Readers interested in the theological implications of existentialism, hermeneutics, and deconstruction would be attracted to *The Fall of Interpretation*. In his book, Smith assesses various theological and philosophical interpretations of interpretation, and argues that the majority of writers who claim to be post-foundational are, in fact, closet essentialists. There are several aspects of this book that must be applauded. For one thing, Smith’s bold and broad scope is commendable. His book, moreover, is written in a free and easy manner that makes his point accessible for readers unschooled in the jargon of contemporary philosophy. His focus on the biblical “fall,” and his subsequent examination of how a theological conception of a “fall” finds itself entrenched in Derrida, Heidegger, and Gadamer, is perhaps the most interesting, if not compelling (in the case of Gadamer), aspect of Smith’s book. Another noteworthy contribution of Smith’s book can be summarized in his thought-provoking question: “the terms *creation* and *fall* are common parlance in theology, but can this terminology be transported into philosophical discourse? Is this not faith language and therefore inadmissible in philosophy?” (25)

Smith begins his book by interpreting our banishment from the Garden of Eden as a fall that results in the necessity of interpretation. What the Garden represents is the pure immediacy of meaning and truth. Smith equates our banishment from the Garden with both the corruption of immediacy and also the need for mediation, distance, and the “curse” of interpretation. Interpretation, Smith argues, is conceived of as a despised sin by both theological and philosophical writers. Smith traces the conception of interpretation as a fallen state in the works of Koivisto, Lints, Pannenberg, Gadamer, Habermas, Heidegger, and Derrida. The first half of his book is devoted to addressing “how these authors and traditions understand interpretation itself: what status do they accord to the act of interpretation?... [W]hat valuation is accorded to interpretation?... [H]ow does the tradition interpret *interpretation* itself?” (19) Beginning with Koivisto and Lints, Smith argues that contemporary evangelical theology understands interpretation as a mediation that must be overcome. Smith suggests that using hermeneutics both to negate the need for hermeneutics and also to reinstate a paradise of present immediacy is the ultimate goal for both Koivisto and Lints.

While Smith’s coverage of Koivisto and Lints is fair and convincing, his interpretation of Gadamer’s hermeneutics is wrought with dubious assumptions. Smith proposes that Gadamer only embraces interpretation on the surface of his philosophy while underneath longing for an essential immediacy. He argues that Gadamer presents us with a philosophy that understands interpretation as only *currently* necessary, and to be overcome by the end of time. In claiming that
Gadamer understands interpretation as somehow fallen, Smith argues that Gadamer expresses the hope of one day overcoming interpretation and escaping our human finitude. Smith’s perspective is perhaps unsurprising considering his implicit allegiance to Caputo. Smith’s indebtedness to Caputo results in an interpretation that presents nothing we have not already heard from Caputo himself. Smith makes numerous uncritical references to Caputo’s presentation of Gadamer as a “closet essentialist,” and adds nothing new to Caputo’s position (except, maybe, a pledge to become the best Caputonian possible).

Less dubious, however, are Smith’s interpretations of Heidegger and Derrida. Smith spends much time discussing Heidegger’s conception of facticity and focusing on Heidegger’s description of the human situation as being connected to a violent fall. Smith points out that Derrida is operating with a model very similar to Heidegger’s, insofar as he understands interpretation as a violent act which separates, cuts, and excludes. Similar to Heidegger, the fall is built into Derrida’s description of interpretation; where misunderstanding and misinterpretation are woven into the very structure of the sign.

While Smith sees himself as sympathetic to both Heidegger and Derrida, he differentiates himself on the issue of interpreting interpretation as a fall. In this light, Smith writes: “While I agree with both Heidegger and Derrida that interpretation is part and parcel of being human, I disagree—precisely because of that view of interpretation—with their construal of this as necessarily or structurally fallen and violent” (89). Smith distances himself from both Heidegger and Derrida by asking: “but if interpretation—and the determinate conditions of interpretation—are necessary and ‘essential’ aspects of human existence, why must these be described as fallen and violent?” (99) At this point, we might ask: why not? It is clear that Smith is terrified of associating interpretation with violence, but he neglects to address and/or critique Derrida’s reasons as to why and how signs and interpretations are violent.

Smith makes way for his own position by asking: “what if being-in-relation were understood as a crucial aspect of being authentically human?... for if to be-in-relation is an aspect of being a creature, then it must be understood as a modality of creational goodness, of the goodness of creation. Rather than being always already dominated by the other, the Other and others are crucial to my be(com)ing human” (101). At this point, readers who have interpreted Gadamer as a postmodern (and not as a “closet essentialist”), as well as those familiar with Ricoeur, will see nothing new or provocative in Smith’s proposal.

Smith claims that his own “creational model” of interpretation is “neither simply evangelical nor deconstructive precisely because it attempts to step ‘outside’ (inasmuch as that is possible) the paradigm ... of those models” (134). If the reader has not already raised an eyebrow, now would be a good time to start. Smith proceeds to describe his “creational model” by simply accepting (without critique, examination, or justification) Augustine’s affirmation of the goodness of creation.
Smith refuses to identify finitude with fallenness or violence, and simply concludes that Augustine’s goodness of creation “thus ought to affirm the goodness of temporal, finite existence” (139). From this, Smith believes he has a solid basis for saying: “if finitude ... is constitutive of ... existence, and if such finitude demands an ‘experience’ of time as temporal succession, then would not time and language both be a creational good rather than something befalling humanity?” (139)

While this conclusion might be relevant and noteworthy for contemporary theologians, it would hardly be original or informative to the contemporary philosophical world (e.g., Gadamer, Ricoeur, Foucault, Eco, Levinas). What Smith proposes is no different than what Olthuis, Gadamer (e.g., in The Relevance of the Beautiful), and Ricoeur propose. Furthermore, what is most curious, considering Smith’s project, is the curious lack of attention to Ricoeur. Not only does Smith make no mention of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, he also misconstrues the entire hermeneutic project. In one instance, he writes: “hermeneutics and the necessity of interpretation are aspects of only a fallen creation, a disrupted immediacy, from which we look for redemption in a paradise where interpretation is absent and immediacy is restored” (146). If it were not for Smith’s misinterpretation of the hermeneutic project, perhaps he would recognize that his own project is, in fact, mostly redundant and unnecessary.

All of this raises a larger problem with Smith’s book: he has neglected to answer his interesting and important question of whether faith language can be properly incorporated into philosophical discourse. In bringing a traditional theological problem of evil to contemporary philosophy, Smith finds himself pressed to argue that all aspects of creation, insofar as these aspects are created by a good God, must therefore be good. In trying to show that interpretation is a product of a “good” God, and in distancing interpretation from the notions of “sin” and “violence,” Smith’s text becomes entangled in the age-old debate on the existence and cause of evil—an issue relevant more for theologians than for contemporary philosophers.

Smith’s use of absolute conceptions of Good and Evil are a result of his faith in essential truths, rather than a product of his limited understanding of hermeneutics and deconstruction. The external (temporally autonomous and prior) Good that Smith utilizes is one that does not exist for the likes of Derrida, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. Not only does Smith fail to realize this, he also fails to offer an argument in favor of his own position. Instead, he simply cites his reliance on his faith, and is absolutely right to predict that this foundation—“that is what I ‘in fact’ believe”—will be “destined to be rejected by some as a lapse into ‘theology,’ and a rather naive theology at that” (160).

Smith ends his book with a chapter filled with unjustified assertions, a dubious notion of fixed temporal points, and naively accepted dichotomies that are highly suspicious to a postmodern reader (e.g., accidental/essential, absolute truth/relativism, violence/good, inside/outside, before/during). Surely, such a
smorgasbord of presuppositions would turn any healthy postmodern green. What starts as a promising and interesting theological/philosophical examination, unfortunately, ends in a spiral of theological agendas, uncritically accepted presuppositions, an impoverished view of hermeneutics, and an unjustified application of faith language to contemporary philosophy.

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FELIX Ó MURCHADHA

L'étude d'Ó Murchadha se présente avant tout comme un essai d'élucidation du concept de temps et de ses implications en ce qui a trait à l'agir dans l'œuvre de Martin Heidegger de Sein und Zeit jusqu'au milieu des années trente. Le cadre de cette recherche est toutefois établi grâce à la mise en relief d'une constitution duale du temps qui se divise en Kairos et Chronos. Or, bien que Heidegger ait brièvement parlé de kairologie en 1922–1923, cette conceptualité n'est pas rigoureusement sienne, et si elle semble être d'abord formulée afin d'aider à l'intelligence de l'œuvre du philosophe, il devient rapidement manifeste qu'elle servira aussi à en faire la critique. Ó Murchadha prend de la sorte souvent ses distances par rapport à l'œuvre qu'il commente en se laissant également guider par l'esprit de certaines critiques déjà adressées à Heidegger par Arendt, Taminiaux ou Lévinas. L'on constate ainsi que cette étude ne constitue pas simplement un travail d'exégèse classique, mais plutôt un effort de pensée autonome inspiré par Heidegger.

Nous savons ce que Heidegger, en ce qui concerne l'analytique du Dasein et de sa temporalité, doit à l'Éthique à Nicomaque. L'ouvrage de Theodor Kisiel sur la genèse de Sein und Zeit demeure à cet égard la référence obligée. En effet, afin de trouver des prédécesseurs à son ontologie du Dasein, Heidegger ne pouvait que se tourner vers la philosophie pratique (autant celle de Kant que d'Aristote par ailleurs), car leurs investigations théoriques étaient à ses yeux entièrement contaminées par une ontologie inexplicité de la Vorhandenheit. Hors du domaine théorique, là où la Vorhandenheit exerçait moins sensiblement son influence, risquaient sans doute de s'exprimer certains aperçus susceptibles d'être réappropriés par l'analytique existentiale. Ó Murchadha insiste à bon droit sur cette dette contractée par la conceptualité heideggerienne à l'endroit de l'éthique. La pensée heideggerienne de la résolution et du temps authentique doit en effet beaucoup à la conception aristotélicienne du Kairos. Ó Murchadha propose