

**Manuel DeLanda & Graham Harman.** *The Rise of Realism*. Polity 2017. 240 pp. \$64.95 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781509519026); \$22.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781509519033).

Manuel DeLanda and Graham Harman's recent co-authored book takes the form of a dialogue. Like much of the work being published by Polity, including Harman's *Immaterialism* (2016), the book is notably characterized by a pithy and accessible form intended for both a general readership and for professionals. The conversation is structured as a comparison of their respective fundamental principles with a particular emphasis on the subject of realism and its relation to DeLanda's 'neo-materialism' and Harman's object-oriented ontology. The two philosophers engage in light, friendly debate, but the book is primarily a venue for them to clearly present their foremost positions and to establish common ground in their mutual endorsement of realism. That is, they set out to demonstrate the extent to which anti-realist assumptions have pervaded post-Kantian philosophy and to chart a new, non-anthropocentric course for contemporary philosophy.

In the first chapter, the two discuss the relation of realism and materialism. While both thinkers are realists, DeLanda is a strident materialist who rejects any appeal to the transcendent, whereas Harman denies the existence of matter, privileging instead essence and form. In chapter two, they review the fundamental claims of realism and anti-realism, distilling from each orientation nine core propositions. They then turn to the history of philosophy to consider thinkers whose stance on these positions has variously shaped their respective ontologies and epistemologies. In the process, they attempt to refute these anti-realist claims. In the third chapter, they compare their realist ontologies. Though they continue to disagree about the existence of essences, both endorse a flat ontology that includes entities with an enduring identity rather than seeing all things as in a persistent state of becoming. Chapter four concerns their take on phenomenal experience and the impact of these commitments on their respective epistemologies. The fifth and final chapter is devoted to questions of space, time, and science. Here, at the close of their conversation, they recap where their ideas converge and differ. In addition to their shared commitment to realism, they both vehemently oppose anthropocentrism. However, they remain at odds on the status of matter. Additionally, where DeLanda sees objects as dynamic and relational, Harman contends that autonomous objects possess inertia and only change intermittently. While Harman considers the practice of philosophy as akin to art, DeLanda regards philosophy as closer to the sciences.

One of the book's greatest strengths is that it helps readers identify the differences that separate two thinkers who are often more closely associated than their ideas warrant. Their comparative approach allows them to map the contours of the 'two very different schools of realism' that each endorses (151). In addition to their focus on realism, Harman and DeLanda offer a brief overview of new materialism and object-oriented ontology that explains where the two come together and part ways. While their conversation allows them to survey the substantial common ground they share, what is more noteworthy is that it reveals just how diametrically opposed the two are on fundamental questions. Beyond what it reveals about their individual styles, grievances, hang-ups, and core commitments, this volume offers a review of the principal problems, topics, and preoccupations of the philosophical camp each represents.

This work will be particularly useful for those interested in the realism / anti-realism debate. At its best, the book delineates a variety of realist and anti-realist positions and ably describes what is at stake in taking up these positions. The authors situate their own thought among this constellation of ideas, insightfully engaging with the work of thinkers past and present. The second chapter is

undoubtedly the strongest portion of the book. Building on the work of Lee Braver, the authors develop a clear, accurate, and thorough rendering of the core realist and anti-realist claims. This accessible treatment clarifies the terms of the debate, demonstrates just how entrenched anti-realism is in the history of Western philosophy, and shows how the newest trends in continental thought are taking things in a fundamentally different direction. Here, Harman and DeLanda make clear just how significant a break contemporary philosophers have made with respect to canonical continental thinkers.

The book's chief deficiency is its lack of focus and rigor. Of course, one must make certain allowances given its conversational format. Even so, the authors' treatment of numerous subjects is far too superficial. They continually flit from one topic to the next, leaving their arguments underdeveloped. While this keeps them from getting mired in esoteric minutiae, their meandering style comes across as undisciplined. Ultimately, this risks making the book unsatisfying for both professionals and novices.

Another point of contention I have with the book may appear trivial, but it concerns something that significantly diminishes the book's effectiveness. In several places, the authors make reference to a set of guidelines that they agreed to adhere to beforehand. Other parameters are apparent but unstated. For example, the interlocutors rarely hold the floor for more than three paragraphs at a time. In addition, the book lacks conventional prefatory remarks that would provide the reader with a sense of the authors' intentions, motivations, and the limitations they set for their conversation. Without these, the book gives the impression of a fragmentary work that cannot be properly situated. One is left wondering about the authors' aims in writing this book. What is their purpose? What was the nature of this discussion? Was it conducted virtually? What was its duration? How did they arrive at the decision to collaborate in this way? Is this the complete text? What were the predetermined parameters of their conversation? Nothing would have been lost by including even a brief statement about the authors' motivations and formal plans for the book. The lack of an introduction, however, is glaring and galling.

The tone of the book considerably damages its credibility as well. DeLanda is the main offender in this respect but Harman is not guiltless. The authors cattily dish about their contempt for certain peers who they readily deride by name, even going so far as to recount past conversations. Perhaps the effect would have been more palatable had these opinions been expressed with a modicum of wit, but there is none to be found here. As a result, the exchange often gives the impression of gossip rather than academic critique.

Harman and DeLanda's discussion provides a condensed and laudably accessible expression of their respective ideas. However, these contentions can be found in more complete, rigorous form in their other works. Ultimately, few novel ideas are forwarded in this book. DeLanda's contributions to the volume are of particularly little moment. His trademark scientism and shallow eclecticism are on full display here. Harman's contributions, on the other hand, are of markedly higher quality. His claims, if not new to this work, are compelling and he offers a more charitable reading of other philosophers. While this book offers the uninitiated a clear index of each thinker's principal ideas, better expressions of these are available elsewhere. With the exception of the second chapter, the professional philosopher who is familiar with the work of DeLanda and Harman will not find much to get excited about here.

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