The book presents the proceedings of the international conference Metaphysics: Aristotelian, Scholastic, Analytic (Prague, June 30 – July 3, 2010), and it deals with several important metaphysical questions that occur – as the title suggests – at fundamental moments of the history of philosophy, from Plato and Aristotle’s metaphysics to contemporary analytic metaphysics, by way of the First and Second Scholasticism. The chapters are divided into six sections: “Categories and beyond”; “Metaphysical structure”; Substance and accident”; “Existence”; “Modalities”; “Predication”.

I will briefly discuss the contents of the essays and then I will propose some comments.

The first essay is “What is an ontological category?” by Peter van Inwagen, one of the most important contemporary metaphysicians. In this article, the author analyzes the notion of ‘ontological category’ by means of the notion of ‘natural class’. The latter is strictly linked to the thesis according to which it is possible to recognize a real division among things, so that “for any class, if its boundary marks a real division among things, then either that class or its complement is a natural class – but not necessarily both” (p. 15). After defining a class as 'large' whose membership comprises a significant proportion of the things that there are and a class as ‘high’ if it is a proper subclass of no natural class, Van Inwagen states that "a natural class x is a primary ontological category only in the case that: [i] there are large natural classes; [ii] x is a high natural

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class” (p. 18). Finally he claims that in general “an ontological category (simpliciter) is a class that, for some n, is an n-ary ontological category” (p. 19).

In “Scholastic debates about beings of reason and contemporary analytical metaphysics” Daniel Novotny compares the contemporary debate on nonexistent objects to the scholastic debate on entia rationis by showing that the latter cannot be simply reduced to the former, since there are different backgrounds. I note in particular the following difference, pointed out by the author, regarding the notion of nonexistent object (p. 34):

- Intentional View: a nonexistent object is a mind-made, intentional being;
- Quasi-Being View: a nonexistent object is explained by means of some peculiar sort of being that pertains to every object, whether existing or not;
- Ausser-Being View: an object as such stands beyond being and non-being, even if each object is not exempt from being or non being.

Novotny notes that the scholastics usually accepted the first account, because “no alternative was seriously entertained by them” (p. 35).

In “What is constituent ontology” Michael Loux considers the distinction between constituent and relational ontology, a distinction that one can find in the whole history of philosophy, from Plato and Aristotle on. Briefly, given the character of familiar particulars, i.e., “the fact that individual material objects, plants, animals and human beings possess properties, fall under kinds, and enter into relations” (p. 43), relational ontology states that underived sources of character exist beyond the world of sense (beyond space-time) and that sensible particulars have a non-mereological connexion to them (they participate in an essence); instead constituent ontology affirms that the familiar particulars have their own forms because they are constituted by the appropriate underived bearers of characters, i.e. these latter are (immanent) parts of them.

According to Loux, any type of constituent ontology should affirm a sort of framework principle that he calls constituent essentialism: “if a plurality of objects, a …n, constitutes a particular x, then […] the resulting whole, x, has
necessarily the property of having all and only \( a \ldots n \) as constituents” (p. 52). Then Loux also formulated the linked principle for a constituent ontology, the so-called principle of constituent identity: “necessarily, for any objects, \( x \) and \( y \), if \( x \) and \( y \) have all and only the same constituents in precisely the same order, \( x \) and \( y \) are identical” (p. 53).

On the bases of these two principles, Loux argues that contemporary versions of constituent ontology cannot explain some general facts without falling into serious difficulties, for example, the persistence of familiar particulars through time or that familiar particulars are concrete individuals.

The essay “Elemental transformation in Aristotle: three dilemmas for the traditional account”, by Anne Peterson, shows that the traditional account of the notion of prime matter, that is associated to Aristotle, is not compatible with “three metaphysical doctrines also often associated to Aristotle: a certain variety of essentialism, actualism” and a sort of “constituent ontological strategy” (p. 60). In fact, assuming the traditional account of prime matter as essenceless pure potentiality that provides a persistent substratum for elemental transformation, essentialism (i.e. the thesis according to which everything that exists has an essence), actualism (i.e. the thesis that something must be actual to be at all) and the above-mentioned variety of constituent ontology (i.e. the thesis that “one constituent of a whole serves as subject and the other as predicate”, p. 71) imply some contradictions.

Starting from the general thesis – shared by Aristotle, scholastics and (the greater part of) analytical philosophers - according to which truth depends on reality, Ross Inman in “Essential dependence, truthmaking, and mereology: then and now” presents a general truthmaker principle and a truthmaking relation such that \( x \) is a truthmaker for \(<p>\) if and only if \( x \) exists and it is necessary that if \( x \) exists, then \(<p>\) is true (p. 75). After presenting some arguments by E.J. Lowe, the author shows that the truthmaking relation should not be considered by means of a “rigid-existential dependence” (i.e. \( x \) rigidly depends on \( y \) just in case
it is necessary that \( y \) exists if \( x \) exists), but rather by means of what Lowe names “essential dependence” (\( x \) essentially depends on \( y \) just in case there is a function \( f \) such that it is a part of the essence of \( x \) that \( x \) is \( f(y) \)).

On this basis, Inman explores “the scholastic roots of the notion of essential dependence as developed in the work of Duns Scotus” (p. 78), and he claims that “both Scotus and Aquinas, with Aristotle, adopt the fundamental intuition behind the notion of truthmaking: the dependence of truth on being” (p. 84). Finally the author presents an essentialist account of truthmaking based on Aquinas’ hylomorphic ontology.

In “Essence and ontology” E.J. Lowe points out some controversial points of Aristotle’s hylomorphic ontology, and he proposes to reconsider them by means of another Aristotelian kind of ontology that one can recognize in his presumed early work, the Categories. Starting from it, Lowe builds up his own neo-Aristotelian four-category ontology of individual substances, modes, substantial universal and property universals. Then he argues that such an ontology with a neo-Aristotelian account of essence (i.e. the essence of an entity is “just what that entity is, as revealed by its real definition” (p. 108)) provides a metaphysical foundation for modal truth without appealing to the notion of ‘possible worlds’. In fact, according to Lowe, the notion of possibility and necessity have to be explained by means of the notion of ‘essence’ rather than vice versa. In particular, “a metaphysically necessary truth is a truth which is either an essential truth or else a truth that obtains in virtue of the essences of two or more distinct things” (p. 107).

In “An Aristotelian argument against bare particulars”, Lukas Novak starts from the distinction between de dicto and de re necessity, and by means of the notion of de re necessity distinguishes essentialism from anti-essentialism. The former believes in de re necessity, whereas “denial of de re necessity entails anti-essentialism” (p. 113). But the notion of “bare particulars” would undermine Aristotelian essentialism, because such a notion is linked to the thesis according
to which “all properties (except trivial ones like self-identity, and some others) belong contingently to their subjects, or in other words, that individuals have no (non-trivial) essences” (p. 114). Novak provides an argument for showing that anti-essentialism is untenable. The general premise of his argument is the fact that there is what Aristotle would call accidental change. The strategy of the argument is as follows: “once we concede that accidental differences are based on really distinct particular entities that ‘inform’ the given subjects, we must also concede that ultimately, some entities must differ by themselves, that is, essentially” (p. 119).

“The ontology of number: is number an accident?” by Prokop Sousedik and David Svoboda deals with the question of what a number is. According to the authors, such a question should be faced by the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accident, i.e. between ens in se and ens in alio. After analyzing some fundamental ontological approaches to number, the authors show that the notion of number as accident of quantity implies unacceptable or contradictory consequences. However, they also argue that the notion of number as object is just as unacceptable as the other one. Therefore, they propose a “middle way”, according to which “from a logical point of view number is an object but from the ontological point of view it is an entity that depends on linguistic structure (ens in alio)” (p. 123).

After introducing the distinction between the Doctrine of Divine Conservation (DDC) and the Doctrine of Existential Inertia (DEI), Edward Feser, in “Existential inertia”, argues for the traditional Thomistic doctrine of divine conservations. DDC claims that the created things are constantly preserved into being by the activity of God, whereas DEI affirms that “the world of contingent things, once it exists, will tend to continue in existence on its own at least until something positively acts to destroy it” (pp. 143-144). According to Feser, by means of Aquinas’ Five ways for God’s existence one can provide arguments for the truth of DDC.
In “Aquinas vs Buridan on essence and existence, and the commensurability of paradigms” Gyula Klima considers Aquinas’ intellectus essentiae “argument for the real distinction of essence and existence in creatures” (p. 169). According to Klima, the objections of Anthony Kenny to that argument beg the question, because Kenny appeals to two notions of existence (existence as Fregean existential quantifier or – say – existence as Fregean Wirklichkeit) that do not occur in Aquinas (the first notion) or that are not conceived from the same premise of Kenny (i.e. Kenny’s assumption that “the distinctness of essence and existence would have to mean that it is possible to have one without the other” (p. 172)). Then, the author presents Aquinas’ argument as follows, clearly showing that it is immune to Kenny’s criticism:

(1) The nature of c is known
(2) The existence of c is not known
(3) Therefore, the nature of c is not the existence of c

Since Buridan objects to Aquinas’ argument exactly in the above-mentioned form, Klima’s aim is to show that such a debate is based on a different conception of “how our concepts latch onto things in the world” (p. 169), but the author opens the possibility of an argument “across paradigmatically different conceptual frameworks” (p. 169).

In “Potentiality in Scholasticism (potentiae) and the contemporary debate on ‘powers’” Edmund Runggaldier deals with two notions of potentiality that correspond to two different accounts of modality: the first can be considered as what is called possible-worlds approach in contemporary analytic metaphysics; the second “has its basis in everyday life, i.e., in our experience of having certain capacities and acting accordingly” (p. 185). In fact – linked to such a distinction – the author points out the scholastic distinction between potentiae objectivae and potentiae subjectivae. The objective potencies are potentialities as mere
possibilities, i.e. entities that do not exist in our actual world; instead subjective potencies are “integral parts of the world we inhabit” (p. 187), since they are dispositions and powers inherent to a real subject or bearer (see p. 187).

David Peroutka considers the notion of ontological possibility in his essay “Dispositional necessity and ontological possibility”. He states that the notion of possibility as logical non-contradiction is insufficient, since there are maximally consistent ways things could be that do not respect, for example, the laws of nature. Therefore the author offers an ontological account of possibility: “something is possible if and only if there are active and passive causal capabilities enabling its production” (p. 204). Since a disposition – i.e. a property leading necessarily to an effect – “belongs to the essence of that quality in which it is based” (p. 206) and since “essential appurtenance is defined as an across-all-worlds connexion”, Peroutka offers an account of possibility/necessity by means of possible-worlds approach (p. 205):

- Possibility: x is possible in the world w if and only if there is some possible world causally accessible from w in which x exists.
- Necessity: x is necessary in the world w if and only if x exists in each possible world that is causally accessible from w.

“The optimal and the necessary in Leibniz’ mathematical framing of the compossible” by Mark Faller is an essay on Leibniz’ metaphysics of possibility and necessity. The fundamental principles in Leibniz’ metaphysics are – as Faller points out – the Law of non contradiction (“Principle of contradiction”) and the Principle of sufficient reason: the first “can never be violated under any circumstances” (p. 224); the second principle “is the determinant cause of all of nature and all of reason” (p. 224). The author also considers Leibniz’s optimism, i.e. the thesis according to which “God has chosen the most perfect world, ‘the simplest in its hypotheses an the richest in phenomena’” (p. 220), and he analyzes the mathematical grounding of this thesis.
In “The interpretation(s) of predication”, Uwe Meixner presents several approaches to the question of the ontological basis of predication (accounts by Sophists and relativists, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Leibniz, Frege, set-theoretic theory, minimally Aristotelian view, redundancy theory, identity theory, fact-referring functional predication theory) by considering primarily the general form of simple predicative statements: \( \Phi(\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n) \), where “the sequence represents the occurrences of the singular terms in a simple predicative statements […] and the letter \( \Phi \) represents the rest of the statement” (p. 230). Plato’s account, for example, works as follows:

\[ \Phi(\alpha) \text{ is true} \text{ – this amounts, ontologically, to this: } \alpha \text{ is sufficiently similar to } \Phi \text{ itself} \text{ (p. 232)} \]

and Frege’s account is the following:

\[ \text{“} \Phi(\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n) \text{“ is true – this amounts, ontologically, to the following: the functional value of the } \Phi \text{-concept for } <\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n> \text{ is the true. (p. 242).} \]

The author shows the problems that undermine each account, but he endorses the fact-referring functional predication theory, i.e.:

\[ \text{“} \Phi(\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n) \text{“ is true – this amounts, ontologically, to the following: the completion of the } \Phi \text{-universal by } <\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n> \text{ is a fact, that is: an obtaining state of affairs (p.245).} \]

The last essay is “Towards a Thomistic theory of predication”, where Stanislav Souzedik explains the Thomistic theory of predication that he considers to be an identity theory of predication, since “it seems that Thomas intended to say that what we mean by the subject and the predicate of such a sentence refers to one and the same thing” (p. 247).
The book is quite fluent (with the exception of some points), and it can be easily understood by readers that are not very familiar with the most technical aspects of analytical metaphysics. In some ways it can also be seen as an introduction to many important metaphysical questions. Moreover, the book efficaciously contributes to developing profitable connections between different philosophical traditions, by showing that the fundamental metaphysical questions continue to persist throughout the history of philosophy and, – above all – that mutual comparison can be beneficial for scholars belonging to different areas of research.

Among the many essays of the book, I am going to highlight some of them – Van Inwagen, Novotny, Inman and Loux’s essays – as pointing out some suggestions for possible lines of research that could extend the debates. Van Inwagen’s essay ends by stating that the traditional philosophical question about the nature of being can be considered as the following one: what does it mean for a category to be non-empty? But it seems that for the author such a question belongs to meta-ontology rather than ontology, since “‘ontology proper’ is the attempt to set out a satisfactory list of ontological categories; everything else in ontology belongs to meta-ontology” (p. 24). I think that such a question should be linked to the metaphysical question of emptiness and empty world – a way by means of which analytic metaphysics considers the traditional question of nothingness – and therefore I am not sure that in this way it would remain just a meta-ontological or meta-metaphysical question.

In his essay Novotny presents – among others – the Ausser-Being account for nonexistent objects, as we have seen. It is interesting that the Italian philosopher Emanuele Severino strongly argues that such a view about object has been endorsed – implicitly or explicitly – by all Western philosophers, whereas he claims that an object is necessarily linked to its being so that it eternally exists (his conclusions are similar to some eternalist views)\(^1\).

\(^1\) See for example SEVERINO, E. Destino della necessità, Milan: Adelphi, 1980.
Considering the notion of truth, Inman states that the dependence of truth on being is the Aristotle’s fundamental intuition which is inherited by scholastics, until contemporary analytic philosophers. However, I think there is another notion of truth that one can find in Aristotle, i.e., the notion of truth linked to the so-called elenctic refutation as it occurs in the fourth book of Aristotle’s Metaphysics. Of course, this notion does not exclude the other one; rather the elenctic refutation works for showing how really things are, but I think it is an aspect that one should investigate when one considers the notion of truth in general and above all in Aristotle.

Finally, the suggestion that occurs in Loux’s essay, according to which one cannot distinguish the relational ontology from the constituent one by means of the Principle of instantiation, is quite remarkable.