

# Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies

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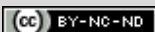
## Introduction

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# Introduction

Eileen Brennan

In "The Paradigm of Translation," Paul Ricœur names two ways to access the *problem* of translation: "the foreign door" and "language's work on itself." He admits to favouring the first route, now better known as the test of the foreign, which brings us face to face with a problem that no theory can solve. It turns out that the solution to the problem of translation lies in "intellectual work, theoretical or practical," which Ricœur prefers to describe using "the Freudian vocabulary." He calls it the work of recollection and the work of mourning. So what type of problem are we dealing with here? It is partly an ethical problem: How to ensure that all languages, and indeed all cultures, enjoy equal status? To know whether we have passed the test of the foreign Ricœur suggests that we check to see whether we are now able to appreciate the strangeness of our own language and to accept that engaging with others is good for our development, good for our mental health. He writes: "And then, without the test of the foreign, would we be sensitive to the strangeness of our own language? Finally, without that test, would we not be in danger of shutting ourselves away in the sourness of a monologue, alone with our books?"

Ricœur may favour this way into the problem of translation, but he assures us that he sees the other access route perfectly well too. He thinks that observing the way that language works on itself provides us with "the key to the difficulties of translation *ad extra*." He explains that language has a "propensity for the enigma, for artifice, for abstruseness, for the secret, in fact for non-communication," making intralingual but also interlingual translation difficult. He is prepared to concede that "the glorious poetry of a Paul Celan is bordering on the untranslatable," but he prefers to say that translation is difficult, even extremely difficult, rather than impossible. As in the case of entering through the foreign door, entering the problem of translation through language's work on itself provides us with an opportunity to address an ethical problem. In this instance the problem is: How to maintain a distance within our intimate relationships? Ricœur suggests that the solution lies in following language's lead. He writes: "And if we had not skirted the disquieting regions of the unspeakable, would we have the sense of the secret, of the untranslatable secret? And our better exchanges, in love and in friendship, would they save this quality of discretion — secret/discretion — which safeguards the distance in the proximity?"

I have to admit that I have always found these lines affecting, and I was hoping that some of our contributors would choose to comment on them, but it was not to be. For very good reasons, it has to be said, more or less everyone has chosen to access the problem of translation by following Ricœur through the foreign door. And yet, when three of the contributors set about exploring the relationship between Ricœur's work and that of another, they selected thinkers who were once close personal friends of Ricœur. Whether this was a factor in making the selections is not clear. Two contributors discuss Ricœur and Derrida on the topic of translation whilst a third argues that Emmanuel Mounier had an enduring influence on Ricœur.

The grief that Ricœur experienced following the death of Mounier is powerfully captured in “Emmanuel Mounier: A Personalist Philosophy,” published in *Esprit* in 1950 just months after Mounier’s death. Ricœur writes: “I have not been able to reread Mounier’s books as books should be read, as the books of a dead person.” The story of Ricœur’s much more complex relationship with Derrida is beautifully told by François Dosse, in *Les sens d’une vie*. Again, there is a remarkable poignancy in Dosse’s account of the “intense exchanges” that took place between Ricœur and Derrida in the early to mid-2000’s. The two men knew that they were both facing into the final months of their lives, and weakened by illness and old age they had to rely on the telephone if they were to have one final, extended debate. Dosse reports that their intense exchanges on the theme of finitude drew them closer together, healing a rift that had lasted for many years. I sometimes wonder whether Ricœur’s statement on what it is that makes for “better exchanges, in love and in friendship” could be applied to this experience of reconciliation with Derrida. Derrida died in 2004, Ricœur in 2005.

The first pair of articles explores the relationship between Ricœur’s and Derrida’s writings on the topic of translation, advancing the dialogue between these two thinkers. B. Keith Putt, in “Traduire C’est Trahir — Peut-être: Ricœur and Derrida on the (In)Fidelity of Translation,” contributes to Ricœur studies by defending Ricœur from the criticism, made by Derrida, that he harboured a disguised, eschatological hope for the restoration of a pure semiotics. Putt also makes the bold but not uncontroversial claim that Ricœur was *more* “deconstructive” than Derrida at least in certain respects. As Putt notes, Ricœur never “translated” translation into “the punitive symbolism of transgression, retribution, and reconciliation,” whereas Derrida did even if only occasionally. Lisa Foran, in “An Ethics of Discomfort: Supplementing Ricœur on Translation,” has the same critical intent to associate and dissociate Ricœur and Derrida. However, unlike Putt, she finds a conservatism in Ricœur’s writings on translation when it comes to unitive meaning and “pure” translation. In her view, Ricœur is *less* “deconstructive” than he needs to be if he is to succeed in grounding his ethics of hospitality. Foran contends that adopting Ricœur’s paradigm of translation carries certain risks, including that of complacency about our capacity to understand the Other. Inspired by Derrida, she holds that it is only by maintaining a sense of “discomfort” around the Other that we can hope to be truly ethical in our dealings with her. Responding directly to Ricœur’s suggestions for a new ethos for Europe, Foran contends that here too a socio-ethical engagement is possible only if we remain “on the knife edge of discomfort.”

Dries Deweer, in “Communication, Translation and the Global Community of Persons,” invites us to consider Ricœur’s writings on the ethics and politics of global community building, writings that he claims point to an abiding relationship with Emmanuel Mounier. Deweer offers three important insights into Ricœur’s ideal of living the good life with and for others in just institutions. First, he shows how this ideal was inspired by Mounier’s personalist and communitarian ideal of a universal community. Secondly, he notes how Ricœur’s account of translation allowed him to move beyond Mounier’s “tragic optimism” to a justifiable optimism about building an ethical community. In Ricœur’s case, though not in Mounier’s, that meant building an ethical *global* community. Thirdly, Deweer explains the practicalities, as Ricœur understood them, of establishing an institutional framework that would allow every human being to fully flourish as a person. In a move that would appear to support Foran’s reading, Deweer suggests that Ricœur considered the “project of mentality integration to be the pre-

eminent locus for the ethical paradigm of translation.” However, unlike Foran, Deweer does not consider it necessary to subject Ricœur’s three models of integration to any form of critique.

Paul Marinescu, in “Traduire le passé: enjeu et défi d’une opération historiographique,” explores the relationship between Ricœur’s hermeneutics of history and his theory of translation. Marinescu begins by focusing attention on Ricœur’s idea of translating the past and wonders whether this idea could help us define a new paradigm for thinking about the hermeneutics of history. His article makes two significant contributions to Ricœur studies. First, it provides a discerning and very useful analysis of the main texts in which Ricœur tackles the problem of translation. Secondly, it offers a critique of a thesis that has been too little debated, that is Jervolino’s and Kearney’s thesis that the paradigm of translation served as the third and final paradigm for Ricœur’s evolving hermeneutics.

The originality of Mohammad Ali Kharmandar’s contribution, “Ricœur’s Extended Hermeneutic Translation Theory: Metaphysics, Narrative, Ethics, Politics,” consists in refusing to accept that *On Translation* is Ricœur’s full statement on the topic, viewing it rather as a text to be expanded upon in light of other works by Ricœur, and then undertaking the complex task of laying out this broader theory of translation. Kharmandar’s novel idea represents a real contribution not only to Ricœur scholarship but also to translation studies. The “extended” hermeneutic theory of translation that he uncovers in Ricœur’s work is one that is currently unrecognized in the extant literature.

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Eileen Brennan