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The Aesthetics of Autonomy: Ricœur and Sartre on Emancipation, Authenticity, and Selfhood

Farhang Erfani

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The Aesthetics of Autonomy: Ricœur and Sartre on Emancipation, Authenticity, and Selfhood argues that, despite their differences, Sartre and Ricœur have a similar goal. While they are both anti-essentialists, they nevertheless advocate for the notions of selfhood and autonomy. Autonomy, for them, is the end result of an aesthetic path. An identity, at the individual or collective level, is created by weaving together contingent threads of the given. In other words, identity is a narrative construct. The first two chapters focus on the respective methods of Sartre and Ricœur. Despite their different emphases, Farhang Erfani argues that they have a similar dialectical method, between the situation and our ability to surpass it for Sartre, and between sedimentation and innovation for Ricœur. The third chapter brings them together and shows how they can complement each other in building a narrative identity at the individual level; Ricœur is helpful in appreciating Sartrean notions of bad faith and authenticity. The fourth and final chapter turns to collective identity; Erfani argues that Ricœur's notions of ideology and utopia are better complemented with Sartrean political ethics. Erfani advocates for a Sartrean model of "Dark Utopianism" that overcomes the limits of Ricœur's political philosophy. Reading Sartre and Ricœur together provides for a balanced approach to the question of autonomy that at once pays due attention to the weight of the situation and the past, while opening up the space for change, innovation, and progress. The conclusion, accordingly, applies this thesis to the question of globalization.

Both Sartre and Ricœur scholars will be eager to explore and debate the original synthesis presented in *The Aesthetics of Autonomy*. It also makes contributions to hermeneutics, post-War French philosophy, and philosophy of religion. Finally, given its emphases on politics and aesthetics, the book also places itself within arguments of political theory and literary theory.

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