Review of International Studies, Vol. 43, part 2, pp. 240–259. doi:10.1017/S0260210516000383
© British International Studies Association 2016
First published online 15 December 2016

Beyond the hermeneutics of suspicion in the critique of humanitarian intervention

Dimitrios E. Akrivoulis*
Assistant Professor, Department of Balkan, Slavic, and Oriental Studies, University of Macedonia

Abstract

Realist and Marxist critiques of humanitarian intervention are distinctively materialistic in scope. The IR literature has already described this scepticism as a 'hermeneutics of suspicion', a term associated with the work of Paul Ricoeur, which aims to unearth the intervenors' material and geopolitical interests hypocritically hidden behind the pretext of humanitarianism. The article first notes the decontextualised misappropriations of the term as an iconic and omnipotent instrument of doubt, as well as the limitations of the social constructivist response on the matter. By contextualising Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion as developed in his life work, the article then calls for an extension of critique from a hermeneutics of suspicion to a hermeneutics of naïveté. Applied in the critique of the ideology of humanitarian intervention, the article thus calls for a shift of focus from the examination of the distorting (Marxism, realism) and legitimising (social constructivism) functions of this ideology to its integrating function that has allowed the evocation of humanitarian principles as international norms, and uncritically vindicates this arrangement. The article proposes that this hermeneutical detour could allow critique to proceed to a greater analytical depth, opening up a set of critical questions.

Keywords

Hermeneutics of Suspicion; Hermeneutics of Naïveté; Paul Ricoeur; Marxism; Realism; Social Constructivism; Humanitarian Intervention

> Critical inquiry must be distanced … from what Paul Ricoeur calls the 'hermeneutics of suspicion', the recovery of an underlying truth that is masked by everyday understandings.
> Richard K. Ashley (1987)[1]

> I do believe you think what now you speak.
> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Introduction

Traditional critique of humanitarian intervention is distinctively materialistic. More often than not, criticism echoes either: (a) the realist thesis that humanitarian intervention is but a modern euphemism for the perennial drive of states to serve their material or geopolitical interests

---

*Correspondence to: Dr Dimitrios E. Akrivoulis, Department of Balkan, Slavic, and Oriental Studies, University of Macedonia, Egnatias 156, 54636, Thessaloniki, Greece. Author's email: dakrivoulis@uom.gr

[1] Richard K. Ashley, 'The geopolitics of geopolitical space: Toward a critical social theory of international politics', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 12:4 (1987), p. 408.

abroad; or (b) the Marxist[2] focus on the hidden interests that the ideational variables underpinning humanitarian intervention[3] conceal or distort thus serving the materialistic expediencies of global capital.[4] In this respect, the essential difference between International Relations (IR) realist and Marxist critiques mostly concerns the role of the state in a clearly hypocritical practice. Their essential similarity is one of method: an alleged 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that seeks to uncloak the materialistic foundations of a distorting ideology used as a pretext for action.[5] Here lies the core of the problem: the acclaimed moral basis of humanitarian intervention is so radically contested, that there is no space left for further critical reflection. Evidently, when this moral basis is rejected as irrelevant or hypocritical, when moral claims fail the lie detector's polygraph, theory is limited to the mere deciphering of propaganda techniques.

The association of a so-called 'hermeneutics of suspicion' with realist and Marxist readings of humanitarian intervention implies that both these theories are regarded as theoretical manifestations of the subject's critical positioning toward the world of politics; sceptical predispositions toward the limits of rationality and the role of morality in a world defined by power relations and the perennial pursue of power maximisation. According to this reading, the role of theory is to bring to surface these power relations, the interests and the hypocrisy characterising political discourse and practice. I hold that this association is based on a generalising and rather oversimplified reading of the hermeneutics of suspicion, a term associated with the work of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur.

Indeed, a carefully appropriated hermeneutics of suspicion may be useful as a first-level critique. It fails however alone to allow this critique to proceed to greater depth. This delving may be better served, this article argues, by an extension of critique from a hermeneutics of suspicion to what will be discussed here, following Paul Ricoeur, as a hermeneutics of naïveté. Explicating this analytical move presupposes, of course, a clarification of what the hermeneutics of suspicion and naïveté entail in the first place, as conceptually developed in the age-long work of Ricoeur and informing various aspects of his multifaceted philosophy.

In what follows, the article will first examine the self-acclaimed heritage of 'hermeneutics of suspicion' in realist and Marxist critiques of humanitarian intervention, further noting the limited scope of respective responses within social constructivism. Contextualising the hermeneutics of suspicion within the development of Ricoeur's own thought, the article will suggest that realism and Marxism misappropriate the term as an omnipotent critique that discloses the hidden, true Reality of international politics. Drawing from relevant aspects of Ricoeur's work on the relation between language and reality and the social functions of ideology, the article will demonstrate the analytical limits set by this misappropriation and the realist/Marxist emphasis on distortion, as well as the still limited scope of the social constructivist emphasis on the legitimising function of the ideology of humanitarian intervention. Finally, the article will introduce how an extension of a carefully appropriated hermeneutics of suspicion to a 'hermeneutics of naïveté' could expand the scope of our critical horizon beyond the contours of existing critique.

---

[2] I refer here to those approaches within IR Marxism that adhere to an exclusively materialistic – and thus fragmentary – reading of Marx's own work.

[3] For reasons of economy, I will refer to these ideational variables as 'the ideology of humanitarian intervention'.

[4] The emphasis being on the materialistic critique of humanitarian intervention, this article will not discuss the liberal narrative that reads the historical development of international politics as the progressive development of 'universal morality'. More often than not, liberalism visualises humanitarianism as an orange that has been gradually peeled until its inside grape is fully revealed. The deep resonance of the revelatory, almost messianic elements of this argument are hard to pass unnoticed, further reinforcing the naturalisation of this process as a gradual self-realisation of 'humanity'. Paradoxically, this liberal narrative eventually conceals far more than what it promises to reveal. In a way, it is supressing and concealing even more than what the alleged 'hermeneutics of suspicion' of realism and Marxism has excluded from deliberation. Given the above, and although many ideational criticisms within liberalism emphasise the unilateral, materialistic, and selective scope of interventionist practices on purportedly humanitarian grounds, the liberal narrative on the matter needs separate, detailed examination within the scope herewith proposed.

[5] This parallel examination of realism and Marxism does not ignore, of course, their notable differences, let alone the individual differences within these rich traditions, which are unavoidably treated here in a rather schematic manner. See Andrew Linklater, *Beyond Realism and Marxism: Critical Theory and International Relations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990).

Although the hermeneutics of suspicion and naïveté will be herewith discussed by reference to this particular critique, the argumentative emphasis of this article is not centred on humanitarian intervention *per se* but on the misappropriation of the hermeneutics of suspicion in its critique and the usefulness of extending interpretation to a hermeneutics of naïveté. Given that humanitarian intervention has been so heavily criticised as a hypocritical state practice, a mask to the face of interest, this critique serves as an apt analytical framework for better explicating this hermeneutical detour, which may well extend beyond the scope of humanitarian intervention.

The realist/Marxist 'hermeneutics of suspicion' and the constructivist response

In a rather unsystematic manner, the literature has already associated IR realism and Marxism with 'hermeneutics of suspicion' both in their criticism[6] and in their defence. In the case of Marxism, this connection may seem self-evident, given that Marx has been first described by Paul Ricoeur as one of the three 'masters of suspicion' (along with Freud and Nietzsche).[7] Even in the case of realism, such an association also appears to be almost commonsensical. Duncan Bell, for example, expressively relates the hermeneutics of suspicion with a particular 'radical understanding of realism' that, unlike other more conservative or liberal 'realist orientations', does not tie realism 'to any particular political project, but instead focuses chiefly on unmasking power relations, and exposing self-interest, hypocrisy, and folly, whether in domestic or international politics'. Discussed as an aspect of Hans Morgenthau's approach, Bell defines this critical realist variant as 'a *sceptical* disposition about the scope of reason and the influence of morality in a world in which power, and the relentless pursuit of power, is a pervasive feature. It can be seen as an expression of the "hermeneutics of suspicion".'[8]

---

[6] Typical is Richard Ashley's opening quote. See also Jim George and David Campbell, 'Patterns of dissent and the celebration of difference: Critical social theory and International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34:3 (1990), p. 281; Richard Shapcott, *Justice, Community, and Dialogue in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 63; Milja Kurki and Colin Wight, 'International Relations and social science', in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (eds), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 23; Richard Devetak, 'Postmodernism', in Scott Burchill et al., *Theories of International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 166. Of course, the hermeneutics of suspicion has been used in various contexts and to serve diverse, even conflicting ends. For example, Heikki Patomäki identifies such a hermeneutics with scepticism and Derrida's deconstruction, whereas Amit Ron uses Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of suspicion' to re-examine the public-elite relation during peace process. On a different strand, Francis Beer and Robert Hariman recognise in what they define as 'post-realism' an embrace of a hermeneutics of suspicion, to the extent that it 'challenges the suspension of disbelief' and 'looks behind claims to reason, morality, or legitimacy for fixed motives, alliances of mutual self-interest, and the like. In its most radical form, it presumes strong linkages among forms of domination or authority.' Heikki Patomäki, 'Is a global identity possible? The relevance of big history to Self-Other relations', *Refugee Watch*, 36:13 (2010), p. 57; Amit Ron, 'Peace negotiations and peace talks: the peace process in the public sphere', *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 14:1 (2009), pp. 1–16; Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman, 'Realism and rhetoric in International Relations', in Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman (eds), *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996), p. 21.

[7] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 32.

Stefano Guzzini identifies a similar hermeneutics in what he describes as 'anti-apparent realism'. Drawing from Norberto Bobbio's distinction between a conservative realism (which opposes the 'ideal') and a critical realism (which opposes the 'apparent'), he describes the latter as 'an attitude more akin to the political theories of suspicion. It looks at what is hidden behind the smokescreen of current ideologies, putting the allegedly self-evident into the limelight of criticism.' 'Anti-apparent realism' shares with its 'anti-ideal' variant 'a reluctance to treat beautiful ideas as what they claim to be. But it is more sensible to their ideological use, revolutionary as well as conservative. Whereas anti-ideal realism defends the status quo, anti-apparent realism questions it. It wants to unmask existing power relations.' Guzzini then discusses E. H. Carr as a typical example of a realist that has oscillated between these two versions of realism. Carr, for Guzzini, has been a 'strong critic of the status quo, not because it was wrongly led into a kind of utopianism, but because the ideological clothing used by the great powers of the day … brandishing an apparent "harmony of interests", masked their power and responsibility'.[9]

Besides Carr and Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr has been also praised as one of those thinkers who introduced a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' to the analysis of international politics. Robin Lovin, for example, presents Niebuhr's 'hermeneutics of suspicion' as a more advanced version, because although it 'draws on both Marxian and Freudian interpretations', it 'corresponds to neither of them. Niebuhr applies his criticism more consistently to all parties in social controversy because his analysis rests in the end on a theological insight.'[10]

This self-acclaimed heritage of 'hermeneutics of suspicion' bequeathed by the realist founding fathers permeates contemporary (neo)realist[11] readings of humanitarian intervention. The constraints of international anarchy leave no room for moral considerations.[12] Humanitarian concerns may come forth only when materialistically or geopolitically defined state interests are at stake, and to the extent that the international balance of power is not threatened. Alternatively, humanitarian intervention becomes 'disruptive', sparking antagonism among the intervenor(s) and all others whose interests are best served by the preservation of the status quo.[13] In a nutshell, humanitarian intervention is either a hypocritical or a failed policy option, or both, if the intervenor's core interests are at not at stake.

---

[8] Bell quotes here Brian Leiter's 'powerful naturalist reading' of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, listed as 'an exemplar of realism in moral and political theory'. Duncan Bell, 'Introduction: Under an empty sky: Realism and political theory', in Duncan Bell (ed.), *Political Thought and International Relations: Variations on a Realist Theme* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 16, 24, emphasis added; Brian Leiter, 'The hermeneutics of suspicion: Recovering Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud', in Brian Leiter (ed.), *The Future of Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 76. See also Brian Leiter, 'Classical realism', *Philosophical Issues*, 11:1 (2001), pp. 244–67. Of interest here is also Richard Ned Lebow's reference to the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' in his reading of the texts of Thucydides, Clausewitz, and Morgenthau in an attempt to 'discover their intended meanings and their authors' intentions'. Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 57.

[9] Stefano Guzzini, 'The enduring dilemmas of realism in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 10:4 (2004), p. 553. See also Stefano Guzzini, 'The different worlds of realism in International Relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 30:1 (2001), pp. 111–21. See, however, Michael Cox (ed.), *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000). On this fragmented reading of Carr's 'harmony of interests' I will return below.

[10] Robin W. Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 8.

[11] Christopher Layne, 'Kant or cant: the myth of the democratic peace', *International Security*, 19:2 (1994), p. 11; Kenneth Waltz, 'Realist thought and neo-realist theory', in Robert L. Rothstein (ed.), *The Evolution of Theory*

In the case of IR Marxism, second, the strong emphasis on distortion renders once again its association with the hermeneutics of suspicion self-explanatory. Humanitarian intervention becomes relevant for Marxism mostly in the context of a systemic colonial competition among imperialist capitalist states and/or antagonising corporate capitalist interests, at least to the extent that the former serve the latter or, even, identify their national interests with the latter.[14] The emphasis (and the philosophical vaulting horse) here is either on Marx's thesis on the eventually beneficial outcome of this colonial competition facilitating the global transition to capitalism and then, inescapably, communism, or on Luxemburg's and Lenin's arguments that such a competition unavoidably leads to global war. This competitive and anarchic system is but a conscious product of the elite economic powers that profit from it.[15]

Moreover, the concept of sovereignty and its legal status is, for Marxists, less the outcome of a bottom-up process than one more dimension of a top-down imposition of hierarchy,[16] solidified by international law. In that sense, Marxist reservations to humanitarian intervention are not based on or go with claims for preserving the global inviolability of state sovereignty.

in International Relations: Essays in Honour of William T. R. Fox (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), p. 29.

[12] To a certain extent, a minor exception to this rule could be traced within neoclassical realism, calling for the examination of the role of ideational variables in the analysis of the systemic constraints placed upon decision-makers. See, for example, Colin Dueck, 'Neoclassical realism and the national interest: Presidents, domestic politics, and major military interventions', in Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (eds), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 133–69; Nicholas Kitchen, 'Systemic pressures and domestic ideas: a neoclassical realist model of grand strategy formation', *Review of International Studies*, 36:1 (2010), pp. 117–43. In the context of the present analysis, however, my major complaint with these approaches concerns their treatment of these ideational variables as having a one-way, bottom-up (hence, rather limited) impact on the foreign policy decisions of leaders. As will become more apparent below, this approach is too distant from the one attempted here which implies (against the level-of-analysis approach) that leaders are themselves embedded in the discourses and practices informed by the ideology of humanitarian intervention, in a way not too different from all other agents.

[13] Jennifer M. Welsh, 'Taking consequences seriously: Objections to humanitarian intervention', in Jennifer M. Welsh (ed.), *Humanitarian Intervention and International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 62; Colin Gray, 'No good deed shall go unpunished', *International Journal of Human Rights*, 4:3–4 (2000), pp. 302–6.

[14] Alex Callinicos, 'The ideology of humanitarian intervention', in Tariq Ali (ed.), *Masters of the Universe? NATO's Balkan Crusade* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 176; Ellen M. Wood, 'Kosovo and the new imperialism', in ibid., p. 192; James Tyner, *The Business of War: Workers, Warriors and Hostages in Occupied Iraq* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 32–3.

[15] Robert Cox, 'Social forces, states and world orders: Beyond International Relations theory', in Robert Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 204–54.

[16] Justin Rosenberg, *Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 14.

As to humanitarian intervention, the critique is essentially not too distant from that of realism's own. Irrespective of the policy options of states, their humanitarian arguments remain pretentious. States will resort to either sovereign inviolability as a pretext for inaction or, reversely, global morality as a pretext for intervention. The main goal remains indifferent to the sincere protection of and respect for human rights or sovereignty in the target state.[17] Whereas realists insist, however, that when states resort to a humanitarian rhetoric and/or foreign policy agenda, they either lie or simply fail to serve their true interests, Marxists stress that such options unequivocally serve as distortions.[18] The outcome though remains the same: any appeal to 'universal morality' or any other aspect of the ideology of humanitarian intervention is hypocritical; far from an internationally accepted norm informing state behaviour, this ideology is but a mask to the face of interest.

I hold that against their self-proclaimed theses the realist and Marxist critiques remain simply sceptical or even 'suspicious' in a sense different from that implicit in the hermeneutics of suspicion they allege to practice. Beyond their oversimplified readings of this hermeneutics and the critique of ideology as mere distortion – two themes that will be explicated below – this schematisation is evident even in the unproblematised association of the founding thinkers of realism with the hermeneutics of suspicion. The most notable case perhaps is found in E. H. Carr's seminal work, which is of special interest in the context of the present analysis.

Commenting on the 'harmony of interests' doctrine of liberal states, Carr claims that the legitimising exaltation of state interests to internationally recognised rules functioned 'as an ingenious moral device invoked, *in perfect sincerity*, by privileged groups in order to justify and maintain their dominant position'.[19] Extending his criticism toward this adaptation of ideas to concrete political aims, Carr indeed comments on the general tendency of states to ameliorate their political expeditions by way through universal dogmas: 'free trade' was but the paradise of the economically powerful; 'solidarity' and 'internationalism' were but the rhetoric of empire; and 'peace through law' was but the imposed perspective of those most favoured. Nevertheless, the core of Carr's charge is not that 'human beings fail to live up to their principles'. As he notes, 'it matters little that Wilson, who thought that the right was more precious than peace, and Briand, who thought that peace came even before justice, and Mr. Eden, who believed in collective security, failed themselves, or failed to induce their countrymen, to apply these principles consistently. What matters is that these supposedly absolute and universal principles were not principles at all, but the *unconscious reflections* of national policy based on a *particular interpretation* of national interest *at a particular time*.'[20]

---

[17] Janna Thompson, *Justice and World Order: A Philosophical Enquiry* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 6.

[18] Even when the emphasis is on the security considerations serving 'an already existing system of networked global liberal governance', Marxists note that representing humanitarian intervention as the 'virtuous cause' of the 'civilized' (most powerful) states, is but a euphemism for a carrot-and-stick system of punishment and reward directed to all those 'rogues' that 'defy the contour of political/ideological order advantageous to the hegemonic state'. Mark R. Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2001), p. 258; Diana Johnstone, 'NATO and the new world order', in Philip Hammond and Edward S. Herman (eds), *Degraded Capability: The Media and the Kosovo Crisis* (London: Pluto, 2000), p. 14; Mark R. Duffield and Nicholas Waddell, 'Securing humans in a dangerous world', *International Politics*, 43:1 (2006), p. 3.

[19] Edward H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 75, emphasis added.

[20] Ibid., p. 80, emphasis added.

Against those readings that insist to interpret this quote within the context of the 'ethical' dimensions of realism,[21] I read it as an exemplary demonstration of hermeneutics at work, yet one far more subtle than the misappropriated 'hermeneutics of suspicion' recognised by the literature. First of all, this quote reveals Carr's own influences by the turn-of-the-century tradition of idealist epistemology, as organised by Dilthey, Croce, Collingwood, Beard, Oakeshott and Becker, as well as further developed in Mannheim's work. Recognising these influences may allow us to better understand Carr's wider objections toward the distinction between fact and value, when he suggested that 'the belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which it is very hard to eradicate'.[22] As he interestingly suggests elsewhere in his manifold work, 'the writing of history, like any other form of human enquiry is a process of selection and interpretation intimately bound up with the preoccupations, preconceptions, and prejudices – what is more politely called the ideology – of the investigator. Ideology is the point where history and politics meet.'[23] Against, therefore, even to Nicholas Wheeler's most careful reading, Carr does not merely support that 'states are always able to create a legitimacy convenient to themselves'.[24] Carr rejects both the allegedly universal character of the idealist principles, and the objectively defined character of national interest. Instead, he focuses on how national interest is *interpreted* in a *historically and culturally specific* manner.

Yet, how is such a specific interpretation formed when it comes to the decision to intervene for humanitarian purposes? The answers offered so far on the matter by social constructivism are of interest. They fluctuate however between the options allowed by realist thought (use of force, rationality, etc.) and the prioritising of norms over power. In a (seemingly) bridging manner, Alex Wendt attempts to even unite the two opposites, while treating them as equally possible but mutually exclusive scenarios. According to Wendt, (mostly weak) states may be persuaded about the obligation to intervene for humanitarian purposes through either: (a) forceful conviction and power; (b) the rational choice that respecting those norms eventually serves their national interests; or (c) the acceptance of those norms as legal and valid. In this latter case, states do not follow norms in a calculating manner. To the contrary, they are rather easily convinced, since these norms have already redefined their identities and interests, thus guaranteeing their moral approval.[25] Wheeler places an even greater emphasis on the role of norms and how their acceptance affects the formulation of power relations and national interests. In other words, recognising the 'universal morality' thesis underpinning humanitarian intervention as an international norm determines eventually the behaviour even of the most powerful states.[26]

My complaint with this reasoning is that it still downgrades the processes of interpretation and meaning. Whereas this is more evident in Wendt's *Social Theory*, Wheeler's own emphasis on the role of ideas and norms in the conceptualisation of national interest stands on the antipode of the realist version and constitutes the other side of the same coin. This 'coin' is but a manifestation of an intrinsic tendency within (Western) thought to reduce almost any issue to a seemingly unsurpassable dualism, or, better, of an intrinsic inability to think in terms other than those set by such dualisms. If for Lévi-Strauss the emphasis of similar dualisms is placed on the mutual exclusion of the two conflicting terms,[27] or for Derrida on their hierarchical and axiological arrangement in antithetical terms (mind/body, idea/matter, etc.),[28] in our case the above dualism demonstrates a rather limited understanding of the processes of interpretation and of the creative power of meaning. It is founded, that is, on the belief that the subject's relation to political reality may be conceptualised *either* as discovery *or* as creation/construction.

---

[21] Ian Clark, *The Hierarchy of States: Reform and Resistance in the International Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 155; Jack Donnelly, 'The ethics of realism', in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 151. See, however, Thomas W. Smith, *History and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 51; Peter Wilson, 'E. H. Carr's The Twenty Years' Crisis: Appearance and reality in world politics', *Politik*, 12:4 (2009), pp. 21–5.

[22] Edward H. Carr, *What Is History?* (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 10.

[23] Edward H. Carr, 'The view from the arena', *The Times Literary Supplement* (7 March 1975), p. 246.

[24] Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 6.

[25] Alex Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 285–90.

[26] Wheeler, *Saving Strangers*, p. 7.

On the one hand, if this relation is one of discovery, then recognising a 'universal morality' as an international norm remains independent from the supposedly rational, value-free and objective process of conceptualising national interest. In this case, states are expected to intervene on humanitarian grounds only to the extent that this coincides, agrees, or simply does not conflict with their national interests (Marxism/realism). On the other hand, if this is a relation of creation, then the same recognition will reformulate the very content of national interest (social constructivism). I propose that this mutually exclusive binarism could be overcome through the 'creation-as-discovery' paradox introduced in the work of Paul Ricoeur. In the following section, I will explicate this point further while discussing the misappropriation of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion by existing IR critique.

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion and naïveté

As mentioned above, the hermeneutics of suspicion has been associated with the work of Paul Ricoeur.[29] It has been used, however, often decontextualised, in isolation from Ricoeur's overall work, misused as a synonym to cognitive scepticism,[30] and misappropriated as an iconic term describing the omnipotent practice of unearthing a hidden, true Reality.[31] This misappropriation mostly stems from confusing Ricoeur's own account of the hermeneutics of suspicion with his discussion of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche as the three 'masters of suspicion' in his seminal *Freud and Philosophy* (1970).[32]

---

[27] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 8.

[28] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 278–93.

[29] The intellectual breadth of Ricoeur's work is almost unparalleled. Still the literature of International Relations has rather failed to fully profit from his work. The reasons are many and diverse, the most important being perhaps his reluctance to overcome metaphysics. John Caputo's *Radical Hermeneutics*, for example, a book extensively quoted in the IR literature, only indirectly and symptomatically refers to Ricoeur, while the latter's 'critical' hermeneutics is left out from the radicalisation of hermeneutics. From the very beginning, Ricoeur is closely associated with Gadamer's conservative hermeneutics and thus suspect of 'blocking off' this radicalisation. John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 5, 149–50, 289, 302–3, fn. 18. Nevertheless, as Kearney observes, Caputo's omission of Ricoeur seems rather peculiar, especially since Ricoeur's later hermeneutic writing 'surmounts the conservative limits of Gadamerian hermeneutic of recollection' and represents 'a significant opening' to the direction opted for by Caputo: 'This omission is probably explicable in terms of Caputo's methodological intention to forge some kind of middle way between the conservative hermeneutics of Gadamer and the radical deconstruction of hermeneutics by Derrida. Ricoeur's medial position would no doubt have made this opposition less stark and less dramatic.' Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: From Husserl to Lyotard* (London: Harper Collins Academic, 1991), p. 205, fn. 26.

[30] In the context of the present analysis, scepticism is referred to here as a philosophical position about truth. Whereas scepticism is doubt of ideas, suspicion is doubt of the motives of people, including one's own. This conceptual clarification is necessary to avoid confusion, especially when scepticism is often used as a term in different analytical contexts as almost a synonym to suspicion.

Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche are there discussed by Ricoeur as masters (*maîtres*, teachers) of suspicion not because they were experts in the practice of suspicion, but because they 'taught us to unmask the tricks' of false consciousness[33] upsetting the Cartesian system of doubt.[34] Following a long tradition of suspicion that goes back to Montaigne and La Rochefoucauld,[35] all three represent 'three convergent procedures of demystification' of reality.[36] Their works however did not only aim at destructing established ideas, but at solidifying a new Reality, new objective, absolute truths compatible to each one's own cognitive framework. Due to its iconoclastic power, suspicion is indeed an important and powerful tool in challenging already accepted reality. Yet, as we shall see below, suspicion is not sufficient by itself, for Ricoeur.

Ricoeur's own early interest in suspicion was fuelled by a series of factors, including his phenomenological influences and objections to structuralism, his intellectual interest in human fallibility, and the *Zeitgeist* of suspicion in postwar France and abroad. During 1965–75,[37] Ricoeur explicated his own account of suspicion through the hermeneutics of suspicion introduced however as an inherently tensional/dialectical term. Although Ricoeur later abandoned his explicit references to the hermeneutics of suspicion, his antinomical understanding of the term is reflected all through his seventy years of work.[38] Read within the context of Ricoeur's overall work and his persistent emphasis on the dialectical tension between

---

[31] On the misappropriations of the term, see Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 1, 7. See also Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 143; Leiter, 'The hermeneutics of suspicion', pp. 74–105; Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 57; Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 145–6, 166. See however, Steven H. Clark, *Paul Ricoeur* (London: Routledge, 1990).

[32] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 32. Although the literature extensively quotes Ricoeur's *Freud and Philosophy* (1970) when referring to the hermeneutics of suspicion, the term is expressively first used by Ricoeur a year later in his preface to Don Ihde's analysis of Ricoeur's contribution. Paul Ricoeur, 'Foreword', in Don Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), pp. xiv, xvii.

[33] Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 18.

[34] 'I call suspicion the act of dispute exactly proportional to the expressions of false consciousness. The problem of false consciousness is the object, the correlative of the act of suspicion. Out of it is born the quality of doubt, a type of doubt which is totally new and different from Cartesian doubt.' Paul Ricoeur, 'The critique of religion', in Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (eds), *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), pp. 214–15.

[35] Marx, to a lesser extent.

[36] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, pp. 33, 34. See also Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 99, 127. Nevertheless, as Ricoeur later correctly insisted, all three assert that we deceive others *as well as ourselves* about our beliefs, motives and actions through our misperceptions. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 302, 341.

[37] A period partly coinciding with the postwar dominance of the structuralist emphasis on doubt and suspicion about all aspects of human endeavour. François Dosse, *History of Structuralism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 354.

[38] Richard Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 156.

'two antinomical poles',[39] the hermeneutics of suspicion presents itself as something other than an omnipotent and iconoclastic analytical weapon. Ricoeur's own emphasis on the tensional dialectics between hermeneutics *and* suspicion in the term, amplifies the dangers implicit within each of its separate components. On the one hand, the emphasis of hermeneutics alone on the existence and the possibility of deciphering a true deeper meaning is balanced by suspicion toward the truthfulness even of this very disclosure. On the other hand, the false sense of omnipotence caused by the excessive use of suspicion alone is balanced by the emphasis of hermeneutics on the critique of critique.

Understood as such, the hermeneutics of suspicion is not just a more elaborate practice of suspicion. It redirects hermeneutics from an emphasis to the disclosure of a deeper truth, from an answer to an already given question, to the very questioning of the question. Ricoeur is fully aware that hermeneutics cannot be omnipotent because 'the limits of the question imply also the limitations of the answer'.[40] Questioning the questions posed by others and self-reflexively by ourselves hence presents itself as the third and final stage of this hermeneutical detour.[41] Its first stage is of course that of a first level naïveté preceding our critical dispositions to the world (pre-critical naïveté). Its second stage is defined by our critical questioning of what is presented to us as true (suspicion). Its third, post-critical stage is what Ricoeur describes as a 'hermeneutics of naïveté'. This final stage will be explicated in a separate subsection below.

Against therefore the decontextualised readings of the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' by the realist and Marxist traditions or by those critical to them, I hold that evaluating its sway over our critical dispositions involves its examination beyond its iconic usage and within the wider context of Ricoeur's work, that is, in conjunction with: (a) some of its central and most relevant to our analysis themes, namely the relation between language and reality, as well as the social functions of ideology; and (b) suspicion's own dialectical pair, naïveté, read as the hermeneutics of naïveté.[42] My major problem with the aforementioned realist and Marxist accounts is not their theoretical distance from Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion, but that this misappropriation blocks them from introducing a form of suspicion that would allow a deeper and self-reflexive level of criticality and function as a condition for possibility[43] rather than analytical closure.

Language and reality

The relation between language and reality is evidently central in the practice of suspicion and most relevant to the critique of humanitarian intervention. Discussing this relation, Ricoeur introduces one of the most challenging points of his work: the ontological paradox of 'creation-as-discovery'.[44]

---

[39] A feature typical of his self-described (following Eric Weil) 'post-Hegelian Kantian' philosophy. François Dosse, *Paul Ricoeur: les sens d'une vie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997), pp. 120, 586.

[40] Charles E. Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur: His Life and Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 104. See also Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 165.

[41] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 161; Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume III* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 246–7.

[42] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 351.

[43] Scott-Baumann, *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*, pp. 173–4.

[44] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 254. Ricoeur's focus here is on the metaphoric function of language rather than the figure of metaphor *per se*. He builds his approach slowly and carefully, moving from the semiotic (word) to the semantic (sentence), and finally to the hermeneutic level (textual discourse) of inquiry.

Building on Gaston Bachelard,[45] Ricoeur notably remarks on this paradox as following: 'Through [the] recovery of the capacity of language to create and recreate, we *discover* reality itself in the process of being *created*. … [Language] is attuned to this dimension of reality which itself is unfinished and in the making. Language in the making celebrates reality in the making.'[46]

My argument is that Ricoeur's ontological paradox transcends the analytical limitations and either/or syllogism implicit in: (a) the verificationist emphasis of the realist and Marxist misappropriations of 'hermeneutics of suspicion' in their treatment of language, which discard the intervenors' rhetoric on the humanitarian motives of their actions as empirically unverified and irrelevant to the realities of international politics; and (b) the constitutivist emphasis of social constructivism that insists that the rhetorical representation of 'universal morality' as an international norm determines the humanitarian behaviour of states. If we follow these traditions, then we would have to accept that the way international politics is ideologically represented either: (a) has to be tested and validated against a hard reality that exists as such irrespective of the ways we use to represent it (*discovery*); or (b) is capable of arbitrarily create an altogether new reality (*creation*).

This ontological paradox, however, is not introduced here as a middle or relativist solution to the problem of the relation between language and reality in the critique of humanitarian intervention. The two terms in the creation-*as*-discovery paradox are brought together (once again) by Ricoeur in a dialectical and tensional manner. In our case, this tension is born from the very fact that the evocation of what has been herewith discussed as the ideology of humanitarian intervention is always already embedded in historically and culturally specific practices and discourses[47] pursuant to this ideology.

Following Ricoeur, we could say that this ideology does not intersect on the increase of the categorial as a result of meaning regeneration, but on the depiction of individual states and the 'international community' 'as acting' in humanitarian terms. This is the ontological function and strategy of the discourses and practices implicit in the ideology of humanitarian intervention: a shattering and increase at the level of both language/action and reality, now metamorphosed in parallel.[48] They help abandon not only older structures of language and ideas, but also older structures of the meaning of political reality. When we assume that reality is simply constructed through such discourses and practices, we presume that we already know the true meaning of reality existing *outside* of them. If we accept, however, that the discourses and the practices in which we are always already embedded, reformulate reality anew, then we have to assume that this reality is itself a novel reality. Eventually, any changes at the level of discourse and practice happen in parallel with similar changes at the level of reality.[49]

---

[45] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

[46] Paul Ricoeur, 'Poetry and possibility', in Mario J. Valdés (ed.), *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (New York: Harvester Press, 1991), p. 462, emphases added.

[47] Against traditional accounts within phenomenology, Ricoeur places great emphasis on the intersubjective concept of discourse, which he identifies as a 'language-event', while associating discourse and practice, texts, and actions. For Ricoeur, discourse (spoken or written) is characterised by four fundamental traits: (a) it is always already historically specific; (b) it always refers somehow to the person who speaks or writes; (c) it always has a reference to the world it re-presents (dynamism); and (d) it always addresses an interlocutor in the intersubjective terrain. Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), p. 145.

[48] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), pp. 45–69.

[49] Paul Ricoeur, 'Creativity in language', in Reagan and Stewart (eds), *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, pp. 122–3, 132–3.

Wheeler is right to note the significance of Quentin Skinner's theoretical contribution to the understanding of the role of language in the legitimisation of political expediency.[50] Skinner's hermeneutic position indeed aims beyond the distorting function of ideas, disclosing their legitimising function irrespective of the agent's motives or intentions. Nevertheless, according to Skinner, the width of the legitimising terms evoked by the subject is limited and determined by the historically and culturally dominant ethos of the times.[51] Even if we accept that ideas and norms legitimise concrete political aims, even if we accept that any appeal to 'universal morality' as an international norm legitimises concrete expediencies of international intervention, this does not necessarily entail that *any* appeal to the ideology of humanitarian intervention is apriori hypocritical. As will be further explicated in the next subsection, the legitimising function of ideology is neither a synonym to distortion,[52] nor its functional aftereffect. Most crucially, both functions of distortion and legitimisation presuppose that the ideology of humanitarian intervention has already functioned in an integrating manner through a nexus of discourses and practices empowering shared understandings of its ideational variables (that is, universal morality, humanitarianism, human rights, sovereignty as responsibility, etc.).

Furthermore, how would it be possible to discern – even to a certain degree of accuracy – the agent's true intentions? Even when the agent addresses herself to the future reader (through memoirs) or even to her own self (through personal diaries), how could it ever be possible to discover her motives with certainty? Even if we accept that the most apologetic confession simply aims at the a posteriori legitimisation of past wrongs, is it ever possible to disconnect the subject from the practices and discourses in which she is embedded as an agent? When, for example, the sum of the most notable international law professors in the UK defended in the House of Commons the legality of the Kosovo intervention (Kosovo Crisis Inquiry),[53] is it accurate to suggest that they adopted a non-academic, politicised, distorting, and hypocritical stance toward the facts, in an attempt to legitimise the 'illegal' intervention of their government, or that their legal views were embedded in the historically and culturally dominant discourses and practices that recognised humanitarian intervention as an international obligation? To explicate this point further, I will argue in the next subsection that the critique of the ideology of humanitarian intervention needs to extend to a deeper level of function, namely that of integration. This involves an extension of critique beyond the hermeneutics of suspicion to a hermeneutics of naïveté.

---

[50] Wheeler, *Saving Strangers*, p. 7.

[51] Examining how the English merchant class legitimised the accumulation of wealth at the turn of the sixteenth century, Skinner remarks that this particular class did not directly defend a new capitalist ethos. He supports that this capitalist practice kept pace with the principles of Protestantism, the dominant legitimising principles of the then society. Quentin Skinner, 'Some problems in the analysis of political thought and action', *Political Theory*, 2:3 (1974), pp. 277–303.

[52] Following Ricoeur's analysis and treatment of 'distortion', my references to the term do not imply the pre-existence of a real, *correct* political structure that becomes ideologically dissimulated. Instead, political 'reality' is understood here in the light of Ricoeur's reading of Marx's *German Ideology*, where the real is equated with the *actual* and the *material*, as individuals are put together with their material conditions, the way they operate: 'The social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear [*erscheinen*] in their own or other people's imagination [*Vorstellung*], but as they really are [*wirklich*]; i.e. as they operate [*wirken*], produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will.' Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology, Part I* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), pp. 46–7. Thus, instead of using less charged terms like 'deception' or 'closure' to describe this ideological function, I adhere to Ricoeur's reading of distortion, meaning the process in which *the established political order is uncritically vindicated and the community's symbols become ideologically fixed and fetishized*. Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 229.

[53] The respective memoranda were submitted by Professors Ian Brownlie QC, Christine Chinkin, Christopher Greenwood QC, Vaughan Lowe and Mark Littman QC, and are all included in a special issue of *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 49:4 (2000).

The hermeneutics of naïveté

As the antithetical pair of suspicion, the concept of naïveté has been also central in the work of Paul Ricoeur.[54] Its conceptual development as a 'hermeneutics of naïveté'[55] followed the development of his own philosophical detour from biblical exegesis and the interpretation of symbols to his theory of action, agency and identity informing his more mature 'philosophical anthropology',[56] to which Ricoeur's political thought is integral.[57] This conceptual development indicates the extension of the hermeneutics of suspicion and naïveté not only beyond the plane of biblical hermeneutics, but also beyond the level of individual consciousness set by the phenomenological tradition[58] to the sociopolitical, intersubjective plane.[59]

Focusing on the structures of consciousness and their relations, the epistemological basis of naïveté itself springs from the Husserlian critique on naïve metaphysics of empiricism and historicism ('naïve objectivism')[60] and return to the phenomenology of experience as the basis for understanding human existence[61] and, following Dilthey, the subjectivity of others.[62] Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's influences further extended its epistemological context, including the study of the way in which language transmits social realities in the construction of individual consciousness.[63] In what has been described by the literature as his 'critical'[64] or 'diacritical'[65] hermeneutics, Ricoeur builds on *yet departs* from this tradition extending its scope beyond the subjective terrain of phenomenology and the 'conservative'[66] scope of Gadamerian hermeneutics.[67]

---

[54] The ideas of naïveté and 'second naïveté' are recurrent themes in the development of Ricoeur's thought all through the span of his life work, starting even from his 1950 *Le volontaire et l'involontaire* and not from his 1969 *La symbolique du mal*, as often noted in the respective literature. See Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), pp. 18, 76, 83, 155.

[55] The conceptual origin of the term as opposed to the hermeneutics of suspicion should be traced in Gabriel Marcel's differentiation between 'primary' and 'secondary reflection', whose work has been a constant source of inspiration for Ricoeur. Paul Ricoeur, 'Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur', in Lewis Edwin Hahn (ed.), *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), p. 7.

[56] This conceptual development most notably includes his: *Le volontaire et l'involontaire* (1950); *Idées directrices pour une phénoménologie* (1950); *La symbolique du mal* (1960); *De l'interprétation: Essai sur Sigmund Freud* (1965); *L'homme faillible* (1965); *La métaphore vive* (1975); *Interpretation Theory* (1976); *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (1980); *Temps et récit: Tome III* (1985); *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1986); *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990); and *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (2000).

[57] Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and the Risk of Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), p. 1.

[58] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 143; John Wall, 'Moral meaning: Beyond the good and the right', in John Wall, William Schweiker, and W. David Hall (eds), *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 48.

[59] As Dauenhauer notes, 'it is important to address the issue of the relationship between philosophical and religious, especially biblical, considerations in Ricoeur's political works. On the one hand, Ricoeur has always been concerned to distinguish carefully and clearly between the biblical and the philosophical domains. Each of these domains, he has consistently recognized, is an autonomous field of investigation. On the other hand, he has always insisted that it is wrongheaded to insist that investigations in either of these fields take no notice whatsoever of considerations arising from the other field.' Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur*, p. 20. See also Paul Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 139.

[60] Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1999), p. 4. See also Joan McCarthy, *Dennett and Ricoeur on the Narrative Self* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2007), p. 92; J. Aaron Simmons and Bruce Ellis Benson, *The New Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 339–40.

As briefly introduced in the beginning of this section, Ricoeur discusses the hermeneutics of naïveté as the third and final stage of a hermeneutics that detours[68] from a pre-critical, first order naïve understanding or conviction, to a critical distanciation through the hermeneutics of suspicion and, finally, to a moment of deeper, post-critical involvement made possible through a 'second naïveté'. In his textual form of analysis, Ricoeur suggests that the first level of this hermeneutical detour involves a pre-critical naïveté that allows the text (what is to be understood) to unfold by and through itself. The primary loyalty of the 'reader' at this stage is to the 'text' itself irrespective of its authorial intention.[69] The second level is marked by the reader's critical engagement with the text informed by a hermeneutics of suspicion. At the third, final stage of 'appropriating' the text,[70] Ricoeur introduces the application of a hermeneutics of naïveté. This new, 'postcritical' naïveté is 'informed' to the extent that unlike its precritical variant it interprets[71] what the hermeneutics of suspicion has already excluded from our deliberation as hypocrisy or mere lie.[72] Its promise is a return to the same narratives in a more 'nuanced reading' that allows finding something altogether new.[73]

---

[61] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1931), pp. 112–14, 150–5; Eftichis Pirovolakis, *Reading Derrida and Ricoeur: Improbable Encounters between Deconstruction and Hermeneutics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), p. 44.

[62] The history of phenomenology discusses the concept of naïveté as a product of Romanticism or the anti-Enlightenment, and of philosophers such as Dilthey or Schleiermacher, who examined the impact of Kantian idealism on the study of the 'human' sciences (*Geistewissenshaften*).

[63] Karl Simms, *Paul Ricoeur* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 37–8.

[64] See, for example, John B. Thompson, *Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Michael Gardiner, *The Dialogics of Critique: M. M. Bakhtin and the Theory of Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 123–36; Jonathan Roberge, 'What is critical hermeneutics?', *Thesis Eleven*, 106:1 (2011), pp. 5–22.

[65] Richard Kearney, 'Between oneself and another: Ricoeur's diacritical hermeneutics', in Andrzej Wiercinski (ed.), *Between Suspicion and Sympathy: Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium* (Toronto: The Hermeneutic, 2003), pp. 149–60.

[66] Jürgen Habermas, 'A review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*', in Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy (eds), *Understanding and Social Inquiry* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), p. 358; Paul Ricoeur, 'Ethics and culture: Habermas and Gadamer in dialogue', *Philosophy Today*, 17:2 (1973), pp. 153–65. See also Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur*, pp. 224–40.

[67] Especially in the context of his ideology critique, Ricoeur has been in dialogue with and drawn from various approaches within Marxism and post-Marxism, such as the Frankfurt School and Althusser. By addressing Ricoeur's hermeneutics as 'critical' the article does not propose, of course, a new reading of Ricoeur as a post-Marxist philosopher. It implies instead that although drawing from the hermeneutic tradition, Ricoeur's hermeneutics seeks to extend its boundaries by addressing the crucial dimensions of power and the ideological deformation of language use.

[68] This detour is often described by theological studies as an 'arc' because, evidently, it has to return and reaffirm the initial conviction of faith in the reading of the biblical text. Boyd Blundell, *Paul Ricoeur between Theology and Philosophy: Detour and Return* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 81, 106. See also the excellent Mark I. Wallace, *The Second Naïveté: Barth, Ricoeur, and the New Yale Theology* (Macon: Mercer, 1995).

[69] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 76. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 188–95. See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. 269–70.

[70] Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, p. 37.

[71] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, pp. 28, 496.

Yet, how could a hermeneutics of naïveté be analytically useful in the context of the present analysis? First, the expediency of a hermeneutics of naïveté stems from the analytical options disclosed once interpretation persists beyond the confines posed by the so-called 'hermeneutics of suspicion' of the realist and Marxist critiques with their emphasis on the intervenors' materialistic motives and the hypocritical evocation of the ideology of humanitarian intervention. Second, this extension of our hermeneutical endeavour will allow what Ricoeur calls a 'genetic phenomenology' that 'attempts to dig under the surface of the apparent meaning to more fundamental meanings',[74] a 'regressive analysis of meaning'[75] of the ideology of humanitarian intervention beyond its apparent, surface-level functions. At this ideological and intersubjective plane, analysis may proceed beyond the suspicion implicit in the emphasis on its distorting (realism/Marxism) and legitimising function (social constructivism), thus disclosing the political consequences of its deeper social function of integration.

Following a hermeneutic of naïveté, the student of international politics accepts to begin with the assumption that the agent in study is honest in her intentions and to what she openly declares. To be precise, the researcher accepts that the agent expresses honestly her subjective experience and interpretation of reality, to the extent possible. In a sense, the hermeneutics of naïveté is almost synonymous as a process to Clifford Geertz's 'empathy',[76] at least to the extent that the researcher acts as if she observes over the shoulder of the agent the 'text' that the agent reads or writes. This 'reading' of an action 'resembles the reading of a text; the same kind of hermeneutic principles are required for the comprehension of both'.[77]

A hermeneutics of naïveté attempts to decode meanings with the smallest possible distortion. In this hermeneutic process, meaning is discerned through the regard of the whole, resulting from the understanding of its parts. A hermeneutics of naïveté presupposes a phenomenological *epoché* that suspends judgement, so that the researcher could first understand the way in which the agent understands reality. This entails that the researcher attempts to first understand the language of the agent's culture. Therefore, a hermeneutics of naïveté does not propose a naïve faith in the agent's intentions, but a naïveté at a second level, a second naïveté, that *presupposes* critical thought and suspicion in a postcritical and informed manner.[78]

---

[72] Paul Ricoeur, 'Philosophy of will and action', in Reagan and Stewart (eds), *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 70. See also Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of his Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), p. 214; Domenico Jervolino, *The Cogito and Hermeneutics: The Question of the Subject in Ricoeur* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1990), p. 12.

[73] Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, p. 351. See also Paul Ricoeur, 'What is a text? Explanation and interpretation', in David M. Rasmussen, *Mythic-Symbolic Language and Philosophical Anthropology: A Constructive Interpretation of the Thought of Paul Ricoeur* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), pp. 148–9; Patrick L. Bourgeois, *Extension of Ricoeur's Hermeneutic* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), pp. 138–9.

[74] Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 111.

[75] Ibid., p. 311.

[76] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[77] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative, Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 50.

[78] Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, p. 356; Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*, p. 162; Patrick Bourgeois, 'Hermeneutics of symbols and philosophical reflection: Paul Ricoeur', *Philosophy Today*, 15:4 (1971), pp. 231–41.

The hermeneutics of naïveté is herewith proposed as something more than a thought experiment or an alternative research methodology. On the one hand, it is absolutely consistent with the fundamental hermeneutic position that nothing escapes meaning. On the other hand, it upsets the dualistic hypothesis, according to which it is either the objectively defined state interests of the intervenors that define the content of norms at their own discretion (Marxism/realism), or the international norms that determine the content of their national interests and political choices (social constructivism).[79] To the contrary, a hermeneutics of naïveté could allow us to appreciate that the conceptualisation of both interests and norms is never independent from a wider cultural process defined by the total network of practices and discourses pursuant to the ideology of humanitarian intervention, in which acting agents are always already embedded.

Yet, how exactly could a hermeneutics of naïveté allow the critical investigation of the ideology of humanitarian intervention to proceed to a deeper analytical level? As already noted, the hermeneutics of suspicion followed by realism and Marxism focuses on the distorting character of the ideology of humanitarian intervention, whereas the critique of social constructivism focuses on its legitimising character. Wheeler interestingly notes the limiting role of this legitimisation of state policies: ‘Put boldly, my contention is that state actions *will be constrained if they cannot be justified in terms of a plausible legitimating reason*.’[80] As he explains, the concept of ‘constrain’ derives from Wendt’s constructivist thesis on ‘how actors are embedded within a normative context structured by rules’.[81] Wheeler’s central argument is based on Skinner’s thesis that the agent’s honesty is indifferent: ‘any agent possesses a standard motive for attempting to legitimate his untoward social or political actions. This implies first of all that he will be committed to claiming that his apparently untoward actions were in fact motivated by some accepted set of social or political principles. And this in turn implies that, even if the agent is not in fact motivated by any of the principles he professes, he will nevertheless be obliged to behave in such a way that his actions remain compatible with the claim that these principles genuinely motivated them.’[82]

According to Wheeler’s critique, therefore, the ideology of humanitarian intervention could function either in a distorting *or* in a legitimising way. In case the emphasis is on its legitimising function, it is still possible that the evocation of this ideology may aim at the distortion of reality and the concealment of the true intentions of the intervenors. The major contribution of social constructivism on the matter is hence the following: irrespective of whether these intentions are honest or not, the recognition of ‘universal morality’ as a norm of international behaviour eventually limits the choices of states.

A hermeneutics of naïveté, however, allows us to take one step further. The first question to be set is the following: What is it exactly that allows the alleged ‘universal morality’ to function effectively both as distortion and as legitimisation? Which is the *sine qua non* precondition that would guarantee its effectiveness according to the above? Without neglecting the role of the existing power relations that strengthen the convincing strength of claims and limit our critique, both the distorting function evoked by realism and Marxism, and the ‘limiting’ function of legitimisation evoked by Wheeler presuppose a net of discourses and practices that allow to these ideological expressions to function first in an *integrating* manner. To put it in Ricoeur's terms, they presuppose a culture, an ideology in the sense of a worldview,[83] which integrates all agents that embrace its basic principles. In other words, the ideology of humanitarian intervention does not only function in a pathological manner, in a distorting or legitimising way. Both of these social functions presuppose that this ideology has already functioned in an integrating manner.

---

[79] Similar is the position on this point of normative theory. Molly Cochran, *Normative Theory in International Relations: A Pragmatic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[80] Wheeler, *Saving Strangers*, p. 4, emphasis in original.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Skinner, ‘Some problems in the analysis of political thought and action’, p. 299.

As Ricoeur reminds us, the Marxist conceptualisation of ideology as distortion is but a definition of ideology at the first level. Although ideology encloses the claim that it offers the only authentic representation of reality and can, therefore, function as distortion, it never ceases to function in representational terms.[84] In that sense, distortion is but a phase, a paradigmatic expression, a function or simply one mere level of ideology, yet not the model of ideology *per se*. Drawing on Max Weber's motivational model, Ricoeur proceeds from the distorting to the legitimating function of ideology, suggesting that ideology fills in the gap between claim and belief by providing a surplus value that relates to power. The third level of Ricoeur's exploration of the concept of ideology is that of integration. Following Clifford Geertz's claim on the symbolic mediation of social action, Ricoeur asserts that it is ideology that plays this mediating role in the social realm. By symbolically mediating social action, ideology integrates society. It is only because it has already functioned in an integrating manner, at this deepest level, that ideology may then function as distortion and legitimisation.[85] Distortion is possible 'when the integrative function becomes frozen … when schematization and rationalization prevail'.[86]

Recognising the pathology of this integrating function may allow us to recognise not only the deep resonance of the 'humanitarian' ideology in what we already recognise as 'international community', but also its role in the reaffirmation of a new universal narrative on morality and human rights. It offers a basis for agreement and uniform conceptualisation of political obligations. To the extent, however, that this narrative does not question, discredit, or abolish the relations of inequality at the global level, it finally functions as the safest guarantee for securing global concession to the choices of those states that heavily contribute to the organisation of this narrative.

Against Wheeler, therefore, I do not hold that the 'humanitarian' ideology is simply imposed by powerful states as a result of the internal strains of public opinion, which has been exposed to the representation of grief in terms of the Holocaust genocide by the mass media. To the contrary, I hold that even those who best represent the ideology of humanitarian intervention remain themselves consumers of this culture. This necessitates a shift of our research interest to all those symbolic and wider cultural processes that elevate the obligation to intervene to an international responsibility, especially in the West.[87]

---

[83] Ricoeur's approach starts, therefore, from Karl Mannheim's 'sociology of knowledge' as an alternative critique of ideology. However, Ricoeur departs from Mannheim's claim that ideology constitutes merely a deviation from reality. Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, pp. xiii, 172–3. I concur with Terry Eagleton that the ideological function of Mannheim's thesis is to 'to defuse the whole Marxist conception of ideology, replacing it with the less embattled, contentious conception of a "world view"'. Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 109. Indeed, such a reading of ideology may repress the Marxist class-related connotations of the concept. It might be also the case that, as Eagleton again has noted, the drift of Mannheim's work comes to downplay concepts of mystification, rationalisation, legitimation, and the power-function of ideas 'in the name of some synoptic survey of the evolution of forms of historical consciousness', thus returning ideology to its pre-Marxist conceptualisation. Terry Eagleton, 'Ideology and its vicissitudes', in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 194. Yet, this could hardly be the case with Ricoeur's own account due to the centrality not only of the distorting but also of the rationalising, legitimating, power-related, and mystificatory manifestations of ideology in his analysis.

[84] Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 136.

[85] Ibid., p. 10.

[86] Ibid., p. 266.

The hermeneutics of naïveté allows us here to recognise that a critical investigation of humanitarian intervention needs to start at a level deeper than those of mere distortion (realism/Marxism) and legitimisation (social constructivism), namely at the level of integration. Once we recognise this integrating function, we could better reflect on how we have come to recognise 'universal morality' as an international norm of political behaviour, but to also critically review the pathological content of the other two social functions (legitimisation and distortion). Legitimisation could thus become meaningful not simply as the product of the distorting concealment of the intervenors' interests, but as the normal outcome of securing international consent and active engagement through the integrating function. Similarly, distortion could be seen as involving more than the conscious concealment of the intervenors' interests and intentions. It could be now appreciated as the ideological tool necessary for the perpetuation of the existing system and the established international distribution of power, leading to what we may call with Ricoeur a 'stagnation of politics'.[88]

Once we move to this deeper level of function, our emphasis may shift from the intervenor's intentions and motives to the dominant practices and discourses that have already defined the very content of the 'humanitarian'. The symbolic transformation of humanitarian intervention from a materialistic practice into a practice of compassion and solidarity, in other words, the rhetorical and practical euphemism of the material dimension, produces and sanctions a symbolic capital of recognition, knowledge and appropriation of all those categories, through which agents come to understand the world of international politics. Evidently, in a neoliberal capitalistic context of individualism and inequality,[89] the reconceptualisation of the materialistic dimension of humanitarian intervention eventually conceals and legitimises the founding practices and relations (material and symbolic), in which it is embedded.

This reconceptualisation does not only conceal the calculating/utilitarian dimension of humanitarian principles, as realism and Marxism imply, but also determines and supports the symbolic dimension of the means chosen to serve this ideology. To be more precise, what is at stake here concerns less whether the intervenors will conceal their materialistic interests and hence their dependency on the demands of market economy and power politics, than whether they would allow the demonstration of a calculating spirit or openly admit the material dimensions of such practices and strategies, since this would most certainly undermine their international positions. In still other words, such a prospect would have strengthened antagonism in international relations, and weakened all those ideological/symbolic elements that allowed the meaningful presence of an 'international community' in the first place.

Although material considerations affect the decision to intervene, this calculating reasoning remains implicit or denied, in a way that allows the perpetuation of the current arrangement and relations of inequality.[90] The result however is the same: all those values compatible with the new spirit of humanitarianism remain valid. Nevertheless, they do not just function as a temporary symbolic vehicle that helps increase the intervenor's material capital. They remain active post-intervention determining the actions and self-understandings of the members of international community. Because agents are already embedded in these dominant practices and discourses, their questioning of the conceptualisation and political functions of these values becomes almost impossible – at least before all hopes born from these values are eventually betrayed.

---

[87] Dimitrios E. Akrivoulis, 'Metaphors matter: the ideological functions of the Kosovo-Holocaust analogy', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 17:2 (2015), pp. 222–42.

[88] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 229.

[89] Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 37–59.

[90] To put it in Pierre Bourdieu's terms, the duality of the objective truth of the material and calculating interests and power relations, and the subjectively experienced meaning of humanitarianism is a condition of symbolic economy. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977),

Conclusion

This article called for a shift of focus of the critique of humanitarian intervention, (a) from questioning the hypocritical evocation of 'universal morality' in order to serve the intervenors' material interests to the exploration of the historically and culturally specific discourses and practices that first help recognise this principle as an international norm; (b) from an emphasis to the distorting and legitimating function of the ideology of humanitarian intervention that serves this evocation to its symbolic and integrating function as the *sine qua non* precondition of both other social functions; and (c) from the dualistic understanding of norms and interests as mutually exclusive to the appreciation of their holistic embeddedness within a cultural context of meaning and interpretation.

The hermeneutics of naïveté introduced in this article first allows us to pose a set of new questions at a second, deeper level of criticism, beyond the one opened up by the scepticism of what is misrepresented in the IR literature as a 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. If one responds to the intervenor's humanitarian claims with the Player King's words from the play-within-the-play in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a new critical horizon of meaning is disclosed: 'I do believe you think what now you speak'. Yet, what is the meaning of the freedom that marches, of the exported democracy, of the rights to be protected, of the coming political community, within which the above would become meaningful and just post-intervention? What is the meaning of all those ideals, and what is the content of the 'humanitarian', when they all remain embedded in the dominant neoliberal predicament, or when the West still needs to critically reflect on who is very subject of the Rights of Man?[91]

Second, and as a corollary, a hermeneutics of naïveté allows us to extend the critique of the ideology of humanitarian intervention beyond the limiting emphasis on distortion and hypocrisy. The traditional critique of humanitarian intervention as a mere mask to the face distorting the intervenors' pursue of their material expediencies, neglects that eventually the so-called 'universal morality', the 'march of freedom', or the 'global export of liberal democracy', discursive supplements to 'humanitarian' ideology, eventually serve the intervenor's interests much better than any other traditional colonial strategy of the past by empowering an integrating ideological platform that secures consent. The ideology of humanitarian intervention does not only legitimise the use of force even against respective international law prohibitions (for example, art. 2 par. 7 of the UN Charter).[92] At a much deeper level, it further functions in an integrating manner both before and

---

pp. 140–3. See also Johann Michel, *Ricoeur and the Post-Structuralists: Bourdieu, Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, Castoriadis* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2015), pp. 1–30.

[91] Jacques Rancière, 'Who is the subject of the Rights of Man?', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103:2–3 (2004), pp. 297–310.

[92] Anthea Roberts, 'Legality vs. legitimacy: Can uses of force be illegal but justified?', in Philip Alston and Euan Macdonald (eds), *Human Rights, Intervention, and the Use of Force* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 179–214. Typical is the case of the 'illegal but legitimate' NATO's intervention in Kosovo. Independent International Commission on Kosovo, *The Kosovo Report: Conflict, International Response, Lessons Learned* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 4.

after the intervention. Before the intervention it helps secure the widest and stoutest cohesion within the intervenors' institutions (for example NATO) or *ad hoc* coalitions ('Coalition of the Willing'). Even more crucially, it aims to extent this integrating function post-intervention in the target state, which is now expected to participate in the discourses and practices of liberal democracy and market economy. Yet, in this march of freedom and the export of democracy and human rights, freedom marches alone, without equality, thus allowing the gradual and unfaltering transition from dissent to consent.

A hermeneutics of naïveté may help critique proceed beyond pre-constituted intellectual confines to questions such as: Which are the rights that are protected, introduced or 'restored' through humanitarian intervention? Who is the subject of those rights post-intervention? What is the content of the freedom that 'marches' alongside this meta-political humanitarianism? How has consensus been reached on what is to be pursued or aspired thus excluding such questioning from critique? Even more challengingly, could we answer the above questions and talk about human rights in a meaningful way outside of the political context of a community that conceptualises ethically and legally their meaning and substantialises in practice their exercise, without adopting universal imperatives or without the danger of imposing a Western reading of those rights, thus repeating a long-lasting tradition that continues to ordain in a neocolonial manner both human rights and the idea of Man?

The type of questioning introduced above serves only as an indication of the questions opened up once interpretation extends from: (a) a hermeneutics of suspicion, as understood following Ricoeur (as a self-reflexive act of critical 'distanciation') rather than as misappropriated by the realist and Marxist traditions (aiming at unearthing a true Reality hidden behind the hypocritical evocation of a humanitarian ideology); to (b) a hermeneutics of naïveté, a second, post-critical naïveté, that would interrogate not the truthfulness of the humanitarian claim but the noematic content of its implicit political concepts and ideological variants informed by the dominant discourses and practices in which political agency and identity become meaningful in the first place. The aim of this article has been limited to discussing the limitations of existing critique and of introducing the hermeneutical detour necessary to overcome them. Further explicating or substantiating the type of questioning set forth above and the practical contours and political consequences of the integrating function of the humanitarian ideology presupposes a direction of research toward the application of this hermeneutical detour by reference this time to the (neo)liberal narrative of humanitarianism.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

Biographical information

Dr Dimitrios E. Akrivoulis is Assistant Professor in the Department of Balkan, Slavic, and Oriental Studies at the University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki. His research interest is in international political theory. His most relevant work includes 'Paul Ricoeur', in Terrell Carver and James Martin (eds), *Palgrave Advances in Continental Political Thought* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 229–43; 'The Hermeneutics of Suspicion and the Responsibility to Protect', paper presented at the 2011 Annual HESILIR Conference, Panteion University, Athens; and 'Metaphors matter: the ideological functions of the Kosovo-Holocaust analogy', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 17:2 (2015), pp. 222–42.