

Ricœur in Dialogue with Feminist Philosophy of Religion

Hermeneutic Hospitality in Contemporary Practice

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Introduction: On dialogue

A twenty-first-century feminist philosopher has to work painstakingly in her analysis of a philosophical text, in order to discover those shared assumptions which emerge as the necessary conditions for dialogue with that text.¹

The present essay builds upon the discovery of shared assumptions, which are the necessary conditions for a dialogue between a feminist philosopher of religion and the text of ‘Paul Ricœur’s hermeneutic phenomenology’. This dialogue will assume that Ricœur’s text is the result of an exchange between two different spheres of discourse: that is, the description of human lived experiences and the interpretation of those experiences. In the development of his own distinctive twentieth-century philosophical position, Ricœur brought together phenomenology as a descriptive discourse concerning what appears to human consciousness and hermeneutics as a twofold method – of critical and restorative hermeneutics – interpreting the meaning of those appearances. The discourse and method of Ricœur’s hermeneutic phenomenology, then, constituted the necessary ground for explaining and understanding ‘a text’, whether that be an actual written document, an object of discourse or any meaningful action considered as a text.² However, what quickly becomes clear to the twenty-first century feminist philosopher is that Ricœur never applied his descriptive phenomenology or his critical and restorative hermeneutics to questions concerning the gender, or sexu-

al difference, embedded in human lived experience.

To fit into the theme, *Paul Ricœur in Dialogue with Theology and Religious Studies*, I have also chosen to imagine a reversal of a feminist philosophical dialogue with Ricœur’s text(s), in order to place Ricœur in dialogue with ‘feminist philosophy of religion’. Of course, this will require me to bear in mind the assumptions which a twentieth-first-century feminist philosopher would share with Ricœur’s twentieth-century text. In the context of this reciprocally related hermeneutic-feminist dialogue, we will confront some of the same issues, which any scholarly exchange between theology and religious studies would face. The issues include treating the text of ‘a feminist philosophy of religion’ with the tools of, on the one hand, objective analysis and logical argumentation in the social and human sciences and, on the other hand, faith-based understanding and Christian revelation. But equally, as a feminist philosopher, I already share assumptions concerning the dual moments of a Ricœurian, critical hermeneutics of suspicion and restorative hermeneutics of faith: each of these hermeneutical moments can be employed to confront sex/gender in philosophy of religion. So, I propose that these shared hermeneutical assumptions of a feminist philosopher and the text of a Ricœur’s phenomenological hermeneutic will help to facilitate a dialogue between the two interlocutors – the feminist and the hermeneutic phenomenologist – in mediating differences of sex and gender across human lived experiences.

We know that Ricœur built his life’s work on reading, writing and interpreting texts. But similarly, I have argued that feminist philosophy of religion relies upon reading, interpreting and ‘re-visioning’ texts, especially but not only

¹ Pamela Sue Anderson, ‘A Joyful Dialogue with Spinoza and Others: Le Doeuff, Deleuze and the *Ethics*’, 341-355 in *Paragraph* 37:3 (2014), 347.

² Paul Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Edited and translated by John B. Thompson; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), 35-8, 51-2, 147-9, 197-198.

‘Anglo-American philosophy of religion’ itself as a text.³ Ricœur was so committed to interpreting human experience – treated as texts of meaningful action – that we find both the method and the structure of his philosophical writings to be premised upon understanding life across disagreements of meaning. Hermeneutics becomes his distinctive method when applied to phenomenological description of human experience; hermeneutics is not only his most characteristic tool for resolving conflicts of interpretation between different positions, it is a major indication of Ricœur’s deep and passionate commitment to understanding human life and to living together.

Ricœur was never the sort of philosopher who wanted simply to win an argument. Instead he aimed to enter into ‘the conflict of interpretations’ (*le conflit des interprétations*), in order to increase the number of topics and possibilities for new understanding.⁴ Ricœur was also never a philosopher who simply wanted to find the end or absolute resolution of all conflicts or disagreements. Instead he aimed to learn from every form of interpretative conflict. In fact Ricœur made it perfectly clear that we must choose between hermeneutics and absolute knowledge!⁵ Absolute knowledge – or, what Ricœur himself called the ‘hegelian temptation’ – might have been his *telos*: to resolve all conflicts in an final unity. But instead, Ricœur chose hermeneutics as the path for ongoing interpretation; this path has no end point. As a hermeneutical phenomenologist, Ricœur sought constantly to increase knowledge of what is given to us and humility in the face of human difference. Today I propose that using a Ricœurian hermeneutics in a dialogue with feminist philosophy of religion adds to this unending process of interpreting differences.

In preparing this essay, I turned to *On Translation*, which was published in English the year

of Ricœur’s death, 2005.⁶ I was struck by the way in which this small gem of a book demonstrated a distinctive passion for hermeneutic hospitality. Although Ricœur himself describes translation as ‘linguistic hospitality’, his hermeneutical method in *On Translation* touches, I suggest, more profound insights concerning differences between two sides of a dialogue. In this context, a translator and a text bring two different languages into a sort of interpretative dialogue attempting to communicate across differences, by way of shared understanding. This will be the case here: where my aim is putting Ricœur in dialogue with feminist philosophy of religion.

2. Hermeneutic hospitality: *On Translation*

The hermeneutic dimension of *On Translation* appears initially in the ‘fear’ of, and then, ‘resistance’ to, linguistic and cultural differences. Fear and resistance as two hermeneutic sensibilities render Ricœur’s account of translation similar to a broken dialogue: when at the sharp edge of suspicion there is a betrayal of a text. Sexual difference has been a focus of French psycholinguists such as Luce Irigaray; but Ricœur was silent when it came to Irigaray’s elucidation of sexual difference, ‘the feminine’ and ‘the masculine’ in psycholinguistic terms. This might be understandable due to his own difficulties with Lacan and Lacanian psycholinguistics in the late 1960s-70s. However, Irigaray herself fell out of favour with Lacan in 1974. So, Ricœur might have found an ally in Irigaray, since Lacan rejected each of their critiques. Unfortunately, Ricœur never engaged with either Irigaray or her impact on philosophy of religion.

Irigaray herself remains a contentious figure in feminist philosophy of religion. Moreover, I would like to contend that Ricœur’s dual hermeneutics of betrayal (or suspicion) and faithfulness (or faith) have more relevance for feminist philosophers seeking to engage with texts, in order to re-vision gender in philosophy of religion.

⁶ Paul Ricœur, *On Translation* (Translated by Eileen Brennan; London: Routledge, 2005).

³ Pamela Sue Anderson, *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion: Reason, Love and Epistemic Locatedness* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012), ix-x; cf. Pamela Sue Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion: the Rationality and Myths of Religious Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

⁴ Paul Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Ed. D. Ihde; Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1974).

⁵ Ricœur, *Hermeneutics*, 193.

gion than Irigaray's 'fling with' philosophers and their texts.⁷ (I will say more about re-visioning below.)

For the moment, I would like to consider more closely what Ricœur says about the translator, who like an interlocutor in dialogue, remains loyal to the words of a text, whether written or spoken; and this loyalty remains, even while knowing that a negative moment of betrayal is an inevitable other side of the positive moment of Ricœurian hermeneutics. A moment of betrayal implies that the words written or spoken are not always translated with a sensibility of (critical) openness to the original language of the text. Of course, one of the perennial problems for any hermeneutics, especially when the differences of language are involved, about which Ricœur has always been clear is that we can never be absolutely certain of the original intention, for good or bad, of any author or speaker. Moreover, betrayal might take place simply because lack of fidelity is thought to be the way to protect one's own side or one's own self from unsettling differences. We could take, for example, the resistance of a Christian theologian – in the form of self-protection – who fears betrayal of his Christianity, if he engages in a feminist critique of the (masculinist) God of Christian theism.

Ricœur himself was passionate about hermeneutics, conflicts and finding a path through disagreement in the direction of increased understanding. And yet, his silence concerning conflicts over gender issues in philosophy, or with and between gender in theology and in religious studies screams out to feminist philosophers at least. I have already suggested that this could not simply be due to his generation of philosophers generally not engaging feminism, since over his very long life span Ricœur never shied away from conflicts in philosophy on other matters of personal identity or of religion and theology. A resistance by his own generation of philosophers to feminism might be a reason for

silence. Yet again, whatever the reasons, let me suggest points at which we might create a dialogue between Ricœur and feminist philosophy of religion.

To be in dialogue with a philosophical text, or in dialogue with another woman or man, the interlocutors must share certain common assumptions. For one thing, Ricœur's idea of 'hospitality' is a hermeneutic assumption which, I suggest, we share. In *On Translation*, Ricœur discusses 'linguistic' hospitality, but I am appropriating this hospitality for hermeneutics. So, 'hermeneutic' hospitality would aim to balance trust and fear; it would address dangers in a betrayal of faith by learning to welcome differences. For another thing, we should assume the central importance of texts for philosophical dialogue between theology and religions, as well as between philosophy of religion and feminist philosophy of religion.

Ricœurian hermeneutics has critical philosophical potential in translation but also in dialogue. Ricœur encourages a reflexive hermeneutics of suspicion and faith. His philosophy was clearly dedicated to the dual moments of hermeneutics. From his earliest work on a philosophy of will, Ricœur practiced a dual, critical and restorative interpretation of human symbolism concerning the origin and end of evil. Even before Ricœur became known for his engagement with the three masters of suspicion – Marx, Nietzsche and Freud – he challenged what he identified as a 'first naïveté' when it came to Christian symbolism.⁸ Basically, my point is that Ricœur seeks to avoid over-confidence due to either naïveté or hypocrisy, when interpreting the meaning of a text.

Whether in translation or in hermeneutics, the interpretation of differences across discourses and cultures can be a critical tool for dialogue. Yet philosophical dialogue remains a fragile business: to confront disagreement, in a genuine exchange of meaningful discourse is personally and politically challenging. It is a specific concern of mine that some feminist theologians have

⁷ Pamela Sue Anderson, "Transcendence and Feminist Philosophy: On Avoiding Transcendence", 27-54 in *Women and the Divine: Touching Transcendence* (Eds J. Jobling and P. Haynes; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and Anderson, *Re-visioning Gender*, ix-xiii, 50-1, 62-3, 93-4.

⁸ Paul Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Translated by Emerson Buchanan; Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 19-24; and Paul Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (Translated by Denis Savage; New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1970), 32-36.

taken up a hermeneutics of suspicion as their method of feminist critique – without understanding the dual nature of Ricœurian hermeneutics, of both faith (trust) and suspicion (mistrust) – and so, without the positive moment of faith there is no possibility of genuine dialogue. But to be fair, I have not previously written about the dialectical moments of a feminist dialogue with Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology either. Nor have I written about the influence of Ricœur on my own feminist philosophy of religion. To be honest, my work is nevertheless informed by Ricœur's hermeneutic of criticism and restoration. Yet rather than focus on mutual failures of transparency, I would like to make a question productive: why Ricœur himself never attempted a dialogue with French feminist psycholinguistics or with feminist philosophy more generally, whether beginning with the hermeneutical moment of faith or suspicion. The answer might be simple: it was a generational thing for men and women of Ricœur's age to leave feminism to those younger than them.

Olivier Abel has made the suggestion that Ricœur's initial silence concerning 'feminism' perhaps go back to 1949 France when Simone de Beauvoir published, *Le deuxième sexe*. As a Protestant (not a Roman Catholic) and a philosopher in post-WWII France, Ricœur had no objections to the arguments in Beauvoir's landmark text. However, later when he might have become involved with feminist philosophical debates, Ricœur felt unable to read all of the books which would have been necessary for him to study, in order to be informed on feminist philosophy; he always read everything on any topic before he discussed it philosophically in print. Yet whatever his reasons, there seems to be a blind spot when it comes to a self-reflexive hermeneutics of suspicion concerning gender in Ricœur's own philosophical writings.

3. Ricœur and feminist philosophy of religion

It could be said that as a consequence of my own writings which, on the one hand, have explored Ricœur's work since the beginning of the 1980s, and which, on the other hand, have worked on a

feminist philosophy of religion since the mid 1990s, I have led a split existence when it comes to my philosophical thinking. For this reason, the conference "Ricœur in Dialogue with Theology and Religious Studies", Lund University, 2013 gave me the opportunity to bring two domains together in "Ricœur in Dialogue with Feminist Philosophy of Religion".

Ricœur never wrote about feminism or had any dialogue with feminist philosophy, whether with individual persons or texts. Nevertheless, his passion and his tools for mediating conflicts would suggest that Ricœurian hermeneutics could do a great deal for the conflicts – the negative and positive moments - in philosophy of religion, addressing internal conflicts and external disagreement. In particular, I would like to explore what exactly Ricœur has to offer students in dialogue with theology and religious studies on the contested ground of feminism, and more specifically, on the issue of re-visioning gender in philosophical texts. It is true that precisely at the point where there is difficulty or difference creating disagreement, Ricœurian hermeneutics will find an opportunity to open up new possibilities. So, let us see what difficulties and differences might generate disagreement – between feminist philosophy and philosophy of religion - to which we can respond, offering to place Ricœur in dialogue with feminist philosophy of religion.

My project for the past 20 years has been cultivating the ground for a feminist philosophy of religion; and this has meant a struggle to break new ground between philosophy and theology with insights from feminists who have tended to find themselves on the fringes of both disciplines. Or, as some philosophers would say, on the one hand, the 'hard core' of the field of philosophy of religion is gender-neutral, while a feminist philosopher would add that this hard-core is 'male-neutral'; that is, male with the (unwitting) pretence of neutrality. On the other hand, 'soft edges' of the field of philosophy of religion might be allocated to women and 'their' gender issues! Clearly this imagery is ironic, reflecting the very sexism which is so problematic, with its 'hard' and 'soft' metaphors, privileging the former over the latter. Describing men as hard and women as soft is almost laughable, if it was not

still so real in many places where philosophy of religion is taught. It is obvious that fear and resistance are everywhere apparent when it comes to disagreements or conflicts between feminism and masculinism in philosophy. Yet dare we say that this is one of the best reasons to have training in hermeneutics – and why Ricœurian hermeneutics would be incredibly useful – in dialogue with feminist philosophy of religion.

We might find that the most fruitful points for dialogue, employing the tools of Ricœurian hermeneutics, are on topics on which both feminist philosophers and hermeneutic phenomenology share philosophical sensibilities. So, rather than conflict resulting in a battle between opposing sides, ending in the defeat of one by the other, both the feminist philosopher and the hermeneutic phenomenologist would seek to mediate conflicts; they would develop a dialogue, in order to help both sides to learn from each other. In particular, the challenge for a dialogue, with the help of Ricœurian hermeneutics, would be to make learning new possibilities the task, and not ‘winning the day’: we are not aiming to knock out ‘the other guy’!

In *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion*, I returned to old texts in the field – those which Ricœur might have described as ‘configurations’ in philosophy of religion – and I sought to re-vision gender in the field as it has been configured (especially in the asides of a text). This re-visioning is similar to Ricœur’s ‘reconfiguring’ of the world ‘in front of a text’. I have not explicitly appropriated Ricœurian hermeneutics in my reading and re-visioning gender in traditional texts of theology or religions. But perhaps I could have, and I might have done so unwittingly.

All too roughly, the Anglo-American field of philosophy of religion has served as the object for my re-visioning. I explained ‘re-visioning’ as ‘the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction’.⁹ ‘An old text’ is another name for the

object of re-vision. The aim of *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion* is to see ‘with fresh eyes’, as if I am ‘entering an old text [of traditional theism]’, one which I have taught and studied for more than thirty years, but now ‘from a new critical direction’ informed by women-philosophers and not only by men in the field. As a woman-philosopher, I teach Anglo-American philosophy of religion, while writing on topics in European philosophy of religion, notably Ricœur’s French hermeneutic phenomenology. So, as a feminist philosopher my dialogue was, broadly construed, with twentieth-century philosophy of religion in the Anglo-American world; but there is no doubt that my own hermeneutic sensibilities – learnt from Ricœur – are at play on some level in any dialogue I might have between theological and/or religious texts and philosophical texts.

4. French twentieth-century philosophy and dialogue

Independent of my work on feminist philosophy of religion, I have studied dialogue as a practice for women philosophers in relation to French philosophy in the twentieth-century.¹⁰ Dialogue has a much more philosophical feel in Europe. Or at least I suggest this is true in the contemporary context. Anglo-American philosophy of religion is much more concerned with proofs for the existence of the traditional theistic God or ‘arguments’ in defence of ‘His’ omnibenevolence in the face of innocence suffering and evil than dialogue with historical texts. So, both my feminist concerns and my Ricœurian sensibilities have been ideal for encouraging dialogue. Yet the difficulty is the resistance to dialogue with foreign texts, blocking hermeneutic hospitality. For instance, this resistance is appa-

⁹ Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision”, 18-30 in *College English* 34:1 (October 1972), 18; reprinted in *Adrienne Rich’s Poetry and Prose*, pp. 166-177 (Eds B. Gelpi and A. Gelpi; New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 167.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977); Vladimir Jankélévitch and Béatrice Berlowitz, *Quelque part dans l’inachevé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977). Michèle Le Doeuff, “Women in Dialogue and in Solitude”, 1-15 in *Journal of Romance Studies* 5:2 (Summer 2005); cf. Anderson, “A Joyful Dialogue”, 341-55.

rent when twenty-first century philosophers dismiss or slight feminist philosophy of religion.

This difficulty is gradually decreasing as more feminist analytic philosophers – women and men – are engaging with gender, sexuality and race, employing methods from the social and human sciences.¹¹ In this way, Anglo-American philosophy is being slowly changed by feminist philosophical interventions into a field which has been restricted by its exclusive object, traditional Christian theism, and by strictly logical argumentation about the theistic God. Needless to say, a Ricœurian model of hermeneutic dialogue with (foreign) texts, with other religions, with other sexualities, genders and so on, has not been exploited – or used – enough yet by Anglo-American philosophers of religion. Nevertheless, my own increasing concern for issues of epistemic injustice, including hermeneutic injustice, and loss of confidence within the field of analytic philosophy of religion has led me to return to Ricœur. In recent years, my aim has been to develop a feminist dialogue concerning ‘the capable subject’ (*le sujet capable*) and ‘the lived body’ (*le corps propre*) as two different levels of Ricœur’s own hermeneutic phenomenology; these are timely topics for feminist philosophy of religion. Thus, placing Ricœur in philosophical dialogue with feminist debates about embodiment and capability increases the opportunities for feminist philosophers, in turn, to engage in dialogue with hermeneutic phenomenologists.

The aim of the next section of ‘Ricœur in Dialogue with Feminist Philosophy of Religion’ is to reverse our direction of thought and have feminist philosophers of religion turn to focus explicitly on the hermeneutic phenomenology of ‘one’s own body’ and ‘the capable subject’.¹² Focusing on these conceptions in dialogue will enable us to explore gender in hermeneutic phenomenology.

¹¹ Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹² Anderson, *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion*, 1-3, 89-95.

5. ‘Le corps propre’ and ‘le sujet capable’: dialogue with a text

To achieve my aim, it is necessary to initiate a feminist dialogue with a philosophical text. This dialogue will focus on three topics from the “Introduction” and “On Interpretation” in *Philosophy in France Today*.¹³ First, in the Editor’s “Introduction”, written more than thirty years ago, Alan Montefiore reflects on the philosophical ‘subject’s loss of self-confidence in its own ability to understand itself, and indeed, in its own intrinsic significance’.¹⁴ Second, in “On Interpretation”, Ricœur interprets his own self-identity as a philosopher by elucidating the path he took to ‘hermeneutic phenomenology’ of the lived body.¹⁵ Third, in retrospect, and in dialogue with these two chapters, we discover that Ricœur himself anticipated his later, larger philosophical account of the capable subject.¹⁶

In turn, the feminist dialogue with a Ricœur text will give us more ground for a Ricœurian dialogue with feminist philosophy of religion. So, we are given Ricœur’s hermeneutic elucidation of the phenomenological subject’s loss of self-confidence in its own ability to understand itself; and, to this we can add, a feminist question about gender. A feminist critique would question a philosophical tradition, which had addressed the problem of personal identity without giving any attention to the role that gender or sexual difference might have played. Similarly, a feminist critique would expose a hermeneutic tradition which had failed to give attention to the role gender or sexual difference has played in

¹³ Pamela Sue Anderson, “Lost Confidence and Human Capability: A Hermeneutic Phenomenology of the Gendered, yet Capable Subject”, 31-52 in *Text Matters* 4 (2014).

¹⁴ Alan Montefiore, “Introduction”, vii-xxv in *Philosophy in France Today* (Ed. A. Montefiore; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983), xi.

¹⁵ Ricœur, “On Interpretation”, 175-198 in *Philosophy in France Today* (Ed. A. Montefiore; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983), 187.

¹⁶ On the capable subject, see Paul Ricœur, “Who Is the Subject of Rights?”, 1-10 in *The Just* (Translated by David Pellauer; Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000), 2-7; Paul Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition* (Translated by David Pellauer; Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005), 89-149.

interpreting religious myths, in particular, concerning the origin and end of evil. Ricœur's own phenomenology of religion had elucidated the self-understanding in the ancient myths concerning defilement and evil with very little awareness of gender.¹⁷

Thus, a feminist philosopher today can, in dialogue with Ricœur and Montefiore focus on the 'subject's loss of confidence in her own ability to understand herself'.¹⁸ A dialogue with the 1983 text reveals a moment when feminist self-understanding was just on the horizon: feminist consciousness did develop in three decades of transition, 1983-2014, in both French and Anglo-American philosophy. During these decades women in philosophy actively sought to restore a woman's confidence in her own ability to understand herself, philosophically, personally and socially. I place my emphasis on "restore", since the use of restoration recalls both Ricœur's positive moment of hermeneutics and Ricœur's phenomenological account of that which needs to be restored: the 'originally', 'capable' subject.

So, in dialogue with a hermeneutic phenomenology of human capability and embodiment, we can recognise that, for Ricœur, originally each lived body, as *le corps propre* (one's own body), was a capable body. To this phenomenological recognition is added a Ricœurian interpretation of what has happened, gone wrong, or has been concealed, in the loss of confidence in one's own capability. The additional feminist questions have to do with *l'homme capable* (the capable [hu]man): Is 'human' rather than 'man's' capability gender neutral? Or, is the gender in philosophy necessarily masculine?

We could propose that Ricœur never meant for capability to be restricted to *l'homme* in the sense of the generic 'man'. Only an implicit and pernicious gender bias would ignore *la femme capable* (the capable woman) who, similar to any capable man, can have confidence in her

own ability to understand herself philosophically. Crucial to this self-understanding, though, is the fact that the lived body of socially and materially specific subjects is gendered: gender is part of what gives a fundamental, yet materially distinctive, sense to each originally capable being. However, a decisive question of (hetero)sexual difference arises here. How does a philosopher, or theologian, address an implicit heterosexual bias in a dialogue with Christian myths? Heterosexuality is implicit in the narrative of Adam and Eve. The story of the 'original' creation of women and men – which is based to some degree, as Ricœur himself has shown, upon an ancient religious myth – will continue to re-inforce pernicious heterosexual norms. In turn, this myth will ratify evil done to women because of (her) seduction of Adam into sinful desire and ratify violence done to gay and lesbian relations in the name of a good 'god' who had created man and woman for each other.

In 1980 when I first thought about beginning a dialogue with Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology and with Ricœur himself, I attempted to understand two necessarily interrelated aspects – those of practical reason and of natural inclination – making up what I came to identify as Ricœur's Kantian dual-aspect subject of action. At the time, I argued that the dual aspects of Kantian rationality and sensibility together constituted the two moments of Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology.¹⁹ Thirty years later, placing Ricœur in dialogue with feminist philosophy of religion, it is quickly apparent that contemporary (feminist) philosophers have a much greater social awareness of the damage done by philosophical and religious myths concerning the female subject; these myths have tended to inhibit and/or prohibit her ability to understand herself as living in a sexually, materially and socially specific body with a non-negotiable human capability for dialogical relations.

So feminist philosophers in dialogue with Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology today can recognize that the philosophical subject contin-

¹⁷ Ricœur does discuss Eve, see *The Symbolism of Evil*, 28-29, 253-260. Cf. Pamela Sue Anderson, "Defilement and death in Ricœur's configurations of two female figures: or, action at the boundaries of the self's clean and proper body". Invited lecture delivered, *Ricœur Retrospect III: Culture*, Divinity School, University of Chicago, 9 January 2015.

¹⁸ Montefiore, "Introduction", xi.

¹⁹ This argument developed in my 1980s research for my doctorate (DPhil) at the University of Oxford – part of which was later published as Pamela Sue Anderson, *Ricœur and Kant: A Philosophy of the Will* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1983), 41-59.

ues to struggle with a whole (new) range and wider dimensions of dis-unity in human identity. Ricœur himself moved far beyond his early recognition of the Kantian tensions between freedom and nature; such tensions are not the most difficult challenge, if they ever were, to a philosopher's self-unity. Equally from Ricœurian dialogues with feminist philosophy we can discover that the on going dis-unity of the self involves cultural, as well as cognitive, conative and affective factors. It is not just that the self's unity within the history of twentieth-century philosophy has been broken up, but that something highly significant has been lost from a 'first naiveté' concerning the creation of women and men.

But I think that we can agree, in a Ricœurian spirit: this loss of self-unity and of a first naiveté are not things to be mourned. Instead we can and must retrieve what has been lost from our social and interpersonal awareness of human capability and the lived body in the development of new ethical understandings of gender, sexual orientation and other social and material matters. Contemporary feminist philosophers at least have come to recognize that women and men have materially and socially specific differences due to gender's intersection with a whole range of social and material mechanisms of oppression. But instead of mourning the supposed 'death' of a transparent and unified subject, dialogue with philosophical and religious texts should enable Ricœurians and feminist philosophers alike to see the unique singularity in each of our visions of the world, without obscuring the concrete differences of our lived (bodily) experiences.

6. Gendering and re-visioning gender in dialogue with Ricœur

In the twenty-first century, gendering has become increasingly evident as a philosophical issue.²⁰ My attempt in the present essay is to formulate a dialogical relation between, on the one

hand, imagining Ricœur's dialogue with feminist philosophy of religion and, on the other hand, generating a feminist dialogue with Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology; these dialogues reflect how far gender awareness has come in the past three decades of philosophy in Europe and in the Anglo-American world. In this section, I would like to address a dual process: first gendering, which happens (unwittingly) in philosophy, and, second, re-visioning gender in philosophy of religion which, as I have proposed, is a deliberate process for feminist philosophers and hermeneutic phenomenologists.

Here 'gendering' means the generally hidden process of determining the qualitative - as distinct from the numerical - identities of bodies, especially bodies in relation to culturally recognized sex and/or gender norms. So far in this essay, I have assumed that gender already exists in philosophical and religious texts. This means that we need both phenomenological tools to uncover the gendering, which has gone on in western philosophy in reading and writing great philosophical works. But we also need a critical and a restorative hermeneutics in philosophy of religion, in order to tackle both hermeneutic injustices in centuries of gendering philosophy and hermeneutic justice in re-visioning gender for future centuries. Thus, as a hermeneutic issue, gender exists as a presupposition to how we think, act and live. Yet philosophers generally have resisted seeing gender's role in their thinking.

At this stage, I suggest that we recall Ricœur's idea of hermeneutic hospitality. Philosophers could welcome feminist insights into how we have in fact betrayed gender by refusing to recognize both the dominance of one gender (type) in our thinking and the damage to the other gender(s) which philosophy excludes and devalues. A socially, materially and sexually specific male gender has been privileged at a great loss to philosophy itself; the epistemic conditions, which have been necessary grounds for developing philosophical knowledge, have encouraged epistemic injustice; injustice rather than justice has flourished when it comes to gender in philosophy. But remember that gendering has been a hidden process in western philosophy; so, gendering needs to be elucidated before philoso-

²⁰ I stipulate what is meant by 'gendering': it is the generally hidden process of determining the qualitative as distinct from the numerical identities of women and men.

phers can grasp the problem with the construction of gender in philosophy.

Thus, a critical focus in my own feminist hermeneutics of philosophical and literary texts, in *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion*, attempts “to look back with open eyes” and “from a critical distance” at the gendering of human identities by the moral and religious dimensions of texts.²¹ This gendering of identities has very definitely, even if unwittingly, shaped the philosopher’s self-understanding, especially her or his understanding of human emotion, reason and cognition.

In the previous section of this essay, we engaged with points from Ricœur’s “On Interpretation”. In this section, I would like to stress the significance of Ricœur’s distinctively French ‘reflexivity’.²² For Ricœur, reflexive means being subject-oriented in the sense that the philosophical subject literally turns back upon him or her self. Now, a contemporary feminist appropriation of this philosophical reflexivity might add gender awareness to the subject’s reflexive act. The philosophical subject would, then, recognise her ability to reflect socially and materially upon herself, her actions and how they have been marked by gender. This self-reflexivity does not necessarily ensure self-understanding in philosophy; but at the very least it could initiate a hermeneutic process of uncovering what has been hidden about our identities as human subjects.

Most relevant for the hermeneutic phenomenologist’s dialogue with feminist philosophy (of religion) is that the subject’s self-understanding could emerge in relation to its own (internal) alterity. And it is worth noting that, unlike the French phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas and the French psycholinguist Irigaray, Ricœur never takes the self’s alterity to include sexually specific female subjects.²³ This makes Ricœur sig-

nificantly different from either Levinas or Irigaray when it comes to gendering philosophy; he is simply not interested in elucidating sexual difference. Yet this is not the only way a feminist philosopher understands gendering. Rather than two sexually specific subjects, one male and the other female, philosophical subjects can be differentiated by gender according to gender’s intersection with social and material mechanisms; for instance, when sexual orientation, race, class, ethnicity, religion intersect with gender, we can no longer identify two distinct gender types.

In other words, gendering as a social process, can be interpreted with the help of hermeneutic phenomenology. So, then, Ricœur in dialogue with feminist philosophy of religion should be able to offer tools for elucidating and interpreting gender and alterity, as they function in philosophy of religion today. Thus, the hermeneutic process of gendering can be critically addressed with the negative (critical) and positive (restorative) moments of Ricœurian hermeneutics.

The closest Ricœur himself comes to giving an account of a female figure in a philosophical text is an interesting exception, Antigone, in *Oneself as Another*.²⁴ Previously, I have placed Ricœur in dialogue with Antigone, relating his reading intertextually to other configurations of this same female figure from ancient myth and modern philosophy.²⁵ These other configurations move Antigone from Sophocles’s text to the texts of G. W. F. Hegel, George Steiner, Martha Nussbaum, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler and more recently, Julia Kristeva. But what is remarkable, yet contentious about Ricœur’s configuration of Antigone for my essay is that she does not represent sexual difference: Antigone’s action is not configured as that of either a wo-

²¹ Anderson, *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion*, ix, 1, 49, 89-94.

²² Paul Ricœur, “On Interpretation”, 187-188.

²³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (translated by Alphonso Lingis; Duquesne UP, 1992); Luce Irigaray, “The Fecundity of the Caress: A Reading of Levinas. *Totality and Infinity*,” “Phenomenology of Eros”, 185-217 in *An Ethics of*

Sexual Difference (translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill; Cornell UP, 1993).

²⁴ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another* (Translated by Kathleen Blamey; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 241-249, 256.

²⁵ For my own early inter-textual reading of Antigone, see Pamela Sue Anderson, “Re-reading Myth in Philosophy: Hegel, Ricœur and Irigaray Reading Antigone”, 51-68 in *Paul Ricœur and Narrative: Context and Contestation* (Ed. M. Joy; Calgary: U of Calgary P, 1997).

man or a man. Instead Antigone is a tragic figure for Ricœur.

In Ricœur's configuration, Antigone is above all a tragic figure because her 'one-sidedness' in the face of "the complexity of life"; this inevitably means death.²⁶ The point of seeing Ricœur's Antigone text in dialogical relation to other configurations is that Ricœur's gendering does not explicitly portray any normative figure of female alterity in *Oneself as Another*. A feminist reading of Ricœur's Antigone would conclude that "she" configures neither gender nor sexual difference. Antigone's singularity suffices to mark her out as at most for Ricœur, an exception to any gender. Antigone is not a figure of female alterity because she rejects her roles as fiancée, wife, home-maker, mother, etc. Ultimately, she is the figure no living human being can be, or would want to be, since giving up life. Antigone's tragedy is to be walled up alone in a living death.

What is also noteworthy about Ricœur's Antigone is its relation to G. W. F. Hegel's reading of Antigone as "the eternal irony of the community".²⁷ This eternal irony is apparent in the ways in which Antigone is sharply distinguished by her action from the role of her sister, Ismene, and from her own potential role as a wife and mother. Antigone resists and persists as the eternal irony of the community; she is necessary, yet she must die. Again, Irigaray, in sharp contrast to Ricœur, disruptively mimes Antigone as a sexually ambiguous figure who can be read to play either a masculine or a feminine role. But in playing these gender roles Irigaray's Antigone can imitate sexual difference, of woman (not man), of mother (not father), sister (not brother), former lover (not beloved). In Irigaray's disruptive miming of a female figure in a text, she deliberately mimes roles for Antigone, as if she could be multiply gendered, in order to explore the dimensions of sexual difference between two sexually specific subjects. It, then, seems that Ricœur has not kept up with feminist texts, in-

sofar as he configured the philosophical subject, including Antigone, as genderless and so, not a sexually specific subject. But, of course, a critical hermeneutic of suspicion might discover some hidden aspects to Ricœur's unwitting gendering in philosophy.

7. Ricœur in dialogue with texts of and by women

To keep our dialogue with feminist philosophy of religion going, let us consider two texts from the French literary theorist and psycholinguist, Julia Kristeva. Kristeva can help us to a better understanding of how the subject is gendered. We might even imagine Ricœur re-visioning gender and female figures in the texts of philosophy and of religions, in the company of female authors like Kristeva. First, in Kristeva's dialogue with Catherine Clément, she claims that it is

That sense of strangeness that confers on certain women the appearance of a disabused and benevolent maturity, a serene detachment that, it seems to me, is the true sense of [what] Hegel so enigmatically calls "the eternal irony of the community". In fact, women do not remain on the near side of phallic power, but they accede to it only to better learn their way around its omnipotence. That *detachment*... stems from our immersion in Being and sensible timelessness.²⁸

Is Kristeva proposing that this 'immersion in Being' gives a woman – like Antigone, if mirroring the maternal position – (social) confidence in her own capability? My tentative answer is that Kristeva makes gender crucial in this (non-Ricœurian) Hegelian reading of confidence and capability; for a woman, both of these characteristics – confidence and capability – derive from her eternal, maternal gender role; this is implied by a woman's immersion in Being and sensible timelessness.

Second, in *Feminist Readings of Antigone*, Kristeva develops several new and highly nu-

²⁶ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 249.

²⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Translated by A. V. Miller; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 288. For more on Hegel's reading of Antigone and Ricœur's relation to it, see Anderson, "Rereading Myth in Philosophy", 55-59.

²⁸ Catherine Clément and Julia Kristeva, *The Feminine and the Sacred* (Translated by Jane Marie Todd; New York: Columbia UP, 2001), 60.

anced points concerning Antigone. These configurations of Antigone are relevant for re-visioning gender. In her eighth interpretative point (out of nine) concerning Antigone, Kristeva suggests

Far from being a relic of the past, the universality of Antigone resonates in the psychic life of women today. [...] the emancipation of the “second sex,” and the intermingling of diverse religious and cultural traditions (as Judith Butler discusses in *Antigone’s Claim*)²⁹ – the anthropologically universal dimension of *feminine solitude* confronted with the drive of de-binding (*déliation*) still makes itself evident today in clinical observation, as well as in social behaviour. Solitude and de-binding (*déliation*), neither necessarily reject motherhood, but rather demand and accompany it. [...] This cannot make us forget, however, the emerging strength of those women who have the opportunity and the capacity to generate a new understanding, skill, or even a way of life or survival out of it: a remarkable consequence of the emancipation of women that is still in process.³⁰

In the above Antigone opens up the possibility of playing a maternal role as an equal, but different gender from one playing a paternal role. Kristeva stresses the emerging strength of women who have the opportunity and capacity to generate new understandings of themselves.

For my part, in “The Lived Body, Gender and Confidence”, I interpreted the story of Eve as the first woman who suffers a loss of confidence in her own intrinsic significance. Eve is not primarily portrayed as a maternal figure in texts of ancient culture and in ongoing religious traditions. Instead we read the texts of western culture as they capture the philosophical imaginary in portraits of this woman (Eve) in the process of becoming aware of her body physically and cognitively. At the very same moment in the *Genesis* narrative, when this female figure glimpses her own capability she becomes simultaneously

conscious of losing confidence in her own body and in her cognitive ability.³¹

My interpretation of the texts configuring Eve’s desire, especially of the ancient myth in *Genesis*, follows the narrative concerning this “first” woman phenomenologically. So, unlike thinking historically about a particular woman, narrating Eve’s loss of confidence is meant to capture the lived experience of women generally, and their relations to men. In reading the *Genesis* story, we find that Eve reflects the gendering of woman in both western philosophy and theology. In following the narrative concerning Eve’s desire for knowledge of good and evil, we are told that desire leads Eve not only to disobey a divine command, but to seduce the “first” man (Adam). In this narration, a clear, gender difference appears with Eve and Adam. In other words, this interpretation supports differentiation of human subjects by (two) gender(s). Thus, gendering the lived body becomes a process moving from pre-personal capability to personal awareness of moral values.

In addition, insofar as gendering appears in dialogue with this text about Eve, when it is read phenomenologically, portraying the man as seduced by the woman, then the action of the female protagonist is configured to set in motion the fall of the lived body from an original condition of innocent capability to one of lost confidence in the power to act and to know. This gendering assigns a different value to man as opposed to woman. And yet, both of these gendered subjects remain capable: assigning good or

²⁹ Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000).

³⁰ Julia Kristeva, “Antigone: Limit and Horizon”, 215-230 in *Feminist Readings of Antigone* (Ed. F. Söderbäck; Albany: State University of New York P, 2010), 226.

³¹ This conception of capability derives from a range of Ricœur’s later writings. More work could still be done on exactly how to define capability. Is it pre-personal? Capability might be both metaphysical and ethical in Ricœur’s philosophy, especially since informed by Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and Spinoza’s *Ethics*. Yet Ricœur himself appeals to “the phenomenological point of view” to describe the multiple expressions of the capacities of “the I can”; see Paul Ricœur, “Autonomy and Vulnerability”, 72-90 in *Reflections on the Just* (Translated David Pellauer; Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007), 75. Hermeneutic phenomenology enables Ricœur to describe ‘selfhood’ and the ‘I’ through “the mode of different abilities”; this includes, “I can speak, can narrate, can act”, Ricœur, “Autonomy and Vulnerability”, 76; cf. Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 10–23, 298–317.

evil to one and another of the heterosexually gendered pairs does not lessen human capability as an original power of action.

Eve becomes aware of, as I have retrospectively interpreted her in the phenomenological terms of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “the embodied modalities of her existence” as she is thrown open into a “mortal situation of listening”.³² Becoming attuned to her situation, the woman’s self-discovery involves both surprise and terror. In moving from pre-personal to personal awareness, Eve remains incarnate; that is, she retains her bodily awareness, motility and entanglement in intersubjective, fleshy existence. At the moment when the gendered subject emerges out of pre-personal existence, she is aware of her own lived through body.³³

8. Problems of French phenomenology for feminist philosophers

Contemporary feminist critiques of the phenomenological subject and its body have challenged the lived body as the medium of gender-neutral perception. For example, Judith Butler’s critique of Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* challenges the implicit heterosexuality and traditional male-gender norms of the lived body.³⁴ Butler contends that the lived body

tends to be confused with a “naturalized” body; and the latter is always already an “interpreted” body which, as Butler also contends, means a gendered body.

For another example, Michèle Le Doeuff accuses the *Phenomenology of Perception* of objectifying the female body:

Merleau-Ponty says that for a normal subject, the body of another person is not perceived as an object. The perception that might have been objective is in fact inhabited by another, more secret, perception, which, he says, accentuates the erogenous zones of the visible body of the other according to a sexual schema peculiar to the perceiving subject so that this body will call forth “the gestures of the masculine body”. He was speaking of the visible body in general, perceived by a normal subject; however, it becomes clear that this visible body is a woman’s body, seen and re-drawn by the gaze of a man, who before long will move unhesitatingly from gaze to gesture? Not only is the subject necessarily male, the visible body necessarily that of a woman, but also the gaze (of a man directed at a woman) can remake what it sees, to accentuate what he finds erogenous. A form of visual violence is normalized here in all its generality. On principle and as a general procedure, the (masculine) gaze re-creates the visible body of a (feminine) other precisely as it wishes.³⁵

In *Giving an Account of Oneself* Butler discusses Michel Foucault’s critique of “the trans-historical subject” in phenomenology.³⁶ Can there be such a subject? Clearly for existential phenomenologists like Beauvoir the subject is always embodied and situated in a world, transcending history. And yet, at the time when Merleau-Ponty and Ricœur developed their respective phenomenological accounts of *le corps propre* (one’s own body) in Paris, even though they had read Beauvoir’s phenomenology in *The Second Sex*, their descriptions seem to assume a male-neutral body as, quite possibly, a trans-

³² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Translated by C. Smith; London: Routledge, 2002), x–xvi, 158–170. I employ phenomenological terms to describe the however implicit, dominant configuration of Eve as her story unfolds from an originally given account of human capability to the apparent loss of what was originally hers; see Pamela Sue Anderson, “The Lived Body, Gender and Confidence”, 163–180 in *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contestation and Transcendence Incarnate* (Ed. P. S. Anderson; Dordrecht-London-New York: Springer, 2010).

³³ Anderson, “The Lived Body, Gender and Confidence”, 163–4, 178–9.

³⁴ Judith Butler, “Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description”, 85–100 in *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy* (Eds J. Allen and I. M. Young; Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989).

³⁵ Michèle Le Doeuff, *The Sex of Knowing* (Translated by Kathryn Hamer and Lorraine Code; London: Routledge, 2003), 79; cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 180–181.

³⁶ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham UP, 2005), 115–117.

historical, dis-embodied subject.³⁷ In particular, they attempted no explicitly gendered description of Eve and her gradual awakening to the pre-personal capability to which her body will in some sense cleave, but from which she will in another sense be separated by the critical process of gendering the male as ‘subject’ and the female as ‘abject’.³⁸ The dual sense of the body both cleaving to and separating from pre-personal form creates an ambiguous condition for the lived body.

We could also read the dual sense in the ambiguous condition, which appears in Ricœur’s hermeneutic phenomenology: the condition includes the pre-given human capability and the misunderstandings of self (and others). In his last text, Ricœur admits that the course of recognition for the capable subject encounters existential difficulties of identity, alterity, differences, violence, inabilities undergone, failures of memory and endless conflict on the level of lived through experiences.³⁹ There is an opening in this text to take up the loss of confidence in the ability to understand oneself and be understood in terms of the gendered body.

Let us now return to the story of Eve who is configured as a fleshy figure of abjection. Appropriating Merleau-Ponty’s use of ‘flesh’, we can describe the pre-personal form of Eve’s incarnate capability constituting a fleshy inter-subjective field of affection. Flesh connects bodies and world(s) intersubjectively. Moreover, at the same time as constituting an intersubjective field, this living body can be surprised by the upsurges of transcendence which “fly up like sparks from a fire” setting off new, more perso-

nal discoveries in relation to the “lived through” world.⁴⁰ Flesh constitutes a generality from which particularity emerges. For instance, in the mythical portrait of Eve, she gradually emerges as the lived body and person (subject): but this is she who will be abjected. Describing her in terms of flesh and fleshy is, to a certain degree at least, consistent with the biblical myth of the first woman’s body. Yet the negative imagery of abjecting flesh has been rejected by those philosophers and feminists who think we have—and should have—left mythical stories and images behind once we have been educated by history, biology, genetics, etc. Nevertheless descriptions of flesh, especially including the female body’s association with she who is abjected from her own subject position, remain part of the ethical, social and spiritual imaginary of western cultures.

Arguably the term, fleshiness, captures how (hermeneutic) phenomenologists still imagine and connect sexed bodies. In the feminist terms of Merleau-Ponty’s contemporary and friend, Beauvoir, the female body becomes “the second sex” or even, “the sex”. And this is relevant to our focus on the manner in which confidence (*la confiance*) and lost confidence, or mistrust (*méfiance*), of individually gendered bodies becomes a critical issue for contemporary feminist and non-feminist philosophers. For the sake of argument, I have identified confidence as a social phenomenon; and it is something that can be lost. It can also be elucidated, in phenomenological terms, at the point (in time) when the lived body intersects with the personal realm of that body-subject’s history and culture. In the first half of twentieth-century France, Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir each offered highly significant descriptions of the ambiguous condition of the lived body. They uncover the manner in which the pre-personal realm of (capable) flesh surges forth in sensual, spiritual and ethical life creating the possibility of inter-subjective communication. They also anticipate a hermeneutic phenomenology by making manifest fleshiness as an original medium of communication enabling body-subjects to remain entangled in an intersubjective world. Thus, body-subjects be-

³⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany; London: Random House, 2009). For useful references to the influence Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty had on each other’s phenomenological writings, see Katherine J. Morris, *Starting with Merleau-Ponty* (London: Continuum, 2012), 129-134.

³⁸ Pamela Sue Anderson, “‘Abjection... the Most Propitious Place for Communication’: Celebrating the Death of the Unitary Subject”, 189-230 in *Bodies, Lives, Voices: Gender in Theology* (eds K. O’Grady, A. Gilroy and J. Gray; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

³⁹ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 249-254.

⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xv.

come aware of themselves as vulnerable selves in their relations within the world.

Feminism has a crucial role to play in a hermeneutic phenomenology of lost confidence and, in the case of philosophy of religion, in the loss of a self's ability to understand herself.⁴¹ What makes loss a useful focus? First, a feminist critique of lost confidence goes back to the myths concerning Eve and the origin of "female weakness": there the felt loss in a woman's own capability challenges an uncritical and non-reflexive stance on the self. Second, this critical focus elucidates a capacity for understanding gender through hermeneutic dialogue with religious texts and with philosophical interlocutors in a time of cultural transition.

Claims to gender-neutrality in phenomenology conceal highly significant issues of loss of confidence, loss of epistemic justice and loss of reflexive self-understanding. Moreover, this gender-blindness fails to enable dialogue with texts that have been sources of pernicious gender, homophobic and other sexual violence. Loss of self-confidence in who we are as sexually, materially and socially specific, embodied subjects not only damages our knowledge and cultural - especially religious - practices, but this damage obscures that which was in phenomenological terms originally given: our human capability.

There are problems with hermeneutic phenomenology. Yet phenomenological terms have enabled us to explore given conditions of our lived bodies and human capability; and following Ricœur, we can add hermeneutic sensibilities - a hermeneutic hospitality - to our philosophical dialogues. Hermeneutics involves interpretation of texts, of written but also spoken words. And, in this context, the hermeneuticist interprets the opaque, in order to make more transparent the capability and epistemic locatedness of each subject. In the end, Ricœurian hermeneutics can help women and men to make sense of themselves, to understand their own cognitive and conative abilities, and to achieve greater self-awareness through dialogue across difference.

But it is equally true that we have to help Ricœur by raising awareness of gender, by way of a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of faith.

9. Conclusion

A Ricœurian dialogue with feminist philosophy of religion and feminist dialogue with Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology simultaneously support women and men in philosophy, who are critically open to both the gendering and the re-visioning of gender in philosophical texts. Philosophy of religion and feminism become part of a changing European culture: together they help us to articulate the material, social and cognitive dimensions of a subject's conditioning. In particular, imagining Ricœur in dialogue with feminist philosophers of religion enables increased understanding of those dimensions of a subject's life that phenomenologists would describe as non-natural.

In dialogue with texts in French phenomenology and in feminist philosophy of religion, I have tried to demonstrate that significant changes in the culture and content of philosophy have taken place since the moment when, in 1980s Oxford, Montefiore edited a collection of essays, including Ricœur's "On Interpretation". Over these past three decades, I began to dedicate myself to uncovering a process of gendering, and this was followed by re-visioning gender in modern European philosophy of religion. In this paper I have aimed to bring Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology in dialogue with feminist philosophy of religion; but this requires a hermeneutic process of dialogue with texts in philosophical theology. These texts offer evidence of confidence being lost in the ability to achieve self-understanding in contemporary philosophy of religion, as well as evidence of new possibilities in the creating of new dialogue partners and in an ever-increasing ability to understand one another. These are the possibilities for renewed self-confidence generated by putting Ricœur in dialogue with feminist philosophy of religion.

⁴¹ For further background, see Anderson, "Lost Confidence and Human Capability: A Hermeneutic Phenomenology of the Gendered, yet Capable Subject" 31-52.