

INTRODUCTION

# A Matter of Interpretation

A PRIMER ON POSTMODERN  
HERMENEUTICS

‘That’s a matter of interpretation.’

That observation is an excellent way to make mischief, if you are so inclined. But, mischief-making aside, it also makes a sound philosophical point.

Still, a fact is a fact, yes? It’s as clear as the nose on your face. Maybe not. Ask yourself, how many facts are there around you right now? You see the problem. We have to specify the terms, the framework. Are you counting noses or chairs or subatomic particles – or what? We need an interpretation before we can start counting. The theory that *everything* is a matter of interpretation is called hermeneutics. This may sound like making mischief in the extreme, but it also makes perfect sense. Hermeneutics is cold, sober theory, and it lies at the basis of all our inventiveness in the sciences and the arts, of our democratic freedoms in politics, and of innovative institutions and living traditions. Without it, things would come to a grinding halt.

So, every time a well-known speaker insists, perhaps accompanied by a bit of table-pounding, ‘The fact of the matter is ...’, well, whatever

interpretation it is that the speaker means to pound in, the right philosophical response is that there are no uninterpreted facts of the matter. Every matter of fact is a matter of the interpretation that picks out the facts. Hermeneutics is the theory that the distinction between facts and interpretation bears closer scrutiny, which is what we intend to undertake here.

To get these issues on the table, let's start with a short FAQ about postmodern hermeneutics, an imaginary dialogue in which I defend hermeneutics against an inquirer who treats the distinction between facts and interpretation as sound dogma. We'll resume this dialogue in the Conclusion of the book to see what we've managed to accomplish in the meantime.

## **Hermeneutics: FAQ**

*What is hermeneutics?*

Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation. It is the theory that everything is a matter of interpretation.

*But aren't certain things just facts?*

In hermeneutics, we defend the idea that there are no pure facts. Behind every interpretation lies another interpretation. We never reach an understanding of anything that is *not* an interpretation. We can never peel away the layers to get to some pure, uninterpreted, naked fact of the matter. No matter how loudly you proclaim you are just sticking to the facts, you are only raising the volume of your own interpretation. In hermeneutics, I like to say, interpretation goes all the way down.

*Does this go for what you just said?*

Of course. I am presenting an interpretation of hermeneutics, which I am prepared to defend against the alternatives, which I will point out as we go along. Interpretations go all the way down *but* some interpretations are better than others (which I will also explain as we go along). It is important to hold both those thoughts in our heads at the same time.

*So, you're saying facts don't matter. How can you deny that there is a distinction between a neutral fact and an interpretation?*

Facts matter quite a lot. That's why it really matters that we understand what facts are. To understand anything at all requires having an angle on it, a perspective, an interpretive slant, in the absence of which we would just not understand, period. A neutral and disinterested understanding is pretty much a blank, unknowing stare. It is the look you see on the faces of students with a writing assignment without the least idea of what they are going to do. Their problem? No slant, no angle of entry, no interpretation. The facts you find are a function of the interests you have, and disinterested interpretations are nowhere to be found. A disinterested understanding has never got a term paper written, or anything else.

*Are 'hermeneutics' and 'interpretation' interchangeable terms?*

The word 'hermeneutics' comes from the Greek, and 'interpretation' from its Latin translation. But it is more useful to distinguish between them by saying that interpretation is an art, and hermeneutics is the theory of that art. An interpretation is a first-order *act* or process – like an analysis of a film by a critic, of an X-ray by a radiologist, of the causes of the First World War by a historian, of an economic recession by an economist, or of the testimony of a witness by the jury. Hermeneutics is a second-order *reflection* upon such acts, upon the concrete work of interpretation carried out in art, in science, in classrooms and courtrooms, and in general.

*So, in hermeneutics we show these people how to make interpretations?*

We would never presume such a thing. Concrete interpretations are the business of the specialists in these particular fields. Hermeneutics does not pretend to be a know-it-all and it is not a how-to manual. It is a *philosophical* theory. We show people how to understand what is going on in interpretation.

*Why philosophical?*

Because hermeneutics is a theory of *truth* – it describes the nature of truth as something that is acquired only through interpretation – and of *being human*, because it claims that interpretation lies at the heart of who we are as human beings.

*Why add 'postmodern' to hermeneutics?*

Hermeneutics has a long history, stretching all the way back to Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> We're dividing that history into two parts, the first of which we call the

modern era, beginning in the biblical studies brought on by the Protestant Reformation and culminating in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, everything changed, and culminated in what we're calling postmodern, which is the version that really interests us here.

*So, what's the difference?*

In the modern era, the humanities were put on the defensive in the face of the rising prestige of the new natural sciences and the success of the scientific method, which was threatening to take over everything. So, the people who worked in the humanities said, Look, in the humanities we also have a method, and we also attain truth and objectivity, but it is different. The natural sciences give us *causal explanations* of mathematically measurable phenomena, while in the humanities we reach an *interpretive understanding* of works of art or historical events, phenomena which have a non-mathematical *meaning*. The humanities are different but just as legitimate.

*That makes a lot of sense. What was wrong with that?*

First of all, let me be clear that 'postmodern' does not mean *anti-modern* or returning to the *pre-modern*. It passes *through* modernity, allowing itself to be instructed *by* modernity, and then comes out the other end with a new twist, continuing what was started in modernity by another means. In the twentieth century, two important things emerged which changed the course of traditional hermeneutics. First, the postmodern philosophers said that there is no such neat divide, that *every* act of understanding is *already* an interpretation, not only in the humanities but also in the natural sciences, and, as a matter of fact, not only in the academic disciplines but in everything we do in daily life. Second, they said that we should take some of the air out of this word 'method', a favourite of the natural sciences, and realize that truth is wider and deeper than method. Method can be very wooden and it can even be a positive obstacle to finding the truth. So, we have to see that interpretation is a more flexible, inventive process than any method will allow – scientific or otherwise.

*I can see that in the humanities but not in the natural sciences.*

That's the nineteenth-century mistake. We learned from twentieth-century historians of science, who were studying the people on the ground

in the sciences, researching real scientists actually ‘doing’ science, that science is a much messier business than the modern philosophers had led us to believe. There’s a great deal of interpretive skill involved – proposing speculative hypotheses, interpreting evidence, reading data, devising experiments, dealing with anomalies for which the method is unprepared, passionately sticking to an idea even when the evidence is slim and everyone in the scientific community thinks you are mad. This proved especially true when the historians studied revolutionary changes in science, which look a lot more like political or artistic revolutions than the modern philosophers and scientists wanted us to think.

*But what happens to objectivity in all this interpreting? Especially in the sciences?*

Objectivity is redescribed, not discarded. It is understood in a more cautious and circumspect way, with all the appropriate conditions, complications and restrictions. We deconstruct the idea of pure objectivity or pure facts and replace it with the distinction between good interpretations and bad ones.

*What do you mean by ‘deconstruct’? What’s that?*

Deconstruction is the particular version of postmodernism that we are using here. There are other versions, which are better fit for other purposes, but this is the one that works its way into hermeneutics in the most felicitous way. For the moment, let’s just say that deconstruction is the theory that all our beliefs and practices are constructions, and that whatever is constructed is de-constructible, and that whatever is de-constructible is also re-constructible, which would mean that all our beliefs and practices are *reinterpretable*. So, deconstruction backs up the idea of endless reinterpretation and rejects the idea of ready-made truths that drop from the sky. There’s a lot more to it, but that should get us started.

*I don’t quite get the difference between hermeneutics and deconstruction.*

Hermeneutics, which comes from German philosophy and has a theological provenance, is focused on the law, the historical tradition and the classics, and so tends to be a bit more interested in mainstream culture and canonical great works. Hermeneutics stresses that we do not begin from scratch; we begin from an inherited situation which is already up and

running. Deconstruction, which started as a French movement of the 1960s and has a background in contemporary linguistics, tends to be of a more radical stripe, more suspicious of inherited traditions. Hermeneutics takes *conversation*, not *critique*, as its model of inquiry, while in deconstruction the model is a scrupulously close, the-devil-is-in-the-details *scrutiny*. My argument here is that each one requires the other. Without deconstruction, hermeneutics risks being naïve; without hermeneutics, deconstruction risks running off the rails. That is why I call this postmodern approach ‘radical hermeneutics’.<sup>2</sup>

*What do you mean by ‘radical’?*

In radical hermeneutics, we take the point of view of the outliers, the outsiders, the ones whose views have been neglected or excluded. Postmodern – radical – hermeneutics takes the view from the margins. Deconstructors are disposed to dissent, to point out alternative explanations, to bring up anomalies, to question received interpretations, to suspect unquestioned assumptions. They are not against conversation, but they worry about those who cannot get into the conversation, either because they are excluded or because they don’t have the requisite linguistic skills or are speaking in a new way. Deconstructors cultivate a congenial disposition to look at things *otherwise*, to pick up views that have fallen out of favour or dropped through the cracks of the tradition.

*Why should the rest of us care about any of this? Isn’t this just all academic stuff?*

Not at all. As a life-long academic, I would be the last one to treat academic studies lightly, but these are not just arcane debates. Hermeneutics provides our best protection against the threat of tyranny, totalitarianism and terror in politics, and of dogmatism and authoritarianism in ethics and religion. Indeed, these threats can be found anywhere – including in the sciences, the art world or that of economics – anywhere that the quiet dictatorship of a rigid orthodoxy takes root. Orthodoxy discourages dissent (alternative interpretations) and tries to impose a privileged interpretation.

*Are you saying that hermeneutics is crucial to democracy?*

That’s one of my claims. Postmodern hermeneutics, in which we reserve the right to ask any question, is constitutionally anti-authoritarian and

democratic. Without hermeneutics, you would never be able to explain what a democracy is. Without democracy, you would never be able to practise hermeneutics; you would end up in jail, or worse.

*But if everybody has their own opinion and we leave it at that, isn't that just inviting chaos? Isn't that just as bad as authoritarianism?*

That's an excellent point. That's the opposite extreme, and it is a particular problem today.

*What's so different about today?*

That's another part of what 'postmodern' means – the high-tech, mobile, globetrotting, multicultural, polyglot, cosmopolitan world we live in. In postmodern culture, things are more de-centred, democratic, pluralistic, multifocal and bottom-up. The mainstream is interrupted by the voices and the faces from the margins. Consequently, we are today far more likely than we have been in the past to appreciate that an interpretation *is* an interpretation, to see that there are other interpretations, to recognize that it has not fallen from the sky, that it is not an eternal truth handed down from on high.<sup>3</sup>

*But don't philosophers deal in eternal truths?*

Ah, but eternal, absolute truths are interpretations that we have forgotten are interpretations. Hermeneutics is the 'inconvenient truth', to borrow an excellent phrase from Al Gore which reminds us of what truths themselves are. In the modern era, things were taken to be more orderly and methodic, more centred and stabilized – science here, the humanities there, subjectivity here, objectivity there; all things tidily in place. Postmodernism, like democracy, is messier. We have acquired a sensitivity to the diversity of cultures and the multiplicity of lifestyles, to difference – ethnic, gendered, sexual. Difference is our watchword. So, we also have to worry about the opposite problem, not absolutism or authoritarianism but sheer relativism.

*What do you mean by 'relativism'?*

In its pure state, relativism means 'anything goes'. There are as many truths as there are opinions. We all have our own truths, the way we all have our favourite flavours and colours.

Relativism insinuates itself into postmodern thinking in subtle ways, some of which could prove lethal. For example, it is one thing for the conservatives to be shocked by young people who simply reject the marriage game, who assert that they are responsible adults who are going to live with whomever they want to live with and break up with them whenever they are of a mind to. On this point the conservatives have to realize that they don't get to tell other people how to live their lives. That's not relativism, that's different points of view, which is a fixture of life in postmodern times. But it is quite another thing when relativism takes hold and people enlist hermeneutics in the service of dangerous and destructive causes.

*Like what?*

Like the climate-change deniers, who argue that the looming ecological disaster is just a theory, that it is only an interpretation, or, worse still, the conspiracy theorists who say it is a left-wing fiction meant to enhance control by the state over private enterprise. Or religious fanatics who question the theory of evolution on the grounds that it is just a theory, or who reject the findings of contemporary physics in favour of their interpretation of Genesis. In a democracy, such people are legally entitled to their views, but the danger is that such thinking will infect public policy and undermine efforts to control climate change, or affect how science is taught in schools.

*Right. Facts matter. So, we should hit people like that with the hard facts.*

Not so fast. We cannot pick and choose when we think hermeneutics applies. Even our firmest truths are matters of interpretation, but that does not mean that anything goes. *Some interpretations are better than others.* Some are arbitrary, frivolous and contrived, and some are serious and well tested. They are 'proven' not in the sense of becoming an Absolute Truth but in the sense that we say that someone is a person of proven experience in the field. That is why we prefer the 'opinion' of a respected physician over that of our crazy uncle about this nagging pain we are having. While there may not be this thing the moderns called Pure Reason, which is plugged into Absolute Truth, there are *good reasons* to believe one thing rather than the other – like the things the climate scientists are telling us –



and, consequently, we have a moral obligation to our children and grandchildren to listen to their warnings.

*Then are you admitting that there are 'alternative facts'?*

'Alternative facts' is a cynical political ruse aimed at undermining good interpretations. 'Alternative interpretations' is good hermeneutic theory, and also, we might say, a fact of life.

*So, climate change is not just a matter of interpretation?*

If we truly understand what an interpretation is – which is what we do in hermeneutics – we would never say '*just* a matter of interpretation'. A good interpretation is a blessed event, a wonderful thing, a *tertium quid*, the 'third thing' that shows the way out of the loggerhead that results whenever the fruitless and destructive war between absolutism and relativism breaks out.<sup>4</sup>

*You said this word 'hermeneutics' comes from the Greek. Is there a story there?*

A great story. The word comes from the myth of the Greek god Hermes, who was a very colourful god indeed, famous for his cunning and thefts, his tricks and deceptions. For Hermes, telling the truth is human, but lying is divine. On his first day on Earth, he caused a terrible row on Mount Olympus by stealing fifty cattle from the great god Apollo. Hermes was a loveable rogue, sweet talking, ambitious, shrewd, inventive, and bold as brass, a deity with the devil in his eye.<sup>5</sup> The word first came into modern terminology when it was used by Protestants during the Reformation for the study of the Bible.

*But why would the Reformation theologians invoke a god like that?*

They were drawing on the later Homeric tradition. By then, Hermes had become a safe character, the winged messenger (*angelos*) of Zeus to mortals. The devilish divinity of the earlier versions of the legend had been confined to an entirely respectable function, reduced to a kind of divine postman or instant message system. This downgrading was the doing of the followers of the cult of Apollo, upper-crust, aristocratic Greeks who were of a mind to keep this trickster god in check. Hermes the deceiver was denounced as a downright disgraceful deity by Plato and Aristotle, who expected better behaviour of a god. So, the powers that be consigned him to the post room in the Olympian basement. Then the biblical scholars

conveniently forgot Hermes the cunning rogue, an independent deity and nobody's messenger boy, more likely to steal the post, or tamper with it, than to deliver it. The earlier Hermes was a rabble-rouser.<sup>6</sup>

*So, the first myth of Hermes had a political slant?*

Precisely. Hermes gave voice to a rising middle class tired of being pushed around by the aristocrats, who clearly preferred the status quo. He saw from his cradle that all the wealth and power had been concentrated in the upper 2 per cent of the population, and that the time had come for a change. He was more a Robin Hood than a common thief, more a freedom fighter than a criminal – distinctions that clearly depend on your point of view, on your interpretation, which is hermeneutics 1.0.

*It sounds like Hermes himself requires a hermeneutic.*

That should not be surprising. Greek myths, biblical myths – myths in any tradition – give us something to think through, and that means to interpret. One of my main ideas is that, in the ancient story of Hermes itself, we can divine the difference between *two interpretations of interpretation*. The one you follow depends upon on your interpretation. Hermes the Straight Man, favoured by the mainstream, the theologians, the more tradition-bound, or Hermes the Trickster, favoured by the marginal, the outliers. Mainstream and marginal hermeneutics. Insider hermeneutics and outsider hermeneutics. Hermeneutics straight up and exorbitant hermeneutics. The view from the centre and the eccentric view. The one figure is more hierarchical, conservative and subservient to the gods on high, representing a kind of law-and-order, top-down hermeneutics. The other is a god of the people, a voice of the *demos*, a divine disturber of the peace who made the higher-ups nervous because he would not conform to the established order; in short, a more radical hermeneutical type intent on shaking up the system and making unpredictable things happen.

*So in postmodern hermeneutics, we follow the lead of the impious Hermes?*

My idea is to give Hermes the rogue a hearing, to pay more attention to the hell-raiser and the trouble-maker, and to defend a more mischievous, radical, devilish art. But with one qualification: I do not want to abolish the pious Hermes. I am not trying to *abolish* interpretations (it's the absolutizers who abolish) but to *multiply* them. I affirm throughout the *two*

faces of Hermes, both traditional interpreter and interloper, both messenger and trickster, both courier and corruptor, both god of caution and god of risk-taking. The two interpretations of interpretation are deeply intertwined, the way hermeneutics and deconstruction are intertwined. The very idea of the postmodern is to cast doubt upon tidy, ordered and settled distinctions. Interpretation worthy of the name takes place in the distance between the two and is nourished by the tensions of an optimal disequilibrium. Without *both* faces of Hermes, hermeneutics not only has no name, it has no heart, no life.

## Itinerary

I will look in again on this conversation in the Conclusion but, before we get started, let's get an idea of the path we will be following in this book. In the first part (Chapters 1–6), we will introduce the leading figures in postmodern hermeneutics, and in the second part (Chapters 7–10), we will take up some pressing issues in the postmodern world where we can see hermeneutics at work.

We'll start with Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), who was the game-changer in contemporary hermeneutics. To be sure, the first thing anyone says these days when they hear his name is that he was a card-carrying member of the Nazi Party, and that's the first test hermeneutics faces in this book. How do we interpret the thought of a man whose personal politics were so odious? Does the corruption of the man corrupt the work? I defend the view that *Being and Time* (1927),<sup>7</sup> his magnum opus, is the most important work of continental philosophy in the twentieth century; after it, nothing was the same (Chapter 1).

Even after the Second World War, Heidegger published a whole new wave of books, which received a surprisingly warm reception in France. That altered the course of hermeneutics *again* and contributed to the emergence of postmodern theory in the second half of the century. So, we'll have to look into the post-war Heidegger, too (Chapter 2). Heidegger had a number of important students, the most important of whom, from our point of view, was Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), whose own magnum opus, *Truth and Method* (1960),<sup>8</sup> represents *the* magisterial exposition of hermeneutics in the twentieth century, which clearly merits a careful look (Chapter 3).

Next (Chapter 4) we turn to Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), the founder of the movement called deconstruction, and his major work, *Of Grammatology* (1967).<sup>9</sup> So, without pretending to cover everything, I will highlight how this book, along with *Being and Time* and *Truth and Method*, changed everything in hermeneutics, mutating the modern into the postmodern. I should warn you that the most controversial feature of my presentation is the inclusion of Derrida, one of the ‘68ers’, as in 1968, the year of the student protests in Paris and something of the unofficial roll-out year of postmodernism. In the standard renderings of hermeneutics, Derrida is regarded as the devil himself, as a critic of hermeneutics and one of its itchiest antagonists. If hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation, its critics deride deconstruction (Derrida’s game) as a theory of *mis*interpretation, as if the great works of the tradition can mean anything you want them to mean. For his part, Gadamer was worried that Derrida’s emphasis on difference was so strong that it would end up making conversation impossible.

Derrida himself avoided using the word ‘hermeneutics’, which he confined to its conservative theological side. He reduced it to the interpretation of *the* meaning (as if there were but one) of *the* tradition (as if there were but one), which finds the *key* which unlocks the authentic and authoritative interpretation. But that of course is to restrict it to the mainstream interpretation of interpretation – not interpretation from the margins, but from the centre, from the heart of the tradition. So, what I do in this account is to allow Derrida to play the part of a Parisian Hermes, to be a crucial player who shifts the backdrop of hermeneutics from German theologians to an odd assembly of atheistic troublemakers on the Left Bank. I am saying, if Derrida bedevils hermeneutics, the result is a devilish hermeneutics. Derrida is said to be a post-structuralist, so to see how all this works, we will also have to follow his critique of structuralism (Chapter 5), which is where deconstruction started.

This is not to say that all the big names in postmodern hermeneutics are German and French. It has a very colourful representative in the United States, Richard Rorty (1931–2007), and in Italy, Gianni Vattimo (1936–), who became friends later on in their lives, and to whom I devote a separate treatment (Chapter 6). This isn’t everybody, to be sure, but they are the main modern hermeneutic players.<sup>10</sup>

In the second part of the book (Chapters 7–10), I try to catch hermeneutics in the act, to observe it in action in the postmodern world, in the workplace, in the vocations and professions, in concrete institutions and real life. I start with the question of justice and the interpretation of the law, where hermeneutics has never been more important (Chapter 7). I then look in on a group of Canadian nurses who have taken Gadamer to heart in a fascinating way, which shows the bedside manner of hermeneutics in contemporary healthcare (Chapter 8).

The main challenge for hermeneutics today, in my view, is to address what is becoming of the professions, of our institutions, of our world, in the age of ‘advanced information technologies’, which have brought about a sea change in everything we do. Here we see a mutation from the postmodern to what is called the ‘post-human’, to indicate the ways in which the human is being invaded and taken over by the technological. Here I come to the question of the ‘program’ – of Big Data, of the Algorithm – which would bring the play of interpretation under its rule. Today, in what I will call the ‘post-human imaginary’, we are left to wonder, ‘Have we ever been human?’ (Chapter 9).

I edge towards a conclusion by going back to where hermeneutics started, in religion and theology. The reason that religion finds itself in crisis today – it is becoming increasingly unbelievable among educated people – is a hermeneutical misunderstanding, a failure on the part of religion to understand its own character as a *symbolic* practice. My idea is to see not whether religion can save us but whether hermeneutics can save religion – from itself. I bring up the interpretation of religion not only because it is so much in the news but also because there is something religious about interpretation, something which taps into the deep structure of our lives, a certain proto-religion, which will, however, provide little consolation to the pious (Chapter 10).

After a brief summing-up (Chapter 11), I bring everything to a head in a ‘Conclusion without Conclusion’, a kind of concluding postmodern postscript which describes the possibility of a God even Nietzsche could love. If that all sounds a bit mysterious, let’s just say it is the mystery implied by saying that interpretation goes all the way down.

## Notes

### INTRODUCTION: A MATTER OF INTERPRETATION: A PRIMER ON POSTMODERN HERMENEUTICS

1. The best account I know of that history is Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).
2. See John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
3. For the received definition of postmodernism as incredulity about big stories, see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiii–xxiv.
4. For a perspicacious and still pertinent presentation of this point, see Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).
5. See ‘To Hermes’ in *Homeric Hymns*, trans. Sarah Ruden (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 2005), 38–56. There is some chance that the name of the god came from the verb *hermeneuein*. That’s another interpretation.
6. See Norman O. Brown, *Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of a Myth* (New York: Random House Vintage Books, 1947).
7. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).
8. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. edn, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989).
9. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, corrected edition, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

10. Conspicuous by his absence from this list is Paul Ricœur (1913–2005), a major figure and something of a personal mentor to Derrida, whom I omit because I am following the more radical path of hermeneutics from *Being and Time* through Gadamer and Derrida. In *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), Ricœur referred, in an oft-cited expression, to the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, where meaning is reduced to a manifestation of a subterranean will-to-power (Nietzsche), the unconscious (Freud) or class interests (Marx). This ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, Ricœur said, constitutes the negative moment of interpretation, which he then framed within a kind of hermeneutical triad, reminiscent of Hegel: a first moment of uncritical, innocent faith (in an idea, institution, etc.), which passes through the moment of suspicion and critique, in order to be repeated in a higher, post-critical faith. Historically, these three stages could be loosely thought of as premodern, modern and postmodern. For a good account, see Charles E. Reagan, *Paul Ricœur: His Life and Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). The most interesting hermeneutic work being done in the tradition of Ricœur today is by the Irish philosopher Richard Kearney (Boston College).