Aristotle’s *Categories* is the subject of an extensive number of commentaries and of an unusual amount of debate, and for good reasons. To begin with, in spite of its relatively short length, it can be a rather difficult text to understand, even for the trained philosopher, to say nothing of those who are just beginning their study of philosophy. Yet, because it laid the foundation for many subsequent philosophical discussions in general, and for logic in particular, it was, during much of the Middle Ages, often the very first philosophical text students encountered. Even contemporary philosophers who are steeped in philosophy and who have studied the *Categories* in depth often find it difficult, albeit for different reasons. One difficulty, as the ancient commentators on the *Categories* recognized, is that Aristotle himself is ambiguous about the subject of the work. What exactly is he categorizing? Is it ‘things that are’ or ‘things that are said’ or something in between, such as a concept? Furthermore, depending on how one understands its purpose, the *Categories* can be seen in harmony with, in contrast to, or even in contradiction to, Plato’s own theory of the five highest genera. For all of these reasons the *Categories* has historically acted like a magnet, attracting commentaries from Aristotelians, Platonists, and Stoics alike. Quite naturally, some of these commentaries defend Aristotelianism, whereas others defend either Platonism or Stoicism by attacking Aristotle’s *Categories*. Finally, still others, especially during the Late Middle Ages, use the *Categories* as a means to expound their own philosophical systems in the process of interpreting Aristotle.

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1 According to my count of the texts listed by Charles Lohr, roughly two hundred extant Latin commentaries on the *Categories* were written during the Middle Ages. Of course, this number does not take into account the commentaries that are not extant, nor the ones written in Greek, Arabic, or Hebrew. Cf. the lists of extant commentaries cited by Charles Lohr in *Traditio*, vols. 23–29.
Though many of the ancient and medieval commentators, such as Porphyry, Boethius and Albert the Great, did write original treatises on philosophical issues, their commentaries are in themselves valuable contributions to philosophy, particularly those from the later Middle Ages. Consequently, studies of the various commentaries, and especially those dealing with the *Categories*, are valuable projects, as the following essays amply demonstrate. As Robert Andrews points out, medieval “*Categories* commentaries are the repository of centuries of analyses of the basic concepts of Western thought, all carefully organized and awaiting modern rediscovery.” And while most of those commentaries are still awaiting rediscovery, the following essays, I hope, will convince everyone that the effort is worthwhile.

Originally, I planned to include essays on all three main philosophical traditions alive throughout the Middle Ages, namely, those written by Jewish, Christian and Islamic philosophers. Essays pertaining to the Jewish tradition, however, are noticeably absent due to the lack of contemporary scholarship in this area. Consequently, the preponderance of the remaining articles focuses mainly on Christian philosophers. The scope of the project has, however, stayed away from theological issues, even though discussions of the categories often have tremendous theological implications, especially concerning the doctrines of Transubstantiation and the Trinity. Consequently, the issues raised in the following essays are properly philosophical issues, not theological.

What follows is a collection of fourteen original essays, all devoted to one or more medieval commentaries on Aristotle’s *Categories*, written by a wide variety of philosophers from Europe, Canada, and the United States. I will summarize each of them briefly.

Michael Chase begins the volume by demonstrating the importance of Simplicius’ commentary for two key medieval thinkers, Aquinas and al Fārābī. Due in part to Simplicius’ influence, and particularly

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2 Compare Fr. Wippel’s description of St. Thomas’ commentaries: of his theological commentaries, “two are commentaries in the strict sense, i.e., on the *De Hebdomadibus* of Boethius and on the *De divinis nominibus*; the other two offer brief expositions of the texts of Boethius and of Peter and use them as occasions for much fuller and highly personal disquisitions by Thomas himself.” John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2000), p. xviii.


4 Not counting the introductory essay or the original work by Thomas Maulevelt.