

Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism

Reconsidering the Relation of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics in Ricœur

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Abstract

Recent developments in literary theory and philosophy, specifically regarding the role of critique, that inspire the turn to post-critique and realism, respectively, indicate a renewed sensitivity for concerns characteristic of hermeneutic phenomenology. This essay argues that crucial aspects of Ricœur's articulation of phenomenology and hermeneutics may help to understand and support post-critique and realism and that, in turn, the latter two invite hermeneutics to return to its phenomenological condition. To this end, Ricœur's understanding of the hermeneutical condition of phenomenology, both in the form of Husserl's idealist phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion, is revisited; Ricœur's account of distantiation is critically assessed; and, finally, the interplay of trust and distrust at stake in hermeneutic phenomenology is contrasted with the modern insistence on hyperbolic doubt.

Keywords: Distantiation; Post-critique; Realism; Trust and Distrust; Ricœur

Résumé

Les développements récents en matière de théorie littéraire et de philosophie, notamment concernant le rôle de la critique, qui suscitent respectivement le tournant vers la post-critique et vers le réalisme, témoignent d'une sensibilité renouvelée pour des préoccupations relevant de la phénoménologie herméneutique. Cet essai soutient que certains aspects fondamentaux de l'articulation de la phénoménologie et de l'herméneutique chez Ricœur permettent de comprendre et de défendre la post-critique et le réalisme et que, en retour, ces deux derniers appellent l'herméneutique à revenir à sa condition phénoménologique. Pour ce faire, la compréhension ricœurienne de la condition herméneutique de la phénoménologie, sous la forme de la phénoménologie idéaliste de Husserl et de la phénoménologie de la religion, sera soumise à un réexamen ; les considérations de Ricœur sur la distanciation feront l'objet d'une analyse critique et, enfin, l'interaction de la confiance et de la suspicion qui est en jeu dans la phénoménologie herméneutique sera mise en contraste avec l'insistance moderne sur le doute hyperbolique.

Mots-clés : distanciation ; post-critique ; réalisme ; confiance et suspicion ; Ricœur

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[B]ut for a second generation (which does not possess that to which [the corrective] was a corrective) a corrective that has been made normative, made into the whole, is eo ipso confusing. And with each generation that passes in this manner, it must get worse, until in the end the corrective, which has established itself as independent, brings forth precisely the opposite of what was originally intended —Søren Kierkegaard.¹

Recent developments in literary theory and philosophy demonstrate a renewed sensitivity for concerns characteristic of hermeneutic phenomenology, even though they appear under a different heading. For instance, under the heading of “post-critique” a new approach to literature and to cultural objects in general is introduced. In the self-description of important protagonists of this movement, such as Felski and Sedgwick, this approach is in the first place meant to correct the central role awarded to critical theory and to reappraise different forms of attachment that, for example, binds a reader to a novel.² Methodologically, this reorientation is guided by Actor-Network Theory, first developed by Latour to bring about a sociological turn in the philosophy of science. Yet, beyond the scope of a socio-philosophy of science, this theory is closely connected to the present-day philosophical interest in a new philosophical realism, under the heading of “speculative realism” or, simply, “the new realism” developed by authors such as Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman, Jane Bennett, Maurizio Ferraris, and Markus Gabriel.³

At first sight, it might be considered counterintuitive to use these developments as the momentum for a reappraisal of hermeneutic phenomenology in general and of Paul Ricœur’s in particular. Is hermeneutics in the twentieth century not characteristic of the continental version of the linguistic turn, which the different forms of new realism today aim to overcome? Is phenomenology, especially in its idealist form, not exemplary of what Meillassoux has called

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Notebooks. Vol. 9, Journals NB26–NB30*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hanay, Bruce H. Kirmmse, David D. Possen, Joel D. S. Rasmussen and Vanessa Rumble (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 281 [= NB 28:82 or XI 1 A 28]. I would like to thank the editors of this issue, Paul Marinescu and Marc-Antoine Vallée, for their helpful and insightful comments.

² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,” in *Touching Feeling. Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 123-52; Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015) and *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020).

³ The obvious connection between this turn to realism and Actor-Network Theory is Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks. Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: Re.press, 2009), but many more connections exist.

“correlationism”?⁴ Yet, the relations between these present-day developments in philosophy and literary theory on the one hand and hermeneutic phenomenology on the other are more complicated. In this essay, I want to show why Ricœur’s account of the articulation of phenomenology and hermeneutics may contribute to understanding better what is at stake in these new developments in literary theory and realism (albeit to a lesser extent), and how they could benefit from a renewed interest in hermeneutic phenomenology in general and Ricœur’s version of it in particular. I have three initial reasons to think that such an approach is worthwhile.

First, the real opponent of authors such as Sedgwick, Latour, and Felski is critical theory. The title of Latour’s famous article leaves nothing to the imagination in this regard: “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?”⁵ Interestingly, to characterize the role of critical theory in the humanities and in literary theory in particular, Sedgwick and Felski adopt a term borrowed from Ricœur, namely the hermeneutics of suspicion. In Ricœur, as I aim to argue, the suspicious form of interpretation needs to be understood as a corrective to certain problematic aspects of phenomenology. However, as indicated in the epigraph borrowed from Kierkegaard, when a corrective becomes the new norm, it “brings forth precisely the opposite of what was originally intended.” It seems to me that the return to forms of attachment in literary theory should be understood along this line of thought, namely as a way of addressing the problem that arises when the critical corrective has become a new norm. In the first section, I show in which sense the hermeneutics of suspicion is to be understood as corrective and not as norm.

Second, this brief allusion to the present-day focus on attachment rather than critique and its accompanying detachment suggests that Ricœur’s concept of *distanciation* and its relation to *appartenance*—*Zugehörigkeit* or co-belonging—deserves to be the focal point of this reassessment of critique. Therefore, it is our task to interrogate the specific role of distantiation in the articulation of phenomenology and hermeneutics. This is what I set out to do in the second section, where I point out a certain ambivalence or double role of distantiation. Note, too, that the concept of distantiation truly singles out Ricœur from among the other famous representatives of hermeneutic phenomenology, such as Heidegger, Gadamer, and Arendt.

Third, the articulation of phenomenology and hermeneutics includes both the explication of the hermeneutical condition of phenomenology and the phenomenological condition of hermeneutics. While the former helps us to problematize the idealist version of phenomenology,

⁴ While Meillassoux’s notion of “correlationism” developed in *Après la finitude. Essai sur la nécessité de la contingence* (Paris: Seuil, 2006) includes Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology (see 22-4), implying that hermeneutic phenomenology is at odds with the realist turn, Harman’s object-oriented ontology is explicitly developed in conversation with phenomenology and hermeneutics; these authors clearly criticize the central role and place of language that marks the linguistic turn as a whole in philosophy; yet, this turn is counteracted or compensated in hermeneutic phenomenology by the strong emphasis on the *Sache* or, in French, *la chose*; see Gert-Jan van der Heiden, “Witnessing, Truth, and Realism. A Hermeneutic-Phenomenological Approach,” *Critical Hermeneutics*, vol. 6/2 (2022), 161-89. For further reflections on the relation of hermeneutics and (esp. Meillassoux’s) philosophical realism, see also Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *Ontology after Ontotheology. Plurality, Event, and Contingency in Contemporary Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2014).

⁵ Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 30 (2004), 225-48.

thus rendering it fruitful again to realist projects in philosophy, the second is more important in the course of the specific topic of this essay since it allows us to reposition hermeneutics—and in particular the hermeneutics of suspicion that has become a new norm—on phenomenological grounds. At this point, the importance of Ricœur in the current debates is, as I will suggest, to “reverse engineer” or to deconstruct critique by showing how these critical approaches and their detachment only make sense in relation to a primordial attachment. What this means is discussed in the second half of the second section as well as in the third section.

I. Hermeneutics as Corrective of Phenomenology

The question of the articulation of hermeneutics and phenomenology takes on several forms in Ricœur’s work. Here, I want to show how in two basic thematic concerns in his work, hermeneutics is introduced both to correct and to condition phenomenology. Hermeneutics is brought into play to expose and to respond to particular problems in phenomenology. Yet, in the course of exposing and responding, hermeneutics is shown to be a condition of phenomenology. Let me recall two basic ways in which this happens, namely with respect to the idealist version of phenomenology and with respect to the phenomenology of religion.⁶ In the exposure of the hermeneutical condition and corrective of phenomenology, central concepts of Ricœur’s hermeneutic phenomenology, such as distanciation and co-belonging, are taking shape.

For the account of hermeneutics as corrective and condition of phenomenology, I take Ricœur’s essay “Phénoménologie et herméneutique” from 1975 as my point of reference since it is exemplary in several ways.⁷ In this essay, hermeneutics is first presented as a critique of the idealist dimensions of Husserl’s phenomenology. This includes criticisms of the particular “scientificity” at which this form of phenomenology aims, the specific methodological role of the eidetic intuition that founds this phenomenological science, and the unchallenged primacy of subjectivity as the place and ground of eidetic intuition. In a second movement, however, which is characteristic of the dialectic dynamic of much of Ricœur’s thought, these hermeneutical negations of the idealist dimensions of phenomenology turn out to provide a fruitful way toward a non-idealist,

⁶ These two ways correspond to two basic problems that trigger the turn to hermeneutics. First, in relation to the phenomenology of religion, the experience of evil, see Paul Ricœur, “Herméneutique des symboles et réflexion philosophique (II)”, in *Le conflit des interprétations. Essais d’herméneutique* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 313, where he suggests that “l’herméneutique du mal [est] peut-être le lieu de naissance du problème herméneutique.” (For the English version, see *The Conflict of Interpretation. Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin et al. (London: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 317). Second, the very status of the cogito and consciousness of which Ricœur writes: “Mais la phénoménologie husserlienne ne peut aller jusqu’au bout de l’échec de la conscience ; elle reste dans le cercle des *correlations* entre noèse et noème” (Paul Ricœur, “Le conscient et l’inconscient”, in *Le conflit des interprétations*, 104; my emphasis; *The Conflict of Interpretation*, 102); note that this quotation can be read to say that hermeneutics aims to extend phenomenology beyond correlationism.

⁷ Paul Ricœur, “Phénoménologie et herméneutique,” *Phänomenologische Forschungen*, vol. 1 (1975), 31-75; “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” trans. Bradley DeFord, *Noûs*, vol. 9/1 (1975), 85-102. When referring to both originals and translations, I refer by #a/#b, where #a is the page number of the original and #b the page number of the translation.

hermeneutic phenomenology in which eidetic intuition of being(s) is replaced with interpreting and understanding the *sense* of being(s).⁸ Unlike the transcendental subject of Husserl's earlier static idealist phenomenology,⁹ the interpreter is "never at the beginning nor at the end," but always "*in medias res*."¹⁰ That is to say, interpreters are not detached from the being(s) they aim to understand, as if they could adopt a view from nowhere, but they are always already related to the beings they aim to understand by cultural and historical affects, linguistic attunements, societal powers, physical forces, and bodily drives. In one way or another, these beings affect them and matter to them, making interpretation both possible and desirable.¹¹ Along these lines, the hermeneutical critique of idealist phenomenology actually demonstrates (dialectically) that phenomenology is hermeneutical from the outset both because of the inescapable *situatedness* of the one who aims to understand, and because intentionality is always already "outside itself ... *towards meaning*," exposed—in the sense of Heidegger's *ausgesetzt*—to the meaning of the being we encounter.¹²

In the exposure of this hermeneutical condition of phenomenology and the hermeneutic phenomenology resulting from it, the dialectic of *appartenance* and *distanciation*, co-belonging and distantiation, plays a central role. In fact, Ricœur mobilizes the term co-belonging, which also plays a fundamental role in Heidegger's and Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology, to criticize Husserl's phenomenology. Husserl's idealist conception of the relation of thinking and being in terms of subject and object, Ricœur argues, does not reach into the profound realm of the co-belonging of being and thinking, of the fact that the interpreter always already "shares in the thing which he questions."¹³ Note that "the thing" translates the French "*la chose*," itself a translation of what German hermeneutic phenomenology calls "*die Sache*," or the "subject matter":¹⁴ it is the *res* or the *res evidens*, not as the object given to the neutral, independent gaze of the subject or cogito, but rather in its Roman sense as the being that matters to us—it is this latter sense of *res*, so central to hermeneutic phenomenology, that also fuels present-day forms of realism.¹⁵

⁸ Ricœur, "Phénoménologie et herméneutique," 52/96.

⁹ Ricœur emphasizes that a turn to hermeneutic phenomenology in Husserl's own work does take place, but only later, in the later period of *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften*, see Ricœur, "Phénoménologie et herméneutique," 60/96.

¹⁰ Ricœur, "Phénoménologie et herméneutique," 43/91.

¹¹ Compare this also to Latour's insistence on "matters of concern" rather than "matters of fact," in "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam," as well as to Gadamer's reflections on the spectator or the *theōros*, who is not detached from the spectacle they see on the stage, but are rather affected by it, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), 129-30.

¹² Ricœur, "Phénoménologie et herméneutique," 54/96; Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), 189.

¹³ Ricœur, "Phénoménologie et herméneutique," 39/89.

¹⁴ For a more elaborate account of *die Sache* and *das Ding* in relation to the Latin *causa*, from which *la chose* is derived, see also van der Heiden, "Witnessing, Truth, and Realism," 180-1.

¹⁵ See Martin Heidegger, "Das Ding," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 165-87, especially 177-8; Latour, "Why has Critique Run Out of Steam," 231-4; see also Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die Natur der Sache und die Sprache der Dinge," in *Hermeneutik II* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), 66-76.

The importance of this original sharing in the subject matter is underlined by Ricœur when he argues that, even though it might be epistemologically and negatively accounted for as a sign of the “finitude of knowledge,”¹⁶ it actually goes back to “the completely positive relationship of belonging-to”; as Ricœur emphatically adds: “*which is the hermeneutical experience itself.*”¹⁷ Hence, hermeneutical experience is in the first place the experience of a primordial co-belonging or sharing in the being we aim to understand; not subjectivity, but this co-belonging, this basic sense that the being we encounter matters to us, is the ground for understanding and interpretation.

Let me point out a particular limitation, which I would like to overcome, of what Ricœur calls here “hermeneutical experience.” In the context of the discussions taking place within hermeneutical thought in the 1970s, hermeneutical experience and co-belonging primarily concern the experience of and the belonging to a tradition, an *Überlieferung* in Gadamer’s sense of the word.¹⁸ Yet it seems to me that the particular participation of the interpreter in the *res* that they interpret—whether it is a text or something else—cannot be described sufficiently in terms of historical tradition alone. At this point, the realist turn that marks our current situation does have something important to offer to hermeneutic phenomenology. The present-day attention to attachment and to the different ways in which beings affect and act on us—in the sense of *wirken*—should be understood as an enrichment of the somewhat limited attention to historical tradition to account for hermeneutical experience. To provide only one example, texts do not only come to us from the past, that is, by travelling a temporal distance in a space marked by cultural and historical continuity, but also from other places and other cultures, thus traversing spatial and cultural distances and differences. These attachments are all at stake in the interpreters’ sharing in the being(s) they aim to understand. Additionally, Nietzsche’s suggestions that all our affects are like senses by which we interpret the sense—or assess the value—of that which we encounter should be included as indispensable elements of how the interpreter shares in the sense of the being they experience.¹⁹

With this extension of what it means to share in the sense of the being(s) one encounters, the hermeneutical emphasis on co-belonging only gains importance. Yet, at the same time, it is remarkable that Ricœur characterizes co-belonging as hermeneutical *rather than* phenomenological. This characterization makes sense because Ricœur offers it in a context in which “phenomenology” is taken as phenomenology within Husserl’s idealist vein. However, if one claims that phenomenology—no longer restricted to an idealist sense—is hermeneutical from the outset, should one not say that the experience of co-belonging is rather a hermeneutico-phenomenological one?

¹⁶ This seems a direct response to Gadamer’s remark in relation to Aeschylus’ dictum that we learn through suffering, see *Wahrheit und Methode*, 362-3.

¹⁷ Ricœur, “Phénoménologie et herméneutique,” 39/89.

¹⁸ See Gadamer’s account of hermeneutical experience as an experience of tradition (*Überlieferung*) in *Wahrheit und Methode*, 363-8.

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral* [1887], III.12 (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1921), 427-9; see also Johann N. Hofmann, *Wahrheit, Perspektive, Interpretation. Nietzsche und die philosophische Hermeneutik* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 59; Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *Metafysica. Van orde naar ontvankelijkheid* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2021), 122-6.

This interconnectedness of hermeneutics and phenomenology, it seems to me, becomes even more pressing in Ricœur's exploration of the articulation between hermeneutics and phenomenology in relation to the phenomenology of religion, which again positions phenomenology differently. In the argument I want to put forward, my interest is not for the sake of the field of phenomenology of religion alone. Rather, I am interested in the question of how this type of regional phenomenology may affect and impact what we call general phenomenology.²⁰

In the phenomenology of religion, the claim—*Anspruch*—made by the holy on the human is the original phenomenon. A phenomenological analysis of this experience shows that the human is receptive to such claim and thus can share in the sense shared out by this phenomenon; subsequently, for phenomenology, this is a religious form of an experience of co-belonging with an accompanying sense of self that explicitly transgresses the boundaries of a founding subjectivity. This co-belonging is thus phenomenological not in an idealist sense, but only in the sense of *hermeneutic* phenomenology. In this regard it is noteworthy that the self-experience that Ricœur unfolds in "Phénoménologie et herméneutique," that "I exchange the *me, master* of myself, for the *self, disciple* of the text," is understood as a hermeneutical corrective of idealist phenomenological subjectivity.²¹ There is a certain analogy between the hermeneutic experience of being a self addressed by and exposed to a text—rather than a subject imposing itself on a text—and the experience of the holy that addresses me as a self over against which I am never in the position of subject. A phenomenology of religion describes how the phenomenon of the holy that makes a claim on me has *always already* suspended the primacy of transcendental subjectivity—there is no "master of myself" in relation to the *res evidens* at stake in the experience of the holy. In this context, the holy can only appear as incomprehensible, heterogeneous, and simply out of reach when approached in terms of a founding subjectivity. Hence, the phenomenological experience of *the holy* is not a negative experience of a loss of subjectivity, but rather a positive *hermeneutic-phenomenological* experience of a sharing in the holy, of being addressed as a self by something that transgresses me. Responsiveness might be accounted for as hermeneutical as opposed to phenomenological *in an idealist vein*—as, for instance, in: "This style of 'response to ...' hermeneutics opposes to the idealism of *ultimate self-responsibility*"²²—which makes a lot of sense

²⁰ I cannot go into detail here, but rather than engaging explicitly with the work of Otto, Eliade or Van der Leeuw, my approach is better understood by the following historical consideration: for Husserl, Otto's phenomenology of religion is poor phenomenology and because of this, he suggests the young Heidegger to engage with the phenomenology of religion; there are good reasons, as I have argued elsewhere, to claim that Heidegger's early explorations in this regard in fact inspired his critique of Husserl's idealist phenomenology; for more detailed accounts, see Gert-Jan van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology. Heidegger on Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, and Descartes," *Forum Philosophicum*, vol. 26/2 (2021), 207-26; "Engaging with and Detaching from Religious Experience. Towards a Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Religion," *The Heythrop Journal*, vol. 64/2 (2023), 162-72.

²¹ Ricœur, "Phénoménologie et herméneutique," 51/95. This particular movement in which the position of the subject is turned into that of the one who is addressed, is already present in his reflections on the religious symbol, see, e.g., Paul Ricœur, *De l'interprétation. Essai sur Freud* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), 40; *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 30. Also here, it is about participation in the symbolic announcement of the holy.

²² Ricœur, "Phénoménologie et herméneutique," 51/95.

in relation to the idealist moments in Husserl's phenomenology. Yet, the phenomenology of religion discloses that the phenomenon at stake is only given in and by interpretation. At this point, the regional phenomenology of religion naturally guides us to a general sense of phenomenology that is intrinsically hermeneutical.

Thus, with respect to the phenomenology of religion, the question of hermeneutics and its correcting and conditioning functions take on a different form. Ricœur's oeuvre is very rich in this respect, offering many different accounts of what the hermeneutical condition of religion is. Yet, in relation to the context in which Ricœur's notion of the hermeneutics of suspicion reappears today, I want to limit myself to one aspect of this complicated articulation of hermeneutics and phenomenology of religion. The hermeneutics of suspicion, which I will discuss in more detail in the following section, is in one fundamental regard a basic corrective of the phenomenology of religion.²³ It interrupts the believer's or the participant's sharing in the appearance of the holy. Rather than sharing in what is presented in the festival or at a sacred place, suspicious interpreters detach themselves from the claim the holy makes on the participant. Let me emphasize that this claim can take on many different forms, ranging from the intoxication of a bacchantic celebration to Lévinas's ethical demand that the Infinite makes on us. Yet, in each case, according to the hermeneutics of suspicion, the interpreter should suspend this claim, that is, aim to withdraw themselves from it.

The reason to call for such a practice of interpretation is clear. The claim presents itself as a claim made by the holy or the divine, but what if it is actually produced by other relations, forces, or powers that act on us? It is important to capture what this means. If we follow the previous explication of co-belonging as sharing in the sense of being(s) we encounter, the phenomenology of religion argues that in the celebration of a cult or in the experiencing of the demand of the Infinite, we share in the divine sense of the holy. However, if this divine sense in which we think to share is merely an illusion created by much more earthly relations, forces, and powers that act on us, the religious experience of co-belonging turns out to be a deceptive one. It is in this sense that the hermeneutical corrective displayed in the hermeneutics of suspicion does *not* point to a primordial co-belonging, as it does in its correcting of idealist phenomenology, but rather to the necessity of suspending this co-belonging and of detaching oneself from the claim exerted by a deceptive phenomenon. Here, too, the stakes of the hermeneutics of suspicion transcend those of the regional phenomenology of religion and affect a more general paradigm of hermeneutic phenomenology for which co-belonging is a basic experience. The latter paradigm of co-belonging departs from the idea that the different ways in which we relate to a being allow us to share in the sense of this being. The paradigm of suspicion, on the other hand, argues that these different ways

²³ The relation between the terms "phenomenology" and "hermeneutics" remains ambivalent. I hope that the distinction between phenomenology in an idealist vein, hermeneutic phenomenology (of which the phenomenology of religion in a strict sense is a regional version), and hermeneutics of suspicion at least helps to unravel this ambivalence a bit. Sometimes, Ricœur juxtaposes phenomenology and hermeneutics in relation to religion, see e.g., Paul Ricœur, "Manifestation and Proclamation," in *Figuring the Sacred. Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 48-67, where the manifestation of the holy is distinguished from the hermeneutics of proclamation; on other occasions, the phenomenology of religion, such as the one developed by Eliade, is equated with the hermeneutics of faith or trust, see Ricœur, *De l'interprétation*, 36-40/29-32.

constitute a false sense of participation: we do not share in the true sense of this being, but are rather exposed to an illusory sense that deceives us of what truly is happening in the different relations in which we encounter something.

My presentation here remains one-sided since it does not show how the hermeneutics of suspicion can be productively related to a paradigm of hermeneutic phenomenology and its role of co-belonging. I will address this dichotomy in detail in the next section. Let me conclude this section by pointing out that the severe criticism of critique made by Sedgwick, Latour, and Felski operates on the basis of such a dichotomy. These critics reject the current detachment of critique and instead embrace the sense of attachment and significance with which we are related to all kinds of beings. In this way, they draw our attention to the phenomenological side of our relation to beings, which critique, to the extent that it has become a new norm, has lost sight of. They do so for two reasons, one negative and the other positive. First, as Latour insists, while the Enlightenment used critique “for debunking quite a lot of beliefs, powers, and illusions” — that is to say, as corrective against illusions — critique runs aground when it becomes a new norm and is applied everywhere by everyone, offering the means to debunk illusions and truths alike.²⁴ Second, in the context of his reflections on religion, Ricœur prefigures Sedgwick’s and Felski’s concerns for a new meaningful relation to artworks when he writes about this approach: “Phenomenology is its instrument of hearing, of recollection, of restoration of meaning.”²⁵ Ricœur’s characterization of the attempt by the phenomenology of religion to reenchant language through turning to symbols seems to articulate the very concern that motivates Sedgwick and Felski in their postcritical approach to literature: “the modern concern for symbols expresses a new desire to be addressed,” that is, a desire to participate in the sense of what we encounter.²⁶ In this sense, realism in philosophy and literary theory is about returning to reality as a matter of concern, that is, as a *Sache, chose, or res*.

II. The Double Sense of Distantiation as Corrective

Let us return to “Phénoménologie et herméneutique” and consider in some detail “the dialectical counterpart” of co-belonging, namely the concept of *distantiation*, which Ricœur discusses extensively in other texts as well and which marks his unique position in hermeneutic phenomenology.²⁷ Interestingly, the French text speaks of “*le correctif dialectique*,” which is to say,

²⁴ Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam,” 232.

²⁵ Ricœur, *De l’interprétation*, 37/28.

²⁶ Ricœur, *De l’interprétation*, 40/31. This renewed desire also helps us to better understand what was lost in the so-called “linguistic turn.” This turn was never about listening more carefully to what language—in the form of religious symbols, of novels, or of poems—has to say to us, but rather about the dismantling and disenchantment of language. Whether it is in the form of analysis developed in analytic philosophy or of the (post-)structural critique of discourses, language is conceived of as a human predicament that analysis and critique ought to overcome, rather than as the medium to which humans belong because it articulates, explicates, and preserves the sense of being(s) we encounter in the world.

²⁷ See, e.g., Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *The Truth (and Untruth) of Language. Heidegger, Ricœur, and Derrida on Disclosure and Displacement* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2010).

that distantiation is not simply the dialectical complement or supplement of co-belonging, but rather its dialectical *corrective*: distantiation is introduced to correct the sole emphasis on being taken in by the particular historico-cultural dimension of one's sharing in a phenomenon.²⁸ That is to say, distantiation counteracts a unilateral emphasis on attachment, a corrective that allows Ricœur to pinpoint the hermeneutical condition of phenomenology. Yet, to assess the notion of distantiation, it is important to distinguish two separate hermeneutical goals that Ricœur himself tends to blend together.

(1) On the one hand, as dialectical corrective, distantiation intrinsically belongs to the historical form of the co-belonging of human thinking and being. The historical condition of our belonging to tradition includes the process of handing down, of communicating over distance (in time) made possible by the texts handed down to us. Hence, distantiation—here Ricœur follows Gadamer—is intrinsic to “hermeneutical experience.” Thus, while the idea of the co-belonging of being and thinking offers an alternative to the opposition of transcendental subject and object in idealist phenomenology, distantiation emphasizes that belonging is not the same as being caught up, for instance, in the moment of one's private encounter with the divine. In this sense, distantiation indicates that belonging cannot be reduced to the experience of the subject alone. To share in the sense of a text includes a subjective and existential moment, to the extent that a claim is made on me, here and now, but this sharing is also always mediated by the effective history—*Wirkungsgeschichte*—of the text.

By extending the notion of hermeneutical experience in the way as suggested above, so that tradition is no longer the only and privileged mediator enabling the sharing in the sense of a being we encounter—be it a text or something else—the concept of distantiation is broadened accordingly. Not only a canonical text from the past of our own culture speaks to us from a distance, but also, for instance, the non-linguistic objects that I encounter in a different culture speak to me from a distance. Such objects also *speak* to me, that is, I somehow share in their sense. Yet, much more than in the encounter with objects we are familiar with because we know them from our own culture or education—*Bildung*—we run the risk of being carried away by the mere appearance of the object in encounters with objects from afar. Hence, the phenomenological moment of co-belonging is complicated by the distance between cultures, so that interpretation becomes an arduous and risky task, and misunderstanding, as Schleiermacher already emphasized, seems to be the hermeneutical default. Distantiation thus serves as the hermeneutical corrective to one's being taken away by the sense with which an object appears at first sight. Yet, it is somewhat like love at first sight: even though such love does not disclose the other to us in their complexity, it does attach us to them and thus generates the attunement and affection that allows us to get to know them.

In a more or less Derridean turn of phrase, the interplay of co-belonging and distantiation concerns the risk inevitably given with the very finitude of co-belonging, that is, with the very chance of sharing in the sense of what appears in the first place. It is part of the object's being to appear; in this sense, it can always appear to a particular point of view—this is the phenomenological moment of co-belonging: the *res* is a *res evidens*. Yet it appears always to a *particular* point of view, that is, mediated and attuned by interpreters such as by cultural and

²⁸ Ricœur, “Phénoménologie et herméneutique,” 51/92.

historical affects, linguistic attunements, societal powers, physical forces, and bodily drives — this is the hermeneutical corrective of distantiation and makes the *res evidens a res dubia*.

Let me emphasize that in this first account, distantiation is *not* a matter of detachment, but rather the corrective of a certain phenomenological conception of co-belonging. That is to say, distantiation emphasizes that interpreters constitute the very attachment by which they share in the sense of what they encounter. Hence, co-belonging is not concerned with an unambiguous, direct experience of what something is in itself or what something is essentially — this sense of co-belonging is corrected by distantiation. Co-belonging instead concerns the ways in which something draws near to us from a distance; that is to say, it is the process by which we are attached to something, by which something is brought into our presence (*An-wesen*) so that it may matter to us (*An-gang*) and make a claim on us (*An-spruch*).²⁹ Differently put, the phenomenology at stake in co-belonging is always already hermeneutical because a distance and a difference is traversed. Clearly, historical distance and our belonging to a tradition is the first example explored in hermeneutic phenomenology, especially by Ricœur and Gadamer, but it seems to me that recent post-critical and realist developments invite us to expand and extend the conceptual apparatus of hermeneutic phenomenology to include these other differences and distances that are traversed and by which humans share in the sense of what they encounter in the multifarious world around them. This extension, as argued, is in fact suggested by the notion of distantiation itself. It is in the first place a spatial figure — communication at a distance can, subsequently, be understood also as a temporal distance, but there is no reason to insist on this limitation. For example, telecommunication need not be restricted to texts from the past of one's own culture. (In fact, taking into account the mixture and mutual contamination at the heart of the historical development of all cultures, the spatial sense of distantiation might, perhaps, even be more primordial than the temporal one, which is derived from it.) Such a spatial extension of Ricœur's notion of distantiation might offer a fruitful point of contact the recent trends in post-critique and realism.

(2) On the other hand, distantiation serves in Ricœur's work as quite a severe critical instrument to tear down the self-assurance of the transcendental subject. As can be seen throughout his reflections on the human self, from *De l'interprétation* until *Soi-même comme un autre*, as well as on the corresponding hermeneutical predicament as analysed in *Le conflit des interprétations* and *Du texte à l'action*, distantiation offers Ricœur critical tools that he traces out in an exemplary way in the interpretive models developed by the masters of suspicion, in the explanatory models of structuralism, and in the critique of ideologies. Thus, distantiation is the keyword in his thought to problematize the founding role of subjectivity in the idealist versions of phenomenology and to integrate "an objective and explicative segment" in the process of self-understanding.³⁰

While Ricœur argues that distantiation is not "simply alienating," this second element does bring into play specific methodological considerations that allow him to enrich his hermeneutics with explanatory methods, so that hermeneutics may develop into a critical hermeneutics or,

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, "Der Satz der Identität," in *Identität und Differenz*, GA 11 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2006), 31-50; at 40-1.

³⁰ Ricœur, "Phénoménologie et herméneutique," 47/92.

following Habermas, a “depth hermeneutics.”³¹ In *Du texte à l’action*, the notions of depth and critique are often used to show how an elementary and “naïve” or “surface” interpretation should be enriched by critical instruments that require one to detach oneself from the claim a text makes on us. This temporary detachment allows the structural and critical analysis of a text to be integrated in a new stage of interpretation that truly deserves to be called a “critical” or “depth” interpretation.³²

Ricœur suggests that this dimension of distantiation is a further elaboration of the dialectic of co-belonging and distantiation. Yet, I have some concerns and questions about this suggestion, because it is in relation to the hermeneutics of suspicion, structuralism, and the critique of ideologies that distantiation becomes genuine detachment, albeit only for an intermediate moment in the dialectical progression of interpretation. This moment of detachment makes one wonder whether the type of distance at the heart of these critical and explanatory approaches is essentially not *without* dialectic relation with an original co-belonging. Do these approaches not run the risk of *severing* the articulation of phenomenology and hermeneutics marking the dialectic of co-belonging and distantiation?

Whatever the exact answer is that Ricœur’s thought offers to these questions, it is important to note that the opposition staged between phenomenology and the hermeneutics of suspicion does not result in a dialectic synthesis or reconciliation—neither conceptual nor practical—but rather points to a different kind of dialectics, one that I’ve analyzed elsewhere in terms of Saint Paul’s *katargēsis*.³³ Let me explain this dialectic in a few steps.

From *De l’interprétation* onwards it is clear that Ricœur is quite critical of the methodological soundness of the hermeneutics of suspicion. If unconscious forms of coding are at work in consciousness, how is it possible that the masters of suspicion have the exact means necessary to decipher and decode this unconscious coding and ciphering? As he writes:

What all three attempted, in different ways, was to make their “conscious” methods of deciphering coincide with the “unconscious” *work* of ciphering which they attributed to the will to power, to social being, to the unconscious psychism. *Guile will be met by double guile*.³⁴

Hence, when interpretation is in the first place a form of deciphering and unmasking, it is unclear how one comes to occupy the *detached* subjective position necessary to be able to decipher

³¹ Paul Ricœur, *Du texte à l’action. Essais d’herméneutique II* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 359; *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 291.

³² See, e.g., Ricœur, *Du texte à l’action*, 155/121, 205-11/162-7.

³³ Hence, not an *Aufhebung* in Hegel’s sense of the word, but a *katargēsis* in Saint Paul’s sense of the word, a suspension or a way of rendering inoperative, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains. A Commentary to the Letter to the Romans* [2000], trans. Patricia Daley (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 93-108 who develops this notion in terms of the suspension of the *nomos*; I argue that a more general conception of dialectics can be derived from this, Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy. The Outcast and the Spirit* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), chap. 3.

³⁴ Ricœur, *De l’interprétation*, 42/34.

in such a way. This means that for Ricœur the hermeneutics of suspicion cannot stand on their own feet—and the same applies *mutatis mutandis* to structuralism and the critique of ideologies. Basically, Ricœur's critical assessment of the methodological unsoundness of these critical approaches prefigures Latour's later critique of critique and the concerns expressed by Sedgwick and Felski.³⁵ And yet, Ricœur offers them a role as corrective—a corrective, however, which should never become a new norm due to its methodological flaws—by integrating these critical approaches in a critical hermeneutics. Still, it remains to be seen to what extent this helps Ricœur and what the net result is. His analysis of the cogito offers an exemplary illustration.

Clearly, the goal of the detour along Freud in *De l'interprétation* was to offer a corrective to the idealist version of Husserl's phenomenology. Later, in the preface of *Soi-même comme un autre*, the pair of Husserl and Freud is replaced by that of Descartes and Nietzsche.³⁶ In both cases, the goal of the hermeneutics of suspicion is to demonstrate how the modern cogito is wounded—*blessé*—or even shattered—*brisé*. Yet, the dichotomy between the Cartesian self-certainty of the subject and the Nietzschean reduction of any sense of self to a mere illusion remains dialectically unproductive. While Nietzsche and Freud negate the Cartesian and Husserlian cogito, this negation is not taken up in a higher form despite appearances to the contrary—appearances sometimes caused by the composition of Ricœur's texts, but not by the actual content of, say, *Soi-même comme un autre*.

To be more precise, we should perhaps posit a certain development in Ricœur's own position. In the period of *De l'interprétation*, Ricœur suggests that the hermeneutics of suspicion not only establishes that hermeneutics is indispensable—hence their role as a corrective of these types of phenomenology—but also that the hermeneutics of suspension needs to be taken into account dialectically with other types of interpretation in light of the unitary ontological figure of human existence that he is looking for.³⁷ While for Ricœur the reconciliation of these different interpretations is never is conceptual (as Hegel desires) but necessarily remains provisional or practical, the idea of reconciliation seems to be a guideline in the reflections of the 1960s. How much this corrective function of suspicion has influenced Ricœur is visible in the negative language that he continues to use, up to *Soi-même comme un autre*, such as the wounded cogito or the shattered cogito.³⁸ In line with what we find in the text with which I started, "Phénoménologie et herméneutique," the goal of the negation of the cogito by the work of the hermeneutics of suspicion is to show that human selfhood cannot be posited at the beginning, but is only given as the dialectic result of these different interpretations.

³⁵ See also Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* [1991], trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

³⁶ See the preface of Paul Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 11-38; *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1995), 1-25.

³⁷ This is Ricœur's famous ontological detour or long route as opposed to Heidegger's shortcut, see Ricœur, *Le conflit des interprétations*, 23-8/19-24.

³⁸ Note that the idea that the cogito is broken or shattered (*brisé*) within itself is already present in Ricœur's work from as early as *Philosophie de la volonté*, vol. I *Le volontaire et l'involontaire* (Paris: Aubier, 1949), 13, hence before his engagement with the hermeneutics of suspicion; yet this latter encounter seems to allow him to systematize the role of this shattered cogito for a hermeneutics.

Yet, it remains to be seen whether the dialectical development in the history of modern thought that Ricœur portrays in this way, going from the transcendental positions of the subject via the corrective of the critical positions decentering the cogito to a hermeneutical position of the self that arrives at the end of these processes of interpretation, still makes sense in the context of the discoveries of *Soi-même comme un autre*.

Let me simply posit that the set-up of the opening pages of *Soi-même comme un autre* in terms of the dichotomy of Descartes and Nietzsche *cannot* be understood as a moment in a dialectic development that leads to a new position. The new ontological ground that Ricœur explores under the heading of attestation is of a genuinely different nature.³⁹ In fact, it seems to me that only at this point, Ricœur truly discovers the ontological sense of the famous play of trust and distrust that he already introduced in the 1960s. Let me explain this.

Trust is not certainty. Those who are certain do not need to trust. In fact, the Cartesian hyperbolic doubt is itself an attempt to remove the element of trust—namely the trust in the authority of tradition—and replace it by certainty. In this sense, the question of trust, intrinsically related to the concept of attestation as Ricœur beautifully shows, is *not* the outcome of a quest for certainty and its subsequent corrective negations. Rather, trust belongs on a different plane than the certainty sought for in modern thought. Similarly, distrust is not like the hyperbolic doubt exercised in Descartes and Nietzsche, albeit for fundamentally different reasons. Indeed, if we want to find a dialectical synthesis of Descartes and Nietzsche, it can only be the modern insistence on hyperbolic doubt. Distrust, however, as the privative “dis-” indicates, refers back to an elementary and preceding trust—not to certainty. When distrust arises, an elementary trust is under pressure. The interplay of trust and distrust does not result from a dialectic of certainty and illusion driven by the force of hyperbolic doubt. It is simply something else, as Ricœur discovers when addressing the notion of attestation.

Ricœur himself points to the phenomenological kinship between attestation and testimony (*témoignage*).⁴⁰ The elementary trust by which an addressee accepts a testimony comes under pressure when a second witness with a substantially different account of the same event makes themselves known. Due to the second testimony, the event appears to be something else than the first witness suggested. This triggers distrust. However, distrust itself is an attitude with many degrees and forms. Only one of them—certainly not the most natural one—includes hyperbolic doubt. Distrust can be hyperbolized and thus be transformed into a demand of complete certainty. Since this demand cannot be met, the result can only be a rejection of the practice of testimony altogether—a problematization that can clearly be seen in modern authors such as Descartes and Hume for whom the trustworthiness or authority of testimony must be related back to a ground or reason in the cognitive capacities of the subject. Yet, the transformation of distrust into hyperbolic doubt is the consequence of method, that is, of an external methodological and epistemological demand, that obscures the basic and founding phenomenological role of the practice of testimony, of the authority of tradition, of the elementary trustworthiness of someone else’s stories, and so on. With this method, as Sedgwick provocatively puts it, corresponds a particular mood, namely

³⁹ This is announced in the preface and explored in the last study of Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 11-38/1-25; 345-410/297-356.

⁴⁰ Especially Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 347-51/299-302.

paranoia: hyperbolic doubt is methodological paranoia.⁴¹ It is this hyperbolized dimension to which post-critique and realism reacts.⁴² That is why the present moment requires hermeneutic phenomenology to distinguish strictly between *suspicion*, as hyperbolic doubt which is so paranoid that it suspects everything, and *distrust*, which goes hand in hand with the multiplicity of perspectives that characterize the human condition.

The notions of attestation, in relation to self-understanding, and of testimony, in relation to the social existence of beings and events in the world, do not result from any dialectic of Cartesian certainty and Nietzschean suspicion. Rather, it is only when this dialectic has run aground, and the external methodological demand that carries it is suspended, that the realm of attestation and testimony may come into view again.⁴³ We may conclude that attestation and testimony *do* involve distantiation, but only in the first sense I distinguished, not in the second sense of sheer detachment. The interplay of trust and distrust, so elementary for Ricœur's thought, can only come to true fruition once it is recognized that they are brought into play *as soon as* we recognize the first sense of distantiation—which is why Ricœur rather than Heidegger discovers the central importance of trust and distrust⁴⁴—but this possibility is *hidden* from view when it is approached from the violent perspective of modern hyperbolic doubt. The interplay of trust and distrust as attitudes to phenomena is grounded in the ontological condition marked by an interplay of co-belonging and distantiation. However, if the notion of distantiation is enlarged enough to include hyperbolic doubt, its original sense, which arises out of the interplay of co-belonging and distantiation, runs the risk of being displaced and distorted.

This realization, then, is perhaps the genuine contribution of the hermeneutics of suspicion. As a corrective it has been able to show the fundamental drawback of hyperbolic doubt and it comes to its end, in the double sense of the word, when it succeeds in exorcising modernity's evil genius and in suspending the thought experiment of hyperbolic doubt. After the end of the hermeneutics of suspicion fuelled by hyperbolic doubt, we still have Nietzsche, but a different Nietzsche, one who makes us aware of how the multiplicity of our affective relations to what we encounter allows us to share in its sense. We also still have a conflict of interpretations after the end of this hermeneutics of suspicion, because distantiation as the dialectic corrective of co-belonging multiplies the ways in which we share in the sense of what we encounter in the world. However, this conflict will no longer be fuelled by methodological doubt, but would instead be inspired by the diverse ways in which the subject matter — *la chose, die Sache* — matters to us.

III. Trust and Distrust, *Res Evidens* and *Res Dubia*

The above considerations, descriptive and critical, of Ricœur's account of the articulation of phenomenology and hermeneutics allow us to better grasp the current post-critical and realist

⁴¹ Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading."

⁴² Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam," 232.

⁴³ This is what I would call a *katargēsis*, see van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, chap. 3.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *The Voice of Misery. A Continental Philosophy of Testimony* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020), 165-9.

turn. The point of departure and the context of Ricœur's account of the relation of phenomenology and hermeneutics is significantly different from that of post-critique. Departing from phenomenology—or, rather: phenomenologies—Ricœur's first concern is to establish its hermeneutical condition. He does so by bringing out the importance of co-belonging and its "dialectical corrective" of distantiation. Yet, at the same time, in one stroke, Ricœur stretches the concept of distantiation to such an extent that it includes forms of detachment on which the approaches of the hermeneutics of suspicion, different forms of structuralism, and the critique of ideologies are also based. The point of departure offered by Latour, Sedgwick, and Felski is different. Their express concern regards critique and its particular attunement, so their attempts to introduce new types of reading, reparative and focused on attachment rather than detachment, show that the current moment is one in which the corrective—distantiation—has become a new norm—distantiation as detachment. To cite Kierkegaard once more, as soon as the corrective "has established itself as independent, [it] brings forth precisely the opposite of what was originally intended." However, this has been possible due to the *ambiguity* of the term "distantiation" as well as of the term "suspicion." Rather than being understood as the dialectical corrective of co-belonging, distantiation in the form of critique and suspicion has taken over, erasing its phenomenological provenance so that it has become identical to detachment, to the distance adopted by methodological doubt.

The current moment requires re-establishing the phenomenological condition of hermeneutics. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Felski also designates her turn to attachment as a form of "neo-phenomenology," refers several times to the hermeneutics of trust, and states, albeit between brackets, that she "retain[s] some sympathy" for hermeneutic phenomenology.⁴⁵ Sedgwick's attention to reparative readings also allude to what Ricœur in the 1960s would call a hermeneutics of trust. To mirror this affinity between Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology and the approaches of Sedgwick and Felski, let me note that long before Felski introduces the term "post-critique," Ricœur uses it as an adjective for the type of faith or trust, *foi*, that marks the approach or attitude, *Einstellung*, to religious symbols in the phenomenology of religion.⁴⁶

This post-critical faith is described as "la foi qui a traversé la critique."⁴⁷ The choice of the verb *traverser*, as in *traverser une crise*, is important here. This trust has experienced critique. That is to say, it has been exposed to modern critique and lived through the peril that this experience brought with it.⁴⁸ Yet it has endured this danger and has come through. From this perspective, the hermeneutics of suspicion—which, as should be clear by now, is not identical to the work of the masters of suspicion, but rather concerns one particular way or method of approaching phenomena and interpreting them—is not simply an alternative way of interpreting, but is rather the modern

⁴⁵ For "neo-phenomenology," see Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 18; *The Limits of Critique*, 191. For the "sympathy," see Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, 30, and for the reference to the "hermeneutics of trust," see Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, 9, 173.

⁴⁶ Ricœur, *De l'interprétation*, 37/28.

⁴⁷ Ricœur, *De l'interprétation*, 37/28.

⁴⁸ For the relation of experience and peril, see Claude Romano, *L'événement et le monde* (Paris: Puf, 1998), 193-201; Gert-Jan van der Heiden, "Poverty and Promise. Towards a Primordial Hermeneutic Experience," in *Phenomenology and Experience. New Perspectives*, eds Antonio Cimino and Cees Leijenhorst (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 63-80, especially 72-5.

temptation *par excellence* for hermeneutic phenomenology. Where trust encounters distrust in the context of modern thought, thinking is tempted to turn this distrust into methodological doubt, which hyperbolizes its original phenomenological form.

In light of this, it becomes clear in which sense the hermeneutics of suspicion is only a corrective. Its “paranoia,” to use Sedgwick term, cannot stand on its own; yet, it serves one particular goal, namely to deactivate modern hyperbolic doubt so that the realm of trust and the interplay of trust and distrust can be brought into the open. To this end, however, hermeneutics today needs to recall its hermeneutic-phenomenological condition. Distantiation in its hermeneutic-phenomenological sense is not sheer detachment and does not find its fulfillment in methodological doubt. Rather, as the dialectic corrective of co-belonging, it opens up the field for the play of trust and distrust. A simple example may illustrate this. In a dialogue, the points of view expressed by the other may require me to revise my own. This experience of distantiation clearly triggers distrust with respect to my capacities to find the sense of *la chose* or *die Sache* that we discuss on my own. At the same time, the dialogue also triggers trust in my capacity to learn from the other, even though I can never adopt the individual position and experiences of the other, and it triggers trust in my capacity to teach the other, even though we are unsubstitutable. This process of trust and distrust attunes our sharing in the sense of the *Sache* we encounter; it is the human condition of how something is evidently given.

The modern call for hyperbolic doubt seems to be grounded in a certain *hubris*, a primordial faith of the cogito in itself, that it is possible to arrive at complete, certain evidence. The hermeneutical condition of phenomenology, by contrast, as Ricœur has emphasized from the very outset of his work, implies that at the heart of the experience of a *res evidens* there always resides a *res dubia*. Hermeneutic phenomenology has understood that the *res evidens* is not given in the attitude that only accepts certainty, but in an attitude of trust. By its very nature, trust is accompanied by the possibility of distrust. Since distrust attunes us to the *res dubia* residing in each *res evidens* it does not make any sense to try to exorcise this possibility; rather, the hermeneutical fertility of approaching that which appears as *res evidens* as *res dubia* should be acknowledged. Hermeneutics cannot exist as hermeneutics of suspicion alone, but only as the to-and-fro movement between trust and distrust, between *res evidens* and *res dubia*, and between co-belonging and distantiation. Whatever appears clearly always requires further explication and in turn, whatever appears vaguely or ambiguously gains clarity by explication.⁴⁹

The post-critical turn and its emphasis on attachment rather than detachment teaches hermeneutics that it has to take care of and return to its phenomenological condition. This is a lesson which the realist turn in a more general sense has also taught hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is not about the linguistic condition of human understanding alone but about the human participation in the sense of being(s) we encounter. In turn, hermeneutics should remind realism that this participation is always of the order of human thought and human language. The aforementioned discussion on trust and distrust, on the *res evidens* and *res dubia*, also shows that post-critique and realism should not forget to learn their own lesson, namely that the deactivation of hyperbolic doubt does not open up a realm without distrust whatsoever. The tendency to trust one’s attachments and to affirm one’s belonging is and remains in need of a dialectic corrective.

⁴⁹ Ricœur, “Phénoménologie et herméneutique,” 75/101.

This is the basic hermeneutical conviction by which it enriched and displaced phenomenology. This dialectic corrective comes in the form of distrust and distantiation, that is, in the form of the capacity to reconsider that which appeared as *res evidens* as *res dubia*. It is, after all, from the perplexity and wonder that arises in this way, that thinking is born.

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