

The concept of "a hermeneutics of suspicion," or, for that matter, of "a hermeneutics of recollection" (Ricoeur) is, in my opinion, confused.

If "hermeneutics" is properly understood to mean either the praxis or the theory of interpretation and, more exactly, *critical* interpretation, then it has nothing to do with "suspicion," even though, in the case of critical interpretation, it may indeed have something to do with methodical skepticism about the validity of all un- or pre-critical interpretations *as interpretations*. Any interpretation, including any critical interpretation, properly so-called, is distinguished by its "methodical abstraction" from any kind of validation, including critical validation, requiring transcendent norms, in the sense of norms going beyond what is said and meant in the *interpretandum* itself. But "suspicion," rightly understood, has to do precisely with such validation, in that to suspect something is to anticipate a possible result of validation, positive or negative, on slight evidence or without proof.

Thus the concept of "a hermeneutics of suspicion" confuses the same two distinct steps in critical appropriation—interpretation and validation—that are confused, according to Marxsen, in the concept of "a historical-critical exegesis." Just as exegesis is one thing, criticism of the results of exegesis, something else, so interpretation of something is one thing, suspicion of what it is interpreted to mean, something else.

1 February 1996