

Subordinating Trust to Text: A Hermeneutic Reversal

Abstract

In analytic philosophy, the concept of trust is often considered primarily to be a three-place relation between trustor, trustee, and the domain of trust. The analysis of trust is unsatisfactory, however, if such a relationship is derivative of other forms of trust, and consequently the analysis has only succeeded in explaining a particular branch of trust rather than explaining the root. Annette Baier considers a climate of trust, with all the moral perils of intimacy, explanatorily superior to contract-based, rational trust between non-intimate equals in modern Western philosophy and thus provides an example of how the traditional analytic model is problematic.

In this paper, I propose another account on which the conventional three-place trust relationship investigated in analytic philosophy is derivative. Based on Heidegger's fundamental ontology, humans are constitutively hermeneutic. If Heidegger's fundamental ontology or a similar hermeneutic anthropology is accepted, then trust relationships between humans are explanatorily subordinated to trust relationships between readers and texts rather than the other way around, as traditional accounts suggest. This reversal has a significant impact not only on our analysis of trust, but also on moral theory, personal identity, and scientific method. My paper details both the reversal in explanatory primacy and the implications for these philosophical disciplines.