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## *Review Essay*



# Richard Kearney's Relevance for Psychology: A Review Essay

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### Abstract

This essay argues that Richard Kearney's philosophical work has something important to say to phenomenological psychology and, in turn, has something important to learn from it. It begins by highlighting a movement of return after deconstruction, consistent throughout Kearney's oeuvre, that emerges clearly in the recently published *Imagination Now* collection—which contains some of Kearney's most important writings. It then shows how this movement is a fundamentally therapeutic endeavor. A quick review of several recent volumes about Kearney's work makes clear how his philosophy suggests an embodied and not simply a linguistic approach to therapy. As such, a certain phenomenological psychology is revealed as being implicitly operative in Kearney's work. The essay then ends by highlighting three possible benefits of having phenomenological psychologists engage with Kearney's work: a reevaluation of the non-cognitive aspects of subjective constitution, a renewed look at the role of both the narrative and carnal dimensions in psychological research and psychotherapy, and an even more enhanced socio-cultural role for phenomenological psychology.

### Keywords

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Richard Kearney is a scholar with a long and complex history. He has written over 15 books in philosophy, religion, Irish Studies, hermeneutics, aesthetics, psychoanalysis, and history, as well as 2 novels and a book of poetry, and has edited or co-edited more than 20 additional books spread across those fields. This productivity has given rise to an abundance of secondary literature as well: there are now no fewer than 5 books solely about his work that have been published, in addition to numerous articles, dissertations, book chapters, workshops, and conferences devoted to thinking through (and with) Kearney's work. Were it already over, his career would be considered to have been fecund and productive. But it is not over; in fact, in many ways it just seems to be coming into its own: five of the aforementioned books and edited volumes have come out in the last two years, with another authored book (on touch) to be published next spring, and at least one more book about his work expected in 2021.

With a scholar this productive, it can be difficult to know where to begin: how does one decide where to wade into such a voluminous body of work? Fortunately for those new to Kearney's work (and even for those already quite familiar with it, for even we can sometimes lose the forest for the trees), the recently published *Imagination Now: A Richard Kearney Reader*,<sup>1</sup> edited by M. E. Littlejohn, provides an excellent starting point for Kearney's thought. Organized around the theme of "imagination" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. xxi), this collection of articles and excerpts of Kearney's work provides a historical and thematic overview of Kearney's corpus in a way that highlights a certain movement or pattern of thought that, the collection shows, functions as the driving force for all of Kearney's work, and ties together his otherwise quite varied set of topics, themes, and styles (hermeneutic, deconstructive, phenomenological, popular, artistic, poetic, narrative, etc.). In this essay, I hope to show how this central movement—which, following the vocabulary that Kearney has been using since about 2010, I will characterize as the movement of the "ana"—mirrors quite closely what in psychology might be called a "therapeutic" movement. When Kearney himself applies this movement to themes of embodiment and trauma—which he has done in the last few years under the terminology of "carnal hermeneutics"—the results are very obviously of interest to contemporary psychological research. But this movement—even when applied to art, religion, or other spheres of life and study—is inherently indicative of an account of human being that is of essential importance to psychology as pursued in a *phenomenological* way.

I therefore hope to show in this essay that Kearney's work could be an important conversation partner for contemporary phenomenological psychology. I will try to show that we should view Kearney's work as a kind of

“phenomenological psychology in action” that has been productive in a variety of fields and disciplines, but which has only recently—and in a very limited way—been deployed in an explicitly psychological fashion. In this regard, the phenomenological psychology operating implicitly within Kearney’s work remains a potentially fruitful, though under-studied, area for further research in phenomenology, psychology, and “Kearney studies”. For this reason, my hope with this essay is to invite phenomenological psychology (in very Kearney-ian fashion) into a dialogue with Kearney’s work that will help all of us understand our own work, disciplines, and even ourselves, differently.

## 1 The Movement of the ‘Ana-’

Let us begin, then, with the movement that I am arguing acts as the central driving force of all of Kearney’s thought: the movement of the ‘ana-’. This terminology comes from Kearney’s 2011 book *Anatheism: Returning to God after God*. Quite simply, it is “coming back ‘afterward’ in order to move forward again” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 157), i.e., returning to something in order to find new ways of moving forward with it. It seeks neither to abandon one’s past, nor simply to take it on and perpetuate it, but to re-enliven or reanimate it in new, interesting, and life-giving ways.

In the *Imagination Now* reader, we see quite clearly just how consistent of a theme this has been for Kearney throughout his work. His earliest works, for example, focused on the imagination, and the positive role it can (and should) play in our every day lives. In the titular “Imagination Now” chapter, for example, Kearney discusses how human action, in the “postmodern” age, seems caught in a tension between “our immense responsibility as individuals *and* our dispersion into a collective network of multiple communications” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 17). To maintain an impetus for ethical action in such conditions, Kearney advocates for a “poetics of the possible” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 18), which is a way of imaginatively recovering, within those networks, the possibilities of creative re-interpretation inspired by the needs of the Other. Such a poetics of the possible affirms the critical moments of the ‘deconstruction’ of the ‘old’ humanist account of imagination, but “on condition that we understand such dispossession as a *via negativa*, a purgation that is not an end in itself but a point of departure for something else. After the disappearance of the self-sufficient imagination, another kind must now reappear” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 19), one that, having learned the lessons of postmodernism, “emerges as a response to the other, as radical interdependence” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 19). That is, the ‘traditional’ account of imagination is deconstructed and critiqued,

but only so as to recover a new account of the imagination that “works better” for our contemporary milieu (and we must return, later, to what it means for Kearney for something to ‘work better’). The movement of the ana- is here clearly visible, in a proto-form: a return to imagination, after (the modern, humanistic, independent) imagination has been discredited or deconstructed.

This account of imagination then develops into a “poetics of imagining” that seeks to rearticulate Ricoeur’s notion of “second naiveté”, in which “[w]e enter an attitude of methodic unknowing” that makes us “capable of conducting old inquiries in new ways” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 25). Here, we see the form of the ana- movement again at work in Kearney’s thought: the deconstruction of old forms in service of an ethical reconstruction of those forms.<sup>2</sup> But what type of reconstruction is Kearney after, here, once we have abandoned the modern, independent, isolated account of the individual as a sovereign, self-sustaining subject? Kearney makes clear that this ‘new house’ is constructed narratively: in response to the call of the Other (“Who are you?”), we tell the story of our lives, not simply fabricating it out of nowhere, but “in the light of new and old stories [the subject] tells about itself and others” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 28). This centrality of narrativity as a way of describing the essentially inter-dependent and intersubjective nature of the human person is another trope that remains consistent throughout Kearney’s work—one that has important implications for the relationship to phenomenological psychology implicit in Kearney’s work, and one that ultimately, as we will see, cannot be divorced from the centrality of the ana- movement.

We will return to all that below. For now, let us continue to trace—briefly—this ‘ana-’ movement throughout Kearney’s oeuvre, to see its centrality to all of Kearney’s project. Tracing this movement—indeed, making this connection in the first place—is made much easier by the organization of the *Imagination Now* reader in the way that it attempts to weave together both thematic and chronological elements. For the “poetics of the imagination” next gives rise to Kearney’s reconceptualization of God/the sacred as *posse* (i.e., possibility, possibilization). Such a reconceptualization has three significant implications, as laid out in the “God of the Possible” chapter: first, “it means that the presuppositions and prejudices that condition our everyday lives are put into question” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 152); second, it reminds us of *our* responsibility (since God is possibility which requires us for actualization); and third, it “reminds us that what seems impossible to us is only seemingly so” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 152). These implications obviously follow the three-fold movement of the ‘ana-’: the deconstruction of old forms (1st implication) so as to create new possibilities (3rd implication) for ethical engagement or renewal (2nd implication). In the words of the subtitle of Kearney’s *Anatheism* book, this is a returning to God

after (the) God (of metaphysics has been deconstructed; cf. Littlejohn, 2019, chps. 11, 12 & 15). Such movements of return (to X) after (X) come up again in Kearney's accounts of carnal hermeneutics (a return to hermeneutics after hermeneutics' obsession with language/texts has been deconstructed; cf. Littlejohn, 2019, chps. 6 & 7), Irish-English relations (a return to [a confederated form of] nationalism after the individuated and sovereign forms of nationalism have been deconstructed; cf. Littlejohn, 2019, chp. 19), relations to 'the stranger' (a return to hospitality after hospitality [especially the firm distinction between guest and host] has been deconstructed; cf. Littlejohn, 2019, chps. 16 & 18), history (a return to memorialization after memory [as a simple recording of what 'objectively' just happened] has been deconstructed; cf. Littlejohn, 2019, chp. 17), and more.

## 2 Narrative and the Therapeutic Core of Kearney's Work

This 'ana-' movement is, therefore, central to all of Kearney's work, as *Imagination Now* makes clear. But grounding that movement in the notion of imagination, and more specifically in Kearney's notion of "narrative imagination," as *Imagination Now* does, helps bring something else to the fore, something that is perhaps surprising to long-time readers of Kearney's work and that shows a resonance between that work and (at least some forms of) psychology. For casting the 'ana-' movement in light of narrative imagination helps us see that this movement, which is so central to Kearney's work, is nothing other than the very movement of psychotherapy itself, and as such Kearney's work can be read as a fundamentally *therapeutic* endeavor.

The relation between narrative imagination and psychotherapy is announced by Kearney himself (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 29). There, he draws on Ricoeur's notion of psychotherapy as the "talking cure" in volume 3 of *Time and Narrative*. Kearney states that:

psychoanalysis or psychotherapy involves an intersubjective process whereby a self (the analysand) comes to know itself better by narrating itself to another (the analyst) more truthfully than it had narrated itself heretofore [...] Through the so-called "talking cure," the analysand commits himself to "working through" (*durcharbeiten*) the fragments of existence until they constitute some kind of narrative configuration. The scattered bits and pieces of suppressed or unintelligible experience are shaped by a narrative retelling that enables the self to acknowledge a certain self-constancy in and through change. In principle, therefore,

psychotherapy might be said to show how the story of a life comes to be composed through a series of rectifications applied to preceding narratives (that we tell about ourselves or others tell about us). This is what Ricoeur calls the recovery of an ethically responsible self-identity by re-connecting past to present and future”

LITTLEJOHN, 2019, p. 29

While there is an unhelpful conflation between psychoanalysis and psychotherapy at work here, it seems to me, the overall point remains germane: that narrative plays a significant role in the establishment of our personal (and, as he argues elsewhere, collective; cf. Littlejohn, 2019, chps. 4 & 5) identity; and that at least part of the task of therapy is helping the patient (or therapist<sup>3</sup>) tell their story differently, so that they are able to incorporate some elements of their life in ways that are more conducive to healthy functioning in the future.

This therapeutic function repeats the ‘ana-’ movement we have discussed above: old ways of making sense of things must be deconstructed or reworked, so as to open up new possibilities for healthier, more ethical interaction between self and world. But casting this movement now explicitly as a therapeutic function (a possibility opened up by the centrality of the narrative imagination to both processes) helps us flesh out the dimension of the ‘ana-’ movement that was previously referred to, vaguely, with terms like “better,” “more ethical,” etc. A person in need of psychotherapy acknowledges that something in their life is not working as it should, and this prevents them from doing certain things they would otherwise like to do: they are unable to sleep, say, or unable to make themselves emotionally vulnerable in relationships, or unable to cope with the loss of a loved one. Whatever it is, they recognize that their day to day lives are being negatively impacted, and they are trying to understand why that is the case, and either rectify (‘fix’) it, or find strategies to cope with it so that they can do the things they wish to do, and live a full, happy(er), ‘healthy(er)’ life. That is, therapy is something a person chooses to do, to improve their quality of life and heal from things they may not have chosen to undergo: it is a purposeful response to that which is thrust upon us, a response that seeks hope and health.

The same can be said of Kearney’s work. It begins, always, with the acknowledgment that “we are where we are” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 318). We may not have chosen to be in these conditions or in this situation, but we are here, nonetheless. And while we cannot control all that happens to us, we can try to find a way of moving forward from here that will enable us to act wisely, both in our current circumstances and as we shape our future circumstances. This

two-fold notion of acting wisely is another key focus of Kearney's work, which is always about what we do (*poesis*) and how to do that wisely (*phronesis*). These two elements cannot be easily separated: a key element of Kearney's early work is to show that "[t]he practical wisdom (*phronesis*) of ethics would be impossible without the narrative plots of poetics" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 40), because stories provide us with knowledge "respecting the singularity of situations as well as the nascent universality of values aimed at by human actions" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 59). Put simply, the stories we tell (about) ourselves shape the values we hold, and hence shape both the 'goods' we pursue, and the ways we have of pursuing them. This is why the therapeutic 'ana-' movement is so central to Kearney's work: insofar as stories shape even our account of the good life and how to pursue it, we can never simply abandon the stories or traditions that have previously shaped us, even when they cease to be helpful. Instead, we must always return to (ana) those stories, even and perhaps especially after those stories have been called into question (critiqued, deconstructed, found wanting).

And we return to these stories precisely in service of 'healing,' of becoming healthier, that is, of being better able to navigate our world in ethical, Other- and self-honoring ways. Such health requires, Kearney claims, "a twin therapy of (1) narrative catharsis and (2) carnal working-through" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 121). While narrative is crucial to the therapeutic movement, then, it is not sufficient: only in "healing by word-touch," can "a double transformation of incurable wounds into healable scars" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 121) occur. In order to move forward, then, we need not only to reconceptualize ourselves and our stories in a more "linguistically hospitable" way, but we also need to enact or incarnate that ana- movement in and through our very bodies, in a "carnally hospitable" way (Littlejohn, 2019, chp. 20). Such "carnal hospitality can operate at several levels of embodied exchange" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 293), in part because the "three connotations of sense—as (1) sensation, (2) meaning, (3) orientation" combine in our incarnate bodies to "signify how we make sense of our lives in the flesh" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 95). In this regard, if hermeneutics is "the task of interpreting (*hermeneuein*) plural meaning in response to the polysemy of language and life" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 87), then this interpretation manifests itself most basically in our very embodied living: interpretation is nothing other than "incarnate *phronesis*" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 90) because hermeneutics goes 'all the way down,' in and through the body.<sup>4</sup> Hence, Kearney's notion of "carnal hermeneutics" (Littlejohn, 2019, chp. 7) is the therapeutic correlate of narrative imagination: both are necessary for broad-based, sensible, individual and communal healing.

### 3 The Embodied Performance of the Therapeutic Movement

Hence, this ‘ana-’ movement, like therapy itself, is not simply a speculative exercise, or a fun intellectual game or mental puzzle (like Sudoku, or some critiques of Analytic philosophy). It is a choice we make, and something we live through, in the sense of giving us the ‘categories’ or ‘structures’ we use to engage the world. Kearney is clear that the ana- movement of his work is “not a dialectical necessity or speculative system, but an existential movement that we go through again and again in life” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 315). As the editors of *Richard Kearney’s Anatheistic Wager*<sup>5</sup> put it, the ana- movement “is not simply a metaphysics of probability and calculation, à la Pascal. Nor is it a risk that prompts an existential leap or pragmatic prudence. It appears at birth, is present throughout life, and disappears only with death” (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 3).

As an existential movement (perhaps *the* existential movement, as we will return to below), this need to return to X after X is not primarily accomplished theoretically, but in other, less cognitive/reflective modes: art, literature, desire, touch, etc. If therapeutic healing requires both linguistic and carnal elements, then it is therapeutically significant that “Poetry and art have a way of combining the powers of linguistic and carnal hermeneutics” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 299). In this way, Kearney’s work is not accidentally inter-disciplinary, but essentially so: the very therapeutic aim of his work, requiring both narrative and carnal therapies, would necessarily draw him to poetry and literature, but also to other arts (visual, cinematic, dramatic, etc.), as these have the power to combine both forms of therapy together into a deeper, more sufficient therapeutic movement. If this is true, this would further bolster claims about the therapeutic power of art, movies, music, etc. in and for psychological healing.

This theme is highlighted explicitly in *The Art of Anatheism*.<sup>6</sup> In that edited collection, art (in various forms: plastic, cinematic, literary, etc.) is explored as a favored means of uncovering, and returning in more healthy ways to, various elements of our existence. In this work, the focus is mainly on returning to the sacred after the death of God (as discussed in *Anatheism*), but, as we have shown, this ana- movement is not restricted in Kearney’s work only to the sacred, but returns again and again in various ways and guises. The book’s opening four chapters provide the philosophical and theological background for the notion of our “creating and recreating the divine in the wake of the death of God” (Clemente & Kearney, 2017, p. ix). Through the contributions of Kearney, John D. Caputo, Catherine Keller, and John Pantleimon Manoussakis, this re/making (*poesis*) of God (*theos*) or of the sacred is shown to occur through human actions. The remainder of the book focuses on the plastic, performance,

cinematic and literary arts as the sites of such theo-poiesis. Examining unique and distinct examples of this in painting (cf. Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, chps. 5–9; of especial interest here is Jean-Luc Nancy's contribution in chapter 9), in music (chapters 10–11), in religious liturgical ritual (chapters 12–14; especially interesting here is Maxwell Parsons Pingeon's analysis of the re-configuring of sacrality in, and hence the pseudo-religious liturgical nature of, the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous<sup>7</sup>), in cinema (chapters 15–17), in the literature of Marilynne Robinson (chapter 18), and more, the book shows the power of artistic creation to make and remake our understanding of the divine, but also more broadly, the power to make and remake our understanding of anything. As such, artistic creation is shown to be a prized example of the ana- movement and its therapeutic potential.<sup>8</sup>

*Richard Kearney's Anatheistic Wager* (RKAW) affirms this power of the aesthetic, but emphasizes that, for Kearney, the aesthetic cannot be isolated from ethics since “[o]ne cannot create art and neglect the art of living well” (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 253). Therefore, Kearney's ana- based movement “continues in and through art—and above all: the art of living” (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 4). What is “at stake” in this ana- movement, then, is nothing other than how we live our lives everyday, since creative (re-)making is the order of human living itself, and not simply of artistic expression. Building, in some ways, on the contributions by Gschwandtner and Bradley in *The Art of Anatheism*, which both pertain (though in different ways) to sacred liturgies, this volume shows that one's relation to the divine plays a bigger role than we might expect in how we live our lives everyday, insofar as God (or the ‘sacred’) can be encountered in our everyday lives in very tactile ways. But this, of course, cannot look the same for everyone: we all have differing relations to the divine, and come from traditions that provide us different tools to explain or account for that relation. This claim is at once inter-religious (cf. especially Moyaert's and O'Leary's contributions, Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, chps. 8 & 9), social and psychological. Shelly Rambo's contribution, for example, examines how the notion of resurrection (the restoration of life after death) can and must be rethought to accommodate those who have experienced trauma. In the case of those who are post-trauma, “[l]ife ‘after’ cannot be thought of in terms of a simple return to an old life or even a piecing together of the past” (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 239), because trauma is characterized by “rupture and departures” in which “the world lost cannot be regained” (p. 246). “With no going back,” she asks, “what might a [way] forward look like?” (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 239). To answer this, she finds the ana-movement of returning to X after X potentially quite helpful—provided that the ‘after’ is

not thought exclusively in the vein of recovery and restoration. Here, she finds Kearney's own anatheist reflections overly theist, and not sufficiently "ana-": Kearney's own commitments to Christianity do not allow him to "to fully release resurrection without the promise of its return" (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 246) because he is too committed to affirming "the will of the father" in ways that cause her to wonder "whether Kearney's concept of resurrection is anatheistic *enough*" (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 244). As such, Rambo opens a crucial conversation regarding the efficacy of Kearney's work for thinking theories of trauma, namely, whether Kearney's work conflates the existential and the traumatic in ways that do not adequately account for the distinction and relation between the existential subject who "remains active in the face of the dark night" and the irreparable loss of trauma in which "All is lost" and "Not made right again" (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 246).

In asking how religion might be re-thought to better include those suffering from trauma, Rambo wonders "whether [religion] can testify to divine presence in ways other than a triumphalistic account of life overcoming death" (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 240). Here, she finds the way in which Kearney "offers the possibility of repurposing the theological within what can be identified as the 'secular'" (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 242) promising. Others in the volume flesh out this theme more strongly: James Wood's and Emmanuel Falque's dialogues with Kearney in the volume (chapters 1 and 4, respectively) both push Kearney to explicate more precisely how his ana-theism is both distinct from theism or atheism and how it can be (therapeutically?) helpful to both groups to rethink the sacred in more 'secular' terms. Brian Treanor's argument that faith, for Kearney, is necessarily "a lived orientation or disposition" (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 116) is also germane here. Treanor argues for two distinct elements of the ana- movement: "The first aspect of the [ana-] is calculative, having to do with what we can and cannot *know*; the second aspect of the [ana-] is imaginative and embodied, having to do with what we *do* about what we know or believe" (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 117). These two aspects are clearly intertwined, and the tension between them reconnects us (without returning us, Treanor maintains, in a point that takes on extra meaning in light of Rambo's critique) to "the strangeness of things" (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 117). This strangeness is precisely what opens us to the possibility of faith, which Treanor describes via a "fivefold motion" of imagination, humor, commitment, discernment, and hospitality (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 120). This notion of faith—which describes a 'form' of faith and not its content (p. 123)—is essential to recovering the "epiphanies of the everyday" (Littlejohn, 2019, chp. 14) that characterize the sacred in the

secular for Kearney. Such a characterization of faith and of the sacred in formal and experiential terms, rather than epistemic and content-based terms, recasts our thinking of religion in ways that help us (potentially) see and experience the sacred everywhere in our everyday lives; it also significantly alters how we might account for 'experiences' of the religious within a psychology of religion.

Finally, *Debating Otherness with Richard Kearney: Perspectives from South Africa*<sup>9</sup> allows us to see how Kearney's invocations of the ana- movement play in the unique context of post-Apartheid South Africa. This is a uniquely interesting opportunity, first because Richard's most recent work (represented by the "Double Hospitality" chapter in *Imagination Now*) deals significantly with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC), and especially with the experiences that Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (a noted South African scholar and peace activist whose relation to Kearney's work is examined explicitly in chapter 13 of *Debating Otherness*) has with and as a result of the TRC. Her experience is a major example Kearney uses to show the therapeutic power of touch, thereby showing us already in *Imagination Now* the ways that South Africa influences Kearney's thought. Getting the chance, in this volume, to see how South Africa is, in its turn, influenced by Kearney's thought gives us a unique glimpse into the performance of the "dia-critical" and "dialogical" character of Kearney's work (cf. Littlejohn, 2019, chp. 6), by helping us see how both sides of the dialogue are transformed by the encounter (something that also emerges in the various interviews with Kearney spread across these volumes: cf. Littlejohn, 2019, chp. 21; Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, chps. 1–4; Veldsman & Steenkamp, 2018, chp. 15). This power of mutual transformation is especially poignant in Wilhelm Verwoerd's contribution to the volume, "Toward Hospitality between Enemies." Verwoerd's experiences as a researcher for the South African TRC and as a reconciliation practitioner in Northern Ireland give him a very unique take on the relationship between Kearney's work and reconciliation between enemies.

Secondly, this volume is of interest for the very personal essay that Kearney writes, outlining his history and how it shapes his work. In direct response to the gracious and personal invitation of Justin Sands in the first chapter (whose subtitle is "Where do you come from, Richard Kearney?"—clearly reminiscent of Ricoeur's *dou parlez-vous*, a phrase whose significance for Kearney's work is explored in the introduction to *The Art of Anatheism*), Kearney is able to articulate "Where I speak from" (the title of his contribution to the volume). This personal window sheds light on much of Kearney's work, especially its therapeutic purposes, and further confirms that the work of the ana- is not simply academic nor occasional, but an existential commitment that we constantly work through, in all parts of our lives.

While the centrality of the ana- movement to the whole of our lives is therefore embodied in various ways in art, poetry, liturgy, and religion, there is another, perhaps even more basic, way that we encounter the world in a carnally interpretive way: our sense of touch. For while carnal hermeneutics operates “at several levels of embodied exchange,” as we noted earlier, “it is in touch that the most basic act of exposure to the other occurs” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 293). Hence, it should not surprise us that Kearney’s forthcoming book (due Feb 2021) is entitled *Touch: Recovering our most Vital Sense*. In his chapter on carnal hermeneutics in *Imagination Now*, Kearney alludes to the significance of touch as “the ability to experience and negotiate the passion of existence, understood etymologically as *pathos/paschein*—suffering, receiving, or undergoing exposure to others who come to us *as this or that*” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 100). This enables him to conclude later in the volume that “it is in touch that the most basic act of exposure to the other occurs” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 293). Touch is thereby shown to be both essentially hermeneutic or interpretive and the primal medium (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 98) of our openness and vulnerability to the other. As such, touch is the ultimate coming together of epistemology and ethics (as discussed, e.g., in Treanor’s contribution to *RKAW*) in our very practical comportment toward the world: “we say that someone *sensible* is someone *sensitive*: they have ‘the touch’” and because having “the right touch is to touch and be touched wisely”, Kearney can state quite boldly that “Touching well is living well” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 96). This relation between touch, tact, ethics, and wisdom is essential to living well in our contemporary situation, which seems to be losing touch with touch, in part because of the rising trend of understanding our social relations as (digital) social media (cf. Littlejohn, 2019, chp. 8, “Losing Touch”). Hence the need to return (again) to touch, after touch has been redefined through the notion of the ‘touch screen’. This application of the ana- to touch itself is the next step in Kearney’s therapeutic attempt to help us live healthier lives in our contemporary world.

#### 4 Kearney and Phenomenological Psychology

These embodied applications of the therapeutic movement of the ana- show the broad applicability of Kearney’s fundamental insights. But they also include an implicit account of the subject and its relation to Others, to itself, and to the world that is at work in Kearney’s “therapeutic” philosophical project. This account, I would like to argue now, is best explained via a distinctly phenomenological account of psychology that opens us to understand certain things about the subject’s condition that do not emerge as forcefully in psychoanalysis, cognitive science, or strictly individualist accounts of the subject.

The account of the subject implicit in Kearney's work operates in a space between two main guardrails: first, the notion of a *persona* that is presented in and through the person (cf. Littlejohn, 2019, chp. 13); and second, the necessarily intersubjective nature of the subject, revealed through the power of the narrative imagination (cf. Littlejohn, 2019, chps. 3 & 4). There is a certain tension in trying to honor both the irreducible singularity of the *persona* and the necessarily communally- and empirically-constituted nature of the person. Within the phenomenological tradition, we might talk about this as a tension that seeks to honor both Levinas and Husserl, ultimately, I will argue, taking us very close to Merleau-Ponty.

Let us begin with the notion of the *persona*. Kearney defines this as: "that eschatological aura of 'possibility' that eludes but informs a person's actual presence here and now" and which he uses "as another word for the otherness of the other" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 167). This is then contrasted with "person", which refers "to my fellow in so far as he/she is the same or similar to me (empirically, biologically, psychologically, etc.)" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 167). "At a purely phenomenological level," Kearney tells us, "*persona* is all that in others exceeds my searching gaze, safeguarding their inimitable and unique singularity," while nevertheless ceaselessly spurring "language to speak figuratively about it, deploying imagination and interpretation to overreach their normal limits in efforts to grasp it—especially in the guise of metaphor and narrative" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 167). The *persona* is therefore the "guarantor of singularity" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 171), and without it the other can be reduced strictly to an element within my projects, a tool within my toolshed that I am free to use as I see fit. It is the *persona*, therefore, that entails that we must approach another subject as an ethical subject, worthy of a respect that is shown, not through simple distance or apophatic silence<sup>10</sup> (cf. Littlejohn, 2019, pp. 153–154), but through dialogue and conversation, seeking to understand (though not comprehend) them and allowing them to understand us.

But conversely, this dialogical encounter with the other does not *just* occur as an encounter between two subjects. It is also an encounter that is formative of the subjects involved, at least in their person-ness. We see this in Kearney's use of narrative, which is necessarily intersubjective,<sup>11</sup> normative,<sup>12</sup> and formative.<sup>13</sup> But we must remember that 'story' here is not *simply* textual, linguistic, or cognitive—it is included in our very embodied mode of being in the world (as our discussion of the centrality of touch and carnal hermeneutics made clear). Hence, the narrative, hermeneutic imagination "combines the powers of ethics and poetics in the formation of an intersubjective culture (*Bildung*) where, suspending the will to dominate, we exist one-for-the-other" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 95). The invocation of culture is significant here: the subject is not merely constituted by a singular relation to one Other (as

a cursory reading of Levinas, or, in a different way, the Husserl of the fifth *Cartesian Meditation*, might suggest), but rather is constituted by an entire web of sense that combines sensation, meaning, and our orientation in the world (cf. Littlejohn, 2019, p. 95).<sup>14</sup> This ‘web of sense’ is experienced by us in and through the institutions and traditions we inhabit (cf. Renaud, 2004, p. 58): we are formed in them and by them, even as we re-form them through our continued action. In this regard, our engagement with the other, our hermeneutic engagement with them in and as the very exposure of our flesh, is nothing less than the question of our very being itself.

The editors of *Richard Kearney's Anatheistic Wager* acknowledge this when they state: “Being itself is a question and is questioning. And before we can calculate or leap or make any kind of practical consideration, the wager [of the ana- movement] is always already there—wagering in and through us. As long as we live, the wager will be there. It cannot be gotten rid of” (Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, p. 3). This theme of our very embodied existence being an exposure to, but also a questioning of, being itself emerges explicitly in the later work of Merleau-Ponty (especially *The Visible and the Invisible*).<sup>15</sup> Leonard Lawlor has even argued (rather convincingly, in my opinion) that this notion of being-as-questioning is a crucial interpretive key for understanding 20th century French philosophy as a whole.<sup>16</sup> Kearney echoes this, claiming that narrative (which, you will recall, is necessarily connected, for him, to this cultural production of the subject) is perhaps what makes “a merely biological life (*zoe*)” able to be “considered a truly human one (*bios*)” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 49). In this regard, the ana- movement (of deconstructing our old ‘stories’ or traditions so that they can be reconstructed in healthier ways) is not simply *an* existential movement, it is *the* existential movement, the movement of human existence itself: we are always interrogating or questioning being (in the form of nature, but also of institutions, traditions, etc. (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 2010)), and doing so is the very mode of our being.<sup>17</sup> The movement of returning to X after X is the fundamental movement of humanity’s being-in-the-world.

This implicit account of the subject and its relation to itself, its world, and others is, as I hope this quick sketch has shown, thoroughly phenomenological. It simply does not emerge in the same way from psychoanalysis, and certainly not from more empirically-based psychological accounts. There are a several features of this account that emerge in Kearney’s work that I think would benefit from a more substantive discussion with phenomenological psychology. Let me highlight three of them here:

1. First, this account of the subject privileges the non-cognitive aspects of the subject’s constitution over the cognitive aspects. That is, we are

shaped at least as much (if not more) by the non-cognitive elements of our traditions. This includes, as we saw with Kearney's own work, the literary, plastic, and dramatic arts, but also more nebulous and difficult to reflect on things like the differing ways our bodies are exposed to others (think, for example, of the differing reactions white and black bodies have to and for police), the differing levels of "grievability" for different population that are smuggled into various social and public policies (cf. Butler, 2020), the use of different kinds of liturgies in various religious traditions (cf. Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, chps. 7–9; Clemente & Kearney, 2017, chp. 12), or simply differing types of popular music (cf. Clement & Kearney, 2017, chps. 10 & 11). This is not simply equivalent to the 'unconscious forces' of psychoanalysis (though there may be resonances between the two concepts), but perhaps gets closer to something like a 'spiritual analysis'<sup>18</sup> of our various cultural traditions and the impact they have on the constitution of subjects within those traditions. Psychologically, this privileging of the non-cognitive would seem to have implications for the necessity of non-linguistic modes of therapeutic "working-through": therapy can no longer simply be the "talking cure," because the nature of our subjectivity is such that we bear psychological wounds in ways that are, and so must be addressed by, pre-cognitive, pre-linguistic means. And given the significance of touch as the medium of our vulnerability to the other, such non-linguistic therapeutic modes must include, in some way, the possibility of therapeutically healing touch. We must be touched by another in order to heal psychologically, even as we must also touch the world. This is not simply a claim about how therapy works, but about the fundamental nature of the psychological subject in its phenomenological engagement with the world.

2. The necessity of both linguistic and carnal therapies for psychological healing therefore opens questions about the nature of the psychological and psychotherapeutic enterprise. The medical, interventionist model of healing (which seeks a "cure" provided to the "patient" by an "expert") that is characteristic of modern Western medicine may not be sufficient to this carnal (and not simply 'bodied'<sup>19</sup>) healing. Kearney alludes to this by referring to two archetypal figures at the founding of modern medicine: Asclepius and Hippocrates (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 124). The latter, who is more obviously taken up by contemporary medicine (e.g., in the Hippocratic Oath doctors take), is characterized by the use of "means of identifying (diagnosing) and seeking and destroying (treating) the disease, using evidence-based practice" in order to enact "a heroic model of outsmarting and overpowering the enemy" (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 124). While

this model has been very successful within certain limits, Kearney pushes us to consider whether some wounds (including at least some psychologically traumatic ones) require also the Asclepian approach in which “the healer cannot completely control the pain and grief of dying, [but] can choose to be with [the one dying] and hold that pain” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 125). Contrary to the ‘hero’ or ‘expert’ model of the Hippocratic approach, the Asclepian model opens the door to a mutual humanity between doctor and patient, a mutuality that “releases the potential” for healing that is within each one of us (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 125). Here, both doctor and patient acknowledge their own wounds and need for healing and walk through that process together. Such a non-heroic model—Kearney calls it the model of the “wounded healer”, invoking Chiron, the teacher of Asclepius—finds support in palliative care medicine<sup>20</sup> and in trauma theory.<sup>21</sup> But given its connection to carnal hermeneutics, and therefore to the constitution of subjects more broadly, we are left to wonder whether such a model could not have a wider application in psychological and medical fields. From Kearney’s work, at least, an awareness of the phenomenological nature of our constitution (e.g., as carnal beings and not simply as ‘bodies’ with ‘minds’) seems to require a supplemented approach to Hippocratic medical and psychological treatment.

3. The notion of mutuality at work in the Asclepian model resonates with the mutual and communal (rather than simply inter-subjective) nature of subjective constitution suggested by Kearney’s work. Such a focus on mutuality problematizes, for example, the dyadic starting point of much of psychoanalysis,<sup>22</sup> suggesting instead that we must think of subjects as always already located in broader communal networks of sense that transcend subjects. Yet much of mainstream psychology seems premised on accounts that are centered around individual subjects (I go to therapy; I take my medication; etc.). The Asclepian model suggests a change to that in terms of therapeutic practice, but what might correspond to that in terms of theoretical approaches? I wonder if there might be room here for phenomenological psychology to engage more meaningfully with social psychology. This would not just be a taking up of the data and findings of contemporary (empirical, demographic, statistical, etc.) social psychology, but a rethinking of the methods and foundations of social psychology from a phenomenological perspective. What might such a phenomenological social psychology look like? How might it work: would dialogue and narrative be key methodological elements of such a phenomenological social psychology (as Kearney’s work would suggest), or would such a phenomenological social psychology be grounded elsewhere? Can such

communal constitution be accommodated within psychology—even social psychology—or must we move instead beyond phenomenological psychology to a phenomenological politics?

These are only a few features that can be distilled from the implicit theory of the subject at work in Kearney's thought. They each have clear and obvious implications from and for phenomenological psychology, though the precise nature of those implications is far from clear. That is to say, while this review essay does not seek to establish or fix the relation between Kearney's work and phenomenological psychology, I hope that it has shown that there is a relation between them, and that paying more attention to that relation might be beneficial for both phenomenological psychologists and those engaging with Kearney's work. Rephrased in the language of Kearney's hermeneutics, we might say that this essay has sought to show that Kearney's work would be a good conversation partner for phenomenological psychology. If this hope has been realized, the *Imagination Now* reader is an excellent place to begin to engage with Kearney's work. From there, various of the other volumes mentioned might prove more or less helpful, depending on your specific research interests. But overall, phenomenological psychologists will find much fodder for thought in Kearney's work, and Kearney's work will benefit from being engaged by phenomenological psychologists.

### Notes

- 1 Hereafter cited in-text as *IN*.
- 2 John D. Caputo, one of the key interlocutors for Kearney's religious philosophy, would no doubt point out that this pattern is, in fact, central to deconstruction itself, in its Derridean provenance and manifestation (cf. Caputo, J. D., 1996; Caputo, J. D., 1997).
- 3 To avoid the overly medicalized model of therapy (which we will discuss below as a Hippocratic or hero-based model), James H. Olthuis proposes replacing the language of doctor-patient with that of therapist-therapeut (cf. Olthuis, J. H., 2001).
- 4 Hence, Kearney's "carnal hermeneutics" could be read, perhaps, as a more "more radical hermeneutics" (cf. Caputo, J. D., 1988; Caputo, J. D., 2000).
- 5 Hereafter cited in-text as *RKAW*.
- 6 Hereafter cited in-text as *AA*.
- 7 Scholars interested in religion and religious experience will also find great interest in Christina Gschwandtner's typically excellent analysis of Syrian liturgical texts as "an exercise in dialogic hospitality" (Clemente & Kearney, 2017, p. 176) in chapter 12.
- 8 The poetic and highly personal reflection contributed by the poet Fanny Howe (chapter 20) is especially poignant on this point.
- 9 Hereafter cited in-text as *DO*.
- 10 This is Kearney's criticism of Levinas, Marion and, at certain times, Derrida: they make the other so transcendent that they, functionally, lose any meaningful relation with the

- other at all, insofar as we can “disregard others not just by ignoring their transcendence but equally by ignoring their flesh-and-blood thereness” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 168).
- 11 A story is “someone (a teller) telling something (a story) to someone (a listener) about something (a real or imaginary world)” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 62).
- 12 “Story telling is never neutral [...] each story seeks to persuade us one way or another about the evaluative character of its actors and their actions” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 64).
- 13 Narrative “enables the self to acknowledge a certain self-constancy in and through change [...] Without a minimum of narrative self-constancy over time (which some acquire through therapy), we could not properly speak of the same subject being answerable to other subjects” (Littlejohn, 2019, p. 29).
- 14 This notion of the communal (and not simply intersubjective) account of the subject emerges in Husserl’s later work and its reception in later French thought, such as Merleau-Ponty’s account of *Stiftung* as the “unlimited fecundity” of “the products of culture that continue to have value after their appearance” (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 1960, pp. 73–74). Robert Vallier provides an excellent overview of the significance of this term for Merleau-Ponty’s work in “Institution: The significance of Merleau-Ponty’s 1954 Course at the Collège de France” (cf. Vallier, 2005).
- 15 “The existing world exists in the interrogative mode” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 103).
- 16 Cf. Lawlor, L. (2003). *Thinking through French philosophy: The being of the question*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- 17 An obviously Heideggerian theme, from *Being and Time* forward.
- 18 I mean this in the phenomenological sense, and not in a distinctly religious sense (cf. DeRoo, 2020, for an elucidation of what is meant by ‘spiritual’ here).
- 19 By this I mean that, while Western medicine can certainly account for our physical nature as psychological creatures (seen most clearly in the neuro-scientific approach to psychology), it threatens to treat this physical nature *simply* as bio-chemical bodies, rather than as carnal flesh, if there is not some kind of phenomenological intervention to awaken it to its own biases, rooted in the “natural attitude” and its sharp distinction between subject and object, between bodies and meaning. But there is a corresponding danger on the other side, namely that phenomenology can devolve into a kind of Gnosticism if it does not acknowledge the importance of bodies and not simply flesh (cf. Clemente & Doude van Troostwijk, 2018, pp. 104–108). Phenomenological psychology operates in the space between these two extremes.
- 20 Kearney cites: Kearney, M., 2007 and Kearney, M., 2009.
- 21 Kearney cites: Davoine & Gaudiliere, 2014.
- 22 Cf. for example, Oliver, 1997.

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