his well-known debate with Jacques Derrida, non-standard theory operates "*from the thing itself*" (Derrida and Laruelle 2005; emphasis original). Fittingly, it was Derrida who proclaimed "there is nothing outside the text" (Derrida 1976, 158-9), which amounts to a reiteration of the Berkleyan/Fichtean argument that we cannot get "behind" the phenomenal to the noumenal. However, if we suspend ontological duality, then what becomes clear is that we always already think from the thing-in-itself because every thought is a thing-in-itself. It is phenomenal. In this sense, we can separate the Real from ideality (logocentrism) while still recognizing the reality of all thoughts in-the-last-instance. We might even say *the text is always already outside of itself*. Non-standard philosophy is "not so much a question of breaking out of the circle," as Brassier put it in his earlier work, "as realizing that you were never inside it [the text] in the first place" (Brassier 2007, 129). Said differently, from within the vision-in-One, there is no way to distinguish the text (the finite, phenomenal projected elephant) and what is outside the text (the noumenal elephant of the Real) conceptually. We may there assert that the "problem" of an external noumenal reality is not truly a problem at all. It is an illusory *aporia* created by the procedures of standard philosophy, which creates the appearance of distance from the Real through an operation of Transcendence. One here could conceivably speak of non-standard philosophy as "externalizing" the phenomenal or "internalizing" the noumenal. But both descriptions still operate from a kind of conceptual dualism that is inappropriate, not because the difference is sublated, which is the route Hegel and German Idealism took, but rather because the phenomenal and the noumenal are held together in quantum "superposition" (see Laruelle 2010c). Superpositioning, in a basic sense, is another way to think of art-worlds not as approximations of the Real but as so many immanent performances of the Real. For the Real is indifferent to how it is superpositioned, performed, or cloned through philo-fictions. It is a "weak force" (see Laruelle 2015b). And non-standard philosophy is an alchemical means, as it were, by which to incubate and execute

an endless proliferation of artistic performances. As an underdetermined weak force, the Real bears an illimitable series of determinations and superpositions. Here, then, it is noumenals materialized "all the way down," so to speak.

We may here reinvoked our adaptation of Kant's empirical directive ("reality, whatever it is, is known only through its effects, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept of reality whatsoever"). For non-standard philosophy, the question is no longer, "What is the Real?" but "What can the Real do?" This points toward the generically empirical attitude of non-standard theory, which motivates its users to create and inhabit new art-worlds, new philo-fictions, new imagined elephants by which to superposition, perform, and explore in endlessly creative ways. For if we take this empirical directive as axiomatic, then – to play upon Spinoza's famous dictum about the body – we might say *we do not even know what the Real is capable of*. If the Real is only knowable in and through its effects, then we are in the position of blind men in a forest, a fly on the ceiling, a cat or dog in the library who cannot determine their lack of comprehension and so do not even know aprioristically what the Real can do .

This is, in so many words, what Laruelle points to as the "democracy-of-thought" (Laruelle 2012a), that is, an open-ended, performative conjunction and aesthetic exchange of art-worlds with no one in a position of royal transcendence. Here, philosophy, science, politics, and art converge as one, unable to be disentangled from each other in-the-last-instance. And this is because all art-worlds are forms of *rationality, experimentation, relationality, and creativity* all at once.

### **Non-Standard Religion**

What would it look like to run religion through the organon of non-standard philosophy? Of course, Laruelle has already undertaken a number of religious experiments in terms of heresy, messianism, Gnosticism, and mysticism (Laruelle 2010a, 2015a, 2015d; cf. Dubilet 2015); and others have taken up theology (Smith 2013, 2011) and Buddhism in their own non-standard work (Wallis, Pepper, Steingass 2013). However, in what follows, I offer a theory of what we may call "non-standard religion" in general, which runs parallel to Laruelle's account of standard philosophy.

Let "the Sacred" be one of the first names of the Real (see n. 6). In this light, the axiom of non-standard religion is that all performance is transcendently preceded by

and presupposes an underdetermined domain of value: "the Sacred."<sup>18</sup> This dictates that all performance is immanent *to* the Sacred, and so is unable to determine what the Sacred is or how this is so. In Priestian terms, non-standard religion operates from the presupposition of Domain (the generic immanence of the Sacred) and Closure (performance's immanence to the Sacred), but is foreclosed from any operation of Transcendence by which thought could determine the Sacred as an ultimate end. Our project is, therefore, to provide an account of what the Sacred (Domain) is like from within finitude (Closure) such that transcendental determination of what the Sacred is (Transcendence) is explicated as both impossible and inconsistent. This would humble any attempt to treat the Sacred as an ultimate *telos*. Such would stage usher in a "de-ultimatization" or "de-teleologization" of sacrality, for the Sacred is precisely that which is prior-to-the-first determination of itself as a goal. Or, said differently, it is the real trace anterior to every determination of the Sacred.

"Standard religion," if we may use the term, is classifiable as a species of conceptual dualism, specifically, a type of *teleological dualism*. Teleological dualism operates from the following assumption: that the Sacred (*s*) has some property (*F*) that makes it distinguishable from all other ends, and that *F* determines *s* as an object of ultimate achievement. The assumption here is that performance can realize the Sacred as an end (*telos*) through practice (*pragma*). We may describe this idea in terms of "the Principle of Sufficient Hierophany" (as derived from Eliade's term, "hierophany": an appearance of something sacred). This Principle states that both that the Sacred is a goal and that performance is able to realize that goal through some posited way of life. The implication of this principle is that thought is able to obtain a dualistic distance by which to represent the Sacred as an object of realization for performance. We may refer to this as the "Pla-

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<sup>18</sup> The term, "the Sacred," derives from combination of the work of Mircea Eliade and Ann Taves. Specifically, the Sacred is an *intentional* (and therefore not necessarily existent) object of ultimate value correlated to human consciousness, both apprehended through, and ascribed to, various things (Eliade 1969, i; Taves 2009, 16-55; cf. Rennie 2017). Here I offer a *non-phenomenological* and *non-ascriptive* reinterpretation of this term through a non-standard mutation of Eliade's philosophy of religion. I am of one accord with Bryan Rennie's sentiment that if Eliade "expressed a coherent understanding of religion which allows for sacrality to be identified with the ascription of reality without involving the assumption of autonomy, without defining sacrality in terms of a supernatural and independent ontology, he has surely made a contribution to the history of religions" (Rennie 2017:9).

tonic" heart of standard religion. Here Nietzsche's reconstruction of Plato is illuminating: "The real world, attainable to the wise, the pious, the virtuous man – he dwells in it, *he is it*. (Oldest form of the idea, relatively sensible, simple, convincing. Transcription of the proposition 'I, Plato, *am* the truth.')" (Nietzsche 2003, 50; emphasis original). The assumption here is that there is a pre-established harmony, or isomorphism, between teleology and sacrality, which dictates that the Sacred is the realizable goal of performance.

In order to put the Principle of Sufficient Hierophany into action, a "Hierophanic Decision" is required. The Principle states that, in principle, the Sacred is given as a goal whereas a Decision states *what* that goal (the *telos*) is specifically given as and *how* that goal is realizable (the *pragma*) in order to achieve what we may generically refer to as a "maximally beneficial" way of life, such as enlightenment, salvation, etc. Givenness, as we have already seen, is a phenomenological term, which signifies that the operative assumption of standard religion is that the Sacred appears, that is, that the Sacred gives itself as hierophany X, Y, or Z. Specifically, the Sacred appears teleologically: either as *the* purpose of life (as in ontotheology) or the purposelessness of life (as in meontotheology, that is, nihilism). In this sense, standard religion – as well as its mirror, "standard secularism" – operates from a model of teleological rivalry, for regardless of whether one treats the Sacred as an ultimate purpose (ontotheology) or ultimate purposelessness (meontotheology), one operates from the assumption that the Sacred is given as a goal, or the negation thereof. Teleological rivalry is the constitutive structure of both standard religion and secularism in that they both operate from the assumption that religions are so many spheres of representation and performance competing to conceptualize and achieve the one true maximally beneficial form of life.

As opposed to standard religion, let us explore a non-Platonic model of the Sacred. Here the Sacred would not be determined as an ultimate end. This is because the attempt to objectify the Sacred as an ultimate end presupposes a dualistic difference between performance and the Sacred, which is inconsistent. Why? Let us take the Sacred as the *generic immanence* that is transcendently prior to its objectification as an ultimate end. We may define the Sacred, then as the transcendental analytic *a priori* of performance, that is, the generic tautology ( $a = a$ ) from which we think and performs. In this sense, the Sacred, strictly speaking, is a form of non-conceptual knowledge, which we can articulate as a transcendental *a priori* of performance without making recourse to any experience, including even religious or mystical experience. Specifically, the Sacred is given-without-givenness, that is, given to thought and performance prior-to-the-first objectifica-

tion of the Sacred as an ultimate end (that is, as the ultimate purpose or purposelessness of life). From the within the vision-in-One, therefore, *the Sacred does not appear*. It is not a hierophany. It is, rather, the non-inferential, immediate given that transcendently draws performance into action prior-to-the-first-determination of goal-making. The Sacred is that which always already lures thought into a performative aim, whether that aim is spontaneous or sustained, near or far, great or small. Prior to any conceptual determination, we may describe the Sacred precisely as the transcendental analytic *a priori* of performance.<sup>19</sup>

As the transcendental analytical *a priori* of performance, the Sacred may be defined as the necessary but insufficient condition for goal-making. The Sacred is transcendently given-without-giveness, and only thereafter posited as goal X, Y, or Z. For in order to make a goal, a Hierophanic Decision is required. A Hierophanic Decision may be defined as the *occasional* cause that makes a teleological formation, a differential sphere of performance, possible. Every differential sphere of performance constitutes a kind of cut from the generic immanence of the Sacred, which *conceptualizes* the apparent separation of "what is" from "what should be." Mutating Eliadean terms, teleological dualism operates in terms of a conditioning/conditioned schema whereby the conditioned datum (the profane plane of experience as posited through an operation of Closure) and its conditioning faktum (the Sacred as posited through an operation of Transcendence) are posited together as the givenness of the Sacred as a whole: the synthetic unity of the Sacred and the profane (the Domain). Here the Sacred and profane, problem and solution, diagnosis, etiology, prognosis, and treatment plan are all posited *simultaneously*. The Sacred and its opposite, the profane, are a single package deal (cf. Eliade 1959, 10). In Priestian terms, standard religion may be said to operate from the assumption that an operation of Transcendence, whether brought about by human or superhuman autonomy (or some combination thereof), can be effected by which to reveal the Sacred as an ultimate goal realizable through religious performance. In other words, the assumption is that either adherents of standard religion can obtain a transcendental viewpoint (Transcendence) by which they can determine the teleology of the Sacred ( $\Omega$ ) or that the Sacred (God, Being, Brahman, etc.) reveals and determines *itself* through a hierophanic operation of Transcendence. Either way, the knowledge and realization of the Sacred as

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<sup>19</sup> In the language of Jorge Ferrer's participatory approach to transpersonal phenomena, we refer to the Sacred as *the undetermined mystery of reality* (see Ferrer 2017). One might helpfully contextualize my project here within the "participatory turn" (see Ferrer 2008; cf. Allison 2017).

ultimate end is made possible. Here we may mimic Laruelle and propose that adherents of standard religion may be said to project an ultimate end for themselves, which is to say, one that has been constructed in the realm of operational transcendence, within which they claim to intervene, and in terms of which they gauge all possible interventions.

This operation of Transcendence is inconsistent, however, given that the Sacred is precisely that which unilaterally determines performance in-the-last-instance. This dictates that thought is unable to determine the Sacred as an ultimate end of performance. Because from within the vision-in-One, every attempt to turn the Sacred into a realizable end of performance overlooks the fact that the Sacred is transcendently prior to every teleological determination. Mutating Laruelle, Priest, and Eliade together, we can say that from the vision-in-One, every conceptualization of the Sacred (the operation of Transcendence) is in fact transcendently immanent to the Sacred (the presupposed Domain) in-the-last-instance (Closure). In other words, thought is unable to determine the Sacred as an object of realization, because every performance is immanent to the Sacred to begin with. This we can understand that every Hierophanic Decision, every posited end, is only apparent and relative to the differential sphere of performance itself created through that Decision.<sup>20</sup> This appearance is possible due to the non-dualistic relationship between the Sacred and performance, whereby the Sacred unilaterally determines every performance as sacred in-the-last-instance. And this fact dictates that every determination of the Sacred as an ultimate end is one-sided, nothing but another occasion of the *relation vel distinction rationis* (distinction of our mind, but not ultimate in-the-last-instance). We may now assert, then, that since all religious worlds are immanent to the Sacred, we are all unable to objectify the Sacred from the outside. We are always already performing it prior to our conceptualization of it, and so are unable to determinate what it is. Performance is suspended in an axiological openness whose boundaries it is unable to demarcate, and any attempt to determine them reinstates the basic *aporia* of finitude. For insofar as thought posits the Sacred as religious world *x* to which it is supposedly immanent, this very positing constitutes an inconsistent operation of Transcendence by which thought both is and is not contained within world *x* conceptually.

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<sup>20</sup> Every Decision serves a *differential* function existentially and politically. As Eliade puts it, we formulate hierarchies of values in order to make sense of, or "cosmicize" the Real, into the religious worlds we then inhabit (Eliade 1982, 201).

However, if we go way of non-standard religion, then we are free to bypass this *aporia* through the suspension of both the Principles of Sufficient Philosophy and Hierophany and their decisional operations.<sup>21</sup> Insofar as we recognize the unilateral determination of performance by the Sacred, we are free to treat every Hierophanic Decision in a religiously pluralistic way. Religions are so many "hierofictions" – a proposition that signifies the artificialization of religion.<sup>22</sup> Here, therefore, we may invoke Eliade, who declares, "no 'form' [of the Sacred] is exempt from degradation and decay, no 'history' is final" (Eliade 2004, xxiv). Mutated through non-standard religion, this declaration not only undermines any standard form of exclusivism, inclusivism, or pluralism, it also dictates that there can be no such thing, definitionally, as an ultimate end. Moreover, and as Eliade writes, "we cannot be sure that there is anything... that has not at some time in human history been somewhere transformed into a hierophany" (Eliade 1996, 11); or as he put it elsewhere, "the Sacred is manifest in an infinity of forms" (Eliade 1960, 353). In other words, because there can be no such thing as an ultimate end, the Sacred is precisely that which allows for an infinite proliferation of hierofictions, none of which is sufficient to determine it in-the-last-instance. The Sacred is infinitely performable. The Sacred allows for an illimitable number of axioms.

If we begin from the axiom that all of us are like blind men in a forest, flies on a ceiling, or cats and dogs in a library, then we do not and *cannot* know what the Sacred is, or even what it would mean for something to be the "ultimate" end of existence. Because from within non-standard forms of religion, we no longer ask "what is the Sacred?" or "Which religion is true?" We rather ask, "What can the Sacred do?" To adapt our revised empirical directive to religion, we might say that the Sacred, whatever it is, is known through its effects, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept of sacrality. What constitutes a maximally beneficial form of life is no longer a dogmatic given, but an *open* and *empirical* question.

To think the Sacred from within finitude: such would usher in a democracy-of-thought, a democracy-of-religions, or, even better, a "parliament of religions" (with a nod

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<sup>21</sup> A certain history of philosophy and religion would be possible through narrating the relationship between these two principles in terms of their dual-operationalization (ontotheology), the suspension of religion's sufficiency in favor of philosophy's sufficiency (secularism, atheism, materialism), or vice versa (as in various forms of Christian orthodoxy (see Adams 2014; Hart 2004); or their *dual-suspension*. The history of such dual-suspensions has yet to be written.

<sup>22</sup> As Peter Sloterdijk suggests, religions are "anthropotechnics," that is, technologies of the human being (Sloterdijk 2013).

to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair). For the formation of such a parliament of religions would initiate a true *scientia sacra*, as if for the first time. And such a science would be pluralistic, open-ended, empirical, performative, and democratic (cf. Blake 2016).

### Conclusion

It is one of the great ironies of post-metaphysical thinking that in attempting to reject a transcendental viewpoint, it so often ends up with royal knowledge anyway. This is because to know the boundaries of immanence, one would have to know where immanence ends and transcendence begins. But how could one ever determine the boundaries of immanence from within the vision-in-One? We thus find ourselves suspended in this indeterminate, open interval between the finite and a limit we cannot comprehend, caught up in the creation of art-worlds from which we design and enact an endless supplementation of non-dualistic thought and performance without finality. Of course, this does not mean that we cannot make, or have not made, progress in knowledge. Relative, finite progress is always possible empirically and ethically. It is rather the idea of *ultimate* progress that has been rendered unintelligible.<sup>23</sup> We might again say that the limits of thought are boundaries that cannot be crossed, but we do not even know what they are. And since we do not know the limits of the thought, *we do not even know what the Sacred is capable of*. Organized research programs into the Sacred are needed.

It therefore becomes imperative to think pluralistically and non-dualistically, that is, to think *generically*. For it is, finally, only a rigorously generic thought of the infinite, which would be able to approach the infinite freed from the authority of both philosophy and religion – an infinity that we could never conquer through conceptualization or achievement, but requires open-ended experimentation. And such a thought of the infinite that dictates the incompleteness of the finite.<sup>24</sup> We never find closure on the Real or the Sacred. And why would we want to? If indeed our goal is not to transcend the apprehension of duality, but specifically to transcend the apparent sufficiency of thought to conceptualize infinity, then non-standard religion may be understood as an apparatus of the

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<sup>23</sup> In order to account for *how* such progress from within non-standard theory, the relationship between *art* and *truth* would need to be explicated (see Graham 1996).

<sup>24</sup> A generic infinity is closest to Cusanus' model of the infinite in that, unlike the Scotist-Cartesian lineage's treatment of infinity as a "clear and distinct idea," it is a rigorously finite and purely *negative* concept.

impossible: the site of unending production for thought and performance. As Vasubandhu insists, after enlightenment, the appearance of duality persists. Conceptuality is not the enemy, but a conventional tool to be *understood*.

We always already find ourselves within the finite, unable to determine the infinite. However, this should not drive us to overcome this indeterminacy and so fall into an inclosure paradox, but rather to embrace endless art-making: an "open *doxa*" of performance that is more "musical" than it is dialectical. We may understand this process of art-making as a kind of *empirical mysticism*, a mysticism that cannot be separated from philosophy, science, politics, or art. For *sacrality* cannot be separated from the designing of art-worlds, and every art-world is a site of rationality, experimentation, relationality, and creation. In this sense, we might say such empirical mysticism is the very means of our own self-creation and becoming. For in the end, a non-standard procedure is nothing else but an *asceticism* – a "divinely artificial art" (Nietzsche 2010, 37). And so we offer a closing imperative: invent future religion!

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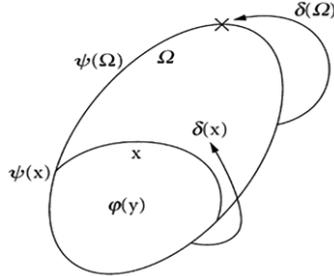
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## Appendix A: Inclosure and Openness Schemas

1. Inclosure Schema (see Priest 2002, 156):

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (1) $\Omega = \{y; \varphi(y)\}$ exists and $\psi(\Omega)$ | Existence                                  |
| (2) if $x \subset \Omega$ and $\psi(x)$                    | (a) $\delta(x)$ not- $\in$ x Transcendence |
|  | (b) $\delta(x) \in \Omega$ Closure         |

Figure 1. Inclosure Schema

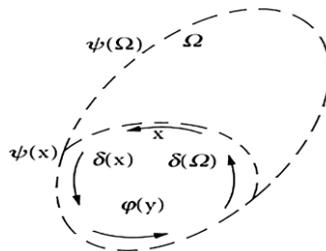


## 2. Non-standard Philosophy's Openness Schema<sup>25</sup>

The Real ( $\Omega$ ) is immanence ( $y$ ) given-without-giveness ( $\varphi$ ), as in  $\varphi(y)$ . Non-standard philosophers think according-to the Real, meaning the  $\Omega$  is non-conceptual and thus undetermined, as in  $\psi(\Omega)$ . Let us posit  $x$ , the domain of thought, which is taken as a subset of  $\Omega$ , and that  $\psi(x)$ . Together,  $\psi(\Omega)$  and  $\psi(x)$  make up the axiomatic basis of non-standard philosophy. Next, let us apply an operator,  $\delta$  (a Philosophical Decision) to  $x$ , which conceptualize  $\Omega$  specifically in terms of  $F$ . However, insofar as  $x \subseteq \Omega$ , then  $\delta(x)$  is immanent to the undetermined limits of both  $x$  and  $\Omega$  in-the-last-instance. Thus non-standard philosophy is constituted by an "open *doxa*" of performance that is *aesthetically* consistent and incomplete.

- |     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| (1) | $\Omega = \{y \mid \varphi(y)\}$ is given and $\psi(\Omega)$ | Domain                                  |
| (2) | if $x \subseteq \Omega$ and $\psi(x)$                        | (a) $\delta(x) \in \Omega$ Closure      |
|     |  | (b) $\delta(\Omega) \in \Omega$ Closure |

Figure 2. Openness Schema



<sup>25</sup> Cf. Gangle 2014. Elsewhere Gangle proposes that "diagrams are the appropriate method for investigating immanence immanently" (Gangle 2016, 2).