

Exploring Paul Ricœur's Course of Recognition as a Possible Pathway to Intercultural Recognition

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the potential resonance between Paul Ricœur's *The Course of Recognition* and key concepts in intercultural philosophy. Rather than tracing the development of intercultural thinking within Ricœur's own work, the aim is to reread and reinterpret Ricœur's philosophical concepts in light of the structural and ethical concerns articulated by intercultural philosophers such as Franz Martin Wimmer, Ram Adhar Mall, and Heinz Kimmerle. The analysis proceeds by systematically following Ricœur's course, from identification through self-recognition to mutual recognition, and identifying where these conceptual stages intersect with, complement, or illuminate principles central to intercultural philosophy. The focus remains on conceptual applicability: how Ricœur's phenomenological and narrative insights may enter into dialogue with intercultural philosophical frameworks that emphasize plurality, asymmetry, historical difference, and dialogical or polylogical openness. The discussion therefore seeks to establish both the conceptual proximity and productive tensions between Ricœur and intercultural philosophy by rereading Ricœur's *Course of Recognition* as a possible preparatory anthropology for intercultural philosophy, while also exposing questions concerning plurality, asymmetry, and the limits of reciprocity.

Keywords: *Mutual Recognition, Intercultural Recognition, Attestation, Capable Human Being, Narrative Identity, Polylogue.*

Résumé

Cet article se propose d'explorer les résonances possibles entre *Parcours de la reconnaissance* de Paul Ricœur et certains concepts majeurs de la philosophie interculturelle. Plutôt que de retracer l'émergence d'une pensée interculturelle dans l'œuvre même de Ricœur, l'objectif est de relire et de réinterpréter ses concepts philosophiques à la lumière des préoccupations structurelles et éthiques formulées par des philosophes de l'interculturel tels que Franz Martin Wimmer, Ram Adhar Mall et Heinz Kimmerle. L'analyse procède en

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suivant systématiquement le parcours de la reconnaissance chez Ricœur, depuis l'identification, en passant par la reconnaissance de soi, jusqu'à la reconnaissance mutuelle, tout en examinant les points d'intersection, de complémentarité ou d'éclairage réciproque entre ces différentes étapes conceptuelles et les principes centraux de la philosophie interculturelle. L'accent est mis sur leur applicabilité conceptuelle : il s'agit d'examiner comment les intuitions phénoménologiques et narratives de Ricœur peuvent entrer en dialogue avec des cadres philosophiques interculturels qui mettent l'accent sur la pluralité, l'asymétrie, la différence historique ainsi que sur l'ouverture dialogique ou polylogique. Cette étude vise ainsi à mettre en évidence à la fois les proximités conceptuelles et les tensions productives entre Ricœur et la philosophie interculturelle, en relisant *Parcours de la reconnaissance* comme une possible anthropologie préparatoire à la philosophie interculturelle, tout en faisant apparaître les questions liées à la pluralité, à l'asymétrie et aux limites de la réciprocité.

Mots-clés : *Reconnaissance mutuelle, reconnaissance interculturelle, attestation, homme capable, identité narrative, polylogue.*

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1. Conceptual Foundations: From Phenomenology to Intercultural Hermeneutics

1.1. The Passive and Active Dimensions of Recognition: From Ricœur's Grammar to Intercultural Reciprocity

Paul Ricœur's philosophical inquiry into recognition begins with what he calls a "rule-governed polysemy" of the verb "to recognize," traced through ordinary language and lexicographic tradition. The double structure of recognition, to recognize and to be recognized, is not merely a grammatical analysis but a point of departure for an entire philosophical itinerary. Ricœur writes:

To recognize as an act expresses a pretension, a claim, to exercise an intellectual mastery over this field of meanings, of signifying assertions. At the opposite end of this trajectory, the demand for recognition expresses an expectation that can be satisfied only by mutual recognition.¹

This initial polarity between activity and passivity, mastery and vulnerability, becomes one of the guiding threads of *The Course of Recognition*. While the active form relates to identification, recollection, or classification, functions that are associated with knowledge and perception, the passive form evokes an ethical demand: the appeal to the other for acknowledgment, esteem, or justice. In this sense, recognition exceeds cognition and becomes a relational phenomenon. Ricœur explicitly underlines that this grammatical reversal corresponds to a deeper philosophical transformation.² What begins as a cognitive or epistemological act becomes, in the course of Ricœur's analysis, a profoundly ethical and social relation. Recognition involves not only identifying the other but acknowledging the other as a moral and political subject. Ricœur himself defines this trajectory as a movement "from the most contingent to the most fundamental,"³ tracing how recognition-as-identification gives way to recognition-as-acknowledgment and finally to mutual recognition. Within an intercultural horizon, this passage from knowing to acknowledging finds a striking parallel in what Ram Adhar Mall describes as the *mutual recognition of cultures* (*gegenseitige Anerkennung der Kulturen*). For Mall, intercultural orientation "is sustained by a mutual recognition of cultures, each of which possesses its own

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 19.

² Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 19.

³ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 21.

distinctive access to the one truth"⁴. Given the risk of reading "one truth" as a substantive unity, it is important to stress that Mall's formulation can be taken procedurally. Recognition requires moving beyond the boundaries of one's own interpretive framework without presuming convergence into sameness. This statement mirrors Ricœur's transition from epistemological mastery to ethical affirmation: both thinkers underline that recognition must move beyond the boundaries of one's own interpretive framework.

Ricœur's idea of mutual recognition as a demand fulfilled only through reciprocity finds its concrete intercultural expression in Mall's vision of intercultural philosophy, according to which "intercultural philosophy thus outlines a model of philosophy that affirms the universal applicability of the concept of philosophy, while legitimately recognizing the plurality of its philosophical centers and origins."⁵ Ricœur himself insists that "we must give the greatest importance to those operations leading to community (those of *Vergemeinschaftung*, communalization or formation of community), which draws reciprocity out of asymmetry."⁶ In this perspective, reciprocity is not an abstract symmetry of equals but a dynamic process in which the self and the other engage through mediation and mutual transformation. As Ricœur writes, "the other must be my analogue, so that beyond my experience of myself I come to terms with that of others on a basis of reciprocity, even though this chain of constitutions draws its basic meaning from me as ego."⁷

Mall's formulation gives this Ricœurian reciprocity a plural and intercultural horizon: intercultural philosophy becomes the philosophical enactment of communalization (*Vergemeinschaftung*) under polycentric conditions, rather than on the basis of a single center. In affirming "the legitimate recognition of the plurality of philosophical centers and origins,"⁸ Mall extends Ricœur's anthropological and ethical reflections into an epistemic and cultural practice, one that resists the absolutization of a single *philosophia perennis* by cultivating an open disposition (*Haltung*), a reflective and dialogical stance toward other traditions. Franz Martin Wimmer develops this insight on the level of intercultural communication or interaction. He situates recognition in an ethical *disposition* that grounds dialogical communication and understanding (*Verständigung und Verstehen*), a dialogical effort premised on the equality of partners, an equality of participation rather than a guarantee of agreement:

It is not merely texts that are to be interpreted, nor abstract 'cultures' that encounter one another, but human beings who ... speak together in the expectation that my dialogical partner has something to say to me which I myself could not have said.⁹

Where Ricœur describes recognition as a reversal from mastery to receptivity, Wimmer interprets this same reversal as a critique of centrism (*Zentrismus*), including the temptation to treat one's own horizon as the implicit measure of the whole. Intercultural philosophy, he writes, "is not only anti-Eurocentric, but also criticizes the dependent and exclusionary association with any

⁴ Ram Adhar Mall, *Essays zur interkulturellen Philosophie* (Nordhausen: Bautz, 2003), 116-117.

⁵ Mall, *Essays zur interkulturellen Philosophie*, 42.

⁶ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 156.

⁷ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 156.

⁸ Mall, *Essays zur interkulturellen Philosophie*, 42.

⁹ Franz Martin Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie. Eine Einführung* (Wien: WUV, 2004), 151.

cultural center.”¹⁰ In this light, the Ricœurian “course” of recognition may be reimagined as a process of *decentering* in which the self and its culture learn to relocate themselves within a polycentric network of meaning. Just as Ricœur’s “mutual recognition” refuses the hierarchy between the recognizing and the recognized, Wimmer’s rejection of Eurocentrism or any form of *centrism* refuses the philosophical hierarchy between centers and peripheries without presuming that decentering yields a final unity of perspectives.

For Ricœur, recognition completes the passage from cognition to esteem; for Mall and Wimmer, it becomes the interpretive and dialogical disposition that allows philosophy to exist within a plurality of traditions. Both trajectories resonate at certain points, yet their encounter also exposes unresolved tensions concerning plurality, asymmetry, and the limits of reciprocity. Recognition as *Anerkennung* can be interpreted as opening toward an intercultural stance, a way of thinking and existing that acknowledges the irreducible plurality of truth while sustaining dialogical orientation of reason, understood not as the anticipation of unity, but as an ongoing search for resemblance across difference. As George Taylor has suggested, understanding across cultural difference may be better conceived not as fusion or unity, but as a metaphorical convergence that preserves tension rather than resolving it.¹¹ From this shared standpoint, recognition is not a completed event but a fragile and reversible relation, contingent upon conditions of communication, power, and mutual openness.

1.2. The “Between” and the “Inter”: Hermeneutic Topologies of Encounter in Ricœur and Intercultural Philosophy

The notion of the *between* plays a decisive role in Ricœur’s final reflections on recognition. While it may first appear as a spatial metaphor, Ricœur unfolds its deeper philosophical significance as the location where mutual recognition, reciprocity, and asymmetry are negotiated under tension. His concluding meditation on the dialectic of recognition and misrecognition rests on this fragile space of relationality:

It is in the “between” of the expression “between the protagonists of the exchange” that is concentrated the dialectic of the dissymmetry between me and others and the mutuality of our relations. And it is to the full meaning of this “between” that the integration of this dissymmetry into mutuality in the exchange of gifts contributes.¹²

This *between* is neither a neutral zone nor a fixed bridge between two identities. Rather, it is a dynamic and generative space shaped by asymmetry, mutuality, and fragile recognition, a space that resists both the extremes of fusion (as closure) and the violence of total separation. As Ricœur insists, even in the most generous forms of mutual recognition, dissymmetry is never fully overcome: “The one is not the other. We exchange gifts, but not places.”¹³ Ricœur’s idea of *between* thus introduces an ethical topology of distance and relation. It marks a space where proximity and

¹⁰ Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie. Eine Einführung*, 54-55.

¹¹ George H. Taylor, “Understanding as Metaphoric, Not a Fusion of Horizons,” in *Gadamer and Ricoeur. Critical Horizons for Contemporary Hermeneutics*, ed. Mootz and Taylor (New York: Continuum, 2011), 113.

¹² Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 263.

¹³ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 262.

alterity are intertwined under what he calls "a just distance that integrates respect into intimacy."¹⁴ This notion resists any ideal of complete fusion or immediate transparency, emphasizing instead the necessity of sustained dialogue and symbolic exchange.

Ricœur's reflections in *On Translation* further illuminate this point. There, he explicitly rejects the idea that translation presupposes a third language or an underlying common origin shared by all idioms. Translation unfolds not from a transcultural metalanguage but between historically situated languages, each marked by its own irreducible singularity. What makes translation possible is not prior unity but what Ricœur calls linguistic hospitality: the ethical willingness to welcome the foreign word into one's own home without erasing its strangeness. In this sense, the "between" is not grounded in an original sameness but sustained through a risky and provisional act of mediation.

Intercultural philosophy gives this *between* a more explicit theoretical contour. Heinz Kimmerle emphasizes that philosophy's renewal depends on what occurs in the between (*im Zwischen*), a space that generates novelty without presupposing a common origin "above" the interlocutors: "What emerges from this [in-between] can foster the openness of thinking, make concealed areas within one's own tradition visible, and, in any case, expand its possibilities."¹⁵ The *Zwischen* here is not a void between fixed poles but a generative medium in which new dimensions of thought encounter one another. Ricœur's *between* aligns with this vision; it both marks a hermeneutic threshold where transformation and self-revelation occur through encounter without collapsing difference into synthesis. Ram Adhar Mall further refines this relational idea through his linguistic and philosophical distinction between *trans* and *inter*.¹⁶ For Mall, *inter* does not signify transcendence beyond cultures but rather encounter within them, namely a living experience of dialogue that occurs in the *between*. His critique of *trans*-philosophical abstraction may be placed in partial dialogue with Ricœur's reservations concerning abstract or totalizing forms of synthesis: both insist that the relation between self and other must remain situated, dialogical, and open to transformation, and therefore resistant to any "third place" that would guarantee unity in advance.

Franz Martin Wimmer, finally, gives systematic form to this intuition by grounding philosophy itself in the between (*zwischen*). Wimmer transforms the *inter* from a descriptive prefix into a methodological principle: philosophy, in its very essence, takes place between culturally situated subjects. His approach extends the movement from Ricœur's phenomenology of the self and its relations with others to a communicative ethics grounded in intercultural exchange. In this light, Ricœur's *between* and the intercultural *inter* can be read as mutually illuminating, while also exposing tensions concerning mediation and asymmetry. Both designate a non-synthetic space of relation, a philosophical and ethical space where identities encounter one another under conditions of shared vulnerability and mutual incompleteness, while preserving the irreducible singularity of each self. The *course of recognition* takes place precisely in this *between*, as a fragile interval that must be sustained, not a bridge that guarantees convergence: "A just distance is maintained at the heart of mutuality."¹⁷ Such "just distance" does not designate neutrality or detached observation. It

¹⁴ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 262.

¹⁵ Heinz Kimmerle, *Die Dimension des Interkulturellen: Supplemente und Verallgemeinerungsschritte* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 138.

¹⁶ Hamid Reza Yousefi and Ram Adhar Mall, *Grundpositionen der interkulturellen Philosophie* (Nordhausen: Bautz, 2005), 107.

¹⁷ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 262.

names instead a form of evaluative discernment: the capacity to acknowledge difference while critically assessing claims in light of shared ethical responsibility. Read together, Ricœur's reflections and those of intercultural philosophy clarify the *between* not as an empty space but as a living process. The *inter* and the *between* equally mark the threshold where understanding, transformation, and even misrecognition occur. They resist the closure of identity while sustaining the dialogue that makes recognition possible. Ricœur's "just distance" thus corresponds to the intercultural *Zwischen*, a fragile yet creative interval in which thinking and recognition remain open; unfinished but continually renewed through exchange.

1.3. Recognition Between Universality and Plurality

Before proceeding, a clarification is necessary regarding the conceptual vocabulary employed throughout this paper. Terms such as unity, universality, synthesis, and even framework, do not designate a completed totality or a harmonizing structure that absorbs plurality into sameness. Rather, they are used in a regulative and procedural sense: unity names a task of holding together without eliminating difference; universality is employed here not in a strong transcendental or systematic sense, but in a limited hermeneutic sense referring to openness toward plurality and dialogue. Synthesis is used here in a limited and analogical sense, referring to provisional articulation rather than a completed or totalizing unity.

Scholarship on Ricœur has increasingly emphasized the cultural and intercultural dimensions of his thought, while also exposing unresolved tensions concerning universality, asymmetry, and the limits of hermeneutic reciprocity. Suzi Adams draws attention to what she terms Ricœur's shift from a hermeneutics of culture to a cultural hermeneutics, highlighting the manner in which symbolic mediation constitutes the very condition of meaning. Timo Helenius explores recognition as a process of cultural subjectivation, interpreting *The Course of Recognition* as a hermeneutic articulation of cultural identity, while also revealing the fragility of reciprocity in contexts marked by asymmetrical relations of power. Ernst Wolff proposes rereading Ricœur from the periphery, thereby exposing tensions between Ricœur's universal aspirations and historically uneven intercultural conditions, situating his philosophy within the unfinished task of decolonization and the pluralization of hermeneutic voices. At the same time, stronger critiques concerning Eurocentrism, colonial asymmetry, and the limits of universalist hermeneutics also remain necessary for assessing the intercultural implications of Ricœur's thought.

2. Recognition as Identification: Temporal and Cultural Mediations

2.1. Recognition and Synthesis Across Time: From Ricœur's Kant Interpretation to Intercultural Continuity

The preceding section situated recognition within the fragile "between" of intercultural relation. The present section turns to Kant not merely to rehearse Ricœur's exposition but to examine a tension internal to this project: how far the Kantian language of synthesis and unity can be retained once recognition is relocated within intercultural plurality. Paul Ricœur begins his inquiry into recognition by turning to Kant, whose *Critique of Pure Reason* plays a fundamental epistemological role concerning the concept of recognition (*Rekognition*). He notes that Kant's transformation lies in the replacement of *distinguishing* with *joining together*. As Ricœur writes: "For

Kant, to identify is to join together.”¹⁸ This emphasis on joining rather than separating reflects a decisive conceptual shift: recognition is no longer the clarification of what is already known but the very synthesis that underlies cognition itself. “Synthesis” here refers to a transcendental operation underlying the possibility of coherent cognition rather than the achievement of a completed unity. Recognition becomes the act that not only holds together experience across successive appearances but also integrates time as a structuring form of sensibility, without implying the erasure of discontinuity or the closure of meaning. Recognition is not a static act of identifying something already known but the active articulation of coherence within consciousness, a transcendental condition for the possibility of cognition rather than a substantive homogenization of experience.

At this point, Ricœur's Kantian epistemology provides a foundational model of *recognition in relation to temporal synthesis and imagination*. Yet intercultural philosophy also questions and revises this model, asking how synthesis functions when identity is not only stretched across time but also dispersed across plural cultures and worldviews. The problem becomes one of intercultural mediation and interpretation across plural cultural horizons, in which “recognition in concept” must be tested against the lived reality of encountering and interpreting others across spatial and symbolic difference without presupposing convergence into a single horizon.

Wimmer's reflections on culture may be placed in partial dialogue with Ricœur's reflections on temporality, mediation, and plurality, while remaining situated within a distinct intercultural framework. In his discussion of the concept of culture (*Zum Begriff der Kultur*), Wimmer distinguishes between two complementary dimensions: *cultura creata* (created culture) and *cultura quae creat* (culture that creates). Drawing on a Neoplatonic analogy, he explains that culture may be understood “in the static sense ... as a *cultura creata*, that is, as a state of culture ... considered from the perspective of what is already given.”¹⁹ This stands in contrast to its dynamic aspect, which he describes as “a *cultura quae creat*, that is, a cultural activity that appears under the aspect of influencing and shaping, and is therefore active or dynamic in nature.”²⁰ When both aspects are brought together, Wimmer concludes: “What we are in fact dealing with might rather be expressed by the formula *cultura creata quae creat*.”²¹

This distinction parallels Ricœur's interpretation of Kant's recognition as a temporal synthesis, an act that receives and produces coherence. Just as *cultura creata quae creat* (created culture that creates) mediates between inheritance and innovation, Ricœur's synthesis of recognition joins the receptive temporality of inner sense with the productive spontaneity of the understanding. In both cases, the human subject is not merely the passive bearer of a given order but also its ongoing interpreter and re-creator. Recognition thus functions, epistemologically and culturally, as the mediation that unites *given* and *giving*, *creata* and *creans*: a unity best understood as a task than a completed synthesis. Ricœur's own reflections on tradition reinforce this point. Tradition is not mere sedimentation but a dialectic between sedimentation and innovation.²² What

¹⁸ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 36.

¹⁹ Franz Martin Wimmer, *Globalität und Philosophie* (Wien: Turia + Kant, 2003), 120.

²⁰ Wimmer, *Globalität und Philosophie*, 120.

²¹ Wimmer, *Globalität und Philosophie*, 121.

²² Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. 1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 68.

has been “created” can become the reservoir of future reinterpretation. Tradition, rather than culture understood as a totalized entity, remains open to reinterpretation.

Wimmer’s insight further clarifies the intercultural implications of Ricoeur’s model. Every culture, he writes, possesses “something internally universal, the particular unity of form encompassing all expressions of life within a group of people,”²³ yet this internal universality is never self-enclosed. Here “universality” functions primarily as an internal coherence of form, not as a claim to an overarching unity that cancels plurality.²⁴ Similarly, Ricoeur’s synthesis of recognition depends on the temporal openness of consciousness, its capacity to integrate new representations into a coherent identity without erasing their difference. Both perspectives resist the illusion of a purely static unity: identity, whether personal or cultural, must be continually renewed through interpretation and remains exposed to correction through encounter. This insight finds systematic articulation in *Oneself as Another*, where Ricoeur describes identity not as a substance but as a task sustained through narrative configuration and ethical attestation. The self is never given once and for all; it is constituted through the ongoing mediation between sameness (*idem*) and selfhood (*ipse*). In this sense, Ricoeur’s account of personal identity as an unfinished and mediated process may also illuminate certain intercultural and historical dynamics, although important differences remain between selfhood and the historical continuity of cultures and traditions.

From this standpoint, recognition through time in Ricoeur corresponds to cultural creativity through encounter in Wimmer. To recognize is to join what has been received with what can still be formed, to inhabit the tension between *cultura creata* and *cultura quae creat*. In both epistemological and intercultural senses, recognition becomes the act that transforms continuity into reinterpretation and historical renewal, thus making unity not a presupposition but an ongoing and revisable task. In this sense, Ricoeur’s engagement with Kant may be read as preserving a distinction between transcendental structures of temporality and their concrete hermeneutic actualization. What is configured is a provisional coherence open to revision rather than a closed unity. When placed in dialogue with intercultural philosophy, it gestures toward a broader horizon of intercultural mediation. Here, “recognition in concept” extends beyond the temporality of inner experience and is tested against the plurality of cultural horizons. It thereby enters the fragile and uncertain process of encountering and interpreting others across spatial and symbolic difference.

2.2. The Test of Recognition: From the Unrecognizable to Intercultural Rupture and Renewal

At the heart of Ricoeur’s analysis lies the proposition that recognition is inseparable from change. He affirms: “The one common feature that these modes of being must share to give rise to operations of recognition, it seems to me, is change.”²⁵ Ricoeur’s analysis of perceptual uncertainty and re-identification mirrors the *intercultural condition* in which the familiar categories of one’s own culture often fail to accommodate the other. Misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) should therefore be understood as an inherent risk in all recognition, especially within intercultural encounters.

²³ Wimmer, *Globalität und Philosophie*, 120.

²⁴ Wimmer, *Globalität und Philosophie*, 121.

²⁵ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 61.

Ricœur's meditation culminates in a poetic reflection on time as both an agent of distortion and of grace: "Time, the artist, had made all the sitters portraits that were recognizable, yet they were not likenesses ... He was an artist, moreover, who worked very slowly."²⁶ This metaphor expresses the essence of intercultural recognition, not as the static matching of pre-existing identities, but as a fragile and historically mediated process shaped by memory, symbolic continuity, change, and affective engagement.

Within the framework of intercultural philosophy, Ricœur's phenomenology of temporal change finds a comparable counterpart in Franz Martin Wimmer's typology of retrospective and prospective identity (*retrospektive* and *prospektive Identität*). Defining *rupture* as "the phenomenon that something which previously (or later again) was self-evident ... is no longer (or not yet) self-evident"²⁷, Wimmer asks how unity can be conceived when rupture is the rule. Here "unity" is at stake precisely as something that must be rearticulated, not as a stable possession. He distinguishes between identities that draw continuity from the past and those that create it from the future. The retrospective identity looks back to an origin that must be preserved, "past as origin"²⁸ (*Vergangenheit als Ursprung*), and finds stability by maintaining continuity with what once was. By contrast, the prospective identity begins from rupture: "present as origin"²⁹ (*Gegenwart als Ursprung*), where continuity "is possible only afterwards.

In Ricœurian terms, the passage of recognition "through increasing degrees of misrecognition to the point of nonrecognition"³⁰ delineates precisely the experiential threshold where retrospective orientation loses its hold and a new prospective configuration must be articulated. Read in this light, Ricœur's "test" of recognition maps onto Wimmer's temporal dialectic. The backward pull of memory resonates with retrospective identification (*Vergangenheit als Ursprung*), while the forward orientation of reconfiguration embodies prospective identification (*Gegenwart als Ursprung*). Ricœur's hesitation at the moment of recognition, "to predicate two contradictory things of a single subject"³¹, expresses the same structural tension Wimmer describes when identities must be rearticulated after a rupture, that is, when coherence must be regained without erasing discordance. Just as Ricœur's recognition must reconcile the memory of what has been with the perception of what is now, Wimmer's identity oscillates between the retrospective need for coherence and the prospective openness to transformation.

3. Recognizing Oneself: Capability, Narrative, and Intercultural Responsibility

3.1. Attestation and the Capable Human Being: From Inner Rule to Intercultural Responsibility

Following the epistemological and structural themes of recognition, our focus now turns to the constitution of the self. The aim here is not merely to revisit key developments within

²⁶ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 66.

²⁷ Wimmer, *Globalität und Philosophie*, 92.

²⁸ Wimmer, *Globalität und Philosophie*, 94.

²⁹ Wimmer, *Globalität und Philosophie*, 94.

³⁰ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 61.

³¹ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 66.

Ricœur's philosophical anthropology, but to show how capability and attestation provide a necessary bridge between self-recognition and intercultural responsibility. This shift brings us to his phenomenology of the capable human being. Ricœur's phenomenology of the "capable human being" (*l'homme capable*) offers a systematic and differentiated account of self-recognition. Ricœur shifts attention to an anthropology, where self-recognition is articulated through a variety of interrelated capacities: speaking, acting, narrating, and, at a more reflexive level, imputing responsibility, remembering, and promising. At the center of this anthropology is the notion of ipseity. This concept exceeds the Cartesian ego and Kantian subject by the self as reflexively mediated through practices and relations without dissolving the irreducibility of selfhood. For Ricœur, this complex web of I can statements ("I can speak," "I can act," "I can promise," etc.)³² provides the foundation of what he calls a "hermeneutics of selfhood".

Ricœur's notion of attestation expresses a fundamental assertion of oneself as an acting subject, an assertion that remains exposed to the possibility of correction, challenge, or refusal by others. Without this structure of attestation, intercultural dialogue would lack an accountable subject capable of answering for its claims. It mediates between the fragility of the human condition and the stability of moral responsibility: the "I can" is always accompanied by the "I answer for." The capable self is not an independent origin but a self mediated through relations with others. Nevertheless, it remains the irreplaceable center of reflection, action, and attestation, whose claims are ethically answerable before others and within just institutions while preserving its own capacity for judgement and responsibility.

The Ricœurian idea of attestation implies that every "I can" involves a performative claim. To say "I can speak" or "I can promise" is to assert a certain reliability of the self before others. While capacities such as speaking indicate basic forms of agency, promising introduces a higher ethical commitment through which the self attests to its own constancy across time. This attestation functions as what might be called an inner rule, understood as a commitment to truthfulness and accountability within the act itself but which cannot secure its own legitimacy apart from intersubjective validation. The capable self is therefore not absolute; rather, it is confirmed through dialogue, responsibility, and reciprocity. In this respect, attestation operates analogously, though not identically, to what in intercultural philosophy Franz Martin Wimmer calls a minimal rule (*Minimalregel*) governing philosophical communication.

Wimmer gives this openness a practical and intercultural formulation in his minimal rule. This minimal rule functions less as a normative law than as a guiding attitude, one that transforms the hermeneutic disposition of philosophy itself. He writes: "Do not consider any philosophical thesis to be well founded if only people belonging to a single cultural tradition have participated in its formation."³³ This minimal rule is an ethical imperative against intellectual monologue. It functions as an outer rule complementing Ricœur's inner rule of attestation. While Ricœur's notion of attestation asks the self to give evidence of its own capacity, Wimmer's rule asks that any claim to truth give evidence of its legitimacy across different cultures.

Taken together, Ricœur's attestation and Wimmer's *Minimalregel* establish a dual framework of responsibility, one directed inward, the other outward. The capable self attests to its agency through acting, speaking, and assuming responsibility despite the fragility of selfhood; the

³² Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 93ff.

³³ Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie. Eine Einführung*, 54.

intercultural philosopher exposes claims of reason to dialogue, critique, and revision across plural perspectives. Both demand faith in human capability balanced by an awareness of its limits. In Ricœur, this limit appears as the ever-present fragility of the "I can"; in Wimmer, it appears as the epistemic humility articulated in the minimal rule. Thus, attestation and the minimal rule jointly describe the ethical and methodological conditions of recognition in an intercultural era.

3.2. Narrative Identity and Intercultural Configuration: Mediating Ipseity Between Discord and Concord

Ricœur's anthropology of the capable human being finds its most dynamic expression in narrative identity (*identité narrative*), which mediates between sameness (*idem*) and selfhood (*ipse*). This formulation shifts the question of identity from ontology to hermeneutics. Narrative mediation does not produce a simple unity. Rather, as developed in *Time and Narrative*, narrative identity arises through the interplay of concordance and discordance.³⁴ The self becomes intelligible through the emplotment (*mise en intrigue*) of heterogeneous occurrences into a meaningful whole. "The character," he writes, "is him- or herself emplotted"³⁵, which means that the unity of the self is not pre-given but emplotted into being through narration, a narrative coherence that remains revisable as the story is retold.

In intercultural perspective, narrative identity thus becomes a space where translation and transformation take place. Every culture configures human time and agency through distinctive narrative grammars, myths, histories, or genealogies that mediate between continuity and rupture. When Ricœur insists that the self can only endure through narrative mediation, he implicitly gestures toward the plural forms of such mediation across cultures. What remains constant is not a universal story but the capacity to narrate, the performative act of making meaning through differences.

3.3. The Performative "I Can": From Speech Acts to Shared Responsibility in Intercultural Mediation

If narrative identity provides the temporal configuration of the self, the performative structure of the "I can" provides its pragmatic articulation. Ricœur's analysis of action and speech, following Austin's speech act theory, reveals that the declaration "I can" is itself an act. To say "I can speak" or "I can promise" is to perform an act of self-commitment; it transforms potentiality into actuality. The "I can" is neither descriptive nor metaphysical; it is performative, an act of speech through which the self manifests and attests to its agency within conditions it never fully masters, and whose intelligibility and public acknowledgment depend upon its uptake within a shared horizon of meaning.

This performative dimension carries deep intercultural significance. In every linguistic and cultural world, saying "I can" assumes a shared framework of meaning in which the act is understood as valid and significant. The ability to act or to make a promise therefore depends on the cultural and dialogical contexts that make such speech acts intelligible. Ricœur's hermeneutics situates capability within shared conditions of interpretation and communication without reducing agency to intersubjective constitution. Human agency is always mediated, though not

³⁴ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, 229.

³⁵ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 99.

fully constituted, by culture and communication. By grounding capability in attestation, Ricœur's hermeneutics may be placed in partial dialogue with Wimmer's minimal rule: no act of reason or selfhood is legitimate if it arises from only one tradition of meaning. The "I can" implicitly gestures toward a "we can" of recognition, insofar as every performative claim presupposes a community capable of understanding, responding, and possibly contesting it. Moreover, the performative "I can" must be continuously verified by the praxis of responsibility. In Ricœur's terms, imputability marks the point where the self's performative claim encounters its ethical test. "With imputability the notion of a capable subject reaches its highest meaning."³⁶ To promise, to act, to remember, each of these "I can" statements implies an "I answer for", a structure that binds agency to accountability before others. The link between attestation, self-imputation, and responsibility forms the basis of Ricœur's moral anthropology and reflects Wimmer's idea that intercultural philosophy should move beyond abstract tolerance to concrete practices that change how we think.

From this point, the link back to intercultural mediation becomes clear. The performative structure of capability reaches beyond the individual and extends toward a community of dialogue partners. Many expressions of "I can" take on their meaning within relations with others. The statement "I can speak" finds its meaning within dialogue; while a promise may be initiated by an individual act of commitment, its validity and endurance often depend upon a shared horizon in which others can remember, respond, or hold the agent accountable. Seen through Wimmer's *minimal rule*, Ricœur's ideas of narrative identity and the performative "I can" together describe a process of intercultural dialogue and mutual interpretation. Together, narrative identity and performative capability form the hermeneutical link between individual self-recognition and intercultural dialogue.

4. Mutual Recognition: Ethics of Reciprocity and Intercultural Listening

4.1. From Mutuality to Polylogue: Structural Tensions Between Dissymmetry and Reciprocity

The move from self-recognition to mutual recognition marks not merely a further step in Ricœur's argument, but the decisive point at which recognition must be rethought in intercultural terms. If self-recognition grounds agency in attestation, mutual recognition tests that agency within relations of asymmetry, vulnerability, and historical difference. It is here that the Ricœurian framework opens toward intercultural philosophy, for recognition can no longer be understood solely at the level of selfhood but must also be enacted as a fragile ethical practice among plural and unequal interlocutors. Ricœur repeatedly warns against premature closure in the name of reciprocity. "What matters is the seriousness with which each of the two parties undertakes to overcome the dissymmetry that, in a way, persists in the background of experiences of reciprocity, leaving reciprocity to appear as an always incomplete surpassing of this dissymmetry."³⁷ While acknowledging Levinas's emphasis on ethical asymmetry, Ricœur reinterprets this relation in a way that preserves the initiative, capability, and responsibility of the self.³⁸

³⁶ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 105.

³⁷ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 154.

³⁸ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 331.

This subtle philosophical caution resonates with positions in intercultural philosophy. Ram Adhar Mall proposes equal standing (*Gleichrangigkeit*) rather than equality (*Gleichheit*) as the principle governing intercultural dialogues. His formulation acknowledges structural historical, political, linguistic asymmetry while insisting on a dialogical form of mutual recognition that does not diminish difference. Franz Martin Wimmer's minimal rule in the previous section similarly posits that "only when a genuine mutual exchange takes place in reciprocal recognition is intercultural philosophy possible."³⁹, thereby instituting a baseline of reciprocal recognition without presuming the leveling of difference or power.

Ricœur's reflection on mutual recognition culminates in an anthropology of shared existence, in which the self and the other are bound by the fragile relation of one another (*allelon*). Yet, as Ricœur insists, this reciprocity is never pure or symmetrical. The ethical meaning of recognition lies not in its completion but in its attempt, in the continuing movement toward the other that never cancels difference. In this perspective, mutual recognition is best understood as a fragile practice of reconciliation and mediation across asymmetrical relations: a process through which agents, histories, and languages sustain an unfinished dialogue. It is here that Franz Martin Wimmer's notion of *polylog* becomes illuminating, for it provides a concrete intercultural articulation of the relational structure that Ricœur describes phenomenologically. By *polylog*, Wimmer does not simply mean dialogue extended to multiple participants. Rather, *polylog* designates a methodological and structural principle according to which philosophical claims must emerge through the interaction of several cultural perspectives, none of which can claim priority as a universal center. The quotation that follows summarizes this orientation, but *polylog* itself refers not merely to the "in-between" as a space, but to the disciplined practice of sustaining plurality within argumentation. Wimmer writes: "One of the essential tasks of intercultural philosophy is to develop methods that bring modes of thinking originating from different cultural backgrounds into a mutually enriching dialogue."⁴⁰

Wimmer's formulation clarifies what Ricœur's phenomenology leaves implicit: the *between* of recognition must itself become a shared practice of speaking and listening. While Ricœur's *allelon* captures the ethical reciprocity between self and other, *polylog* unfolds this reciprocity across a multiplicity of participants. In this sense, *polylog* can be read as a collective enactment of responsibility that parallels Ricœurian attestation, an extension of "I can" into a dialogical "we can." The *allelon* becomes the medium through which diverse traditions enter into processes of translation, comparison, and mutual interpretation without reducing difference to sameness.⁴¹ Both thinkers, in distinct spheres, resist closure: for Ricœur, the closure of reciprocity into equality; for Wimmer, the closure of universality into monologue. In each case, recognition represents not a substantive universality but an open-ended orientation toward mutual understanding.

Finally, Ricœur's contribution lies in revealing the phenomenological depth of this openness. The *mutual* in mutual recognition does not imply symmetry but the ongoing work of maintaining a just distance, a relation that holds together proximity and difference. Such "just

³⁹ Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie. Eine Einführung*, 19-20.

⁴⁰ Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie. Eine Einführung*, 19.

⁴¹ Ricœur's model of translation extends beyond language to the exchange of memories and narratives, providing a framework through which different historical traditions may encounter, compare, and reinterpret one another without reducing difference. See Paul Ricœur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe" (1995).

distance" implies the capacity to acknowledge difference while critically assessing claims in light of shared ethical responsibilities. In this sense, it preserves both openness to the other and the critical dimension of dialogue. Viewed in this light, Wimmer's *polylog* does not introduce something external to Ricoeur's ethics but rather rearticulates its relational structure under intercultural conditions. Mutual recognition, to remain true to the plurality of the human condition, must take on a *polylogical* form that preserves alterity rather than assimilating differences into a unified horizon. In this light, mutual recognition and intercultural recognition both reject the erasure of dissymmetry. Yet they also preserve the possibility of normative critique, since dissymmetry may arise not only from difference but from injustice. They rather cultivate a structural attentiveness to the *inter*, not as a median of sameness, but as a location where relational difference becomes productive.

4.2. Agape and Listening: Symbolic Generosity and the Ethics of Intercultural Encounter

Deepening the structural and ethical tension explored in mutual recognition, Ricoeur introduces the concept of *agape* as a transformative force within the phenomenology of recognition. *Agape*, for Ricoeur, is a "gift [that] neither requires nor expects a gift in return"⁴²; it radically decenters the self and resists the expectation of equivalence. It is this absence of calculation that "renders unnecessary the reference to equivalents because it knows nothing of comparison and calculation."⁴³ *Agape* introduces a non-strategic disposition of generosity that makes possible the symbolic gestures of forgiveness, hospitality, and peace. This *agapeic* model of recognition invites comparison with Heinz Kimmerle's methodology of *listening* (*Methodologie des Hörens*). What intercultural philosophy does is not to invent listening, but to radicalize and extend it across cultural and historical plurality. He writes:

The project of an intercultural philosophy consists, first of all, in listening, listening for a long time, to how the philosophy of another culture articulates itself as a response to certain questions and as a reaction to certain arguments. Listening, too, must be learned; it requires openness, concentration, discipline, and a methodically guided technique. Like understanding, which comes much later, it is an art.⁴⁴

In this formulation, listening is not a preparatory stage preceding understanding but a self-suspending attitude that corresponds, in its ethical structure, to Ricoeur's notion of *agape*. Listening, as Kimmerle understands it, requires patient, non-appropriative attentiveness, a willingness to remain with what cannot yet, or perhaps never will, be fully understood. In this sense, recognition as acknowledgement should not be understood as the assimilation of the other into one's own horizon, but rather as the ethical capacity to sustain alterity without dissolving it into sameness. In Ricoeur's vocabulary, this non-reciprocal orientation of hearing the other without immediate comprehension mirrors the symbolic generosity of *agape*: a gift without return that acknowledges the other's presence as irreducibly other. Yet *agape* does not eliminate critical judgment. As Ricoeur's engagement with Freud demonstrates, generous listening may serve not to endorse but

⁴² Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 219.

⁴³ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 220.

⁴⁴ Kimmerle, *Die Dimension des interkulturellen: Supplemente und Verallgemeinerungsschritte*, 127-28.

to retrieve a fuller hermeneutics beyond distortion. *Agape*, therefore, does not suspend critique; it orients critique toward more humane ends.

For both thinkers, such openness entails an ethical risk. Kimmerle explicitly warns that one “must, of course, not expect that in such a dialogue everything will become comprehensible or find a place within one’s own horizon of understanding.”⁴⁵ What remains incomprehensible, the “isolated fragments” (*erratische Blöcke*) of the intercultural encounter, marks precisely the limit where listening becomes a form of acknowledgment rather than assimilation. Likewise, Ricœur’s *agape* refuses the closure of mutuality into symmetry; it is a gesture of giving that persists even in the absence of return, the counterpart to Kimmerle’s listening, which listens even when understanding fails. In this light, both *agape* and listening sustain a relation grounded in generosity, openness, and attentiveness to otherness. The act of listening, “to listen over a long period of time” (*lange Zeit hindurch zu hören*), creates the temporal and ethical space in which Ricœur’s “peaceful experiences of mutual recognition”⁴⁶ become possible across cultures. From this perspective, recognition does not consist in reducing difference but in remaining open to transformation through encounter with the other. *Agape* may thus be understood as an ethical disposition that also opens a possible mode of intercultural engagement. Yet such generosity remains embedded within relations of responsiveness. That is what Ricœur, following Mauss, describes as the dynamic of “give, receive, give in return”⁴⁷. It is within this tension between asymmetry and reciprocity that the possibility of intercultural recognition emerges as a fragile and continually renewed achievement.

5. Intercultural Recognition: From Path to Framework

Taken together, the course of recognition may be read as a heuristic cartography of intercultural philosophy. What begins as a phenomenological itinerary becomes a framework for intercultural understanding, one that remains open to revision rather than fixed as a completed system. At the methodological level, the dialogue between Ricœur and intercultural philosophy calls for practices that safeguard the *Zwischen*, the in-between space of dialogue. The *polylogue* that Wimmer envisions is not a deliberative assembly of cultures but a hermeneutic workshop where meaning is constantly renegotiated. To take part in such dialogue is to accept incompleteness, what Ricœur calls the fragility of recognition. Within this framework, attestation becomes intercultural responsibility: narrative identity turns into intercultural translation and mutual recognition unfolds as polylogical practice. The Ricœurian *between* thus takes institutional shape through Wimmer’s *minimal rule* and Mall’s principle of equal standing, while Kimmerle’s art of listening provides its affective depth.

If Ricœur provides one possible path, intercultural philosophy simultaneously extends and questions this trajectory by confronting it with plurality, asymmetry, and forms of structural difference that remain insufficiently developed within Ricœur’s own framework. Ricœur’s phenomenology of recognition, though attentive to vulnerability and reciprocity, leaves insufficiently addressed the broader question of structural power, colonial asymmetry, and

⁴⁵ Kimmerle, *Die Dimension des interkulturellen: Supplemente und Verallgemeinerungsschritte*, 126.

⁴⁶ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 219.

⁴⁷ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 243.

historically uneven conditions of recognition.⁴⁸ While exposing the limits of Eurocentrism, intercultural philosophy also lacks at times the resources through which Ricœur articulates forgiveness, reconciliation, and narrative mediation⁴⁹.

Ricœur's course of recognition may be read as a preparatory anthropology for intercultural philosophy, one whose limits become newly visible through intercultural critique, yet whose unrealized potentialities of meaning may also be reopened through such encounters. Recognition is never completed. It must be "won from the unrecognizable"⁵⁰ again and again, each time history fractures or misunderstanding returns. The course of intercultural recognition therefore has no end; it is a perpetual passage through the *between*, a disciplined openness that unites humility with creativity. What endures is not consensus but the fragile willingness to sustain dialogue across enduring cultural differences. In this sense, the ethical and hermeneutic legacy of Ricœur converges with the methodological attentiveness of intercultural philosophy to propose a shared orientation: to cultivate the just distance in which respect and intimacy, critique and openness, remain in productive tension. The path of recognition thus becomes a fragile and unfinished project, continually exposed to misunderstanding, asymmetry, and renewed misrecognition, while remaining open to intercultural correction, revision, and transformation. It is through this ongoing process that human beings and cultures may come to understand themselves anew, not by assimilating others to their own image, but by acknowledging alterity as a condition of mutual transformation.

⁴⁸ This dimension is addressed elsewhere in Ricœur's reflections on ideology, authority, and the political paradox, but it cannot be pursued here within the limited scope of the present discussion and remains underdeveloped within the framework of recognition itself.

⁴⁹ Further engagement with more critical perspectives, such as those developed by Enrique Dussel or Jeanne Marie Gagnebin, may help deepen the unresolved tensions concerning asymmetry, historical violence, and the limits of universalist hermeneutics within intercultural recognition. These questions remain important avenues for future research.

⁵⁰ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 66.

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