

PAUL RICOEUR AND THE TRANSLATION- INTERPRETATION OF CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

Dengan mengelola gagasan Ricoeur tentang '*Hermeneutics of Self*' artikel ini membahas kesadaran tentang pluralitas budaya dan bahasa yang makin nyata. Dalam situasi itu komunikasi makna menuntut 'penerjemahan' serentak kewajiban 'berdukacita'. Dalam kerangka itu identitas bukan lagi soal 'batas' melainkan soal interaksi. Identitas mesti dilihat sebagai sesuatu yang tak pernah final, ber-evolusi dalam saling penerjemahan antar bahasa dan budaya. Penerjemahan adalah pertarungan yang diwarnai 'dukacita' sebab penerjemahan identitas kita oleh pihak lain (eksternal) maupun oleh diri sendiri (internal) selalu hanya sampai pada 'ekuivalensi tanpa adekuasi', dan kesenjangan itu tak kan pernah teratasi.

It may come as no surprise to claim that the question of translation-interpretation has been at the heart of Paul Ricoeur's philosophical enterprise. Indeed, translation may be said to be an abiding interest of Ricoeur. Early on in his philosophical career, he made a mark in the phenomenological movement by translating, while he was a POW at the outset of World War II, Edmund Husserl's *Ideen I*.¹ Paul Ricoeur, of course, went on to become one of the three “giants” of contemporary hermeneutics.² Towards the end of his life, one of the last books he published was a collection of essays aptly entitled *Sur la traduction*.³

My aim is to bring out some of Ricoeur's ideas on translation, particularly, to indicate some guideposts on the way to the translation-interpretation of cultures.

Before doing this, allow me to give you a quick broad sketch of Paul Ricoeur's “hermeneutics of the self.”⁴ Hailed as “the philosopher of all dialogues” when he passed away in May 2005, Ricoeur sought to answer the question “What is the meaning of being human?” by undertaking a multidisciplinary dialogue not only with different movements in philosophy (marxism, structuralism, hermeneutics) but with the human sciences (like psychoanalysis, linguistics, history), literary criticism, and biblical exegesis.⁵ For Ricoeur, there is no other way to understand oneself except through the interpretation of the expressions of the self—one's actions, symbols, myths, metaphors, and texts.⁶ What is unique in this 'hermeneutics of the self' is the stress on the 'creativity' of language, action, time, narrative identity and memory. Without ignoring the vulnerability of our human condition, Ricoeur brought out the capacities of 'capable human being' or the basic powers that found our humanity.⁷ These are the capacity to speak or the ability to produce a reasoned discourse; the capacity to act or the power to produce events in society and nature; the capacity to narrate or the power to recount stories that reveal our hidden possibilities; the capacity to feel responsible for our actions; the capacity to promise or the ability to keep our word; the capacity to forgive or the power to address a liberating word to the Other; and the capacity to experience a “happy memory,” with just enough remembering and forgetting.⁸ From this description of capable human being, we see that the entire orientation of Ricoeur's philosophy is essentially “ethical” in the sense that it awakens in us the power to exist creatively. Clearly, Paul Ricoeur, the philosopher of hermeneutics, is the philosopher of hope who proclaims the superabundance of sense over the abundance of nonsense. It may be this conviction of a sense which can be transmitted that is the impetus for the question of translation.

The Passion for Translation

But what accounts for Ricoeur's passion for translation?⁹ One may immediately trace it to his high regard for the “great texts” texts coming from traditions that continue to be maintained alive through the grace of interpretation. The transmission, translation, and interpretation of these texts certainly preoccupied Ricoeur. Taking a cue from Marcel Henaff, three major reasons may help us understand Ricoeur's undeniable interest in translation.¹⁰ First, there is the general theoretical problem of the transmission of a message from one tradition to another tradition, or even, the transfer of meaning from one language to another. Second, there is the ethical question of alterity, of the difference between the Self and the Other. Third, there is the question of the plurality of languages for a single humanity. Why are there so many languages—so many obstacles to communication? Why is there a profusion of cultures? How should we interpret the myth of Babel? Rather than taking it as a story of regret, the translation-interpretation of texts may help us to look at the myth of Babel as an opportunity, a task.

Civilization: The level of values

One cannot but notice that the young Ricoeur interested himself in the question of civilization and culture. In an essay of 1951 entitled (“Towards the Peaceful Coexistence of Civilizations”) “*Pour la coexistence pacifique des civilisations*,” Ricoeur embarked on a “critique of civilization.”¹¹ According to him, the urgent task is to exercise a difficult “discernment” of civilization.¹² This difficult “discernment” should not be a way of shunning the pressing problems of our time but a means of strengthening the motivation behind our social and political commitment. After all, to be socially and politically committed is “to choose, in a global fashion, a model of being human, a way of living, of owning, of earning and spending one's money, of working and distributing the fruits of labor, of obeying and commanding, of enjoying oneself and boring oneself.”¹³ One must therefore discern in order to act. But in turn, one must also act in order to be able to discern.

What then is the meaning of “civilization”? Ricoeur's first attempt in answering this question is found in his earliest essay on civilization written in 1946—(“The Christian and Western Civilization”) “*Le chrétien et la civilisation occidentale*”.¹⁴ Here, he reflects on the values that constitute a civilization and inquires on how these same values get maintained in history.

Ricoeur does not at all begin his analysis with a preconceived and rigid notion. On the contrary, he allows the vague and global preunderstanding of this notion to lead him towards the fundamental discovery of our existence as incarnate and historical.

According to Ricoeur, we participate in a certain adventure, with historico- geographical limits, that promotes certain values. These values “all at once permeate us, support us, limit us, and yet subsist only by our consent and our action.”¹⁵ If we delve more closely into this global lived experience, we perceive these basic aspects: first, civilization is a situation; second, a civilization is relative to other civilizations; third, the values of a civilization are both historical and transcendent; fourth, there is an exigency for the creative renewal of these values; and fifth, there is a reciprocal relation between the values of civilization and the values of religion. Let us briefly take these up one by one.

First of all, civilization manifests itself as my situation. I am originally bound to my civilization in the same way that I am linked to my body. In this sense, civilization is a social extension of my body. It plays the same equivocal role as my body—I obey it and I command it. My civilization is, at the same time, a hindrance and a chance, (or as we put it here, a burden and an opportunity, “a nature and a task.”¹⁶

Secondly, my civilization is relative to other civilizations. Although there is but a single humanity, there are many diverse civilizations. The relativity of civilizations, cultures and traditions has become even more pronounced in the present time. It is no longer possible to adhere to a tradition without introducing into one's own allegiance a critical consciousness of its relativity with regard to other traditions.¹⁷

Thirdly, every civilization presents certain original values. To speak of a civilization is to point to the constellation of values that give it a unique stamp. According to Ricoeur, the core of a civilization is “a global will-to-live, a way of living; and this will-to-live is animated by judgments and values.”¹⁸ Here, we notice the paradox of values—they arise in history but nevertheless transcend it. Justice and freedom, for example, are *a priori* values but they only appear in history when revealed by the initiative of outstanding personalities, mass movements, or by the spirit of the age.

Fourthly, there is the exigency of creatively renewing the values of a civilization. Values only flourish insofar as they are nourished by the “voluntary memory” of a people.¹⁹ This “voluntary memory” does not safeguard the past passively but renews it creatively.²⁰ In a way, it is absurd to defend the past or that which has been acquired. What one defends is the future or a project that will be.

Lastly, there is a reciprocal relation between the values of civilization and the values of religion. One can even go so far as to say that the values of a civilization, which are also moral values, are “guaranteed” by religious values, in the sense that the latter strengthen the former. Certainly, these moral values in themselves are “neutral” with regard to religion. But their true nature does not exclude a relationship with religious values. According to Ricoeur, history has particularly shown us that moral values wither away when they no longer have the “horizon” of a greater hope which goes beyond the individual and the common good. Religion prevents moral values from perishing away by giving us a higher motive of dedication and fidelity to the values of civilization. We may speak then of a dialectical relation between moral and religious values. On the one hand, moral values need to be related to religion in order to endure.²¹ On the other hand, religious values need to be manifested in the world through moral values.

We have made this brief survey to show that many of the themes subsequently developed by Ricoeur regarding civilization and culture already find expression in this essay of 1946. In Ricoeur's philosophical exploration, we see these themes become elaborated with greater detail and more nuance. For now, we note that Ricoeur's analysis here stays exclusively on the level of *values*. In an essay, nearly twenty years later, he differentiates three varied levels in the phenomenon of civilization.

Civilization: The three levels

In a 1965 talk entitled “The Tasks of the Political Educator” addressed to “all those who feel responsible for the transformation, the evolution, and the revolution of their countries by an act of thought, of speech and of writing,” Ricoeur takes up again the analysis of the phenomenon of civilization.²² This time, his method is “analytic” which he qualifies as proceeding “by means of a series of divisions, determining a series of levels and provisionally unconcerned on articulating these levels.”²³ The advantage of this analytic approach lies in bringing out “what is irreducible in politics in relation to economics and techniques.”²⁴ It is important to realize that the term “civilization” is used here by Ricoeur in its largest sense which covers the three levels of *industries*²⁵, *institutions*, and *values*. By doing this, Ricoeur steers away from what he considers as the “sterile” debate linked to the different origin of the two terms “civilization” and “culture”. In German sociology, the word “*Kultur*” is restricted to the level of values while the word “*Civilization*” covers the three levels of industries,

institutions, and values. However, one also speaks of “acculturation” to refer to the growth of civilization in all its aspects.

1. The level of “industries”

By the first level of *industries*, Ricoeur refers to a very vast aspect of civilization that does not only go beyond the level of tools and machines but also of techniques. In a general way, “industries” may be applied to “everything which can be considered as the accumulation of experience.”²⁶ This phenomenon of accumulation is at once evident on the level of tools and machines. With their conservation, particular historical inventions become the universal acquisition of humanity. Ricoeur broadens further the meaning of “industries” to include the “whole network of organized mediations which are put into the service of science, politics, economics, and even of ways of living and means of leisure.”²⁷ In this sense, the level of techniques taken as “collective experience” can be regarded as the level of “industries” crystallized into disposable goods. Finally, Ricoeur extends the meaning of “industries” to cover not only technical inventions but also intellectual, moral, and artistic achievements. Thus, documents, monuments, actions, works of art (insofar as they represent the crystallized forms of these experiences) figure as “industries.” In the widest sense, “industries” therefore refer to every human experience to the extent that it leaves traces.

On this first level, civilization assumes a singular form—there is *a* civilization. From the viewpoint of a technological history, there is but one global civilization. Ricoeur points out that this awareness of belonging to a single universal civilization is fairly recent. For the first time in history, we “experience ourselves as a single humanity which enlarges its capital, its instruments and means of working, living and thinking.”²⁸

2. The level of institutions

With the second level of *institutions*, civilization takes on a plural form—there are several civilizations. Now, we are made aware that humanity “only realizes its consciousness through closed figures which are those of multiple institutional systems which regulate its historical experience.”²⁹ In this sense, we may look upon each civilization as “a historico-geographical complex which covers a certain domain and which although it may not be rigidly defined, has its own peculiar vital cores and zones of influence.”³⁰

But what does Ricoeur understand by “institutions”? From a static viewpoint, he means those forms of social existence in which the relations between persons are regulated by *rights* (constitutional, public, civil, penal, commercial, social, etc.). From a dynamic viewpoint, he means *politics* taken in the broad sense as “the sum total of activities which have for their object the exercise of power, therefore also the conquest and the preservation of power.”³¹ At this point, Ricoeur justifies the analytic method he employs. By distinguishing the level of “industries” from the level of “institutions,” Ricoeur brings out the irreducibility of politics to economics and techniques. Politics is to be identified with the history of power, “which not only does not pose the same problems but neither arouses the same maladies nor exhibits the same pathology and consequently, is not relieved by the same therapeutic.”³² While there are accumulation and progress on the level of “industries”, there can be crisis and regression in politics or on the level of “institutions.”

3. The level of values

By the third level of *values*, Ricoeur does not mean the abstract values that are the object of philosophical speculation. “Values” here have to be understood as the “concrete valorizations” that can be apprehended in the attitudes of human beings in regard to others “in work, property, power, temporal experience, etc.”³³ These concrete values constitute no less than “the very substance of the life of a people.”³⁴ At a superficial level, these concrete values are expressed in their customs and traditions. Beyond these, they are manifested in the traditional institutions which reflect the thought, will, and feelings of a people at a particular time. But if one wants to contact the “creative nucleus” of a culture, one has to penetrate “that layer of images and symbols which make up the basic ideals of a nation”—“the awakened dream of a historical group.”³⁵ These images and symbols need to be authentically deciphered and methodically interpreted.

It is on this deep level that we witness Ricoeur's radical astonishment on what he considers “most mysterious” in the historical existence of our being human—the diversity and plurality of cultures.³⁶ If we see a universal technical civilization on the level of “industries,” we begin to experience fragmentation on the level of “institutions” or the history of power. On the level of “values”, we experience historical finitude when we realize that “humanity has played out its destiny in a diversity of languages, a diversity of moral experiences, and a diversity of spiritualities and religions.”³⁷ This radical astonishment is even more eloquently expressed in a 1961 text

entitled “Universal Civilization and National Cultures”:

“The strange thing, in fact, is that there are many cultures and not a single humanity. The mere fact that there are different languages is already very disturbing and seems to indicate that as far back as history allows us to go, one finds historical shapes which are coherent and closed, constituted cultural wholes. Right from the start, so it seems, man is different from man; the shattered condition of languages is the most obvious sign of this primitive incohesion. This is the astonishing thing: humanity is not established in a single cultural style but has 'congealed' in coherent closed historical shapes: *the* cultures.”³⁸

What is even more amazing is that coupled with Ricoeur's radical astonishment before the plurality of cultures is the fundamental conviction that these historical cultures are not incommunicable to one another. Far from being completely shut off from one other, they have the capacity to enter into “communication.”³⁹

Three precautions

To the question: “How is the encounter with different cultures possible?” Ricoeur answers by making a wager on the unity of humanity, convinced that the Other, though different, is the same as oneself. This conviction is based on the possibility of translation or the translatability of all languages. Ricoeur affirms:

“Certainly everything does not come out in a translation, but something always does. There is no reason or probability that a linguistic system is untranslatable. The belief that the translation is feasible up to a certain point is the affirmation that the foreigner is a man, the belief, in short, that communication is possible.”⁴⁰

Ricoeur does not only wager on the translatability of languages but also on the translatability of cultures. To quote him once more: “What we have just said about language—signs—is also valid for values and the basic images and symbols which make up the cultural resources of a nation.”⁴¹

Ricoeur's starting point, we have stressed, is the radical astonishment before the fact of the plurality of cultures and the deep conviction in the horizon of a single humanity. There are indeed cultures, languages, nations, and religions. But if the word “cultures” is in the plural, the word

“humanity” is in the singular. The problem is to understand what meaning we can give to humanity in the twofold aspect of the human—as a unique being and as a community of unique human beings. It is time to examine Ricoeur's unique understanding of “translation” which will be crucial in the interpretation of cultures.

But before examining translation as the mediation to the plurality of cultures and the unity of humanity, Ricoeur proposes three precautionary measures that should be taken to clear the way for the interpretation of cultures.⁴²

First precaution: one needs to distinguish the concept of cultural exchange from geopolitical concepts. For Ricoeur, geopolitical concepts are related to the idea of “borders”. This idea of “borders” is a perfectly-legitimate notion as it applies to “nation-states,” with their implied limits or borders (whether this is sovereignty with regard to currency, territory, military or judicial competence). Instead of the notion of “borders,” Ricoeur prefers to see cultural centers as spreading and radiating out their creative influences that interweave with other influences from other centers. Intercultural exchanges then are distinguished by crisscrossing influences that form a tightly-knit network.

Second precaution: one must not think of identity, and especially collective identity as static, unchanging but as dynamic narrative identity.⁴³ Living communities have a history which can be narrated or recounted. The recounting of narratives is one of the ways by which the crisscrossing influences of cultures can be appreciated.

Different from an identity conceived as substance, the concept of narrative identity allows us to include changes in the cohesion of a life. Identity conceived as same (*idem*) is thus replaced by an identity conceived as self (*ipse*). This last identity conforms to the dynamic temporal structure coming from the activity of emplotment in the narrative text. The activity of emplotment (*mise-en-intrigue*) is a work of composition which takes together a series of events in order to form an organized unity. Emplotment brings about a synthesis of the heterogeneous. Through the configuring activity of emplotment, unexpected surprising events become integral parts of the narrative understood from hindsight. In this way, the narrative develops an original concept of dynamic identity which ties together identity as same and identity as difference.

Emplotment, when applied to self-identity, shows how dynamic and creative a human life can be as changes are integrated in the cohesion of a life. With his notion of narrative identity, Ricoeur brings out the initiatives and possibilities of human action. What is important to note is that like the

narrative, self-identity “remains unfinished and open to the possibility of being recounted differently, and also of being recounted by others.”⁴⁴ It is this possibility of being recounted differently and of being recounted by others that will figure prominently in the translation-interpretation of cultures. According to Ricoeur, this narrative identity also constitutes the life of nations.

Ricoeur links the idea of narrative with the idea of promise. If narrative identity is turned towards the past, the idea of promise is turned towards the future. The problem is not merely to make promises but to keep them. Ricoeur links narrative identity with the project of existence as a project to hold on or to maintain.⁴⁵

Third precaution: One must always be aware of the idea of a horizon. The idea of a horizon contains a trap. It can never be attained because the horizon recedes as one approaches it. Here, Ricoeur introduces the idea of the variation of horizons. Within a given culture, the horizons of the different aspects of life vary in their rhythm.⁴⁶ They neither advance nor retreat all at the same time. There are various kinds of horizon. To illustrate this, Ricoeur gives the example of a landscape viewed from a moving train. There are nearby horizons that rapidly change, average horizons that evolve more slowly, and distant horizons wherein the landscape looks unchanging.

Against the background of these three precautions—first, the idea of crisscrossing influences from creative centers; then, the idea of a narrative identity linked to the idea of promise; and finally, the idea of a variation of horizons, Ricoeur finally introduces the two notions that play a great role in cultural exchanges: the task of translation and the task of mourning.

The task of translation

1. Translation as mediation

Let us take the first task of translation. Translation constitutes the answer to the undeniable phenomenon of human plurality.⁴⁷ Starting with the fact of the “diversity of languages” (to use Wilhelm von Humboldt's title), Ricoeur remarks that “it is because human beings speak many languages that translation exists.”⁴⁸ Translation is the mediation between the plurality of cultures and the unity of humanity.

Translation is also the reply to the dispersion and confusion of Babel. We must note, however, that Ricoeur offers a more benevolent interpretation of the myth of Babel. It is not “a linguistic catastrophe inflicted by a jealous god on human beings” but an originary situation of

separation.⁴⁹ Babel then is “not a metaphor of the moment of our becoming but the condition of a starting point.”⁵⁰ We are “after Babel,” to use the words of George Steiner, by constitution and not by fault.⁵¹

For Ricoeur, translation has always been around, along with the diversity of languages. But it cannot be reduced to a simple technique spontaneously practised by “travelers, merchants, ambassadors, traitors,” long before the professional translators and interpreters.⁵² Translation constitutes a paradigm for all exchanges, not only from one language to another but also from one culture to another culture. Translation opens out to concrete universals and not to an abstract universal that is cut off from history. Dispersed and confused from the beginning, we are called to what Walter Benjamin calls the “task of translation.”

2. The paradigm of translation

Two paths are available to the problem posed by translation: first, to take the term “translation,” in its strict sense, as the transfer of a verbal message from one language to another; second, to take the term in its broad sense as synonymous with the interpretation of a significant phenomenon within the same linguistic community. The first path is taken by Antoine Berman in his book, *Traduire à l'épreuve de l'étranger*,⁵³ the second by George Steiner in 'After Babel'.⁵⁴ Ricoeur himself prefers the first path which highlights the relation of the Self to the Other.

Starting with “the diversity of languages” considered by George Steiner as a “harmful extravagance,” Ricoeur is struck more by the enigma of the universality of language rather than by the failure of communication: “Human beings speak different languages but they can learn other languages other than their maternal tongue.”⁵⁵

According to Ricoeur, this last affirmation has led to a ruinous alternative: either the diversity of languages is radical and translation is impossible; or translation is a fact and one must then look for the originary language, the absolute or perfect translation. To this paralyzing theoretical alternative of “translatable versus untranslatable”, Ricoeur wants to substitute the practical alternative of “fidelity versus treason.”

Why does this task of translation have to contend with the alternative of fidelity versus treason? Simply put, there is no absolute criterion for the good translation. A good translation can only aim at an equivalence without identity. The amazing phenomenon of translation then is that it transfers the meaning of one language to another or from one culture to another culture, without however giving the identity but only offering the

equivalent. Translation is the phenomenon of equivalence without identity.⁵⁶ By doing this, it serves the project of a single humanity without breaking up the initial plurality.

For Ricoeur, there is nothing absolutely untranslatable. Despite its incompleteness, translation creates similarity there where there seemed to be only plurality. The presupposition of translation is that languages are not strangers to one another to the point of being radically untranslatable. Every child is capable of learning another language from his or her own, attesting that translatability is the fundamental presupposition of the exchange of cultures.⁵⁷ We have remarkable examples of production from the translation of hybrid cultures. The translation of the Torah from Hebrew to Greek in the Septuagint, then from Greek to Latin and from Latin to the vernacular languages is a first example. Another is the exemplary translation of the immense corpus of Buddhism from Sanskrit to Chinese, and then still from Korean to Japanese.

It is this kind of phenomenon which Ricoeur thinks of when he evokes the exchanges between cultural and spiritual heritages that are in quest today of a common language. This common language will not be what one dreamt of in the 18th century, an artificial language which can not be retranslated into the natural languages which have a proper complexity. What translation can produce are concrete universals in quest of ratification, appropriation, adoption or acknowledgement. Translation thus creates the comparable between incomparables.⁵⁸ It is in this resemblance or similarity in diversity created by the work of translation that the “universal project” of a single humanity and the multitude of cultures are reconciled.

The work of mourning

1. The “test of the Other”

It is here where Ricoeur brings in Freud's “work of mourning”. In translation, there is both a safeguarding and a “consent to loss”⁵⁹ This “work of mourning” consists, not only, in renouncing “the ideal itself of the *perfect translation*,” but also in exposing oneself to the “test of the Other.”⁶⁰

In the essay entitled (“The Challenge and Happiness of Translation”) “Défi et bonheur de la traduction,” Ricoeur makes some observations on the “great difficulties and the little joys” of translation. The “great difficulties” of translation are summed up in the word “*épreuve*” found in

Antoine Berman's book. "Epreuve" or "test" carries the twofold sense of a "punishment undergone" or "trial". Ricoeur likens this "test" to what Walter Benjamin calls the "task of the translator."⁶¹ This "task" carries the twofold meaning given by Freud when he talks about the "work of memory" and the "work of mourning".⁶²

The "test" consists in the "uncomfortable situation" of the translator who mediates between the author (his work, language) and the reader. The translator's anguish is expressed by Franz Rosenzweig's view of translation: "To translate is to serve two masters"—first, the author in his work, and second, the reader in his desire of appropriation.⁶³ Before him, Schleiermacher already expressed the paradox in this way: To translate is both "to lead the reader to the author" and "to lead the author to the reader."⁶⁴

It is in the mediation of this exchange that the translator embarks on the work of memory and the work of mourning. The work of memory has to attend to the two poles of translation. First, one has to fight the "resistance" of the text to be translated. Ricoeur understands "resistance" here in the psychoanalytic sense of the refusal or even hatred of what is other.⁶⁵ It is a kind of auto-sufficiency which can lead to a linguistic ethnocentrism. Second, one has to confront the resistance of the language of translation. This takes the form of the presumption of untranslatability which ends up in the fear that translation will always be a bad translation.

2. The "consent to loss"

It is at this point that the work of mourning comes in. It is summed in the determination "to renounce the ideal of *perfect translation*."⁶⁶ Only this renunciation allows one to survive the "uncomfortable situation" of serving two masters: the author and the reader. It will also enable us to assume the two discordant tasks pointed out by Schleiermacher as well as give us the courage to take on the dilemma of "fidelity versus treason."

But what "perfect translation" is being renounced? It is the dream of the perfect translation which is marked by a rationality that is totally detached from cultural constraints. Such a rationality would suppress the memory of what is foreign, the different and also the love for one's own language. The perfect translation is a translation that is a "gain without a loss."⁶⁷ It is that which would like to take the place of the universal language.

It is this "mourning of the absolute translation," however, that accounts for the happiness of translation. The happiness of translation is a gain when, after consenting to the loss of absolute translation, it accepts the

gap between adequation and equivalence, “equivalence without adequation.”⁶⁸ We accept the unsurpassable difference between what is proper to us and what is foreign to us.⁶⁹ In acknowledging the irreducibility of the author with the reader, the translator finds his happiness in what Ricoeur likes to call “linguistic hospitality” (*hospitalité langagière*).⁷⁰ Ricoeur adds that “linguistic hospitality is also the model for the exchange between religions and cultures.”⁷¹ “Language hospitality,” as the pleasure of inhabiting the Other's language, is compensated by the pleasure of receiving, in one's own home, the word of the Other.⁷²

Translating Otherwise

The goal I set myself was to bring out Paul Ricoeur's ideas on translation in view of giving some guidelines in the interpretation of cultures. Ricoeur's philosophical writings may be viewed as a “hermeneutics of the self”—an interpretation of the expressions of the self that unfolds the capacities of capable human being. What is unique in this vision of being-human is the stress on creativity which has its source in a conviction on the superabundance of sense over the abundance of nonsense. It is the problem of the transmission of meaning from one language to another, from one culture to another that seems to give an impetus to his preoccupation with translation.

Beginning with a critique of civilization in the narrow and broad sense, we see how on the level of “industries,” there is progression in unity. Here, one can speak of a universal technical civilization. But on the level of values, there is fragmentation and dispersion. There is the undeniable fact of the diversity and plurality of languages and of cultures. Ricoeur's radical astonishment before this plurality and his deep conviction in the “communication” among human beings, languages, and cultures make him realize the urgent “task of translation” that is accompanied by a “task of mourning.”

This dual task, however, presupposes that certain precautions have been taken: first to think of creativity not in terms of limits or borders but in terms of crisscrossing influences that form a tightly-knit grid; second, to think of identity (whether personal or social) as changing and as unfinished; and third, to think of cultures as evolving in a variation of horizons.

If translation is the paradigm of all exchanges, not only from one language to another but from one culture to another, then some guidelines from the practice of translation can help us in the translation-interpretation of cultures. First, one must courageously open oneself to the “test” of the

Other, to welcome difference and respect it as unsurpassable. But together with this, one must wager on the possibility of an “equivalence without identity,” an “equivalence without adequation.” What Ricoeur seems to be suggesting is for us to take a non-hierarchical view of cultures in intercultural exchanges. Not only this. One must also undertake the “work of mourning.” Just as there is no perfect translation, no historical culture can pretend to claim cultural hegemony. As in the act of narrating, to mourn is to learn to narrate otherwise. To quote Ricoeur:

“One must know how to tell one's story as seen by others. That is to say, for me to let myself be narrated by the other. Not only for me to narrate myself otherwise ...but to agree to let *mimesis* be produced by the other.”⁷⁴

As in the act of narrating, one can translate and must translate otherwise without hope of filling the gap between equivalence and total adequation.

We are back to our reflexive capacity for language, our available possibility to talk on language, to distance ourselves from it. There is not only external translation—our capacity to interiorize the Other but also an internal translation. For Ricoeur, this internal translation is an original exploration which bares the daily workings of a living language. These complex processes show us that no universal language can ever reconstruct its indefinite diversity. The unbridgeable gap between a perfect language and a living language is the reason behind constant misunderstanding which calls for translation—saying the same thing otherwise, saying simply other about life in a way that is unfinished—interpreting it while one still lives.⁷⁵

End Notes:

1. Husserl (Edmund), *Idées directrices pour une phénoménologie* (Bibliothèque de philosophie), translation of *Ideen I*, with introduction and notes by Paul Ricoeur (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), XXXIX-567 p.
2. Ihde (Don), “Paul Ricoeur's Place in the Hermeneutic Tradition, The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur”, edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn, *The Library of Living Philosophers, XXII* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), p. 59.
3. Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction* (Paris: Bayard, 2004), 69 p. These essays are: “Défi et bonheur de la traduction” (1997), “Le paradigme de la traduction” (1998), and “Un passage: traduire l'intraduisible» (1999). From hereon, all

- sources without the author's name refer to Ricoeur.
4. Greisch (Jean), *Paul Ricoeur : L'itinérance du sens* (Grenoble : Editions Jerome Millon, 2000), p. 286.
 5. Delacampagne (Christian), « Paul Ricoeur, philosophe de tous les dialogues, » *Le monde* (22-23 May 2005), p. 11.
 6. HT, 25, 32-33 ; HV, 28, 35-36 ; DINT, 54-55 ; DI, 61-62.
 7. Devenir capable, être reconnu, *Esprit* (July 2005), p. 125.
 8. Foessel (Michaël)-Mongin (Olivier), *Paul Ricoeur* (Paris : Association pour la diffusion de la pensée française, 2005), 88p.
 9. In a thought-provoking essay, Marc de Launay writes that “one only inquires on the true nature of the practice of translation at the moment that translation itself plays an important or visible role in a given cultural domain, at a precise period in history.” See de Launay Marc), “Réflexions sur la traduction,” Paul Ricoeur, *Cahiers de l'Herne* (Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 2004), p. 85.
 10. Henaff (Marcel), « 'La condition brisée des langues' : diversité humaine, altérité et traduction, » *Esprit* (La pensée Ricoeur) (March-April 2006), p. 69.
 11. “Pour la coexistence pacifique des civilisations,” *Esprit* (La paix possible) (19 March 1951), p. 409. In the “Préface” to the first edition of *Histoire et vérité*, Ricoeur traces the link between his “critique of civilization” and Emmanuel Mounier's “political pedagogy”. See HV, 7; HT, 3-4.
 12. “Discerner pour agir,” *Le Semeur* (Peut-on s'orienter dans le monde moderne ?) 48 (May-June 1950), pp. 432-433, 452. See also PSE, 78, 127.
 13. “Pour la coexistence pacifique des civilisations,” p. 409 (translation mine).
 14. In *Christianisme Social* (October-December 1946), pp. 423-436. What gave rise to this meditation on civilization? After having been forced to spend years in the concentration camp of “a highly civilized yet warlike and confused enemy,” Ricoeur felt himself invited “to make a new examination of what is termed civilization and its basis in experience and thought.” See Edward G. Ballard, “Translator's Foreword” (1967), in *HAP*, XIII.
 15. “Le chrétien et la civilisation occidentale” (1946), p. 423 (translation mine).

16. *Ibid.*, p. 424. See also VI, 119; FN, 125: “Just as I have not chosen my body, I have not chosen my historical situation but both the one and the other are the locus of my responsibility.”
17. In a UNESCO-commissioned study on the conception of time in diverse cultures, Ricoeur makes these introductory remarks: “Receptiveness to other cultures is today the precondition of our allegiance to any viewpoint; the tension between what is 'our own' and what is 'alien' is all part of the interpretation by which we endeavour to apply to ourselves the distinctive significance of a particular tradition. This tension between 'own' and 'alien' implies no over-view, no all-embracing vision.” See *Cultures and Time*, At the crossroads of cultures (Paris: The Unesco Press, 1976), p.33; *Les cultures et le temps*, Bibliothèque scientifique, Au carrefour des cultures (Paris: Payot/Les Presses de l'UNESCO, 1975), p.41.
18. “Christianity and the Meaning of History” (1965), in HT, 87; HV, 88.
19. Ricoeur considers the heritage of a civilization alive only insofar as it can be creatively reinterpreted in new situations. For him, a “heritage” is not “a sealed package we pass from hand to hand, without ever opening, but rather a treasure from which we draw by the handful and which by this very act is replenished. Every tradition lives by the grace of interpretation, and it is at this price that it continues, that is, remains living.” See “Structure and Hermeneutics” (1974), in *CINT*, 27; *CI*, 31.
20. In an interview of 1975, Ricoeur reaffirms his belief in the possibility of rejuvenating the traditional heritages of Antiquity by means of philosophy: “One cannot have hope if one does not have a memory. But we must make a memory that is no longer repetitive but creative. That is one of the goals of philosophy.” See “Entretien,” in *La philosophie d'aujourd'hui*, Bibliothèque Laffont des grands thèmes, 84 (Paris : Robert Laffont, 1975), p. 21 (translation mine).
21. According to Ricoeur, “it is always an eschatology that is the soul of a social message. See “Le chrétien et la civilisation occidentale” (1946), p. 427 (translation mine); also p. 434.
22. “The Tasks of the Political Educator” (1973) [translation by David Stewart of “Tâches de l'éducateur politique,” *Esprit* (Amérique latine et conscience chrétienne) 33 (July-August 1965), Nos. 7-8, p.78], in *PSE*, 271-293 ; see p. 271.
23. My translation for: “...par une série de coupes, déterminant une série des niveaux, sans souci, provisoirement, d'articuler ces niveaux. » Stewart's translation which changes Ricoeur's meaning, reads :

- “...by means of a series of divisions only provisionally determining a series of levels and articulating these levels.” See *PSE*, 272.
24. *PSE*, 276.
 25. I prefer to abide by Stewart's translation of “industries” for “*outillages*” to emphasize its broad sense. Ricoeur distinguishes “*outillages*” from “*outils*” which Stewart translates as “tools.” See *PSE*, 293 note 1.
 26. *PSE*, 272.
 27. “Universal Civilization and National Cultures” (1965) in *HT*, 275; *HV*, 290.
 28. *PSE*, 274.
 29. *PSE*, 275.
 30. “Christianity and the Meaning of History” (1965), in *HT*, 86-87; *HV*, 87.
 31. “The Political Paradox” (1965) in *HT*, 255; *HV*, 269.
 32. *PSE*, 276. In this connection, Ricoeur is especially critical of Marxism-Leninism for *reducing* political alienation to economic alienation. He affirms: “I believe that the great error which assails the whole of Marxism-Leninism and which weighs upon the regimes engendered by Marxism is this reduction of political evil to economic evil. From this springs the illusion that a society liberated from the contradictions of the bourgeois society would also be freed of political alienation.” See *HT*, 258; *HV*, 272.
 33. *PSE*, 279.
 34. *PSE*, 280.
 35. “Universal Civilization and National Cultures” (1965), in *HT*, 280; *HV*, 296.
 36. *PSE*, 281
 37. *Ibid.*
 38. *HT*, 280; *HT*, 296.
 39. *PSE*, 282. Ricoeur charges this word with a new meaning. By “communication” is meant “a dramatic relation in which I affirm myself in my origins and give myself to another's imagination in accordance with his different civilization” or culture. See *HT*, 283; *HV*, 300.
 40. *HT*, 282; *HV*, 298.
 41. *Ibid.*
 42. “Cultures, du deuil a la traduction,” *Le monde* (24 mai 2004). See also « OÙ vont les valeurs » ? dir. Jérôme Binde, *Entretiens du XXIème siècle, II* (Paris : Editions Unesco-Albin Michel, 2004), 503 p.

43. See "Life in Quest of Narrative" and "Narrative Identity," in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, edited by David Wood (London-New York: Routledge, 1991, pp. 20-33; 188-199.
44. "Asserting Personal Capacities and Pleading for Mutual Recognition," p.2
45. Ricoeur observes that the national motto of The Netherlands is: "Je maintiendrai!" (I shall hold on to it).
46. There are many ways in which a civilization undergoes crises in such different domains like technology, economics, politics, culture, etc. Here, one notices a recurrent trait of Ricoeur's way of thinking—the sensitive respect and appreciation for the diversity and continuity of problems. This attitude is crucial in the comprehension and resolution of crises. See Garcia (Leovino Ma.), "The Meaning of Human Existence in Ricoeur's Social-Political Writings: Part Three," *Budhi II*, No. 3, 1998, 1-67, p. 32 note 9. For the other parts of this study, see Garcia, "Paul Ricoeur: Philosopher of Responsibility and Hope: Introduction and Part One," *Budhi I*, No. 1997, 129-182; "The Meaning of Being Human in Ricoeur's *Philosophy of the Will*: Part Two," *Budhi I*, No. 3, 1997, 81-154, *Budhi II*, No. 1, 1998, 65-103; "Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Reflection on the Human Being's Avowal of the Fault," *Budhi II*, No. 2, 1998, 157-187.
47. *Sur la traduction*, 53.
48. *Sur la traduction*, 22.
49. *Sur la traduction*, 34-36.
50. Henaff (Marcel), "La condition brisée des langues': diversité humaine, altérité et traduction," p. 69.
51. *Sur la traduction*, 21, 23, 44, 59
52. *Sur la traduction*, 24, 56-57, 60.
53. Paris: Gallimard, 1995.
54. Steiner (George), *Après Babel* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998).
55. *Sur la traduction*, 25.
56. *Sur la traduction*, 40.
57. *Sur la traduction*, 25.
58. *Sur la traduction*, 66.
59. *Sur la traduction*, 8.
60. *Sur la traduction*, 42 (Ricoeur's emphases).
61. *Sur la traduction*, 6, 30, 35-36. "Task" is taken here not as a constricting obligation but something to be done so that human action can continue.
62. *Sur la traduction*, 41-42.

63. *Sur la traduction*, 9.
64. *Sur la traduction*, 9, 41, 61.
65. *Sur la traduction*, 41.
66. *Sur la traduction*, 42 (Ricoeur's emphases).
67. *Sur la traduction*, 18.
68. *Sur la traduction*, 19, 43
69. *Sur la traduction*, 18, 42, 62.
70. *Sur la traduction*, 19, 43.
71. *Sur la traduction*, 43.
72. *Sur la traduction*, 20
73. Ricoeur (Paul)-Antohi (Sorin), « Memory, History, Forgiveness : A Dialogue between Paul Ricoeur and Sorin Antohi » (2003), p. 23.
74. *Sur la traduction*, 20, 45, 49
75. Greisch (Jean), "L'inachèvement comme accomplissement," *Esprit* (July 2005), pp. 118-121. See also *MHF*, 506 ; *MHO*, 657.

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