

Original Sin and Generative Anthropology

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I. Being-as-First-Known as Species-Specifically Human Cognition

What we think about, and why we think it, is an open matter; but **this very openness** is understandable only in the context of its origin.

Eric Gans([1](#))

Neither a particular concept nor a particular object, being-as-first-known [*ens ut primum cognitum*] is **the intellectual light or clearing** within which mere *objects* of perception, which as such consist in their relations to us as knowers, are transformed even within the objective order into *transcendental* things – that is to say, those features of the environment, whether or not objectified, which exercise and participate in an existence in their own right *apart from* our perceptions and derived from the same source, whatever that might be, on which the physical universe as a whole depends.

John Deely([2](#))

The first clearing occurred on the scene at the originary event. The originary appetitive object was transformed into a *transcendental* thing. For the first time, it was known as *existing* apart from the appetition of the proto-hominids. This transcendental consciousness was a consciousness of God, *but of God as known before the Fall*. The Fall is the theological term I use to precisely designate the anthropological event of the original human choice to initiate the first *sparagmos*; as Generative Anthropology (GA) has seen, the Fall is from the exchange of the sign on the originary scene to the *sparagmos*, i.e., to the origin of the communal meal.[\(3\)](#) This original *human* choice was quintessentially human because the very choice presupposes cognition of the originary scene.

To be sure, as it is so cognized today, the *source* of transcendental existence was cognized in the originary event as that upon which the physical universe as a whole was dependent, i.e., an ultimate source independent of all individual appetite. Yet at the originary event, this cognition was not merely of a *source of existence* (“whatever that might be,” as our finite reason must confess, ignorant of that source’s essence while unavoidably dependent on its existence for our own existence). Indeed, it was a cognition of this same God known in rational faith as the source of all existence (the “whatever that might be”) yet here, at the originary event, it was both cognized as the transcendent object of communal desire and *known concretely and objectively as the formal condition of man’s very communal constitution and the ultimate perfective unity actually possible for human nature*. Without God, “we” would not be a “we.” The political animal is such (i.e., political and social) only as a member of the originary “Kingdom of God.”

After the Fall, God was no longer the first-known of human cognition. He receded behind “*being-as-first-known*” (*ens ut primum cognitum*): a Thomistic phrase that we may abbreviate with Heideggerian capital-“B” Being. Being-as-first-known is the pre-theoretical ground of all our human cognition, irreducible to anything else in subsequent cognition.⁽⁴⁾ Being, as Heidegger well knew, is not God; for when God becomes Being, He is made into an idol.⁽⁵⁾ Being-as-first-known names our current post-lapsarian epistemological state, which means that cognition now is no longer perceptually aware of God as the source of communal human nature as it was thus perceptually aware on the originary scene (properly speaking, this originary fullness of perception is what “firstness” is, as I will explain later).⁽⁶⁾ Instead, “God” at most is the rational appellation given by the political animal (a.k.a., man) to the ostensive *source* of all existence. But in post-lapsarian practice, this name is consistently *misapplied* (in all humanly religious thought) to the (usually material) object at the center of communal desire. That is, God is known to fallen man only through a *sparagmos*. Before the Fall, God was consciously known on the originary scene as the real, actual source of human scenic community (for which the aborted gesture of appropriation was a sign). After the Fall, the communal meal, not God, must alone bear this meaning. The *remembered* meal enters the relation of signification by representing the mind-independent, objective existence of the appetitive object even after it is consumed. It thinks a god exists instead of God. It thereby forgets Being and begins to think beings, in the characteristically post-lapsarian human manner: within the ontological difference, as before the Fall, yet now also forgetting that God is the source of Being.

On this basis, then, I argue against Chapter 7 of *Signs of Paradox* and maintain that anthropology has indeed not overcome metaphysics. Gans rightly observes, “There are times when we cannot rely on our experience because it is not the source of the being of what we experience.”⁽⁷⁾ “The return to Being from the preoccupation with

beings is a return to originary scenicity”;(8) “real thinking ... is about Being rather than beings”;(9) “Empirical anthropology rests on a generative foundation. ... the ‘fall’ from Being into beings is originary”;(10) “Being becomes beings in the sparagmos.”(11) But to my mind Gans is wrong to see anthropology as ultimately prior to philosophy and metaphysics. He alleges, “Metaphysical thought ... cannot conceive originary being”; for “thinking is a deconstructive search”; “thinking is the antisparagmos that reunites the object’s scattered remains, recomposing Being from beings.”(12) The reason this is an error (of GA overstating its case) is because true metaphysical thought does not make “the concept of being” into “an atemporally stable locus.”(13) For Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics, being-as-first-known is *not* a concept, and therefore Aristotelian-Thomism names Being’s pre-theoretical irreducibility as *primum cognitum*, “first-known.” The dynamism of pure act is the source of being which, as Aristotle observed, is “said in many ways.” In other words, “an atemporally stable locus” names only a *univocal* conception of Being. The famous Thomistic “analogy of being,” however, maintains that Being cannot be named in an irreducible univocal sense; because it is irreducibly transcendental, it can only be “said in many ways.”(14) Incidentally, it is for this reason that Heidegger’s deconstruction of metaphysics fails to deconstruct Thomistic metaphysics.(15)

II. The Ontological Difference and a Univocal Originary Scene

Beings depend on Dasein for their being. Without the fissure in the night of being, or in Heidegger’s preferred metaphor, the clearing (*Lichtung*) of being, which is Dasein, beings could not appear as beings. ... Things are not independent of Dasein, but neither are they projections of Dasein. They are only for Dasein, but they are as non-Dasein.

Sean McGrath(16)

Of course only as long as Dasein *is* (that is, only as long as an understanding of being is ontically possible), ‘is there’ Being [‘*gibt es*’ *Sein*]. When Dasein does not exist, ‘independence’ ‘is’ not either, nor ‘is’ the ‘in-itself’. ... *In such a case* it cannot be said that entities are, nor can it be said that they are not. But *now*, as long as there is an understanding of Being and therefore an understanding of [objective] presence-at-hand, it can indeed be said that *in this case* entities will still continue to be.

Martin Heidegger(17)

Only the human being can cognize being-as-first-known. Only the human intellect has Being as its formal object. Other animals have objective worlds that are species-specific, yet what is irreducibly primary in their worlds is not being as such (it is rather some species-specific objective ordering of perception, developed in

evolution, that confers that species' unique adaptive advantage in the environment).[\(18\)](#) But the objective world of the human is scenic. The originary scene conferred language as our species-specifically human adaptive advantage.[\(19\)](#) Yet the ontological difference (between Being and beings) within which human language moves is what, in our post-lapsarian state, permits us to forget that God is the source of Being. If we think the ontological difference at all, we tend to conceive of Being in a univocal way. Even if we think the originary scene, we tend to conceive of Being in a univocal way as the mental projection of representation accomplished by originary signification. The reason for this tendency is that, in our fall from the originary scene, God is no longer directly known in human perceptual awareness as the source of originary Being. On the originary scene, *He was. He was directly beheld by the intellect to be the source of the originary scene that the sign had brought into perceptual awareness; but after the Fall, discursive thought was then substituted for this direct vision.* And the only way to see the truth of this today is to think the originary scene with the help of metaphysics. Otherwise we will reduce the originary event to something less than what it *first* was.

There are suggestive parallels between GA's scenic event and Heidegger's *Ereignis* event. Both GA and Heidegger claim to have achieved a non-metaphysical kind of "originary" or "primordial" thinking. I argue that both GA and Heidegger are mistaken inasmuch as they fall into a univocal anthropological conception of Being. Sean McGrath has recently commented on this shortcoming in Heidegger's anthropological analysis of Dasein. McGrath has observed well how human cognition is the "fissure in the night of being" that Heidegger describes as "the clearing of being": i.e., that only for humans is being the formal object of cognition. Only with us is the being of something an issue within our object-world. Only for humans can beings be conceived of as mind-independent in their transcendental existence; for only humans have access to the clearing that is our mind-dependent object-world in which being is first known as the irreducibly first, formal object of our cognition. Horses don't make wills or rail against injustice on the other side of the planet; they cannot linguistically conceive of the possibility that some things *do exist on*, independently of their cognition of them, or that these things *could be otherwise*.

Heidegger's "phenomenology for the Godforsaken," with its hidden theological agenda (laid bare by McGrath in his path-breaking book), willfully shuts off in advance any access to natural theology's analogical reasoning. As McGrath suggests, this is due not just to the Lutheran but especially to the Scotistic influence on Heidegger,[\(20\)](#) an influence which ultimately saddles him with a univocal conception of Being. The approach of GA, however, holds more promise in that its account of the originary scene can be reconciled with a proper understanding of the

analogy of being given in “being as first known” (*ens ut primum cognitum*). The danger with GA is that its thinking could remain fallen even when it thinks the originary scene. The danger would be that it too, like Heidegger’s “event” (the event of the “It gives” in which Being temporally gives itself to beings), cannot think behind the Being of beings to the source of Being (“whatever that might be,”[\(21\)](#) as Deely puts it) because GA’s thinking of the ontological difference maintains its post-lapsarian bias to think Being as univocal, i.e., having only one meaning. For GA, this one meaning is the purely anthropological meaning of the pre-sparagmatic Being of the appetitive object recognized by the human community as *first* known linguistically as the common object of desire, as *first* mediated by the sign. For Heidegger, this one meaning of Being is the univocal (because purely temporal and finite) Being that (as Gans puts it) “can ‘reveal’ or ‘hide’ itself because it resides in a locus that can be pointed to.”[\(22\)](#) But metaphysics can think the originary scene such that we will neither forget transcendent, analogically-known Being as what human cognition knows as *first* known, nor will we forget the reality of God as pure act who is known as the source of Being-as-*first-known*, a reality that humanity only once originally and immediately perceived (i.e., before the Fall). To exemplify how a metaphysical thinking of the originary scene can approach the problem of original sin, I turn now to Hans Urs von Balthasar’s discussion of human cognition both before and after the Fall.

III. Originary Cognition of God and Analogical “Firstness” on the Originary Scene

God is present as the unfelt fullness, as fullness in the void. In paradise God was the *primum notum* (in faith, not in sight), both *quoad nos* and *in se* [the first thing known, both with respect to us and in himself]. Today he is the *primum notum* only *in se*, no longer *quoad nos*. Abstraction and the indifference of the will are not eliminated; they remain the form in which and by way of which faith’s immediacy and concreteness have to actualize themselves.

Hans Urs von Balthasar[\(23\)](#) initially explored this problem in my chapter in *The Originary Hypothesis* (edited by Adam Katz), “Epigenetic Evolution of the Immortal Intellect on the Originary Scene.”[\(24\)](#) I argue there that GA’s understanding of the originary scene is perfectly compatible with a traditional metaphysical analysis that approaches the problem of hominization in terms of potency, act, and the implied doctrine of fourfold causality correlative with the temporal evolution of dynamic, changing natural units interacting in the environment.[\(25\)](#) I wish to make the further point here that this kind of metaphysical analysis is required to rescue GA from the nominalist conclusions that must be drawn by GA if GA fails to repudiate a univocal conception of Being. For example, Gans writes that the metaphysical thinking of Being is *nothing but* “the forgetting of the ostensive movement toward the center”[\(26\)](#) because Being has a purely anthropological meaning. But while we

can agree with Heidegger than man is the only animal for whom Being appears in the species-specific object-world given by language.[\(27\)](#) this does not mean that the anthropological understanding of how “God exists” (viz., as the ground of society) is *ultimately prior* to the metaphysical understanding of how “God exists” (as pure act, *ipsum esse subsistens*, the source of Being). This would be to make the mistake of not distinguishing *firstness* in terms of its primary meaning as given on the originary scene. Firstness is not primarily the temporal event of an ape (let us call him Adam) who emits the first sign.[\(28\)](#) Prior to that experienced *temporal* priority is the ontological priority of the “It gives” (*es gibt*, as Heidegger would say)[\(29\)](#) that gives Being on the originary scene. Adam couldn’t be the (temporally) first sign-emitter if he didn’t first (ontologically) exist, i.e., physically exist. This physical existence of Adam is not an anthropological anachronism, as if it were merely retrojected by metaphysics into the originary scene by a mistaken maneuver of thought, a kind of category mistake that has failed at originary thinking. In fact, we cannot think the originary scene without first recognizing how the being of things *before* the scene is *first* semiotically enfolded into the scene (which enfolding, I observe, is “firstness” in its primary meaning).[\(30\)](#) Only after the fall from the originary scene is the confusion about Being and beings rampant and the forgetting of God as the source of Being the subsequent inheritance of our species (an epigenetic cognitional debility impacting in no small way on intellect and will).

To think the giving of this primary meaning of “firstness,” let me pursue my argument by commenting on the treatment of original sin by Hans Urs von Balthasar in *The Christian and Anxiety*. There Balthasar’s response (and frank tribute) to Kierkegaard makes reference to Heidegger’s “ontological difference” in a critique that clarifies how original sin is to be understood metaphysically. His discussion is highly abstract, but this permits me (given knowledge of GA’s originary scene) to supplement it with concrete examples of that which he speaks. In doing so, I hope to make clear how original sin stands in relation to the originary event’s “intuition of being.”[\(31\)](#) The first human “intuition of being,” I maintain, beheld God as the source of Being with a kind of immediate perceptual awareness (this is the ontological “firstness” concerning which Adam’s temporally first gesture is logically derivative).[\(32\)](#) Only after the Fall does our “intuition of being” fail to perceive God in the direct awareness first given at hominization.[\(33\)](#) For after the Fall our “intuition of being” is reliant solely on the irreducible experience of Being-as-first-known as what structures our species-specific object-world.

In the third chapter of *The Christian and Anxiety* on the essence of anxiety, Balthasar explains how Being enters the clearing of the scene; that is, Being is what makes possible in human thought the connection of a universal essence to a particular thing. The possibilities unleashed by this quintessentially human mode of

existential cognition induce a kind of “vertigo” or “anxiety” as the human mind becomes aware of the absolute *transcendence of Being* (absolute because it is never an object; for it is always already what is irreducibly primary in cognition) and the utter *contingency* of the multifarious varieties of *beings* given in perception.[\(34\)](#) Note how the scene of cognition (inherited from the originary scene) is described: “The mind needs to have within itself a stage that is empty...”[\(35\)](#) The awareness of the emptiness of the empty stage (the “clearing” to which cognition of being-as-first-known opens the human) is awareness of the “yawning gulf in the midst of transcendence and the contingency manifested therein...”: “Being is not a category or a concept; it is that by which the mind, letting go of everything, must itself be apprehended in order to comprehend something.”[\(36\)](#) The mind comprehends beings because Being apprehends the mind (i.e., the mind is captivated by the scenic intellectual power of the originary scene).

Paradoxically, Being differentiates beings by giving them their manifold existences, yet it is thereby itself indifferent to cognition, since cognition is unable to differentiate Being itself.[\(37\)](#) This means that contingency can never be fully surmounted because the intelligible necessity of existents can never be exhaustively derived from Being itself; conversely, Being itself cannot be dismissed as a chimerical concept, as if the positivism of existents were the only reality, because without the actuality of Being that grounds human cognition (Being-as-first-known) there would never be any positive knowledge of beings in the first place.[\(38\)](#) Thus the abstraction that belongs to cognition can never be satiated, at one end, since Being is irreducible to differentiation (i.e., *transcendent*); nor, at the other end, can the will ever be satiated by attaining this or that being, since the *contingency* those beings manifest always falls short of the state of the will’s indifference before Being (i.e., cognition can always ask itself whether the contingency attained was ever really “... worth the effort expended”).[\(39\)](#) Balthasar describes well how the maturing child becomes aware of this vertigo proper to human cognition; for example, for this child, no toy can ever fully satisfy the promise of the transcendent that she was opened up to by the wonder which she first caught sight of in play with toys.[\(40\)](#) The human being living in the ontological difference is opened up by Being to the abstraction of the intellect, and to the indifference of the will, both of which we experience standing in the clearing before all beings.[\(41\)](#)

The modes of abstraction and indifference of the will, which Balthasar has described thus in terms of *the openness and the anxiety* concomitant with living in the ontological difference, are not totally consequent on the Fall, because “the ontological difference is by necessity the very expression of creatureliness itself, whatever state the creature may be,”[\(42\)](#) i.e., a pre- or post-lapsarian state. Hence, before the Fall, the human creature is characterized by openness alone: man’s

openness to the ontological difference (i.e., knowing that beings are not Being, viz., that beings have a source in Being).[\(43\)](#) But, after the Fall, man is characterized by openness *and anxiety* (and this is what is named by “the theological truth of the fall into sin”).[\(44\)](#)

Balthasar describes God as *primum notum* (“first known”) before the Fall, yet only so known within the ontological difference:[\(45\)](#) “We are not saying that Adam saw God face to face ... [but that] the space within Adam that became a place of emptiness and indifferent freedom through the withdrawal of the divine presence ... [became so because] God, though not seen face to face, [originally for Adam] is the most present, *most concrete* reality, whence all that is substantial in the world receives its equally certain and unquestionable rightness, obviousness, and nameability.”[\(46\)](#) This is what it means for God to “walk and talk” with Adam “in the evening breeze of paradise”: i.e., God before the Fall is still “invisible, yet as tangible and all-pervasive as the wind,”[\(47\)](#) says Balthasar, explaining the metaphor in Genesis.[\(48\)](#) Thus Adam, in addition to having, to a certain (pre-lapsarian) degree, the abstraction and indifference of the will that characterizes discursive thought, also has an intuition of Being, “an intuitive thinking ability, which one would have to understand less as ‘infused knowledge’ [given by grace] than as a [natural] knowledge arising from the concrete life of faith in God.”[\(49\)](#) Balthasar describes in this way the originary openness *without the anxiety*, yet which had the cognitional potential to become an openness with post-lapsarian anxiety:

Since Adam is a creature, the dimension between the universal and the particular, between the existent and Being, subsists for him, too. But no void yawns between either of these tensions, because both the universal and the particular, both the existent and Being itself are for him transparent toward God, who, standing beyond both of them, grants that he may be known in both.[\(50\)](#) This is the transparency of “the evening breeze”: “In him we live, and move, and have our being.”[\(51\)](#)

To try my hand at another suggestive metaphor, I would say: think of, not just the breeze, but also the sky, as a metaphor for the clearing of Being. After the Fall, human cognition sees a sky, an object-world something like what our eye sees when it looks to the night sky: the stars, the bright points of light, are beings; the blackness, the void in between, is Being. We navigate the world in which we live by this ontological difference. How we chart our course is a matter of abstraction (Polaris represents the North) and of indifference of will (in the night of Being, we choose to set sail through the dark, either here or there, off into the unknown). But before the Fall, the difference was as night is to day. In pre-lapsarian paradise, the sky was lit up by the fullness of Being itself and in the full light of its clearing the world in which we lived was seen in the full measure of its rightness: the sparagmos

had not occurred; resentment had not brought on the darkness. Thus God Himself was manifest, in the way that the sun shines in the bright and clear, fully lit sky of day. The sky was not defined by the absence of the sun, by the absence of God in the darkness of Being. Instead we lived and moved in the light of the day. To be sure, faith knew the sun as the *source* of the daylight, but of course, as faith, could not gaze directly upon it; instead, it knew God as the source of the light of Being that lights up all beings (just as we too know the sun as the source of the light of day and yet do not gaze directly into it).

For Adam it was obvious: *God is not Being, but rather the source of Being, and neither God nor Being are to be confused with beings.* This hard-won metaphysical insight of Aristotle and St. Thomas is not contradicted by the originary scene; rather it precisely describes the structure of the broad daylight (“the clearing”) of the originary event, which is still with us today, even in all our night-darkened cognition. Moreover, the nominalist temptation for GA is to discount the actuality of daylight, to deny the actuality of Being and yet affirm the actuality of beings.[\(52\)](#) Yet, in this regard, the theological doctrine is monitory and serves to re-illuminate for the human intellect a basic truth: Were the reality of Being to be denied as essential to the scene, this would in turn render the *event* of the scene itself into nothing but an empty nominalism, a fiction of the mind, *with no Being beyond the being of the mind.* But the being of the human mind is not “firstness” itself. The “firstness” that the mind came to know in the originary event was not created *ex nihilo* by the projection of its own communal self. It was, rather, the “firstness” of Being itself eventuating, creating man in the open light of day in which God’s existence is obvious. Only today, if we give in to the nominalist temptation, do we dare to think that there is no sun, no God as source of the Being of beings. Yet such is our temptation, given the sun’s absence on the other side of the world of the dark night. God is present, even though we are tempted by thinking to *think* he is absent.

IV. The Nominalist Temptation: To Think “God” is Only a Word

So, permitting ourselves some indulgent empirical speculation, let us suppose that a small group of prehumans (let’s call them group A) are roaming the African savanna 2.5 million years ago. They stumble on a group of hyenas who have made a fresh kill of antelope. They scare off the hyenas with rocks and sticks and screaming and such. Surrounding the kill they approach the bleeding gobs of fur and meat. But then, each sees the others’ appropriative gesture, and each hesitates for a moment. Each individual perceives the other’s gesture in a paradoxical oscillation between the central object and the peripheral aborted gestures of the others. Lo! the aborted gesture of appropriation is transformed into a sign: the deferral of mimetic conflict through representation. After this hesitation, the

'division' of the kill follows in the ensuing sparagmos. But this sparagmos is forever haunted by the memory of the sign, which demonstrated to each individual that his relationship to the central appetitive object is mediated by the other's desire. Henceforth each individual will be unable to appropriate the central object without realizing that he is participating in a social act that is mediated by the other's desire.

Richard van Oort⁽⁵³⁾ Our post-lapsarian state renders us unable to see beyond the Being of GA's anthropology to God without the help of metaphysics (which, as Benedict Ashley has observed, is better termed today *meta-science*,⁽⁵⁴⁾ the critical self-awareness of human thought by which it reflects on the possibility and actuality of all that is). Metaphysics' preamble to faith is indispensable because of the dispensation under which we live : viz., that Being, not God, is what we know first after the Fall (for which reason, the role of divine revelation, in which God gratuitously gives what He wills, stands over and above the bare minimum of what is indispensable with respect to human reason: and revelation stands not opposed, but rather works to counteract the species-specific downward "gravitational" tendencies bequeathed by the Fall; for example, in both affirming the reality of the "firstness" of the Paradise event and the reality of our debilitating disinheritance, intellectually and volitionally, after the Fall).

The sunny day is the original state of innocence in the ontological difference. The starry night is the post-lapsarian state of anxiety, our current fallen state of living in the ontological difference with God absent to direct perception. Our post-lapsarian natural inheritance to henceforth know God naturally by relying solely on abstraction was inaugurated by the achievement of originary thinking on the scene; there too, indifference of the will oscillated between sign and referent (for indifference of the will is the generated originary esthetic pleasure humans have in contemplating the sign and its referent).⁽⁵⁵⁾ The Fall was triggered by the originary resentment that then and ever after tempts us to appropriate the center.⁽⁵⁶⁾ The nominalist temptation today is to say that God was not present to Adam before the Fall, to say that God was an imaginary scenic presence, entirely conjured in his sacred being by society's mediation. ("All that God is is our *name* for the giver of the event of the sacred communal meal.") To affirm that He really was present is to affirm "firstness" in its *primary* meaning and to avoid misunderstanding "firstness" by way of a derivative, analogous sense (whether temporal or mental or otherwise). Because either the originary event happened, or it did not. If it did, and if we have the minimal faith — the purely natural faith, accessible to unaided reason — *that* it did, then this event of being had to have had its source in God — "whatever that might be." We know that He Who Is exists because we have cognitional access to the firstness of the originary Event, *es gibt*: It Gives the essence of man. True, an ape aborted a gesture of appropriation, and contributed that much; "but existence is always on loan from God and cannot be borrowed elsewhere."⁽⁵⁷⁾ And existence

is not just a word, a nominalist *flatus vocis* (noise signifying nothing real): it is an event; nay, it is the originary event that gives all, now as then. Yes, there is a human dimension onto this event that cognizes it species-specifically, i.e., with the imaginary, the scenic, the mind-dependent; but for all that, the event is no less shot through with the clearing and the lighting, a filament and strand of the mind-independently real God,[\(58\)](#) for it was on the originary scene that man in all innocence saw the unveiling of the supremely real, the source of all actuality (scenic and otherwise), the God Who Is, and who, yes indeed, might still be thought today semiotically: i.e., knowable only in the darkened-night semiotic web by which man navigates the ontological difference. For the human is able to understand not only the mind-dependent (like every other animal with an object-world) but also the mind-independent (which the human alone knows in its *existence* as either woven into the web or, analogously, as that which stands behind it sustaining it as a source).[\(59\)](#)

Gans writes, “The deepest mystery of metaphysics is its repression or forgetting of the relation between the Being of the scene, to which religion attributes personhood as God, and the metaphysical scene-as-such on which objects present themselves to our ‘objective’ contemplation.”[\(60\)](#) As I have argued, however, true religion and true metaphysics does not confuse God with Being (only fallen religion makes Being into an idol, forgetting the source of Being, the “It gives” [es gibt] of the actual event behind Being). Thus it would be better to say that “the deepest mystery of *original sin* is its repression or forgetting of the relation between the Being of the [originary] scene” and the post-lapsarian metaphysical scene-as-such (for which Being is now first known), the post-lapsarian irreducible “intuition of being” that constitutes our species-specific object-world. Absent divine intervention (or better: in conjunction with it, nature offering itself up to the gratuity of grace), metaphysics is indispensable for originary thinking about our redemption from original sin. Because if God truly exists, then anthropology has to abandon the nominalist temptation and to think semiotically. It would then be underway to truly thinking theology.

Notes

1. *Signs of Paradox: Irony, Resentment, and Other Mimetic Structures* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 100. Bold emphasis mine. [\(back\)](#)
2. *Four Ages of Understanding: The First Postmodern Survey of Philosophy from Ancient Times to the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 348. Bold emphasis mine. [\(back\)](#)
3. Gans, *Signs of Paradox*, pp. 1-9, 13-23, 131-151; cf. Eric Gans, *The End of*

Culture: Toward a Generative Anthropology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), Chapter 9, “Jewish Culture: Narrative Monotheism,” pp. 189-226. [\(back\)](#)

4. Cf. Deely, *Four Ages*, pp. 341-350. [\(back\)](#)

5. Cf. Sean McGrath, *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy* (Catholic University of America Press, 2006), pp. 25-59. [\(back\)](#)

6. When I distinguish the analogical meanings of “firstness” in section III below, arguing that the gift of Being is ontologically prior to cognition of that gift. (N.B. Perceptual awareness of the sign leads directly, on the originary scene, to intellectual cognition of God; not so after the Fall.) [\(back\)](#)

7. *Signs of Paradox*, p. 94. [\(back\)](#)

8. Ibid., p. 92. [\(back\)](#)

9. Ibid., p. 95. [\(back\)](#)

10. Ibid. [\(back\)](#)

11. Ibid. [\(back\)](#)

12. Ibid., p, 97. [\(back\)](#)

13. Ibid. [\(back\)](#)

14. Cf. Deely, *Four Ages*, pp. 313-331. [\(back\)](#)

15. Cf. Andrzej Wiercinski, *Philosophizing with Gustav Siewerth: A New German Edition with Facing Translation of “Das Sein als Gleichnis Gottes”/ “Being as Likeness of God,” And A Study, “From Metaphor and Indication to Icon: The Centrality of the Notion of Verbum in Hans-Georg Gadamer, Bernard Lonergan, and Gustav Siewerth”* (Konstanz: Verlag Gustav Siewerth Gesellschaft, 2005), and Andrzej Wiercinski, *Inspired Metaphysics? Gustav Siewerth’s Hermeneutic Reading of the Onto-theological Tradition* (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2003). [\(back\)](#)

16. *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 83-84. [\(back\)](#)

17. *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (Harper & Row, 1962), I. 6, p. 255. [\(back\)](#)

18. Cf. John Deely, *Basic of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 5.B., pp. 59-62. This text is also available online at

<http://carbon.cudenver.edu/%7Emryder/deely/basics/> ([back](#))

19. Cf. ibid., 5.C., pp. 62-65. ([back](#))

20. Not to mention Heidegger's rejection and inversion of Thomism (by his maintaining that "potency is higher than actuality," albeit a univocal temporal potency). Cf. McGrath, *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 91-104. ([back](#))

21. *Four Ages*, p. 348. ([back](#))

22. *Signs of Paradox*, p. 92. ([back](#))

23. *The Christian and Anxiety*, trans. D.D. Martin and M.J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000). ([back](#))

24. Christopher S. Morrissey, "Epigenetic Evolution of the Immaterial Intellect on the Originary Scene" in Adam Katz (ed.), *The Originary Hypothesis: a Minimal Proposal for Humanistic Inquiry*. Critical Series in the Humanities (Aurora, Colorado: Davies Group, 2007), pp. 75-99. ([back](#))

25. Cf. Benedict Ashley, "Change and Process," in John N. Deely and Raymond J. Nogar (eds.), *The Problem of Evolution* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1973), p. 294: 'The natural unit has (1) some *organization* or order (formal cause) and (2) at the same time has *potentiality* (material "cause") for becoming other than it is. (3) This potentiality is actualized from outside by *another natural unit* (efficient cause), and this actualization is either destructive of the unit, or actualizes it in its own line of stability and actuality, and hence is (4) *teleological* (final "cause").' ([back](#))

26. *Signs of Paradox*, p. 101. ([back](#))

27. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (Harper & Row, 1962), I. 6, p. 255; cf. McGrath, *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 83-84. ([back](#))

28. Pace Adam Katz, "Remembering Amalek: 9/11 and Generative Thinking," *Anthropoetics* 10.2 (Fall 2004 / Winter 2005), <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap1002/amalek.htm>. ([back](#))

29. Cf. Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 23-25. ([back](#))

30. Cf. Deely, *Basics of Semiotics*, 5.A, pp. 51-59. ([back](#))

31. Cf. the Appendix in John F.X. Knasas, *The Preface to Thomistic Metaphysics: A Contribution to the Neo-Thomist Debate on the State of Metaphysics* (Peter Lang, 1991), on Jacques Maritain's "intuition of being," albeit from a Gilsonian point of view. For what, to my mind, is the definitive response to Gilson, see John Deely, *Intentionality and Semiotics: A Story of Mutual Fecundation* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2007), esp. pp. 9-21. [\(back\)](#)

32. Cf. Katz, "Remembering Amalek," p. 1: "the emission of the originary sign, the gesture of renunciation enacted in the moment when mimetic crisis threatens the existence of the community itself in a generalized paroxysm of violence, is enacted by a *single individual* in midst of the crisis, and the other members of the proto-community in turn *imitate and thereby register and confirm that sign as a sign.*" [\(back\)](#)

33. I refer to originary hominization, not embryonic hominization; i.e., to phylogenetic origin, not ontogenetic origin. [\(back\)](#)

34. *The Christian and Anxiety*, pp. 124-126: "The locus of anxiety in the mind is indicated by the reciprocal relationship between transcendence and contingency. ... Being never appears and realizes itself as such in any existent or in any collection of existing things." [\(back\)](#)

35. Ibid., p. 125. [\(back\)](#)

36. Ibid., p. 126. [\(back\)](#)

37. Ibid., pp. 126-127: "The anxiety in the innermost essence of cognition lies in the fact that knowing takes place *between* two poles ... cognition must allow Being to differentiate it in ever-new ways in relation to existing things." [\(back\)](#)

38. Ibid., pp.127-128. [\(back\)](#)

39. Ibid., pp. 128-129. [\(back\)](#)

40. Ibid., pp.129-131: "... The same structure that reveals the truth of Being also veils it; the same structure that causes the light of Being ... to dawn also spreads to the same extent the night of meaninglessness and incomprehensibility." [\(back\)](#)

41. Ibid., pp.131-133: "In the ontological difference the world becomes abstract in two directions ... Abstractness becomes the *inner quality* of worldly being ... counterbalanced by no actuality, that is, no necessary character in the object-to-be-chosen ... [and in] the dizzyingly exposed position of an arbiter and judge (*liber arbiter*)."[\(back\)](#)

42. Ibid., p. 133. [\(back\)](#)

43. This “ontological difference” can be known discursively after the Fall, but is known intuitively (i.e., through direct perceptual awareness) only *before* the Fall. [\(back\)](#)

44. Ibid., pp. 133-135: “The void that opens up in the mind, the cause of its anxiety, could then be traced back to an absence ... [viz.,] that of its Creator and grace-giver ... [and the source of] his entire freedom and liberation.” [\(back\)](#)

45. Cf. ibid., p. 142-144. [\(back\)](#)

46. Ibid., p. 135. [\(back\)](#)

47. Ibid., p. 135. [\(back\)](#)

48. Gans in *The End of Culture*, pp. 200-201, takes the anthropomorphism literally (cf. all of pp. 190-202 on “The Creation and the Fall”), but Balthasar reads it in light of the ontological difference in *The Christian and Anxiety*, pp. 135-136, 142-143. [\(back\)](#)

49. Ibid., p. 136. [\(back\)](#)

50. Ibid. [\(back\)](#)

51. Ibid., p. 135; Balthasar is of course quoting St. Paul at Athens, Acts 17:28. [\(back\)](#)

52. If GA doesn’t affirm the actuality of Being, then it is a nominalism. Yet, to affirm it, GA must go beyond minimalism to metaphysics. [\(back\)](#)

53. Christopher S. Morrissey (ed.), “Sparagmos! A Dialogue on Girard and Gans,” *Anthropoetics* 11.1 (Spring/Summer 2005):

<<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap1101/sparagmos.htm>>. [\(back\)](#)

54. Benedict Ashley, *The Way toward Wisdom: An Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Introduction to Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006). [\(back\)](#)

55. Cf. Eric Gans, *Originary Thinking: Elements of Generative Anthropology* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 117-131. [\(back\)](#)

56. Ibid., pp. 18-20, 124-126; cf. p. 136 on originary resentment as “a ‘prehistoric’ category.” [\(back\)](#)

57. Deely, *Four Ages*, p. 287. [\(back\)](#)

58. Cf. Deely, *Basics of Semiotics*, p. 59. [\(back\)](#)

59. Ibid., 5.A., pp. 51-59. For a justification of the use of analogical reasoning in Aristotelian-Thomist metaphysics, see Ashley, *Way toward Wisdom*, pp. 27-31, 53-54, 132-139. [\(back\)](#)

60. *Signs of Paradox*, p. 103. [\(back\)](#)