One of the admirable qualities of this book is that it discusses a traditional dichotomy with a contemporary voice. The dichotomy is between attributes and substances and is reflected in the division of the book into two parts. Loux's discussion leads to an unusual combination: a Platonist theory of attributes and an Aristotelian theory of substance. In reaching these conclusions, Loux touches on a variety of issues central to contemporary metaphysics and philosophical logic — predication, quantification, identity, possible worlds, and essentialism, to name a few — and on views of various philosophers, both classical and contemporary. Loux draws extensively and fairly knowledgeably on familiar discussions of these topics. It seems to me that sometimes he gets to rather less than the bottom of matters. But Loux's account is a good introduction to the terrain: it is clearly written, effectively organized, and vigorously argued.

1. Attribute-agreement and substance-individuation

I turn first to a quick sketch of the main arguments of the book.

Distinct objects may, as we sometimes say, agree in certain of their characteristics: so it is with diverse wise philosophers, black cats, or deciduous trees. Reflection on the nature of attribute-agreement, as Loux calls it, is at the root of the traditional problem of universals. Loux discerns three different conceptions of what is involved in attribute-agreement and, correspondingly, three positions in the dispute over universals.

According to metaphysical realism or Platonism, objects agree in attribute only if they literally have something in common — as Loux puts it, they exemplify a single attribute. For the realist, "attribute-agreement is grounded in the multiple-exemplification of attributes" (p. 4). Attributes, in contrast to particulars, are multiply exemplifiable; hence their designation as universals.
Against realism, Loux sets nomialism, here taken as denying that attributes are universals, and extreme nominalism, taken as denying that there are attributes, whether construed as universals or particulars. On the former view, attributes are particulars and "attribute-agreement is grounded not in identity of attribute but in the weaker relation of similarity or resemblance of attribute" (p. 5). On the latter view, "objects agree in attribute because of how they are, what they are, and how they are related to other things and not because they exhibit or exemplify abstract entities of one sort or another..." (p. 6).

Loux discusses, but rejects, three arguments in favour of realism: the first is based on an analysis of predication; the second on the notion of resemblance; and the third on higher-order quantification. His defense of realism comes in Chapter Four and is based on what he calls "the phenomenon of abstract reference".

In the second half of the book, Loux, employing a Platonist theory of attributes, turns to various philosophical accounts of the ontological structure of substances. In some ways, the central issue here mirrors what is involved in attribute-agreement: what needs to be explained, in the case of substances, is what binds together the various properties of an object and makes them properties of one and the same thing.

Loux considers in some detail two traditional rival views. According to the bundle theory, a substance is nothing more than a bundle or cluster of properties; according to the substratum theory, a substance incorporates, in addition to its properties, an underlying bare substratum. Neither theory, Loux argues, is satisfactory: the bundle theory cannot account for the fact that diverse substances might be qualitatively indiscernible, and the idea of bare substrata as individuating entities is incoherent.

Loux develops his own account, a substance-theory of substance, in Chapter Nine. On this view, a substance is simply the instantiation of a substance-kind; consequently, "each substance exemplifies a universal which guarantees its numerical diversity from every other substance" (p. 163).

In what follows, I shall discuss critically several of Loux's central claims and arguments. There is much of great interest in his book that I do not discuss.

2. Predication and universals

Central to the contention that an account of predication commits us to a realist ontology is the claim, endorsed by a distinguished philosophical