

From Suspicion to Affirmation: Paul Ricoeur and a Genetic Phenomenology of Ideology

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Abstract

This paper aims to shed light on the problem besetting ideology as established in the work of Paul Ricoeur. While the term ideology has tended to have negative connotations, Ricoeur argues that ideology also has a positive, integrative function in the realms of social transformation and cultural imagination. Thus, he questions the common connotation of ideology as an exclusively critical or negative term. Following Marx, Weber and Geertz, Ricoeur argues that ideology can be conceptualized in three ways: distortion, legitimation, and integration. For him, ideology has a function beyond dissimulation and legitimacy: that of maintaining group identity and group integration in society. Ricoeur calls his approach in the lectures a “regressive analysis of meaning,” an “attempt to dig under the surface of the apparent meaning to the more fundamental meanings,” and a “genetic phenomenology in the sense proposed by Husserl in his *Cartesian Mediations*” in order to recognize the claim of a concept which is at first sight merely a polemical tool. The first three sections of this paper investigate Ricoeur's account of ideology and his attempts to make the term more “honest” through his three conceptions of it: distortion, legitimation and integration. The conclusion summarizes the major themes articulated in those discussions, and suggests further directions to explore toward the positive conceptualizing of ideology.

Keywords: Paul Ricoeur, ‘conception of ideology’, ‘ideology and distortion’, ‘ideology and legitimation’, ‘ideology and integration’, suspicion, ‘hermeneutics of affirmation’.

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