

Ben Lazare Mijuskovic. *Plato's Battle Between the Gods and Giants and its Continuing Relevance in the Speculative Philosophy of History*. Brill 2025. 238 pp. \$129.00 USD (Hardcover 9789004713345); \$129.00 USD (eBook 9789004713352).

Plato's Battle Between the Gods and Giants and its Continuing Relevance in the Speculative Philosophy of History applies the Greek religious metaphor of a cosmic struggle between Gods and Giants in Plato's *Sophist* 246a-e as a frame narrative for millennia of intellectual debate amongst philosophers, psychologists, and novelists. Mijuskovic pits materialists or "Giants" (Democritus, Epicurus, Aquinas, Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Marx, and Russell) against idealists or "Gods" (Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, Boehme, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and Copleston) (5). His work follows an opening claim, "there is no median path and no compromise between them" ruling out any third-way approaches in the history of ideas successfully bridging humanities and sciences (1). The long debate over the nature of consciousness seldom reveals a synthesis of materialism and idealism as Mijuskovic chronicles in *The Achilles of Rationalist Arguments* (1974); *Contingent Immaterialism* (1984); *Consciousness and Loneliness* (2019); *Metaphysical Dualism, Subjective Idealism, and Existential Loneliness* (2022); *The Philosophical Roots of Loneliness and Intimacy* (2022); and *Theories of Consciousness and the Problem of Evil in the History of Ideas* (2023). His canon provides context for the unique approach taken in *Plato's Battle* as a departure from the simplicity argument with its uses and implications in philosophy and psychology.

My review will contextualize Mijuskovic's latest publication in the scope of his previous publications. Familiarity with these enriches *Plato's Battle Between the Gods and Giants and its Continuing Relevance in the Speculative Philosophy of History* as a capstone in history of philosophy and history of ideas since the 1970s. It contains seven chapters unequally distributed due to his effort to fill gaps in research in defense of metaphysical dualism, subjective idealism, objective idealism, transcendent intentionality, phenomenology, and existentialism. Chapters 3 through 4 span 132 pages, equal to two-thirds of the entire book. Chapters 5 through 7 explore the problem of evil and optimism versus pessimism through a study of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (1818) versus Eduard von Hartmann's *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869). This section contains masterful integration of Thomas Hardy's novels with Schopenhauer and von Hartmann philosophical impact in conversation. Mijuskovic's expert research in the intersection of Philosophy, Psychology, and Literature shine in Chapters 6 and 7 of *Plato's Battle*.

Plato's Battle expands his emphasis upon history of ideas used in his seminal works *The Achilles of Rationalist Arguments* (1974) and *Contingent Immaterialism* (1984). His initial publication



incorporates graduate studies supervised by Professor Richard H. Popkin as a PhD dissertation. In Chapter 1 of *The Achilles* titled “Introduction to the Argument and Its History,” Mijuskovic credits A. O. Lovejoy’s “unit-idea” from *The Great Chain of Being* (1971) as the inspiration for the history of ideas methodology he employs (*The Achilles* 2-3). In Mijuskovic’s interdisciplinary approach, a “unit-idea” is durable across time and space: “the idea itself...the argument or principle or paradigm, remains the same. It does not change...there are refinements, technical developments, and amplifications of hidden conceptual implications” (*Contingent Immaterialism* 4). *Plato’s Battle* moves beyond the initial unit-idea of the simplicity argument to freedom of will, spontaneity of consciousness, and worldview (optimism versus pessimism).

Throughout his many articles and books, Mijuskovic provides a thorough survey of the history of philosophy and psychology examining the ontological, epistemological, practical, and therapeutic dimensions of the “simplicity argument” first presented in Plato’s *Phaedo* 78b used by metaphysical dualists, subjective and objective idealists, phenomenologists, and existentialists. His expansive exploration of the nature of thought within philosophy of mind, its uses in the history of philosophy, its psychological ramifications, and its ethical implications finds structure in a new Platonic metaphor. *Plato’s Battle* situates materialists and idealists in the metaphor of an enduring struggle throughout the history of ideas.

The text affords rich new ground for Mijuskovic’s exploration of the cosmic struggle between materialists and idealists foreshadowed in several places in his most recent work. First, *Consciousness and Loneliness: Theoria and Praxis* (2019) comments on Plato’s *Sophist* 246a-e in the opening chapter: “Plato’s description of the conflict between the two camps characterizes the on-going struggle in Western thought between religion and humanism...and science on the other” (9). He later includes the entire passage with this helpful introduction: “the Gods are those who believe that (a) there are at least some real and immaterial active realities ‘alongside’ material ones; and/or that (b) ‘reality’ is fundamentally mental, mind dependent, or spiritual. On the side of the Giants stand those who assume that the real is nothing else but matter and body, material things, which can be touched and handled and are forever in motion” (108).

Metaphysical Dualism, Subjective Idealism, and Existential Loneliness (2022) repeats *Sophist* 246a-e as a justification for his dichotomist approach (2-3), a passing remark on the quantitative versus qualitative distinctions in the history of philosophy (76), and as “opposing principles of reality – subjective mental *qualities qua perceptions* and material objective spatial *quantities*” (179). His 2022 work provides the seed of an argument exploring quality and quantity in the battle between Gods and

Giants. *Plato's Battle* devotes a section of Chapter 3 analyzing the categories of quality versus quantity using Hegel's *Science of Logic* 21.102 (93-104).

The Philosophical Roots of Loneliness and Intimacy (2022) clarifies how *Sophist* 246a-e relates to Mijuskovic's own academic experience: "by the early period of the twentieth century, my themes were already rapidly coming under increasingly heavy criticism, most notably from sources championing scientific positivism, analytic philosophy, and language theorists" (46). The metaphor of battle in the context of philosophical discourse resonates with Mijuskovic's own frustration researching metaphysical dualism, subjective idealism, and existential loneliness – often deemed "unscientific" by his critics rooted in the Platonic Giants' materialism as a first principle he did not share. Later, Mijuskovic identifies linguists and analytic philosophers on the side of Giants whom he calls "handmaidens to science" (63). He identifies Platonic Gods as scholars of loneliness since they favor "idealism, epistemic spontaneity, reflexive self-consciousness, transcendent intentionality, existential choices, and so on. The empirical sciences (i.e. Giants) – including medicine, behaviorism, cognitive behavioral psychology, psychoanalysis, and current neurosciences" (*Philosophical Roots* 90). He continues with a note on Wilhelm Dilthey's threefold conceptions of world view developed in his next book *Theories of Consciousness*. Mijuskovic devotes Chapter 2 "The Foundations of Western Science: Materialism, Empiricism, and Determinism" to explore this charge from *Philosophical Roots* highlighting examples from Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Ayer, Ryle, and D. M. Armstrong as "handmaidens" and Platonic Giants. The entire passage of *Sophist* 246a-e appears in *Philosophical Roots* Chapter 5 "Ethical Responsibility, Spontaneity, and the Problem of Evil" in defense of his writing history of ideas rather than history of philosophy. He ties together both the simplicity argument and the Battle of Gods and Giants in this passage as a microcosm of his life work (148-150). Readers of *Plato's Battle* should carefully consider *Philosophical Roots* pages 146-152 as a wonderful example of philosophy of mind and history of ideas in conversation grounded in Plato's dialogues and unit-ideas as first principles. Such an interplay affords an immense set of possibilities for frame narratives based upon unit-ideas rooted in Platonic myths: for example, political ethics in Gyges (*Republic* 359d–360b); gender constructs in the androgyne (*Symposium* 189d–193d); and pedagogy in Theuth (*Phaedrus* 274c–275e).

Theories of Consciousness and the Problem of Evil in the History of Ideas (2023) opens chapter 1 titled "The Battle Between the Gods and the Giants: The Idealists and the Materialists" as the most extensive treatment of Plato's *Sophist* 246a-e prior to his publication with a similar title. His stated aim seeks to "challenge the current contemporary psychological dominance of the behavioral and

neurological sciences by highlighting both their theoretical paucity and their ‘mechanical’ inadequacies via their ‘causal explanations’” (*Theories of Consciousness* 1). This brief chapter sets the stage for this philosophical debate pitting Dilthey’s triadic formulation of metaphysical being (naturalism, idealism of freedom, and objective idealism) further developed in *Plato’s Battle* Chapter 5 “The Ancient Origins of Good and Evil.” Mijuskovic sees this as a dichotomy within the frame narrative of Sophist 246a-e where naturalism aligns with materialism of the Giants and idealism of freedom and objective idealism align with ideals of the Gods (*Theories of Consciousness* 14). Once again, he also discusses the role A. O. Lovejoy plays in his use of the history of ideas in this work versus the history of philosophy.

As Plato anticipated first, this battle places sides in opposition throughout the history of ideas with profound consequences to our understanding of the nature and character we possess as *homo sapiens*. Giants winning means we humans are determined, material, phenomenal, behavioral, and neurological. Gods winning means we humans are free-willed, rational, phenomenological, and existential. *Plato’s Battle* challenges readers to take an honest look at the Gods and their many efforts to appeal to the humanities as a baseline narrative for human being against the reductive scientific perspective all too common among philosophers, psychologists, and authors throughout Mijuskovic’s career. Such a dualistic approach challenges readers to follow a dialectical argument leaning in the humanist direction as a corrective to a large body of philosophical and psychological material shaped by the sciences. Mijuskovic seeks to fill a contemporary gap in research in defense of the Platonic Gods, emphasizing consciousness as active, existential, free, spontaneous, and transcendent. His defense of a humanistic worldview, freed from trappings of religious dogma, weaves metaphysical dualism, idealism, phenomenology, and existentialism as a viable alternative to scientific materialism/determinism. *Plato’s Battle* appeals to a broad readership interested in the intersection of philosophy, psychology, and literature as only Mijuskovic can address. I highly recommend it to readers with a penchant for history of philosophy, the history of ideas, and ethics.

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