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De Rentiis, Dina

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Dina De Rentiis

Chresiology – short presentation

Hermeneutics has introduced the “art of understanding” into modern scholarship, structuralism has provided the humanities in particular with a methodology of systems and structures, and post-structuralism has added to both a dimension of critical thought on meaning and order. Building on these earlier approaches of producing, classifying, and scrutinizing knowledge and meanings, Chresiology offers a new philosophical roof for theories and methodologies concerned with relations and relationality.

Relations and relationality already played an important role in traditional hermeneutics and structuralism. This importance has only increased in post-hermeneutical and post-structuralist thought. At present, relationality is a central theoretical issue in the sciences and the humanities alike. Exploring this issue further promises to effect deep changes in many, and potentially in all, disciplines. However, since analyzing relations requires that we determine (sets or parts of) objects, the tacit hierarchy between meaning and/or order—e.g. systems and structures—on one side and relation/s on the other side remains frequently unexamined and ultimately unchallenged: it is meaning and/or order first, relation/s second.

The purpose of Chresiology is not to invalidate this hierarchy permanently, nor to supplant (post-)hermeneutics or (post-)structuralism. More a critical “art of relating” than a theory of relationality, Chresiology enables scholars to prioritize temporarily relation/s over meaning and order. Ultimately, it allows them to modulate carefully at what precise moments in their analysis they want to prioritize either meaning, order, or relations, without leaving their own fields of study and without rejecting, or renouncing, their respective fields’ extant theories and methods.

The signet of Chresiology, “chresis”, is not a concept. It does not retain, or receive, a meaning within or from this theory, nor does it designate an object of analysis. Within Chresiology, “chresis” works as a tag—and eventually as a hashtag—recycled from a disused ancient term and redesigned for present use. Therefore, this short presentation does not end with an explanation of what chresis “is” or “means”, but with a cue for what it can “do”.

If Chresiology “is” anything, then it “is” a modulation of perspectives and approaches based on the sustainability of what we call our “thesaurus”, our “word shrine”. It is not about taking one more methodological turn and moving into one (other) direction, but about turning around, not about evolving, but about revolving.

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