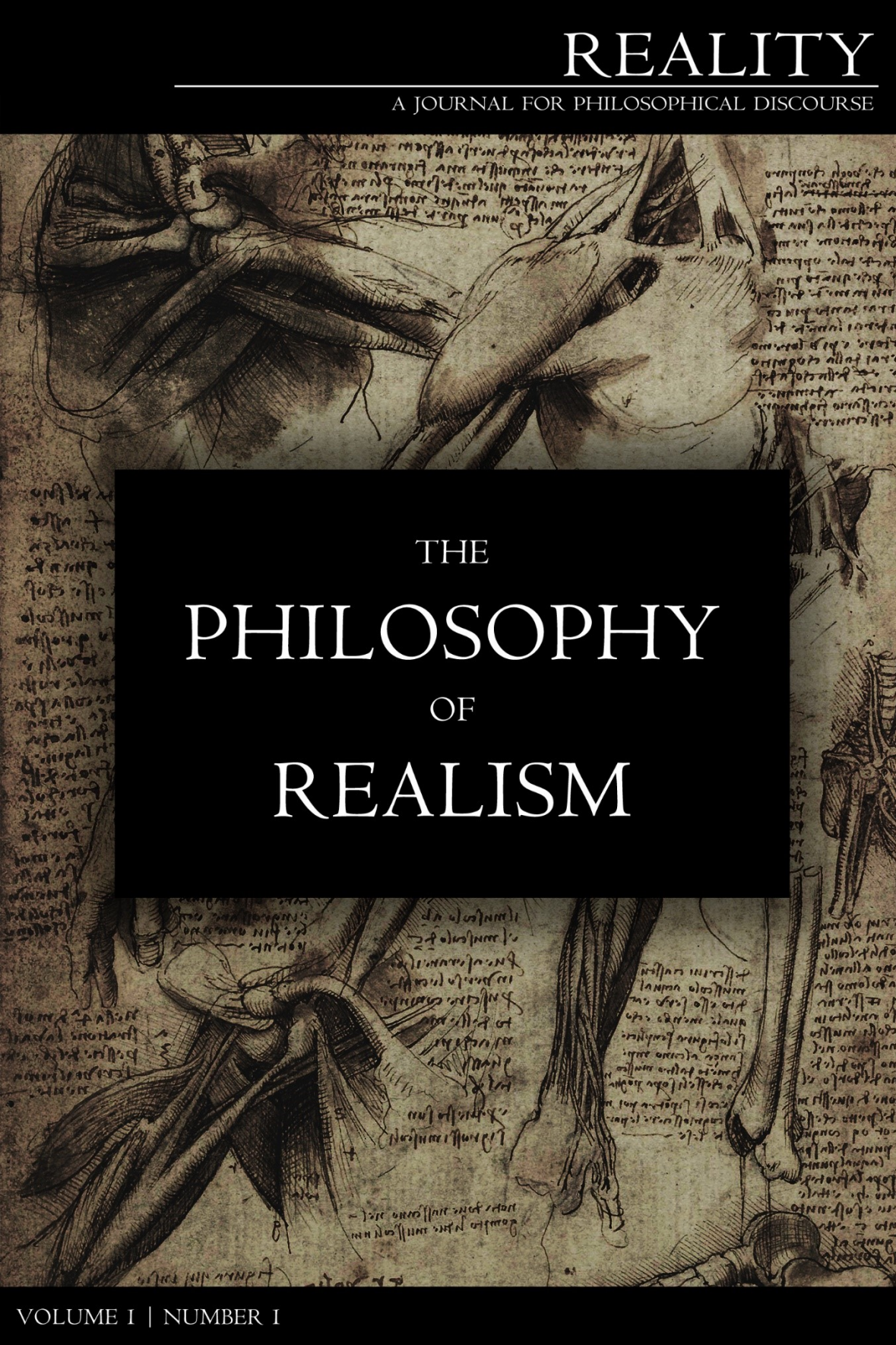


# REALITY

A JOURNAL FOR PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE



## THE PHILOSOPHY OF REALISM

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REALITY

A JOURNAL FOR PHILOSOPHICAL  
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THE  
PHILOSOPHY  
OF  
REALISM

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# Editorial Introduction

## Reality as Katharsis (κᾶθαρσις)<sup>1</sup>

Attaining the Real

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This first issue of REALITY—*The Philosophy of Realism*—like most publications and especially those of a collaborative effort, signifies innumerable hours of effort. The goal of our journal is simple: to reinvigorate an intelligent discussion about realism as a philosophical approach. By a realist approach, we mean not simply as pertains to theories of knowledge, but rather a kind of thinking that perfuses itself throughout all philosophical inquiries: all questions of truth, of meaning and purpose, of good, of human action, the political, the physical and the metaphysical, of thought and thing, and anything else about which one might ask, “What does this *mean*?” To clarify this pursuit of reality, and expound on its importance, our first issue asks the question: what *is* realism? It is an important question, not simply for our purposes here, but for philosophy as a whole, and thus an important question for all human beings. Without maintenance of a sound answer—which must be sustained dialogically—philosophy wilts into one or another sophisticated theory that begins by denying some aspect of the real; and a small error in the beginning becomes great in the end.

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<sup>1</sup> Correspondence to [editors@realityjournal.org](mailto:editors@realityjournal.org).

To safeguard against such slippery slopes, we take a cue from the first philosopher of the Western tradition, Socrates, and seek to define our terms: “what is reality?”

## §

*Reality*—the English term, that is—has its etymological roots in the Latin noun *res* and its later medieval adjectival form, *reale* (n.). The noun signifies “thing,” “event,” “affair,” or even “cause,” while the adjective modifies a noun or verbal noun to signify that its referent has the intrinsic possibility of existing, as opposed to, say, something contrived in the imagination, or expressed in a proposition, that cannot exist independently of our cognitive actions, e.g., a “heffalump” or a “square-circle.”<sup>2</sup>

*Res* has more ancient corresponding Greek progenitors in τὸ ὄν (*to on*), meaning “the being/existence,” and οὐσία (*ousia*), meaning, also, “being” in the sense of “what belongs to something properly” such that, if it is removed, the thing in question will not *really* be what it is—e.g., if it is not an arthropod, it is not a honey bee, or if it is not mammalian it is not a dolphin, making the features of

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<sup>2</sup> Notably, the term *res* as used by Aquinas indicates the imposition of a name from the quiddity understood; thus it primarily signifies the intelligibility of a thing and only by a kind of consignification does it signify the existence. See c.1252/56: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.25, q.1, a.4, c.: “Respondeo dicendum, quod secundum Avicennam, ut supra dictum est, dist. 2, qu. 1, art. 3, hoc nomen ens et res differunt secundum quod est duo considerare in re, scilicet quidditatem et rationem ejus, et esse ipsius; et a quidditate sumitur hoc nomen res. Et quia quidditas potest habere esse, et in singulari quod est extra animam et in anima, secundum quod est apprehensa ab intellectu; ideo nomen rei ad utrumque se habet: et ad id quod est in anima, prout res dicitur a reor reris, et ad id quod est extra animam, prout res dicitur quasi aliquid ratum et firmum in natura. Sed nomen entis sumitur ab esse rei...” – “It must be said that, according to Avicenna, as mentioned above (d.2, q.1, .a3), that these nouns ‘being’ [*ens*] and ‘thing’ [*res*] differ insofar as there are two objects of consideration in a thing [*in re*], namely the quiddity or intelligible rationale of it, and the existence of it; and it is from the quiddity that the noun ‘thing’ [*res*] is taken. And because the quiddity is able to have existence, both in the singular existent which is outside the soul and in the soul, insofar as it is apprehended by the intellect, therefore the noun ‘thing’ [*res*] is related to each: both to that which is in the soul, insofar as it is said to be the thing of thought, and to that which is outside the soul, insofar as a thing is said to be as established and firm in nature. But the noun ‘being’ [*ens*] is taken from the existence of the thing...”

*arthropod* and *mammalian* part of the *reality* of the honey bee and dolphin.<sup>3</sup> *Reality*, then, to put it simply, pertains to and signifies *what is*, and to *things actually existing in the world*. *Realism*, what many philosophers would now call an *epistemological* theory, in the broadest of terms, means that (i) there is *reality*—that things actually exist in the world—and (ii) that we can comprehend and express true (or conversely false) statements/propositions about this reality.

*Realism*, in this broad sense, is a perennial philosophy having its source in antiquity and including, but not limited to, such a broad range of thinkers as Socrates (469/70—399BC), Plato (427—347BC), Aristotle (384—322BC), St. Augustine (354—430AD), St. Thomas Aquinas (1224/5—1274) and the many thinkers of his school, such as John Poinset (1589—1644), as well as Charles Sanders Pierce (1839—1914), Edmund Husserl (1859—1938), Martin Heidegger (1889—1976), Edith Stein (1889—1942), Karol Wojtyła (1920—2005), and many others.<sup>4</sup> Common to these monumental figures is the doctrine that thought and language are determined by existing things in the world through real relations and that thoughts and words are capable of expressing true meaning about these things. Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, the most comprehensive and consistent champions of the realist philosophical world view, offer concise statements of the doctrine. In defining truth and falsity, Aristotle notes the following:<sup>5</sup>

For to say that ‘what is (τὸ ὄν) does not exist (μὴ εἶναι)’ or that ‘what is not (τὸ μὴ ὄν) does exist’ (εἶναι) is to speak falsehood (ψεῦδος), but to say that ‘what is (τὸ ὄν) exists (εἶναι)’ and that ‘what is not (τὸ μὴ ὄν) does not exist (μὴ εἶναι)’

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<sup>3</sup> ὄν (*on*) and οὐσία (*ousia*) are both participial forms of the Greek verb ‘to be’ (εἶμί/*eimi*), meaning literally, ‘being’ and ‘beingness,’ respectively. For a helpful account of the history of the meaning of these terms and their translations in Latin and English, see Joseph Owens 1951: *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 139; and, see also, R.E. Houser 2010: “The Language of Being and the Nature of God in the Aristotelian Tradition,” in *Proceedings of the ACPA*, vol.84, 117. On the best translation of οὐσία as ‘being’ and not the common ‘substance,’ from Boethius’ translation of the term in Latin (‘*substantia*’), see Chapter 2, pp. 104-109, of Daniel C. Wagner 2018: *φύσις καὶ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ἀγαθόν: The Aristotelian Foundations of the Human Good*, available through ProQuest.

<sup>4</sup> This list is meant to be neither comprehensive nor indisputable, and thoughtfully articulate disputations are most welcome as submissions to REALITY.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle i.348-30BC: *Metaphysics* IV.7 (1011b24-28): “τὸ μὲν γὰρ λέγειν τὸ ὄν μὴ εἶναι ἢ τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι ψεῦδος, τὸ δὲ τὸ ὄν εἶναι καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν μὴ εἶναι ἀληθές, ὥστε καὶ ὁ λέγων εἶναι ἢ μὴ ἀληθεύσει ἢ ψεύσεται.” Translations of all Greek texts here are by Daniel C. Wagner.

is to say the truth (ἀληθές), so that something said to exist or not to exist will either be said truly or falsely.

According to Aristotle, meaningful thoughts and statements (i.e., ones that can be true or false) are not an imposition, construction, or fabrication of the mind—as though a proposition is true *because* we think it or want it to be so. Rather, on this realist approach, reality or being determines the mind fitted for its comprehension and provides the measure by which the truth or falsity of a thought or proposition is to be judged. Thus, and for example:<sup>6</sup>

...it is not because we think truly that you are white that you are white, but rather it is because you are white that we are speaking this assertion truly.

Developing this realist approach and explaining how truth and being are related and yet distinct, St. Thomas Aquinas expresses that truth is the *conformity* or “*adequation (adaequatio)* of the intellect and the thing or reality.”<sup>7</sup>

An uncritical and ahistorical approach will likely suggest that *realism* is one of multiple equally tenable alternative philosophies—that it is just one of many -isms from which one must choose “one’s own philosophy.”<sup>8</sup> This claim about the reality of philosophy and its relation to realism is false. That is, all proclaimed philosophies or philosophical systems deserve to be considered at least in terms of their principles, but many of them deserve also to be discounted on the basis of those same principles. For example, deconstructionism, which although it often portrays “reality” as consisting in extramentally existent relations, denies

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<sup>6</sup> i.348-30bc: *Metaphysics*, IX.10 (1051b1-10): οὐ γὰρ διὰ τὸ ἡμᾶς οἶεσθαι ἀληθῶς σε λευκὸν εἶναι εἶ σὺ λευκός, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ σὲ εἶναι λευκὸν ἡμεῖς οἱ φάντες τοῦτο ἀληθεύομεν.

<sup>7</sup> Aquinas i.1256-59: *Questiones Disputates de Veritate*, q.1, a.1, c.: “Prima ergo comparatio entis ad intellectum est ut ens intellectui concordet: quae quidem concordia adaequatio intellectus et rei dicitur; et in hoc formaliter ratio veri perficitur. Hoc est ergo quod addit verum super ens, scilicet conformitatem, sive adaequationem rei et intellectus; ad quam conformitatem, ut dictum est, sequitur cognitio rei. Sic ergo entitas rei praecedit rationem veritatis, sed cognitio est quidam veritatis effectus.” – “Therefore, the primary relation of being to the intellect is such that being concords to the intellect; this concordance is called a certain *adequation/equality (adaequatio)* of the intellect and the thing (*rei*); and in this [*adequation*] the formal principle of truth is completed. This, therefore, is what truth (*verum*) adds to being, namely, a conformity or adequation of the thing and the intellect.”

<sup>8</sup> Of course, such a notion is, on the realist conception of philosophy, absurd and self-contradictory as it entails that what I might say is true about reality is at the same time not true about reality according to someone else’s “personal philosophy.”

that these relations connect any really existent things; there is only the pattern of relations, and nothing really related as such.<sup>9</sup> Not being a true realism, it cannot be considered a true philosophy any more than Roscelian nominalism or Cartesian idealism.

We can see the necessary exclusion of these non-realist theories from the argument that a proper understanding of *philosophy* and *realism* shows them to be coextensive, both as historical fact and in terms of their essential meaning. First, in its source in Ancient Greece, as indicated above, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were all realists.<sup>10</sup> Realism, thus—whatever position one might take as a “personal philosophy”—must be given a preeminent position in the history of philosophy as *philosophy*. Second, some brief reflection on the ancient source and meaning of the word *philosophy* shows that it is essentially realist in its meaning. The Greek term φιλοσοφία (*philosophia*) is a compound form of φίλος/*philos* meaning “love” (from the verb φιλέω/*phileo*), and σοφία (*sophia*), meaning “wisdom.” The question is, of course: what is the meaning of this *wisdom*, which Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were driven to seek by love? As Aristotle makes clear at the outset of his *Metaphysics*, *sophia* was long associated with expert technical knowledge in production, i.e., it was the highest level of knowledge in τέχνη (*techne*)—*craft, trade, or art*. The master craftsmen, Aristotle tells us, was respected and called wise precisely because he understood the *things and state of affairs* in the production and because he could *causally*

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<sup>9</sup> See Kemple 2019: “Signs and Reality”, 78n6 below.

<sup>10</sup> The fact that Plato, for some portion of his philosophical career, proposed an idealist theory of knowledge in making *separated* Ideas/Forms (τὰ εἶδη/*ta eide*) what is real (οὐσία) (c.370bc: *Parmenides*, 130b-d; 133c) does not militate against the thesis that he was a realist as his teacher Socrates and student Aristotle. His realism will be displayed below, alongside that of Socrates. While it must be qualified that his sometime position that what is real, and perhaps, only real, is the separated Idea is not ultimately compatible with sense-perceptive realism, it is also to be noted that Plato himself appears to have recognized the fundamental problems with this theory and to have rejected it accordingly (see *Parmenides* and *Sophist*). In any case, and following Socrates, Plato adopted and employed the Ancient Greek oratorical, mathematical, and medical tradition of classifying and defining by division of *forms or species* (τὰ εἶδη/*ta eide*), which is manifestly realist. See, A.E. Taylor 1911: “The words εἶδος, ἰδέα in Pre-Platonic Literature”. As Aristotle shows succinctly at i.360-330bc: *Categories* 5 (3b10-18), Plato’s realist approach to defining the particular things in the world is simply incompatible with the claim that ideas/forms exist as separated individuals. Following Socrates, Plato clearly believed that rational-discourse (λόγος/*logos*) is ordered toward expression of the truth (ἀλήθεια/*aletheia*) about reality through definition (see, e.g., *Euthyphro*, *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Cratylus*, *Sophist*, *Parmenides*).

explain them. The physician knows not only that an herb is medicinal as an empirical fact, but why and how it is medicinal given its properties and the disposition of the body being healed. He knows that aspirin alleviates the headache, and that it does this chemically at the cellular level by stopping the production of the enzymes responsible for inflammation, etc. The master carpenter knows the things that exist in the production of the house at this particular stage here and now and he knows why they are so with respect to the end or goal being sought, i.e., the house for the sake of shelter and protection. This distinguishes him from the apprentices and laborers who lack such comprehension, but produce through his intelligent direction. He knows the fact that the foundation has been set in the dimensions it has been set in; that it has been plated level; and that this state of reality will causally allow for the construction of the floor box, framed walls, roof, etc., which will then provide the shelter and protection. Those who are masters of a τέχνη (*techne*), then, clearly operate in a realist framework: they are wise because they know the realities of their artistic productions and they can explain their causes.

Similarly, in leisure and inspired by wonder and curiosity as opposed to utility, the philosopher is the one who seeks wisdom, which is theoretical knowledge sought for its own sake, of the factual states of affairs in the world and their causes.<sup>11</sup> For example, wisdom is knowing not only the fact that the light of the sun is absent and no shadows are being cast at midday (though the sky appears clear), but also the causal explanation of this phenomenon by appeal to interposition of the moon between the earth and the sun.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Aristotle—who, incidentally, was also the first historian of Philosophy—tells us that Socrates sought precisely this sort of wisdom. Socrates was famous for asking the question τί ἐστὶ (*ti esti*) or “what is it?” Given a particular subject of inquiry, Socrates sought a rational-account or expression, i.e., a λόγος/*logos*, so that he could reason from it causally to important conclusions about the subject.<sup>13</sup> This method of inquiry is thematic in Plato’s dialogues, where Socrates is often the star interlocutor. For example, Socrates requests a definition of piety (in the *Euthyphro*) so that he can reason to the conclusion that he is not impious (in the

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<sup>11</sup> See i.348-30bc: *Metaphysics*, I.1.

<sup>12</sup> See, Aristotle i.348-30bc: *Metaphysics* I.1 (981a28-30): οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἔμπειροι τὸ ὅτι μὲν ἴσασι, διότι δ' οὐκ ἴσασιν· οἱ δὲ τὸ διότι καὶ τὴν αἰτίαν γνωρίζουσιν. Or, “Those with experience have grasped that something is the case, but not the account of why it is so. But those [with science or art] know also the account of why it is so and the cause.” The translation is my own.

<sup>13</sup>i.348-30bc: *Metaphysics*, XIII.4 (1078b24-25): συλλογιζέσθαι γὰρ ἐζήτει, ἀρχὴ δὲ τῶν συλλογισμῶν τὸ τί ἐστίν. Or, Socrates “was seeking to syllogize/argue and the principle (ἀρχή) of syllogisms/arguments is the definition (τὸ τί ἐστίν)

*Apology*); or, he requests a definition of virtue in order to show the sense in which it is teachable (as a form of knowledge) and the sense in which it is not teachable (as a voluntary practice; in the *Meno*). There is, perhaps, no better example of this in the case of Socrates than that found in the *Apology* where, having discovered about himself and human beings in general that our defining and perfective characteristic lies in knowing and rational inquiry (attracting the ire of many Athenians), he can draw the conclusion that “the unexamined life,” i.e., a life devoid of giving “rational-accounts of human virtue/excellence...,” is not worth living for the human being.”<sup>14</sup> It is no wonder, then, that Aristotle would characterize Socrates as a realist, asserting that he was the first to seek universal definitions and to draw conclusions from them regarding the human good.<sup>15</sup>

Socrates, who we must recognize as the first Philosopher, was a realist, holding that *things exist in the world*—there is reality—and we can know these things and express truths about them. Thus we see philosophy, as the love of wisdom, is from its deepest roots historically and essentially coextensive with realism.

Having expressed the basic meaning of *reality* and the realist philosophy that is married to it, it is fitting now to say a word regarding motivation. **Why reality?** Which is to say: what is the importance and significance of realist philosophy?

First, the realist holds that the expression of the truth about reality is good for the human being, as it constitutes the perfection of the highest faculty of the human being: the intellect, which, as we have already seen St. Thomas indicate, is ordered toward and harmoniously fitted for reality and its disclosure. Apprehending the reality of ourselves and the world we live in, apprehending that things are in various manners, we have wonder and then the desire to know the distinction of all things real and their causes. This innate yearning is precisely why Aristotle famously begins his *Metaphysics* with the line, “All human beings desire to know by nature.”<sup>16</sup> In a way, thus, if we ask the question “why reality, realism, and philosophy?”, as looking for some extrinsic justification of their connection, we run afoul of a category error: it is tantamount to asking why plants grow, photosynthesize, flower, and reproduce with the same expectation of extrinsic justification. That is: we philosophize as the most free and highest expression of our being, because it is our inescapable end, good, perfection, and fulfillment. To be human—to be at our *most* human—is to philosophize, just as

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<sup>14</sup> Plato c.399bc: *Apology*, 38a1-6: ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ. All translations of Plato by Daniel C. Wagner, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>15</sup> i.348-30bc: *Metaphysics*, XIII.4 (1078b16-29).

<sup>16</sup> i.348-30bc: *Metaphysics*, I.1 (980a20): Πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναί ὀρέγονται φύσει.

plants find their fulfillment in flowering. There is a second and essentially related reason driving our need for reality: *katharsis*.

The English word “catharsis” has come to mean “a release, or relief from powerful repressed emotions.” The term’s original Greek meaning (as is usually the case) is a good deal more profound, enlightening, and pertains to processes of *human\_reason* rather than of *emotion*. Etymologically, κάθαρσις (*katharsis*) looks to be a compound of the preposition κατά, meaning here “toward,” “into,” or “according to,” and a form of the Greek verb, αἰρώ (*aeiro*), which can mean both “a taking away/removing” and a “lifting up, raising, or elevating.” Literally, therefore, the term κάθαρσις means “toward-taking away” and “toward-raising up or elevating.” Both of these meanings, i.e., “removing” and “elevating,” are essential to *katharsis*. In the Pythagoreans (famous now for mathematical contributions, but also known in antiquity for strong philosophical and religious convictions), κάθαρσις (*katharsis*) is a kind of *purification* of the soul through education (μουσικός/*musikos*), where impurity is *removed* from the soul so that it can obtain what is fitting for it in a state of health (ὑγιειά/*hugieia*) and harmony (ἁρμονία/*harmonia*). An ἁρμονία/*harmonia* was literally a carpenter’s joint, e.g., a dovetail; thus the soul being in a *harmonia* meant, for the Pythagoreans, that it obtained what was fitting for it, or what it belongs with as its end, as tenons and mortises are ordered to fit together in formation of the joint and the box. Here, the notion of *katharsis*, then, is already connected to *health* and flourishing of the human being.

Similarly, in the medical tradition championed by Hippocrates, *katharsis* is a *purgation* or a *purification*, whereby the physician “takes away” some alien harm from the body (disease, or some dietary harm or imbalance), an impediment to healthy function, so that the body in turn can be *elevated* and returned to the state of health or proper biological functioning. To use a modern example, which we think Hippocrates would appreciate, overconsumption of caffeine can result in blurred vision—an unhealthy state of the eye. This state is *disharmonious* and unhealthy because the eye has a proper object or end, to which it is fitted: generally the reception of color; specifically shape[s]. Too much caffeine results in the eye not achieving this end/object well, or bad vision. The physician, then, removes this excess from the patient, proscribing caffeine, which process of *katharsis* will *elevate* the eye back to a state of health allowing the person to obtain what is fitting in the case of vision.

Following and developing the Pythagorean and Hippocratic traditions, Plato appropriates the term κάθαρσις/*katharsis* and applies it in his expression of the meaning and purpose of philosophy and rational-discourse (λόγος/*logos*). In the *Phaedo*, Plato’s Socrates, speaking to an audience of Pythagoreans, identifies the

practice of philosophy with *katharsis*. Philosophy as *katharsis*, he explains, is a process of “purification” or “moral cleansing” in removal of carnal desire and evil associated with the body so that the soul can obtain its good—i.e., knowledge (*Phaedo*, 67a-c).<sup>17</sup> In the *Sophist*, Plato then appeals to *katharsis* in order to contrast Socrates’ vocation as a philosopher with the dubious activities of sophists.

The sophists were, in fact, the first anti-realists, and anti-philosophers, rejecting the order of reason/speech—λόγος/*logos*—to the true expression of reality or being. These were figures such as Protagoras (490—420bc), who denied the principle of non-contradiction and, thus, truth and meaning,<sup>18</sup> and Gorgias (483—376bc), who reduced spoken discourse (λόγος/*logos*) to power for the sake of self-aggrandizement through the manipulation of others.<sup>19</sup> This radical skepticism was fundamentally connected to subjectivism and a moral relativism that would allow for the justification of virtually any human behavior and, most importantly, would prevent human beings (if subscribed to) from obtaining their good in the perfection of the intellect. Here, the morally dubious character of anti-realist sophistry, which caused Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle to have much contempt for these figures, comes to the fore: where there is no truth in speech about reality, all human discourse in language becomes eristic and coercive manipulation.<sup>20</sup> The skeptical rejection of reality must also lead us (if we are thinking at all) to a dark and cynical view of human relations in speech.

Contra this anti-realist approach, Plato explains that, by way of “critical examination” and “refutation” (ἔλεγχος/*elenchus*), Socrates the philosopher *removes* false opinions from the minds and souls of his interlocutors so that they can *elevate* themselves through learning the truth about what is fitting,

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<sup>17</sup> It turns out there is a need for a κάθαρσις of Plato’s κάθαρσις in the *Phaedo*, as he deems the body and matter evil, but that is the topic of another essay!

<sup>18</sup> Diogenes Laertius c.210-40AD: *Lives of Philosophers*, 9.53 (DK): “Contradiction is impossible.” And, 9.531 (DK). “...there are two mutually opposed [but equal] arguments on any subject.” Translations by Daniel C. Wagner.

<sup>19</sup> In his *Encomium to Helen*, and aside from implying a denial of the principle of non-contradiction by holding that all persuasive “discourse” (λόγος/*logos*) is false, Gorgias (c.380bc) repeatedly identifies discourse with “power” (δύναμις/*dunamis*), he compares it to a “drug” (φάρμακον/*pharmakon*) (14), he calls it a “plaything” (21) for his own wants and desires.

<sup>20</sup> For a classic example of eristic discourse from one of Gorgias’ admirers, see Plato’s c.385bc: *Meno* (80a-e), where Socrates calls Meno’s self-contradicting argument that learning is impossible an ἐριστικὸν λόγον (*eristikon logon*).

beautiful, and good (*Sophist*, 230b-d).<sup>21</sup> Reality is therefore attained through *katharsis*. In this technical sense, realist Philosophy provides (i) *the removal or refutation of harmful ideas that are impediments to the good of the human person so that* (ii) *the human person can actually achieve the human good*. Because of the possibility of falsity in the expression of reality, there is ever a need for the realist philosopher to correct error and aid all humans in the pursuit toward expression of the truth, the only good which may satisfy the deepest yearnings of our human nature.<sup>22</sup>

## §

The need for *katharsis* by way of realist philosophy stretches beyond the Protagoras and Gorgias<sup>23</sup> of antiquity, through the medieval and modern periods and all the way to our own contemporary period. For beginning with Jean Roscelin (c.1050-112) and continuing through William of Ockham (c.1287—1349), the Latin age of philosophy contended with nominalist theories that made thought essentially unrelated to things. These early nominalisms would indirectly lay the ground of those that permeated modernity, which still undermine philosophy in the Western world today. Though it takes many forms—comprising not only that of Roscelin and Ockham, but the conceptualism of John of Salisbury (1115—1180) and all the best known philosophers of modernity, such as Descartes (1596—1650), Locke (1632—1704), Hume (1711—1776) and Kant (1724—1804), as well as many of the prominent philosophical thinkers and theories influential today—nominalism may be commonly defined as the denial that relations as such possess an ontological status independent of the mind, or, being effectively the same thing, if they do exist they cannot be known.

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<sup>21</sup> C.f., F.E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon*, 98-99. I have conferred with the Greek of Iamblichus in the case of the claims regarding the Pythagoreans, along with that of Plato in the *Phaedo* and *Sophist*.

<sup>22</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas also understood philosophy in terms of the realist expression of truth and *katharsis*, as we have set it out here. At 1259/65: *Summa Contra Gentiles* lib.1, c.1, n.4, thus, he notes that the twofold office of the wise man is “meditating to speak divine truth (*veritatem divinam*) [...] and to refute error that is contrary to the truth (*et errorem contra veritatem impugnare*)”.

<sup>23</sup> We do want to qualify that not all figures in the history of philosophy who have taken what we would consider an anti-realist stance are sophists in terms of principles or motivations.

We see this nominalism grown especially by William of Ockham, who held there to exist nothing other than individuals.<sup>24</sup> That is, the heart of his objection to the notion of universals is objecting to their possibility of holding existence; for Ockham conceived existence on the model of substantial being alone, *in esse*; i.e., being as in a substance—either *in se* (in itself, as a relatively-independent substance, such as this or that human individual) or *in alio* (in another, in a substance as an accident, such as the color of this or that human being’s hair). Anything universal in itself, or even anything general (if we may assume a distinction between universality and generality), could not be either a substance or an accident; for then it would be subsisting within an individual and therefore constrained to particularity and thus not predicable of others and not universal.<sup>25</sup>

In short, this entails that conceptual meaning apprehended by and in the mind cannot signify what is real and commonly possessed in particular beings in the world. On this view, for example, when we predicate ‘animal’ of a particular ox and a particular human, all that these particular things have in common (in terms of meaning) is the name, ‘animal’ (thus, ‘nominalism’), and it is not the case that we call them both ‘animal’ because they really each possess the identical ontological features pertaining to animality—organic, living, bodily, etc. It is little surprise, given the prevalence of nominalism among the thinkers of the Enlightenment, that social contracts became the norm for enforcing moral order: for, absent belief in real relations as governing cognition-independent reality, only convention can nominate an action as good or bad, right or wrong. The influence of this nominalist thinking on our morality can be seen still today, where morality and the political exist not in a continuum—as they did for Aristotle—but as separately divided into private and public spheres.

But while nominalism still shows itself today explicitly through undermining our moral and political realism, it begins always with errors concerning the knowability of the real itself. The nominalism of modernity, for instance, culminated in one of the more severe expressions of anti-realism and skeptical idealism (albeit, under the guise of empiricism) in the history of philosophy:

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Armand Maurer 1962: *Medieval Philosophy: An Introduction*, 277-81.

<sup>25</sup> The nonsense here, of course, is that if a sign is an individual thing—a sign being for Ockham the means whereby “universality” occurs, namely in that one individual thing, the sign, can signify many (cf. Maurer 1962: *Medieval Philosophy*, 280-81)—there is no explanation for the existential status of its connection to those things its signifies; that is, if a sign is not a relation, or does not entail a relation, how can it bring about a connection between the mind and its object? (Cf. Deely 2010: *Medieval Philosophy Redefined*, 326-27).

David Hume. Aware of the full consequences of nominalism<sup>26</sup> and Cartesian Dualism with respect to our ability to know things in the world, Hume notes that:<sup>27</sup>

The mind has never anything present to it but the [immanent] perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects. The supposition of such a connexion is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning.

Reducing human knowledge to the matter of fact customary conjunction of ideas in the mind (which he conflated with perceptions<sup>28</sup>), Hume denied the possibility of wisdom (*sophia*) about the world altogether. In the same vein, Fredrick Nietzsche (1844—1900)—a new instantiation of Gorgias—redefined truth as “the will to power”, which is to say one will’s domination of that of another.<sup>29</sup> Truth for Nietzsche, then, is not, as Aristotle and St. Thomas expressed it, an expression of the way things really are or are not; rather, it is merely an instrumental expression of power which gets one what one wants—control and domination of other. Richard Rorty (1931—2007) holds a similar view, renaming truth “anti-representationalism,” which “...does not view knowledge as a matter of getting reality right, but rather as a matter of acquiring habits of action for coping with reality.”<sup>30</sup> Dialogue, on this view, is not about the expression of what is truly good, it is eristic verbal combat aimed merely at a “consensus.”

Coincident sophistry can be found in the resurgent rise of scientism, not merely as the ephemeral positivism and verificationism popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but as an emergent cultural ethos among the increasingly-secularized West, exemplified in thinkers such as Sam Harris, who has proposed that advances in neuroscience—chief among other idioscopic scientific disciplines—will enable us to regulate morality.<sup>31</sup>

The implicit and unconscious nominalism behind the popularity of our current (and recent) sophists—found in adherents of contemporary nihilism and

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<sup>26</sup> For Hume’s nominalism, see 1748: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sec. XII, part 1, 244.

<sup>27</sup> 1748: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sec. XII, p. 114.

<sup>28</sup> 1748: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sec. II.

<sup>29</sup> 1886: *Jenseits von Gut und Böse: Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft* in the English translation by Helen Zimmern, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* c.1, sec.4.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Rorty 1990: *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, 1.

<sup>31</sup> 2010: *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*.

scientism alike, both beliefs alike often coinciding in the same individual—demands a rigorous, candid, insightful, and *kathartically*-exercised realist inquiry into the truth of what is. Within the pages of this volume, you will find just such an approach to realism.

## §

*Reality* proposes a unique structure for all its issues. Every article is accompanied by the review of a peer, not given in the form of hastily-written notes sent anonymously to an editor, but in a thoughtful composition: either a **comment**, a short discussion of the papers merits and demerits in scholarship and argumentation, or a **response**, which goes to greater lengths providing not only consideration of the original article, but the reviewer's own thinking as well.

In “The Logical Terms of Sense Realism: A Thomistic-Aristotelian & Phenomenological Defense”, Daniel C. Wagner presents critical exegesis of Aristotle's treatment of definition and subsequent defense of univocal predication. By drawing on the traditions of Thomism and Husserlian phenomenology, Wagner is able to show both the philosophical indefensibility of nominalism and the possibility of discovering the identity between individuals and what is given in universal definitions.

Commenting upon Wagner's article is James D. Capehart, in “The Philosophical Implications of Sense Realism”. Capehart's comment succinctly presents the key merits of Wagner's position and suggests further developments: namely, integrating the explicit doctrine of universals presented by Thomas Aquinas and demonstrating the relevance of true univocal predication for moral questions.

Brian Kemple provides an advocacy for “semiotic realism” in his “Signs and Reality”, which provides resolution to a lasting problem in the Thomistic tradition: namely, *how* it is that the cognitive means of knowing have a similitude to the objects known. Beyond resolving the immediate textual dispute, this semiotic realism—building upon the philosophy of John Deely, Charles Peirce, John Poinset, and Thomas Aquinas—is upheld also as the means to unraveling the tangled knots of “meaning” in our present day.

Responding to Kemple is Matthew Miner, who provides a series of complementary remarks in “The Analogy of *Res-ality*”. These remarks focus on the importance of the as-yet underdeveloped application of semiotics to *signa*

*practica* and provide a critical a clarified understanding of the operations of the intellect.

Following is Kirk Kanzelberger’s “Reality and the Meaning of Evil: On the Moral Causality of Signs”, an investigation of the nature of moral evil which builds upon the consequences of semiotics and the “reality” of beings of reason. Aided by a piece of dramatic fiction, a reflection on the nature of fiction itself, and profound insights into the semiotic traditions of Deely, Peirce, Poinset, and Aquinas, Kanzelberger demonstrates that what is meant by evil in the world of real human experience cannot be understood *simply* as privation.

Commenting upon Kanzelberger’s work is Michael Dodds, OP, in “Made of Flame and Air”, providing both original insight and commentary. Fr. Dodds’ contribution deftly weaves C.S. Lewis and Miguel de Cervantes into the narrative wrought by Kanzelberger, bringing further illumination to the complexities of evil’s reality.

Finally, Francisco E. Plaza provides us an article on “Political Science and Realism” which challenges both the brusque pragmatism of value-free materialism and the utopian-idealist subjectivism which dominate contemporary political thought. Instead, Plaza proposes, political science must seek the actual common good with a realist metaphysical foundation. This proposal is enlivened with the thinking of not only Aristotle, but Strauss, Voegelin, and Maritain.

Responding to Plaza is Brian Jones, whose “Classical Realism in a Democratic Context” furthers the challenge of modern politics, astutely pointing out how contemporary political science ignores the explanatory power of ideas in the reality of political life, and further that the *context* of modern politics as pervasive if unconsciously religious.

## §

These four articles and their four peer responses are far from an exhaustive presentation of the philosophy of realism: not only is there variation in the thinking of the authors and topics, but realism by its very nature—as discussed above—pertains to the whole of rightly-conducted philosophical inquiry. To *encapsulate* realism is not the intent of this issue.

Rather, this is a *primer* for realism: not one which endeavors simply to prove that realism is true, but moreover that realist philosophy holds answers to questions beyond the “*yes or no*” question of whether we know what is real. We do: and within these pages, the weighty philosophical impact of that truth will be felt.