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The Universality of Hermeneutics in Joseph Kockelmans's Version of Hermeneutic Phenomenology

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Foreword

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In an autobiographical sketch, Joseph Kockelmans (2008) reflects on his *Denkweg* in a manner that allows him to delineate the profile of his version of hermeneutic phenomenology. Based essentially on this sketch, I should like in what follows to [AU1] bring into focus three principal moments of his "journey into phenomenological philosophy" that allude to his idea of the universality of interpretation in all culturally specified modes of being-in-the-world. I will call these moments respectively (a) the phenomenological reformulation of the Greek episteme; (b) the integration of the ontological difference in the theory of scientific truth; and (c) the historicity of objectifying thematization.

There is in Professor Kockelmans's works from the 1950s a gradual transition from Nikolai Hartmann's theory of the ontological modalities and categories (addressed in its capacity to serve as a prerequisite for reconstructing the ontological assumptions of basic scientific theories) to a kind of hermeneutic ontology. This transition is especially palpable in his reading of Hartmann's "Philosophy of Nature." In Hartmann's categorial metaphysics of knowledge *Dasein* and *Sosein* (as ways of being) are subordinated to the modes and spheres of being. The transition was by no means accomplished via a direct borrowing of Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*. It is rather the idea that the very metaphysics of knowledge should seek to make sense of the ontological categories by having recourse to the interrelations of *Dasein* and *Sosein* within the scope of scientific knowledge. A true "Philosophy of Nature" cannot avoid addressing the revealing of nature's being in these interrelations.

Professor Kockelmans's subsequent transformation of Hartmann's concept of *Dasein* in terms of ek-sistence as a pre-categorial way of being opened the avenue to hermeneutic phenomenology. The constitution of meaning is the "facticity" which the theory of categories presupposes, being unable at the same time to reflect upon it. Yet important motifs of a categorial metaphysics of knowledge were retained

in the new philosophical project. These motifs precisely informed the desire for a rehabilitation of the Greek episteme within the ontological framework. Still in his Dutch period, Professor Kockelmans adopted the view that philosophy is neither a meta-scientific world view nor can it be "naturalized" by recasting its problematic in scientific terms and languages. The constitution of meaning in human ek-sistence is the subject which philosophy has to address. Philosophy can master this task by developing a kind of hermeneutic ontology that leaves enough room for epistemological investigations. It is the rehabilitation of the Greek episteme that provides the chance for reconciling such investigations with the ontological search for meaning constitution and truth as un-concealment.

But what kind of epistemology does this rehabilitation imply? An answer to that question is to be found in Professor Kockelmans's long-standing critical encounter and dialogue with the post-empiricist philosophy of science. Roughly speaking, in this dialogue he was after an epistemology that is capable to complement hermeneutic phenomenology in a manner that can bridge the analytic of meaning constitution with a theory of epistemic-thematic articulation of various kinds of objects. Obviously, such a theory has little to do with the established (in the analytic philosophy) concept of epistemology as a normative theory about "justified true beliefs." By exploring the leeway released by the combination of the Greek episteme with the Greek phronēsis, Professor Kockelmans unfolded in diverse directions the claim that there is a horizonal understanding at the root of all specific forms of articulated knowing. It is this understanding that is a subject shared by both, hermeneutic phenomenology and the kind of epistemology which he looked for. Reflecting on horizonal understanding provides the access to both the transcendence of the world, i.e. to what is at issue in the ontology of the potentiality-for-being, and to the ongoing fore-structuring of knowing by contextualized epistemic practices and procedures. Kockelmans (1993, p. 101) made the case that horizonal understanding "has in itself the eksistential structure of being a projection." Because of this structure it acquires epistemological relevance.

Understanding as "grasping by anticipation"—so the argument goes—fore-structures the formation of each epistemic-thematizing attitude toward the world. (Professor Kockelmans was preoccupied in the first place with the triads of fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception that characterize the kinds of scientific thematization qua objectification of the world.) The "anticipatory sighting" of what gets constituted by epistemic practices assures the passage from hermeneutic ontology to hermeneutically pertinent epistemology. Horizonal understanding is at once a constitutive ontological phenomenon and (via its interpretative specification) the fore-structure of each kind of knowing (including the knowing achieved by procedures of idealization in the natural sciences). In his long-standing elaborations on the "being of knowing," Joseph Kockelmans gained deservedly the reputation of the philosopher who in the most profound manner succeeded in demonstrating the hermeneutic-phenomenological unity of (non-metaphysical) ontology and (non-representationalist) epistemology.

In working out the variety of epistemology which takes into account the "being of knowing," Professor Kockelmans dedicated serious efforts to criticizing the

holist epistemological strategies (offered by Lakatos, Kuhn, Stegmüller, Hübner and several others) for their reflexive deficits and characteristic failures to make intelligible the fore-structuring of (the production of) scientific knowledge. Yet the focus on this fore-structuring did not promote a search for a radicalization of the intrinsic hermeneutic tendencies (as these have been most clearly exhibited in Mary Hesse's work) in the post-positivist historicism. It was rather a criticism aimed at a retrieval of what has gotten lost in the post-empiricist turn. In this regard, Professor Kockelmans undertook an original rendering of logical empiricism's problematic of meaningfulness with the intent to "repeat" this problematic in a hermeneutic-phenomenological framework. At stake was the eradication of the empiricist foreclosing of any approach to theory-observation interrelations that might take into consideration the interpretative contextualization of scientific thematization—the contextualization which is to be strongly distinguished from the contextual-epistemic interpretability implied by the post-empiricist thesis of theory-ladenness. Against logical empiricism Professor Kockelmans made the point that the interpretative nature of scientific thematization cannot be recast in terms of logical semantics. Finally, the hermeneutic approach to the fore-structuring of scientific knowing (as an approach that mediates between ontology and epistemology) calls into question basic assumptions shared by all parties in the realism-debate. The procedural-empirical laying bare of formally symmetric structures that unite measurable and quantifiable entities as domains of research proved to be a shared doctrine of constructive empiricism (as a particular position in this debate) and Kockelmans's program for a hermeneutic phenomenology of the natural sciences.

On constructive empiricism, not the relationship of correspondence but that of constructive co-interpretability of theoretical models and data models (as deliverances of experimental and observational experience) is at the heart of scientific enterprise. The epistemological counterpart of the relationship of co-interpretability is the empirical adequacy of a theory (in van Fraassen's technical sense). The greatest merit of constructive empiricism is the overcoming of the static subject-object relation's epistemology. The hermeneutic circle involved in the mathematical saving of phenomena, on which van Fraassen insists in his earlier work, strongly bears resemblance to the circularity of the horizonal understanding's epistemic specification within the objectifying research of the natural sciences. Yet the constructive empiricist skips the possibility to reflect on the hermeneutic circle of saving phenomena in a manner that would allow her to reinstitute the problematic of scientific truth by means of transcendental arguments. By amending her conception through such arguments, the constructive empiricist would be able to arrive at a concept of truth beyond the technical discussion of theory's empirical adequacy, avoiding at the same time making concessions to scientific (and structuralist) realism. More generally, since constructive empiricism offers only a subtle and cogent "description of what from an empiricist point of view it means to be an empirical scientist" (Kockelmans 1993, p. 138), this doctrine ignores the transcendental dimension of scientific objectification whose approaching reinstitutes the problematic of scientific truth against the background of the ontological difference. Reflecting on the constructive-hermeneutic circularity of models and data

(appearances) should open the way from epistemology of science's empirical adequacy to the ontological specification of what scientific truth is.

The way in which Professor Kockelmans puts in his earlier work the fore-structuring of scientific knowledge first leads to the second principal moment in his philosophical journey. This moment gets expressed by a principal thesis to be found in several papers of him in the 1970s: With regard to the kinds of fore-structuring of thematizing knowledge that mediates between the ontological disclosure of scientific domains and the epistemic organization of scientific research, three basic hermeneutic situations of scientific thematization are to be distinguished related accordingly to the objectification through mathematical projection, phenomenological description of profiles that remain invariant within manifolds of variations (as this is shown in particular by phenomenological psychology), and interpretative-dialogical reflexivity in making sense of cultural phenomena. Though these three kinds of scientific thematization correspond to a certain extent to three types of scientific disciplines (objectifying [empirical] sciences, descriptive-phenomenological social sciences, and interpretative human studies), Professor Kockelmans has good reasons to insist that he is dealing with hermeneutic situations of doing research and not with institutionalized disciplines. Each of the situations may in principle take place in every scientific discipline. Thus, the second moment in his philosophical journey is the triple specification of the research processes' interpretative nature with regard to three kinds of science's basic hermeneutic situations.

Let me stress some important consequences that Professor Kockelmans drew from the way in which he spelled out the concept of hermeneutic situation of scientific thematization. The first one is the argumentation against the strategy of shifting essentialism from science's cognitive structures to invariants (groups of symmetries) of pre-scientific perception. Perception, however elementary it could be, is always already in a (pre-scientific or scientific) hermeneutic situation. In other words, there is no perception that precedes the constitution of meaning. All perceptive acts are contextualized by meaning-constituting practices. A paradigmatic alternative to the hermeneutic-contextual view of perception is suggested by various structuralist doctrines. Thus, Cassirer's gestalt-psychological view (expressed for the first time as early as in the conception of the *symbolische Prägnanz* from the 1920s, and clearly formulated in his celebrated paper "The Concept of Group and the Theory of Perception") restores the spirit of epistemological essentialism on a pre-scientific level by emphasizing structural invariants in the sensory flux of perception. Cassirer tried to advocate the view that it is not (only) the formal structure of scientific knowledge, but also the "structure of perception" that remains invariant/symmetric with respect to a group of transformations. On Kockelmans's argument, since symmetries of perceptual spaces and perceptual objects inevitably take place in a context, it is the meaning-constituting contextualization (and not the symmetries) that has to be taken as a point of departure of epistemological analyses within the scope of hermeneutic philosophy.

Another consequence from the scrutiny of the concept of hermeneutic situation is the new argumentation against the hypostatization of mathematical essences.

A domain of scientific research gets disclosed not through the projection of a mathematical formalism. A domain's being-disclosed is always in a hermeneutic situation in which practices and procedures of idealization and the related to them ongoing projection of formal structures come into being. The formation of basic mathematical formalism is always interpretatively contextualized.

The hermeneutic situation in which the regimes of epistemic practices get established and a particular domain of knowing gets disclosed is not outside the reality of being-in-the-world. It belongs to that reality which becomes at once revealed and concealed by being disclosed in a hermeneutic situation. This observation has a substantive implication for the specificity of scientific truth: The characteristic way of revealment/concealment defined by the hermeneutic situation of a scientific thematization is the *ontological truth* of that thematization. In stressing this kind of truth that is ignored by the analytical philosophers of science, Joseph Kockelmans does not go on to get rid of the epistemic (correspondent, coherentist, consensualist, pragmatic, instrumentalist, and so on) kinds of scientific truth. Yet he argued that the *ontic truth* (either of particular scientific propositions and statements or of holist conceptual frameworks like those of scientific theories) is to be circumscribed in semantic and epistemological terms only when one manages to determine the ontological truth of the basic scientific thematization (for instance, the thematization by means of which the domains of classical physics are disclosed). The rationale for this claim is that the formulation of all epistemological/semantic criteria for truth as well as the carrying out of all formal and non-formal procedures of verification take place in a reality that is always already disclosed by a scientific thematization. The ontological truth of the latter stipulates the conditions of possibility of the ontic truth within scientific knowing. The truth of formal invariants and groups of symmetries "shows itself" also in a hermeneutic situation of thematization. This is why it is also only a kind of ontic truth.

The third moment in Joseph Kockelmans's philosophical journey is his conception of the "critical studies in the history of science." His hermeneutic vision of science's historical dynamics opposes the post-empiricist division between internal and external history of science. The treatment of the historical horizon of scientific thematization resists any relegation in the competence of one of the two types of historiography. Within this horizon there is a constant interplay of practices belonging to various discursive formations. To be sure, one has to distinguish clearly between two cases. For the sake of brevity, think on bacteriology and quantum electrodynamics as typical manifestations of these cases. Bacteriology became disclosed within a heterogeneous discursive formation that involves non-scientific practices and administrative policies as well as clinical activities and research practices of physiology, classical immunology, cytology, zoology, and chemistry. The objectifying thematization and delineation of relevant objects of inquiry had been "prepared" by meanings of various kinds constituted by this discursive formation. Accordingly, the research articulation of the domain of bacteriology "found" in the period of its inception "ready-made entities" already distinguished by hygienic, clinical, and biological meanings. As Bruno Latour in particular shows, entities like contagiousness, miasma,

aetiologic agents, different kinds of microorganisms, "model organisms" and so on circulated with important functions in spaces of political power. The initial objectifying thematization in bacteriology transformed these entities into scientific objects. Thus, the founding hermeneutic situation in bacteriology involves the task of scientification of "life-world's entities." This task is completely alien to the inception of quantum electrodynamics. The domain got disclosed by recasting of objects constituted entirely by research practices of older domains. There was no "provocation" from external problems arising out of non-scientific social practices. The founding hermeneutic situation involved the task of "enfranchising" of already existing scientific objects. Accordingly, the objectifying thematization was determined by research practices entitled to accomplish the recasting in question—computations based on perturbation theory, conceptual practices of overcoming incompatibilities between special relativity and quantum mechanics, formal practices of searching for covariant formulations of experimental results, etc.

Yet regardless of the way in which the domain had been historically disclosed—so Professor Kockelmans's basic argument goes—the hermeneutic situation of thematization makes the constitution of meaningful scientific objects a function solely of research practices. In other words, once disclosed, a scientific domain is characterized by a research process that projects its own horizon of possibilities. This is also the horizon of relevant problematization within the everydayness of scientific research. Once brought into play in a characteristic hermeneutic situation, the research process is dependent only on the possibilities projected by the practices of this process.

On Kockelmans's conception, the "rational reconstruction" of science's historical dynamics is a hermeneutic task. This does not mean that social-pragmatic interests have no impact on the research process. They certainly make enormous impact. Yet this impact gets refracted by the horizon of research possibilities. The very refraction provides a protection against cognitive deformations of scientific research caused by external pressure on the research process. It is a protection that is again of hermeneutic nature: Within the hermeneutic circle of the constitution of meaning and meaningful objects in scientific research, the external aims and interests get "translated" in possibilities of doing research that are proper to the articulation of the respective scientific domain.

Hermeneutic phenomenology of the natural sciences seems to be both highly esoteric and too exotic an initiative. Yet it is of prime importance for everybody who champions the post-metaphysical universalizing of hermeneutics. Without approaching the interpretative nature of the natural sciences, philosophical hermeneutics would be essentially restricted. Without doing this it would have had to refrain from laying claim to the conceptually most sophisticated form of culture. Professor Kockelmans dedicated a great deal of his work to the removal of this restriction imposed for several historical reasons on philosophical hermeneutics. In his final work he concentrated his efforts on supplementing the natural sciences' hermeneutic ontology with various approaches developed in methodical hermeneutics (Kockelmans 2002). At issue are the formation of textual traditions

and the effective-historical series of contextualization of classical texts in the history of physical disciplines. This was an additional contribution of his to the post-metaphysical universalizing of hermeneutics.

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