

philosophy to break the power of the mathematical sign over the philosophical mind?” (219)<sup>24</sup>

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Adrian W. Moore: *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*. (Series: The Evolution of Modern Philosophy). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012, ISBN 978-0-521-85111-4; £ 70.00, US \$ 110.00 (Hardback); xxi + 668 pages

One of Dashiell Hammett’s most famous detective stories is entitled *The Big Knockover*. Adrian W. Moore’s new book would have deserved the title *The Big Sense Making*; he preferred to call it: *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*. In this 668 pages heavy tome, Moore undertakes to re-tell the history of modern metaphysics from René Descartes to Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze. In the course of this “narrative”, he employs and advertises his own conception of metaphysics according to which it would be “the most general attempt to make sense of things” (1).

*A New Series*. The book belongs to the new series *The Evolution of Modern Philosophy* by Cambridge University Press that seeks to answer the following questions: “Why has philosophy evolved in the way it has? How have its sub-disciplines developed, and what impact has this development exerted on the way that the subject is now practised?” Perhaps I am still taking such announcements too seriously, but when you come to think about it, any claim to provide complete and illuminating answers to these two questions would be utterly presumptuous. Moore, certainly, didn’t answer these questions for the case of metaphysics; nobody did and nobody could. After all, what scientific disciplines and what masterminds are supposed to be in the position to explain why philosophy as a whole or some philosophical sub-discipline, e. g. metaphysics, has evolved exactly in the way it has? And, by the way, is the history of modern philosophy aptly described as an evolution at all?

<sup>24</sup> Thanks to Prach Panchakunathorn for comments and discussion.

*A History of Metaphysics and Meta-Metaphysics*. Interestingly, Moore is totally free from such qualms. The ambitious and, to my mind, overly ambitious, aim of his book is “to chart the evolution of metaphysics from the early modern period to the present” (8). And, Moore definitely likes the analogy with biological evolution: “‘Evolution’ is an apt word. Metaphors of fitness, progeny, and mutation can all be applied in the description of how we got to where we now are” (xviii).

To keep his ambitious project manageable, Moore structures his story around a selection of individual thinkers. He has chosen twenty protagonists he distributes amongst three parts: *Part One, The Early Modern Period* (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Fichte, Hegel); *Part Two: The Late Modern Period: The Analytic Tradition* (Frege, early Wittgenstein, later Wittgenstein, Carnap, Quine, [David] Lewis, Dummett), and *Part Three, The Late Modern Period: The Non-Analytic Tradition* (Nietzsche, Bergson, Husserl, Heidegger, Collingwood, Derrida, Deleuze).

Historians of philosophy will find Moore’s periodization somewhat extraordinary. Early modern philosophy is usually taken to extend, roughly, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment. While Kant may be a borderline case, Fichte and Hegel are certainly not classified as *early* modern thinkers. More importantly, many historians of modern metaphysics will miss some of their favorites. I, for one, missed John Locke, George Berkeley, Bernard Bolzano, Franz Brentano, Bertrand Russell, George Edward Moore, Nicolai Hartmann, Wilfrid Sellars, Peter F. Strawson and David Armstrong. I also missed the whole movement of inductive metaphysics that started soon after the breakdown of German Idealism and is showing signs of a comeback in our days. Still more importantly, while Moore compares the protagonists of the chapters with each other, he does little to contextualize the contributions of the individual thinkers. Almost all philosophers belong to schools or at least to circles; accordingly, they are best understood in the context of complex constellations and interrelationships. Thus, it is certainly not enough to compare Kant to Locke, Leibniz or Hume; Kant’s revolution in metaphysics can hardly be understood by those unfamiliar with less well-known figures such as Christian Wolff, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, Johann Heinrich Lambert, Christian August Crusius and others. Even self-styled lone wolves were heavily influenced by earlier and contemporary thinkers – Nietzsche, for example, by Heraclitus, Arthur Schopenhauer, Gustav Gerber and Charles Darwin. To take another example, Quine’s attitude to metaphysics cannot be appreciated without a thorough knowledge of at least Bertrand Russell, the Vienna Circle and the Lvov-Warsaw School. A final example: It is no accident that David Lewis dedicated his *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology* to “the philosophers, past and present, of Sydney and Canberra”. Unfortunately, Moore ignores the highly influential Australian school of metaphysics and meta-metaphysics (C.B. Martin, Ullin T. Place, David Armstrong, J. J. C. Smart, David Chalmers).

Most importantly, the history of modern metaphysics cannot be understood without an intimate familiarity with its origins in antiquity and the ensuing disputes on the scientific status, objects and methods of this highly controversial discipline. Of course, Moore’s task was a history of *modern metaphysics*; and this is already a considerable task. Nevertheless, he should have put in front of his material a short introductory chapter about what happened before. More specifically, there can be no serious history of metaphysics that does not start with the problems we find in Aristotle’s vision of what he called “First Philosophy”. Aristotle left posterity not only the idea of a new philosophical discipline, he also left a