

## Philosophy in Review



# Ben Lazare Mijuskovic, "Theories of Consciousness and the Problem of Evil in the History of Ideas"

Michael D. Bobo 

Volume 44, numéro 1, février 2024

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1110364ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1110364ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

University of Victoria

ISSN

1206-5269 (imprimé)

1920-8936 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Bobo, M. (2024). Compte rendu de [Ben Lazare Mijuskovic, "Theories of Consciousness and the Problem of Evil in the History of Ideas"]. *Philosophy in Review*, 44(1), 34–37. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1110364ar>

© Michael D. Bobo, 2024



Cet document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

**érudit**

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

**Ben Lazare Mijuskovic.** *Theories of Consciousness and the Problem of Evil in the History of Ideas*. Palgrave Macmillan 2023. 211 pp. \$119.99 USD (Hardcover 9783031264047); \$39.99 USD (Paperback 9783031264078).

Ben Mijuskovic expands his life work in the eighth major publication of an interdisciplinary series examining layers and relationships of consciousness and loneliness within philosophical, psychological, and literary contexts. This latest installment includes refreshingly personal dimensions of his family history in Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Yugoslavia from turn of the twentieth century, throughout World War I, and in the aftermath of World War II. Mijuskovic's grandfather and father negotiated complex political relationships with notable figures like Tsar Nicholas I of Russia, King Peter II of Serbia, and President Tito of Yugoslavia. When addressing his philosophy of evil and psychology of narcissism, Mijuskovic's calculated autobiography offers a unique study in human depravity and suffering with both oppressed and oppressor in view. The current conflict in Ukraine and the Balkans with Russia stems from the unresolved dynamics and power struggle Mijuskovic's mother and father survived upon arriving to the United States in the late 1940s. *Theories of Consciousness* ventures into unfamiliar territory for the author in this exploration of his family history from an ethical stance. His career and numerous publications in philosophy of mind and psychology ground this work in most Existential and personal ways. In sum, this work constitutes his own theory of consciousness and struggle with the problem of evil. As a student and avid reader of Mijuskovic, *Theories of Consciousness and the Problem of Evil in the History of Ideas* is his finest work to date for its humanity, compassion, and purpose.

Throughout his fifty-year career in academia and clinical psychology, Mijuskovic boldly opposes trends, methods, and conclusions in the last century of philosophical and scientific research. His previous works consistently resist reductive arguments within philosophy of mind and clinical psychology. These fields have all too often relied on materialist, empiricist, behavioral, and neuroscientific answers while missing a fundamental aspect regarding the nature of human consciousness. From his earliest offerings, Mijuskovic establishes each of his works with a central thesis defining consciousness as a simple, indivisible, monad as seen in Plato's *Phaedo* 78b and defended as 'the Achilles of rationalist arguments' in Kant's first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, A 351-2). Platonic dualism and Kantian subjective idealism must be understood *a priori* before properly handling any of his works. Challenging his metaphysics frustrates readers and misses the purpose of his research in response to decades of physicalist arguments and



subsequent therapeutic measures. The immateriality of thought provides a building block for exploration of consciousness, space, time, existence, and ethics. This ‘unit idea’ or ‘Achilles’ has been lost in the past century among academicians and clinicians alike. This absence motivates and justifies Mijuskovic’s life work. Immateriality of thought and consciousness precludes and subverts the last century of psychiatric, psychological, and therapeutic argumentation.

*Theories of Consciousness* surveys the pertinent conclusion from his major works since *The Achilles of Rationalist Arguments* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1974). This all-too-brief review seeks to entice readers with a brief survey of his essential arguments, including passing mention to key scholars and schools. As with any work by Mijuskovic, this work contains an exhaustive bibliography of classic philosophers and psychologists to stage a study of the tensions within the history of ideas related to consciousness, loneliness, narcissism, and evil.

Chapter 1, ‘The Battle Between the Gods and the Giants’, opens with the fundamental conflict between idealists and materialists likened to Plato’s *Sophist* depiction of the battle between Gods and Giants. Mijuskovic reads the history of philosophy and psychology in this epic fashion. One side of the struggle, ‘Gods,’ includes idealists, dualists, rationalists, free will philosophers, phenomenologists, existentialists, and advocates of the coherence theory of truth. This position emphasizes qualities over quantities, favors epistemic spontaneity, and aesthetic creativity. The opposing side of ‘Giants’ entails materialists, mechanists, determinists, empiricists, phenomenologists, behaviorists, neuroscientists, and advocates of correspondence theory of truth. Philosophers and psychologists have inevitably taken sides in this metanarrative from his analysis. Denying or attacking the dualist framework for this text misses the point of Mijuskovic’s theses throughout his numerous articles, chapters, and books. Third-way proponents will take issue with this approach from the outset. Careful reading of his most recent works over the past two years will demonstrate a rather comprehensive and persuasive argument. *Theories of Consciousness* builds upon the philosophical arguments presented in *Metaphysical Dualism, Subjective Idealism, and Existential Loneliness* (Routledge, 2022) and the psychological ones in *The Philosophical Roost of Loneliness and Intimacy* (Springer, 2023). These three volumes provide a thorough history of philosophy and psychology from Plato to Chomsky.

Chapter 2, ‘Historical and Conceptual Background’, moves to a survey of the history of the Simplicity Argument, and its uses in defense of the soul as: 1) a substance, 2) a reflexive identity, 3) a temporal unity, 4) a subjective ideality, and 5) a possible immortality. These draw from Platonic and Kantian arguments against Democritean materialism. His argument for the priority of

quality over quantity rests upon these observations: ‘quantities are physical; qualities are mental...for science all reality is reduced to material and measurable quantities *alone* and quality is eliminated...the atoms are homogenous.... By contrast, qualities are intrinsically heterogenous’ (18-19). Quality defines consciousness for its very necessity for mental heterogeneity within an immaterial self-reflexive time-oriented subjectivity.

Chapter 3, ‘Can Senseless Matter *Alone* Think?’, tackles Humean bundle theory of consciousness which Mijuskovic parlays for his own greater argument in defense of idealism which Hume likewise espouses.

Chapter 4, ‘Is Perception or Self-Consciousness Primary?’, features two major philosophical moves. It opens with arguments for self-consciousness using Democritus and Plato’s *Theaetetus*. The thrust of his conclusion posits ‘Plato’s *psyche* is both immaterial, that is, simple, unextended but active with the material atoms of Democritus are inanimate, non-conscious, and by definition *inert* material substances’ (46). He transitions to a debate pitting the materialism of Hobbes, Locke, and Hume against the idealism of Kant. His conclusions establish the rest of his argumentation concerning loneliness and ethical freedom contained in Chapters 5 through 12: ‘Only if the *psyche*, soul, cogito, Monad, or the unity of apperception are reflexively self-conscious can loneliness and intimacy exist and persist and can we judge between good and evil’ (49).

Chapters 5 through 7 map out the connections between freedom and ethics based upon the philosophical presentation from the first three chapters related to the nature and identity of the soul, consciousness, established above. Key figures in this portion of *Theories of Consciousness* correlates three key philosophies: 1) Leibnitz on spontaneous freedom and time-consciousness, 2) Plato on the coherence theory of truth, and 3) Kant’s unity of apperception and categorical imperative. The quality of consciousness Mijuskovic previously establishes works freely, within time, self-reflexively, as a unity, with intentionality and ethical integrity. This leads to a conversation on Kantian aesthetics which ground Fichte and Hegel on imagination: ‘it is the imagination, not the will that carries the self forward’ (122). A unified, reflexive, internal time-consciousness possesses the capability to ascertain truth within a collective aesthetic imagination envisioned by Leibnitz, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel working in unison as Mijuskovic posits.

Chapter 8, ‘On the Distinction Between the Ought, and the Is’, moves the work into the realm of ethics properly with the problem of evil as a final argument based upon Mijuskovic’s family history from the turn of the twentieth century through World War II. Here the repercussions of freedom, spontaneity, and aesthetics play out in several ways which include evil by necessity.

Existentialist conclusions follow in rather direct and personal passages: ‘I am condemned to be free. And if I were inclined to choose in the interest of science, I am also free to deny values altogether or to be neutral. *And most importantly, I am also free to choose goodness over evil or to choose evil over goodness.* As I have uttered elsewhere, I am absolutely free to choose between saintliness and sadism’ (136). This direct address to his reader differs considerably from otherwise philosophical narratives Mijuskovic typically uses. Readers feel an intimacy to this portion of the text as he leads up to personal revelations.

Chapter 9, ‘Narcissism, Loneliness, and the Problem of Evil’, pulls together the philosophical and ethical arguments for a Freudian analysis of the unconscious which pulls from Schopenhauer and aligns with phenomenology or the Giants in Plato’s *Sophist*. He builds upon the charge of sadism previously in his discussion of narcissism and loneliness leading to the worst acts when aligned consciously or unconsciously. Gregory Zilboorg’s classic study on loneliness receives proper treatment at this point in the text. Mijuskovic pairs Freud and Zilboorg in this ‘deeply seated psychological triad: first, the narcissistic quality of the ego with its megalomaniac delusions of unlimited power; second, the injury of rejection with its sense of the deep incumbency of loneliness; and third, its desire to hurt others indiscriminately as the dynamics of compensation to the fore’ (168).

Chapters 10 through 12 use the philosophical and psychological conclusions within Mijuskovic’s own life as a case study. This is the closest to an autobiography Mijuskovic has written to date. After reading these chapters, one may know the author in a most profound manner. It is the crowning achievement of his decades of philosophical and psychological discourse. Read this with the utmost care only after reading his exhaustive works to date. Only then will one appreciate the degree of vulnerability Mijuskovic discloses from his own family history.

**Michael D. Bobo**, Norco College