

*Heidegger and the Death of God: Between Plato and Nietzsche*. Duane Armitage.

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. Pp. xi + 118.

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Duane Armitage, in *Heidegger and the Death of God: Between Plato and Nietzsche*, analyzes the epistemological commitments of Martin Heidegger in terms of the polarity offered by Plato and Nietzsche as they argue for the proper account of reality, that is, the ontological status of intelligibility, meaning, truth, and being. On the one hand, Plato represents a transcendent idealism, that of the forms, in which truth, being, and intelligibility are mind-independent, thus grounding the changing sensible world on the fixed, invisible world of being. Moreover, this Platonism is inherently theistic, grounding the intelligibility of being in the existence of God (much like the rational theism of Cartesianism for which Armitage also advocates). On the other hand, Nietzsche represents the gross materialistic reductionism of modern science and technology that results in an atheistic nihilism and relativism. This Nietzscheanism reduces all metaphysical claims to natural processes and the will to power – things are true insofar as they are of use to the exercise of one's will, including notions of God. Armitage situates Heidegger in the midst of this battle between the giants of materialism (Nietzsche) and the gods of idealism (Plato), with reference to the Gigantomachy rhetorically sketched by Plato in *The Sophist*. Heidegger offers Armitage a purported third way to overcome metaphysics outside the boundaries of the battle between the gods and giants: a perspectival understanding of being that mediates the two realms of being and becoming through a rendering of the Platonic notion of *methexis* (participation) via *alethia* (truth). Heidegger comes close to resolving the Gigantomachy with what Armitage describes as his “meta-metaphysical” position on the importance and necessity of doing metaphysics and his attempt to overcome nihilism via art. Yet even Heidegger's attempted third way via art is itself already posited by Plato, as noted by John Sallis, leaving one caught amidst the battle of the Gigantomachy. Building on the work of Thomas Nagel, Armitage advocates for the necessity of metaphysics and transcendence in the manner of Plato's ontologically independent forms. Ultimately, Armitage argues that both Nietzsche and Heidegger fail to sufficiently ground the intelligibility of being and truth.

Armitage structures the text well, concisely rendering each chapter. In the introductory chapter, Armitage sketches the gist of his argument, highlighting the stakes of the Gigantomachy with an either-or proposition. Either meaning, intelligibility, logic, reason, etc. are real or they are not. If yes, then Platonism and Theism. If no, then Nietzscheanism and atheistic nihilism (6). In the second chapter, Armitage criticizes Nietzsche's philosophy of science as a self-defeating materialism and atheism that relies on making metaphysical truth claims which become a merely

self-referentially unintelligible liar's paradox resulting in the destruction of the foundation of modern science and technology. In chapter three, Armitage delves into Heidegger's third way via an analysis of the Platonic problem of methexis (participation) and alethia (truth) through art.

The argument is roughly made up of two parts. First, Armitage establishes the metaphysical and transcendental nature of Heidegger's thought, dialoguing with Heidegger's essay "What is Metaphysics?" and the notion of nothing. The human being transcends the physical to the metaphysical after recognizing nothing or difference, which Armitage succinctly describes: "Nothing is quite simply the possibility of metaphysics," and later "Nothing then is the condition for asking the why" (64). In other words, nothing prompts one to question the nature of being, though how or why the nothing does this remains unexplored other than Heidegger says it does. The human being at its core is metaphysical, "always transcending beings in favor of their being, their intelligibility" (65). One should ask whether this is what Heidegger means by transcendence for the Dasein. Second, Armitage explores Heidegger's notion of art, which discloses or reveals truth and mediates the methexis or participation of particular being with "beyng" and the beautiful. This notion of art "enacts a radically new ontology: an ontology of truth and beauty that can prove salvific in the current cultural climate of Nietzschean nihilism" (70). Armitage argues that this position on art is actually already present in Plato, thus making Heidegger a type of realist in that meaning, truth, intelligibility, and being are "ontological independent realities that reside outside of the human subject's will" (76). With this insight, Armitage seemingly neglects Heidegger's discussion of Plato's *Sophist* or his work on the status of images from his lectures on Hölderling's *The Ister*.<sup>1</sup> It also seems to misrepresent the status of being as some kind of graspable, external reality rather than the abyssal, absconding, and concealing groundless ground of beyng of Heidegger's other beginning of metaphysics.<sup>2</sup> This latent Platonism in Heidegger's thought then leads to "a kind of theism," in direct contradiction to Heidegger's stated text in his *Contributions to the Philosophy of Religion* (83).<sup>3</sup> In the fourth chapter, Armitage breaks away from Heidegger and Nietzsche to trace the work of Kierkegaard and Thomas Nagel regarding the paradox of the Gigantomachy, finally

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1. Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewics and Andre Schuwer (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003); Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* trans. William McNeill and Julia Martin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

2. Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012).

3. "With the death of this God, all theisms wither away," in Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*, 326.

concluding with Nagel that only Platonic realism sufficiently grounds reason and rationality.

As Armitage's argument unfolds, the ostensible topic of the book, namely Heidegger and the death of God, appears but only as a small example of Heidegger's attempted third way between the gods/Plato and the giants/Nietzsche. In this sense, the work seems mislabeled. It is not an in-depth analysis and rendering of Heidegger's engagement with the notion of the death of God, nor does it engage with the multitude of scholarship on the topic.<sup>4</sup> Rather, the work as a whole is an argument for Platonic and Cartesian theism over and against a Nietzschean atheistic nihilism. Heidegger's work provides Armitage a useful heuristic within which to couch this argument and recount the history of Western metaphysics as the history of Platonism and its inversion by Nietzsche. In other words, Armitage uses Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche as a scaffold to support his claims for a theistic ontological idealism and realism. This leads to a somewhat idiosyncratic reading of Heidegger's position regarding the ontological status of truth, being, beauty, and art, as well as a truncated engagement with Heidegger's notion of the last god. If the reader is looking for an insightful analysis of Heidegger's take on the death of God, the reader should look elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

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4. F. Schalow, *Heidegger and the Quest for the Sacred: From Thought to the Sanctuary of Faith* (Boston: Springer, 2001); Gail Stenstad, "The Last God - A Reading," *Research in Phenomenology* 23 (1993): 172–185; George Seidel, "Heidegger's Last God and the Schelling Connection," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 55, No. 1 (1999): 85–98; Ben Vedder, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Religion: From God to the Gods* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007); Elliot R. Wolfson, "Heidegger's Apophaticism: Unsayings the Said and the Silence of the Last God," in *Contemporary Debates in Negative Theology and Philosophy*, eds. Nahum Brown and Aaron J. Simmons (Palgrave: Cham, 2017), 185–216; Benjamin D. Crowe, *Heidegger's Phenomenology of Religion: Realism and Cultural Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

5. For a start, see Tracy Colony, "The Death of God and the Life of Being: Heidegger's Confrontation with Nietzsche," *Interpreting Heidegger: Critical Essays*, ed. Daniel Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 197–216.