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FALL OF DASEIN: HEIDEGGER READING LUTHER 1924-1927

Let us enter into our discussion by an archeological analysis of a significant case of last-century thinking, where we can find, in a highly entangled way, Lutheran and theological elements within a philosophical framework: Heidegger's *Being and Time* of 1927. To make manifest this complex interrelation between philosophy and theology, we wish to isolate an exemplary phenomenon in Heidegger's text and subtext that we may call the "circuit of lust". We will then question this operation of transposition or transfer of theological elements and discuss its legitimacy in Heidegger.

Heidegger's analytics of falling or fallenness (*Verfallen, Verfallenheit*) will be our starting point. In § 38 of *Being and Time*, the general mode of phenomenalization of the "mobility of falling" (*Bewegtheit des Verfallens*) of human being or *Dasein* in its everydayness is characterized by the term "whirl", or "turbulence" (*Wirbel*):

This constant tearing away from authenticity and into the "they" [*das Man*] (though always with the simulation of authenticity) characterizes the mobility of falling as a *whirl*.¹

This whirl disperses the human being among the glories of the world, tearing it into "the tranquillized supposition that it possesses everything, or that everything is within its reach",² as Heidegger writes, and thus brings the existence away from its highest possibility. This means: away from its possible authenticity or own excellence and fulfilment (*Eigentlichkeit*), as it can be represented, for example, by the ideal of a philosophical life.³ This mobility of falling manifests itself as a fleeing from the possibility of authenticity: a possibility of authenticity which human being, when it is dissolved in the world of

¹ M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (SZ) (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), 178; *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie, E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); *Being and Time*, tr. J. Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996). – The term "whirl" could be a reference to Augustine, *Ep. Io. tr.*, II, 10 on I Jn 2, 16: *Volvit te amor mundi ? tene Christum.* – I have chosen not to burden this text with a scholarly apparatus; for documentation and further elaboration of some parts of it, the reader can refer to C. Sommer, *Heidegger, Aristote, Luther. Les sources aristotéliennes et néo-testamentaires d'Être et Temps* (Paris: PUF, 2005).

² SZ, 178.

³ Cf. M. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* (GA) 19, 169 on Aristotle, *Met.* V, 16, 1021 b 20; GA 18, 46, 99; Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* II, 5, 1106 a 15; I, 6, 1098 a 15; IX, 9, 1169 b 33; X, 7, 1178 a 5. On *Eigentlichkeit* = ἀγαθόν / εὐδαιμονία, cf. GA 18, 75, 77; *Eth. Nic.* I, 3, 1095 b 14.

diversion, in the sense of Pascal's *divertissement*, does not want to see, or cannot see, and thus constantly represses:

The absorption of *Dasein* in the “they” and in the “world” of its concern reveals something like a *flight* of *Dasein* from itself as an authentic potentiality for being itself (...) In this flight, *Dasein* precisely does not bring itself before itself. In accordance with its ownmost characteristic of falling, this turning away leads *away from Dasein*.⁴

The mobility of falling is a constant “fall” (*Absturz*) into the “nothingness” (*Nichtigkeit*), or vanity, of the inauthentic, “worldly” existence, into the discursive mode of opinion (*δόξα*) and falseness (*ψεῦδος*) of what Heidegger calls *das Man*, and is therefore a falling away from the authentic self articulated by a truth-saying *λόγος*. This, we wish to argue, is a phenomenological conceptualization of Martin Luther's description, in his commentary of the Genesis Book,⁵ of the excessive and “hyperbolic” nature of sin (Rom 7, 13) as a movement of flight that turns away from God.

Heidegger gave a two-part talk on *The Problem of Sin in Luther* in Rudolf Bultmann's seminar on Paul's ethics (1923/24) on 14 and 21 February 1924 in Marburg, a large part of which dealt with this Lutheran commentary, especially the exegesis of Genesis 3.⁶ Let us remember what happens there. The “man” and the “woman” hear the sound of God walking up and down in the garden, and they try to hide themselves from the presence of God among the trees (Gn 3, 8). Then God calls Adam and says to him: “Where are You?” (Gn 3, 9). In his commentary, Luther writes:

This is the description of the trial. After Adam has become terrified through the awareness of his sin, he avoids the sight of God and realizes that not only Paradise but the entire world is too narrow to be a safe hiding place. And now, in that mental agony, he reveals his stupidity by seeking relief from sin through flight from God. But he had already fled too far from God. Sin itself is the real withdrawal from God, and it would not have been necessary to add any further flight. Thus it happens, and this is the nature of sin, that the farther man withdraws from God, the farther he still

⁴ SZ, 184. On this movement of “turning away”, cf. SZ, 135-136, 139, 184, 253-259, 425; on the movement of flight (*Flucht, fuga...*), cf. GA 17, 284-288; GA 20, 391-393; SZ, 184-185, 257-258; GA 24, 193.

⁵ M. Luther, *In primum librum Mose enarrationes = Enarrationes in Genesis (Exegetica opera latina)*, ed. C. v. Elspeger, t. I, Erlangen: Heyder, 1829) / *Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (WA) (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883 et sq.; reprint Graz: Böhlau, 1964 et sq.), 42, 127-131; *Lecture on Genesis*, in *Luther's Works*, trans. G. V. Schick, ed. J. Pelikan, vol. 1 (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1958), chap. 1-5.

⁶ M. Heidegger, *Das Problem der Sünde bei Luther*, in B. Jaspert, *Sachgemässe Exegese. Die Protokolle aus Rudolf Bultmanns Neutestamentlichen Seminaren 1921-1951* (Marburg: Elwert, 1996), 28-33; *The Problem of Sin in Luther* (PSL), trans. J. van Buren, in Heidegger, *Supplements*, ed. J. van Buren (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 105-110. – For a commentary of Heidegger's commentary of Luther's commentary, cf. M. Heidegger, *Luther et le problème du péché (1924)*, translation and commentary, in *Le jeune Heidegger (1909-1926). Herméneutique, phénoménologie, théologie*, ed. S.-J. Arrien, S. Camilleri (Paris: Vrin, 2011), 259-286. – We can find some traces of this talk in SZ, 179-180, and 306, n. 1. Luther's commentary is quoted in SZ, 190.

desires to withdraw; and he who has once fled and apostatized keeps on fleeing forever.⁷

The source and the beginning of all perversity and all fallenness is, of course, the original sin, the Fall. Man turns away from God and falls away from his original faith. The meaning of sin is this apostasy, this godlessness and remoteness from God, and it could be described, as Heidegger does, as a fundamental dynamic category of human being in the world. After having emphasized that for Luther, the very essence of man is corruption (a doctrine that we can recognize in the concept of “guilt” [*Schuld*], beyond lack [*Mangel*] and *privatio* in *Being and Time*), Heidegger comments:

Luther turns his attention to the movement that sin (*Bewegtheit der Sünde*) as a mode of the being of man bears in itself: One sin begets another and drags man down even deeper. The real sin is *incredulitas*, i.e., unbelief, *aversio dei*.⁸

This dynamic can be said to be hyperbolic, because this sin is a sin that “might become sinful beyond measure”, exceedingly sinful (Rm 7, 13), in such a manner that the “real meaning of sin is this”: “He who flees once flees in such a way that he constantly wishes to distance himself further, he keeps on fleeing forever”.⁹ (Luther)

Heidegger’s interpretation is very close to the interpretation of his friend and colleague Rudolf Bultmann – Heidegger and Bultmann were together in Marburg from 1923 to 1928 and regularly worked together –, who also insisted, in an article published in 1925, on the importance of the movement of fleeing in Luther’s commentary of Genesis 3:

Adam thinks he is able to flee before God; but by the flight, God’s claim and address (*Anspruch*) is not cancelled (...) how right Luther is when he says that the natural man flees before God and hates God. By fleeing the reality of his concrete existence, he precisely seeks to flee from that in which only he can find God.¹⁰

It is important to hear this *Anspruch* and to be able to respond to it by faith, to have some chance of being justified by God’s transforming action, of being brought to my authentic self through inauthenticity, through the “world” and my sinful condition. This is also what Heidegger means when he says in his commentary:

And nonetheless the situation of man in which he distances himself from God is a relation to God that shows itself in a certain looking back on man’s

⁷ M. Luther, WA 42, 128-129.

⁸ PSL, 108.

⁹ PSL, 109.

¹⁰ R. Bultmann, “Welchen Sinn hat es, von Gott zu reden?”, in *Glauben und Verstehen* (GV), t. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933), 28, 30. Cf. also “Die liberale Theologie und die jüngste theologische Bewegung”, GV, t. 1, 1-25, especially 18; “Römer 7 und die Anthropologie des Paulus”, in *Exegetica. Aufsätze zur Erforschung des Neuen Testaments*, ed. E. Dinkler (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1967), 198-209.

part in the sense that God is rejected as *auctor peccati*, in the sense that man says: “God is not God.” / And this situation of man is effected by God, insofar as it is the *summa gratia* that he did not remain silent after the Fall but *loquitur*.¹¹

The situation of the sinful and corrupt human, fallen away from God, is the very work of divine grace. The state of sin, which strictly speaking is alienation from God, is correlated with the redemption of sin by the grace of God as a happening or an event that occurs without my will. For Luther, a close reader of Paul, grace is not granted on the ground of merits and works (Ep 2, 8-9: “Because by grace you have salvation through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is given by God: / Not by works, so that no man may take glory to himself”). Grace is granted on the ground of sin (as we know from Rm 5, 20: “where sin abounded, grace overabounded”). In other words, I first have to become lost in order to be saved: “whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mk 8, 35).¹²

But let us concentrate on this hyperbolic fleeing as the meaning of sin that could be called the compulsive, pathological “circuit of lust” in the sense of “concupiscence”; in other words, what in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* is called the everyday mobility of falling. The very matrix of this circuit is the New Testamentarian principle pronounced by Christ himself: “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again” (Jn 4, 13). And this principle could also be found in other religious traditions, for example in initial Buddhism, in the Buddha’s *Sermon of Benares*, where the “thirst” or “greed” for being is given as the main reason for wandering in the “long night” of the samsaric cycle.

In the later Christian tradition, this circuit of lust, or desire (*concupiscentia*, *cupiditas*, *libido*, *appetitus* / ἐπιθυμία...), was often and forcefully described, for example by Bernard of Clairvaux in his *De diligendo Deo*:

The wicked, therefore, walk round in circles (*in circuitu impii ambulant*), naturally wanting whatever will satisfy their desire (*appetitus*), yet foolishly rejecting that which would lead them to their true end.¹³

And the young Luther, in the Proof of his Theological Thesis XXII in the *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), describes also the endless circuit of desire through the term “dropsy” or “water-addiction” of the soul:

(...) desire cannot be satisfied by the acquisition of those things which it desires. Just as the love of money grows in proportion to the increase of the money itself, so the dropsy of the soul becomes thirstier the more it drinks
(...) This holds true of all desires / Thus also the desire for knowledge is not satisfied by the acquisition of wisdom but is stimulated that much more.

¹¹ PSL, 109.

¹² Cf. also Lk 17,33, Mt 10,39, Jn 12,25.

¹³ Bernard of Clairvaux, “De diligendo Deo”, VII, 19, in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. 5, Treatises II (Washington: CPC, 1974) – trans. mod.

Likewise the desire for glory is not satisfied by the acquisition of glory, nor is the desire to rule satisfied by power and authority, nor is the desire for praise satisfied by praise, and so on.¹⁴

As a remedy for curing desire, Luther recommends the extinction or *destruction* of the addiction, a remedy which is precisely the “wisdom” which is folly considered from the point of view of the world. First, I have to understand that if I reach greedily for pleasures, which finally causes me pain, it is because I take some good for some evil and some evil for some good, and instead of walking forward on a straight path, I remain in a vicious circle. This confusion of the wrong good, which I greedily chase, with the real good (for example, the possibility of an excellent, “authentic” life), is simply called in the Bible, as we know, the “knowledge of good and evil” (Gn 2, 17, 3, 5), and means the new ability which man misuses through his sin, which is, in reality, a state of mental confusion and fallenness instituted through my worldly desire, through my love for the world.

Therefore, we could say that the “old man”, or the falling *Dasein*, driven from his worldly desire, and slave of his own circle of sin, has to be destroyed to give place to the “new man”. This means that the basic direction of my fundamental “desire”, which is one and the same force (Mt 6, 24), the fundamental direction of my “care” (*Sorge*: *cura*, ὄρεξις), as Heidegger calls it in his existential-ontological transposition, has to be redirected and *converted*, a fundamental New Testamentarian structure that also functions in *Being and Time*.

The fundamental orientation of my care is split into two antagonistic and conflictual directions: towards “spirit” and towards “flesh” (Ga 5, 17, Mt 26, 41), as the New Testament would put it. In *Being and Time*, these two fundamental movements of human being in the world, as the movement of turning to... and the movement of turning away from... (*An- und Abkehr*),¹⁵ are precisely conceptualized in the temporal and dynamic antagonism between fleeing as falling (*Flucht, Verfallen*) and anticipation (*Vorlaufen*), two modalities of care which refer to the possibility of annihilation of *Dasein*'s being (the possibility of death).

Heidegger's central concept of anticipative resolution (*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*) of death, as a counter-movement against the movement of sin, transposes the structure of faith: resolute “courage” facing the fear of death reverses the intentional direction of care. The practical everyday business (*Besorgen*), and also the theoretical attitude, which are both referred to worldly beings, now turns to the mortal being of *Dasein*, in a philosophical *meditatio mortis*. Heidegger's concept of authentic *Dasein* philosophically aware of its mortal condition, hearing the call of its own finitude, secularizes therefore the “new life” (Rm 6, 4) of the NT that responds to the call of God by faith. Before the life in faith, the *homo vetus* lives as a “debtor” (Rm 8, 12) to the flesh, sin and death (*Schuld, Tod*), under the sign of fear (φόβος). In the life according to the flesh, “sin revives” (Rm 7, 9) and enslaves the *ego* (Rm 7, 17-20). Destroying the old *ego*, faith freely obeys (Ga 5, 13) the Word of the cross; sin and death are defeated and overcome (2 Co 4, 13).

¹⁴ Luther, *Disputatio Heidelbergae habita* (WA 1, 350-374); *Heidelberg Disputation*, trans. H. J. Grimm, in *Career of the Reformer*, 39-70, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, ed. J. Pelikan, H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Concordia, 1957).

¹⁵ SZ, 135.

In this context, “sin” means that, because of a defective direction of my fundamental desire or care, I miss the possibility of the excellence of my life as the anticipated goal or target, in the sense that Aristotle defines ἀμαρτία (“sin”) as a “missing of virtue” that is situated between excess and deficiency. If I want to accomplish life in its highest possibility, the intentional direction of my care has to be brought *from* worldly beings *to* the authentic self (*through* the tribulation and passion of anxiety where *Dasein* is reduced to “nothing”), from the “things of the world” towards the “things of the Lord” (1 Co 7, 32-34).

This is a conversion, or revolution, of the direction of my entire life, from lust or concupiscence to love or agape: the “love for the world” and for its transitory goods becomes now the love of God, as John proclaimed it in the first letter, and as Augustine will describe it later as the triple concupiscence or lust in Book X of his *Confessions* (30, 41):

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. / For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. / The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever (1 Jn 2, 15-17).

And “doing the will of God” means nothing else than to follow the commandment of love – a difficult, almost impossible task – and to follow the commandment of love means to destroy the circle of worldly craving and the fear of death on which it relies. Perfect love drives out fear (1 Jn 4, 18). “Love” (*caritas, amor, dilectio*), as Augustine in his treatise on fear formulates it (*De div. qu.* 83); it reduces the craving or desire to possess temporal goods or ephemeral things (q. 33). Perfect love is precisely the absence of fear (q. 36), and thus exemption from the pathological and obsessional adherence to the permanent “mobility”, to the “fatal mutability” of the world and to the false and sinful *ego* or the fallen *Dasein* which desires this vanishing world.¹⁶

We interrupt here the development of these Neo-Testamentarian, Lutheran elements inside Heidegger’s conceptual framework, and would like to conclude by thematizing very briefly the nature of Heidegger’s reading of Luther. Things are not as simple as they may seem to be, because Heidegger is not just a secularization of Luther: he is a Neo-Lutherian *Aristotelian* Thinker.

We can see that Heidegger is guided by the Lutheran project of a return to the proto-Christian experience of the NT by way of a destruction of “pagan wisdom”, i.e. a destruction of Greek philosophy and especially of Aristotle, the “blind and pagan

¹⁶ In Heidegger, “mobility” (*Bewegtheit*) translates, in an Aristotelian context, κίνησις (μεταβολή); cf. for example GA 22, 170; GA 9, 243. On the notion of “mutability” (*mutabilitas, vanitas*), which could translate Heidegger’s “mobility” and inscribe it in a larger conceptual field, cf. Augustine, *Io. ev. tr.*, XCIX, 5; XXXI, 5; *De civ. Dei*, XIII, 10; *Conf.*, XII, 8, 8; 15, 21; 17, 25; Boetius, *Consol. Phil.*, II, 1, 10; 15; 2, 14; Thomas, *S. theol.* I, q. 9, art. 2; II-II, q. 57, art. 2; *In ep. ad Rom.*, VIII, lect. 4 (in v. 21), 666 with ref. to Augustine, *Contra Maximinum*, II, XII, 2 and Aristotle, *Phys.* VIII, 1, 252 a.

master.”¹⁷ The Heideggerian *Destruktion*, which covers the 1922-1926 period of a very close reading of Aristotle, develops this initial impulse of the Lutheran *destruction*, which wants to dismantle the scholastic architecture considered as a “theology of glory” which has turned away from the experience of cross and passion.¹⁸ But it is important to note that it is also in the young Luther that Heidegger finds a positive impulse to access to a primordial Aristotle without passing through the “scholastic doctors”: “It is highly doubtful that Aristotle’s thought can be found in the Latins”, as Luther affirms in the thesis 51 of his *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* (1517).¹⁹ In fact, Luther reads Aristotle – as we can see for example in his commentary (*Divi Pauli apostoli ad Romans epistola*, 1515/16) of Rm 12, 2 where he borrows terms of the *Phys.* to articulate the process of justification²⁰ – to find in his philosophy something that could be useful for theology: *Vide quam apte serviat Aristoteles in Philosophia sua Theologiae*.

In brief, we can say: Heidegger is NT (Luther) with (and against) Aristotle. In other words: *qui sine periculo volet in Aristotele philosophari, necesse est, ut ante bene stultificetur in Christo...* Let us suggest that the complex nature of Heidegger’s conceptuality (*Begrifflichkeit*) is generated by these two matrixes which are the categorical structures and the operative presuppositions of Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology of factic life, or the analytics of human *Dasein*. What we may call a “crossed” or chiasmatic reiteration of Aristotle and the NT (Luther) nourishes and constitutes the rigorous operation of a *phenomenological conceptualization* of basic experiences insufficiently thought, or even unthought, in the philosophical *and* theological tradition.²¹ One of these examples of destruction is the phenomenon of the “circuit of lust”, as we have tried to demonstrate, but without soliciting the Aristotelian elements.

¹⁷ LO II, 142 (WA 6, 457). Luther’s hostility against Aristotle (Heidegger even speaks of hate, *Hass*, in GA 60, 97; GA 63, 5) has to be nuanced: *Vide quam apte serviat Aristoteles in Philosophia sua Theologiae* (WA 1, 28).

¹⁸ The *destructio*, as the *ruina* and *annihilatio* of sin and human wisdom, is so central in Rm that Luther considers it as the “heart piece” (LD 5, 48; WA DB 7, 2) of the NT; cf. LO XI, 215 (WA 56, 157) on Rm 1, 1.

¹⁹ LO I, 99 (WA 1, 226).

²⁰ LO XII, 210-211 (WA 56, 441-442).

²¹ Cf. GA 20, 404 where Heidegger takes the example of the phenomenon of angst: “Dieses Phänomen der Angst ist nicht etwa eine Erfindung von mir, sondern es wurde schon immer, wenn auch nicht in der Begrifflichkeit, gesehen. Ich versuche hier nur, die Begriffe von den Dingen zu geben, mit denen man sonst als nebulose in den Wissenschaften zu arbeiten pflegt, auch in der Theologie zuweilen”. The operation of conceptualisation is strictly phenomenological, following a minimal definition of phenomenology: “das, was sich zeigt, so wie es sich von ihm selbst her zeigt, von ihm selbst her sehen lassen” (SZ, 34). As the science of being (*Wissenschaft des Seins*) or ontology (ibid., 37), phenomenology puts into light the essence or the entantity (οὐσία) of phenomena through definition (*Umgrenzung*) or concept (*Begriff*): λόγος (ibid., 58).