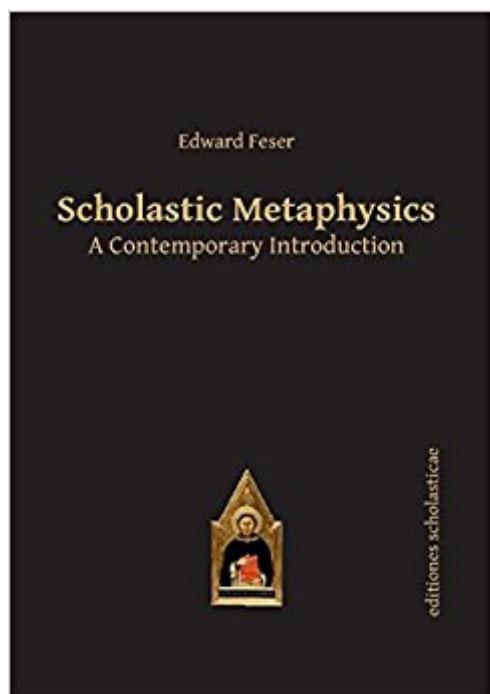


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# **Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction (Scholastic Editions Ă¢â,¬â€œ Editiones Scholasticae)**



## Synopsis

Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction provides an overview of Scholastic approaches to causation, substance, essence, modality, identity, persistence, teleology, and other issues in fundamental metaphysics. The book interacts heavily with the literature on these issues in contemporary analytic metaphysics, so as to facilitate the analytic reader's understanding of Scholastic ideas and the Scholastic reader's understanding of contemporary analytic philosophy. The Aristotelian theory of actuality and potentiality provides the organizing theme, and the crucial dependence of Scholastic metaphysics on this theory is demonstrated. The book is written from a Thomistic point of view, but Scotist and Suarezian positions are treated as well where they diverge from the Thomistic position.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One would be hard pressed to find a better introduction to scholastic metaphysics than that provided by Edward Feser. The book is excellently organized, treats its various topics with remarkable thoroughness and depth, and is written in an always clear, precise, and vibrant style. The book could only have been written by someone who has a complete command of the fundamental concepts of scholastic metaphysics, as well as an impressive knowledge of the main currents of modern philosophy. . . . For anyone who seeks a substantive and sound introduction to scholastic metaphysics, this is the book with which to begin.

D. Q. McInerny, The

Review of Metaphysics  $\neg\wedge$  "This is an excellent little survey of scholastic metaphysics. . . . Highly recommended. Anyone working in metaphysics, the philosophy of nature, or the philosophy of mind would be well advised to read through this book."  $\neg\wedge$  •Patrick Toner, American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly  $\neg\wedge$  "Feser's new book is a welcome addition for those interested in bringing the concepts, terminology and presuppositions between scholastic and contemporary analytic philosophers to commensuration. In fact, I would contend that Feser's book will constitute an important piece in its own right for guiding the research program for contemporary Thomistic metaphysicians into the future."  $\neg\wedge$  •Notre Dame Philosophical Review  $\neg\wedge$  "Scholastic Metaphysics is a well written defense of common sense beliefs about the nature of reality itself, and if read carefully, will probably persuade many. Establishing the veracity of this metaphysic entails supporting classical theism, the reality of universals, the efficacy of natural reason, and the normativity of natural law."  $\neg\wedge$  •Andrew Fulford, The Calvinist International  $\neg\wedge$  "Edward Feser's latest book gives readers who are familiar with analytic philosophy an excellent overview of scholastic metaphysics in the tradition of Thomas Aquinas. . . . Feser's book contains a wealth of material about the debates in contemporary analytical philosophy. . . . The recovery of scholastic metaphysics depends on the recovery of that understanding of nature and substance that is central to the thought of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. . . . In his new book, Edward Feser has taken a key step in this important endeavor."  $\neg\wedge$  •William E. Carroll, Public Discourse  $\neg\wedge$  "What this book does, and does very well, is give us an insightful introduction to metaphysics. . . . It is one of the most refreshing books I have come across in years. . . . Edward Feser's Scholastic Metaphysics is an ordinary  $\neg\exists$ emanual that is not ordinary. It is nothing less than a defense of reality, of the capacity of the mind to know what is. It is a book that puts science in the right place because it has the mind in the right place."  $\neg\wedge$  •Rev. James V. Schall, S. J., Crisis Magazine  $\neg\wedge$  "In his new book, Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction (Editions Scholasticae, 2014), Edward Feser shows how the Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics developed by thinkers who take key ideas from Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas is still relevant today. . . . For any readers who seek the thrill of thinking through the most serious intellectual disputes about the fundamental structures of reality, Scholastic Metaphysics delivers the excitement. Feser offers an indispensable philosophical toolkit for any mind that dares to contemplate not only the real truths of modern physics, but also everything that in principle, by nature, lies beyond physics."  $\neg\wedge$  "I not only enjoyed the book thoroughly, I wanted more. . . . For those, though, who are philosophically minded, and

who want to explore the ideas I've been discussing in my posts on St. Thomas Aquinas over the last couple months, I recommend it highly. [www.patheos.com/blogs/crywoof](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/crywoof) Feser is a good writer. . . . Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction was by and large a pleasure to read. <http://lyfaber.blogspot.com> Feser's book is a clearly written and remarkably well-researched analysis of the concept of scholastic metaphysics. This is a well-conceived, articulated, and impressively-researched book. [Review of Contemporary Philosophy](#)

Edward Feser is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Pasadena City College in Pasadena, California, USA. His most recent books include Aquinas and The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism, and the edited volume Aristotle on Method and Metaphysics.

Oh my gosh, was this book worth the wait! I cannot tell you how excited I was for the release of this book, yet it far surpassed my expectations. I have read and benefitted from many readings of Aquinas, Garrigou-Lagrange, and other scholastics and neo-scholastics, but after reading this book, I believe I could reread all of them and get out so much more than I missed the first time. This book gives definitions, distinctions, and examples to carefully flesh out all the metaphysical background that authors like Aquinas and Garrigou-Lagrange take as necessary background in their work. For example, I was reading Garrigou-Lagrange the other night, and he used the term "specific difference." Had I not read Feser, I would not have realized that there was a technical meaning to this term. Little things like this are invaluable, and Feser has delivered a gem that I will most likely keep referring to for years to come. In addition, the bibliography is quite extensive and gives a plethora of other reading material, including many authors that I had never even heard of. As I mentioned above, this is a contemporary introduction to the metaphysics that were held by the Scholastics. In that regard, this book is one of the very few that I know of which 1) is concerned with scholastic metaphysics qua metaphysics 2) systematic 3) scholarly 4) readable. For example it is difficult to find a thorough defense of the principle of sufficient reason (PSR). Even in a great book like Father Garrigou-Lagrange's "God VI" the great Thomist is not interested in PSR qua PSR but in order to apply it to prove God's existence. These kinds of little details are things that those not familiar with some of the underlying assumptions of the scholastics need to be filled in on before fully appreciating the writings of neo-Scholastics. To that end, this book is invaluable.

Careful definitions are given, reasons and arguments are given for the existence of things like form, matter, potency, final causes etc. The book is also scholarly in the sense that it interacts with much of the current literature in philosophy (especially contemporary analytic philosophy), comparing and contrasting these views with Scholastic metaphysics. Yet as I mentioned it is also readable if you have a solid background already in some of this stuff e.g. Feser’s Aquinas or The Last Superstition. It is not as easy or as light a read as his aforementioned books, but is still quite readable, especially given the level of sophistication of the material. Finally, it is worth mentioning that Feser defends Thomism in particular, especially against the thought of Suarez and Scotus. The positions of Suarez and Scotus are charitably laid out and argued for (at least on issues where they would differ from Aquinas), but ultimately rebutted by the Thomistic response. There are at least two uses of this book. One (as I have basically done) is to use it to simply learn to be able to coherently articulate scholastic metaphysics. What are essences, secondary matter, nominal definitions, etc? How do they relate to one another, and how do certain concepts necessitate others? This book is an unparalleled resource for such a goal. But one can also use it to defend and interact with arguments against concepts in scholastic metaphysics. How does one answer the critiques leveled against scholastic metaphysics by men like Hume, Kant, Locke, etc? What does scholastic metaphysics have to say about contemporary analytic philosophy? This book delves into that series of questions as well, and one can put their focus in either reading, obtaining a tremendous benefit. But for someone who is still trying to gain his bearings, one can easily use it for the former, perusing the more technical interactions with contemporary analytic philosophy and skepticism. As to the specific contents of the book, Feser sets the stage in the first chapter by noting that the book is “about the science of the absolutely first principles of being.” This is in contrast to a book about scholastic ethics, theology or nature (though he mentions on page 9 that he intends to follow up this book with a book on philosophy of nature!!). Feser fancies his book to be complementary to David Oderberg’s 2007 “Real Essentialism,” a book devoted to defending the real existence of essences from an Aristotelian-Thomistic point of view. In that regards, I believe he succeeds. After a brief introduction, Feser gives 4 arguments against scientism, interacting with the views of professional philosophers like Alex Rosenberg and popular science philosophizers like Lawrence Krauss. His replies to Rosenberg’s “explanatory power and prediction of physics” argument in favor of scientism is completely devastating. Feser shows how such a view stacks the deck in favor of scientism by simply defining all that one all of reality in terms of measurable quantity (this is a theme he critiques throughout). The first chapter begins to

flesh out one of the main, if not THE main, fundamental distinctions in scholastic thought, that of act and potency. Beginning by quoting the first of the 24 Thomistic theses (always a good start), Feser, describes act and potency as well as the many distinctions that arise e.g. subjective potency, uncreated potency, absolute pure act, etc. At first I thought including a flow chart in the book making all these distinctions would be helpful, but this actually forced me to make my own, which is much more beneficial than looking at someone else's chart. I highly recommend the reader to make a similar chart, distinguishing all the different kinds of act and potency. You have the active potency to do it! (and if you don't know what that means, all the more reason to make the chart) Speaking of powers, Feser devotes a section of this chapter to defending the existence of need for postulating power or active potency contra a Humean regularity theory as well as counterfactual theories of causation. Borrowing largely from modern analytic philosophy, Feser argues that powers account much better for all possible scenarios and explains why, for example, it is possible for a cause to generate a certain effect, even if it never actualizes this potential. In a discussion of how powers contribute to our understanding of science, it is pointed out that powers make sense of modeling a phenomena with both a discrete and a continuous model. Feser is not afraid to bust out symbolic notation. The chapter ends with a discussion of how act and potency have found its way into modern analytic philosophy under the similar but different guise of categorical and dispositional, as well as a Scholastic appraisal of the analytic concepts. The Chapter on causality begins with a defense of final causes against those who argued that efficient causality is sufficient, such as William of Ockham. The basic response is that such a position lacks a much needed explanation of efficient causality i.e. removing any one of the four causes does not paint a full picture or explanation of a being. Feser then interacts with modern analytic philosophers and how final causes combined with Scholastic distinctions can shed light on their discussions of intentionality. This chapter studies the Principle of Causality (PC), the Principle on non-contradiction (PNC), and the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) as well as the relationship between these principles. The Scholastic Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) is introduced and compared with the rationalist version of the PSR. Feser shows how objects to the latter do nothing to the former. As a devout reader of Fr Garrigou-Lagrange, I do have to point out that Feser dismisses Fr GL's attempt from God VI to argue that denial of PSR implies denial of PNC without actually interacting with Fr GL (but we can forgive him for that). Also defended in this chapter is the Principle of Proportionate Causality (PPC), and how most moderns typically take PPC to be a statement only about material causes. In particular, Feser answers the common objection that evolution disproves the PPC by noting not only that the PPC

concerns all 4 causes, but also noting that the effect must exist in the cause in any one of three ways- either formally, virtually, or eminently. I did have some trouble with the chapter on existence and essence; in particular, on existence. It is still a little bit unclear to me EXACTLY what Thomists mean by existence i.e. a definition. Feser discusses how it is a first-order predicate, but I'm not sure what that means. He does do a good job of saying what Thomists DON'T mean by existence; that is, the Fregean notion of specific existence involving an existential quantifier or individual existence, which I understood given my mathematics background. But I'm still a little unclear as to exactly what the definition of "to exist" is for the Scholastic. However, the answer may be in his very last section on the "analogy of being" where, if I am understanding this properly, no two things can be said to have being in exactly (univocally) the same way- hence the need for the analogy of being and consequently, no need for a general definition of being or existence since it is predicated of every individual differently. As I mentioned above, this book is simply a gem. It is a scholarly work that clearly needs to be taken seriously in the philosophical world. You will not be disappointed upon purchase of this book. It seems to me that after one reads Feser's TLS followed by Aquinas and this, they will be ready to appreciate the writings of the scholastics on a whole new level. I give this book my highest recommendation possible.

I am not a philosopher by training, but as a scientist feel I should understand the relevant discussions on causation. Feser does a good job of listing diverse viewpoints and interpretations and highlights Humean approaches to causation and contrasts the Scholastic approach. As an avid supporter of Scholastic metaphysics he is a good guide to this, which I had long thought to have been supplanted and rejected by more modern approaches. He does a good job of literature review so the strengths of different approaches can be compared. Dare I say there is revival of the scholastic approach occurring? I think(my opinion) triumphal scientism is feeling there is little need for philosophical analysis left in the world with the triumph of physics, but the problem of consciousness just begs for continued analysis of the causation problem. I am not convinced the Humean "loose and separate" approach explains the voice in my head! (see the "I am not a philosopher" disclaimer above. Just an interested amateur). By the way, I have completely failed in my first couple of attempts to understand Wittgenstein. I need more time to think about this one!

An excellent pathway into Thomist metaphysics. The Scholastic system is rigorous. Feser demonstrates that it is. Necessary reading for anyone with an interest in metaphysics.

Great book for understanding Scholastic Metaphysics. Feser puts together a large collection of information. Very informative, answers all the questions you have while you're reading it. Well put together, good flow--great buy.

An excellent introductory text. It covers a range of topics and is familiar with major voices on both sides of the arguments.

As lucid as we've come to expect from Feser, who is, in my opinion, one of the greatest Thomist philosophers living today.

Professor Feser's grasp of both modern and medieval philosophy is comprehensive and sure. "Scholastic Metaphysics" is a concise, comprehensive, reliable, well-referenced, and up-to-date guide to the whole vast titular territory.

Feser hits it again. This text is a splendid contribution to the recovery of the scholastic habitus of philosophy. In today's Zeitgeist, the scholastic habitus is relegated to a dead letter. It is called a "school" of thought, and one is given permission to forget or neglect it as a "contenda" in the contemporary landscape. But in fact the scholastic HABITUS is a thing that can, and should, LIVE. In fact, there is a recovery and renewal of this habitus going on, and Feser is among the leading lights. He knows his modern, recent, and contemporary philosophy quite well. He articulates the scholastic habitus with such other approaches in mind. I did find this text focused a bit too much, for my taste, on the analytic traditions. It would be good to see the continental traditions engaged more. That said, however, this is a very fine text that can easily be employed in the college setting. One only hopes that Feser will write an Introduction to Philosophy text, one that touches the various basic CLASSICAL issues (Logic, Physics, Metaphysics, Knowledge), that does so with an eye to modern-contemporary approaches / questions / objections, and yet remains under 300 pages. If anyone can do it, it is he.

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