

Review of *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*, A.W. Moore, Cambridge University Press, 2012

668 pages, Hardcover price: 73 pounds.

In many ways, Moore's book is an astonishing achievement. In the course of his 668 page book, the meta-metaphysical views of twenty philosophers from a variety of places, times, and traditions are discussed, compared, and contrasted. The breadth of Moore's scholarship is extraordinary: there are very few philosophers that can competently and informatively write about David Lewis, Derrida, Deleuze, Quine, Heidegger, Kant, and Collingwood, among many others. Moreover, Moore treats each of these figures with a critical respect that avoids reducing the philosophers to caricatures while still articulating their positions in approachable ways that typically illuminate what is attractive about them. The physical size of the book is impressive, but what really takes one's breath away is the panoramic view of a large territory of speculative thought in which Moore has invited us to partake.

In addition to an introductory chapter and a conclusion, the book contains three large parts. Part one is devoted to the early modern period, and contains chapters on Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. Part two is devoted to philosophers of the analytic tradition, and contains chapters on Frege, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Quine, Lewis, and Dummett. Part three is devoted to non-analytic philosophers, and contains chapters on Nietzsche, Bergson, Husserl, Heidegger, Collingwood, Derrida and Deleuze. I wholeheartedly applaud Moore's unapologetic enthusiasm for bringing analytic and non-analytic philosophers into conversation with each other. Realistically, given the vast range of figures he covers, few of his readers will have the expertise to critically evaluate all of Moore's accomplishments, and so I approach the task of reviewing this book with great trepidation and humility.

Contrary to what one might expect from the title, one cannot distill from this book an evolutionary or developmental story of how current metaphysical theorizing came to have the features it has. A genuine developmental story is one that charts lines of influence, and one cannot do this merely by providing illuminating studies of individual figures, no matter how major these figures might be. Rather what is additionally required is painstakingly describing various "more minor" figures and the roles they played in the development of contemporary metaphysics. (Consider by way of contrast, Frederick Beiser's (1993, 2008) masterful accounts of the post-Kantian philosophical landscape.) However, genuinely developmental accounts of this sort are possible only when one focuses on a much narrower time-span of philosophical development, and so in retrospect it was unreasonable of me to anticipate that something like this would be found in a historical study beginning with Descartes and terminating with Deleuze. Instead, the book contains case-studies of each of the philosophers listed above.

Moore by his own admission does little to challenge "the canon" in this book [p. . xviii]. I would gently suggest that we need more canon-challenging and fewer case studies of those currently included in it. The early and late Wittgensteins each get their own chapter. But in a book this large and otherwise so philosophically inclusive, it is painful to see that not a single chapter is devoted to a woman

philosopher. Surely in the approximately 360 years of the history of philosophy covered in this book, there were women philosophers worth adding to the roster, and if considerations of space thereby implied that there is only room for a single Wittgenstein chapter, that might have been a better call.

Moore focuses primarily on historical answers to certain questions *about* metaphysics rather than questions solely *within* metaphysics. Moore understands metaphysics as the most general attempt to make sense of things [p.1]. Moore claims that one nice thing about understanding metaphysics in this way is that on this understanding, it is obvious that metaphysics is possible [p. 3]. This seems plausible, but few in the history of philosophy have doubted that one can make a very general *attempt* to make sense of things – the question of interest is whether such an attempt is likely to succeed. Three questions about metaphysics are raised early in the book and are rarely far from the surface in the discussions that later ensure. They are *the transcendence question*, which is whether we can make sense of things that are in some way transcendent of us; *the novelty question*, which is whether we can make sense of things in radically new ways or whether we are bound to make sense of things in the ways we already do; and *the creativity question*, which is whether our metaphysical enterprise is to recognize the sense that things already make or whether it is to create new ways of making sense of things [pp. 9-16].

Many of the chapters that I found the most profitable were those in which Moore explicitly articulated the answers to these questions that the philosopher in question is committed to. The chapters on Kant, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Collingwood, and Deleuze are excellent examples of this. By way of contrast, I think Moore missed an opportunity in the chapter on David Lewis. One of the centrally important ideas of Lewisian metaphysics is that some properties and relations are more metaphysically fundamental, or to use the Lewisian terminology, *more natural*, than others. Lewis (1983) is one important place where this idea is defended. Lewis's views about properties are briefly noted by Moore on p. 18 of section 7 of his introduction, but are not further discussed in the chapter devoted to Lewis. We are far from having a guarantee that the concepts that we employ in our initial metaphysical inquiries correspond to these fundamental properties – and in fact, it is likely that they do not. Accordingly it is worth the while of the Lewisian to assess the extent to which we can create new concepts that more accurately correspond to reality's joints (this is *the novelty question* understood in a Lewisian manner) while at the same time recognizing that ultimately reality has joints against which our concepts can be measured (and this constitutes a Lewisian response to *the creativity question*). In fact, many contemporary Lewisian meta-metaphysicians take these questions seriously. (See for example McDaniel (2009) and Sider (2009, 2012).)

One risk inherent in the kind of project Moore engages in, that is chapter-length case-studies of particular philosophers, is that the developmental story of a given philosopher's metaphysical views could be compressed to the point where it is distorted. It seems to me that Moore mostly avoided this trap, often by electing to focus on a single period within that philosopher's career, e.g., the period of Kant's thought roughly circa 1781-1787 or Husserl's thought posterior to *the Logical Investigations*, rather than trace a philosopher's thinking on certain questions through his career. Perhaps one place in which compression led to distortion is the chapter on Leibniz, in which it seems to me that Moore uncritically presupposes that Leibniz had already embraced a monadological metaphysics circa *the Discourse on Metaphysics*, whereas arguably a monadology was merely one of several options on the

table actively being considered by Leibniz at that time. For example, it is hard for me to understand the train of Moore's thought on p. 73 if a monodological view is not attributed to Leibniz.

Although thinking through this book is a time-intensive task, there is much to be learned from it, and my judgment is that it is time well spent. That said, many of the chapters are sufficiently self-contained to be profitably pursued in isolation from the remainder of the book, though that is harder to say about all of them. Analytic philosophers who want to wade into continental waters will probably struggle with the chapter on Derrida unless they first read the chapters on Husserl and Heidegger, but each of the chapters on Nietzsche, Bergson, and Collingwood can be read independently of each of the other chapters of the non-analytic figures discussed in the book. Similarly, I anticipate that non-analytic philosophers will probably struggle with the chapter on Lewis unless they read the preceding chapter on Quine first, which in turn is best read after the preceding chapter on Carnap. But the final chapter on Dummett presupposes only that one first read the chapter on Frege. Both analytic and non-analytic philosophers can learn much from this book, which hopefully shores up one important moral of Moore's book, namely that analytic and non-analytic philosophers have much to learn from each other.

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