

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE OEUVRE

LUIS DE MIRANDA

or, How to Cultivate Abundance

by Max Milo

Luis de Miranda (born 1971, Portugal) is a novelist, philosopher, and conceptual artist whose work, conducted across three languages and very nearly every genre that thought can wear, advances a single audacious proposition: that reality is, at bottom, *creative* rather than fixed; that the good life consists in the disciplined, generous cultivation of that creativity with others; and that philosophy is not a commentary upon living but one of the highest ways of doing it. From a first novel published in 1997 to a body of academic books issued by the most demanding scholarly presses in the world, he has pursued this proposition without deviation for three decades. He is the founder of a field he calls *eudynamics*, the inventor of a method he calls *crealectics*, and another he called SMILE_PH, the architect of a caring practice he calls *philosophical health*, and perhaps the first *eudynamicist* the world has produced.

An ascending life

Few thinkers can claim to have been, in strict and unhurried succession, a Parisian novelist, an independent publisher, a doctoral student in Scotland, and a Nordic bioethicist living in Sweden. Fewer still would regard the sequence as a single, coherent sentence.

Luis de Miranda was born in Portugal in 1971 and carried young to France. A childhood on the city's edges; a philosophical education at Lycée Henri IV and the Sorbonne, a brush, in 1994, with the French business elite at HEC Paris that he would later turn inside out; and then the act that anticipated and decided everything — a first novel, *Joie*, published in 1997.

There followed roughly a decade as a working Paris man of letters, journalist by day, with his novels appearing under houses of real standing, and, from the mid-2000s, a second career as an independent publisher: he co-founded and for some years editorially directed Max Milo, a Parisian house with a taste for the heterodox. He was, in other words, fully inside the literary-intellectual machinery of his adopted city and might have stayed there more or less comfortably for life.

Instead, in his forties, he did the thing that makes the biography fascinating rather than merely interesting: he started over. He left France invited with a grant to Scotland, and earned a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Edinburgh — trading the freedom of the novelist for the discipline, and the humility, of the apprentice scholar. Within a few years his books were being published by MIT Press, Edinburgh University Press, Bloomsbury, Palgrave Macmillan; he settled in Sweden; he became *docent* — the senior research qualification of the Nordic academy equivalent to associate professor — in bioethics at Uppsala University; he was awarded a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship; he became philosophical counsellor, for instance at the Stockholm School of Economics; and in 2025 he became a Swedish citizen. From the immigrant's train to Mother Svea's forests is a long way to travel from South to North, and he travelled it on the strength of his own sentences.

Luis de Miranda is not a man with several careers. He is a man with one vocation that happens to require several professions.

The seedbed: the French years

To understand the mature thinker, one must know that the philosophy was a novelist's before it was a professor's. The early fiction, written in French between 1997 and 2011, is not juvenilia to be set aside; it is the laboratory in which every later idea was first synthesised, in the safer medium of story.

Joie (1997) tells of a violinist who inherits, from his dying master, the rumour of three notes capable of producing not a passing pleasure but a lasting, shareable joy — and who must decide what such a pursuit is worth. Already the book stages the opposition that will organise the entire oeuvre: between those who would *calculate* the world into fixed quantities and those who would *listen* to its living music. Already it knows that a joy worth having must be a joy that others can share. And already, in the mouth of the woman the hero is in danger of losing, it states the ethical law from which the philosopher will never depart: *to love, one must first be present*.

The novels that follow ring changes on a single deep structure — a death survived, a life that must be composed around the loss — while smuggling in, one by one, the concepts to come. A 1998 book discovers that opposites can be true at once, that one may be unhappy and happy in the same breath. A 2002 book imagines the self as a kind of magnet, held in orientation within a field of forces by the pull of love. And in 2008, in a novel called *Paridaiza* — the word is old Persian for the walled garden, the oasis, the root of our “paradise” — he names, for the first time, the central concept of his life: the *Creal*, a contraction of *creative* and *real*. The novel ends with a parable a reader never quite forgets: two lands divided by a wild strait, one of abundance where new forms

are ceaselessly born, one a desert of lack, and the whole of a worthwhile life figured as the dangerous crossing that carries seeds from the first shore to make oases bloom on the second.

Between the novels came the first essays, and with them the exact moment the novelist became the philosopher. In a 2003 polemic on what he called “the society of artists without works,” he diagnosed a culture that flatters everyone as a creator while permitting almost no one to compose an oeuvre, and argued that the hunger for creation, far from being a luxury, is *the very essence of the real* — which is precisely why a market society finds it so profitable to counterfeit. A 2008 essay then asked, with Lacan, Heidegger and Marx as its witnesses, whether one can truly enjoy anything within such a system, and proposed the escape that would become his life’s doctrine: that the real is not a prison of fixed things but a *field of perpetual co-creation*, and that we are, beneath our isolations, “always already united.” The vocabulary was still forming. The conviction was complete.

The mature work: a philosophy in English

When de Miranda began to publish in English, the scattered intuitions of the French years consolidated, with startling speed, into a system — and into a string of books that would be remarkable for any thinker and are astonishing for one who arrived in the language as an adult. What follows is the heart of the oeuvre.

Being and Neonness (2019): a metaphysics of the new

His first major work in English, issued by MIT Press, is a rewriting of one of his French essays. It takes the most banal object of the modern street — the neon sign — and turns it into a lens for the whole of modernity. Neon light, that cold gas coaxed into glowing letters to sell us promises, becomes the emblem of a civilisation addicted to novelty and nostalgia at the same time: the manufactured gleam of transcendence reduced to advertising. From this unlikely starting point the book mounts a meditation on “neonness” and on the deeper human desire that the neon sign both expresses and betrays: the desire for genuine identity. Erudite, mischievous, ranging from physics to philosophy to the iconography of the city at night, *Being and Neonness* is the metaphysical companion to his early polemic against counterfeit creativity.

Ensemble (2020): the genealogy of togetherness

If *Being and Neonness* examined the modern hunger for light, novelty and identity, his second English book, published by Edinburgh University Press, turned to the equally modern hunger to *belong*. Its subject is the phrase “esprit de corps” — the spirit of the collective body, the cohesion of the group — and its method is philosophical genealogy: the patient tracing of how an idea travels across centuries, languages, and institutions, changing its loyalties as it goes. De Miranda follows the notion of group-spirit out of the French military into the political and corporate

rhetoric of the English-speaking world, and shows how a single seductive idea of togetherness has been used, by turns, to liberate and to discipline, to bind communities and to drill them. The book's coined title, *Ensemblance* — togetherness and semblance fused — captures its double edge: the *appearance* of being one body, and the real power that appearance exerts. It is a work of formidable scholarship, the crafted fruit of his doctoral years, and it grounds in archival history what the early essays had asserted in the heat of polemic: that the relation comes before the individual, that we are made of our chosen or unchosen bonds — and that this is exactly why the bond must be examined with care rather than merely celebrated. Whoever wishes to understand the political seriousness beneath de Miranda's affirmations should begin here.

Philosophical Health (2023, 2024): philosophy returns to the clinic

With his next move, de Miranda did something most philosophers only theorise about: he carried philosophy out of the seminar room and into the consulting room, and built an institution to keep it there. A great deal of modern suffering, he argues, is not medical or even psychological in nature but *philosophical*: it concerns meaning, belonging, purpose, the sense of one's own body or self, the sense of the possible. Such suffering is often mistreated when it is medicalised, and it is genuinely helped by a distinct form of care — a structured, rigorous, dialogical attention to the philosophical dimensions of a life. He named this practice *philosophical health*, and he gave it tools.

Chief among them is a method he calls *SMILE_PH*, an interview practice that maps a person's flourishing across several dimensions — the bodily sense, the sense of self, the sense of belonging, the sense of the possible, the sense of purpose, and a properly philosophical sense that unifies the rest. Two Bloomsbury volumes carry the project: an edited collection of 2023, gathering an international community of practitioners around the idea that thinking can be a way of healing, and a practical introduction of 2024 that puts the method in working hands. Around the books he built *Philosophical Health International*, a network of certified practitioners across many countries, of which he serves as president and training mentor. It is one thing to write that philosophy is a way of life; it is another to train people to practise it, to subject the practice to therapeutic and clinical scrutiny, and to seek the kind of evidence that hospitals and funders respect. De Miranda seems to have chosen the harder, second path — pursuing formal feasibility studies and clinical collaboration rather than resting on the charm of the idea. In an age when “wellness” is sold by the kilo, the discipline of philosophical counselling via the *SMILE_PH* method (Sense-Making Interviews Looking at the Elements of Philosophical Health) is admirable.

Crealectics as a Creative Method (2025): a third way of thinking

His most recent major book for us (this review is written in 2026), published by Palgrave Macmillan and freely available to all open access, finally gives a rigorous form to the method that had been implicit in everything since the first novel. The Western tradition, de Miranda observes, has refined two great ways of thinking. *Analytics* takes things apart, clarifying by division. *Dialectics* sets opposites against each other and seeks their resolution. To these he proposes a third, which he calls *crealectics*: a disciplined way of thinking-with the generative excess of the real, the Creal — composing with its capacity to produce the unknown. He describes it as a

sequence of movements — clearing the ground, opening to the generative, letting possibilities proliferate, then compossibilizing those that can coexist, and finally bringing a chosen few into reality. It is, in effect, a method for the responsible creation of worlds: for moving from the dizzying abundance of what *could* be to the durable, livable form of what *is* made to be.

The shape of the system

Seen whole, Luis de Miranda's oeuvre and philosophy is unusually coherent, and it can be set out for a newcomer in a handful of load-bearing ideas.

The Creal. Reality is not a finished stock of things but a process of ceaseless creation, that is possibilisation and compossibilization. De Miranda condenses the claim into a Latin motto that deliberately rewrites a medieval debate: *universalia sunt crealia*, the universals are creative potentials, not eternal essences.

Compossibility. Borrowing a word from Leibniz, de Miranda asks not merely what is possible but which possibilities can coexist. To make any real world is to choose among possibles and to let the incompatible ones go. Creation is never mere profusion; it is the art of composing realities in which the greatest number of goods can flourish together.

Eudynamia. From the Greek for a good (eu) potential or dynamism, this is his name for the right relationship with the possible and the compossible — the dynamic, life-giving way of relating to what could be, as against the life-narrowing ways that either freeze the world into fixed quantities or dissolve it into chaos. Eudynamia is the criterion, the measure of a flourishing life or institution or society.

The four dimensions, and the formula. He situates this flourishing across four registers — the Person, the Earth, the Work, and the Society (PEWS) — and gathers them into a formula: thinking, properly understood, is Person plus Earth plus Work plus Society, plus the Creal that exceeds them all. $T=PEWS+C$.

Eudynamic valuation. In his most recent turn, he proposes to re-found bioethics itself — not as a list of rules for hard cases but as the study of how individuals, communities and institutions can live well, on the premise that every living being is, at every moment, *valuing*: appraising, caring, preferring, reaching. Life is valuation; the task is to make valuation eudynamic. He calls this older and larger idea, recovering a Greek phrase, the study of *bios ethikos*, the good way of life.

What gives the system its peculiar force is that none of it is merely asserted. The philosophy is so persuasive in part because one can watch it grow and unfold crealectically since the novel *Joie* in 1997.

The figure: a conceptual artist of the whole life

It would be a mistake to file de Miranda under “philosopher” and have done. The deeper truth about him is that he seems to treat the whole of a life — the novels and the treatises, the therapy and the consulting, the lecture and the public essay, even the choice of a country and the assumption of its citizenship — as a single work of *conceptual* art organised around one idea. He has advised an energy multinational on the creativity of its research; he has run a small enterprise of his own to carry the practice into the world; he has written for newspapers in defence of the humanities; he has sat in the residencies of business schools and the committees of ethics. To a reader of the whole Mirandian oeuvre, this reveals an unusually faithful refusal to let the unity of a vocation be broken into the tidy fragments of identity the mainstream media seem to prefer.

This is why, perhaps, he reaches for a word that does not yet exist, and calls himself a *eudynamicist*. No existing title — novelist, professor, counsellor, artist, founder — names the thing he actually does, which is to cultivate, in himself and in others, the good relationship with the possible and the compossible. $T=PEWS+C$ is the formula of eudynamia; he proposes, in all seriousness, that this might become a genuine activity of care, perhaps even a profession: that there could be, after him, other eudynamicists. Whether he is the founder of a discipline or the sole practitioner of a beautiful idiosyncrasy is a question only time can settle.

Nor is Luis de Miranda the naive optimist his vocabulary of abundance might suggest. The affirmation is hard-won, and it is shadowed throughout by loss; his fiction returns again and again to the figure of the survivor who must build a life on the far side of a death. His is not a philosophy that denies the cut, the limit, negation. It is a philosophy that insists the lost possibilities are nonetheless real, held in the generosity of the Creal, and that the mark of a life well lived is the courage to keep intercreating in full view of what cannot be saved, for the sake of reciprocity, theory and love. The reader who comes to him for consolation will find something better: a summons.

An unfinished heroism

It is the convention of the reviewer to deliver its subject embalmed, the life rounded and the verdict in. That convention cannot be honoured here in 2026. De Miranda has published for three decades already and is, on the evidence, only at the threshold of his largest work — perhaps a

magnum opus, perhaps his embodied biography, meant not merely to argue the system but to *perform* it, a total work that would do in its own form what abundance does in the world.

Whether he succeeds is unknown. What can be said now, with the confidence the record allows, is that the world contains a man who left one country as a child and another as an adult, who became a novelist in a borrowed language and then a philosopher in a third, who turned the grief and ferment of a singular life into a system generous enough to be offered to brave readers and practitioners across the world, and who has spent thirty years insisting, against the spirit of a calculating age, that *being gives more than it takes*, that we are joined before we are separate, and that the first duty of a thinking creature is to cultivate — with others, in the real, and unafraid — the abundance it did not make but is privileged to tend.

— Max Milo

Principal works

Selected fiction (French): *Joie* (1997); *La mémoire de Ruben* (1998); *Le Spray* (2000); *A vide* (2001); *Moment magnétique de l'aimant* (2002); *Expulsion*, with H. Delmotte (2005); *Paridaiza* (2008); *Qui a tué le poète?* (2011).

Selected essays and philosophy (French): *Ego trip, la société des artistes sans-œuvre* (2003); *Peut-on jouir du capitalisme?* (2008/2009); *Une vie nouvelle est-elle possible? Deleuze et les lignes* (2009).

Major works in English: *Being and Neanness* (MIT Press, 2019); *Ensemblance: The Transnational Genealogy of "Esprit de Corps"* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020); *Philosophical Health: Thinking as a Way of Healing*, editor (Bloomsbury, 2023); *Philosophical Health: A Practical Introduction* (Bloomsbury, 2024); *Crealectics as a Creative Method* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2025, open access).