

**Richard Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* (Hants: Ashgate, 2004).**

*On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* offers a superb survey of Ricoeur's philosophical journey, which unfolds throughout his long and fruitful life. Ricoeur's original, versatile, and wide-ranging input: from reflexive philosophy and phenomenology, through his engagement with psychoanalysis and the philosophy of language, to religion and political philosophy, is made explicit with a tactile vibrancy and outstanding depth of insight. The portrait of Ricoeur, which transpires from Kearney's cogent exploration, is that of a true sage – the deeply engaged in social and political matters thinker, whose generous, passionate, and powerful response to the fundamental issues of a human being feeds the creative imagination of generations of scholars. Beginning with an explication of the basic ideas that pertain to Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics, the book aptly weaves the manifold strands of his thought, guiding us to apprehend his inimitable *via longa* ("long route") of the hermeneutic inquiry. The first Part of the book is a sound analysis of Ricoeur's debate with a host of diverse themes: the symbolism of evil, politics, poetics, but also the issue of creative imagination and its ethical implications. This apt commentary is supplanted with the author's captivating dialogues with his former teacher in Part two. The interview section deserves special notice as it arises from Kearney's engaged listening to his mentor and the invaluable, vivid experience of intellectual exchange between two thinkers, spanning almost three decades.

In a novel and engaging way, Kearney's deep exploration of Ricoeur's hermeneutics and poetics leads us to apprehend and appreciate the relevance of the relationship between philosophy and ethics. Placing an act of philosophizing in the practical domain, Ricoeur revitalizes the Aristotelian notion of phronetic wisdom, espousing thus, at the same time, the relevance of the ethical dimension of our existence for our understanding and self-understanding. For Ricoeur, as Kearney powerfully emphasizes, philosophy and ethics are not only close to one another but remain in indissoluble oneness. It is impossible to talk about a human being without an ethical backdrop of her conduct. Human existence is always an ethical existence, riven with inner and outer conflicts. The situation of conflict, as Ricoeur explicates, also regards the inherently and dialectically contradictory standpoints and the resulting incongruity of interpretations.

Without a shadow of a doubt, the most enticing facet of Kearney's salient *Conversation* with his teacher is his gloss on Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics of the self. Kearney has the unique ability to sensitize us to the originality of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of selfhood and, more specifically, to his notion of *narrative identity*, which expresses Ricoeur's profound understanding of the human subject in her relating to herself and to others. The ethical dimension of human subjectivity rests on the mutuality of recognition which continually positions us in relation to others and transforms our lives. Recognition originates in love which can transcend the rigid confines and or even the drama of self-centered ego. The reciprocal nature of human recognition sparks off an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation, which bears on our everydayness and changes history.

Kearney's unique accomplishment not only spells out the multifarious ways in which Ricoeur contributes to contemporary hermeneutics but proposes a deep delving into our human condition. With a real zest of an internationally acclaimed philosopher, Kearney invites us to follow in the footsteps of Ricoeur and indulge in philosophy. In Kearney's account, philosophizing truly shines forth as the portal to wisdom, and the owl of Minerva takes on an exceptional and unprecedented value.