

63rd Lecture at the Gramsci Monument, The Bronx, NYC: 1st September 2013
ONTOLOGICAL DISTRACTION
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1. What is reality?
2. How does the subject hold itself in it?
3. What does it mean to love in the here and now of the one world, if we consider how elementarily what we call love remains tied up with the Christian tradition, which allows us to distinguish the concepts of *agápe* and *éros*?
4. Christianity, with its imperative of charity, forms a backdrop from which one does not depart by marking one's contemplations as atheistic.
5. As Jean-Luc Nancy has shown, we stand within the horizon of Judeo-Christian monotheism as long as we maintain—in reference to categories such as justice, the universal, the individual—the “motif of an infinite transcendence surpassing man”; and no thinking that does not wish to be obscurantist can afford to forgo seeking clarity regarding this nexus by analyzing the alliance between atheism and theism.¹
6. Yet this alliance is already that between immanence and transcendence.
7. It calls upon us to think a concept of reality that ultimately amounts to a contentious union of both orders.
8. The constitution of reality, like that of the subject, like the reality of love, requires the antagonism between the two orders, which we can describe as that of the finite and that of the infinite.²
9. Hegel's dialectics brings this antagonism back as a philosophical contention that compels him to reject both options—a simple materialism and a simple idealism—alike (Hegel's term for this rejection is *absolute idealism*).
10. Persistent at the heart of reality is an element that is explicit to it.

11. It is decisive that we situate this incommensurable (which we can easily enough call *God* or, as Levinas does, the wholly other, *tout autre*) within the immanence expanded by its implicit transcendence rather than retroactively re-theologizing it.
12. To do the latter would be to trust in a *pure transcendence*, one that would be at a total distance from a *pure immanence*.
13. Yet transcendence does not mark a higher reality; nor does immanence mean the dimension of what is controlled and known.
14. The alliance of both registers refers to their intertwinement, which remains the difficult inheritance of the history of metaphysics: “The infinite is no longer beyond (*au-delà*). What has long been known—that God is dead—means: the infinite is no longer found in a *radical beyond*.”³
15. It is the name of the truth of finite reality, its *ontological distraction*.
16. Reality is not simply a matter of fact.
17. Its status as incommensurable reveals that it is expansive and distract.
18. Toward what does reality open, to what does it expand, with respect to what does it distract itself?
19. How to think a world without transcendence and yet not substitute for it a phantasm of immanence that negates the possibility of thinking something new, negates freedom and decision, autonomy and the consistency of the subject?
20. How to back out of the alternative of finitude and infinity, reality and ideality, the possible and the impossible?

21. How to think an opening that opens toward something not-given—toward the nothing itself—; how to affirm this opening toward closure without depriving it of its characteristic openness?

22. How to think an opening that is not one?

1 Jean-Luc Nancy, "A Deconstruction of Monotheism," trans. Gabriel Malenfant, in *Dis-Enclosure*, 32.

2 Part and parcel of the infinity of love—which names its punctual intensity, not its temporal extension—is that the loving subject is *not immortal = finite*. The finitude of its life gives meaning to the infinity of love. I love, I die: this certainty can give rise to love, to the feeling of touching upon *the limit of life = its infinity*. The ontological dimension of love resides in the problematic X, which marks the status of the subject as intractable, its incommensurability. We ought not to presume that it has any sort of sublime meaning; it is nothing but the reverse of the subject's reality, which interferes with the real in *problematic* fashion.

3 Mehdi Belhaj Kacem, *L'esprit du nihilisme. Une ontologique de l'Histoire*, Paris 2009, 80–1. Belhaj Kacem's concept of a pure emptiness (*vide pur*), which, thus his claim, inscribes itself upon Blanchot's, Deleuze's, and Foucault's concept of the outside (*dehors*) as its limit to the extent that even that which is most outside (*le plus 'extérieur'*) is part of this emptiness, fails to take into account the fact that Blanchot, Deleuze, and Foucault described the outside not in categories of the interior and the exterior, since it marks the other of interiority and exteriority—the ontological emptiness.