The Analogy of Res-ality
Reflections in Response to Brian Kemple

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I have been asked to write a response to Dr. Brian Kemple’s essay, “Signs and Reality: An Advocation for Semiotic Realism.” What follows will be a kind of “rough and ready critical glance” over this worthy reflection by the final doctoral student of Dr. John Deely, a man for whom I have great personal affection. We are fortunate to have before us for discussion a work in semiotics by someone trained in detail in the scholastic tradition that was so central to Deely’s own work. If semiotics is not to risk becoming a philosophical mélange, it needs scholastic rigor like what we find in Kemple’s thought-provoking essay.

Indeed, when I say that my remarks are “critical,” this word is meant in the semi-classical sense espoused by latter-day Thomists: a reflective consideration of a body of knowledge, heeding above all the principles operative therein. Kemple and I share a great deal, both in vocabulary and in intellectual lineage. Therefore, this article will perhaps be somewhat “insider baseball” for those who are new to this domain of discussions. However, stick along for the ride, for I think that there is much good to come from heeding a bit of dialogue, especially when one’s dialogue partner makes an argument of such importance.

I. General Remarks

Although my plan below is to trace Kemple’s article, allow me several general remarks. Above all else, let us indeed take heed of this article’s summons to understand the truly transcendental scope of the transcendental notion res. This is a matter of great importance for the structure of metaphysics itself, enunciated quite well by Kemple:

We cannot, therefore, understand the full extent of what is signified by “reality” unless we understand the full significance of res—not only the substantial and not only the cognition-independent, but the relational and the cognition-dependent, as well; for relation is equiprimordial with substance in our experience of reality, and relation in and of itself as an intelligible res is indifferent to cognition-independence.

A kind of cyclopean philosophical outlook is indeed interested in the fact that all beings, in whatever predicament/category, are not only apt to exist (and hence, are quite appropriately called beings) but,

1 Correspondence to editors@realityjournal.org.

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2 One might refer to relevant works by Garrigou-Lagrange, Maritain, Maquart, Gredt, and Woodbury to get an overall context for my use of the term.
simultaneously have an essential constitution (and hence, are called things, res, with equal propriety). Yet, the realitas involved in being a res is of much broader scope, precisely because of the per se ity that exists in many domains, be they mind-independent or mind-dependent. Wherever there is per se ity, we have an essence. And wherever we have an essence, we have a being which exists according to its given mode of being, even if that being is “purely objective.” And where we have a being, we have a res. Reality is everywhere that being can be found, whatever sort of being that may be. (One need only think of the notion of moral objects and circumstances. This is merely an analogical case of the per se and the per accidens—analogical and, hence, quite different from the case of “natural essences,” yet not wholly so.)

Indeed, the scope of the notion res or aliquid (or, in Greek, ti) tempted certain thinkers, for example, certain Stoics, to hold that res is the highest “metaphysical” notion, not being. According to a materialistic worldview we could indeed say that there are many things that are not beings: time, space, the void, things spoken (lekta in contrast to the physical words), goatstags, and many other such things. If we might use the Baroque scholastic term ontology as a synonym for being-directed metaphysics, we could say that such thinkers looked to articulate a tinology, a thinghood-directed-metaphysics.⁵

Yet, for scholastics, the domain of cognition-dependent reality generally is a kind of terra non-considerata. To put it another way, it is non-being, given that “real being” for so many scholastics is ens naturae, being considered precisely as separate from the domain of knowledge, technical craft, and moral freedom. All of these “realities” are entia rationis or, to take a telling remark from Antoine Goudin, O.P. (1639-1695), umbra entis, the shadow of being. Here, we have the cyclopean tendency sadly followed by a man who was well aware of many of the issues at play (especially when it came to matters of ens morale). Scholastics too often treat “realism” as meaning “natural realism.” Without always seeing the implications of their position (and most certainly against their own intentions), their account of reality is quite cramped in comparison with the vistas of reality in which they actually live. I have written about this at length elsewhere, so I will spare the reader my meandering thoughts on this point. But the point remains: dear scholastics, you who are the heirs of the single most powerful conceptual apparatus for metaphysical speculation, there is more to reality than in your ens naturae!

This main principle is of such great importance: reality is more than the sum of res naturae. Today, while driving to pick up my wife from her office, I looked down the stretch of highway (which is itself placed near a mall). One is bombarded with so many realities which are cognition-dependent that it is almost impossible to see anything else. Yes, there are “signs,” that is, the foundational elements on the basis of which I then interpretively am aware of the surrounding businesses: “here is Pep Boys,” “here is Kentucky

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³ That is, wherever there is an essential distinction which can be contrasted to that which is accidental.

⁴ My sense is, of course, that of the late scholastic tenor familiar to the readers of Deely. See Deely’s excellent, late-career work John Deely 2009: Purely Objective Reality.


Fried Chicken,” “here is a Jeep dealership,” etc., etc. However, there are many other such signs as well, so very many practical signs, indicating to me actions taken by others or actions I perhaps should take: brake lights indicating that I should perhaps slow down; political bumper stickers which (hopefully) bolster my own communal participation in the political order through a kind of common sentiment; small dashes on the ground indicating the entire legal-rule structure for lane usage. Indeed, even the edge of the road, something made up of a particular (naturally accidental) configuration of various elements, itself has a cognition dependent meaning: don’t pass beyond this point if driving!

All of this is real. Just because it may be a res rationis, it is not a non-res. It is all a res.

Non-being, umbra entis—no! All of this reality is of such great importance. Without this insight, the world becomes dust in one’s hands, an uninhabitable domain in which we do not see the human in the midst of the merely natural to which we would thereby reduce all things. One is reminded of the nominalist position regarding the sacraments in Christian theology: these aren’t in any category; they are just heaps of things, words, actions, etc. But, the Thomists (and others too) said quite differently: they are signs; indeed, they are customary signs, entia rationis! And yet what a central place the sacraments play in Christian theology (at least in its Catholic and Orthodox forms)! Relation could be thought of as being the glue that binds together these disparate realities. They are many in ens naturae; they are one in ens ordinis sacramentalis.

The same can be said of all the reality that we concern ourselves with every day. There is a great deal of development needed here, and I mean only to sketch out some initial reflections. But let us take great heed that the domain of res includes many objects which themselves have an intrinsic constitution, an essence giving them a per se character. This is of great importance in many philosophical problems (not the least of which is the very reality of truth).

But, let us be clear again and indeed emphasize this great insight of Kemple by repeating his own words:

We cannot, therefore, understand the full extent of what is signified by “reality” unless we understand the full significance of res—not only the substantial and not only the cognition-independent, but the relational and the cognition-dependent, as well; for relation is equiprimordial with substance in our experience of reality, and relation in and of itself as an intelligible res is indifferent to cognition-independence.

In other words: let us take the analogical scope of res very seriously indeed!

Allow me to climb back onto my hobby horse for one moment. I encourage Dr. Kemple to reflect on the role of signa practica even more fully. There is such a fertile domain here that we must develop. Too often, the language coming from Deely speaks of the practical domain (and the culturally-constituted, action-oriented domain) without engaging more fully in this topic. This is odd, given that the issue of signa practica comes up in an essay that was dear to him: Maritain’s “Sign and Symbol.” We have much work to do here, and I suspect it was underdeveloped by scholastics because it seemed to be a fearful “subjectivist” domain. Yet, there are precious clues in their theology of the sacraments. Let us turn there, as well as to the Baroque discussions of political and legal realities / fictions. Let us not get lost in the topics of “cognitional metaphysics” (or, to take that phrase from the youthful Simon, “L’ontologie du connaître”) which defined much of the era that formed Deely’s own thought. We absolutely must not leave aside the topics which Kemple has so intelligently unpacked. But we also must push further on. Intellection is practical as well as speculative. The same can be said about signs as well. Semiotics alone can articulate the great and inventive domain wherein the human person takes up and manipulates the
relations among things and actions precisely because of the infinite amplitude of the intellect and quasi-creative power of the will. Finally, let me set aside the ramifications of all this for the levels of ontology below that of man.\textsuperscript{8} That is, however, a topic for another day. It is one of great importance, however, if we are to understand man in his incarnate condition.

2. Particular Remarks in Sequence

I will now turn to my particular remarks. Given limits of space, I will merely march through the text from start to finish, only noting the most important points in Kemple’s essay and reflecting on their significance.

First, in his introduction, Kemple summarizes well the issue facing the whole of the modern and contemporary outlook: “What is objectivity?” This issue is not always well formulated by the said outlook. Properly formulated, the question should be taken to mean: “What is the nature of the nexus of cognition-independent and cognition-dependent meaning involved the knower’s vital relationship with known realities?” This question is not merely a repetition of one more introductory philosophical problem familiar to all undergraduate majors in philosophy. Rather, it is a question that is highly technical: the question of objectivity as such, i.e., a particular way of being which is more intimate than the union of matter and form (for, as Cardinal Cajetan noted well, following Averroes, because it is the known, the knower is more intimately united to the known than matter is united to the form which it receives). Wherever there is objective reception, we find a whole new and unique way of being.

As a way of being lived by finite (indeed, materially-bound) beings, the order of objectivity for humans must itself be progressive in character. There is a kind of becoming in our knowledge, a becoming which is expressed in the conceptual elaboration whereby the confused becomes more distinct, the simple becomes the enunciated, and the enunciated enters into the framework of discursive bodies of knowledge whereby we slowly but surely build up the sciences, ever attenuating our articulations, gathering in the objective domain of knowledge, these partial views of reality which we slowly form from generation to generation. And this says nothing of the whole domain of culture wherein our practical objectivity exists: the domains of moral being and artistic being.

If we fail to see this as a problem, we miss a part of reality, as Kemple states so well in the closing remarks to his introduction. And as he remarks quite correctly too, semiotics, as presented by both Johns (Poinsot and Deely), attempts to articulate that without which objectivity would be impossible: signs.

As he opens the second section, Kemple signals the covert reductivism often afoot even in Thomists’ minds. The distinction between \textit{ens reale} and \textit{ens rationis}, a distinction that would better be articulated (as Kemple himself notes) as that of \textit{ens naturae} in contrast to \textit{ens rationis}, often turns aside the Thomist’s attention from the particular mode of being befalling the cognitional as such: objectivity. But, I’ve beaten this horse well up to this point and therefore will merely note my pleasure that this is a major structural point in Kemple’s essay.

Modernity is the intellectual domain of dualisms: matter and spirit (or mind), matter and ideas, the sensible vs. the intelligible, inorganic vs. organic, knowers vs. non-knowers, nature vs. culture, etc. However, through an articulation of the unique role played by relation in reality as such, it is much easier to see how these domains are not hermetically sealed off from each other. Indeed, because of its

\textsuperscript{8} Namely in the domains of biosemiotics, phytosemiotics, and physiosemiotics.

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particular “towardness,” relation remains indifferent to ens naturae and ens rationis. In either domain, it remains a relation. Moreover, through all the levels of reality, we find ourselves faced with the analogical interplay of extrinsic formal causality and signs, through which communication is indeed possible, structured in terms of multiform levels of act and potency, this latter being, in the end (as Deely saw well at the start of his career), the primary structural notion in metaphysics (and not, categoriality limited to so-called “ens reale”).

In Section 2.1, Kemple provides brief but important remarks on the little transcendental res, which I discussed above. The res-ality of relations, even when they are “relationes rationis,” gives a true density to the domain of the objective as objective. This topic deserves lengthier reflection, though I think primarily from a phenomenological perspective. Here Kemple understandably draws upon a few texts from Aquinas. However, more than a detailed textual study, my hope would be next to unpack the properly proportional structure of the transcendental res, enabling us to articulate the dependencies and distinctions between things in the domain of ens naturae and things in the various domains contained within ens “rationis.”

...we readily oppose “real things” to “mental things”, and often read Aquinas this way, as though his was the same opposition. In other words, I think there has been a tendency to read backwards into Aquinas our own contemporary presuppositions about “reality” and thus by extension into the meaning of the term res. This reading is illegitimate for two reasons: 1) first that this was never the meaning of the term res as Aquinas understood it, as we will see immediately below; and 2) second, to be addressed in the following section, the “reality” of an object consists not only in its independent existence, but also in its ability to affect what independently exists.

-Brian Kemple, “Signs and Reality” [READ ONLINE].

Let me note here again something I hinted at above in my own introductory remarks. It is precisely by articulating how there can be such “cognition-dependent things” that the articulation of truth is assured for domains such as morality (but in many other domains of culture too). (Let us note, though, that cognition-dependent beings are a mixture of things and objects precisely because they are cognition-dependent.) The “things” existing according to ens morale are not things in the sense of what exists according to ens naturae. They are not unrelated, of course, and only a kind of Kantian dualism would separate the moral from the “brute (Newtonian) physical.” However, much of the ink spilled among Thomists would be better applied if they saw that the very reality of moral notions is concerned with things that are only analogically the same as the things studied in purely speculative knowledge concerned with ens naturae.

For our purposes, this realization enables one to explain how there are things such as virtues (which are not merely psychological-subjective states but, rather, are objective formalities which measure human acts in ens morale) as well as art forms, political bodies, institutions, etc. In light of what has been written by Maritain, Deely, and Cahalan (though, remotely based on remarks found in Garrigou-Lagrange’s own Sens commun), truth involves the union of two objects in one and the same thing, that is, one reality
having its own stable, essential structure, though compositely considered in terms of various formalities which articulate its structure through the intellect’s second and third operations of judgment and reasoning respectively. However, much must be done to articulate this matter—reflections of grave importance but great difficulty too. Still, I wanted to note that this theme espied by Kemple, here concerning res rationis, shows that the tradition is open to such developments. Like Deely and his astute disciple, I feel that it is ever important that we forge forward by noting the continuity in our own tradition.

Among the comments made in section 2.2, I would like to draw attention to Kemple’s important observation that, “Among those causes, the most important for understanding the reality of relations and the meaning of res is the objective or specifying cause.” This is a topic of great importance; indeed, I would only like to push him to consider in even greater detail the importance of extrinsic formal causality as a whole. I suspect that his own engagement with Deely’s work will lead to some clarifications that will help slightly more hide-bound Thomists as myself articulate these points more carefully. The practical constituting of signs involves exemplar causality (which has important relations with our volitional capacities, something not always focused on by Thomists, out of fear of being called voluntarists). However, on the basis of such exemplarity, something takes on a new objectivity as well (or at least I suspect this is one way to speak of the matter). In any case, when it comes to the issue of what we call “specifying causes,” I would note that we need to be careful to distinguish objective specificative causality from signative causality, which is a kind of objective causality, though through the vicegerancy of signs.9

I think that the students of Deely would do a great service to Thomists if they would declare from on high the role of extrinsic formal causality in great detail. Too many cyclopean Thomists underrate the importance of this topic, which in fact, structures all of reality. Granted, Thomists piously note its role as regards the exemplar causality of the Divine Ideas, but the good metaphysician knows that such lofty analogates can only be expressed on the basis of our more down-to-earth knowledge of such causality, which sadly is underrated despite its ubiquity. We need a lengthy Tractatus de causalitate exemplaris, dealing at length (and with great phenomenological precision) with all of the analogates of all the various types of exemplar causality. Let the semioticians provide this for us!

And all of this is real causality—real, not in the reductionistic sense of ens realae but real in the sense that much of the warp and woof of being would not exist without this causality. As Kemple says, drawing on Aquinas: “what does not belong to an ens naturae may have a real effect on a cognitive agent.” We must push this point to the maximum in order to draw out all of the sap within it. This whole domain of relational effects is of such importance that we cannot articulate our experience of reality without articulating this point. The language of semiotics alone can do this—but only if this language robustly builds itself on the central insights of someone like Deely, who was so sensitive to the domain of relationes secundum esse.

To understand how this complexification of the real occurs, we need to understand the nature of the sign, for it is the uniquely-human experience with signs that makes

9 The point is discussed in thinkers like Woodbury and Maquart (on whose texts Woodbury bases his own). These texts are available through Deely’s bequest to St. Vincent and may provide some insights on what the best of the Thomist tradition said in articulating these matters concerning extrinsic formal causality.
possible all that complexity: not only the development of culture, but its perversion; not only the revelation of truth but the diffusion of falsehood.

-Brian Kemple, “Signs and Reality” [READ ONLINE].

As he closes his comments in section 2, Kemple uses an expression which I found striking: “the complexification of the real.” He then connects this immediately to the nature of relation (the great insight of the Thomist school, really, is here clearly seeing the ad esse at the heart of relation, making it quite distinct within the Aristotelian-Thomist metaphysics). And let us not forget, however, that such complexification of the real is involved throughout all of reality, and not merely in the relationship between “nature” and culture. For example, the very notion of “nutrition” is relational, for it is only because of the formal causality of vegetative life that something becomes nutrition for something else.

However, that being said, I would like to draw attention to section 3.2 (“Cultural signs: stipulation and culture”), a section which I would have liked to have been much longer, given its importance, at least in my opinion. One of Deely’s great strengths was the fact that he provided us with a general doctrine of signs. Indeed, without this general doctrine, we would be blind to the fact that semiotics is a question of being as being (and, hence, of reality as real), and not merely a question of human knowledge and “subjectivity” (in the modern sense of the word). However, that being said, the domain of semiotic reality most familiar to us is the domain of our own making, the one that we inherit culturally and ourselves actively bear into the future.

Given the poor grandeur of the human intellect, we only come to know more recondite realities on the basis of our knowledge of what is more familiar to us. Therefore, a robust doctrine of cultural signs is very important even for us to fully articulate a general theory of signs. Too often, Deely and his students seem to present these matters as something coming after the general doctrine of signs. This is akin to the general scholastic approach, which too often tries to present a doctrine in facto esse instead of presenting it, so to speak, in fieri. Yes, we need to be careful not to confuse the part (practical signs) for the whole (signs as such). However, our poor human knowledge requires this first becoming in order that such knowledge may, in fact, be. The ladder must be built up to our philosophical synthesis; it does not descend from the heavens already completed. (I recall Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange once stating that this was the great merit of Aristotle’s treatment of definition in the second book of the Posterior Analytics: in this text, we get to witness the great philosopher in the midst of discovering this very doctrine, on which he likely had meditated for decades during his days with Plato. It is, thus, far livelier than in the ready-made presentations of formal logic written by Aristotle’s very able Scholastic disciples.)

Our most proximate experiential basis of semiosis is found precisely in this domain of stipulation and culture. The task of the semiotician, I think, is to show the foundational realism implied by this very experience. Perhaps a fear lingers that a focus on culture will end in shipwreck upon the idealistic shoals of modernity (as well in a form of bondage to “post-modernist” semiotics which, which in fact is not post-modern but, instead, a kind of apotheosis of modern epistemological trends). In any case, I wish that we had much lengthier reflection, from the very start of semiotic discussions, on the phenomenon of stipulated signs. One must be careful not to get trapped here and lose the overall (and utterly general)
character of semiotic activity which structures all of reality. Nonetheless, this is the domain we know best, and that is where we must humbly begin.

A detailed conceptual articulation of these points, however, will require a great deal of expertise on the part of the semiotician who is looking to be careful. Above all, it will require much more attention to be paid to the question of *signa practica*. This is very difficult to do from within the scholastic tradition in which all followers of Deely (rightly) rejoice to live their intellectual lives—but it is only there that it can be done indeed. The scholastics of Poinsot’s day were quite taken up with this topic in the domain of the sacraments. Yes, we must also turn to the secular treatments of these topics where they can be found in those who were influenced by scholasticism, especially in the world of German scholasticism, at least from what I have uncovered in my own research up to this day. However, in order to be fully forearmed, we must master that very difficult space that is found in the discussions of the reality and causality of the sacraments. The followers of Deely would do well to consult, here, the text of Poinsot, which remains strikingly developed in comparison with many others of his era (though, the text that we have, solely in the Vivès edition, is less likely to be fully his own, from what I recall as I write these remarks). Moreover, the clearest articulation of the position taken by Poinsot can be found both in Maritain’s remarks in “Sign and Symbol,” as well as in the work of Fr. Emmanuel Doronzo, who is a faithful and well-informed articulator of the Thomist school, a man whose work should be better known than it is.

Though this is something that will require a great deal of work, I think it is a point of pressing importance, one that I wish more of the followers of Deely would emphasize. John himself seemed to miss this point, alas, because of the methodological limitations he placed upon himself (something that his wife, Brooke, has made abundantly clear to me on this particular topic). I think that the treatment of the semiotics of practical intellection could change the face of Thomism, if only it is done right. I want to encourage Kemple, who is well armed for this fight, to play his role in this conquest.

As I quickly move to my conclusion, I would merely like to focus on some things in section 4.2 which are of great importance. It has been my experience that many Thomists who are vaguely aware of Deely’s work in semiotics do not understand the importance of what he says regarding the *species expressa intellecta* (or “internal word,” concept, or whatever other term one wishes to use). Thomists are rightly jeered when they come off as treating intellection as a kind of “spotlight” (or, alas, x-ray) aimed by the agent intellect at potential intelligibilities actualized by intellection. They do not reflect on how this beam works! (I have heard this critique registered even by thinkers who are disposed positively toward Thomism.) Kemple’s reflections on this topic are quite important, and the reader should pay heed to them.

That is, every concept is formed through the operations of composition and division, with the sole exception of the primordial concept of *ens*: the realization of the irreducibility of objects to their precise objectivization, the “something more” of the object which unveils its being as a cognition-independent intelligible thing. This initial realization is the very light of intelligibility: the *illuminare* of the *intellectus agens*

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10 I would add, too, it is important to consider the debates over so-called intentional causality proposed by Fr. Cardinal Louis Billot, S.J.
whereby all other objects are realizable as having a being beyond their referentially-meaningful constitution as related to the self.

-Brian Kemple, “Signs and Reality” [READ ONLINE].

However, let me issue what I think are worthwhile scholastic words of warning. Kemple is correct that “composition and division” and discursivity play roles in all of our knowing. However, in stricter sense, composition and division are involved in the second operation of the intellect, which forms its own kind of expressed species in the form of a nexus of subject and predicate. Likewise, discursive knowledge is the purview of the third operation of the intellect, which also produces an expressed species, one that is still an enunciation or judgment, though modified because of the mediate knowledge involved in the third operation of the intellect. In the intellect’s first operation, a definition is not so much a kind of “composition” as it is a concentrating act whereby the specific differences—often drawn from common and proper accidents as we seek after essential definitions, to the degree that these are even attainable—help to focus our basic knowledge into more distinct articulations.

This is a point of no small importance for understanding the nature of intellectual activity and the way that the human mind slowly progresses from the known to the (heretofore) unknown. Indeed, too often, in my opinion, when Aristotelians and Thomists speak about such progress from the known to the (heretofore) unknown, the discussion at hand is unduly restricted to the intellect’s third operation—the domain of discursivity properly so called. No doubt, this is based on the fact that Aristotle himself addresses this problem, born of Plato’s Meno, in the Posterior Analytics, the portion of the Organon devoted to the discursivity of the intellect in constituting science. Yet, even in the Posterior Analytics, we have a profound witness to the activity of the intellect in a non-discursive domain of pivotal importance: the work of defining middle terms, on which scientific demonstration hinges for all of its strength. Without properly defined middle terms, one’s objectively inferential drawing of conclusions will be of little use. Indeed, the very abstraction of the sciences (and, hence, their distinction) depends upon the mode of defining.11

11 On objectively inferential syllogistic inference—which is not the only sort of inference that one can draw—see the lengthy explanatory not in Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange 1934: The Sense of Mystery, 28-9n41-42.

12 See Poinsot 1632: The Material Logic of John of St. Thomas [Cursus philosophicus, ars logica, pt. 2], q. 27, a. 1 (p. 558-559): “But, if immateriality is the root of intelligibility, and if, consequently, diverse immateriality is the root of diverse intelligibility, it plainly follows that the root and principle of diverse scientific knowability is diverse immateriality and abstraction, considered not absolutely and apart from all complexity, but in its movement from premises to conclusions. In sciences, the premises and the instruments of proof are the first principles and their definitions, for it is by the first principles and the definitions that the properties are demonstrated of the subject. These definitions and principles are diverse insofar as they use diverse ways of defining or explaining quiddities; this is the same as to involve diverse kinds of immateriality. Indeed, if what renders a thing intelligible is immateriality, and if diverse ways of understanding are caused by diversity in immateriality, and if diverse ways of understanding are caused by diversity in immateriality, diverse immateriality causes also diversity in understanding the quiddity, in other words, diversity in defining. Thus, diversity in the way of defining or understanding the quiddity is the same as diverse immateriality. But where there is diversity in the way of defining, there is also, consequently, diversity in the way of demonstrating, since the principles by which demonstration is effected in the sciences are definitions.” The whole article bears reading.
The first operation of the human intellect is of great importance. Here, in the search for definitions, we have a true operation of vouç (“direct intellectual insight”) pushing onward as the intellect seeks to define the terms that it uses. Beginning with the dim light of a confused and vague concept, we have a true task before us: the expression of one and the same concept, though through genus and specific difference, by which we express the same notion more clearly and distinctly. The product of the first operation of the intellect is an intellectual word by which we express to ourselves this defined “insight” into the reality in question. Certainly, a great deal of reasoning is needed to tease out the various accidents, properties, genera, and species involved. Indeed, to this end, I suspect all of us who hold Aristotle dear would gain much by reflecting at much greater length on the Topics, which provides us a kind of organized guide for such a search for the various “predicables” involved in a definition. Yet such reasoning merely opens the door to the basic insights which themselves are not proven. I have not said everything necessary here, but these remarks suffice for laying out the basic point about the first operation of the intellect.

13 And, this holds, in my opinion, for the case of analogy. The Thomist school’s position concerning the analogy of proper proportionality, especially as explained by John of St. Thomas and Yves Simon seems to be pregnant with implications regarding the interactions of the various acts of the intellect. The so-called imperfect abstraction (by which a given analogous notion is only quasi-abstracted from its analogates) indicates a kind of vital concourse between the three operations of the intellect. Thus, there is a quasi-definition of properly proportional analogous terms as well—though, such quasi-definitions are not by way of genus and species but, rather, by way of order among their analogates. Read in light of certain comments in the article by Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange cited in the next note, I believe that Yves Simon’s work on this topic can be developed in this direction to great benefit. Once more, this great domain of intellectual activity bears witness to what Kemple acknowledges in his article. See Yves Simon 1970: “On Order in Analogical Sets,” 135–71. Great illumination here could be drawn from reflections offered by Deely, who importantly notes the role of language in the process of analogy. The presupposed analogical noetic and linguistic elements interweave in important ways. See John N. Deely 2002: “The Absence of Analogy,” The Review of Metaphysics 55.3: 521–50. In particular, see his summary remarks on p. 548: “Analogy is but secondarily a class of terms within language. Primarily and essentially, analogy is rather a process within language, the process whereby two terms come to be understood through the meaning of a common third, and so a part of the larger process whereby language is a living reality, wherein, by a variety of often unexpected, simple chance events, the meaning of one linguistic element enters into and modifies the meaning of another previously unrelated term.” While there is a sense of “real” analogy among beings in a mind-independent fashion (without which our knowledge would be unfounded), we should always remember that analogical unity is first of all something contrasted to other kinds of unity in the domain of knowledge and language. Analogicity is a second intentional relationship. Yet, that is a topic for a much broader and more nuanced discussion!

14 See ibid., 23n31: “It is understanding, vouç, that progressively passes from the first vague [confuse] intellectual apprehension (before any judgement or reasoning) to distinct intellectual apprehension. To accomplish this, it uses as its instruments (in a sense inferior to it) ascending comparative induction and descending division. However, these are only instruments for it, and the real definition attained by this process exceeds these instruments.” Moreover, see Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange 1935: “De Investigatione definitionum secundum Aristotelem et S. Thomam. Ex posteriorium Analyt. L. II, C. 12-14; L. 13-19 Commentarii S. Thomae,” Acta Pont. Academiae Romanae S. Thomae Aq. et Religionis Catholicae 2: 193-201. This essay will be included in a volume to be published by Cluny Media in December 2019. For interesting parallels in the domain of a kind of Aristotelianized phenomenology, see Sokolowski 1992: “Making Distinctions,” in Pictures, Quotations, and Distinctions: Fourteen Essays in Phenomenology: 55–91.


16 Although, yes, one definition can be proven by another, as when an essential definition is proven through a definition drawn from final causality. Not everything can be discussed here, though, in a review, so I ask the reader to mercifully consider the limitations of the genre.

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There is a different sort of intellectual word formed by the intellect’s second operation. This operation involves the interconnecting of two notions into a complex nexus, an enunciable statement, on which a judgment is rendered. A statement presupposes its terms: “Virtues are habitus” is not the same thing as “Virtue: an elicitive habitus.” The latter merely defines, the former combines the two in a new kind of relation. This is why there are new logical second intentions involved in the second operation of the intellect. Think of the square of opposition from introductory logic courses. All of these relationships among statements are various relationes rationis belonging the domain of the second operation of the intellect.

Our language itself indicates the direction that our intellect is inclined, however, as it seeks to reach its perfection. By a bit of terminological sloppiness, we tend to refer to statements as “propositions.” However, propositions precisely as such belong only to the domain of syllogistic reasoning. By entering into chains of reasoning, statements become propositions, the causes of our drawing of conclusions, and in these conclusions, we have a new sort of knowledge. In the light of the major premise, “Virtues are habitus,” and the minor premise, “Habitus are enduring states of character,” we draw the (bland but true) conclusion, “Virtues are enduring states of character.” The conclusion is known mediately, for it is only known through the discursus of reason. This is why John of St. Thomas held that the third operation of the intellect produces an altered kind of derivative product that is akin to what is produced by the second operation of the intellect. (It does not, note well, produce a wholly new kind of verbum, however.)

Much more could be said about this third operation of the intellect. Here we have the whole domain of rhetorical, “poetical,” non-demonstrative (“topical”), and demonstrative reasoning. Indeed, the final domain of reasoning is itself sub-differentiated into that which is science and that which is wisdom, and as I argue elsewhere, the latter two ought not to be generically collapsed into each other. However, what I have said suffices for making quite clear that the activity of intellection is great! Imagine, likewise, then, what must be added when we consider that practical intellection involves the entire domain of imperative discourse as well—an imperative discourse that involves appetite!

I should add, in passing, that this entire presupposed noetic shows that there cannot be a simplistic meeting of contemporary logic with traditional, Aristotelian logic. The presupposed ontology and

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18 On the earlier history of this point, see de Muralt 1991: “La doctrine médiévale de l’esprit objectivum” in L’enjeu de la philosophie médiévale: études thomistiques, scotistes, occamiennes: 90-167 (esp. 127ff). Also see the next note.

19 For John of St. Thomas’s own position, see Cursus philosophicus thomisticus, ed. Beatus Reiser, vol. 3 (Naturalis philosophiae, vol. 2), q. 11, a. 3 (esp. 372A7—373B17). He concludes: “And thus, I concede that the third operation has a distinct verbum since it is a distinct operation. However, it is modally, not really, distinct from what is represented in its own propositions. But, when one proceeds from a simple apprehension to a composite manifestation, a distinct object shines forth in the quiddity or truth to be manifested. And thus, discourse according to causality (i.e., according to illation) presupposes discourse according to succession (i.e., according to many succeeding propositions), as St. Thomas says in ST I, q. 14, a. 7. However, it does not make one [concept / verbum] out of many propositions” (my translation, italics added)

20 This is the subject of a lengthy study entitled “Wisdom be Attentive: The Noetic Structure of Sapiential Knowledge” to appear in Nova et VETERA. For an insightful study noting the distinction between the notion of science and wisdom, see Muñiz 1958: The Work of Theology.
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phenomenology of mental acts is quite different, and any attempt to dress up Aristotelian logic in contemporary, nominalistic garb will in fact bring about a substantial change in the Aristotelian schema. Alas, such a meeting of systems will take much more work than many realize, perhaps above all, those who style themselves Analytic Thomists. But progress forward cannot be made by merely ignoring the significant presuppositions of the Aristotelian position itself. There is much to be learned from the Baroque logicians in this regard, but such a task is quite daunting. One understands why Maritain abandoned his attempt to write a contemporary material logic.

In a certain regard, the referential context of our worldly experience is such that it includes intelligible meanings as objects for it. It is not that we escape our specifically human frame of reference—that we attain something like a God’s eye view of so-called “objective” reality—but rather that our frame of reference is inherently dynamic; that we do not need to transcend the self because the constitution of the self—as a cognitive agent semiotically united to the world—is through a dynamic relation to the world.

But this world is not merely the world of physical things, res naturae. It receives its constitution also in part from the cognitive actions of human beings. Our reality is not only the things we can touch and see and hear, but also the titles and offices and traditions elaborated between us all in the pattern of relations we call culture. Our ability to use signs, semiosis, in its specifically-human capacity as aware of that ability, as semiotic animals, results in the possibility of an ever-expanding objective constitution of our lives’ experience.

-Brian Kemple, “Signs and Reality” [READ ONLINE].

Now, having said all of this, Kemple’s thematic point is of great importance. Human knowledge is achieved through a lengthy (and, technically, unending) process of articulation, improvement, and interrelating of concepts. (Indeed, it is shot through with this as a kind of historicity which at once freights and enables it qua human.) Kemple is right to tease out this point. I hope to see much more from him in the future on this important topic. However, I believe that such reflections must be undertaken in continuity with the later Thomist school’s treatment of these matters. Great strides can be made in this regard, once more showing that the semiotic outlook can incorporate the truths of the past while striding forward confidently.

Finally, I want to put a “plug” in here, also, for the topic dear to Deely’s students and noted by Kemple, namely, the way that such expression is also involved in the estimative sense / cogitative power. From the perspective of psychology, this is very important, and we could add the same regarding memory and even the non-active imagination. (Sometimes, at least among Arab Aristotelians if I recall correctly, the


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estimative sense was referred to as the active imagination.) However, I have no further thematic point to make in this regard for our purposes in this review article.

3. Conclusion
Temporal constraints prevent me from going on at greater length concerning this excellent article. Kemple has provided us with a worthy advocation for a semiotic form of realism. We can only hope that he and others will continue to develop these themes at greater length. If at times I have expressed my frustrations with “Thomists,” this is only because I share similar frustrations to those felt by John Deely: they do not embrace the full vitality of their patrimony. Everything that the modern person has desired to articulate regarding the true grandeur of the human person—a finite grandeur, no doubt, indeed one which ultimately will not find fulfillment except by receiving it from an order that is higher than nature—can be articulated by the vocabulary of the Thomist school, if only its adherents listen, however, to its members who advocate on behalf of the “way of signs.”
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