

## CHAPTER 1

# HERMENEUTICS

For Ricoeur, hermeneutics is a version of phenomenology. It is less of a break from phenomenology than an extension and transformation of it. He argues that phenomenology and hermeneutics are dialectically related: hermeneutics is grounded on phenomenological presuppositions, while phenomenology is grounded on hermeneutical presuppositions. A survey of the literature shows that while many recognize how similar and complementary these two seemingly opposed schools of philosophy are, the tendency among commentators is to reduce phenomenology to hermeneutics. The Heideggerian ontological critique of Husserl's epistemological project is generally accepted.<sup>1</sup> Ricoeur, however, is among the few who refuse to subsume Husserlian phenomenology to its Heideggerian reformulation.<sup>2</sup> Instead he maintains that hermeneutics rejects only the idealist interpretation that Husserl later gave to phenomenology; hermeneutics is not at all incompatible with some of the other interpretations Husserl gave to his own work. Hermeneutics "has still not finished 'having it out with' Husserlian phenomenology; hermeneutics comes out of the latter, in the double sense of the expression: phenomenology is the place where hermeneutics originates; phenomenology is also the place it has left behind" (TA xiii). Ricoeur's hermeneutics retains a link to phenomenology in a way that post-Heideggerian hermeneutics does not. This link is decisive not only for his place in the hermeneutic tradition but also for his mediation of the Habermas-Gadamer debate. Phenomenological hermeneutics is a nascent critical theory.

## PHENOMENOLOGY AND HERMENEUTICS

Ricoeur retains from Husserl the central insight into the intentionality of consciousness and the methodological technique of bracketing. The well-known doctrine of intentionality asserts that all experience is directed toward some

object of reference, while every object of experience is correlated to a particular experience. *What* is experienced is always correlated with *how* it is experienced by someone. The object of consciousness is an entity that can be repeated and signified in a number of ways. Intentionality and meaning are thus coextensive. Husserlian phenomenology can be seen as an answer to the question What does signifying signify? Intentionality is the fundamental, invariant, transcendental condition for the possibility of experience and meaning. The methodological technique of bracketing, or the phenomenological reductions, is a set of rules for directing our attention toward experience. What we bracket is the temptation either to make judgments about the ontological status of an object of experience or to theorize and explain rather than describe experience. Instead we treat all experience simply as given in consciousness as phenomena, or as meaning presenting itself to consciousness. The goal of a phenomenological description is to explicate experience in terms of the intentional relationship to the world. In phenomenology "our relation to the world becomes apparent as a result of reduction; in and through reduction every being comes to be described as a phenomenon, as appearance, thus as a meaning to be made explicit" (CI 247).

But Ricoeur is critical of the transformation from Husserl's early, descriptive phenomenology to his later, transcendental phenomenology. He says the "logicist" prejudice in transcendental phenomenology is a form of "idealism" that privileges a reflective, representational conception of consciousness over all other forms of it. Husserl overemphasizes the perceptual character of consciousness geared toward establishing the validity of logical and mathematical entities over a broader model of consciousness as a synthesis of experience, speech, and intuition. He also transforms what was originally a methodological program into an ontology of subjectivity. Husserl turns away from a phenomenology of signification to an "egological" ontology in which all meaning is constituted by the activity of the transcendental ego, a notoriously obscure doctrine.<sup>3</sup> Ricoeur concurs with most of Husserl's disciples that the practice of phenomenology does not necessarily coincide with the idealistic interpretation of its method. He thus retains the Husserlian doctrine of intentionality and the methodological techniques of bracketing and eidetic reductions, but rejects the idealist interpretation of transcendental phenomenology in favor of a version that resembles the early, pretranscendental Husserl.

In *Freedom and Nature*, for example, Ricoeur employs the Husserlian method of eidetic analysis to the spheres of the will, affection, and volition, geared toward uncovering our fundamental possibilities of existence through a descriptive, but not a transcendental, version of phenomenology. Unlike Husserl, Ricoeur recognizes the necessity of supplementing phenomenology

with “nonphenomenology” given the limits placed on self-understanding by the obscurity of involuntary bodily movement and capacity. The experience of our own bodies is never unmediated and direct; instead we interpret our involuntary movements and functions as signs or symptoms for the will. These signs are read indirectly *through* my will as indications of the involuntary for the voluntary. A purely eidetic phenomenology of the will finds its limits in bodily obscurity that must be explained diagnostically rather than experienced directly in order to be understood. The diagnostic method suggests a “latent hermeneutics” in which understanding is symbolically mediated. Ricoeur begins to make a turn from eidetic, descriptive phenomenology to hermeneutic phenomenology in which signs and symptoms mediate understanding. What he sometimes calls a “hermeneutic variation” of Husserlian phenomenology is a strategy for an indirect reading of experience through language.

Everything in my first writings which points to an indirect interpretation, applied first to the indices of external objectivities, anticipates the subsequent role of the text as the place for the decentering and dispossession of immediacy. . . . The idea of reading signs . . . is found to be the most fundamental anticipation of a hermeneutic rule for phenomenology.<sup>4</sup>

He replaces an immediate, presuppositionless, intuitive grasping of phenomena by a hermeneutic phenomenology that imposes an indirect, interpretive relationship to any given object of understanding.

In *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricoeur imposes the terms of a second set of limits on phenomenology by psychoanalysis. Through a dialectical confrontation of Husserl and Freud, Ricoeur finds a latent hermeneutics that contrasts to Husserlian idealism and the “transcendental illusion” of a subject that ostensibly is immediately transparent to itself. Freud introduces a science of the dynamics of the relationship between experience and the unconscious and a technique for uncovering the relation of a latent, unconscious meaning to a manifest, conscious meaning. The result is what Ricoeur calls a “semantics of desire.” He explains that the importance of Freud is to show that psychoanalysis limits and “falsifies” phenomenology in Popper’s sense of falsification (which is ironic given Popper’s critique of psychoanalysis as unfalsifiable). Ricoeur writes:

I have always been very attentive to the idea of “falsification,” and I was asking myself what “falsifies” phenomenology. It is the main thrust of my investigation, whereas many people saw it as a sort of

integration of psychoanalysis and phenomenology; on the contrary, I was confirming in my work that this could not be done, that something decidedly resisted it. Phenomenology does indeed have its other. (CC 29–30)

The central Freudian insight into the unconscious is that the play of language and desire reveals and conceals, and therefore shapes and distorts, how we understand ourselves and others. The hermeneutic phenomenology that emerges as a result of such an encounter with Freud is one geared toward unmasking and decoding symbolic expressions as well as restoring and recovering lost and hidden meanings. Dreams and symbols are models of the complexity of language in which meanings are both given and hidden in an immediate meaning. Language and symbolic expressions, instead of perception and experience, are now the primary object of interpretation.

Ricoeur suggests that philosophical reflection begin with the “fullness of language” rather than in a Husserlian search for a presuppositionless origin of all meaning. If language is the medium for thought and experience then it is impossible to think behind language into a prelinguistic and, therefore, presuppositionless realm of consciousness. Symbolic expressions, however, are difficult to interpret given their essentially equivocal nature. Symbols mean more than what is said. A symbolic expression both expresses (signifies) something and indicates (designates) something. “To signify” means both expression and designation; a symbolic expression is a function not only of what the subject intends but also what the symbol designates. And because symbols are public and intersubjective, the *cogito* is mediated and limited by language, shattering the illusion of a self-founding act of consciousness. Symbolism requires hermeneutics because it is a double-meaning expression while hermeneutics is the art of deciphering symbols.

The task of the philosopher guided by symbols would be to break out of the enchanted enclosure of consciousness for oneself, to end the prerogative of self-reflection. The symbol gives reason to think that the *Cogito* is within being, and not vice versa. . . . A philosophy that starts from the fullness of language is a philosophy with presuppositions.” (SE 356–357)

A symbol is any double-meaning expression defined by a semantic structure in which the first-order meaning designates a second-order meaning that is attainable only through the first-order meaning. “The fullness of language,” refers to the relationship of meaning to meaning in which a second meaning

“dwells in” the first meaning. Ricoeur maintains that symbols are “bound to” their primary, literal meanings, which, in turn, are “bound by” their symbols. The “revealing power” of symbols is what binds meaning to meaning, and meaning to me. “The movement that draws me toward the second meaning assimilates me to what is said, makes me participate in what is announced to me” (FP 31). In other words, we believe that a symbol has the ability to communicate something to us because we, in a sense, participate in it when we understand it. Understanding is a form of participation because in order to understand one must already believe. The hermeneutic situation is that we must believe in order to know, yet know in order to believe. “Hermeneutics proceeds from a prior understanding of the very thing that it tries to understand by interpreting it” (SE 352). Hermeneutics is animated by a faith that the symbol has the revealing power to deliver and restore lost or hidden meaning. Interpretation, in this sense, is a recollection of meaning.

Hermeneutics is a contested term. There is no general hermeneutics but multiple hermeneutics, with different rules of interpretation, often competing and even conflicting with one another. At one pole of the hermeneutic field is the “hermeneutics of belief,” aimed at recovering a lost message, animated by faith and a willingness to listen; at the other pole is the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” aimed at demystification, animated by mistrust and skepticism. The counterpole to a hermeneutics that recovers meaning is a hermeneutics that removes illusions. Symbols not only reveal, but conceal; they manifest as well as mystify meaning. The hermeneutics of suspicion draws on the “masters” Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, each of whom contests the primacy of consciousness and casts doubt on the validity of our participation in what we ordinarily accept as true and real. Instead the masters posit a false consciousness in place of an immediate, self-transparent consciousness, and deception or delusion in place of the experience of participation. The relationship between the manifest and the latent replaces the traditional distinction between appearance and reality. All three masters create a means to decipher consciousness through a science of meaning, as opposed to an explication of the meaning of immediate consciousness and its sedimented layers of sense. Consciousness not only has hidden, sedimented layers to be either intuitively apprehended or hermeneutically explicated; consciousness is the result of both social and personal guile and deception. Interpretation is the work of deciphering hidden, distorted meaning in apparent meaning, and of unfolding levels of meanings implied in literal meaning. Hermeneutics involves both belief and suspicion.

Hermeneutics rejects any claim of phenomenology to immediate, intuitive knowledge of the world grounded in full presence and subjective self-certainty. It

also abandons any notion of a prelinguistic, meaning-conferring realm of consciousness for a philosophy that begins and ends within the fullness of language. But there remains a profound affinity between hermeneutics and phenomenology. Hermeneutics rejects only the idealistic interpretation Husserl gave to phenomenology during the period from *Ideas* to the *Cartesian Mediations*. Non-idealistic interpretations of phenomenology and hermeneutics stand in a relationship of “mutual belonging” and mutual presupposition: hermeneutics presupposes the phenomenological priority of the intentionality of consciousness, and phenomenology presupposes the hermeneutical conception of interpretation as explication (*Auslegung*) in order to fulfill its philosophical project. Ricoeur argues that to recognize the relationship of mutual presupposition we must first challenge the idealist interpretation of phenomenology.

He does this by proposing five theses of Husserlian idealism that are opposed, point by point, by post-Heideggerian hermeneutics: (1) Phenomenology must be discontinuous with the naturalism and historicism that typify the physical and social sciences in order to function as their ground and ultimate justification; (2) intuition is the foundation of the sciences; (3) the place of intuition is the subject, for whom only what is immanent is indubitable; (4) transcendental subjectivity is not an empirical subjectivity that is the object of psychology; and (5) the reduction is also an ethical action for which the phenomenologist must take ultimate responsibility.

To the first thesis, Ricoeur replies that the phenomenological, scientific ideal that acts as the ultimate justification is limited by the ontological conditions of understanding, or human finitude, which is better expressed by the Gadamerian concept of “belonging.” Before we begin any foundational project of ultimate justification, we belong to and are supported by a relation to a tradition that always precedes us. To be truly radical, one must question back behind the ultimate justification in a sphere of transcendental immanence, back to the ontological conditions of the possibility of phenomenology’s foundational project. Belonging is the ontological condition “whereby he who questions shares in the very thing about which he questions” (TA 30). The Gadamerian notion of belonging is similar to the Heideggerian notion of being-in-the-world. Although Heidegger’s conception better expresses the primacy of care over perception and the priority of being situated practically in the world over rational reflection, Ricoeur prefers Gadamer’s notion of belonging because it better thematizes the epistemological problem of the subject-object relation in terms of each person’s participation in a tradition and alienation from that tradition. This relation of distance and belonging sets the terms of Ricoeur’s mediation of the Habermas-Gadamer debate.

Hermeneutics counters the second thesis of Husserlian idealism, that is, that intuition grounds the sciences, with the hermeneutic insight that all understanding is mediated by interpretation. As Heidegger explains in section 32 of *Being and Time*, explication is the development of understanding in terms of the structure of the “as.”<sup>5</sup> The “hermeneutical as” mediates the explication of our anticipatory preunderstanding of experience. As Heidegger’s discussion of fore-having (*Vor-habe*), fore-sight (*Vor-sicht*), and fore-conception (*Vor-Griff*) shows explication is never presuppositionless but always precedes according to how *Dasein* is related to a situation before it begins to interpret itself. The explication of understanding is at the same time an explication of the preunderstanding, or the anticipatory as-structure of experience. The hermeneutic relationship of understanding and interpretation, therefore, radically calls into question the Husserlian demand for presuppositionless and ultimate foundations. Hermeneutics shows us that we never arrive at an origin but are always in the middle of a process without a discernable beginning or an end.

Hermeneutics addresses the third thesis of Husserlian idealism, that is, that the ultimate foundation of knowledge is subjectivity, by showing how the *cogito* itself is susceptible to the same kind of phenomenological critique of appearances as any other object of thought. Unlike an object, a subject participates in its own self-deception, which makes uncovering the truth of consciousness and self-consciousness more difficult than it is for an ordinary object. Heidegger addresses the ruses of self-consciousness in section 25 of *Being and Time*, where he questions the adequacy of understanding *Dasein*’s everydayness in terms of the traditional conception of the self as an object. Ricoeur agrees, but cautions that we should pay attention to how systematically distorted communication affects the constitution of subjectivity. Self-knowledge is as dubious and as presumptive as any other kind of knowledge even if socially constituted and mediated by language. “Insofar as self-knowledge is a dialogue of the soul with itself, and insofar as the dialogue can be systematically distorted by violence and by the intrusion of structures of domination into those of communication, self-knowledge as internalized communication can be as doubtful as knowledge of the object” (TA 34).

The fourth thesis of Husserlian idealism, which asserts the primacy of the subject, is challenged by a theory of the text as the “hermeneutical axis.” Following Gadamer, Ricoeur holds that the “matter of the text” is a meaning that is distinct from the intentions of the author. The task of hermeneutics is to understand the matter or issue of the text, which is autonomous with respect to the intentions of the author, its original addressee, and the context in which it was written. Interpretation uncovers the matter of the text as a proposed world in which I could possibly experience, inhabit, verify, criticize, and so on. Ricoeur’s

the conception of the text is a hermeneutic alternative to the Husserlian claim that the locus of meaning is found in the consciousness of a subject. The text shows that writing communicates without recourse to the subjectivity of the author, contrary to Husserl's insistence in "The Origin of Geometry" that the meaning of writing is a "sedimentation" of the consciousness of the author that the reader must "reactivate" in order to understand.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, hermeneutics counters the fifth thesis of Husserlian idealism, that is, the ultimate responsibility of the constituting subject, by proposing that subjectivity appears at the end, not the beginning, of interpretation as the provisionally final, not the first, principle of a theory of understanding. To read a text is to respond to the proposed world by letting it address me in order to let the matter of the text be. "I exchange the *me*, master of itself, for the *self*, disciple of the text" (TA 37). Subjectivity is the result of understanding, not the condition of understanding. Hermeneutics replaces *self*-responsibility with a self that is a "response to." As opposed to the Husserlian demand for ultimate responsibility for *oneself*, hermeneutics demands ultimate responsibility to *another*.

After completing a hermeneutical critique of Husserlian idealism, Ricoeur argues that phenomenology remains "the unsurpassable presupposition" of hermeneutics. At the same time, phenomenology "cannot carry out its program of *constitution* without constituting itself in the *interpretation* of the experience of the ego" (TA 38). Four theses establish the phenomenological limits to hermeneutical experience. First, hermeneutics shares with phenomenology the presupposition that any question about being is above all a question of the meaning of being. What defines phenomenology is "the choice in favor of meaning." A nonidealist conception of meaning is found in the *Logical Investigations*, before Husserl elaborated the reductions and the field of immanence in which an object is constituted. The idea of a universal conception of meaning, which is a function of the intentionality of consciousness, does not have to lead to a transcendental subjectivity from which meaning originates. It is important not to forget that intentionality signifies a world outside of itself. This aspect of intentionality points to the priority of meaning over self-consciousness.<sup>7</sup>

Second, hermeneutics presupposes phenomenology through the hermeneutical conception of distanciation, the dialectical counterpart to the concept of belonging. As Gadamer says, we belong to a tradition and a history in terms of which we interpret the world. To interpret is to render what is alien, foreign, or distant in terms of our historically inherited preunderstanding. But Gadamer's conception of distanciation in *Truth and Method* is ambiguous; it is both the necessary condition of understanding, as well as what must be overcome in order to understand. The phenomenological correlate to hermeneu-



tical distanciation is the *epoche*, provided that it is interpreted in a nonidealistic manner. The *epoche*, or bracketing, begins phenomenological reflection when we turn our attention away from the natural attitude toward the way in which an experience is intended in consciousness. "Phenomenology begins when, not content to "live" or "re-live," we interrupt lived experience in order to signify it" (TA 40). The choice in favor of meaning begins when we break away from the natural attitude and adopt the phenomenological attitude through which experience receives its meaning. It is, however, important to emphasize that the exteriority of consciousness is oriented outside of itself, toward a meaning, in order not to slip back into an idealistic interpretation of phenomenology. Then it can be seen how hermeneutical distanciation is similar to the phenomenological *epoche*. Both represent a movement away from experience toward reflection. "Hermeneutics similarly begins when, not content to belong to transmitted tradition, we interrupt the relation of belonging in order to signify it" (TA 41).

Third, hermeneutics presupposes phenomenology through the thesis that language is derivative from experience. Gadamer's thesis that intelligible experience is language comes as a result of a phenomenology of aesthetic and historical experience, neither of which are necessarily linguistic. There must be something that comes to language, even if we can only identify and say what it is by using language. Even historical experience is not completely linguistic. "The interplay of distance and proximity, constitutive of the historical connection is what comes to language rather than what language produces" (TA 41). Similarly, Heidegger's analysis of the assertion (in section 34 of *Being and Time*) shows how it is derivative of the existential structures constitutive of being-in-the-world: discourse, mood, and understanding. Discourse is the capacity to articulate experience in language but it is not itself linguistic. For Ricoeur "the reference of the linguistic order back to the structure of experience (which comes to language in the assertion) constitutes . . . the most important phenomenological presupposition of hermeneutics" (TA 42). Both phenomenology and hermeneutics share the idea that language is derivative of experience.

The fourth phenomenological presupposition of hermeneutics is the relationship between pre-predicative experience and the historicity of human experience. The return to the lifeworld is shared by both phenomenology and hermeneutics. For phenomenology, the lifeworld is the shared, cultural, and historical horizon of experience that grounds the objectifications of math, and the natural and social sciences. For hermeneutics, aesthetic, historical, and linguistic experience grounds and supports the objectifications and explanations of the social sciences. Hermeneutics can be seen as affecting a return to the lifeworld,

if the lifeworld is “construed as designating the reservoir of meaning, the surplus of sense in living experience, which renders the objectifying and explanatory attitude possible” (TA 43).

After showing the phenomenological presuppositions of hermeneutics, Ricoeur turns to the hermeneutical presuppositions of phenomenology. Through a sophisticated, deconstructive reading, Ricoeur shows that Husserl's phenomenological method repeatedly has “recourse to *Auslegung*” in the sense of explication, exegesis, and interpretation of experience. Hence something other than intuition is critical to complete Husserl's project. Phenomenological intuition depends on explication and interpretation even though Husserl contrasts the task of hermeneutic explication with phenomenological intuitive self-evidence. “Explication,” Ricoeur notes, “is thus midway between a philosophy of construction and a philosophy of description” (TA 50).

In *The Logical Investigations*, Husserl takes recourse in *Auslegung* at the moment in which “signification–conferring acts” are brought to intuition. Ricoeur argues that Husserl conflates logical operations and perceptual operations within intuition by, on one hand, distinguishing between signifying acts and objectifying acts, and yet, on the other hand, suggesting a kinship between them. This ambivalence renders the distinction indeterminate. Furthermore, Husserl claims that the concept of “apperception” is necessary to distinguish between simple acts of perception from sense data, but it too is both an act of perception and interpretation. The result is that the intuitive act that would distinguish between vague, “fluctuating meanings,” and fixed, “stable” meaning is, in fact, an interpretive act of elucidation, clarification, and explication.<sup>8</sup>

*The Cartesian Meditations*, where the development of Husserl's thought culminates in the theory of genetic constitution, has recourse to *Auslegung* in the constitution not only of ideal meanings and articulate expressions but for experience as a whole. The concept of *Auslegung* “intervenes in a decisive manner” in the Fourth Meditation when Husserl shows that the objective world derives its existence, meaning, and validity only in and for an ego. Ricoeur says that Husserl's achievement is at once the “culmination and crisis” of phenomenological idealism. It is the culmination in the sense that “egology” satisfies the demand for apodicticity; it is the crisis in the sense that the question of other egos requires the concept of interpretative explication.<sup>9</sup> In order to show how the other is constituted both in me and as other, Husserl shows how intuition is necessarily accompanied by explication; indeed the phenomenological project as a whole is defined in terms of intentional explication. Ricoeur's claim is that Husserl perceived the coincidence of intuition and explication but failed to recognize all of its consequences. “All phenomenology

is an explication of evidence and an evidence of explication. An evidence that is explicated, an explication that unfolds evidence: such is the phenomenological experience. It is in this sense that phenomenology can be grasped only as hermeneutics” (TA 52).

I believe that Ricoeur rightfully appreciates the similarity and complementarity of these two seemingly opposed schools of philosophy. He recognizes that the issue between Husserl and Heidegger has less to do with ontology as it does with genuinely phenomenological considerations. As a result, Ricoeur focuses his mediation on the doctrine of intentionality and the problem of the constitution of meaning. Hermeneutics and phenomenology share the same goal to describe or explicate layers of sense. Both Husserl and Heidegger affirm that experience is intentional, blurring the distinction between phenomenological consciousness and hermeneutical belonging. Phenomenology and hermeneutics maintain that there exists a “correlation-apriori” of subject and object, or *Dasein* and world. However, it is Heidegger who recognizes the ontological character of the correlation-apriori, freeing us from an overly epistemological conception of intentionality by uncovering a more fundamental relationship of being-in-the-world. Phenomenology presupposes the ontological priority of belonging whereby we are always already practically involved in the world before we reflect and make our involvement consciously thematic.

Ricoeur credits Husserl for opening “the field of the meaningful” for Heidegger to perform a phenomenology of care in *Being and Time*. Hermeneutics is not a break with phenomenology but a “broadening of a philosophy of intentionality” as well as a liberation of phenomenology from idealism.<sup>10</sup> Gadamer concurs with Ricoeur’s assessment on the similarity and continuity of Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology. He notes that when *Being and Time* came out it was quite possible “to see it as simply a new variation and extension within the framework of phenomenology.”<sup>11</sup> The anticipatory fore-structure of hermeneutics is itself an intentional relationship. We listen *to* something, we look *for* something, we feel *for* someone. Interpretation is simply the explication of the layers of sense that constitute lived experience; phenomenology and hermeneutics share the insight into the correlation-apriori, which ultimately does not undermine the priority of intentionality.

However, the second thesis of the essay “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics” is considerably less convincing. The claim that phenomenology presupposes hermeneutics is based on an untenable distinction between description and interpretation, or what Ricoeur refers to as the “recourse to *Auslegung*.”<sup>12</sup> It is not clear at all what this means. Explication, description, and interpretation

are synonymous. They differ only in emphasis: phenomenology is geared to uncovering the structural, universal character of experience, whereas hermeneutics is geared to uncovering the historic, particular character of experience. Unfortunately, Ricoeur's methodological commitment to remain faithful to both Husserlian and Heideggerian orthodoxy obscures what is similar and different between the two. In this case his ethics of method (i.e., respecting the integrity and autonomy of each philosophical position) may have prevented him from more clearly reformulating a nontranscendental, nonidealistic, hermeneutic conception of phenomenology—or rather a conception of hermeneutics that does not forget Husserl. In his subsequent works, however, he develops a version of hermeneutic-phenomenology that is both descriptive and interpretive, oriented equally to what is universal and particular in experience.

### DISCOURSE AND DISTANCIATION

Ricoeur's various conceptions of language—as discourse, text, and narrative—can be seen as an ingredient to an attempt within hermeneutics to retain a phenomenological component of subjective expression and meaning. Around the time of *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricoeur's conception of language was more phenomenological than hermeneutic. He viewed language as an intermediary between an origin and a *telos*; the origin is lived experience, the *telos* an ideal of logicity and ideal entities in terms of which we express ourselves. Language mediates experience and the ideality of meaning. "Language may be reached 'from above,' from its logical limit, or 'from below,' from its limit in mute elemental experience. In itself it is a medium, a mediation, an exchange between *Telos* and *Ursprung*."<sup>13</sup> But contrary to Husserl, Ricoeur claims that an originary, prelinguistic consciousness can never be reached. He affirms that such a thing exists and contributes to the meaning of language, but a regressive inquiry (what Husserl calls *Rückfragen*, or back-questioning) into the origin of meaning leads only to a lower limit, not an origin. The putative origins of both absolute subjectivity and the lifeworld are limit ideas that can never be attained, but only approximated. Lived experience "will never be the naked presence of an absolute, but will remain that toward which this regressive questioning points."<sup>14</sup>

Ricoeur distanced himself even further from a Husserlian model of language following his confrontation with structural semiotics in the 1960s and 1970s. The challenge of structural semiotics to phenomenology is like that of psychoanalysis; both call into question the primacy of consciousness as the privileged, self-evident home of meaning. Both also challenge the claim of Husserl-

lian phenomenology to have discovered, through the reductions, the space of meaning in the intentionality of consciousness in which all phenomenological descriptions about being are descriptions of the meaning, or sense of being. The challenge consists in the notion that “signification is placed in a different field than that of the intentional aimings of a subject” (CI 250).

Ricoeur recognizes the legitimate impetus of a subjectless, structuralist theory of language but wishes to retain what is valid in a subject-centered, phenomenological theory of language. He endeavors to retain the structuralist insight that language has objective characteristics best understood as an empirical science and that meaning is a function of a different agency than consciousness without rejecting the fundamental intentionality of consciousness, or the insight that the activity of the incarnate, speaking, and acting subject is a bearer of meaning. The result of the confrontation with structuralism is a theory of language as “discourse” as a semantic and communicative theory of language. Ricoeur’s thought of the 1970s was dominated by an attempt to model a phenomenological-hermeneutics of human action based on the practice of interpreting written discourse.

Language as discourse for Ricoeur is a dialectic of event and meaning, sense and reference. Discourse takes place as an event but has an ideal, repeatable meaning that allows what is said to be repeated, identified, or said differently. Discourse is both the vanishing occurrence that makes language actual and an entity that can be identified and reidentified as such. As an event it is referential (about something), self-referential (said by someone), temporal (said at some moment), and communicative (said to someone). The meaning of an utterance is both what the speaker means and what the sentence means—that is, the utterer’s meaning and the utterance meaning. Following Grice, Ricoeur notes that the utterer’s meaning is manifested in the utterance meaning.<sup>15</sup> The subjective, utterer’s meaning is attested to by the self-referential character of discourse that is displayed by grammatical devices that indicate who is speaking. Discourse is, therefore, a subjective expression that has objective properties independent of the intentions of the speaker. Both event and meaning constitute the other and neither is fully intelligible without reference to the other.

The suppressing and the surpassing of the event in the meaning is a characteristic of discourse itself. It attests to the intentionality of language, the relation of noesis and noema in it. If language is a *meinen*, an intending, it is so precisely due to this *Aufhebung* through which the event is canceled as something merely transient and retained as the same meaning. (INT 12)

Meaning, then, is both noetic and noematic. Discourse is the medium of understanding into which the event and meaning as well as the subjective and objective poles of language become articulated.

The fundamental feature of discourse is its constitution by a series of sentences whereby someone says something to someone about something. Discourse is a communicative, signifying intention, or a willing to say, that ends in a meaning, outstripping the event of its production. In order to show that discourse is a communicative act, Ricoeur draws on Austin's analysis of the classes of speech acts, the "locutionary act" (the act of saying), the "illocutionary act" (the doing in saying) and the "perlocutionary act" (what we do by saying). Austin's contribution to a theory of discourse is to show that language does more than describe and report facts; people do things with language. Speakers use language, following the customary rules of appropriate application, in order to achieve goals and to accomplish tasks. Even the locutionary act is a speech act and is, therefore, less of a statement that describes or reports some state of affairs than a use of language that accomplishes something. Speaking is an action, the validity of which has more to do with success and failure than truth and falsehood. The criteria for the successful use of language are prescribed by context and custom. This shifts our orientation away from the consciousness of the subject, who represents the world inside her head, out toward a context of shared practices, which ultimately confers meaning and evaluates successful uses of language.<sup>16</sup>

Speech act theory also specifies the conditions for successful communication. One condition is the reciprocal recognition of intentions by both speaker and hearer. If the relationship of a speaker to a hearer constitutes discourse as communication, then dialogue must be an essential structure of discourse. It is here that Ricoeur introduces the "interlocutionary act," or the "allocutionary act," which is the kind of speech act that functions to establish mutual understanding. "Each illocutionary act is a kind of question. To assert something is to expect agreement, just as to give an order is to expect obedience" (INT 15). Discourse is a dialogical, communicative speech performance whereby a speaker and hearer use language to achieve any number of goals, ends, and tasks. The event of discourse is the shared experience of dialogue. At the same time, the communication of meaning transcends the event of its production. The surpassing of the event in the meaning is what Ricoeur calls the "intentional exteriorization" of discourse. In discourse something is expressed and communicated to another. What makes a performative utterance unique is the intention of the speaker that the hearer will recognize his intention. It is always the intention of a speaker to assume that his intention will be understood by the hearer. The orientation of dialogue is toward mutual understanding and reciprocal recognition,

which means that a speaker tries to produce an experience by the hearer in which the latter recognizes the intentions of the former.

Their intention implies the intention of being recognized, therefore the intention of the other's intention. This intention of being identified, acknowledged, and recognized as such by the other is part of the intention itself. In the vocabulary of Husserl, we could say that it is the *noetic* in the psychic. The criterion of the *noetic* is the intention of communicability, the expectation of recognition in the intentional act itself. The *noetic* is the soul of discourse as dialogue. (INT 18)

The claim is that not only my statements have a sense that refers but also as a speaker I intend to do something in speaking that I also intend to be recognized by my interlocutor. Therefore, all illocution is allocution. An utterance simultaneously implies an "I" that speaks and a "you" to whom the former addresses itself. Discourse is a communicative act that presupposes a reciprocal recognition of intentions. This is an insight shared by Habermas as well.

Ricoeur adds complexity of the meaning pole of discourse by drawing on Frege's distinction between sense and reference.<sup>17</sup> The objective side of discourse can be either what a sentence means or about that to which a sentence refers. The "what" of discourse is its sense, the "about what" is its reference. The meaning of discourse has a sense that is immanent to it, that points beyond itself to a referent in the world, through which a referent is given. "The speaker refers to something on the basis of, or through, the ideal structure of the sense. The sense, so to speak, is traversed by the referring intention of the speaker" (INT 20). The dialectic of sense and reference describes the relationship between language and our being-in-the-world. The idea of bringing an experience to language does not suggest that an experience is fully comprehended without language. On the contrary, language raises experience to intelligibility. The claim is that having experiences in the world is the ontological condition of having and using a language. The further claim is that language points not only to ideal meanings but also refers to what exists. Because the theory of discourse is a semantic theory that is communicative and pragmatic, there should be no concern that Ricoeur has adopted an ostensive definition of language.

The double dialectic of event and meaning, sense and reference constitutes not only spoken discourse but written discourse as well. The central feature of written discourse is the exteriority of discourse to itself shown in the surpassing of the event in the meaning. The need for interpreting writing is

more clear because its meaning is further detached from the event of its production. The meaning of written discourse must be interpreted in the absence of a speaking subject who can explain himself, or a shared dialogical situation that acts as a common reference. In dialogue we do not have to construe a hidden meaning to understanding the meaning of a speaker; the intentions of the speaker coincide with the meaning of the message. Putting aside for the moment the problem of unconscious motivations and distortions, to understand what the discourse means is the same as to understand what the speaker means. The ordinary language usage of "to mean" suggests that understanding what a speaker means also means understanding what the speaker says. At very least, speaker and hearer can question each other or refer to a shared dialogical situation to mediate misunderstandings. In writing, however, the meaning of the author and the meaning of the text may or may not coincide.<sup>18</sup> It is here that even the term *fixation* becomes misleading because writing does more than just fix speech. The inscription of spoken language changes the meaning of discourse by dissociating the meaning of the text from the meaning of the author.

Inscription becomes synonymous with the semantic autonomy of the text, which results from the disconnection of the mental intention of the author from the verbal meaning of the text, of what the author meant and what the text means. The text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text means now matters more than what the author meant when he wrote it. (INT 29–30)

The semantic autonomy of the text also affects the other side of communication, that of the hearer or addressee. Whereas spoken discourse is addressed to someone, in a particular dialogical situation, written discourse is addressed to an indefinite number of absent readers. Writing opens up the possibility of enlarging circles of communication by initiating new modes of communication. At the same time, writing creates the more obvious need for hermeneutics. A text must be interpreted over and over as each reader construes a meaning without being able to question the author. Writing refers differently in the absence of a speaking face, with eyes that look back at you, a body that gestures, and a voice that carries meaning. However, the absence of a speaker and a common dialogical situation does not mean that the referential capacity of writing is either limited or defective. What it does mean is that the reference of writing extends beyond the shared situation to a descriptive account of a possible world. A text must be able to "decontextualize" itself so that it may be "recontextualized" in the act of reading. The liberation of writing from the author, his or her



audience, and his or her situation open up possible worlds to be interpreted by an indefinite number of readers. Such interpretation presupposes literacy, the absence of censorship, the accessibility and availability of works, and other social conditions that allow for free interpretation and for a text to reach its indefinite audience. Although the audience of a text is potentially universal, addressed to whomever knows how to read, in fact, reading and writing are significant political and economic issues, subject to rules of admission, exclusion and systematic distortion like any other social phenomenon. Its universality, is, therefore, a limit idea that guides any discussion of who, in fact, reads what, why, and how.

A new dialectic emerges in reading and writing, which Ricoeur calls “distanciation and appropriation.” Distanciation refers to the intentional exteriorization or semantic autonomy of the text to bear meaning apart from the intentions of the author; appropriation refers to the hermeneutic act to make what was foreign familiar and one’s own. The hermeneutical situation is constituted by a play of distanciation and appropriation. “Interpretation, philosophically understood, is nothing else than an attempt to make estrangement and distanciation productive” (INT 44). The dialectic of distanciation and appropriation is Ricoeur’s alternative to the disjunction between the two attitudes taken in the Romanticist hermeneutic tradition and the semiological sciences, between understanding and explanation, truth and method. Distanciation and appropriation are dialectical counterparts of “a struggle between the otherness that transforms all spatial and temporal distance into cultural estrangement and the ownness by which all understanding aims at the extension of self-understanding” (INT 43). The play of estrangement and retrieval, distanciation and appropriation, is what constitutes the transmittal of a cultural heritage. Written discourse, particularly texts, sustain a heritage and tradition through the detachment of writing from its original author, context, and addressee, and the appropriating act of reading that rescues writing from the estrangement.

According to Ricoeur, Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is guilty of maintaining this antinomy between belonging and estrangement, while privileging the former over the latter, appropriation over distanciation. The fundamental hermeneutical act of making the foreign familiar is achieved by overcoming an alienating distance to form a new relationship in which our horizons belong together. Although Ricoeur is very close to Gadamer in this respect, he is concerned that by maintaining this dichotomy Gadamerian hermeneutics moves too quickly to overcome the very distance that enables understanding. In so doing, Gadamer not only misunderstands the nature of discourse but also he precludes the possibility of gaining critical distance from a tradition. Although the dialectic of alienating distanciation and the experience

of belonging constitutes hermeneutical experience, Gadamer unnecessarily forces us to choose between either participatory belonging to a tradition, or the detached attitude of methodological explanation. The problem becomes a false choice between truth or method. His conception of alienating distanciation makes it seem that the kind of objectification that we find in the human sciences is at the same time that which destroys the fundamental relation whereby we belong to and participate in our historical reality. We must either “adopt the methodological attitude and lose the ontological density of the reality we study, or we adopt the attitude of truth and must then renounce the objectivity of the human sciences” (TA 75).

Ricoeur, however, rejects the Gadamerian alternative between alienating distance and participatory belonging, and suggests that a positive and productive notion of distanciation exists in discourse that enables communication in and through distance. Because discourse is always distanced from itself, the difference between ordinary language and the empirical sciences is not as great as Gadamer would have us believe. Distanciation can never be overcome, nor should it be. Distanciation is a moment of belonging, which allows for a critique of ideology to be incorporated, as an objective and explanatory segment, in the process of communication and self-understanding.

The extension of understanding through textual exegesis and its constant rectification through the critique of ideology are properly part of the process of *Auslegung*. Textual exegesis and critique of ideology are the two privileged routes along which understanding is developed into interpretation and thus becomes itself. (TA 35)

Given the shared recourse to *Auslegung*, critique of ideology is internal to phenomenology as well as hermeneutics. The key is the common notion of distanciation that is both the condition for understanding and critique. “Distanciation, dialectically opposed to belonging, is the condition of possibility of the critique of ideology, not outside or against hermeneutics, but within hermeneutics” (TA 268).

Three different forms of distanciation correspond to each of the constitutive parts of a text. A text is a work of discourse that communicates through a distance, projects a possible world, and mediates self-understanding. Spoken discourse displays a “primitive type” of distanciation in the surpassing of the event by the meaning. This primitive distanciation is the “distanciation of the saying in the said.” The intentional exteriorization of discourse is transformed into the semantic autonomy of the text when discourse is fixed in writing. With the

inscription of spoken language, meaning is dissociated from the meaning of the original author. The text also separates the writer from the reader and thus distances the act of writing from the act of reading. The reader is absent when the text is written and the writer is absent when the text is read. The text produces a “double eclipse” of the reader and the writer thereby replacing the immediately dialogical situation with the more complex author-reader relationship. Discourse realized as text maintains a distanciation in relation to both the author and the reader. The distanciation of a work from its author, its original readers, and original situation is constitutive of discourse as a text. The relationship between objectification and interpretation is dialectical; interpretation must overcome objectification, but objectification conditions and gives rise to interpretation. This first form of distanciation may be called “the distanciation of the world of the work.”

A second form of distanciation occurs within the world of the text. “The distanciation of the real from itself” is the distanciation that fiction, poetic, and historical discourses insert into our everyday experience. The metaphoric and symbolic expressions that constitute creative, imaginative discourses open up a referential capacity absent in ostensive and descriptive discourse. They refer to a world “as if” we could be there. The reference is “divided” or “split,” meaning that such writing points to some aspect of the world that cannot be described but only suggested and referred to indirectly. The referent in such creative discourse is “discontinuous” with that of ordinary language, although it refers to “another level” that is “more fundamental” than that attained by descriptive language. Creative discourse reaches the world at the level of the lifeworld.

Creative language is often more revealing than descriptive language; some things are best said or described creatively or metaphorically. The world of the text is distanced from the everyday world. But by pointing beyond the everyday world by projecting new possibilities, the text points back to the everyday world and presents new ways to be in the world. History, like fiction, similarly projects an absent world that invites us to question our present world. Therein lies the critical dimension of poetic and fictional discourse that is unavailable to descriptive discourse. The critical power of poetic discourse is made possible by its referential capacity to point beyond the world, which is another name for the distanciation of the real from itself. Poetic discourse opens up a distance between the everyday world and the world of the text, allowing us to step back and reflect on our world in light of a different, possibly better world.

With the second form of distanciation, we begin to turn from the production of discourse to the interpretation of discourse. If distanciation is communication in and through a distance, appropriation is understanding in and

through a distance. The aim of hermeneutics is to make the foreign familiar in terms of my horizon of existence, which is an act of appropriation much like the kind Gadamer describes. What is appropriated in a text is its sense, or its meaning, as well as the reference, or the world that unfolds before the reader. The acts of reading and writing transform the subjectivity of both author and reader.

The third form of distanciation is what Ricoeur calls the “distanciation of self from itself,” for the text is the medium of self-understanding.

To understand oneself is to understand oneself as one confronts the text and to receive from the conditions for a self other than that which first undertakes the reading. Neither of the two subjectivities, neither that of the author nor that of the reader, is thus primary in the sense of an originary presence of the self to itself. (TA 17)

Reading transforms us as the result of the appropriated meaning of a text. When I “lose myself” in a good book, I really do lose my self in an important way. “It is in allowing itself to be carried off towards the reference of the text that the ego divests itself of itself” (HHS 191). To appropriate the meaning of a text we must first let go and relinquish the illusion that subjectivity alone confers meaning. Reading is a transformative experience in which we gain ourselves as we lose ourselves. Appropriation, then, is not only the dialectical counterpart to distanciation but also the transformation of the self and of self-understanding.

Reading serves a potentially critical function by displacing the illusions of subjectivity and by transforming the experience of the reader who encounters new, different, possibly better worlds. By linking the revelatory power of the text with the critique of subjectivity, Ricoeur integrates the hermeneutics of suspicion with the hermeneutics of the text. The appropriating act of interpreting texts, not just symbols, helps to overcome the illusions of subjectivity. Self-understanding is mediated by the text just like for Freud consciousness is mediated by the unconscious. Interpreting texts may broaden our horizon of experience, change our self-understanding, and transform who we are, how we live, and how we act in the world.

A critique of the illusions of the subject, in a Marxist or Freudian manner, therefore can and must be incorporated into self-understanding. The consequence for hermeneutics is important: we can no longer oppose hermeneutics and the critique of ideology. The critique of ideology is the necessary detour that self-understanding must take if the latter is to be formed by the matter of the text and not by the prejudices of the reader. (TA 88)