

The Ethics of Dialogue in Paul Ricœur: A Philosophical Analysis in Light of Hermeneutic Thought and Identity

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Abstract. *This study explores the ethics of dialogue in Paul Ricœur's philosophy within the framework of hermeneutic thought and narrative identity. It argues that dialogue is not merely a communicative act or a linguistic exchange but an ethical and existential process through which the self is constituted, interpreted, and transformed in relation to the other. The research examines the fundamental dimensions of Ricœur's conception of dialogue, including recognition, plurality, moral imagination, responsibility, and institutional justice. It demonstrates that ethical dialogue depends on the ability to acknowledge difference, engage in mutual understanding, and establish relationships based on respect and responsibility. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of narrative identity in shaping the relationship between self and other, showing that personal identity emerges through interpretation, memory, and interaction. It concludes that Ricœur's philosophy provides a valuable ethical model for promoting coexistence, reconciliation, and meaningful communication in contemporary societies characterised by cultural diversity and moral plurality.*

Keywords: *Paul Ricœur, dialogue, hermeneutic thought, identity, communication, civilisations, self, other, ethics*

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Paul Ricœur-da dialoq etikası: hermenevtik düşüncə və kimlik işığında fəlsəfi təhlil

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Xülasə. *Bu tədqiqat Paul Ricœur-un fəlsəfəsindəki dialoq etikasını hermenevtik düşüncə və povest kimliyi çərçivəsində araşdırır. O, dialoqun sadəcə ünsiyyət aktı və ya lingvistik mübadilə deyil, həm də özünün formalaşdığı, şərh olunduğu və digərinə münasibətdə çevrildiyi etik və ekzistensial bir proses olduğunu iddia edir. Tədqiqat Ricœur-un dialoq anlayışının fundamental ölçülərini, o cümlədən tanınma, plüralizm, mənəvi təxəyyül, məsuliyyət və institusional ədaləti araşdırır. O, etik dialoqun fərqi qəbul etmək, qarşılıqlı anlaşılmaya qoşulmaq və hörmət və məsuliyyətə əsaslanan münasibətlər qurmaq qabiliyyətindən asılı olduğunu nümayiş etdirir.*

Bundan əlavə, tədqiqat, şəxsi kimliyin interpretasiya, yaddaş və qarşılıqlı təsir yolu ilə ortaya çıxdığını göstərən povest kimliyinin özünün və başqasının münasibətlərinin formalaşmasındakı rolunu vurğulayır. Bu nəticəyə gəlir ki, Ricœurün fəlsəfəsi mədəni müxtəliflik və mənəvi plüralizm ilə xarakterizə olunan müasir cəmiyyətlərdə birgəyaşayışı, barışıqı və mənalı ünsiyyəti təşviq etmək üçün dəyərli etik model təqdim edir.

Açar sözlər: Paul Ricœur, dialoq, hermenevtik düşüncə, kimlik, ünsiyyət, sivilizasiyalar, özünün, başqasının, etika

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Introduction

In the minds of many, philosophy is associated with complexity and a distance from the reality in which people live. It must be acknowledged that philosophy, like the various sciences, is not an easy subject that any individual can understand; rather, it is a subject that requires a degree of intellectual effort and mental exertion to comprehend. Human thought has never ceased to pose the question of language and its relation to time, society, and thought, whether this question pertains to the general philosophical domain or to the multiple scientific fields that have made language and communication the subject of their inquiry. Communication and dialogue also constitute a contemporary theoretical concern, whose contemporaneity is in a constant process of becoming.

Ricoeurian philosophy has embodied a human project that aspires to understand reality, to analyse it, and to offer possible conceptualisations of what may be presented as research data in the field of contemporary human thought. It has thus become necessary to move beyond those closed systems and ideologies that do not lead the human being toward the ambitious world of thought that aspires to the future in accordance with what is lived by virtue of a method that interacts with the aims of the self, which seeks what serves it in what is desired. That is, Paul Ricœur calls for philosophising, and the self exists with the community, which imposes upon it the necessity of responding to all. He is considered one of the most prominent philosophers of the twentieth century, combining hermeneutics, phenomenology, and moral philosophy, holding that dialogue is not merely a means of understanding but an existential process for the formation of the ethical self and the establishment of a responsible relation with the other.

Ricoeur's philosophy is characterised by a more humanistic orientation, bearing ethical concerns that enhance the value of the human being in accordance with the values of open dialogue through openness to the triad of French reflective thought, German analysis, and pragmatism. He constructed his dialogue on respect for the other, making the other a partner in defining and shaping truth. Through his philosophy, which aims to ensure the continuity of communication and dialogue among different peoples and civilisations, Ricœur called for not demolishing the achievements of the philosophical edifice whose construction took thousands of years but rather for listening to other civilisations, opening the door of dialogue to them, and exploring what is hidden, for it may contain new benefits for humanity.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative philosophical-hermeneutic methodology. It analyses Paul Ricœur's conception of dialogue through close reading of his major works on hermeneutics, narrative identity, recognition, ethics, and justice. The analysis focuses on the conceptual relationships between self and other, interpretation and identity, and dialogue and institutional responsibility.

Results

Problematic: What are the ethics of dialogue in Paul Ricœur? Moreover, what is its relation to hermeneutical thought and narrative identity?

In Paul Ricœur's philosophy, dialogue is a central concept that transcends the term's traditional meaning as a linguistic exchange between speakers. Rather, it constitutes an interpretive, ethical, and fundamental act for understanding the self and the other. According to Ricœur, dialogue is grounded in three interrelated dimensions: the hermeneutic, the anthropological, and the ethical.

Ricœur maintains that dialogue is an interpretive process through which human beings interact with texts, others, and history through the mediation of language. Understanding in dialogue is not achieved immediately or directly; rather, it requires a necessary distance that enables the reader or speaker to interpret and reflect without eliminating difference. Unlike Gadamer's notion of the "fusion of horizons", Ricœur's conception of dialogue is based on a coexistence or juxtaposition of horizons that preserves the distance and difference between selves (Ricœur, 1986).

By emphasising this distance, Ricœur argues that each person must recognise that the self belongs to them and acknowledge their own subjectivity. For him, the self is characterised by a dialectic between activity and passivity, since human beings possess a dual structure situated between the voluntary and the involuntary. We are beings who are given to ourselves as something to be understood and interpreted. In this respect, Ricœur shares Marcel's view that the answer to the question "Who am I?" can never be completely exhausted. When the question "Who am I?" is posed, the "I" who asks the question simultaneously becomes the object of inquiry. The self is therefore both the questioner and the subject questioned. This circularity gives the self a fundamentally questioning and dialectical character, requiring a hermeneutic approach (Ricœur, 2006, p. 130).

Interpretation consequently becomes a critical mechanism through which the rupture that characterises human existence can be revealed, particularly the distance between metaphysical reflection and the lived experience of the human being as an acting self, or between will and capacity. This leads to a transition "from an ontology resulting from the privileging of being as truth to an ontology that grants priority to being as act and power, within the multiple uses of being insofar as it is being" (Ricœur, 2006, p. 130). However, this fragmentation does not prevent human beings from pursuing ethical completeness within the lived world or from possessing the capacity for action and initiative. For Ricœur, human action is oriented toward an end, namely the good for human beings; consequently, the ethical aim of humanity becomes achievable.

In *Oneself as Another* (*Soi-même comme un autre*), Ricœur introduces the concept of narrative identity, which refers to the temporal dimension through which the self understands and represents itself across time. Narrative identity emerges through the stories individuals tell about themselves and through their continuous relationship with others. The self is therefore not a fixed entity but a narrative construction shaped and transformed by personal experiences, social relations, historical circumstances, and temporal changes (Ricœur, 1990; Sharmāt, 2015).

Within this framework, dialogue becomes a fundamental means of self-construction, because the other is not merely a recipient of communication but rather a constitutive element in the formation of personal identity. The self can only understand itself through a dialogical relationship with others, where recognition, interpretation, and mutual understanding participate in the constitution of identity (Ricœur, 1990).

Without dialogue, identity loses its capacity for formation and renewal. Therefore, Paul Ricœur proposes a return to narrative as the primary means through which a richness of meanings is generated. Narrative brings together diverse events and organises them along the temporal framework that it presupposes; in other words, it grants events a temporal dimension and transforms them into meaningful configurations. This is precisely what many philosophers neglected, according to Ricœur's critique, particularly structuralist approaches, which focus on structures while excluding temporality and the event from their analyses. The process of connecting and organising events therefore constitutes a fundamental source of meaning in Ricœur's thought (Ricœur, 1983).

Another important source of interest in narrative lies at the intersection of Ricœur's thought and biblical exegesis. For Ricœur, narrative encompasses various forms of discourse and is not restricted exclusively to literary production; rather, it can be associated with different forms of human discourse regardless of their field of application (Ricœur, 1983). Narrative does not merely refer to the way in which a storyteller recounts events through their arrangement and transmission. Instead, narrative participates in the production of meaning itself. It is not simply a representation of events or an expression of subjective interpretation but rather a structure through which meaning emerges.

Ricœur also argues that identity is not a fixed entity but is constructed through self-narration, that is, through the stories that the self tells about itself across time (Ricœur, 2004). Narrative identity makes dialogue possible because it recognises the self's incompleteness and its need for the other to reinterpret and understand itself. Furthermore, dialogue in Ricœur's philosophy becomes possible only when accompanied by the act of recognition, which unfolds in several stages: recognition of oneself, recognition of the other, and mutual recognition, the foundation of an ethical relationship.

In this perspective, recognition becomes an essential component of ethical dialogue. Ricœur maintains that recognition begins with recognition of the self, including its capacities and limitations, followed by recognition of the other as a free and autonomous interlocutor, and finally culminates in mutual recognition as an ethical act that contributes to the foundation of justice (Wadih, 2016). Dialogue is therefore transformed from a simple exchange of ideas into the construction of a relationship based on shared responsibility and ethical commitment.

Narrative consequently constitutes an axis around which human existence unfolds through its actions, experiences, and interpretations. It expresses various cognitive and value systems that provide the self with a place and a temporal horizon within which existence becomes meaningful. The self is not separated from its historicity; rather, it reconstructs its past both as an event and as an interpretation of that event through symbolic forms that establish an intercultural relationship between self and other, characterised by openness and difference. In this sense, narrative preserves not only personal identity but also collective identity, including the identity of communities and generations (Ricœur, 1990).

1. Dialogue as an Ethical and Political Horizon

The concept of dialogue in Ricœur's philosophy extends beyond interpersonal relations to encompass the ethical and political domains. He argues that living together can only be achieved through just institutions founded on mutual respect, recognition, and equitable dialogue. In *Memory, History, Forgetting* (*La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*), Ricœur emphasises that overcoming the wounds of the

past and recognising others in their difference requires a dialogical engagement with memory and with the implicit presence of the other within history (Ricoeur, 2002).

Modern philosophical currents have revealed different dimensions of human action and moral life. Marxism uncovered the ideological structures underlying moral practices and connected them to material relations; structuralism examined symbolic systems and social structures; while Freudian theory highlighted the influence of the unconscious and instinctual dimensions. Similarly, Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, distinguished between Christian ethics, characterised by ideals of chastity, virginity, and monogamous fidelity, and ancient Greek and Roman ethics, which emphasised freedom, plurality, bodily experience, and the cultivation of life and pleasure (Foucault, 2004).

Within this broader philosophical context, Ricoeur, in his lectures published in *Lectures 1: Autour du politique*, devoted a study entitled "Éthique et morale" to examining the relationship between ethics and morality and to developing his own ethical framework in dialogue with previous and contemporary philosophical traditions (Ricoeur, 1991). He raises the fundamental question of whether ethics and morality should be distinguished from one another.

Ricoeur argues that contemporary societies are characterised by what he calls moral plurality, meaning the coexistence of multiple, sometimes conflicting, conceptions of the good life. This plurality inevitably generates moral disagreements and conflicts (Bellelouch, 2020). However, the solution does not consist in imposing a single universal perspective but rather in establishing ethical dialogue, through which individuals and communities can express their viewpoints and seek shared understanding, even when complete consensus remains impossible.

2. The Ethics of Dialogue and Its Conditions

2.1 Justice and Otherness

Paul Ricoeur employs the term "institution" and assigns it a specific philosophical meaning. For him, an institution refers to the shared norms and structures of living together within a historical community; therefore, it encompasses political, legal, ethical, economic, and social dimensions (Al-Haj, n.d.). These institutions operate according to the prevailing ethical frameworks within societies; they are shaped by social practices, customs, and traditions that regulate the coexistence of the self and the other within a system oriented toward justice. Justice thus represents the fundamental objective that institutions seek to achieve.

Regarding institutional justice, Ricoeur argues that human beings continue to act as claimants because the experience of injustice is often more immediately perceived than justice itself. Justice appears as a lack, whereas injustice manifests in lived experiences of inequality and exclusion. Furthermore, justice always functions as a mediator of human relationships. Ricoeur emphasises that institutional mediation is indispensable because social relations cannot be regulated solely through direct interpersonal interactions. For instance, the excessive desire to possess more, which constitutes a form of moral failure, can only be counterbalanced by institutional systems of distribution and sharing (Ricoeur, 2015).

Thus, Ricoeur links justice to dialogue, arguing that authentic dialogue cannot emerge in contexts characterised by domination, inequality, or the absence of institutional guarantees. Recognition of the other must therefore move beyond personal attitudes and become embodied in political and legal institutions capable of protecting dignity, rights, and equality. Institutions provide the conditions under which decisions can be made, particularly in situations of conflict. They extend beyond immediate interpersonal relationships and include even those whom we do not personally know, representing the general framework of a historical community seeking to establish a common life.

Living together necessarily presupposes the relationship between self and other. However, this relationship requires a third element: the institution, which stands between the conflicting parties and provides a shared framework for regulating disagreement. Through institutional mediation, conflict is transferred from the sphere of violence to the sphere of ethical and legal deliberation. Ricœur also contributes to the transformation of the concept of justice from the ethical domain into the moral and political domain. Justice is no longer understood merely as an individual virtue, as in Aristotle's conception, where it is opposed to vices such as injustice, falsehood, theft, and violence. Rather, it becomes a comprehensive theory of social organisation, particularly through the work of John Rawls, which incorporates concepts such as fairness, difference, rationality, freedom, entitlement, and the common good (Al-Haj, n.d.).

Rawls develops a procedural theory of justice that differs from Aristotelian teleological approaches and aligns more closely with Kantian deontological ethics and social contract theories. His concept of the original position, characterised by the veil of ignorance, requires rational individuals to deliberate under conditions of impartiality regarding the distribution of social benefits and burdens. This procedure aims to establish principles of justice that are fair and acceptable to all participants. Rawls also criticises utilitarianism for its teleological orientation, in which moral value is determined by maximising overall utility rather than ensuring fair treatment of individuals.

2.2 Moral Imagination

Ricœur introduces the concept of moral imagination as a capacity that enables the self to understand the other's situation and to expand its perspective beyond the limitations of personal experience. This imagination becomes essential for dialogue, particularly in contexts characterised by profound cultural, religious, or political differences. According to Ricœur's perspective, successful dialogue requires individuals to transcend their own experiences and imagine how the other perceives the world, suffers, and constructs meaning (Hafizi & Enayat, 2022).

Dialogue is therefore not limited to the exchange of linguistic expressions; rather, it constitutes the construction of human relationships grounded in understanding and mutual recognition. Moral imagination plays a central role in this process because it combines intellectual and affective dimensions, enhancing dialogue through empathy, perspective-taking, and the creation of ethical possibilities for resolving conflicts.

Furthermore, moral imagination helps establish connections among individuals by enabling them to place themselves symbolically in others' positions. This capacity helps dismantle stereotypes, overcome prejudices, and facilitate mutual understanding. It also allows participants in dialogue to create new collective narratives that emerge from encounters between different perspectives, thereby opening possibilities for overcoming past conflicts and constructing a shared future.

Thus, moral imagination should not be considered merely a theoretical philosophical concept but rather an ethical necessity in contemporary societies characterised by plural identities, cultural differences, and social divisions. The success of dialogue depends on individuals' ability to move beyond self-centred perspectives, recognise others' experiences, and imagine alternative ethical solutions.

3. The Conditions of Ethical Dialogue in Paul Ricœur

3.1 Listening and Understanding

Ricœur emphasises that ethical dialogue requires that "the interlocutor must listen to the other with the intention of understanding, not with the intention of replying", which implies abandoning any position based on domination or preconceived assumptions (Pierron, 2019, pp. 36–51). In Ricœur's

philosophy, dialogue is not reduced to the simple exchange of words; rather, it depends on active listening as an essential condition for ethical understanding.

Listening, according to Ricœur's hermeneutic perspective, is not a passive act of receiving information but an interpretive engagement that requires empathy, openness, and attention to the other's intentions beyond the literal meaning of their words. Ricœur conceives of the other as a self rather than an object; consequently, listening entails an implicit recognition of another subject who possesses meaning, experience, and the capacity to participate in the production of understanding.

3.2. Plurality and Difference

Ricœur acknowledges the existence of moral plurality, arising from the diversity of conceptions of "the good", thereby making dialogue a necessity rather than a source of conflict (Ricœur, 1973). He rejects every attempt to reduce difference to complete unity or absolute sameness. Ethical dialogue requires recognition that human beings live within culturally, linguistically, and historically plural contexts characterised by multiple identities.

This plurality does not represent a threat to ethical life; rather, it constitutes a source of ethical and epistemological enrichment. It reveals that no individual or community possesses an exclusive monopoly over meaning and that understanding emerges through the interaction of different perspectives. For Ricœur, the encounter between diverse identities and experiences creates the possibility of a deeper comprehension of both the self and the world.

From this perspective, ethical dialogue does not seek to eliminate difference but rather to recognise and coexist with it. Plurality should not be confused with moral relativism; instead, it constitutes the necessary condition for ethical interpretation, judgment, and mutual understanding.

4. Accountability of the Self

For Ricœur, the capable self is also responsible, one that recognises its accountability before others and evaluates its actions within an ethical horizon (Ricœur, 2000). One of the fundamental dimensions of Ricœur's philosophy is that the ethical subject is not defined solely by the capacity to act but also by the responsibility attached to those actions.

Accountability means that human beings do not exist as isolated individuals but as subjects embedded within networks of relationships that give consequences to their words, choices, and commitments. Therefore, dialogue cannot be ethical unless it is accompanied by responsibility, a willingness to acknowledge mistakes when they occur, and a capacity to revise one's position through reflection and recognition.

Discussion

An analysis of Paul Ricœur's philosophy demonstrates that ethical dialogue is not merely a communicative instrument or a rational procedure aimed at achieving agreement, as suggested by purely pragmatic approaches. Rather, it constitutes a fundamental existential and ethical act through which the self reveals itself before the other and assumes responsibility for its discourse, decisions, and history. In Ricœur's thought, dialogue does not take place within an abstract linguistic or rational space; instead, it unfolds within a complex field where recognition, temporality, narrative, language, and justice intersect. Ethical dialogue is therefore inseparable from the conditions that make human coexistence possible.

Ricœur proposes a rich conception of dialogue grounded in recognition, plurality, and ethical responsibility. However, the realization of this project depends on concrete conditions, including

respect for others, balanced relations of power, the existence of just institutions, and a personal commitment to sincere communication. The central challenge remains the transformation of dialogue from a philosophical ideal into a lived practice capable of resisting violence and restoring humanity to both politics and ethics. In this sense, Ricœur reformulates dialogue as a form of shared ethical responsibility: every speaker exposes themselves to questioning, recognises the presence of the other, and opens the possibility of understanding, reconciliation, and the reconstruction of identity.

Ricœur does not limit his reflection to individual intentions; rather, he connects the ethics of dialogue with institutional justice, which provides the structural conditions necessary for meaningful and effective communication. Ethical dialogue cannot flourish among individuals or groups subjected to injustice, exclusion, marginalisation, or unequal opportunities. Justice is therefore not merely a legal framework but an existential condition for the emergence of ethical discourse.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Ricœur's conception of dialogue is that it does not demand the elimination of differences but calls for their ethical transformation. Dialogue becomes an encounter between fragile yet capable selves who seek shared meaning without domination and without abandoning their human complexity. In a world increasingly marked by exclusion, superficial communication, and symbolic forms of domination, Ricœur offers an ethical project of dialogue that restores meaning to language, authenticity to speech, and respect to difference. Dialogue consequently ceases to be merely a method of discussion and becomes an ethical practice that establishes the foundations of a more just and humane world.

Conclusion

Paul Ricœur's philosophy presents ethical dialogue as more than a simple means of communication or a method for reaching agreement; it is an existential and ethical process through which the self is formed in relation to the other and assumes responsibility for its words, actions, and history. Dialogue emerges from the interplay of recognition, narrative identity, plurality, language, and justice, making it essential to meaningful human coexistence. However, ethical dialogue requires concrete conditions, including respect for differences, equality, responsible communication, and the presence of just institutions. Ricœur emphasises that justice is not only a legal structure but a necessary foundation that allows authentic dialogue to develop. His conception does not seek to eliminate differences but to transform them into opportunities for mutual understanding and shared meaning. Ultimately, Ricœur views dialogue as an ethical practice based on recognition, responsibility, and reconciliation, capable of overcoming exclusion and domination while contributing to the construction of a more humane and just society.

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