The third section deals with the issue of religion. In the first two chapters Caputo gives an interesting interpretation of the Christian faith as a form of radical hermeneutics. First, in fact, faith is based on the notion of not knowing “the Secret,” but believing in it nevertheless. Quoting Kierkegaard and Eckhart, Caputo praises uncertainty and ignorance as constitutive traits of the religious experience. Second, the exegesis of the Bible and, more strikingly, the mystery of Jesus’s Resurrection are read as interpretative exercises par excellence. The understanding of the Word is based, in fact, on provisional readings of signs, tentative interpretations of traces, inconclusive hypotheses on the significance of the spoken and the unspoken: “Undecidability is the condition, the quasi-transcendental condition, of faith, the thing that makes faith (im)possible, the impossible.” (220–1)

In conclusion, Caputo provides his readers with an insightful, valuable study of several aspects of contemporary postmodernism, both of deconstructionist and hermeneutic origin. His remarks on Derrida and, especially, Richard Rorty are extremely incisive and illuminating. However, his work suffers from a limitation typical of much postmodernism: optimism. Caputo, as before him Derrida, Habermas, and Rorty, assumes that diversity, pluralism, and democracy are going to promote human flourishing by their own virtue. Caputo describes even Foucault himself as a confident defender of these values, despite the fact that the French thinker is often seen as a desperate prophet of the tragic nature of human relations. Such a recurring stress on the intrinsic goodness of diversity, pluralism, and democracy represents the postmodern equivalent of an act of faith. It is not clear, in fact, why diversity, pluralism, and democracy should necessarily grant human flourishing, instead of destruction and life-reduction. As Caputo enjoys highlighting, we do not know what the future is going to disclose: maybe a better life, as he hopes, or maybe an endless nightmare, as most of past and present history seems to suggest.

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Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity / Martin Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe 63
JOHN VAN BUREN, trans.

Heidegger has said that the seminar notes Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity (based on the summer seminar he gave in 1923 at Freiburg), constituted the first notes for Being and Time. One cannot consequently overestimate their significance.
for understanding this later work and his subsequent philosophical path. Given that Heidegger’s work is not a system, the comprehension of its unity requires knowledge of its genesis. Ever since the German publication of *Ontology* in 1988, English readers have impatiently awaited its translation. John van Buren, author of *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King* (Indiana University Press, 1994), accepted this hermeneutical challenge and has succeeded with aplomb. We will begin by briefly highlighting the contents of the work and then proceed to comment on the translation and editing work of van Buren. The difficulty of the translator’s task will be appreciated once the content of this seminar is considered.

The title generally serves as an indication of a book’s contents. At first sight, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity* seems obscure by the combination of terms it presents. What relationship does Heidegger intend between “ontology,” “hermeneutics,” and “facticity?” In the first part of the work, Heidegger states that the task of hermeneutics is to elucidate facticity, the be-ing of the ineluctably self-interpreting (hermeneutical) nature of Dasein. “Facticity” most essentially characterizes Dasein in its be-ing character, in other words as being there in each case for a while, at a particular time, present in the world about which it is preoccupied or concerned. The task of hermeneutics is to hold Dasein wakeful to itself. Heidegger calls this eminent possibility of Dasein “existence.” The wakefulness of Dasein for itself, its not running away from itself, indicates that it is always on the path toward itself, toward encountering itself, in anticipation and questionableness (interpretation gone wrong). This fundamental dynamic of Dasein shapes its specific temporal horizon, revealed by care, disquietude and anxiety. Consistent with the phenomenon of care, Heidegger interprets “of” in the expression “hermeneutics of facticity” not as an objective genitive, but as a possessive one that stresses the self-interpreting nature of facticity (Dasein) itself. Later in the seminar, Heidegger interprets “facticity” as a phenomenon that appears.

Hermeneutics becomes in this way a preliminary exercise which never stops questioning, in which, Heidegger explains, one has to stay as long as possible. The way to maintain one’s self in this questioning is to heed the foreconceptions working in the conceptuality of average everydayness. This conceptuality is conveyed by “talk,” which is motivated by “curiosity,” where Dasein is taken as a mere object of knowledge. The conceptuality of everydayness is founded in unquestioned tradition.

Looking at tradition from this hermeneutic perspective dismantles it. By applying the mirror of his now established determination of factical Dasein to the areas of history and philosophy, one can critique the conceptuality and categories of Dasein that tradition transmits and the fallenness (as opposed to wakefulness) that it perpetuates. This is why in the second part of the seminar, Heidegger tries to explain average everydayness through an analysis of contemporary historical consciousness and today’s philosophy. Whether it tries to elaborate the morphology
of culture, define the totality of being according to an absolute temporal norm, or construct a system, all these efforts impose an interpretation of Dasein as being lulled by the certainty and security of objectivity. Heidegger thereby determines today’s history and philosophy to be “talk” based on “curiosity”: “a being-nowhere found in the ‘must see everything,’” (43) the public-ness of life as such.

In the last part of the seminar Heidegger explains that curiosity can be dominant because Dasein is initially being in a world, encountering and sojourning at home in it, in other words being concerned about one’s environing world, aware that the world is here for one insofar as one cares about it. Through encountering the world, Dasein derives its significance and founds the possibility of hermeneutics as such. The world has sense only if Dasein opens it by means of caring for a specific situation of its everydayness, and not by theoretical grasping. But since care is oriented towards the world in everyday concern, its actualization and temporalisation correspond to “fallenness” where Dasein conceals itself in curiosity, public-ness and habits. Dasein thus hides from its own care; the distress that genuinely moved Dasein toward self-encounter also dissolves.

We will now comment on the work of the translator. Not only is van Buren’s expertise in the early Heidegger recognized, this edition merits re-enforcing this strong reputation. There are useful and relevant additions to the German edition: all Latin and Greek quotations are referenced in the English translation; van Buren adds references to the English translations of the German works cited in Heidegger’s notes; and there is extensive helpful philosophical commentary on the subject matter.

The German edition contains a detailed Table of Contents (which constitutes a summary) as well as an Editor’s Epilogue by Käte Bröcker-Oltmann. Van Buren adds his own Epilogue, copious endnotes and a German-English, English-German glossary. In the translator’s “Epilogue” and the endnotes van Buren meticulously justifies his translation decisions from both linguistic and philosophic perspectives. In addition, he elaborates the principles that guided his work by setting out the Heideggerian understanding of translation. Translation is inevitably interpretation, the transformation of a thought. But transformation here is not pejorative since it brings new insight to the subject matter and illuminates new connections. Moreover, a translator as interpreter must be aware of his linguistic and historical situation, while retaining respect for the language, conceptuality and subject matter of the original text. Since van Buren sees translation as hermeneutics and is aware of his own forehaving, his approach concurs with Heidegger’s, producing a sensitive and eminently thoughtful rendition of this enigmatic text.

The minor qualms that follow do not mitigate our unqualified approval of this excellent edition. On a first reading, the length of the endnotes almost causes one to lose the narrative thread of the main text. These notes are all very helpful and justified, and although it is impossible to separate completely the linguistic
from the philosophic, a possible alternative would be to restrict the endnotes to linguistic remarks and place the more philosophical comments in the Epilogue. The reader could then choose whether or not to refer to the highly specialized linguistic explanations. Another point is that a few translations seem too detailed, for example, “auf” (with respect to, on the basis of, and with view to...), “Woraufhin” (the with-respect-to-which and on-the-basis-of-which), “aus” (wherefrom, out-of-which, and on-the-basis-of-which) and “Einsatz” (initial engagement and bringing into play). An endnote explanation may have been sufficient to suggest the different meanings the reader should have in mind when he reads the word, allowing the translator to choose an expression more in tune with the sobriety of the German term. Finally, van Buren speaks of looking for a balance “between the poetic dimension of Heidegger’s text and its factical earthiness.” (99) While we agree with his view that the seminar anticipates later texts generally regarded as poetic, he has perhaps over-emphasized the poetic dimension of this text. (91, 92, 97, 108, 111) His main examples of poetic language are the words “Aufenthalt,” sojourn, and “Verweilen,” whiling. An explanation of what van Buren means by “poetic” would have been useful.

Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity is a highly enigmatic work due to the nature of its subject matter and its form as lecture notes. Although it stands on its own and can be read without reference to Heidegger’s later work, this text challenges the alleged lack of an ethical perspective in Being and Time. Van Buren rouses the reader’s interest in this subject with a simple question: “Was the course ‘Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity’ the original form of Heidegger’s ‘original ethics’?” Heidegger would have responded in the affirmative, prompting the reader to ask: Is it then meaningful to ground ethics in ontology and to found ontology on existence? To ask this question is to encounter Heidegger’s thought and to be moved by the hermeneutical impulse toward self-interpretation. Perhaps that was precisely what Heidegger ultimately wanted to accomplish.

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Die Resokratisierung Platons, Die Platonische Hermeneutik Hans-Georg Gadamers
FRANÇOIS RENAUD

When I retired from my teaching position at Heidelberg towards the end of the sixties, I originally had planned to develop all of the already submitted, and also all of the commenced studies on Greek philosophy into one larger book on Plato. I never got to