ATHEISM REVISITED

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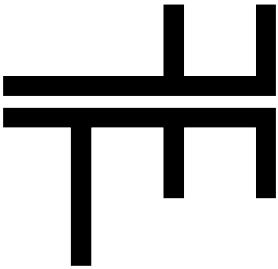

TECHNO-HUMANITIES LAB
FACULTY OF "ARTES LIBERALES"
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Towards a Coalition of the Reasonable: Beyond Atheism v Religion

In natural science, we try to follow Plato maxim to "carve nature at its joints." But the social world can be divided in more than one way and very often old distinctions, such as those between left and right persist long after they have become useful. Although there is a real distinction between atheist and religious world views, this is no longer the most important when it comes to belief. A greater gulf sits between those who see the quest for meaning and value as a joint enterprise involving reason and those who believe that faith or reason endorses one world view and one world view only, making such joint endeavour redundant. Reasonable atheists and religious believers alike should see each others as allies in this divide and distance themselves from groups traditionally seen as allies.

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Atheism of No-One

Faced with a contemporary conjuncture in which the injuriousness of the secular has been demonstrated, what might one make of

the thought of atheism? Is it possible to think an atheism without the secular – at least in so far as one grants that atheism remains (for the secular, not to mention its Christian antecedents) unthought? It is in view of such questions that an encounter with Spinoza, or particularly with his opaque denomination of God, becomes useful: God marks an impropriety or excess within a Spinozist grammar, which is to say that it indexes a problem intrinsic to immanence. To address the nexus of the secular, religion, and atheism is to reactivate this grammar and to address this problem. This paper pursues such address by proposing – against Spinoza's own attempted resolutions, and drawing on certain negative moments in Deleuze, gnostic tendencies in Laruelle, and decisive interventions in afropessimist thought – an account of immanence that revolves around the power to fabulate according to the voiding and blackness of No-One.

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The atheistic conception of nature and its political consequences in Plato and Hobbes

Even if the first sentence of Hobbes' main opus, *Leviathan*, contains the word 'God' and even if he argues that faith in God represents the ultimate root of political obligation, without which there cannot be pacified society, his moral and political doctrine has been considered at least as potentially atheistic and anti-aristocratic both by his contemporaries and by modern scholars (Leo Strauss). Hobbes theory of the just Commonwealth is indeed based upon naturalistic and deterministic conception of motion (mechanism), according to which man's actions, just as those carried out by any other natural body, are determined by psychological and physiological data man cannot alter. Yet, when obeying to his nature alone, man fatally precipitates into mutual

war within which no stable political order can be established. In order to constitute it, he ought not to rely on the religious precepts of the churches, but on the scientific precepts of his reason. Ultimately, the just city needs more the civic cult than the sincere faith. We might say that the atheism lies at core of the political, while religious institutions represent but a patina laid over it in order to scare the subjects and keep them acting in obedience to positive laws. The fact that all natural bodies move according to blind natural necessity, upon which neither God nor man have any government (man can only adapt his actions to his pre-determined nature and to the nature as a whole, and in this the political art consists) had been already discussed in Plato's *Laws*. The idea that nature is mere and senseless game of power entails the one that the main goal of the political art is the dominion of one person or group over the other parts of the body politic. Such a dominion is grounded in and justified by the exact science of nature. According to the old Clinias this is an atheistic conception of nature, in which the very nature is separate from the good and the justice. Accordingly independent from justice is as well the corresponding political art. For Plato the supreme political question, concerning the correspondence between justice and nature, does not concern directly the onto-theological issue but is related to the question what doctrine is better for man and the city. Plato's answer, already expressed in *Pheado*, is that gods exist (Laws, 890d) and that the god is the measure of human political happiness (Laws, 716b). The good city is unavoidably a city full of gods not because gods exist according to the truth discovered by the reason, but because the good is the right measure of the truth: epistemology is a function of axiology and eudaimonology. Finally, atheism might not be false in itself, as an isolated doctrine, but it becomes false in relation to the justice and happiness of the political animal.

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"Atheism and modernity" – some remarks concerning relationships between the ideas of modernity and that of secularism

Although atheism is not originally a modern idea, it is doubtless that modern era had more to do with it than any other in the human history. Modern atheism is probably best summarized under the concept of secularism. The latter seems to be one of the essential aspects of modern emancipation of man, as well as rationalization and reorganization that characterize the developments of modern society and the individual. Atheism or at least a certain diminishment of God's place in human life gave path to any progress in the modern becoming-man. Even if religion is still part of human life after modernization, it is definitely something that any modern man can do entirely without, if only s/he wants to – a condition that almost had no precedents in the history. These recognitions being quite trivial and uncontroversial, the relationship between modernity and religious belief (or disbelief, for that matter) is not simple, nor unambiguous – quite the contrary, a deeper analysis shows an entire dialectics of this relation. Thus, although modernity seems secular and enlightenment – antireligious, there emerges a question of the extent to which modernity continued Christian civilization (a view held by Hegel, and also by Nietzsche, to give just two notable examples) and is a disguised crypto-Christian culture. Also, Immanuel Kant famously found room for religion and religious belief "within the limits of reason" alone, suggesting that there was no opposition between enlightenment (i.e. the essence of modern culture) and faith. And finally, a brief consideration might lead one to find out that modernity is also – and most of all – a belief in infinity. Just as the pre-modern Christian religious view was one that referred to transcendent infinity, modernity reformulated that reference turning it into an immanent infinity, i.e. it replaced divine limitlessness with a human limitlessness, thus inaugurating the era of modern anthropocracy. However, this immanentization of the infinity

might have been an original vice of the modern man, who with this turn just mistook himself for God. So is the very idea of modern man a transformed theological concept?

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Political significance of atheism. Karl Marx' Idea of the 'Positive Abolition of Religion' and the Islamic Question

That aim of the presentation is to analyze the political significance of Marx' idea of the 'positive abolition of religion' and to discuss the limits of its applicability in the contemporary political criticism. The starting point of the analysis is the reconstruction of Marx' critique of liberal, "secular" state, delivered by him in the article *On the Jewish Question*, as well as of his distinction between political and human emancipation. The self-identification of democratic state, i.e. the state which relegates religion to a place among the other elements of civil society, with the "atheistic" state, revealed by Marx in his article as "negative" and "perfectly Christian", will be confronted in the next step of the analysis with the idea of "positive abolition of religion", presented by him in the Preface to the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. In so far as in conclusion of the article *On the Jewish Question* Marx states, that "the *social* (i.e. the 'human', AG) emancipation of the Jew is the emancipation of society from Judaism", the presentation will close with a discussion of the applicability of that idea in the critical reflexion on the most burning question our times: to which extent the question of so called "Islamic radicalism" can be considered in terms of Islamic (political, social, respectively "human") emancipation.

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Politics of transformation and Sino-Spinozist atheism of early 1800s

The early modern notion of "virtuous atheist" ascribed to Spinoza has a political remainder which requires critical assessment. The relation between western atheism and political thought is often taken for granted – the atheism is presented as a radical critique of absolute power and one of the core concepts of modern democratic genealogy. I want to discuss this relation between atheism and politics by looking at the attempts to expel it from the dominant philosophical discourse of early modernity. I want to investigate the political and theoretical productivity of atheism by briefly analyzing an extraordinary encounter between Spinoza's thought and the imaginary discourse on China circulating in Europe at the beginning of 18th century. I will look at the way the attempts to marginalize or exoticize atheism have been paired with critiques of the concept of modification/transformation, considered as a thread to social and natural order. The aspiration to think and live differently would be the main characteristic of atheism as described by its early modern critics and apologists. I will use this material to examine specific condition of the contemporary political horizon – described by Mark Fisher in his *Capitalist Realism* as lacking the transformative dimension. The main philosophical question concerning atheism today would be not so much the question of god as the question of power, which tends to posit itself in a (quasi)theological order. The lesson of Spinoza might be that the atheist mode of thinking is a materialist one; it always looks for analysis of the body that constitutes the theological idea, its capacities, mode of reproduction (or duration) and the affective regime it imposes upon itself and others.

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Transatheism and the Question of Spirit. From a War of Words to a War About Words

« On répète parce qu'*on entend pas*»
Gilles Deleuze

There are two clichés about atheism. The first cliché, which is in common use in catholic countries, is that atheism gives no access to the spiritual dimension of human existence, while right-wing Christians are eager to see in atheism an intrinsic part of what they refer to as 'cultural Marxism.' The second cliché, which one may sometimes come across on beaten intellectual tracks followed by leftist and politically engaged philosophers in general, is that atheism is a deliberate refusal of transcendentality or a "transcendental signified," to put it as Jacques Derrida.

The purpose of my paper is to investigate this "artificial or logical blockage" (Deleuze) of the concept of atheism as the very cause of what Jacques Rancière refers to as "disagreement" [*mésentente*]. However, unlike Rancière, I will endeavour to show that *mésentente*, as far as atheism is concerned, precisely stems from a *malentendu* [misunderstanding] based on the imprecision of words or, to quote Deleuze again, "deafness of words." Crudely speaking, we need to first *hear*, i.e. to understand [*entendre*] what atheism can mean in order to disagree eventually. In other words, we need to *animate* this deaf (and dead) concept in order to hear the *spirit* (*esprit*, *Geist*, *anima*, *pneuma*, *duch/umysł*) speak, i.e. feel it through language(s) *in relation to* what Hegel, after Kant, refers to as *Verstand* [understanding, *entendement*, *rozsądek*] on the one hand and what Freud describes as "oceanic feeling" on the other. I will argue that the spirit as such is a-theistic, i.e. needs to be separated from God: both as the first and last word or the "ground" [*fond(s)*] that Deleuze associated with stupidity [*bêtise*] which is, however, "the transcendental structure of thinking." (Stiegler)

Surprisingly enough, the question of atheism is a question of translation that I understand, in the wake of Bernard Stiegler, as *transduction*. And yet I will interpret transduction not only as a process of introducing genetic material into a cell by a virus, but also as a *cross* of English (*trans*lation) and French (tra*duction*). From this "Frenglish" perspective, which somehow recalls the *sense* of the Latin verb *duco*, transduction becomes both a technical device for con-ducting spirit, like a duct conveying a fluid, and a way of con-ducting oneself. Indeed, I *believe* that atheism requires to be discussed in the context of what Derrida refers to as "globalatinisation" on the one hand and "the idiocy of idioms" on the other. Opting for this deeply philological approach to atheism[1], I will define atheism both as a *archispiritual and hypermaterialist approach to life* in the wake of what Stiegler, after Gilbert Simondon, refers to as "transindividuation." Ultimately, I will endeavour to show that the question of *spirit* – for the spirit is actually [*in Wirklichkeit*, to put it as Hegel] embedded in its idioma-city – is *originally* a question of *technics* (and technology) that needs to be discussed *literally* and *politically* since literalisation, as Stiegler shows, is the condition of the *polis*.

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Gregg Lambert

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On the Dual Horizon of the Death of God

This lecture will address the resurgence of explicitly Christian themes and authorities in Contemporary Continental Philosophy, especially in

1 And more generally to philosophy. With a nod to Nietzsche who defines himself as "the most offensive philologist" in a letter to Malvida von Meysenbug, quoted by Derrida at the very beginning of *Spurs*, I would posit that if a philosopher is a wanderer, a philologist is his or her shadow.

the writings of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy and Italian theorist Giorgio Agamben, drawing upon the arguments of my recent book: *Return Statements: The Return of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

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The visible absence of color. The whiteness of the world and the troubled atheism of Herman Melville

In the 42nd chapter of *Moby Dick*, devoted to the discussion of the "Whiteness of the Whale," Ishmael points to various meanings of the frightful color his captain is hunting, focusing on its significance as the color of the dread of meaninglessness, the signal of the inevitability of our annihilation or even the problematic nature of our own existence. At the end of the chapter, he identifies whiteness as "the visible absence of color" and as "a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink." In an earlier book, *Mardi*, where he develops the symbolism of whiteness for the first time, Melville offers a brilliant phenomenological analysis of the utter helplessness and dread one feels during calm at the open sea, suggesting that this radical experience "almost makes an infidel" of the one who is exposed to it. I take these two passages as the starting point for my analysis of Melville's radical, but deeply troubled and troubling atheism. Melville outlines a fully materialist vision of the universe in which man is not so much terrified by the infinite void as he is overwhelmed by the surrounding, moving masses of uncharted and unchartable, ocean-like matter, with the visible absence of color crystallized in the figure of Moby Dick reminding him of his inability to master the sheer materiality. Drawing partly on psychoanalytic theory, including Andre Green's notion of "blank" anxiety, I would like to map Melville's

atheism as well as various strategies adopted by his characters in the atheistic universe.

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Atheism and This Incredible Need to Believe

I would like to explore the relationship between the atheism and the psychoanalytical process of biding and unbiding in the context of Julia Kristeva's thought and literary experience (Emmanuel Carrère). The unbiding process is one of the con, contemporary disorders of the soul, the liberty of modern patients lead them to put into question any authority, any link risking their own dissolution. To become a subject, as says Kristeva, the individual has to recognize with "this incredible need to believe", the inexorable push toward faith. How is Kristeva's atheism possible? Is her humanism a new proposal or a rather a classical dialectics between faith and non-faith?

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God of psychotics. Beyond the case of Judge Daniel Paul Schreber

The autobiographical book version of Daniel Paul Schreber is one of the most used resources for the study of psychosis, since his delirium are described minutely. Freud makes an analysis of Schreber's case, on which he also bases his theory of psychosis. He innovated by considering deli-

rium as a form of reorganization of the psychic apparatus, in a sense of an attempt of cure, conception well definite today in Freudian psychoanalysis. Freud showed that delirium and hallucinations are not immediate effects of a cause, but a defense of the Ego, in an attempt to get rid of an unassimilable, threatening representation. With his homosexual repressive desire, a way that Schreber found to save himself was the delirium. A submission from her father, who was transferred to a submission to her doctor, who was transferred to a submission to God. So, a man who is not interested in religiosity, why he was returning to God, and still more, to the aspiration of being the woman of God? The love he had been repressed his father, who was then transferred to Dr. Fletcher but which still needed to be repressed and it was transferred to something unreachable but also omniscient and omnipresent: God. In addition, he has the delusion of copulating with God to give birth to a new generation. God here was the only way for Schreber to find fulfilment of his desire.

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The Grammars of the Weak. On Refrain, Rehearsal and Resistance.

Atheist thought has always been created as a rebellious one – gods constitute an intrinsic element of the majority of political systems of humanity throughout its history and the atheist political thinking most definitely proceeds as an exception. The political theory we inherit today has not just been permeated by religious thought, it has been built as an element of theological systems, and there are several responses to it, secularism on one hand, messianism on the other, all of them could be reduced to surface democracies, never challenging the theological core of politics. The radical exceptions appear only seldom – in Nietzsche,

feminism, postcolonial thinking, in Marx. This builds to a tradition of the oppressed – the tradition of those excluded from the Western models of subjectivity and politics. I would like to argue, that it is on the side of the subaltern, that the atheist political thought can be found, one which follows the non-heroic, weak means of production of culture and (always already common) singularity. Proceeding with refrain, rehearsal and resistance I will discuss this politics of the weak as a particular example of atheological, atheist political philosophy.

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Atheism as Criticism: Nietzsche's Oppositions of Destruction and Creation

How does the tragic law of destruction and death play a role in the creation of a situation of god's absence? In other words, how are the two notions of destruction and creation interlinked? The following discourse is not concerned with refuting or proving a falsity or truth over the knowledge of the possible scenarios in which god may or may not exist; rather, the goal is to perform a critical reflection upon how or why this kind of knowledge may be relevant for the future possibility of critical dialogue. If we consider the transition of thought from the unmoved mover to selling indulgences, atheism appears as distrust in organized faith. Or it appears as disbelief in deity if we trace thought from the Absolute to the Absurd (see eg. Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* and Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*). If Nietzsche were a contemporary, at the sight of evangelicals screaming evolution is unreal, he would have declared himself an atheist. Instead, reflecting upon Schopenhauer's existential initiative around a two-sided world as idea and as will, Nietzsche embraces the two forces of destruction and creation at once, for the best

that can otherwise replace a dead god he fears would be empty politics. The emptiness that Nietzsche fears manifests itself in various forms of a kind of caesura or incapacity, where the godless subject cannot speak for itself.[1] 'Atheos' here is not a non-god; rather, god reveals itself as a total abyss that signals a new beginning or the end of all possibility. 'Atheos' represents constructive criticism if/when it can embrace the two forces of destruction and the creation at once. As Nietzsche's madman prophecies god's death, he already knows the future possibility of the coexistence of destruction and creation lies in the worldview of no one else but the god of religious ecstasy, Dionysus.[2] Following Nietzsche's questioning faculty, this proposal is sure not to end on a hasty *Amen! – So it be;* instead, it is determined to call for an ongoing exercise over thinking why or why not the future must remain critically involved in order to *be* possible at all.

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God* Does Not Exist: A novel deductive argument for atheism*

It is widely believed that Mackie's argument for atheism has been shown to be either invalid or unsound. As a result, the debate in the

1 Nietzsche's motif of the death of god as it reappears in cases where thought becomes an unutterable silence or a form of gibberish as in the Greek origin of the word 'barbar'. Two examples are in mind here; Heidegger: "…the thinking that points toward the truth of being as what is to be thought has in no way decided in favor of theism. It can he theistic as little as atheistic" (*Letter on Humanism,* 1946, 29/38), and Adorno: "…nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch" (*Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* [Cultural Criticism and Society], 1951).

2 Nietzsche's voice features the 'eternal recurrence' of the satirical undertone, and the task of revaluating all values begins from destruction: "I am not a man, I am dynamite" ("Why I am a Destiny" in *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, 1888, 1:90).

philosophy of religion over God's existence has shifted from the logical problem of evil to the evidential one. However, even if one deductive argument for atheism fails, this does not entail that no such argument succeeds. In this paper, I defend the premises of a novel, deductively valid argument for atheism*. According to it, if God* exists, then he not only threw us into the world, but did so knowingly, freely, and for a reason. If God* knowingly and freely threw us into the world for a reason, however, then he would be guilty of using us as a mere means to an end. But if God* existed, he would not be guilty of using anyone as a mere means to an end. Thus, God* does not exist. In addition to its being sound, we will see that one of the other virtues of this argument is that, unlike other arguments for either atheism, agnosticism, or theism, it is especially conscientious when it comes to the issue of the nature of the divine. As will become clear, it does not follow that since God* does not exist, there is nothing that is divine. But as we also will see, it does follow that since God* does not exist, the divinity of orthodox Christianity certainly does not do so.

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New (and old) Atheisms reconsidered

While there is wide agreement that atheism consits of the ontological position denying God's existence, the ample variety of forms such a denial may adopt constitutes something that only rarely gets emphasized in a sufficiently explicit manner. This paper shall address the array of ways in which an atheist ontological thesis concerning the (in)existence of God(s) may be construed with the aim of showing that those atheist views are not only radically diverse in their argumentative commitments but can at times prove incompatible with one another. On the one hand,

the distinction shall be drawn between the form of atheism that sustains the inexistence of the many gods of the politheistic religious traditions (while being perhaps compatible with core monotheistic religious beliefs regarding God *with a capital g)* and the sort of an atheist thesis which contends that no God, irrespective of the framework we use to define it, exists at all. Secondly, the paper will introduce the distinction between existential atheism, defined as a contention concerning the existence of God, and an essential sort of atheism which in turn challenges the very conceptual consistency of the notion of God in light of the logical incompatibility between its predicates. Whereas from the point of view of existential atheism (whether of *old or new variety*), the question of God's existence is pretty much viewed as an empirical issue about the kind of things that count as real, from the standpoint of essential atheism, God is not so much an entity that as a matter of course happens not to exist (or probably so) but a notion that, ill defined as it may be shown, cannot even possibly correspond to any real correlate in the world. Finally, the point will be made that there is much to be said in favor of essential atheism and so if the arguments for E.A. are sound, they would demonstrate not merely that there is (probably) no God but, more strongly, that God is not possible.

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Caring as the stuff of the world – revisiting the ethics of care in feminist new materialisms.

Vulnerable and precarious are two words used oftentimes to describe conditions of living today, especially given the economic and ecological urgencies shaping the beginning of 21st century and visions of the future. Thus, it seems no wonder that the notion of care reemerges as one

possible response to precarity and vulnerable stuff of the world. Therefore, it might be important today to ask what does it mean to care, how to practice care, and what is the genealogy of care. The notion of care appeared in feminist scholarship in 1982 when the groundbreaking book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* by Carol Gilligan was published. Originally, the concept of care stemmed from the psychological research, but proved to be potent also in ethical and political feminist conceptualizations (adding to a vibrant concept of ethics of care developed by Nel Noddings, Sara Ruddick, Joan Tronto among others). In the recent feminist investigations, the notion of care is still an important point of reference in different contexts but it is also the subject of reformulations. In this paper, I would like to reflect on how the so called feminist new materialisms approach the subject of care. I will consider subjects such as academic response-ability (Barad 2016, 2012a, b, Martin, Myers, Viseu 2015, Haraway 2008), practices of thinking and knowing with care (Haraway 2016, Puig de la Bellacasa 2012), the question of relevance of ethics of care beyond anthropocentric paradigm (Barad 2016, Haraway 2016, Schrader 2015), and the role of care in discussing the objectivity of knowledge production (e.g. Despret 2004). With this body of knowledge in mind I aim at distinguishing the lines along which care is reformulated: time (nonlinear time of quantum physics), immanence (no outside position, no distance), and relationality (intra-action rather than interaction) and suggest not only ethico-political, but also ontological understanding of practicing care. Simultaneously, this perspective offers a genealogy of the notion of care from pastoral power (as grasped by e.g. Foucault 2009), through the care of the self (Foucault 1988) – as both the tool of subjectification and space for possible resistance to posthuman perspectives that accentuate caring as indeed the stuff of the world.

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"We Are Still Pious". On the Hard Problem of Atheism

As Rudiger Safranski remarks, "Nietzsche's announcement that God is dead was no longer a unique revelation in the late nineteenth century, [p]articularly among the intellectuals, who were his intended audience" (*Nietzsche. A Philosophical Biography*). Indeed, what seems to worry Nietzsche most of all is not the death of God itself, but the fact that it changed nothing – we can see it both in the behavior of the rabble in the preface to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and the "higher men" in the last part of the book, who find a replacement god quickly enough ("The Ass Festival"). The Nietzschean problem can be put in existential terms – "how can we live on as we did before if God is dead" – or in structural ones, as does Heidegger when he claims that "if God (...) has disappeared (...) then this authoritative place itself is still always preserved, even though as that which has become empty." (*The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead'*). If we accept this diagnosis, the question becomes: (how) can we think and act in a way that would take stock of this new situation? Alluding of course to David Chalmers' analyses of consciousness, I would like to call this the "hard problem" of atheism, in contrast to the "easy problem", namely the question of the existence of God. In my presentation, aside from a more detailed description of the "hard problem", I shall analyze two of the possible answers to it, namely Martin Hagglund's reading of Derrida's philosophy as "radical atheism", and Deleuze's views on the question of immanence. At least at face value, both of these answers seem promising because of their unrelenting engagement in rejecting not only any transcendence, but also the longing for it, or, as Hagglund puts it, the desire for God and immortality" (*Radical Atheism*).

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On the Atheistic Impasse of Jewish Feminist Theology

What still determines the debate among feminist Jewish theologians, after over 40 years since feminist theory entered the field of Jewish studies, is the problem of how to align feminist goals with Judaism or, as I will argue, the problem of the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of atheism. The debate that started in 1970s (Adler 1971, Christ and Plaskow 1979) and is still ongoing (e.g. Raphael 2003, Umansky and Ashton 2008, Ross 2012) has encompassed various, often contradictory stances concerning the reexamination of different layers of the Jewish tradition: from tackling the adjustments of ritual practice, through challenging the rabbinic tradition of interpretation of Law, toward proclaiming the need for the reconceptualisation of God's image. While some feminist theologians postulate the transformation of Jewish praxis so that it is more inclusive toward women (Greenberg 1981), some go further in calling for the revision of Halakha (Adler 1998), or even demanding reinterpretation of Torah and replacing masculine God-language with feminine metaphors (Gross 1983, Plaskow 1994). Yet, is it possible to rethink Judaism as a-patriarchic tradition and not fall into the atheistic trap, dismantling Judaism as such? How to marry those two seemingly conflicting elements and propose a theology which would be at once Jewish and feminist? In my paper, I will focus on three emblematic philosophical propositions which enable Jewish feminist philosophers to resolve the tension between feminism and Judaism. The three strategies include: invoking the Kabbalistic metaphors in order to counterbalance the male-oriented language of Torah (Devine 2014, Ross 2014), turning to Spinoza for the philosophical grounds for the body-oriented religious experience (Plaskow 1990, Goodman 2002, Ravven 2004), and renouncing from theistic assumptions and shifting toward Jewish atheism (Ravven 1997). The analysis of the said propositions – which rather than recalling theistic Judaism resemble non-theist, immanent, or atheist

stance – and particularly the investigation of how they intersect with one another, will allow me to examine to what extent the loosening of the theistic element in Judaism is essential not only for the advance of Jewish feminist theology, but also for the revival of Jewish philosophy as such.

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Unhappy, immoral, covertly religious and mentally deficient

While a number of misconceptions about atheism remain, there is now a large body of empirical knowledge regarding what atheists are like and what causes their lack of religious belief. In my presentation I will focus upon four common misconceptions, consider the evidence for and against them and the underlying reasons why the misconceptions persist. Unhappy – While there are a number of studies that show a correlation between lack of religious belief and dissatisfaction, these results can be explained by three factors. Firstly, the irreligious are unhappy when living in religious societies. Secondly, the happiness of the religious appears to be largely connected to belonging to religious social groups. And, thirdly, unhappiness appears to be connected with uncertainty, with the resolutely atheist showing higher levels of happiness. Immoral – The empirical evidence regarding the connection between religiosity and morality is quite complex. While it does not support the claim that atheists are immoral it does provide support for the idea that in traditional societies religion played an important role in maintaining ethical behavior. Importantly, modern secularized societies maintain levels of ethical behavior unheard of in the traditional religious ones. Covertly religious – There are two fundamental problems with this claim. Firstly, as shown by numerous surveys, the great majority of non-believers are simply uninterested in religion. They are 'apatheists'. Secondly, the very category of 're-

ligion' is highly problematic and may not be robust enough to carry any explanatory weight in scientific theories. The claim, however, appears to be aimed at atheist activists. In this context it is better to talk of ideology – a set of beliefs whose aim is to maintain group cooperation. Religions appear to be ideologies but there are also nonreligious ideologies such as communism and nationalism. Human groups are highly susceptible to developing ideological beliefs and atheist groups are neither excluded from this nor particularly subject to it. Mentally deficient – One explanation for lack of religious belief is that atheists lack the necessary mental mechanisms to develop 'normal' religious beliefs. However, the pattern of secularization does not bear out this explanation given that the main factor appears to be having grown up in conditions of existential security. Individual differences, while robust, are relatively minor and have not changed over the last few decades. In other words, the main cause of atheism appears to be a change in the socio-economic conditions, not a variation in individual cognitive capacities.

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The Orphic Myth of Zegreus-Savior Devoured by Tytans and the Idea of Original Sin

My presentation will attempt to outline the debate that revolved at the end of the 19th century around the Orphic myth of Zagreus devoured by Tytans, summarized in Olympiodorus' commentary on Plato. The discussion over myth, which departed from the classical and remarkable work of Nietzsche *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, as well as from the bold and pioneering study on Petelia and Thurii gold leaves proposed by Domenico Comparetti, absorbed and polarized the European, philological circles. Nietzsche considered Zagreus as a central

emblem of his philosophical inquiries that played important part in the philosopher's recurring considerations. In his etymological research, the German philosopher gave the Lesbian-Aolian equivalent of the character's name – Zonnuxos – a special meaning: the dead God. The author of *Zaratustra* assumed that the myth of Zegreus and Bacchic mysteries associated with it preceded the antic cultural institutions. The image of cruelty and barbarism exposed by primordial corrupted sacrifice and the mystery of god's rebirth initially served as a model of cathartic self-purification. The ancient crime was to be expunged through rituals. At the beginning of the VI century BC the traditional superstitious ceremony was substituted with the reformed abstract, enlightened and at the same time (at least in Nietsche's view) life negating idea of expiation though asceticism, promoted by the Orphic movement. Comparetti, associated the sacred hexameters engraved on the tablets with Orphic mystic ritual, Greek pessimistic anthropogony and theory of primordial, ancient fault. Despite the severe criticism, both works gained recognition among the narrow group of scholars, such as Albrecht Dieterich, Hermann Diels, Gilbert Murray, Jane Ellen Harrison and Erwin Rohde (the last one was a close friend of Nietzsche). The discussion upon the Bacchic myth of creation, the idea of the blood guilt, the innate defectiveness transmitted through generations, the ritual of *sparagmos*, the orphic mysteries and resurrection of Dionysus encouraged further investigations on Greek eschatological and soteriological imaginary and how it was reflected in the Hellenized Christian community. The idea that Christian liturgy and doctrine echoes the Dionysian cult was put forward even as early as in antiquity (by Celsus, Justinian Origen, Clemens from Alexandria) and became a matter of further investigations sustained by such scholars as Sigmund Freud, Ernst Maass, Vittorio Macchioro, William Keith Chambers Guthrie, Marie-Joseph Lagrange and Alfred Loisy. In addition, many scholars considered the rise of the Orphic movement as parallel to the Protestant Reformation. I will try to provide the summary of the major commentaries and reflections over the issue and how they were recognized by the critics.

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James Williams
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Signs of atheism: atheism as sign

Following Gilles Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense* closely and also taking inspiration from A. N.Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World* and *Process and Reality*, I argue that we should think of atheism as a process, rather than as a state of mind or behaviour. Returning to studies by Carlo Ginzburg, I then argue that we can also think of these processes in terms of signs. Atheism is a matter of worldly signs, of divination, Deleuze would say. As such, I will argue that we are always wrong to think of atheism through absolutes and as independent of power and of historical circumstances. Yet this does not mean we cannot have a pragmatism based around atheism. To show this, I will conclude the talk with a critical interpretation of William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

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From the atheism of the concept to the atheism without the concept

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari claim that religion exists only when there is transcendence, vertical being or imperial state. Philosophy, with its passion for concepts, continuously seeks its revival in the plane of immanence, and the more radical immanence is the more atheistic is philosophy. Authors of the book *What is philosophy?* – following Duns Scotus, Spinoza, Nietzsche and Bergson – are so radical in applying their postulate of fidelity to immanence that they go as far as to claim that Christian thought creates concepts solely on the basis of its atheism. For

philosophers, the problem is neither the "death of God" nor the "concept of atheism," but the "atheism of the concept." Atheism – in this perspective – is not a drama, but a good state of mind of a philosopher and the achievement of philosophy; a kind of joyful knowledge. In his paper I will try to rethink the "atheism of the concept" fostering – as I claim – a kind of "cult of the concept." I question whether the "atheism of the concept" is not the remains of the theistic thought, which should also be overcome. Further, I also ask whether the "atheism beyond the concept" is at all possible. This, however, forces me in turn to reflect on the very notion of concept. I am aware that "the concept" is not "beyond life," but instead that it is one of the "modes of life." The fact that man lives in a completely designed environment does not mean that he has turned away from life or has turned around the order of life, but only this much that he lives in a certain way. Therefore, the "atheism of the concept" is not opposed to the "atheism without the concept" as long as "the concept" is not opposed to "life." "Atheism without the concept" is, rather, an atheistic practice and refers to "lifestyle" rather than "beliefs" or "conceptual forms." It requires involvement in a non-sacred life. "Atheism without the concept" is the attempt to withdraw the "created life" from the sphere of salvation through Something that is other than life. For an atheist the object of faith is not God – a guarantee of unity, rationality, and world order – but the world itself and without any guarantee. Perhaps it signifies the primacy of the necessity of contingency (Quentin Meillassoux). In the atheistic world, time does not unlock the potential opportunities, it is not the reality of time which produces the reality of events, but the events themselves allow the course of time to emerge. Such a time and cosmos is not governed by any timeless principle; it is left to the pure immanence of its non-righteousness and un-conceptuality. The reason of the "atheism without the concept" is "life itself," the banality of life, "life as-is," while the reason of theology is "holy life" which points to something other than life.

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