were non-computable in terms of expected utility. Who knew whether or how such structural reforms would have brought about tangible benefits and for whom? Faith and hope were at the core of the utilitarian project, not the rational prediction of future events; Knowles seems unaware of this aspect of the doctrine he endorses.

Naturally, as we know today, liberal democracy succeeded, and so thoroughly did it succeed that liberal democracy has become a political given, one that most of Knowles’s readers will accept without much critical examination—as does Knowles himself. Knowles’s text, however, does leave the reader with a clear, even enjoyable, picture of what we have around us *hinc et nunc*, but also with no picture whatsoever of what we ought to have.

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*The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion*

RICHARD KEARNEY


This book is about God, not theology. Setting aside the traditional image of God as ‘*esse,*’ Richard Kearney sketches a hermeneutical retrieval of the Exodic name, revealing a God who is “pure passage” and “pure gift” (36). This book definitely gives its readers something to think about and sets out on an exhilarating new path for thought. Kearney provides textual support for a countertraditional view of God, one whose history is equally venerable as the traditional and is as shrouded in mystery at its “sources.”

The glimpses Kearney gives us of “the God who may be” are fascinating. This is a transfiguring, desiring, and possibilizing God. It is also a possible God, who comes and goes, resonating with Kearney’s earlier work on the imagination (see especially *The Wake of Imagination*). His interpretation of God’s “play” indicates in what respect we may be said to be God’s “images”: the human imagination, as described in his *Poetics of Imagining* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), is also a “paradoxical phenomenon, now here, now gone. Something, as the poet said, ‘more distant than stars and nearer than the eye.’” Like God’s creation of the world *ex nihilo*, the human imagination “resolves to create its own meaning, out of nothing,” being “the capacity to convert the given confines of the here and now into an open horizon of possibilities” (*Poetics of Imagining*, 5, 6, 2).

Kearney’s thesis rests upon linking ancient understandings of the inaugural name of God in Exodus 3:14 with its more contemporary hermeneutic possibilities. Hence, he replaces the essentialist “I am Who I am” with the eschatological “I am Who will be.” This God resists reduction to the status of an idol and repudiates those who would seek to use God’s power by the knowledge of
God’s name. The text reads like a novel. Retrieving eschatological meaning from four biblical texts, Kearney provides more tantalizing definition; he works his interpretation around four key biblical passages: the burning bush, the Shulamite’s Song, the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Thabor, and God’s pledge in Matthew 10 to make the impossible possible.

In developing his argument, Kearney addresses current debates on the notion of an eschatological God who transfigures and desires. He contrasts the fusionary sameness of the essentialist One against the eschatological universality of the Other. Glimpsing God as possibilizing our world from out of the future, i.e., from the eschaton promised by several religious traditions, keeps open the door to hope. This is a God who “happens upon us,” lending to life a sense of “unpredictable surprise, serendipity, and grace” (26). This is a God who calls us from the future, from the eschaton, the call drawing “a recreated creation towards God” (43). Thus, we find ourselves drawn by desire for the possible God, a desire that is not deficiency, but is its own reward. It is a desire in the here and now for a consummation still to come. This is a God who is personal in a way that an abstract God could never be.

Kearney develops the theme of transfiguration in terms of a phenomenology of the persona, which he reads as “the capacity in each of us to receive and respond to the divine invitation” (2), one that is “radically intersubjective” (18). The transfiguration of an individual allows the persona to shine forth, as did Jesus’s persona on Mount Thabor. Transfiguration involves both Creator and creature. God enters into history with us as we create. God needs us not only so that we can be who we may be, but in order for God to be “Who may be.” This God in fact seeks us out and requests our assistance. We are ourselves inextricably involved in the work of enabling the kingdom, a process that involves our own as well as God’s transfiguration.

Just who we may become may turn out to be a surprise for all concerned, given the divine fecundity visible in the potentiality and fecundity of history. For Kearney, the possible has “radical utopian power” (89). He liberates the notion of the possible from its traditional negative shackles which had confined its meaning to the “less than real” or “less than sufficient.” Kearney incisively deploys the ways and means of hermeneutics to critique not only the traditional notion of God as “esse” but also the extremes of deconstruction opposing it—efforts that, Kearney argues, in their rush to free themselves of metaphysics, lead inevitably to aporias concerning ethical practice.

Kearney cuts the Gordian knot of deconstructive ethics to reveal what lies hidden by the intricate and fascinating knotwork. He argues that deconstructive approaches like Derrida’s tend to strip faith of all names, stories, covenants, promises, alliances, and good works, leading to a view in which the Other “surpasses all our phenomenal horizons of experience” (76), and for this reason leaves us vulnerable. We can no longer tell good from evil. Kearney provides an extended discussion of Derrida’s “aporetic logic” (95) concerning the possible/impossible rhetorical pair, including how it relates to the notion of pardon.
He also provides a lucid analysis of Levinas's view of God, questioning whether it is a "purely phenomenological description as he likes to claim" (69), and suggests that the "very hyperbolic excess of Levinas's ethics is, arguably, the very token of its impossibility" (69). In other words, Kearney argues that Levinas's ethics demands an "impossible way of being" (69).

In outlining his alternative interpretation of God, Kearney responds in the negative to one old and unresolved problem: whether God is (or must be, or should be) all-powerful. Not to give away too much, lest I spoil one of many delightful surprises for the reader, suffice it to say that this is also a democratizing God. Rejecting the "esse" God, Kearney charts a middle path between the eschatological and the onto-theological in his hermeneutical retrieval of an "onto-eschatological" understanding of God as "Deus Adventurus" (81), which, he suggests, is more suitable to a new millennium. In co-creating with God, humanity discovers a hermeneutical God, one who "persuades rather than coerces, invites rather than imposes, asks rather than impels" (30). Kearney's alternative interpretation of God is well supported by his interpretations of a wealth of textual sources and by those drawn from a venerable countertradition of interpretation of the four biblical passages.

It is somewhat disconcerting to come face to face with the realization of the extent to which the traditional notion of God has become an idol. For this reason alone the book is worth reading. There are, however, many other reasons. A brief work, it nonetheless manages to provide much fertile ground for thought. Although the index is too restricted, there is material for further research on the topic in its copious notes and bibliography.

INGRID HARRIS

The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty
ERIC MATTHEWS

Merleau-Ponty's philosophical works are extremely rich. He is a provocative artist who works with a large pallet to reconfigure preconceptions and use new shades of meaning to express an original philosophical vision. He draws productively upon not only philosophers (e.g., Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger) but a variety of psychologists as well, many of whom, regrettably, are infrequently studied today—a consequence of which is that Merleau-Ponty has received less acclaim than he deserves. Furthermore, even those steeped in the phenomenological tradition find it difficult to teach the works of Merleau-Ponty to their students since he presupposes so much. Assigning Merleau-Ponty's works to beginners is a bit like taking a child to a daring contemporary art exhibit; they need a word or two to help with orientation. It is not that they do not see