Heidegger’s Fall*

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Lethe is Schwarzwald black, not Buchenwald black.
(John D. Caputo).

With this succinct remark, a widely respected philosopher (and good friend of many years) John Caputo, crystallizes his reaction\(^1\) to an attempt I had made\(^2\) to discuss the tragic debacle of Heidegger’s involvement with Nazism in terms of Heidegger’s own conception of the negativity of truth: aletheia. “Thereby hangs a tale.”

The symposium that occasioned my proposal had been entitled “Heidegger and Politics,” and I had taken as springboard for the essay an earlier reflection of John Sallis, commenting on Heidegger’s then recently published Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom

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Ereignis): “What if truth were monstrous? ... What if there were within the very essence of truth something essentially other than truth, a divergence from nature within nature, true monstrosity?”

Seizing on the theme of the negativity of truth as suggested by Sallis, I stressed the concealment (lethe) quality that remains interior to the process of nonconcealment (aletheia) as Heidegger conceives truth, focusing particularly on a secondary modality of that negativity (after “mystery”), namely “errancy” (Irre):

Errancy is the primordial counter-essence to the primordial essence of truth. Errancy opens itself up as the open region for every opposite to essential truth. ... Every mode of comportment has its mode of erring. Error extends from the most ordinary wasting of time, making a mistake, and miscalculating, to going astray and venturing too far in one’s essential attitudes and decisions. The errancy in which any given segment of historical humanity must proceed for its course to be errant is essentially connected with the openness of Dasein. By leading him astray, errancy dominates man through and through.

I tried to argue that Heidegger’s philosophical experience (the Being-question, eventually Being as aletheia) did not lead to his capitulation to Nazism but did not prevent it either. It may be that he himself became victim of the errancy of which he wrote. Truth that tolerated this would be monstrous indeed. To situate this thesis in a literary context, I wove it into the story line of Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, where I suggested that Kurtz symbolized the victim of this darkness that Heidegger calls “errancy.”

Caputo would have none of it. Lethe, the concealing of concealment that distorts truth and seduces human being into forgetting its concealment, may indeed lie at the heart of aletheia, but for Caputo that was not where Kurtz’s problem lay. The darkness was not in Kurtz’s head (“his intelligence was perfectly

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clear,” says Marlow) but in his heart, in the hardness that had overtaken it. This, then, was not a matter of truth, whether as concealment or unconcealment, but of something “otherwise than truth.” “It had to do with faces, with his utter nullification of the face of the other.” Hence, for Kurtz “there was no Other, no Law of the Other.” He was a simple murderer, with all the in-vulnerability, in-sensitivity, im-passivity that this implies vis à vis the “niggers” that he “decapitated.” “The darkness of lethe is not old enough, not ancient and anarchical enough, to envelop murder.” “Lethe belongs to the economy of shining temples and emergent physis, ... of the silent fall of snowflakes outside the cabin and tinkling cowbells....” But this is “Schwarzwald black.” “Buchenwald black” is the black of murder; its interdiction derives from an “immemorial past” whose signification signifies over and beyond the manifestation of being, that is otherwise than being – lethe and all.

This criticism that Caputo makes of my position is trenchant and compelling. It demands a response, whether by way of defense or of withdrawal. I shall indeed attempt to defend it, if only as a form of discernment in order to decide whether or not to abandon it completely.

Clearly Caputo is condensing into a few pages here the fundamental thesis of his full-length critique of Heidegger as articulated in the imposing work of recent vintage, Demythologizing Heidegger (1993). There he argues that Heidegger’s original posing of the Being-question (“what is the meaning of Being in its differentiation from beings,” that is, question about the “ontological difference”) as formulated in Sein und Zeit (1927) was sabotaged in the 1930s by what Caputo calls a “mythologizing” of Being under the aegis of Greek thought that allowed Heidegger’s seduction into the orbit of National Socialism. Accordingly, multiple turnings notwithstanding, Heidegger never recovered from this fall. Caputo’s own project in the book is to demythologize that Greco-German myth by retracing very critically the evolution of Heidegger’s thinking of Being from beginning to end. He insists that the initial experience of Being must be not simply Greek but “jewgreek” (Joyce’s word), that is, also non-Greek, or, more specifically (in
the Judaeo-Christian West, at least), also biblical, with its special regard for the poor, the victim, the disenfranchised. In a rousing final chapter Caputo formulates his own approach to these problems in terms of what he calls “Hyperbolic Justice,” an intriguing synthesis of his own reflection as filtered through Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida.

In the midst of all this, Caputo takes time to address my proposal, which he first summarizes (“Irre is not evil but it is the condition of possibility of evil”) and then observes:

_That sounds to me like a conflation of Irre with original sin. But Irre is something very Heideggerian-Greek, and it has nothing to do with sin or evil, not even as a condition of possibility. It is a myth of a different sort than the myth of original sin. For Irre means the concealment, the forgetfulness that Being is withdrawn, and that is a strictly phainesthetic matter. It has to do with the look that Being has ... not with human justice or mercy or love. If mortals slaughtered one another under the sky and on the earth, in the name of the advent of the gods, and all this with handmade swords, then the thought of Being could but smile approvingly. ... Irre does not lead us into evil, but into going along with the occlusion of Being as physis and logos, and that has at best an indirect and at worst a downright inverse relationship to the history of ethico-political emancipation._6

Since this is a fuller statement of Caputo’s critique, I shall take it as the context for this reflection and polarize my remarks around three separate foci: 1. a _mise au point_ of the issue that divides us; 2. a clarification or the notion of “original sin” that Caputo introduces into the debate; 3. a return to the question of the possible relation between Heidegger’s thought and original sin.

1.

**Issues and Non-issues:** What is not at stake here is the debacle of Heidegger’s personal history as we know it, particularly with regard to his association with Nazism. At issue only is the

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nature of the thought that could permit it, and the possible usefulness of this thought for the Christian thinker. Nor is there any way to gainsay the fact that his thought was not concerned with the poor, the widow and the orphan, any more than it was concerned, as such, with the problem of God. This simply was not his gift. How many of the great thinkers of history (including Thomas Aquinas) could pass the test of concern-for-the-poor-the-widow-and-the-orphan as a criterion of their philosophical value? The issue is whether their thought excludes the possibility of such concern, that is, concern for every human individual precisely in terms of her humanity. In the present case, the question is whether Heidegger’s fundamental conception of human being (Dasein, Mitsein, Mitdasein, care, solicitude, etc. – in short, his entire anti-metaphysical humanism) excludes the possibility of developing an anthropology that accommodates the dignity of the individual as such, or at least some kind of “ethico-political emancipation.” Until that is done, the question of the intrinsic value of Heidegger’s thought (not of his personal history), hence of its eventual utility for Christians, must, I think, remain open. Finally, not at issue here is Caputo’s full-scale assault on Heidegger in Demythologizing Heidegger, which serves as context for his criticism, except to say that I agree wholeheartedly with the reproach that Heidegger failed to take account of the “jewgreek” experience. The rest must be left for another venue.

What is at issue is the matter of “phainesthetics.” This term is Caputo’s confection from the Greek word phainesthai (“to show oneself,” “to appear”) and characterizes one of the fundamental ways that Heidegger experiences the meaning of Being among the Greeks, particularly in the form of physis. Thus, from the very beginning of his way, Heidegger conceived of phenomenology as the logos of phainesthai, and the conception of truth (aletheia) as unconcealment is but another modality of the same experience. All this is beyond dispute. When Caputo speaks of “a phainesthetic matter,” however, the term becomes pejorative and refers to the alleged “essentialist” use of phainesthai in Heidegger’s later period as the shining forth of earth and sky,
gods and mortals, etc., that is, in Caputo’s reading, an indifference toward the suffering of real flesh and blood. As for an “essentialist” reading of the later Heidegger, this is one of Levinas’s critiques that I consider a gross distortion but cannot deal with properly here. The implication of “phainesthetics,” however, is that the conception of Being as *phainesthai* is too intellectualist to include the wealth of the genuinely “jewgreek” experience of the Is of what-is, and this I deny. If Being as *phainesthai* is a characteristically Greek experience, it is not exclusively so. Surely the prominence of the “light” (and, of course, darkness) motif in the Bible needs no argument here: for example, “let there be light” (Gen 1:3), “by your light we see light” (Ps 36:9), “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). And about the metaphysics of “light” throughout the Middle Ages Caputo surely needs no reminder from me. The experience of Being as *phainesthai*, then, is far more profound than the word “phainesthetics” would suggest.

*Irre* (“errancy”), furthermore, is not quite the “look that Being has.” For “look” here I take to translate *Ansehen/Ansicht*, that is, the way Being “looks,” the visage it offers when it reveals itself in beings as beings. Being, then, withdraws behind the “look,” and it is this withdrawal/concealment/negation that is in question when Heidegger talks about mystery and errancy. In compounding this concealment and seducing us into forgetting it, errancy is precisely what has not to do with the look of Being but with the distorted self-presentation of beings. It drives Dasein hither and thither, dominating it through and through, so that Dasein misperceives the look of Being in beings and falls victim to this distortion.

In presenting errancy as a “look,” Caputo suggests that this “look” appears to a Dasein that is, as it were, at a distance from

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Being, looking at Being as a subject looks at an object. This impression is confirmed by the analogy soon introduced: “If mortals slaughtered one another under the sky and on the earth, in the name of the advent of the gods, and all this with handmade swords, then the thought of being could but smile approvingly.” Clearly, Being here for Caputo is an object and “thought” the thinking subject, suggesting that Being is to be understood as intelligibility, and Dasein as intelligence. This is a travesty. Whatever it is, Dasein is not a subject: it is transcendence; it is Being-in-the-World; it is the “There” of Being among beings, in which and through which the revelation of beings comes-to-pass; eventually, it becomes the clearing where the light of Being is diffused among beings; as such, in the later period, Dasein functions as the thinking of Being, where “of” is to be understood as both subjective and objective genitive.10 (1993 218). All this adds up to saying that if lethe is something much more profound, more hidden, more pernicious than simply the “look of Being,” then it penetrates Dasein to a correlative depth as well. The question is: what does that really mean in the concrete?

What it really means in the concrete is that Dasein is fallen, but fallenness is only one modality of Dasein’s existential structure as being-in-the-world, structure whose proper function is to disclose the world. Other existential components of this movement include the power to illumine projectively (understanding), the power to disclose affectively (state-of-mind), and the power to bring the process to articulation through language (discourse) – all equally original – all unified in the process of care. These existential/ontological structures are, of course, instantiated on the ontic/existentiell level, and it is through the analysis of the ontic appearances that the ontological structures are discerned. The whole task of Being and Time is to probe the ultimate ground of that unity (time) in order to gain access to the larger question – the first and, ultimately, only question that really interested him –

the question of the ontological difference. All the analyses were selected in function of that unique concern. Caputo will not have it. He will not let Heidegger be!

Heidegger simply should have had more “heart” (*kardia*), which is “not so much an insight as a giving into the needs of the other,”[11] [Sorge, 1994 331], “a sensitivity to afflicted flesh.”[12] Kurtz’s problem, after all, lay not in his intelligence but in the darkness-hardness of his heart. However,

*In Heidegger’s “everyday world,” there are no beggars, lepers, hospitals, homeless people, sickness, children, meals, animals... Yet the ‘kingdom of God’ (basileia theou) is a kingdom of flesh, of banquets and of hunger, of cripples made whole, dead men made to live again, a realm of bodies in pleasure and pain.*[13]

These are ontic phenomena, just as idolatry, blasphemy, filial impiety, murder, adultery – in short, all the prohibitions of the Law of Moses – are clearly ontic phenomena. Their sheer “onticity” is the focus of Caputo’s concern, not of Heidegger’s. As a matter of fact, Caputo gives no thought to the possibility that ontic matters of this kind might, indeed, be thought through in a Heideggerian perspective if some phenomenologist as astute as he were to explore the implications, say, of solicitude (*Fürsorge*: “care for the other”). Clearly, however, Heidegger himself, having analysed the ontological structures that underlie such phenomena, heard no call to develop a regional ontology (anthropology) – Mosaic, Christian or otherwise – to deal with them. His unique concern was the difference between such phenomena and the Being that lets them be what they are: the analyses of *Being and Time* were but a step along the way. To refuse him the ontological difference as his problematic of privilege, the way Caputo seems

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12Ibid., 338.

13Ibid., 332.
to do,\textsuperscript{14} is like depriving Plato of his ideas and then bludgeoning him for not being Aristotle. Single-minded preoccupation with the ontological difference, even when grossly insensitive and tasteless (for example, “Agriculture ... atom bombs”) does not make Heidegger guilty, like Kurtz, of ontic “murder.” Language of that kind Caputo may find rhetorically satisfying, but, philosophically speaking, it is not just misleading, it is meaningless. The bottom line is that Heidegger was not what he was not: if that, in itself, be a crime, “who will scape whipping?”

More to the point, how is errancy to be understood? My argument for seeing in errancy the foundation of Being itself for what the early Heidegger described as the fallenness of Dasein (its There) in \textit{Being and Time} has already been made (1992). A comparison of the language describing errancy (\textit{sich-vertun, sich-versehen, sich-verrechnen, sich-verlaufen}) in “On the Essence of Truth”\textsuperscript{15} and Dasein’s untruth (\textit{verschleissen, verbergen, verdecken, verstellend}) grounding its fallenness in \textit{Being and Time},\textsuperscript{16} makes clear that each is the correlate of the other. The common denominator between them is manifest in the use of the inseparable prefix \textit{ver-}, suggesting: removal, loss, untoward action, using up, change, reversal – in other words, negativity of one form or another. One form of this negativity is Dasein’s fallenness, part and parcel of its facticity: “Because Dasein is essentially falling, its state of Being is such that it is in ‘untruth.’ ... To be closed off and covered up belongs to Dasein’s facticity.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14}In private correspondence (cited with permission), Caputo writes: “If you are going to draw an ontological/ontic map, I think that \textit{all} phenomena are ontic and it is just a question as to what ontical phenomena – \textit{Verstehen, Befindlichkeit}, etc. – you are going to valorize when you start calling certain things ontological. I think that the existential analytic proceeds from distinct, definite, historically datable existentiell ideals to which Heidegger is attached and which then get ontological valorization. I don't think that anybody has ever been to the ontological promised land.”

\textsuperscript{15}Martin Heidegger, \textit{Vom Wesen der Wahrheit, Wegmarken} (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976). GA 9:197.


This theme of negativity in Being returns again and again in Heidegger’s thought over the years, but it occurs with special force in Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis), a relatively recent publication (1989) of a text that dates from the years 1936-38, while “On the Essence of Truth” was still gestating.18 There he speaks of a “not” as indigenous to the emerging of the ontological difference itself (Seyn: beon), “and thus to the event that appropriates (Ereignis).”19 What are the consequences of this for life as we know it? Heidegger speaks of Dasein (Being-there) as also Weg-sein (Being-away), and the latter takes two forms: the first is the endemic structural tendency of Dasein to fall away from itself, so that “Being-away is the more primordial name for the inauthenticity of Dasein”,20 the second is Being-unto-death, the ultimate modality of Dasein’s Being-away from itself.21

One should recall, too, a little-known comment reported by Medard Boss as having been made during one of Heidegger’s visits to Zurich in order to offer seminars to the psychiatrists of Switzerland. Speaking of what psychotherapists call “projection” (that phenomenon by which the patient attributes to another feelings [usually negative, for example, anger, hate] that one has oneself), Heidegger observed:

*Psychologically, we say, someone projects an evil side of himself onto an enemy, consequently hates him as the evil one and thus avoids seeing the evil in himself. … But that does not have to be, by any means, a projection – indeed cannot be a projection. For in ascribing evil to another, one is merely warding off the recognition that I too belong to evil [zum Bösen gehöre], like all men. … To each Dasein, also, always already belongs the power-to-be-evil (Böse-sein-können) in relation to what it encounters, whether this power be genuinely brought to fulfillment or not. … Evil is not first of all there as an abstract possibility that then somehow or other is “actualized,” but the power-to-be-evil belongs to my*

18Martin Heidegger, Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis), hrsg. von F. W. von Hermann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann). GA 65.
19Ibid., 388.
20Ibid., 324.
21Ibid., 324.
power-to-be, that is, already in quite original fashion. It is (always) already coming-to-preserve.\textsuperscript{22}

Power-to-be-evil, then, is for Heidegger part of Dasein’s existential structure. If this, too, is another mode of the negativity of Dasein that is grounded in the negativity of \textit{aletheia} (one mode of which is \textit{lethe}), surely we are dealing with something more serious than simply a “look that Being has.” Be that as it may, this leads me to question Caputo’s claim that errancy “has nothing to do with sin or evil, not even as a possibility.” That is the heart of the matter.

2.

\textit{Original Sin and Human Fallenness:} When Caputo speaks of “original sin,” presumably he refers to the old, old story, too familiar to bear repeating: Adam and Eve ... privilege bestowed ... command disobeyed ... privilege withdrawn ... fringe benefits, too ... for them, for us ... but \textit{felix culpa}! ... the “Christ-Event” ... and after ... sure!

This literal reading of the Adam/Eve story gave rise to the terminology of “original sin” only with St. Augustine (fifth century A.D.), who, in controversy with Pelagius, conceived it as a contamination of the human spirit passed on by the first parents of the human race to their descendants, not by imitation (Pelagius) but by generation – indeed through the lust involved in the procreative act itself. Thomas Aquinas, with the help of Aristotle, distinguished between the nature of the sin (loss of sanctifying grace, which could be restored through baptism) and its deleterious consequences (notably “concupiscence,” which remained). In these terms the dogma was defined by the Council of Trent.\textsuperscript{23}

The twentieth century, however, has witnessed a new way of thinking about the Fall. Evidence for human evolution and the

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\item[\textsuperscript{22}] Martin Heidegger, \textit{Zollikoner Seminare}, hrsg. von M. Boss (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1989). GA 65:208-09.
\item[\textsuperscript{23}] H. Denzinger, \textit{Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitionum, et Declarationum de rebus fidei et morum} (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1958), 785-92.
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burgeoning of research into the literary and cultural sources of the Bible liberated fresh speculation among theologians, some of whom began to speak of original sin in existential terms, relating it to human beings’ “situation” in the world. Piet Schoonenberg, for example, explored this situation in terms of the Johannine notion of the “sin of the world” (John 1:29), intending the formula to sum up the social nature of, or solidarity in, the sinfulness of all humanity.24

Karl Rahner’s formulation is more complex. The universal experience of crime and punishment he calls our “existentiell” situation, according to which the exercise of individual human freedom is “codetermined” by the guilt of others with whom we share the world.25 On the “existential” level, he postulates the functioning of what he calls a “supernatural existential.” By this he intends to signify a structural element of every human being by reason of the Christ-Event, through which every human is always already destined to share in the divine life. This destiny is not merely external, something still to come, but is always already inscribed in the very ontological structure of human beings, that is, prior to any act of choice to accept or reject the gift involved – gratuitously, to be sure (because “supernatural”), but nonetheless really there. Presumably, this supernatural existential would have been present in Adam (whether an individual or group)26 consequence of the divine plan of creation/redemption that was always already effective from the beginning, in proleptic anticipation (humanly speaking) of God’ self-communication in the Christ-Event. Salvation would consist in the acceptance of the gift as offered, personal sin in its refusal. If the gift is not bestowed, even though “proffered” in virtue of the supernatural existential, there is a lack of holiness that ought not be present (in terms of God’s salvific will), and it is this lack, marking the human race from its beginning, that is called “original sin.”

24Piet Schoonenberg, Man and Sin, trans. Joseph Donceel (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University, 1965).
26Ibid., 110.
supernatural existential that abides along with the absence of grace it signifies constitutes precisely the ontological “guilt” of original sin – *de facto* part of human being, hence part of the historicity of its being-with-others-in-the-world. It is the *de facto* history of this sinful historicity that Rahner conceives to be the “sin of the world.”27

To conflate errancy with original sin in these terms would be to see it as analogous to the “sin of the world” – a secular paradigm for the universal experience of perversity in human behaviour, that is, solidarity in sin. The question is: may someone do that? If so, is it worth doing?

3.

*Heidegger and Original Sin:* Let us return to Heidegger and ask what correlation, if any, is possible between errancy and original sin, at least in its expanded mode as “sin of the world.” I have already made the point that errancy in the later Heidegger serves, from the perspective of Being, as the ontological ground of the fallenness of Dasein. Thanks to the exhaustive researches, recently published, of Theodore Kisiel28 and John Van Buren29 we now have a better appreciation of what “falling” and “fallenness” meant to him from the very beginning of his attempt to develop the “hermeneutics of facticity” (from 1919 on) that would eventually evolve into *Being and Time*. There is no need to repeat their meticulous analyses. I shall recall only the very beginning of the process to get a fresh sense of its import for the Dasein-analysis of *Being and Time*.

Van Buren is especially helpful here, for he emphasizes the religious background of Heidegger’s early thinking. It is common knowledge that Heidegger’s religious roots were Roman Catholic.

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Van Buren recalls how Heidegger’s student years (1909-15) were marked by the Neo-Scholasticism of his day, how at one point he had ambitioned appointment to the Chair of Catholic philosophy at Freiburg, how his initial teaching years, interrupted by military service (1917-18), brought a disaffection with the metaphysical tradition that this heritage represented. By 1919 he felt the need to abandon it completely, even to destroy it in favor of a new beginning of thought that would be radically non-metaphysical. This included the felt need to abandon Roman Catholicism, too, whose dogmatic formulations were so encrusted with metaphysical overlay. He turned rather to the Christianity of Martin Luther, with its anti-metaphysical bias that Heidegger then felt much more congenial. His conviction was that the acute sense of immediacy and historicality that characterized primitive Christianity lost its freshness when it became burdened by the apparatus of metaphysical speculation. The first task would be to attempt to retrieve that original freshness by examining phenomenologically the experience as articulated by St. Paul and interpreted by the tradition that retained this sense of immediacy (for example, Augustine, Luther, Pascal, Kierkegaard, et al.). The result was an attempt to develop a phenomenology of religion that took the form of courses on “Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion” (WS 1920-21) and “Augustine and Neoplatonism” (SS 1921). Both courses would be followed by a turn to the practical philosophy of Aristotle. I shall limit my attention to this early work.

In the first of these courses, the keynote is sounded by Luther in his Heidelberg Disputation (1518) with his distinction between the “theology of glory” and the “theology of the cross.” The former is based on Scholasticism’s use of Aristotle’s metaphysics to develop a notion of God in all his glory as first cause and supreme good, manifested through created works (for example, the object of the human will as good). The latter is based on the humiliation and shame of the cross, scandal to the Jews and absurdity to the Greeks (1 Cor 1:23). For Luther, the “theology of glory” must be crucified, and the “blind pagan Master Aristotle”

30Ibid., 133-56.
unmasked for the “swindler” that he was. This obviously would mean the dismantling of Aristotelian metaphysics in order to return to the historical consciousness of primitive Christianity, for which life is to be lived from day to day in the awesome shadow of the cross. “The young Heidegger saw himself at this time as a kind of philosophical Luther of western metaphysics.”

With Luther carrying the torch, Heidegger turned to the examination of primitive Christian texts, especially those of Paul (for example, I Thessalonians). If he subsequently devoted an entire course to Augustine (“Augustine and Neoplatonism” [SS 1921]), it was to show how Augustine, for all his sensitivity to the Pauline experience, was the prime example of one who contaminated it by filtering it through Greek (Neo-Platonic) philosophical concepts.

Van Buren spells out Heidegger’s debt to the Christian religious tradition in great detail. Concepts such as care, understanding, mood, anxiety, death, authenticity/inauthenticity and kairological time all have their antecedence in it. Fallenness, in particular, has a long history. Paul speaks, for example, of those who have “fallen from grace” (Gal 5:4), and Heidegger himself takes the distinction between the “fallen and the redeemed by Christ” as the benchmark of Christianity. Augustine describes the condition as marked by temptation, dispersion, entanglements, flight from self to find contentment and the “curiosity” that is a sign of the “lust of the eyes.” For Luther, sinners are their own “obstruction” (obex) against the divine light, and, whether by excess or defect, life itself “goes to ruin.” Pascal adds the elements of diversion and restlessness to the syndrome. In Kierkegaard, the theme returns under the guise of flight from self, or at least from anxiety over the self/God relationship, and Kierkegaard’s description of the inauthentic life is taken over almost verbatim.

In sum, Heidegger’s experience of facticity and fallenness in the early Freiburg years was conceived and nurtured in the

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31Ibid., 167.
32Ibid., 170-202.
33Ibid., 180-81.
Christian religious tradition of what that tradition understood as “original sin.” At one point Heidegger even wrote to his student, Karl Löwith, “I am not a philosopher. … I am a Christian theologian.”34 Rudolf Bultmann went so far as to claim that in the twenties Heidegger’s perspective was “no more than a secularized, philosophical version of the New Testament view of human life.”35 This is a bit much, of course, as the turn to Aristotle makes clear, but at least it suggests that Heidegger’s effort to discern that the formal indications of factical life was clearly compatible with the Lutheran conception of original sin. This would remain true even after Heidegger himself, in the name of the increasingly a-theistic character of his own philosophical endeavor, lost interest in the religious tradition as such.

These religious preoccupations (1920-21) yielded in the following year to a more enduring interest in Aristotle in a course entitled Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle. Introduction to Phenomenological Research (WS 1921-22).36 There he found in Aristotle’s practical philosophy some of the themes that had interested him in the phenomenology of religion. After devoting the first half of the course to broader questions about the nature of philosophy and its role in the university, Heidegger cites a single text of Aristotle that serves as a hook on which to hang his reflection on factical living (das faktische Leben):

It is possible to fail (hamartanein) in many ways (for evil belongs to the class of the unlimited, as the Pythagoreans conjectured, and good to that of the limited), while to succeed is possible only in one way (for which reason also, one is easy and the other difficult – to miss the mark easy, to hit it difficult); for these reasons also, then, excess (hyperbole) and defect (elleipsis) are characteristic of vice, and the mean of virtue. (Nicomachean Ethics, II, 1106 b 28ff).37 (GA 61:108)

34Cited, ibid., 134, 154.
35Cited, ibid., 152.
36Martin Heidegger, Phäomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles. Einführung in die Phäono-
menologische Forschung (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1985). GA 61.
Without regard for the ethical context of Aristotle’s remark, Heidegger describes the “many ways” of failure discernible in ordinary, every-day (that is, “factual”) human living, marked as it is by myriad forms of “excess” (the “hyperbolic”) and defect (the “elliptical”).

The fundamental characteristic of human living for Heidegger is Aristotle’s *kinesis*, which he translates as “animation” (*Bewegung*) or “animatedness” (*Bewegtheit*). Thus, the “animatedness is such that, as animation in itself, it comes to its own aid; it is the animatedness of factual living that fashions (*macht*) itself in such a way that factual living (*Leben*), as living (*lebend*) in the world, does not properly (!) make the movement itself so much as the world, as the wherein, whereupon and wherefor of living, is [itself] alive (*lebt*)” (GA 61:130). This suggests how intimate is the relationship between factual life and the world with which it deals that Heidegger already describes as “caring” (*Sorgen*). “Living is in the broadest relating-sense: caring about one’s ‘daily bread.’ [Luther had used the same phrase.] The latter is to be taken in a very broad, formal-indicative sense. ‘Privation’ (*Darbung* *privatio, carentia*) is the ... fundamental how (*Grundwie*) ... of living” (GA 61:90). At another moment, Heidegger describes this basic poverty as consisting in the fact that “in one way or another something is always missing” (*ständig irgendwie etwas fehlt*) (GA 61:155). In any case, this experience is not just a solitary one (*Selbstwelt*) but one shared with others (*Mitwelt*) in the world.

This indigenous poverty of life by reason of which it lives from the world and out of it (*von und aus*) is marked by the following characteristics:

1) Tendency (*Neigung*) or tendentiousness (*Geneigtheit*). This appears as a kind of weight (*Gewicht*) or gravitational force that drags (*drängt*) life into the world so that life represents itself and builds itself up (*ausbildet*) in terms of the world, indeed is taken up by the world (*Mitgenommenwerden*), and yields to the pressure (*Druck*) of its world. The result is an inevitable, and ever-increasing, dispersion (*zerstreut sich*) of its energies among the things of the world, so that life is forced to find what satisfaction
it can by responding to the demands of life in terms of the world, experiencing itself as a kind of reflection (Reluzenz) of the world (GA 61:100-02).

2) Equally original with this tendency is another component that is inclined to cover up (verdecken) this tendency by annulling (Tilgung), even suppressing (Abdrängen), the distance (Abstand) between life and the world, so that, caught up by its distractions (Zerstreuungen) life tends to make mistakes (versieht sich) and miss aim (vermisst sich) in all its ventures. Here are the roots of life’s search for success, prestige, advantage, influence, etc. that (in a later analysis) feed into its eventual sell-out to the domination of the They. This is the characteristic that inclines life towards excess (hyperbolisch) (GA 61:102-05).

3) A third component of this same structure is more obscure still. Preoccupation with all its distractions leads life to bar itself off from itself (Abriegelung), to lose all sense of its proleptic (vor-) character. (Luther had spoken of the sinner himself as an obstacle to the divine light.) “In caring, life bars itself off against itself, and in this barring becomes unfree (nicht los). In every new distraction, life is always in search of itself and encounters itself precisely where it doesn’t expect, and for the most part in a masking of itself” (GA 61:107). Thus, caring becomes a non-caring (nicht Sorgen) in an endless round of misapprehensions (Sich-immer-neu-Vergreifens) and misde-meanors (Verfehlbarkeiten) of many kinds – life becomes blind, gouging out its own eyes. It is this barring function that makes life miss the mean by reason of defect (des Elliptischen) (GA 61:105-8).

4) A fourth component of factual living is its inclination to lighten its burden by finding the easy (Leicht) path of excess or defect rather than the “hard” way of the mean between the two. The result is a search for comfort and security, flight (Flucht) from whatever would make it look at its masks and perhaps make some basic decision (Urentscheidung) in their regard (GA 61:108-10). All of
these categories of life as animatedness are examined in detail (GA 61:110-30) and life finds its unity in a form of temporality (einheitliche Zeitlichkeit) that Heidegger, in the spirit of Paul, calls “kaiirological” (GA 61:137-40).

This self-constructive, always accelerating animatedness which “as such is always fashioned by its world” (GA 61:130), Heidegger designates as a “plunge” into the world (Sturz or ruina) to which he gives the name “ruination” (Ruinanze), a term that eventually will be replaced by “fallenness”: “the animatedness” of factual living, which factual living in its self as its self for its self out of its self and in all this against its self ‘comes to pass,’ that is, ‘is’” (GA 61:131). Note the built-in counter-movement to the movement as it becomes increasingly involved with its concerns (Steigerung der Besorgnis).

Heidegger identifies four characteristics of this process of ruination: it has built-in corruptibility that makes it prone to temptation (Verführerische), not from without but from within, because it is so exposed to, dependent on, its world (GA 61:141-3); it includes a built-in negative character, for the direction of the plunge is toward a nothing (Nichts) that is a kind of empty space (Leere) where it can come forward no further (Nichtvorkommenkönnen [Vorkommen normally translates physis]), a mark of its ineluctable poverty (Darbung) (GA 61:143-8); at the same time the plunge is into the context of real objects of the world-about without any mediation to buffer them – hence, there is an object-relatedness (Gegenständlichkeit) that is proper to life that is at once both alienating (das Entfremdende) and tranquilizing (das Beruhigende) (GA 61:148-51); the plunge toward the immediacy of object-relatedness that is at the same time into the nothing of an emptiness leaves the movement eminently questionable (die Fraglichkeit) from a philosophical/phenomenological point of view (GA 61:151-5).

Later that same year (1922), when, in order to apply for a new position in Marburg, Heidegger was forced to submit an account of his work-in-progress, he drafted an introduction to a proposed book to be entitled Phenomenological Interpretations of
Aristotle, which Kisiel carefully summarizes. Here, “falling” (Verfallen) replaces the term “ruination” but the essentials of the analysis remain the same. Added, however, was the notion that factual life, though lived by the individual, is absorbed by the average everydayness of the others with whom it lives. Thus, “it is the ‘one’ who in fact lives the life of the individual who is ‘no one.’ ... The tendency of falling is the way life evades itself.” The most striking manifestation of this movement appears in the way life deals with death, but it is not feasible to follow the death problematic any further here.

How does all this add up? Three remarks are in order. In the first place, the plunge of factual living into the world and the consequent movement/countermovement of its ruinous condition anticipates already, I suggest, the insistent-eksistent, to-and-fro dynamism that constitutes the basic structure of errancy. Moreover, the addition of the They problematic (das Man) adds a social dimension to the lostness of the individul in the world. David Krell (in reference to Nietzsche) speaks of the analysis as the “genealogy of masquerade and ruinous self-deception.” Perhaps. Given the context out of which the analysis has emerged, however, could not a Christian theologian use this conceptuality (without distortion) to suggest, at least in part, the underlying structure of the solidarity in perversity that theologians have called the “sin of the world”?

Again, Krell observes, à propos of the negativing (Nichts) ingredient in ruination, that this anticipates the point in Being and Time (# 58), where Heidegger speaks of “guilt” as the “ground of a being that is determined by a not – that is, being the ground of a nullity.” He continues:

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Kisiel, Genesis, 248-71.
Ibid., 297.
Heidegger, Being and Time, 329.
[This analysis] after an extraordinary itinerary of ruinance – through plunge and masquerade, through kairological time and the instant of a counterruinance that is always gnawing at life’s false securities, always boring and burrowing, always subverting life’s complacency, through the necessity of a phenomenological destruction of all interpretative seductions (particularly those of the ethico-religious sort) – culminates in an account of the “whither” of ruinance. (GA 61:143-48).

Where does factical life land when it falls? Nowhere.
When does ruinance strike home? Never.
What rises to break its free fall? Nothing.
The fall is nothing but unrestricted fall, uninterrupted crash (Sturz). Thus the very animatedness of factical life is nihilation.43

This is a tough read, especially since it implies (gratuitously, it seems to me) that ethico-religious experience cannot survive a phenomenological destruction (demythologizing) of its myths. That claim should be challenged, but this is not the time or place. I only wish to raise the question as to whether there is structure enough in a Dasein, trammeled by ontological guilt, to sustain Rahner’s hypothesis of a supernatural existential. To be sure, factical life as described here did not get the technical name of “Dasein” until 1923, or the designation of “existence” until 1925-26 (before then, “existence” was only one possibility of life that might function as counterpoise to its downward plunge), but enough is evident to raise the question for the theologian: how much must be postulated about Dasein to sustain the Rahner hypothesis? If we forego the literal reading of Genesis 3 and favor an evolutionary conception of human origins, how are we to understand the priority of the great gift as proffered vis à vis the always already fallen character of the existentiell situation in which the first humans found themselves? What kind of priority of recipient over gift (logical? chronological? ontological?) would be necessary? Obviously, these are theological rather than philosophical issues and not really our concern, but the very fact that they can be raised suggests that at least these Heideggerian structures are still useful for pondering the nature of this mystery. And these are the

43Ibid., 378.
structures, I claim, that anticipate what the later Heidegger calls errancy.

Finally, Krell calls attention to the restiveness (Unruhe) of factical living in terms of the “powers of the timing-process” (Zeitigungsmächte) under the guise of what he has called the “daimonic”:

Heidegger's restiveness marks the first appearance of the daimonic, of the powers of process, the might of maturation, and the potency of timely growth. In a word die Zeitigungsmächte. Somewhere beyond the traditional categories of soul and body, animation and movement, ensoulement and auto-motion, somewhere between ancient lineages and succeeding generations, between self and other, between life and its sphere, its environs, and its generations – daimon life disseminates.44

For whatever it is worth, the otherness implied in the “powers of process” (that is, daimon life) I take to be an anticipation of what eventually will appear as the power of errancy to dominate Dasein through and through.45

* * *

I wish to come now directly to the problem of errancy. By way of transition, let me note that as Heidegger’s interest in Aristotle continued to develop, the focus on factical living remained constant. This led to repeated attention to the Nicomachean Ethics, and in particular to Book VI, where Aristotle discusses both the role of phronesis, the habit of practical wisdom that discerns the mean between excess and defect (as analysed above), and where he speaks of truth as a process of nonconcealment (aletheuein). The task of life is to live well (eu prattein), but through the passions (especially the love of pleasure), human beings may become concealed from themselves, hence perverse and self-destructive. It is the task of phronesis to help the human being to discover itself in truth. In this sense, Heidegger takes

*Ibid., 371.*

phronesis to be the voice of conscience, with all that means for the call to Dasein to acknowledge its ontological guilt.46

As for aletheia, when Heidegger began to meditate on it explicitly, it was clear that concealment was ingredient to the process: disclosedness of the world is at once its concealedness (Verdecktheit) (GA 63:85). To the extent that speech (logos) is also part of daily factical living, this, too, as uncovering/covering, contains the virus of its own perversion. In Metaphysics, Book V, 29, Heidegger finds three forms of falsity (pseudes) (false thing, false speech, false human), but the source of this falsity is the facticity of speech itself. The very manner of speaking and repeating in the style of the They (das Man) multiplies the possibilities of deception. “Add to this the possibilities of deception in speaking that derive from the world itself: its ‘circumstantiality’ of manifold aspects kata symbebekos, always allowing the world to ‘give itself out’ to be something other than it is; its ‘recessibility’ or elusiveness, as a kind of reverse side to the accessibility of the world through language. For the fleetingness or transitoriness belongs to the world as much as light and dark, day and night.”47

All of this is said from the viewpoint of the early Heidegger, where the focus is on Dasein rather than on Being. It is striking to see what happens to the same themes when we move ahead almost 20 years, to the time when “On the Essence of Truth,” after gestating for thirteen years, was finally being readied for publication (1943). Rather than look at that familiar text one more time, I propose to consider selectively the lecture course that was being given at the same time, Parmenides (WS 1942-43).48

This course meditated on the Poem of Parmenides, I, 22-32, in which the goddess, Aletheia, appears. The process of unconcealment is considered in terms of the transformation of its “counteressence” (Gegenwesen), lethe. As we have just seen, the counterpoise to aletheia is normally taken to be pseudos, in the

46See Kisiel, Genesis, 305-06.
47Ibid., 280.
48Martin Heidegger, Parmenides (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1982). GA 54. Translated by Andre Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1992). Reference will be given to the English pagination after the German.
sense of “the false.” Here Heidegger argues, though, that for the Greeks it meant a cover-up (Verdecken), a mode of concealment (Verbergen) (GA 54:45/30) – a letting-appear, to be sure, but in the form of dissemblance (Verstellen), hiding (Verhehlen) (GA 54:48/33), deception (Täuschen) (GA 54:61/41) or detour (Abweg) (GA 54:87/59). Such distortion does not have its source in human subjectivity; rather its source is something like an event (ereignishaft) that proceeds from something other (GA 54:55/38), that is, the lethe component of aletheia. If pseudos had this ontological meaning for the Greeks, however, how did it come to mean “the false”? By a kind of serendipity for which the Romans were at fault. The German falsch would be a latinization of falsum, derived from fallere (to fall), which in turn is cognate with the Greek sphallo, meaning to overthrow, bring to a downfall, make totter, etc. Heidegger continues:

But this Greek word sphallo never became the genuine counterword opposed to aletheia. I deliberately say “genuine,” because the Greek sphallo can sometimes be translated “correctly” by “deceiving”; what is meant, however, thought in the Greek way, is “making totter,” “making stagger,” “letting stumble into erring.” But man can be led into such tottering and falling in the midst of the beings appearing to him only if something is put in his way obstructing beings, so that he does not know what he is dealing with. First something must be held forth and set forth, and then something else entirely must be delivered, so that man can “fall for” what is presented that way and thereby fall down. Bringing to fall in the sense of misleading first becomes possible on the basis of a putting forth, dissembling, and concealing. (GA 54:57/39)

Notice that we are dealing again with falling, that it is precipitated by aletheia itself (as lethe), and it precipitates a stumble into “erring.” To be sure, it is human being that becomes errant, but this is as an effect of lethe/aletheia whose There it is. “Concealment places the entire essence of human being in hiddenness and tears it away from the unconcealed. Man is ‘away’ from it. He is no longer with it. He neglects and forsakes what is assigned to him. Concealment comes over man and draws him away from the pragmaton orthan hodon [the right path of what is to be done]” (GA 54:122/83).
Note the recurrence of the Dasein as Weg-sein theme of the Beiträge text. What is important to note here, however, is that the effect of concealment (Heidegger also calls it “forgetting,” as if it were a kind of compound self-forgetting on the part of aletheia [GA 54:104-7/71-3]) is not simply on the cognitive level but affects the entire range of human action:

*We are tempted to say the Greeks conceived forgetting not only in relation to cognitive comportment but also with regard to the “practical.” But when we speak this way then we already think in a non-Greek way, for concealment concerns at the very outset man’s entire being-alongside-beings (Dabeisein). Only because this is so does forgetting concern at once and equiprimordially “theoretical” and “practical” comportment. (GA 54:123/83)*

Note that the effect of lethe on Dasein is not a purely noetic phenomenon but affects the whole of its Being, practical as well as theoretical.

This has serious consequences when lethe affects Dasein in its dealings with others in the political arena, or at least in the world of the polis:

*The polis is neither the city nor the state ... but the settling of the place of the history of the Greek experience (Griechentums)... The polis is the abode gathered into itself, of the unconcealedness of beings. If now, however, as the word indicates, aletheia possesses a conflictual essence, which appears also in the oppositional forms of distortion and oblivion, then in the polis as the essential abode of human being there has to hold sway all the most extreme counter-essences, and therein all the excesses (Un-wesen), to the unconcealed and to beings, i.e., counter-beings in the multiplicity of their counter-essence. Here lies concealed the primordial ground of that feature Jacob Burckhardt presented for the first time in its full bearing and manifoldness the frightfulness (Furchtbarkeit), the horribleness (Grauenhafte), the atrociousness (Unheil) of the Greek polis. Such is the rise and the fall of human being in its historical abode of essence – hypsopolis-apolis – far exceeding abodes [yet] homeless, as Sophocles (Antigone) calls human kind. It is not by chance that human being is spoken of in this way in Greek tragedy. For the possibility, and the necessity of “tragedy” itself have their single source in the conflictual essence of aletheia. (GA 54:133-4/90)*
There are several remarks to make about this passage. It supplies a context for a similar passage from the “Letter on Humanism,” where he speaks of the “malice of rage” (Bösartigen des Grimmes) as deriving from the fact that Being itself is contested (das Strittige), that is, the struggle between lethe and aletheia. Is the lethe the blackness of Buchenwald? Probably not – very few things are quite that black, except, perhaps Good Friday. Neither is it Schwarzwald black. We are dealing with real malice here and real evil, and we are talking about the ontological ground of it in the negativity of Being itself. That is black enough.

In such a context, one can understand why Heidegger feels justified in using the words “monstrous” (Ungeheuer) and “daimonic” to describe the emptiness of the place where lethe comes to pass: “The not-ness of the emptiness is the not of withdrawal. … The place of lethe is the Where, in which the monstrous comes to presence in a unique exclusivity. The field of lethe is in a special sense ‘daimonic’” (GA 54:176/119). Note, too, the striking resonance of this formula describing the most extreme form of errancy as proceeding from the lethe of aletheia with the nadir of the plunge of ruination (Ruinanz) – the emptiness (Leere) of the not (Nichts) of factual living (GA 61:143-48).

How does human being make do with all this? Heidegger speaks only for the philosopher, whose task is the exercise of phronesis: insight “into what is properly discernible and unconcealed” (GA 54:178/120), a kind of “saving effort of the unconcealed from the concealment of distorting withdrawal” (GA 54:179/121). Indeed, the course ends on an almost lyrical note, celebrating aletheia as the Open and the Free, and the journey of the thinker to the dwelling place of the goddess.

4.

Conclusion: What, then, is my claim? I maintain that the fallenness of Dasein, a mode of its facticity that accounts for the untruth ingredient to its very structure as the disclosedness of the world, is a theme that dates from the very beginning of Heidegger’s creative work. Initially analogous to an Augustinian-Lutheran
conception of original sin, the notion was elaborated with the help of categories drawn from Aristotle’s practical philosophy (discernment of the mean through *phronesis*) into a non-religious, non-ethical, radically secularized conception of one of the existential components of Dasein’s ontological structure. When the notion of truth as unconcealment (*aletheuein*) (likewise discovered in Aristotle’s practical philosophy) was explored, a negative element of concealment (*lethe*) was discovered as intrinsic to it. In *Being and Time* both themes coalesced to yield the formula, “Because Dasein is essentially falling, its state of Being is such that it is in the ‘untruth.’ ... [This condition] belongs to Dasein’s facticity.”

After the major turn in Heidegger’s thinking that marked a shift in focus from Dasein to Being, the negativity that had marked Dasein’s fallenness now appeared to be grounded in the negativity of *aletheia*, whether as mystery (concealing of the concealment) or errancy (seduction of Dasein into forgetting the mystery). It was in this guise that in the *Parmenides* course, *lethe*, both as mystery (*Vergessen*) and as errancy (*Verstellen, Verhehlen, Täuschen*), was seen to precipitate the downfall (*sphallo*) of Dasein, making Dasein correspondingly errant, not only in its thinking but in its practical action. It was *lethe*, too, that made ontologically possible the “frightfulness,” “horribleness,” and “atrociousness” of the Greek experience. It was this, too, that made Greek tragedy both possible and necessary. The task of *phronesis* now would be to discern deceptive concealment within revealment and deal with it as best errant Dasein could. In the light of all this I have asked whether Heidegger’s fall into the Nazi experience might be accounted for by his own failure to discern the deceptive distortions of that particular phenomenon to end up very errant indeed.

This is the proposal that Caputo dismisses as a conflation of errancy and original sin. If he means by that that I have mistakenly identified a philosophical concept with a religious myth based on a literal reading of Genesis 3, that is incorrect. The only conception of original sin I would consider relevant to this context would be one that would interpret it somehow in terms of the “sin of the world,” a conception I have no reason to believe he has in mind. If he means that I have failed to recognize the
difference between the Greek genius (gifted for vision, hence for philosophical reflection) and the Hebraic (gifted for hearing, hence for religious faith), that is also incorrect. The fact is that both used the same word to express human fault (*hamartia*) and both understood it basically in the same way (“to miss the mark”). If time permitted, this would be the moment to compare the different ways in which each culture actually used the word in order to highlight the profound differences between the two experiences. For my present purposes, that would be beside the point. All I wish to claim is that Heidegger has discerned in Being itself a pernicious negativity that permeates Dasein, its There, and I have asked what consequences this may have had for Heidegger himself who writes about it.

If Caputo means that I seek some soft-headed way to exonerate Heidegger by offering him the chance to say “the *Irre* made me do it,” that is patently incorrect. Heidegger was as

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49 The limits of the present perspective also make it impossible to address formally an objection raised by Caputo in private correspondence (cited with permission): “You keep arguing ... that you can find a place for malice after the clearing is cleared, which is of course better than just forgetting it altogether, whereas I am saying: ‘don’t bother, you’re too late, it’s already there.’ I don’t see you addressing that criticism in this piece.” Indeed I do not. By “already there” I take him to mean that the “place for malice” is already found in the traditions that date from “time immemorial” out of which the aetiological accounts of the Yahwist editor of *Genesis*, 1-11, (shared with neighboring cultures) are woven. I made reference to these accounts in a longer version of this paper that had to be excised for reasons of available space. These traditions antedate by far the emergence of philosophical thought in Greece (circa seventh century B.C.) and do, indeed, deal with (ontic) issues “otherwise than truth as the Pre-Socratics began to conceive it philosophically.” Claus Westermann (*Genesis, An Introduction*, trans. John Scullion [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985], 109) writes suggestively: “In the creation declaration, people for the first time conceptualized the origin of humankind and the world as a whole. To speak of the creator is to speak of the whole. ... This concept of the world and humanity as a whole ... has, in Greek thought, been detached from the creator and become ontology; the Pre-Socratics mark the transition. The idea of the whole and of ‘origin from’ has remained. But the personal act of creating has been transformed into a neutral causality, and ‘origin from’ into being. ... There is ontology only because people once understood their world as creation.” Given the opportunity to address Caputo’s objection properly, I would attempt to argue that ontological structures are “always already there” in ontic phenomena, even though the discovery (postulation?) of them may be subsequent to the chronological experience that records them. (Cp. Aristotle, *Physics*, I, 184a, 1-21.) In Heideggerian terms, the clearing makes possible such a discovery — it is the clearing that is always “already there.”
responsible as Adam was in the Yahwist’s account. “Where is your brother Abel?” is as compelling a question today for Heidegger (and everyone else) as it ever was. I am not trying to excuse Heidegger’s fall, I am trying to explain it – and, indeed, in his own terms. So if, to be done, Caputo means only that I have traced Heidegger’s effort to disengage (under the guise of facticity and fallenness) the formal indication of what Luther (after Augustine) saw to be the basic condition of human being (the “state of original sin”), traced it through the turn in his way to the focus on Being itself in its negativity (α-letheia) as the source of that fallenness, then Caputo is correct. This, however, is hardly a “conflation.”

If that is all I can hope to show, why these labors of Hercules? I see two advantages to be gained by making this case. In the first place, this examination takes Heidegger seriously on his own terms. Van Buren, in his powerful chapter of conclusion, enumerates all of Heidegger’s sins of thought one by one. The author recasts the relevant material in terms of a series of configurations: existential-transcendental, primitivistic, antihumanistic, essentialist, speculative, Hellenic/Germanic, Helleno-Christian religious, gendered, anthropocentric, authoritarian – and adds in the “stories” of Being, to boot. The final pages say “what it comes to.” I have no quarrel with this portentous balance sheet. I only insist that this shows better than any argument I could make that the revelation of Being as α-letheia to Heidegger was trammeled with darkness too. All of the dissemblance, distortion, deception that mark the hesitancies, inconsistencies, ambiguities of his effort proceeded from the same source that marked his genius: the experience of truth that, as finite, includes its own counteressence: enthralling, but darkly mysterious ... and potentially monstrous, too.

Yet there is a much broader reason for engaging in an enterprise of this kind. Heidegger remains (arguably) the most influential philosopher of the twentieth century, and his experience of aletheia raises all over again questions about the nature of truth as such, especially when conceived under the guise of re-velation. On one hand, the Incarnate Word says, “I am the Truth”; on the other, the long history of the evolution of dogma in general (and
of original sin as a particular case in point) is evidence enough of the need of Christian thinkers for conceptual tools to deal with the historicity of that finite truth. As the world moves into the twenty-first century and Christians must operate more and more effectively within parameters of the “post-modern” experience, Heidegger’s notions of truth and the retrieval of it out of mystery, errancy and the unsaid of its articulation, may prove, if taken seriously, very useful indeed. How that might come about is another chapter that cannot be opened here, but at least the viability of such ideas should not be foreclosed because of the apparent failures of the one who proposed them. For Christians believe that the blackness of Buchenwald and the blackness of Schwarzwald are not the ultimate symbols of human tragedy. Both dissolve in the blackness of Good Friday that yielded to an Easter dawn. When all is said and done, this is the mystery of the Christ-Event: that to the unremitting need of our own redemption, it remains in continual advent. That is why we can hope.