

THE STRUGGLE OF HERMENEUTICS IN THE FERTILE DESERT OF SUSPICION

ABSTRACT

This paper clarifies the concept of the “hermeneutics of suspicion”, improving our understanding of how suspicion and trust interact when interpreting oral, written or human texts. This is achieved in three stages. The Prefiguration stage contextualises the concept historically and discusses its development at various points in history. The Configuration stage critically examines Paul Ricoeur’s double hermeneutics of destruction and reconstruction. The reconfiguration stage is open-ended, with a couple of reflections on the ongoing ball-game relationship between the hermeneutics of suspicion and trust.

KEYWORDS

conflict of interpretations; hermeneutics of hearing; hermeneutics of suspicion; hermeneutics of trust; masters of suspicion; struggle

The aim of this article is to make the concept “hermeneutics of suspicion” intelligible. This will lead to a better understanding of the dialectical relationship between suspicion and trust, and their non-negligible interplay in today’s world. Clarifying the concept requires an understanding of its historical context, in other words, a re-view of how it emerged at different points in history, especially in the mid-twentieth century. This forms the first part of the paper, which I will refer to as the ‘Prefiguration’ stage. The second phase, the ‘Configuration’ stage, critically examines Paul Ricoeur’s “hermeneutics of destruction” and “hermeneutics of reconstruction”. Ricoeur refers to this as a “struggle”. The third and final part of the paper, the ‘Refiguration’ stage, concludes with a couple of reflections.¹

I PREFIGURATION

The term “hermeneutics of suspicion” has been misinterpreted, misunderstood, simplified, lost in translation and in interpretation. Various versions of the hermeneutics of suspicion are in circulation. To recover the original meaning of the expression, we need to make Husserl’s call our own: “Go back to the things themselves” (*zu den Sachen selbst*).

¹ Paul Ricoeur uses these three terms – “Prefiguration”, “Configuration”, “Refiguration” – in his theory of triple narrative mimesis. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

A. ETYMOLOGY OF THE WORD “SUSPICION”

The etymology of the noun “suspicion” is from the Anglo-Norman *suspecioun*, which corresponds to the Old French words *suspeçun*, *sospeçon* (“mistrust”; “suspicion”). It refers to the the “act of suspecting”, “unverified conjecture of wrongdoing”, “mistrust”, “distrust”.

While all above meanings are related to trust in some way – whether that be a lack of trust, a suspension of trust or a negation of trust – it is interesting to note that, in other Indo-European languages, words for ‘suspicion’ tend to be derived from words for ‘think’ or ‘look’, with prefixes denoting ‘under’ or ‘behind’. Examples include the Greek *hypopsia* (*hypo* ‘under’ + *opsis* ‘sight’), *hyponoia* (*hypo* ‘under’ + *noein* ‘to think’); Lettish *aizduomas* (*aiz* ‘behind’ + *duomat* ‘to think’); Russian *podozrenie* (Slavic *podu* ‘under’ + Old Church Slavonic *zireti* ‘see’, ‘look’); Dutch *achterdocht* (*achter* ‘behind’+ *denken* ‘to think’); German *Hintergedanken* (*hinter* behind, after + *gedenken* to think).

What often comes up is the notion of thinking behind; that is, suspicion contains within it this meaning of thinking behind something; or seeing under; or looking under. This implies that suspicion compels us to see beyond what is literal, present or evident to the eye. There is something more; something behind. Some thinking behind is called for.

Therefore, suspicion does not only mean a lack of trust, disbelief or doubt; but also the necessity of looking beyond what is evident.

B. HISTORICAL ROUTING OF THE TERM “HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION”

The expression “*maîtres du soupçon*” (masters of suspicion) is attributed to Ricoeur. He is thought to have first used it in his book *De l'interprétation. Essai sur Freud* published in 1965.² What I want to highlight here is that this expression predates Ricoeur’s work on Freud.

Ricoeur uses the expression « *maîtres du soupçon* » in his lecture « Démystification de l’accusation » during the colloque Castelli in Rome from 7-12 January 1965 on « Démythisation et morale »,³ where interestingly Raymond Panikkar too participated. However, the most interesting part is that, in his paper *Le Conflit des herméneutiques: Epistémologie des interprétations* presented at the *Société de symbolisme* in 1963,⁴ Ricoeur refers to Marx, Nietzsche and Freud as “the three great masters of modern hermeneutics” (« *les trois grands maîtres de l'herméneutique moderne* »). Ricoeur continued to use this description – « *maîtres du soupçon* » – in his latter works. The paper

² Though published in 1965, the book was completed at least six months prior to this date. Paul Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation. Essai sur Freud* (Paris : Seuil, Coll. « L’ordre philosophique », 1965).

³ Enrico Castelli, *Démythisation et morale : Actes du colloque organisé par le Centre international d’études humanistes et par l’Institut d’études philosophiques de Rome*, Rome, 7-12 janvier 1965, Numéro 5 (Paris : Editions Mouton, Aubier, 1965).

⁴ The edited version of the talk is found in: Paul Ricoeur, « Le conflit des herméneutiques : épistémologie des interprétation », *Cahiers Internationaux de symbolisme*, 1/1 (1963) : 152-184.

was later re-edited and printed as parts of certain texts in his book *Conflict of Interpretations*.⁵ However, the original text of this talk is in the archives of Ricoeur, the Fonds Ricoeur.

But was Ricoeur the first to use this expression, or was he the only one?

Michel Foucault, a fellow French philosopher and contemporary of Ricoeur, whose work focuses on the self, sexuality, madness, relationship between power and discourse, has also used the term “masters of suspicion”, which Ricoeur first introduced in 1963, as well as the expression “two kinds of suspicion”. However, Foucault’s approach differs from Ricoeur’s. While Foucault speaks of “two kinds of suspicion”, Ricoeur analyses “two great styles of hermeneutics” in his 1963 talk.

At the Round Table discussion held during the Seventh International Philosophical Colloquium in Royaumont, a suburb of Paris, from 4-8 July 1964, and which Ricoeur does not appear to have attended, Foucault presented a paper entitled “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx”. Note the order of the three names. Foucault puts Nietzsche first, followed by Freud and Marx. While Ricoeur, in all his references to the three, follows the chronological order and places them historically: Marx, Nietzsche, Freud. Perhaps Foucault did this because of the great influence of Nietzsche’s writings on his life and works.⁶

Foucault’s paper primarily focused on some of the interpretation techniques employed by Nietzsche, Freud and Marx. He begins by discussing his idea for an encyclopaedia of the history of interpretation techniques, from the Greek grammarians to the present day. He then states that, in at least Indo-European cultures, language has always given rise to two kinds of suspicions. Now, these two types of suspicion can already be found in ancient Greek literature.

The first suspicion is that language conceals. What it says is not necessarily what it means (“*le langage ne dit pas exactement ce qu’il dit*”). Nor does it say what it really means. The meaning one grasps, which manifests itself immediately, “is perhaps in reality only a lesser meaning [*moindre sens*] that shields, restrains, and despite everything transmits another meaning, the meaning ‘underneath it’ [*d’en dessous*].”⁷ Examples of this are allegory and *hyponoia*. Rather than the literal meaning, there is a hidden or deeper meaning of the text, perhaps discovered through careful reading.

The second suspicion that language gives rise to is that there are non-verbal articulations, that go beyond verbal language. There are many other things in the world that speak without verbal: “After all, it might be that nature, the sea, rustling trees, animals, faces, masks, crossed swords all

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations. Essays in Hermeneutics* (Series: Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy), trans. of *Le conflit des interprétations. Essais d’herméneutique* by several translators with an introduction by the editor D. Ihde (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern Press, 1974).

⁶ The paper that Foucault read was published as “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,” in *Nietzsche, Cahiers du Royaumont* (Paris: Les Editions du Minuit, 1964):183-92. It was reprinted in: Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx”, in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy*, ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, (Albany: SUNY, 1990): 59-67.

⁷ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx”: 59.

speak. Perhaps there is some language articulating itself in a way that would not be verbal. This would be, if you wish, very crudely, the *semainon* of the Greeks.”⁸

A system of interpretation is needed, along with its associated approaches, techniques, and methods, due to the suspicion that: 1) language has more meaning than is apparent, and 2) language exists beyond language itself. An example of this would be a rainbow. This ‘language beyond language’, which I call the ‘*extramuros*’ of language, or ‘surplus language’, the ‘more’, also speaks to and challenges us. To use Ricoeur’s expression, I would say that these *extramuros* languages give food for thought. According to Gadamer, there is truth outside of method, including in art. Has the innocent smile of a child not captivated us? Has the symphony of crashing waves not stirred a primal longing within us that transcends us?

Aware of the game of hide-and-seek that language plays, Foucault points out that every century has brought forth its own techniques of interpretation. In the nineteenth century, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud developed new interpretative techniques that had a “shock effect”, disturbing people and placing them “in an uncomfortable situation”. Perhaps, in Kantian terms, these new methods woke people of the twentieth century from their dogmatic slumber. According to Foucault, these new interpretative techniques put us “in an uncomfortable situation, since these techniques of interpretation concern ourselves: since we interpret, we interpret ourselves according to these techniques.”⁹ Furthermore, as we use these same methods to interpret the works of the three thinkers who gave us these methods, “we are always returned in a perpetual play of mirrors”.¹⁰

Foucault identifies four characteristics of modern hermeneutics:

- 1) depth: profundity;
- 2) essential incompleteness of interpretation: interpretation is never final. It is an ongoing, unending process of correction, and the birth of new interpretations;
- 3) this essential incompleteness is due to the fact that an interpretation is always fragmented, non-originary, *with the capstone in yet another interpretation*;
- 4) *the non-originary of interpretation* implies the obligation to interpret and correct endlessly.

Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche are masters of suspicion not because they questioned the ideas of their time, but because of their concept of depth and profundity, and the unfinished nature of their work, which always calls for another beginning and interpretation *ad nauseam*. Thus, Freud’s subconscious is limitless, which leads Ricoeur in *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*¹¹ to identify the subconscious with the unlimited. Marx’s profundity takes the form of “platitude”, of banality that the bourgeoisie hold for money, capital, labour, and value. In Nietzsche, profundity is evident: “There is in the works of Nietzsche a critique of ideal depth, the depth of consciousness that he denounces as an invention of philosophers. This depth would be a pure, interior search for truth. Nietzsche shows

⁸ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx”: 59.

⁹ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx”: 61.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx”: 61.

¹¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature. The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (Series: Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy), trans. and introduction by E.V. Kohak of *Le volontaire et l’involontaire*, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern Press, 1966).

how depth implies resignation, hypocrisy, the mask. It is necessary, therefore, that the interpreter descend, that he be, the good excavator of the underworld”.¹²

It is “above all in the works of Nietzsche and Freud, and to a lesser degree in those of Marx, that we see delineated this experience [this never-ending character of interpretation], which I believe to be so important for modern hermeneutics, that the further one goes in interpretation, the closer one approaches at the same time an absolutely dangerous region where interpretation is not only going to find its points of no return but where it is going to disappear itself as interpretation, bringing perhaps the disappearance of the interpreter himself.”¹³

If we follow Foucault’s thinking, there is nothing new under the sun. The suspicion that language cannot be trusted, that it does not reveal everything, and that it reveals less than we think it does, dates back to classical times. The same applies to the second suspicion: that there is language outside of spoken or written discourse. We see this in allegory.

In his 1984 article “The Hermeneutics of Suspicion,”¹⁴ Gadamer recognises Nietzsche, the Counter-Enlightenment philosopher as the ‘inaugurator’ of the school of suspicion. It was continued in the critique of ideology of Marx with its struggle for power and dominance, followed by the Freudian psychoanalysis. Gadamer rejects both the critique of ideology and psychoanalysis as interpretative methods, partly because of the asymmetrical relationship and the unequal standing of the interpreter and the text. Thus, a psychoanalyst is in a superior position to the patient by virtue of his mastery of the situation. He knows the techniques of interpretation and is therefore unable to engage with the patient on an equal footing.

Scientific interpretation, i.e., the methodology of interpretation, especially of art and poetry, is too invasive due to its objectivising attitude. It violently rips open to uncover what is veiled. It is intrusive, unmasking too much in blinding/glaring light (*überhellen*), until there is nothing left to mask. Would I be wrong in saying that, in the process, scientific interpretation has trespassed on sacred ground with sandaled feet?

Interestingly, Nietzsche also uses the veiling-unveiling metaphor, and its associated danger of too much light: “unveil, uncover, to put into bright light whatever is kept concealed for good reasons... we no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn; we have lived too much to believe this. Today we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, or to be present at everything, or to understand and ‘know’ everything.”¹⁵ For Nietzsche, Friedrich Schleiermacher, is literally the ‘veil maker’ – from the German *Schleier*, ‘veil’, and *machen*, ‘to make’ – which was, according to Nietzsche, perfectly suited to a German idealist.¹⁶

¹² Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx”: 62.

¹³ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx”: 63.

¹⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” *Man and World*, no.17 (1984): 313-23.

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. and commentary by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974): 8.

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo. How One Becomes What One Is*, §3, trans. Walter Kaufmann of *Ecce homo: Wie man wird, was man ist* (New York: Vintage, 1967).

However, the history of the “masters of suspicion” does not end here. Freud mentions two others (apart from himself), who proved that the self is not master of its own self. Who are these two other “masters of suspicion”? They are Copernicus and Darwin.

In his *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (delivered as lectures in 1915-1917, and first translated into English in 1920), Freud writes:

Humanity, in the course of time, has had to endure from the hands of science two great outrages against its naïve self love. The first was when humanity discovered that our earth was not the center of the universe, but only a tiny speck in a world-system hardly conceivable in its magnitude. This is associated in our minds with the name “Copernicus,” although Alexandrian science had taught much the same thing. The second occurred when biological research robbed man of his apparent superiority under special creation, and rebuked him with his descent from the animal kingdom, and his ineradicable animal nature. This re-valuation, under the influence of Charles Darwin, Wallace and their predecessors, was not accomplished without the most violent opposition of their contemporaries. But the third and most irritating insult is flung at the human mania of greatness by present-day psychological research, which wants to prove to the “I” that it is not even master in its own home, but is dependent upon the most scanty information concerning all that goes on unconsciously in its psychic life. We psychoanalysts were neither the first, nor the only ones to announce this admonition to look within ourselves. It appears that we are fated to represent it most insistently and to confirm it by means of empirical data which are of importance to every single person.¹⁷

The great master of suspicion, who ripped the self from its nest of security and revealed that it dwells in an unfathomable chasm of interpretations, has enough self-belief to claim that it was his psychological research that delivered the third and bitterest blow to humanity!

Have I reached the end of my ferreting? Well, my work would be incomplete if I failed to mention Emil du Bois-Reymond, a German physician and physiologist who described Copernicus and Darwin as deflators of human self-regard. The fact is that Freud was inspired by du Bois-Reymond’s writings on the limits and potential of science, and on the limitations of human reason.

One final word, that of Ricoeur’s. Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud were not the only masters of suspicion. In a 1988 interview,¹⁸ Ricoeur added another name to his list: Ludwig Feuerbach, the German philosopher and anthropologist whose book *The Essence of Christianity* provided a critique of Christianity in particular and religion in general.¹⁹ In fact, both Nietzsche and Marx were influenced by Feuerbach.

II

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (edited and published by PDF BooksWorld): 250-251.

¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, « J’attends la renaissance », Entretien (propos recueillis par Joël Roman et Etienne Tassin), dans Jacques Message, Joël Roman, Étienne Tassin (dir.), *À quoi pensent les philosophes ?* (Paris, *Autrement revue*, Coll. « Autrement », n°102, novembre 1988) :174-183.

¹⁹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (London: John Chapman, 1854).

CONFIGURATION

What did Ricoeur mean by the term ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’? Did he imply doubt, questioning, distrust, critique, scepticism, or reflection? Or did he intend to convey something else?

In *Le Conflit des herméneutiques: Epistémologie des interprétations* Ricoeur argues that, in our meditation on symbols, we must constantly reconcile within ourselves the struggle between two opposing hermeneutics: 1) a hermeneutics of reconstruction and recollection, which restores meaning, and 2) a hermeneutics of destruction, which demystifies meaning and is probably necessarily destructive, akin to a Puritanical approach to symbols.

Hermeneutics of reconstruction and recollection (“remythification”) requires the interpreter to be willing and attentive when listening to and engaging with the text. This involves being receptive without prejudice, and absorbing as much as possible in order to restore meaning to the text. It implies highlighting meanings that are present in the narrator’s narrative (face value). The primary trait of this hermeneutics is mindful listening. Ricoeur calls it the “hermeneutics of hearing” (*herméneutique de l’écoute*).²⁰ This hermeneutics adheres to Husserl’s call for a return to things themselves (*zu den Sachen selbst*). Rather than explaining, it seeks to describe, revealing meaning rather than discussing causes and functions. This kind of hermeneutics is guided by trust and faith, as well as good will to allow the symbols to speak.

In the second kind of hermeneutics – the hermeneutics of destruction, with its demystification of meaning – there is wariness and an unwillingness to trust the symbol. The symbol has obscured the real and the interpreter is doubtful. There is a need to decipher the narrative and get to its roots, a process which often uproots the person from the narrative and gives rise to a new one. The end result is liquidation. All three masters of suspicion advocated and practised this second kind of hermeneutics. All three viewed consciousness as false to one extent or another, believing that something more profound lay hidden and could only be understood through critique and reductive interpretation. Destructive hermeneutics requires training to understand hidden meanings. Biblical exegesis, for example, requires specific methods and approaches to interpretation, while psychological analysis demands particular interpretative tools.

According to Ricoeur both tasks – demystification and remythification – must be tackled simultaneously.

In both kinds of hermeneutics, the role of the interpreter is what matters. And it is this role that distinguishes between them. Can the interpreter listen to the text, let it speak and bring forth its meanings? Does the interpreter trust the narrator’s account? Is the interpreter keen to discover meanings that lie in the depths of the subconscious? Does the interpreter go beyond literal meanings and try to clarify faithfully? Is the aim to decode the meanings with minimal presumption and

²⁰ For an interesting study on hearing and listening and their role in philosophical and biblical hermeneutics see: Jean Greisch, *Entendre d’une autre oreille. Les enjeux philosophiques de L’herméneutique biblique* (Paris : Bayard, Coll. « Bible et Philosophie », 2006).

distortion? Is there empathy? Or is there a desire to know more than the participant and impose this knowledge on the participant?

From the outset, language is distorted and reveals more than it intends. It is polysemic. This touches on the first of Foucault's suspicions regarding language. However, it is not only language that is distorted; consciousness is too.

All three "masters of suspicion" introduced a new art of interpretation. They revealed to the world types of deception. They all intended to view consciousness primarily as false consciousness. All three returned to Cartesian doubt. Things are doubtful; things are not as they appear. However, for Descartes, the one thing that withstood doubt was consciousness. Now, with these three, we are taught to doubt consciousness itself. Nevertheless, they are "not masters of scepticism". In the Heideggerian sense, they are "destroyers", because every destruction is a new beginning, and a foundation for something new.

All three "masters of suspicion" distrusted immediate consciousness because they perceived it as a form of false consciousness. Through his writings on alienation and class struggles, Marx sought to demonstrate that freeing the thought process is vital to freeing labour. Nietzsche's analyses of the will to power, the Superman, the eternal return, Dionysius and so on were in fact a conscious attempt to empower the individual, rather than deceiving oneself with false humility. Freud desired to free his patients so that they could live better lives once the hidden meanings in their subconscious had been revealed to them:

What is essential is that all three create with the means at hand, with and against the prejudices of their times, a mediate science of meaning, irreducible to the immediate consciousness of meaning. What all three attempted, in different ways, was to make their 'conscious' methods of deciphering coincide with the 'subconscious' work of ciphering which they attributed to the will to power, to social being, to the unconscious psychism.²¹

Ricoeur recalls one of the earliest sobriquets for psychoanalysis: "healing through consciousness". Guile is thus met by double guile.²² Can we call this the homeopathic principle?

The present always configures the narration of the past. The meanings of past events become evident, gain new significance and insight, in the process of retelling. Most often than not, a new story is created. Thus, the past is rewritten and reconstructed through narration because narration is always retrospective and is interpretation. In this interpretative process, the stories told would take on a life of their own, partly due to the distancing and alienation in time between the events that happened and the narration.

These two seemingly conflicting interpretations actually share a profound unity. These two styles of interpretation converge on the inexhaustible nature of symbols. This nature itself testifies that one can never finish interpreting; that no single interpretation can claim to have the final word, and that we must accept that our interpretations are always limited and often irreconcilable. It is a dialectic of suspicion and trust with oneself, between oneself and the other, and between different

²¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970): 57.

²² Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*: 57.

cultures and civilizations. This is not in the same as Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations,²³ but rather a dialectic of consent and affirmation of the other. It is only through this ongoing dialectic, this ongoing ball game of suspicion and trust that we have decided to continue playing – in spite of, and because of – that prevent conflict and a war of hermeneutics.

III

REFIGURATION: SOME THINGS LEFT UNSAID

A. The finitude of human knowing

Plato affirms this intrinsic characteristic of knowledge in his *Letters* (7).²⁴ It is also endorsed by the philosophy of human finitude, as espoused by Gadamer, Derrida, Ricoeur, and Levi-Strauss. This limitedness applies not only to texts, but also to oneself. A hermeneutical critique of the maxim "Know thyself", inscribed on one of the columns of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, reveals that the injunction itself conceals the limits of self-knowledge. Interestingly, this is only the first of the three entrance maxims. The second reads "Nothing in excess". I think the fulcrum on which the dialectic of suspicion and trust (of critique and conviction) pivots is this second, lesser-known, and more obscure maxim: "Nothing in excess". When it comes to hermeneutics, an excess or dearth of suspicion or of trust is inappropriate. The same applies to knowledge.

B. Masters of Suspicion – « *Les maîtres du soupçon* »

In French, the word '*maître*' holds not only the meaning of "master", but also that of "teacher". The Sanskrit word '*guru*', translated into French as '*maître*', means 'weighty' or 'grave', and is therefore used to denote an 'elder', 'teacher', or 'mentor'. It is derived from '*gu*' referring to 'ignorance', 'darkness'; and '*ru*' meaning 'remover'. A *guru* is therefore someone who removes or eliminates ignorance / darkness.

Thus, 'master' or '*maître*' does not necessarily refer to someone who has mastered the art of something, of anything. In our context, it could refer to someone who has mastered the art of suspicion (or trust). After all, 'master' could also mean 'teacher of suspicion': someone who guides us in asking the right questions and not taking meanings for granted; someone who teaches us to pause before leaping and not to be naive or gullible. They guide us in mastering the art of creative criticism, which entails neither breaking a bruised reed nor quenching a faintly burning wick. These masters practise Socratic *maieutics* helping us birth meaning (justice) in trust (faithfulness).²⁵

²³ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

²⁴ Plato, Seventh Letter, in Plato's Seventh and Eighth Letters, ed. R. S. Bluck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), trans. W. Hamilton, in *Plato: Phaedrus and Letters VII and VIII* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

²⁵ Isaiah 42:3; Matthew 12:20.

This is because our historical condition as fallible and recognising humans teaches us to be conscious of the fragility and limits of knowledge. If interpreting and understanding is a capability,²⁶ this capability to correctly interpret and understand the Text (whether written, oral, or human) is fundamentally a figure of anxious-worry. We are caught in the Fowlers snare of anxious-worry: of being misunderstood; of having misinterpreted, or misinterpreting; of breaking instead of healing. We never let go. Worried and anxious, we tread on the hamster wheel in this unending quest to grasp the right meaning of words, texts, contexts; to capture the correct meaning of the worlds of the text: behind, before, and within. But if we let go of this worry, become like little children filled with suspicious-trust (another oxymoron), we will become masters of suspicion and trust. And we must do this as Judeo-Christian philosophers. Because the Lord of the hermeneutics of suspicion taught us that we must “consider how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet, not even Solomon in all his glory was adorned like one of these.”²⁷

So, the struggle is over. We are in the embrace of infinite care, freed from anxious-worry like the lilies of the field, and the birds of the air, who neither spin nor labour. Like Jacob the heel-grabber in the arms of *Ish*, depicted in Rembrandt’s painting. At the ford of Jabbok, the struggle is over. *Ish* has touched Jacob’s hip socket and wrenched it when he realised that he could not overpower Jacob. Day has broken. And Jacob has wrestled all night and received his blessing: henceforth, his name will be that of a people. Israel. A name which means “struggled with God and humans and prevailed”.²⁸

We are all Jacobs, wrestling with the *Ish* of Texts, at fords that are crossroads of multiple interpretations, where suspicion and trust converge and diverge; struggling to glean the blessing of understanding. We are broken in the process; yet we hardly let go, until we return with a blessing, and a change in name that will become the name of a nation.

²⁶ Neither interpretation nor understanding feature in the list of capabilities presented by Ricoeur in his writings.

²⁷ Matthew 6:28; Luke 12:27.

²⁸ Genesis 32:22-32.

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