



Akademik Eğitim ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi (AJESS Journal)

The Hermeneutics of Suspicion in Paul Ricoeur: From the Critique of Consciousness to the Recovery of Meaning

Dr. Cherouag Ahmed, Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University of Mostaganem, Algeria
cherouag2018ahmed@gmail.com

Dr. Hosni Imane, Mohamed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University of Bordj Bou Arreridj, Algeria
imane.hosni@univ-bba.dz

Article History

Received: 31/07/2026 ; Accepted : 24/08/2026 ; Published : 05/09/2026

Abstract

This article examines Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion as one of the major turns in contemporary hermeneutic philosophy. It analyzes its philosophical foundations, its intellectual context, and its role in reconstructing the relationship between explanation and understanding. The study asks how Ricoeur reworked the critical legacy of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche to construct a hermeneutic project that moves beyond traditional philosophies of consciousness. It also asks how this project moves from the critique of consciousness toward the recovery of meaning and selfhood. The article adopts an analytical-hermeneutic method and offers a critical reading of the main Ricoeurian texts relevant to this question. The analysis shows that Ricoeur did not adopt the hermeneutics of suspicion as a destructive project. He treated it as a necessary methodological stage for freeing meaning from the illusions of false consciousness. He also integrated psychoanalysis, the critique of ideology, and genealogical critique into a broader hermeneutic project based on the complementarity of explanation and understanding. The study further shows that human behavior, like a text, remains open to interpretation. Self-understanding is not achieved directly. It is mediated by language, symbols, texts, and history. The article concludes that the philosophical value of the hermeneutics of suspicion lies in its ability to move beyond traditional oppositions between suspicion and trust, and between explanation and understanding. Interpretation thus becomes a horizon for reconstructing the self and recovering meaning in contemporary thought.

Keywords: Paul Ricoeur; hermeneutics of suspicion; interpretation; masters of suspicion; psychoanalysis; explanation and understanding; recovery of meaning; selfhood.

Introduction

Contemporary philosophy underwent a profound change in its understanding of the human being and consciousness. Modern philosophy had placed great confidence in the subject's ability to attain its own truth through immediate consciousness. This confidence gradually weakened. René Descartes had made the cogito the certain starting point of knowledge. He treated it as a consciousness transparent to itself and in no need of mediation. Critical philosophies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries challenged this position. They showed that consciousness is neither a simple given nor a complete presence of the self to itself. Repressed desires, social structures, linguistic systems, and historical forces all shape it. These factors exceed the subject's ability to grasp itself directly. The human being can therefore no longer be regarded as the sovereign master of consciousness in the Cartesian sense. Self-understanding requires the "long route" through language, symbols, culture, and the unconscious. Ricoeur expressed this condition through the idea of the "wounded cogito." The self becomes the result of an ongoing process of interpretation rather than a fully formed point of departure.

Within this intellectual horizon, the hermeneutics of suspicion emerged as a major development in contemporary philosophy. Interpretation was no longer limited to identifying an apparent meaning. It became a critical practice that questions what appears self-evident. It also investigates the latent meanings concealed in texts, actions, and symbols. Such meanings may exceed the awareness of those who produce them. The concept is closely associated with Paul Ricoeur. In *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (1965), he used the expression "masters of suspicion" for Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche. These thinkers shared a critical effort to undermine absolute confidence in consciousness. They also exposed forms of false consciousness and meanings hidden behind human phenomena.

Suspicion in Ricoeur is not a nihilistic position and does not seek to destroy meaning. It functions as an epistemological tool and a critical method. Its purpose is to dismantle superficial interpretations and uncover the deeper motives that govern human behavior. This critical work prepares the way for reconstructing meaning on firmer grounds. Ricoeur's project therefore differs from Cartesian doubt. Descartes used doubt to reach the certainty of the thinking subject. Ricoeur directs suspicion toward that very subject. He argues that self-knowledge arises only through an interpretive process. This process passes through texts, symbols, language, memory, the unconscious, and other forms of human expression.

This project developed amid intense philosophical debates in France during the 1960s and 1970s. Structuralism was then displacing the subject from the center of philosophical reflection. It often treated the human being as a product of linguistic, social, and unconscious structures. Ricoeur resisted this reduction. He defended the human being as capable of speaking, acting, narrating, and assuming responsibility. At the same time, he did not reject structural explanation. He incorporated its achievements into a wider hermeneutic horizon. In this framework, explanation is a necessary stage of understanding rather than its final goal.

The importance of the hermeneutics of suspicion also lies in its ability to move beyond the traditional separation between philosophy and the human sciences. It does not reject scientific explanation. Nor does it rely on intuitive understanding alone. Instead, it establishes a dialectical relation between explanation and understanding. Explanation is an analytical procedure that reveals structures and hidden relations. Understanding is an interpretive act that restores the significance of human experience in its symbolic and existential dimensions. Human behavior thus becomes, like a text, an open field of interpretation. It cannot be understood through causal reduction alone or through immediate empathy alone. It requires a continuing dialectic between suspicion and trust, and between deconstruction and reconstruction. This movement makes the recovery of meaning possible without returning to the naivety of consciousness or reductive explanation.

Against this background, the present article examines the place of the hermeneutics of suspicion within Ricoeur's philosophical project. It also considers its role in the interpretation of human behavior. The discussion analyzes its philosophical foundations and its relation to the legacy of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche. It then considers its contribution to Ricoeur's hermeneutic method, which is based on the dialectic of explanation and understanding. The inquiry ultimately leads to the recovery of meaning and the construction of selfhood. The central question is therefore the following: How did Paul Ricoeur reconstruct the hermeneutic project through the hermeneutics of suspicion, and what are the limits of the role played by suspicion in the movement from the critique of consciousness to the recovery of meaning and the interpretation of human behavior?

To address this question, the article is organized into four related sections. The first presents the philosophical foundations and context of the hermeneutics of suspicion. The second examines the concept within Ricoeur's project through his critical reading of the masters of suspicion. The third discusses Ricoeur's hermeneutic method and his move from textual explanation to the interpretation of action and human behavior. The final section explains the transition from a hermeneutics of suspicion to a hermeneutics of recovery and the reconstruction of the self.

1. The Hermeneutics of Suspicion in Paul Ricoeur: Concept and Philosophical Foundations

1.1 The Concept of the Hermeneutics of Suspicion in Paul Ricoeur

The hermeneutics of suspicion belongs to Ricoeur's broader hermeneutic project. It seeks to rethink the relation between the self and meaning. It begins by criticizing the view that consciousness is transparent and can grasp itself directly. Its task is to uncover the hidden levels behind apparent meanings. This applies to texts, actions, and human phenomena more generally (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 32-35).

For Ricoeur, the "hermeneutics of suspicion" is linked to a critical project that moves beyond surface interpretations. It seeks latent meanings concealed by forms of immediate consciousness. Ricoeur therefore described Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche as the "masters of suspicion." They revealed the limits of consciousness and the hidden forces that influence human thought and behavior (Ricoeur, 1970, pp. 32-34).

Suspicion, however, is not destructive in Ricoeur's work. It is a hermeneutic method that moves from the manifest to the latent, and from direct meaning to the hidden conditions of its production (Ricoeur, 1970, pp. 32-36). It differs from Cartesian doubt. Descartes doubted in order to establish the certainty of the thinking ego. The hermeneutics of suspicion instead questions that ego itself. The self can be understood only through a long interpretive route that passes through language, culture, history, and symbols (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 135-139). This is the basis of Ricoeur's idea of the "wounded cogito." It

describes a self that discovers that it is not absolutely sovereign over itself. It must recover self-understanding through the mediations of interpretation (Ricoeur, 2001, pp. 20-25).

1.2 Philosophical Foundations of the Hermeneutics of Suspicion

1.2.1 The Crisis of the Cartesian Cogito and the Limits of Transparent Consciousness

The philosophical foundations of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion must be understood against the crisis of the modern concepts of self and consciousness. Descartes established the cogito as a primary certainty based on the identity of thought and existence. Consciousness therefore appeared transparent to itself and capable of reaching truth through direct reflection (Zakaria, 2020, pp. 45-48).

Modern critical thought challenged this conception. It showed that the self does not exercise complete control over itself. Consciousness is shaped by structures and forces that exceed it. These include the unconscious in Freud, ideology in Marx, and the will to power in Nietzsche. Ricoeur expressed this loss of sovereignty through the concept of the "wounded cogito" (*le cogito blessé*). The term refers to a self that discovers the limits of its mastery. It can understand itself only through the mediations of language, culture, history, and symbols (Ricoeur, 2001, pp. 20-25).

The hermeneutics of suspicion therefore moves beyond a philosophy of immediate consciousness. It does not begin with the self's certainty about itself. It begins with the need to interpret signs and traces that reveal meanings concealed within human experience. For Ricoeur, the self is not given directly to itself. It is formed through the "long route" of texts, symbols, and cultural expressions (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 37-39).

1.2.2 The Philosophical Context of the Emergence of the Hermeneutics of Suspicion

Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion emerged during a crisis in philosophies of consciousness and the rise of structuralism in France in the 1960s and 1970s. Structuralism challenged the centrality of the subject. It sought the deep linguistic, social, and cultural structures that organize human phenomena beyond individual conscious intention (Zakaria, 2020, pp. 88-92).

This shift changed the image of the human being as a producer of meaning. In some structuralist accounts, the person became the product of systems that exceeded individual control. This tendency appeared in the work of Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, and Lacan. Concepts such as the "death of man" and the "death of the author" gained prominence. The subject came to be treated as an effect of deeper linguistic, social, and unconscious structures (al-Jabri, 2017, pp. 110-115).

Ricoeur did not reject structuralism altogether. He acknowledged its value for analyzing the internal structures of texts and discourses. Yet he opposed turning structure into a final explanation that eliminates the subject, freedom, and human action. He therefore incorporated structural analysis into his hermeneutic project. For him, it is a necessary stage in understanding, not the end of understanding (Ricoeur, 2001, pp. 117-123).

Explanation consequently occupies an essential place in Ricoeur's philosophy. He treats it as a necessary moment on the way to deeper understanding. This position overcomes the opposition between explanation and understanding by placing them in a reciprocal dialectic. Ricoeur summarizes this principle as "to explain more in order to understand better" (Ricoeur, 2006a, p. 76).

The hermeneutics of suspicion thus becomes a philosophical strategy that moves beyond the opposition between subject and structure, and between understanding and explanation. It does not return to the illusion of transparent consciousness. It also refuses to reduce the human being to a structure of signs. Instead, the self regains self-understanding through a critical passage through the world of symbols and texts. In Ricoeur's formulation, "self-understanding takes place in front of the text" (Ricoeur, 2001, p. 43).

2. The Masters of Suspicion and Psychoanalysis in the Construction of Ricoeur's Hermeneutic Project

2.1 The Masters of Suspicion in Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy

2.1.1 Why Did Ricoeur Bring Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche Together?

Ricoeur's description of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche as the "masters of suspicion" was not merely a historical classification. It expressed a methodological unity among their projects despite their different fields of inquiry. Freud examined the psychic structure of the human being. Marx analyzed economic and social structures. Nietzsche directed his critique toward values, morality, and metaphysics. Yet all three disturbed the spontaneous trust placed in immediate consciousness. They also sought the hidden forces that produce and direct human discourse (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 37-39).

Ricoeur does not group these thinkers together because they offer a single account of the human being. He groups them because they shifted interpretation away from the search for apparent meaning and toward the conditions that produce meaning. Interpretation no longer asks only, "What does this discourse mean?" It also asks, "What forces, desires, or interests speak through it?" Human discourse thus appears as a layered structure. It has a manifest meaning and a latent meaning. The latter emerges only through a critical practice that moves beyond the surface of the text to the conditions of its production (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 16-17).

The hermeneutics of suspicion therefore marks a decisive turn in the history of interpretation. Attention shifts from immediate trust in consciousness to the psychological, social, and historical mechanisms concealed behind it. Ricoeur does not stop at this critical moment. He makes it a foundational stage within a wider hermeneutic project. The aim is to recover meaning after it has passed through suspicion, not to abolish or destroy it (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 57).

2.1.2 Freud and the Interpretation of the Unconscious

Sigmund Freud occupies a central place among the masters of suspicion because his work broke with the classical view of consciousness as a transparent source of truth. Freud showed that people are not aware of all the motives that govern their actions. Consciousness does not fully disclose itself. It is crossed by repressed desires and unconscious conflicts that appear only indirectly. Dreams, neurotic symptoms, slips of the tongue, and parapraxes are examples. Human discourse can no longer be read only at the level of its surface. It carries latent meanings that require interpretation to reveal their deeper structure (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 38-39).

Freud thus moved interpretation from the explanation of apparent meaning to the psychological conditions that produce it. Human signs became symbolic expressions of desires and conflicts that direct consciousness cannot articulate. Ricoeur consequently regarded psychoanalysis as one of the principal models of the hermeneutics of suspicion. It unsettled spontaneous trust in consciousness. It also opened the way for a critical reading that moves beyond discourse to the unconscious motives behind it (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 37-39).

Ricoeur does not stop at a psychological explanation of behavior. He places the critical force of psychoanalysis within a broader hermeneutic project. Suspicion of consciousness becomes a first step toward understanding the human being and recovering meaning. It is not the end of interpretation. This is why Ricoeur later develops an extensive philosophical reading of psychoanalysis as a model of interpretation, not merely as a theory of behavior.

2.1.3 Marx and the Critique of Ideology

For Ricoeur, Marx contributes to the hermeneutics of suspicion by exposing the ideological character of consciousness. In the Marxian perspective, ideas and values do not arise independently of their historical and social conditions. They are formed within networks of interests and relations of power. Political, religious, and moral discourses therefore do not simply mirror reality. They may conceal social contradictions and legitimize existing forms of domination (Ricoeur, 2002, pp. 9-14).

Interpretation in Marx therefore becomes a critical practice. It moves beyond the apparent meaning of discourse and traces it back to the economic and social conditions that helped produce it. For this reason, Ricoeur regards Marx as a major representative of the hermeneutics of suspicion alongside Freud and Nietzsche (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 37-38).

Ricoeur does not, however, accept a reductive Marxism that explains every symbolic and cultural phenomenon solely through the economic structure. He argues that social action is symbolically mediated from the outset. Texts, institutions, and discourses possess a surplus of meaning that exceeds the historical conditions of their production. Exposing relations of power is therefore necessary for understanding, but it does not exhaust meaning. It opens the way to reinterpretation within a broader horizon (Ricoeur, 2002, pp. 11-21).

2.1.4 Nietzsche and Genealogy

Nietzsche is the third figure among the masters of suspicion. He directs his critique toward values, morality, and metaphysics through the genealogical method. Genealogy does not ask whether values are true in themselves. It asks how they emerged and what forces contributed to their formation. Values that appear absolute or eternal are, in this view, products of historical processes. They arise from conflicts and wills to power that later acquire the appearance of fixed truth (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 31-39).

Nietzsche therefore does not ask only whether an idea is true or false. He searches for the will behind it and for the historical conditions that gave it authority. Genealogy becomes an interpretive practice that reveals the historical origins of values. It returns those values to their human contexts and removes their appearance of self-evidence or sacredness. They can then become objects of critique and interpretation (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 37-39).

Ricoeur considers genealogy one of the strongest expressions of the hermeneutics of suspicion. It unsettles confidence in immediate meaning and questions the origins that support discourses and values. Yet Ricoeur does not turn this suspicion into a nihilistic denial of meaning. He uses its critical force as a necessary step before the reconstruction of significance within his hermeneutic project (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 86).

2.1.5 From the Hermeneutics of Suspicion to the Recovery of Meaning

Ricoeur does not borrow the hermeneutics of suspicion from Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche as a final philosophical goal. He uses it as a methodological stage within a broader hermeneutic project. These thinkers exposed the limits of immediate consciousness. They showed that human discourses may conceal psychological, social, or historical structures that can be reached only through critique. Ricoeur argues, however, that stopping at this stage would turn interpretation into a continuous practice of dismantling. Its deeper task is to move from the exposure of illusion to the reconstruction of meaning (Ricoeur, 2003, p. 33, pp. 37-39).

Ricoeur therefore integrates the critical force of suspicion into a dialectic of explanation and understanding. Explanation analyzes the hidden structures and relations that produce discourse. Understanding then places the results of that analysis within the horizon of human significance. Explanation and understanding are not opposites. Each is a necessary stage of interpretation. Understanding requires passage through suspicion, while suspicion is incomplete unless it finally opens toward the possibility of recovering meaning (Ricoeur, 2001, pp. 74-76).

Suspicion is thus not the opposite of meaning. It becomes a condition for freeing meaning from ideological illusion, psychological projection, and false certainty. For Ricoeur, interpretation does not seek to eliminate meaning. It seeks to purify and re-establish it through a deeper critical awareness. Critique therefore precedes understanding as a constitutive moment. It does not replace understanding (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 33-35).

This position gives Ricoeur's project its distinctive character. It does not remain within suspicion as the masters of suspicion did. Nor does it return to naive trust in meaning. Instead, it establishes what may be called "critical trust." Meaning is recovered only after it has undergone critical examination. Interpretation therefore has a double movement. It first dismantles the hidden structures that produce discourse. It then reconstructs its significance within a wider human horizon.

Psychoanalysis, ideological critique, and genealogy are therefore not ends in themselves within Ricoeur's philosophy. They are methodological tools that reveal what is concealed behind human discourse. This prepares the transition to understanding. Psychoanalysis has a particularly important place in this project. It provides the most complete model for applying the hermeneutics of suspicion. This explains why Ricoeur devoted an extensive philosophical study to psychoanalysis in his book *Freud and Philosophy*, where suspicion becomes an entry point for rethinking the self, language, symbol, and meaning.

2.2 Ricoeur as a Reader of Freud

Ricoeur's encounter with Freud is more than a point of contact between philosophy and psychoanalysis. It is also more than a philosopher's interest in a psychological theory. It is a sustained philosophical dialogue about the nature of the human being, language, meaning, and the possibility of self-knowledge. Through Freud, consciousness ceases to be the sole source of truth. Human experience appears as a field in which repressed desires, symbols, memories, and signs intersect. Their meanings become accessible only through interpretation (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 38-39).

From this perspective, Ricoeur treats psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic project more than as a therapeutic theory. Its task is not limited to explaining psychological disorders. It reads dreams, symptoms, slips of the tongue, and everyday acts as meaningful signs. These signs must be decoded and related to the contexts that produced them (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 92).

The unconscious therefore becomes, in the Freudian model, a symbolic system with its own modes of expression. It does not reveal itself directly. It appears through displacement, condensation, metaphor, and symbols. Access to its meanings requires interpretive work that reconnects manifest signs with the latent contents to which they refer (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 89-90).

For Ricoeur, Freud's importance does not lie only in founding a new science of the psyche. Freud also established a new mode of understanding based on suspicion of immediate meaning. This mode moves from the certainty of consciousness to the interpretation of signs and symbols through which people express themselves. Psychoanalysis thus becomes a philosophical model. It shows that self-knowledge is not achieved by immediate intuition. It requires the "long route" through language, symbols, and interpretation. This route becomes one of the central foundations of Ricoeur's hermeneutic project (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 50).

2.3 The Unconscious and the Symbol: From Sign to Interpretation

As Ricoeur reads Freud, the unconscious is not a passive storehouse of repressed desires. It is a system of signs and symbols that speaks in a language different from that of consciousness. Unconscious desires do not appear directly. They take symbolic forms in dreams, psychological symptoms, slips of the tongue, and everyday actions. The unconscious thus becomes a discourse that calls for interpretation more than for description or causal explanation (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 15-16, 32, 87).

From this perspective, a psychological symptom is not merely a functional disturbance or an organic defect. It is a sign with a concealed significance. It points to a psychic conflict that could not find conscious expression. When a repressed desire cannot appear directly, it returns in symbolic form. The symptom therefore becomes a text to be read, rather than an object of clinical observation alone (Ricoeur, 1965, pp. 72-73).

This is why the symbol has a central place in Ricoeur's reading of psychoanalysis. A symbol carries a double structure of meaning. It has an apparent meaning and a latent one that emerges only through interpretation. Symbols are not exhausted by what they state directly. They point toward a surplus of meaning beyond their immediate presence. Interpretation is therefore necessary for understanding human experience, not merely an additional explanatory technique (Ricoeur, 2006, pp. 97-98).

Psychoanalysis therefore does more than provide causal explanations of psychological phenomena. It establishes a form of understanding based on reading signs as bearers of meaning. People do not express themselves only through conscious speech. They also speak through symptoms, dreams, silence, repetitions, and acts that may initially appear meaningless. Interpretation reveals the latent significance of these signs and returns them to the human experience from which they emerged (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 67-68).

2.4 The Dream as an Interpretive Text

In Freud's account, the dream is the most complete model of the work of the unconscious. Freud therefore described it as the "royal road to the unconscious." Dreams give access to desires and conflicts that direct consciousness cannot grasp (Ricoeur, 2003, p. 23). Yet the dream does not display these desires in their original form. It reshapes them within a complex symbolic structure. This structure distinguishes manifest content, which the dreamer remembers, from latent content, which contains repressed desires and becomes accessible only through interpretation (Fromm, 1991, p. 10).

Ricoeur sees the dream as more than a psychological phenomenon. It is also a symbolic text governed by the same rules that govern discourse. A dream does not state its meaning directly. It constructs meaning through images, metaphors, and shifts. Interpretation is therefore a condition of understanding the dream, just as it is in the reading of texts (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 88-89).

This symbolic construction occurs through several mechanisms described by Freud. Condensation brings several ideas or memories together in a single dream image. Displacement transfers emotional intensity from a central idea to a secondary element. Symbolic representation transforms desires and conflicts into sensory images and scenes. Through these mechanisms, the dream is not a copy of reality. It is a symbolic reconstruction shaped more by the logic of the unconscious than by the logic of consciousness (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 90-91).

Ricoeur therefore agrees with Freud that the interpreter's task is not limited to describing dream events. Interpretation seeks the relation between dream images and the desires that produced them. It also examines how psychic censorship reshaped those desires in symbolic form. The dream thus becomes a practical model of the hermeneutics of suspicion. Interpretation moves from the surface of signs to their latent significance. It also moves from suspicion of immediate meaning to a deeper understanding of human experience (Ricoeur, 2003, p. 38).

2.5 From Psychoanalysis to Hermeneutic Understanding

As Ricoeur explains it, the Freudian hermeneutics of suspicion is not limited to dreams or pathological symptoms. It extends to everyday life. Slips of the tongue, forgetting, parapraxes, and minor lapses become signs of the presence of the unconscious in human behavior. What first appears to be an accident or a passing mistake may reveal conflicts and desires that found no direct form of expression. The human being thus becomes an open text. Meaning is not confined to conscious statements. It also appears in actions, patterns of behavior, and repetitions (Ricoeur, 2003, p. 45).

Ricoeur therefore rejects the reduction of psychoanalysis to a scientific theory or a causal explanation of psychological phenomena. Its deeper importance lies in the mode of understanding it establishes. This mode reads the signs and symbols through which people express themselves. Ricoeur consequently treats Freud's writings as hermeneutic texts. They open new paths to self-understanding and move beyond clinical practice toward questions of language, history, symbol, and human identity (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 67-68).

Ricoeur does not accept the Freudian project without criticism. He objects to approaches that reduce the unconscious to a closed linguistic structure, especially the reading associated with Jacques Lacan. An exclusive focus on linguistic structure, in his view, risks excluding the historical and existential dimensions of the self. The human being is not merely a point where linguistic structures intersect. The self can reinterpret experience and construct identity through its relation to history, memory, symbols, and actions (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 104-106).

Ricoeur therefore describes psychoanalysis as an archaeology of the self. It excavates the deeper layers of human experience and reveals the roots that shape present life. This archaeology is not the final stage of interpretation. The self cannot be reduced to what it was in the past. It remains able to reinterpret its history and reconstruct its relation to itself and the world. Ricoeur thus moves from uncovering the origins of meaning to using that discovery in a new understanding of the self. The past becomes a condition of understanding, not a destiny that determines the future once and for all (Ricoeur, 2006a, pp. 57-58).

In Ricoeur's reading, psychoanalysis is transformed from a therapeutic technique into a comprehensive hermeneutic project. Its aim is to broaden the horizon of consciousness and deepen the person's understanding of their own history and desires. It is not simply a method for discovering the unconscious. Ricoeur therefore argues that psychoanalysis is an interpretation of consciousness before it is an interpretation of the unconscious (Ricoeur, 2003, p. 38). The value of interpretation does not lie in removing every form of concealment. It lies in enabling people to reread themselves, assume responsibility, and loosen the hold of compulsive repetition through a deeper understanding of their experience (Ricoeur, 2003, p. 39).

3. Ricoeur's Hermeneutic Method: From Textual Explanation to the Interpretation of Action and the Construction of Meaning

3.1 Ricoeur's Hermeneutic Method: The Hermeneutic Arc Between Explanation and Understanding

3.1.1 The Dialectic of Explanation and Understanding (Erklären vs. Verstehen)

The question of method is among the most difficult issues in Ricoeur's philosophy. It became especially pressing with the rise of structuralism and semiotics. These approaches often explained human phenomena through structures and systems rather than through agency and meaning. Ricoeur responded by seeking to reconcile structure and meaning. This effort later became known as the "hermeneutic arc." Within this arc, explanation and understanding are complementary moments of the interpretive process.

Ricoeur begins with Wilhelm Dilthey's distinction between explanation (Erklären) and understanding (Verstehen). Explanation is associated with the natural sciences and with the identification of causal relations. Understanding characterizes the human sciences and aims at grasping meaning. Ricoeur rejects a rigid separation between the two. Understanding becomes complete only by passing through explanation. Explanation, in turn, remains incomplete unless it opens toward the horizon of human meaning (Ricoeur, 1981, pp. 166-168).

For Ricoeur, a strict division between explanation and understanding creates a rupture between the human and natural sciences. It also leaves understanding vulnerable to subjectivism and confines explanation to a positivism that reduces the human being to a natural object. Ricoeur therefore proposes a complementary relation. Explanation becomes a necessary stage that deepens understanding rather than replacing or opposing it (Ricoeur, 2001, pp. 117-120).

Ricoeur does not reject scientific explanation or structural analysis. He recognizes their value in revealing the structures and relations that organize texts, symbols, actions, and discourses. He draws on the methods of the modern human sciences. Yet he refuses to make such analysis the final goal. Explanation can describe a structure. The question of what that structure means for human existence remains philosophical and exceeds the limits of scientific method (Kaouane, 2009, p. 23).

Interpretation, by contrast, seeks the significance a phenomenon carries within human experience. It does not ask only why a behavior occurs. It also asks what the behavior means, what it reveals about how human beings understand themselves, and what symbolic layers it contains. In Ricoeur's view, the human being is not merely governed by a chain of causes. The self produces meaning and reinterprets experience through language, symbols, and narrative (Ricoeur, 2006a, pp. 54-57).

The relation between explanation and understanding is therefore dialectical. Scientific analysis and philosophical interpretation support one another. Explanation gives understanding methodological rigor and protects it from impressionism. Understanding gives explanation a human and existential dimension and protects it from scientific reduction. Interpretation reaches its goal only when it passes through explanation. Explanation reaches its full value only when it leads to a deeper understanding of the human being (Ricoeur, 2001, pp. 117-123).

3.2 Human Action as Text: Detachment from the Agent and the Autonomy of Meaning

Ricoeur's move from the interpretation of texts to the interpretation of human action is a major development in his hermeneutic project. Interpretation is no longer limited to written texts. It extends to human actions as bearers of meaning and significance. Ricoeur begins with the claim that an action, like a text, acquires relative independence from its agent once it has been performed. It can then be understood and explained by others within multiple historical, social, and cultural contexts (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 104).

A written text becomes detached from its author and its meaning is no longer bound to the author's original intention. Ricoeur argues that action undergoes a similar detachment. Once performed, it enters the public world. Its significance is shaped by its effects, by the contexts in which it is received, and by the readings to which it is subjected (Ricoeur, 2001, pp. 169-176). Meaning therefore does not derive from subjective intention alone. It emerges from the interaction between action and the historical and social world in which that action takes place.

This argument supports Ricoeur's idea of the autonomy of meaning. Action becomes a symbolic structure open to interpretation. Its significance exceeds individual intention and enters a network of relations that society and history continually reproduce (Ricoeur, 2001, pp. 177-185). Understanding an action therefore requires more than identifying the agent's motives. It also requires analysis of the action's structure, effects, symbolic content, and reception within a human community.

Action resembles text in several basic respects. Both leave a durable trace that extends beyond the moment of production (Ricoeur, 1991, pp. 149-150). Writing fixes speech. In a similar way, action inscribes itself in history through institutions, laws, relations, or events that remain open to later reading and reinterpretation (Abu Zayd, 2012, p. 112).

Text and action also share detachment from their originator. Once published, a text becomes open to readings that may differ from the author's intention. An action likewise escapes the full control of the agent. Its consequences and meanings may be interpreted differently from what was originally intended. Its significance is shaped by its effects and by the way others receive it (Ricoeur, 2001, pp. 178-180).

Like a text, action is also open to multiple interpretations. The same historical action may be read from philosophical, social, legal, or psychological perspectives. This does not necessarily imply absolute relativism. It reflects the semantic richness of action and its continuing ability to generate new meanings as questions and contexts change (Ricoeur, 2002, pp. 13-17).

Human behavior therefore cannot be reduced to a series of mechanical causes. It must be read in relation to intentionality, symbols, and the cultural and historical context that gives it significance. Interpretation becomes a methodological necessity. It reveals latent levels of meaning in action and frees action from reductive explanations (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 135-139).

The analogy between action and text is therefore more than a metaphor. It expresses a deep methodological shift in Ricoeur's philosophy. The human being becomes a producer of living texts written into history through action. These texts remain open to rereading and reinterpretation as human experience changes and the horizons of understanding expand (Qara, 1988, p. 76).

3.3 Interpreting Human Behavior: From Understanding to the Construction of Meaning

Ricoeur extends hermeneutics from texts to actions, but the purpose of this move is not simply to explain human behavior. Its deeper aim is to reconstruct meaning within human experience. Once an action becomes readable as a "text," it cannot be treated as an isolated event or an immediate response. It becomes a sign that carries values, desires, conceptions, and social relations within its structure. These elements shape the agent within a particular world (Ricoeur, 2001, pp. 165-168).

For Ricoeur, an action becomes detached from its agent once it enters reality. It acquires an independent existence within the social world. Its meaning is therefore not determined by subjective intention alone. Meaning is also shaped by the effects the

action produces, by the way others receive it, and by the historical and cultural contexts in which it is reinterpreted (Ricoeur, 2002, pp. 13-17). Interpretation thus does more than recover the psychological intention of the agent. It reconstructs the significance that the action acquires within history.

Behavior should therefore not be read as an isolated event. It belongs to the larger narrative of a person's life. Every action points toward a wider story in which past experience, present circumstances, and future expectations intersect. Human decisions and stances gain their fuller meaning when they are placed within the existential course to which they belong. Each act then becomes part of a narrative plot that gives it coherence and significance (al-Tayyib, 2015, p. 88).

This is where the hermeneutics of narrative becomes important. In Ricoeur's view, people do not live their lives as scattered events. They reorganize experience through narratives that connect past, present, and future within a meaningful unity. Narrative does more than describe actions. It reconstructs the relations among them, discloses their aims, and gives them meaning within human experience (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 140-143).

Interpretation thus moves from an act of understanding to an act of construction. The interpreter does not simply explain behavior or uncover hidden meanings. Interpretation also recomposes meaning in light of the unity of human experience. Human action, like a text, remains capable of producing new meanings as the horizon of reading expands and historical and cultural contexts change. Interpretation is therefore a continuing reconstruction of meaning, not the recovery of a ready-made and fixed meaning (Ricoeur, 2006b, pp. 119-123).

Ricoeur's hermeneutics consequently moves from explaining apparent signs to constructing a more comprehensive understanding of the human being. Human behavior becomes a route for rereading both self and world. Interpretation does not end when a meaning has been disclosed. It also contributes to shaping and reconstructing meaning. In this way, people can understand their history, reorganize their experiences, and give a meaningful unity to the course of their lives (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 135-143).

3.4 Narrative Identity: Human Behavior as an Interpretable Story

Ricoeur's hermeneutic project does not stop at treating human action as an interpretable text. It also views an entire human life as a narrative structure formed through sequences of actions and events. People do not understand themselves through isolated actions or scattered experiences. They understand themselves through narratives that give these actions unity and coherence within an integrated life story (Ricoeur, 2001, pp. 191-200).

Narrative identity therefore becomes the framework within which the human self is formed. Identity is not fixed or given once and for all. It is continually constructed through the retelling and interpretation of experience. Narrative does not merely report what happened. It reorganizes events within a plot that reveals relations among past, present, and future. It also gives actions their existential meaning (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 140-143).

Human behavior consequently cannot be read as an isolated response to a specific situation. It is part of a wider personal and social history. A decision to migrate, change employment, engage in political activity, remain silent, or refrain from action acquires its fuller significance only within the experience that preceded it and the aims toward which the person is moving (Ricoeur, 2001, pp. 181-190).

Interpretation therefore extends beyond the discovery of hidden motives or deep structures that govern behavior. It also seeks to understand how people give meaning to their lives through narrative. An action becomes part of a larger plot that reconnects scattered events within a meaningful unity. The person can then be understood through their temporal trajectory rather than through isolated acts alone (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 140-143).

Narrative identity also extends beyond the individual sphere to everyday relations and social and cultural practices. Psychological symptoms, habits, rituals, political discourses, patterns of consumption, myths, and collective narratives may all be read as cultural texts. They express systems of values and symbols. They also reveal how individual and collective consciousness are formed (Ricoeur, 2002, pp. 45-50).

At the clinical level, this perspective makes it possible to read psychological symptoms as symbolic expressions of unconscious conflict. It avoids reducing them to a single biological or psychological explanation and recognizes that several levels of interpretation may overlap (al-Tayyib, 2015, pp. 90-94). At the social and political levels, everyday practices and public discourses also become objects of interpretation. They may conceal ideological systems or relations of domination that exceed their immediate appearance (Darwish, 2016, pp. 170-174). The same approach extends to culture. Myths and collective narratives can be understood as symbolic systems that shape consciousness and guide behavior within society (Hassan, 2018, pp. 110-115).

Narrative identity thus shows that the human being does not live within a series of separate facts. The person lives within a story that is continually reinterpreted. Interpretation is therefore not only a tool for understanding texts or actions. It becomes a means of self-understanding and of reconstructing the self's relation to the world. In this way, the hermeneutics of suspicion joins the hermeneutics of narrative in revealing the continually renewed meaning of human experience (Ricoeur, 2001, pp. 191-200).

4. Beyond Suspicion: From the Hermeneutics of Suspicion to a Hermeneutics of Recovery

The hermeneutics of suspicion is a central moment in Ricoeur's interpretive project, but it is not its final goal. Suspicion can expose illusions and dismantle false meanings. Yet it is not pursued for its own sake. It is a transitional stage that opens the way toward the recovery of meaning and the reconstruction of the self. Ricoeur therefore refuses to turn suspicion into a philosophy of nihilism or permanent distrust. If the hermeneutics of suspicion stopped at deconstruction alone, it would deny the possibility of meaning and leave human beings unable to trust themselves, others, or the world (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 33-39).

Ricoeur consequently argues that interpretation does more than expose illusion or reveal hidden motives. It must also reconstruct the significance made possible by critique itself. Suspicion frees consciousness from illusion. At the same time, it prepares consciousness to receive a deeper and more mature meaning. Interpretation therefore becomes a double movement. It brings deconstruction together with construction, and critique together with the recovery of trust (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 33-35).

Ricoeur's project thus moves from the hermeneutics of suspicion toward a hermeneutics of recovery. The symbol is no longer only a mask that hides desire, interest, or the will to power. It also becomes a field in which new possibilities of understanding can appear. It opens a horizon for rediscovering the self and its relation to the world. Genuine interpretation does not end with the destruction of meaning. It re-establishes meaning after meaning has undergone the test of critique (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 21-25).

The Ricoeurian project therefore seeks a balance between critique and trust. It rejects a naivety that accepts meaning without question. It also rejects a suspicion that turns every meaning into illusion. Truth becomes the result of an ongoing dialogue between explanation and understanding, and between deconstruction and reconstruction. This movement allows the person to understand themselves and the world without returning either to first innocence or to absolute nihilism (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 151-153).

4.1 The Limits of Suspicion: The Risk of Nihilism and Relativism

The hermeneutics of suspicion begins from the claim that immediate consciousness may be false consciousness. Human accounts of the self do not always express the whole truth. They may conceal unconscious motives, ideological interests, or a will to power. Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche therefore practiced what Ricoeur calls an "art of suspicion." They moved beyond the surface of discourse in order to disclose its deeper structures (Ricoeur, 2002, pp. 13-17).

Ricoeur warns, however, that turning suspicion into a permanent philosophical stance has serious consequences. If every meaning is treated as a mask, every value as an interest, and every moral action as merely an expression of a hidden desire, trust becomes impossible. Art, religion, and morality can then appear as nothing more than illusions that require endless dismantling. Interpretation would become nihilistic and deny the possibility of genuine meaning (al-Tayyib, 2015, pp. 95-98). Ricoeur therefore refuses to make suspicion the end of the hermeneutic project. Suspicion is a tool for liberating meaning, not abolishing it. The aim is not to remain within permanent distrust. Critique should expose the illusions that obstruct understanding and then return to meaning in a more mature form. Suspicion is a necessary moment of interpretation, but it is justified only when it leads to the reconstruction of trust on new critical foundations (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 151-153).

4.2 Recovering Meaning and Listening to the Symbol

The hermeneutics of suspicion exposes the limits of immediate consciousness and reveals the illusions that conceal truth. Ricoeur's hermeneutic project does not stop at this critical stage. It moves toward the recovery of meaning as the ultimate aim of interpretation. Suspicion is not an end in itself. It is a necessary stage that purifies understanding from its illusions and makes it more receptive to deeper meaning (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 33-35).

Ricoeur thus distinguishes between a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of recovery. The first practices deconstruction and critique. The second seeks to rediscover the existential meanings disclosed by the symbol after the passage through suspicion. The interpreter does not return to meaning as it existed before critique. The return takes place with a new awareness formed through the experience of suspicion. Recovery therefore moves beyond first naivety rather than returning to it (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 151-153).

The symbol has a central place in this movement. Ricoeur does not reduce it to a mask that hides a repressed desire or an ideological interest. The symbol is a semantic structure rich in meaning and capable of opening new horizons of understanding. Ricoeur expresses this idea in the well-known formulation, "the symbol gives rise to thought" (*le symbole donne à penser*). A symbol does not provide a ready-made meaning. It invites the self to continue thinking and interpreting human experience (Ricoeur, 2006, pp. 97-98).

In this sense, the symbol mediates between the human being and the world. It reveals dimensions of experience that direct conceptual language cannot fully express. Its role is therefore not limited to hiding meaning, as some reductive interpretations suggest. The symbol can also generate new meanings as horizons of understanding change and human experience expands (Hassan, 2018, pp. 130-134).

This conception is not limited to religious or mythical symbols. It also applies to poetic language, narrative, art, and psychoanalysis itself. At its deepest level, psychoanalysis does not seek to destroy the self or reduce it to instinct. It can help

the self release creative capacities and reconstruct relations with self and others. Interpretation then becomes a means of recovering the capacity to understand and act, not merely a tool for exposing illusion (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 38-39).

The recovery of meaning therefore does not mean returning to simple certainty or reviving first innocence. It is the outcome of a long interpretive path that joins critique with trust, and deconstruction with reconstruction. Ricoeur's hermeneutics balances the necessity of suspicion with the possibility of belief in meaning. Neither cancels the other. Each can deepen the other (al-Tayyib, 2015, pp. 100-105).

4.3 The Hermeneutic Cogito: Toward the Capable Human Being

Ricoeur's hermeneutic project reaches a decisive point in the movement from a self shaken by suspicion to a self that reconstructs itself through interpretation. His cogito is not founded on immediate certainty, as in Descartes. Nor does it end with the dissolution of the subject, as in some structuralist and post-structuralist approaches. It is grounded in self-understanding through mediations. Language, symbols, narrative, and action are among the most important of these mediations (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 350-353).

The self cannot achieve direct knowledge of itself. It discovers identity through the interpretation of the texts, actions, and experiences it produces. Self-understanding is therefore the result of an interpretive process that passes through the world and through others. It does not begin from a consciousness transparent to itself. The human being knows itself by interpreting the signs it has left in history and culture and by rereading experience in light of the new meanings disclosed by interpretation (Ricoeur, 1960, p. 13).

This movement gives rise to the idea of "second naivety." It names a renewed trust in meaning after the experience of suspicion. It is not a return to the original innocence of consciousness. It is a critical trust in meaning formed after passing through explanation and deconstruction, and after assimilating their results (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 151-153).

Within this horizon, Ricoeur develops the concept of the "capable human being" (*l'homme capable*), one of the central ideas of his later philosophy. Human beings remain limited and are shaped by language, history, and the unconscious. Yet they remain capable of acting, promising, narrating, assuming responsibility, recognizing the other and practicing pardon and forgiveness. Fragility does not eliminate capability. It reveals the ethical conditions under which capability can be exercised (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 135-139).

Interpretation therefore ceases to be only a method for reading texts or explaining behavior. It becomes a philosophical practice that reconstructs the human self and strengthens its capacity to understand experience and give meaning to existence. The hermeneutics of suspicion is only one stage within this wider project. The project culminates in a hermeneutics of recovery, where critique becomes a condition of trust and suspicion becomes a route toward a deeper and more mature meaning (Ricoeur, 2003, pp. 37-39).

Conclusion

Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion shows that understanding the human being cannot rest on a single explanatory model, whether causal or reductive. It requires a hermeneutic dialectic between explanation and understanding, suspicion and trust, and text and action. From this perspective, psychological symptoms, human actions, and cultural symbols become interpretable signs. They point toward latent meanings that exceed what consciousness says about itself. These meanings nevertheless remain open to several possibilities of understanding and reinterpretation.

The study has shown that Ricoeur absorbed the critical legacy of Descartes, Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche without stopping at its negative or deconstructive results. He reworked this legacy within a hermeneutic project in which suspicion is a necessary methodological stage. Its purpose is to free meaning from the illusions of false consciousness. It is not the final goal of interpretation. Critique consequently becomes an entry point for reconstructing the self and recovering its capacity to understand, act, and assume responsibility.

Within this framework, human behavior becomes a text open to interpretation. It requires a reading that combines explanatory rigor with hermeneutic openness. Such a reading can reveal the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions that shape human experience without reducing the person to any single dimension of existence.

The philosophical value of the hermeneutics of suspicion therefore lies in its ability to move beyond traditional oppositions between suspicion and trust, explanation and understanding, and structure and subject. It supports a view of interpretation as a renewed path toward understanding the human being in existential and symbolic complexity. In Ricoeur, interpretation is not simply a methodological tool for analyzing texts or actions. It is a philosophical horizon through which the relation of the human being to self, world, and other is continually renewed. This renewal takes place in a continuing quest to construct a deeper meaning for human experience.

References

- Abu Zayd, N. H. (2012). The problematic of reading and the mechanisms of interpretation. Arab Cultural Center.
- al-Jabri, M. A. (2017). The discourse of contemporary philosophy and the challenges of structuralism. Arab Cultural Center.
- al-Tayyib, M. (2015). Hermeneutics of the self and narrative in Paul Ricoeur. Dar al-Hiwar for Publishing and Distribution.

- Hassan, F. (2018). *Hermeneutics of action in Paul Ricoeur: A study in the philosophy of interpretation and history*. Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi.
- Darwish, H. (2016). *The problem of method in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics and its relation to the human and social sciences*. Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.
- Zakaria, I. (2020). *Postmodern structuralism: A critique of contemporary reason*. Dar al-Tanwir for Printing and Publishing.
- Fromm, E. (1991). *The forgotten language: An introduction to the understanding of dreams, fairy tales, and myths* (M. M. al-Hashimi, Trans.). Arab Writers Union.
- Qara, N. (1988). *Philosophy and interpretation*. Dar al-Tali'a for Printing and Publishing.
- Kaouane, M. (2009). *Interpretation and the discourse of the symbol: A reading of contemporary Arabic Sufi poetic discourse*. Dar Baha al-Din for Publishing and Distribution.
- Ricoeur, P. (2001). *From text to action: Essays in hermeneutics* (M. Berrada & H. Bourqia, Trans.). Ain for Human and Social Studies and Research.
- Ricoeur, P. (2002). *Lectures on ideology and utopia* (G. H. Taylor, Ed.; F. Rahim, Trans.). United New Book House.
- Ricoeur, P. (2003). *On interpretation: An essay on Freud* (W. Asaad, Trans.). Atlas for Publishing and Distribution.
- Ricoeur, P. (2005a). *The conflict of interpretations: A hermeneutic study*. United New Book House.
- Ricoeur, P. (2005b). *Oneself as another* (G. Zinati, Trans.). Arab Organization for Translation.
- Ricoeur, P. (2006a). *After long reflection... Autobiography* (F. Milet, Trans.). Arab Scientific Publishers; Al-Ikhtilaf Publications; Arab Cultural Center.
- Ricoeur, P. (2006b). *Interpretation theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning* (S. al-Ghanimi, Trans.). Arab Cultural Center.
- Ricoeur, P., Sabila, M., & Benabdelaali, A. (2005). *Paul Ricoeur: From linguistics to the philosophy of language* (M. Sabila & A. Benabdelaali, Trans.). Philosophical Notebooks, 5. Toubkal Publishing.
- al-Ghanimi, S. (2006). *Translator's introduction*. In P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning* (pp. 7-17). Arab Cultural Center.
- Ricoeur, P. (1970). *Freud and philosophy: An essay on interpretation* (D. Savage, Trans.). Yale University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1981). *Hermeneutics and the human sciences: Essays on language, action and interpretation* (J. B. Thompson, Ed. & Trans.). Cambridge University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1986). *From text to action: Essays in hermeneutics, II* (K. Blamey & J. B. Thompson, Trans.). Éditions du Seuil.