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Signs and Reality

An Advocation for Semiotic Realism¹

Brian Kemple, PhD
Continuum Philosophical Insight
Executive Editor, REALITY

The world today has a “meaning” problem. That is: while the attainment of “meaning” poses a perennial difficulty common to every human life in every human age, our lives in this age have a problem with attaining meaning—indeed, a twofold problem. First, the problem being that we do not know, precisely, to what the term “meaning” refers; and second, the problem being that even if we recognize one aspect or more of the term’s referent, we do not

¹ Correspondence to kemple@realityjournal.org.

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Note that this article presupposes some knowledge: namely, a Thomistic account of the human person, as a body-soul composite with faculties of sensation (*sensus exteriores*), faculties of perception (*sensus interiores*), and faculties of intellection (*intellectus agens et possibilis*), as well as appetitive faculties following both perceptual and intellectual cognition.

understand how it can be resolved into a coherent whole, for we lack the requisite principles.

Among the obstacles preventing both the attainment of the meaning of “meaning” and its coherent resolution are myriad misunderstandings of what it means to say that we “know reality”; misunderstandings which not only fall short but miss the mark entirely. More must be done in order to explain both how realism is possible and just what falls into the reality which realism is said to make known.

At the heart of the struggle for realism is the question of to what extent and in what regard the cognitive means of knowing are the same as the object known. This question is especially central to the Thomistic tradition, for Thomas often refers to the *species intelligibilis* as a *similitudo* of the object known. Various misinterpretations and muddy explanations of this reference have hindered an understanding of how the human intellect knows its object.

To resolve this Thomistic problem and the problems of meaning, we propose a **semiotic realism**, a realism that structures its doctrines in accord with the nature of signs and that accordingly understands the *species intelligibilis* as fragmentary, incomplete, and in need of continual deliberate interpretational refinement in order that we attain a better grasp on the truth of the real.

I. Introduction

The world today has a “meaning” problem. That is: while the attainment of “meaning” poses a perennial difficulty shared by every human life in every human age, *our* lives in *this* age have a *problem* with attaining meaning—indeed, a twofold problem.² The first aspect of this problem is that we do not precisely know to what the term “meaning” refers. This confusion stems—in a lengthy and convoluted history that we cannot here discuss—from a commonly adopted and implicitly nominalistic perspective that identifies “meaning” with a **referential** construct.³ In other words and put succinctly, “meaning” is said

² All problems are difficulties but not all difficulties are problems: that is, a problem is a difficulty that has a solution, a way of being resolved such that it is *fixed*. All mathematical problems, for instance, have (at least) one solution which works always in all cases. But some difficulties, do not necessarily have a determinate solution: such as maintaining a relationship (which may have problems in need of solutions, but which solutions do not maintain the relationship, only prevent its dissipation), being virtuous, or discovering meaning.

³ Cf. John Deely 2001: *Four Ages of Understanding*, 487-607 for the history of modern philosophy, the root from which the current problem springs; though to fully understand

either as pertaining to someone's personal interests ("I always feel safe here; this house means 'safety' to me...") or to the conventional definition as one might find in a dictionary ("The meaning of 'charisma' according to Merriam-Webster..."). The realist objection to this reduction of meaning to referential contexts—namely, that "meaning" belongs first and foremost to *things*, to the realities as they have a cognition-independent existence not circumscribed by referential contexts and thus that prior to referential meaning stands **intelligible** meaning—today requires a clearer articulation.

This need follows, for the second aspect of our problem with meaning is that, even if we recognize this multimodality of the word "meaning", we do not understand how the various modes can be resolved into a coherent whole, as we lack the requisite principles. Can one and the same object—meaning, an intelligibility precisely as it is in relation to a cognitive power⁴—have a cognition-independent intelligible meaning *and* a cognition-dependent⁵ referentially-contextual meaning? Do these two senses of meaning conflict with one another, or limit one another? Can the intelligible really be accessed without carrying along the referential—that is, can we really escape the limitations of our own referential context?

Moreover, implicit in both "intelligible" and "referential" uses of "meaning" is a third sense: the sense of importance, or the **teleological** meaning—that is, "This is meaningful to me because..."—the kind of meaning we generally associate with fulfillment or attainment of purpose. While the realist, particularly if reared in the tradition of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, has at least an implicit understanding of the causal, hierarchical relations between these senses of meaning, the unconsciously nominalist world at large is at a loss, and the semi-conscious nominalist belief of many in the academy has taken all three senses of

the constriction of meaning to reference, one would have to examine in greater depth the 20th century nominalisms and relativisms.

⁴ See John Deely 2009: *Purely Objective Reality*, 8-15 for an explanation of the terms "object" and "objective". In short, their meaning in the conventional contemporary vernacular is precisely opposite that which they held at their inception; and the concept they signify has no other single-term signifier in present-day English.

⁵ I use these two terms—that is, cognition-dependent and cognition-independent—as translations of the Latin *ens rationis* and *ens naturae* or *res rationis* and *res naturae*. This is **not** to suggest an ontological priority of cognitive action, but only a categorization of how we experience objects insofar as we are cognitive agents.

“meaning” to be circumscribed by the referential, such that there is no “intelligible in itself” but only “intelligible as referred to this or that mind”.⁶

Thus, chief among all the obstacles preventing both the attainment of the meaning of “meaning” and its coherent resolution are the myriad misunderstandings of what it means to say that we “know reality”; some misunderstandings only falling short,⁷ while others miss the mark entirely, leaving us with vague and unresolved concepts of “reality”.⁸ More must be done in order to explain both how realism is possible—that is, how the intelligible sense of meaning is not only something which we may attain, but which is

⁶ Cf. Jesper Hoffmeyer 2010: “God and the world of signs” in *Zygon* 45.2, 386-87; Niklas Luhmann 1997: *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, 18; Jacques Derrida 1967: *Of Grammatology*, 4. Calvin Schrag 1986: *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity*, 57.

⁷ Gilson falls short, for instance, in holding (1965: *Le Thomisme*, 268) that human concept-formation is “naturally unerring” and that the “intellect conceives essences as hearing perceives sounds and sight colors”. This error stems from mistakenly thinking that the sensed object contributes the whole of our conceptual content (1939: *Thomist Realism*, 183: “nothing is in the understanding unless it has first been in the senses”), rather than that all our knowledge *begins* from sensation (Aquinas i.1259/65: *SCG*, lib.2, c.37, n.2 “omnis nostra cognitio a sensu *incipit*”, emphasis added); see Kemple 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum* 104-10 for more. Conversely, someone like Karl Popper entirely misses the mark, as holding that (1934: *Logik der Forschung*, 8): “there is no such thing as a logical method of having new ideas, or a logical reconstruction of this process. My view may be expressed by saying that every discover contains ‘an irrational element’, or a ‘creative intuition’, in Bergson’s sense.”

I will not address any variety of so-called “analytic” arguments against realism, such as the model-theoretic argument advanced by Hilary Putnam (1977: “Realism and Reason”, 1981: *Reason, Truth and History*, etc.), for the reason that they are—generally speaking, though there may be exceptions—fundamentally flawed in holding the correspondences between thought and the world as between properly-composed representational or informational psychological or logical quanta and their correlates “outside the mind” (also found in, e.g., Jürgen Habermas 1981: *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, 9: “A judgment can be objective if it is undertaken on the basis of a transsubjective validity claim that has the same meaning for observers and nonparticipants as it has for the acting subject himself.”). At best, a quasi-problem and at worst, an absurdity, it is resolved either way by considering the *relational* and *semiotic* nature (rather than representational) of cognitive action.

⁸ Resolution is inherently twofold: for there is a resolution to what is more primordial in the order of cognition, to the *per se nota quoad nos* and to what is more primordial in the order of existence, to the *per se nota quoad se*.

primary for us as human beings—and just what falls into the reality which realism is said to make known.

At the heart of the struggle for realism is the question of *to what extent* and *in what regard* the **cognitive means of knowing** are *the same* as the **object known**. In other words, if the starting point for realism is Aristotle’s assertion that “the soul is in *some way* all things”, then we need to develop an understanding not only of the “all things” but also of the “some way”. This question concerning the nature of our knowledge is especially central to the Thomistic tradition, for Thomas often refers to the *species intelligibilis* or the “intelligible specification” whereby we know (the *quo*) as a *similitudo* of the object known (the *quod*).⁹ In other words, the intellect naturally is all things *in potency*, but is any of them *in act* only by the reception of some specifying or presentative form. Some have taken this claim to indicate that the intellect knows the intelligible species directly and thereby knows the object only indirectly, as what is “reflected” in the intelligible species; such that we know a thing outside the mind by knowing its similitudo inside the mind.¹⁰ Others have taken the *similitudo* to signify that the received species (or *species impressa*) forms the functional whole of the expressed species (*species expressa*), and so the reality of knowledge has a consistent and complete intelligibility from object sensed, to object perceived, to object understood; in other words, that the intention of the knower towards the known by means of a concept entails no interpretational input from the knower, but is instead an immediate sign of the object.¹¹ Both views are poorly

⁹ E.g., i.1259/65: SCG, lib.1, c.53, n.2; 1266-68: ST Ia, q.79, a.6, c.; q.84, a.3, c; a.4, c; q.85, a.1, ad.4; a.2, c; ad.1, ad.2; and in many other texts. The phantasm is referred to as a *similitudo rei particulars* (1266-68: ST Ia, q.84, a.7, ad.2; q.85, a.1, ad.3, etc.).

¹⁰ Cf. Robert Sokolowski 2008: *Phenomenology of the Human Person*, 294-96. Or see the frequent language of *representation* being used in, e.g., Fernand van Steenberg 1947: *Epistemologie*, 130-38. See Gilson 1939: *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge* for more on the problem.

¹¹ Worse than Gilson’s error above—Gilson admitting the reality of the *species expressa* albeit with such caveats as to misconstrue badly its nature—is that interpretation denying there is any such thing as a *species expressa*, perhaps because such a term is not found explicitly in the text of Aquinas, or that the *verbum mentis* (easily grasped by any perspicacious interpreter as a synonym for the *species expressa*) is in no way distinct from the intellect’s act of understanding itself (see O’Callaghan 2010: “Concepts, Mirrors, and Signification: Response to Deely”, *ACPQ* 84.1: 133-62). Against this, read Deely’s original review (2008: “How to Go Nowhere with Language: Remarks on John

supported by the texts of Thomas himself.¹² More poignantly, they are incompatible with what reflection upon experience unveils for us: namely, that the means of our knowledge are fragmentary, incomplete, and in need of continual deliberate interpretational refinement in order that we attain a better grasp on the truth of the real.

By drawing on Aquinas, John Poinsett, and John Deely, we might grab the tools needed to engage in such a reflection upon our experience—namely, upon the process of forming and collating percepts, and from those percepts, forming and elaborating our concepts. The result of this process, the direction of the knower back to the known, is the accomplishment of a semiotic relation: by a sign-vehicle (either a percept or a concept, or in any actual case of a concept, both a concept *and* a percept), our minds are directed back towards the object that is made known. The nature of our knowledge follows from the nature of the relations whereby it is possessed; so too, therefore, our access to reality. Since these relations are constituted by signs, I propose a **semiotic realism**: a realism that structures its doctrines in accordance with the nature of signs.¹³

Signs, it must be noted, are never perfect signifiers of their objects signified. In other words, a sign-vehicle¹⁴ never presents the full reality of the object, partly due to its own nature as a mediator and partly due to the limitations of whatever the sign-vehicle effects.¹⁵ Moreover, because *cognitive* signs, percepts and

O'Callaghan, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn*, *ACPQ* 82.2: 337-59) and his response to the response (2012: "Analytic Philosophy and the Doctrine of Signs: Semiotics or Semantics: What Difference Does It Make?", *TAJS* 28.3-4: 325-63) to get a fuller understanding of the error.

¹² Cf. Maritain 1959: *Degrees of Knowledge*, 119-21, 393-96 (especially 393n2).

¹³ As Deely writes in 2012: "Analytic Philosophy and the Doctrine of Signs", 348: "Scholastic realism' is, indeed, as Peirce said, essential to but not sufficient to constitute semiotics on its proper terms as a perspective that already transcends the modern oppositions of realism to idealism, and of language to all other systems of signification." The realism we need to truly move beyond modernity is not simply a recovery of the scholasticism of Aquinas and his school (nor of Bonaventure, Scotus, or any other scholastic of merit), but rather to recover the truth found in that realism and go beyond it.

¹⁴ See below, n.39.

¹⁵ Peirce indicated this disparity (1906/7: "Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmatism", *CP*.4.536) between the sign-vehicle's signifying and the object by a twofold consideration of the latter: that is, of the *immediate object* and the *dynamic object*, the first being the

concepts, are both expressed forms whereby the mind is actually directed back towards the object through mental operations of collation and elaboration, the **terminal object** (the object as known) may include meanings not found directly in the **stimulative object**¹⁶ (the object as effecting the knower): and these meanings present in the terminal object may or may not be fitting to the stimulative object. In other words, they may enhance *or* impede our knowledge; these “added meanings” may give us a better understanding of the thing than derived from the thing itself, or they may mislead us into believing falsehoods about the thing.

This semiotic realism does not result in a *narrowed* access to the real, nor does it simply mask the real with fabricated objects of interpretation, but rather opens the door to understanding how it is that we truly access the real at all, including but not limited to the realities of *ens naturae*—as well as the ways in which we *fail* to access the real.

2. The Nature of Reality

To say the word “real” in any pre-philosophical context is to suggest the corporeal: what has weight, substance, and an existence independent of opinion. This suggestion is the provenance both of a “common sense” preference derived from our own corporeal nature and of the common reception of the empiricist tradition. That is: both our own experience and our largely unconscious intellectual heritage suggest to us a primacy of things that we can touch, feel, heft, push against, see, hear, smell, and taste. The table is more real to us than the idea of the table, and the person whose hand we hold

object in the precise manner the sign-vehicle relates it, and the second the object as more than presented in that specific sign relation. For instance, if I write “John Deely’s *Four Ages of Understanding* is a history of philosophy”, the predicate “history of philosophy” specifies an immediate object to you, the reader; but beyond that particular specification, others can yet be made, as the dynamic object is not exhausted. I can add, “It is focused on semiotics and how the sign has been treated throughout history”, or “It claims the essential difference between the third and the fourth ages is the recovery of *signum*”, and so on; I could go on about this or that physical copy (“The spine has taken a beating”) or about the pattern of words as a whole which constitutes any copy (“It is quite long and will generally run over 1000 pages”), nearly *ad infinitum*.

¹⁶ This phrase, “stimulative object”, is a translation of the ubiquitously-used phrase in both Aquinas and Poincot, *obiectum movens*.

more real than the one about whom we only read. We may question whether insults slung our way should really hurt, but there is little doubt that rocks slung by our enemies may do real harm. There is a fitting and easily grasped proportion between ourselves, as embodied knowers, and material things, as bodily-knowns.¹⁷

We thus slide unconsciously into a materialism that excludes much of *what is* from the conceptual objectivization of “the real”. No doubt, some blame may be placed upon René Descartes, for it was in reaction to his *dubium sensorium* that Locke and others identified the real with the sensible—while unquestioningly accepting the idealism that was the real danger of the Cartesian revolution—but blame belongs to all who have let continue this narrowing of “reality”.

Even Thomistic authors lapse into a linguistic division between the extramental real, expressed in terms that suggest a primacy of the corporeal, and the mentally fictitious or unreal.¹⁸ This division effaces the essential continuity between the sensible and intelligible real by diminishing the role of relation in the constitution of reality. In other words, if we unconsciously take to speaking in terminology suggesting that reality resides in the corporeal, materialists and nominalists¹⁹ alike gain an insurmountable advantage—an often-unconscious

¹⁷ Gilson i.1931-32: *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, 249: “There is... a natural relation, an essential proportion, between the human intellect and the nature of material things”.

¹⁸ It is unclear, for instance, when the term *ens reale* came into use; it is found in Duns Scotus (e.g., i.1298-1300: *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis, Libri VI-IX*, lib.7, q.13, 64 [10], p.240); the unknown author of the *Summa totius Logicae Aristotelis*; Godfrey of Fontaines (see John Wippel 1981: *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines*, 85n123); Thomas Cajetan (c.1493/95: *In de ente et essentia*, 24-25/66-68); William of Ockham (see Armand Maurer 1999: *The Philosophy of William of Ockham*, 75n184); and countless other scholastic authors.

But it is also found among many modern Thomists. See for example Josephus Greth 1899: *Elementa Philosophiae Aristotelico-Thomisticae*; Peter Coffey 1914: *Ontology, or the Theory of Being*, 42-43; 1917: *Epistemology, or the Theory of Knowledge*: 121; Fernand van Steenberg, 1947: *Epistemologie, in passim*; 1952: *Ontologie*, 24; George Klubertanz 1955: *Introduction to the Philosophy of Being*, 190-92; Joseph Owens 1963: *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 38-39; ubiquitously in Deely, and so on.

¹⁹ Though many definitions of nominalism have been proposed throughout the centuries, perhaps the one which best comprises all its many manifestations is this: the denial that relations as such possess an ontological status independently of the mind, or,

adoption of their preferred framework not only linguistically, but also conceptually—in every discussion.²⁰

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*!

Minerd, “The Analogy of Res-ality” [p.126].

being effectively the same thing, if they do exist they cannot be known. Cf. Poinset 1632: *Tractatus de Signis*, 80/12-20.

²⁰ In his 1935 *Methodical Realism*, Gilson notes that idealism lays out a problem that is (p.21) “posed in terms which, of necessity, imply idealism itself as a solution.” Attempting to muster a challenge to idealism on its own terms already commits one to failure. With similar self-awareness, we must both free ourselves from terminology which implies materialism as the answer and further prevent ourselves from again lapsing into it.

2.I. *Res* as a transcendental

To restore what this division effaces and open wider the doors of reality, two realizations are necessary. First, it must be noted that the phrase “*ens reale*” never once appears in Aquinas’ oeuvre, despite its frequency in the authors of the Thomist school.²¹ Certainly, there is the omnipresent notion of “being independent of cognition” as what is opposed to “being dependent on cognition”; mentions of *res extra animam* are frequent, and the phrase *in re* usually indicates what exists in a being independent of cognition. But rather than call this cognition-independent being *ens reale*, Aquinas’ preferred nomenclature is *ens naturae*²² or the pairing of *res rationis* and *res naturae*.²³ Since *reale* derives from *res*, it would therefore seem odd to oppose *res rationis* by the phrases of either *ens* or *res reale*. This would result in *res* having not merely an analogical valence but an equivocal rupture.

Second, 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*.²⁴ 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.

²¹ See n.18 above.

²² E.g., i.1256-59: *DV*, q.21, a.2, ad.7; 1270/71: *In Metaphysicae*, lib.4, lec.2, n.13; *ibid*, lec.4, n.5.

²³ E.g., 1252/56: *In Sent*, lib.2, d.37, q.1, a.1, c.; i.1256-59: *DV*, q.29, a.4, ad.12; 1266-68: *ST Ia*, q.13, a.7, c., to give just a few examples of many.

²⁴ A tendency that began centuries ago—the slide into a certain privileging of the sensibly-real being common to our human nature. In John Poinsett, for instance, although “*res*” is acknowledged as pertaining to non-corporeal realities, the overwhelmingly ordinary usage is reference to cognition-independent beings. Gilson advocated trusting most of all in the *verba ipsissima* of Aquinas; and yet not only is *ens reale* anachronistically read back into his work, but words the usage of which he would not even recognize, such as “objective” (e.g., Robert Brennan 1942: “Troubadour of Truth” in *Essays in Thomism*, 7); and although it is a defensible practice to argue the coherence of such terminological insistencies (which one might do with *ens reale*), it is another altogether to uncritically presume their fittingness. Cf. Deely 2008: *Descartes & Poinsett*, 31.

If we suspend our prejudices, apprehending the meaning of *res* in Aquinas should not be difficult: for there are exceptionally clear and consistent texts explaining its use. We will look here at three, that together illustrate the primary purpose of *res* as signifying that which has an intelligibility. The first is taken from the *Commentary on the Sentences*:²⁵

It must be said that, according to Avicenna, as mentioned above (d.2, q.1, .a3), 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 firmed in nature. But the noun “being” [*ens*] is taken from the existence of the thing...

There is a bit of circuitousness at work in this passage: for Aquinas must use a term before distinguishing it, in asserting that there are two objects of consideration “in a thing [*in re*]”: the quiddity and the existence. Both objects may be signified by *res*. In other words, *res* may be used indiscriminately and

²⁵ 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...” Cf. i.1256-59: *DV*, q.1, a.1, c.: “Non autem invenitur aliquid affirmative dictum absolute quod possit accipi in omni ente, nisi essentia eius, secundum quam esse dicitur; et sic imponitur hoc nomen res, quod in hoc differt ab ente, secundum Avicennam in principio *Metaphys.*, quod ens sumitur ab actu essendi, sed nomen rei exprimit quidditatem vel essentiam entis.” We may speak of a being with an eye towards its intelligible dimension: which is to say, in consideration of its resolubility to *ens primum cognitum*; or with an eye towards its existential dimension: as resoluble to *ens inquantum ens* and from there, to *ipsum esse subsistens* as the first cause of it. This is the twofold resolution of *ens* to which too few Thomistic thinkers have attended carefully. Cf. Kempel 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum in Thomas Aquinas and the Tradition*, 241-46. It is worth noting that, in the same text of *De veritate*, the meaning of *aliquid*, “something”, is explained as what signifies “some other *what*”, *aliud quid*.

thus implicitly signifying both objects, or it may be used discriminately in principally signifying one and only consignifying the other. The principal imposition of the noun (its establishment in language for the purpose of communicating something) is from the quiddity or the intelligible meaning; thus, *res* only consignifies the existence of the thing—which signification belongs properly to *ens*—but principally and properly signifies the fact that it may be known and defined.

The second text, taken from the *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, confirms and clarifies this interpretation of *res* as principally signifying the intelligible dimension of a being by including a consideration of *res* between *ens* and *unum*:²⁶

It is clear from the previously given reason, not only that these [terms, *ens* and *unum*] are one thing [*unum re*], but that they differ by their intelligible rationale. For if they do not differ by rationale, they would be wholly synonymous, and thus there would be no reason to say, “human being” and “one human”. Thus it must be known that the noun “human” is imposed from the quiddity or the nature of humans; and the word “thing” [*res*] is imposed from the quiddity only; while the word “being” [*ens*] is imposed from the act of existing; and the word “one” [*unum*] from the order or indivision. For “one” [*unum*] is “being undivided [*ens indivisum*]”. What has an essence and quiddity through that essence, and what is in itself undivided, is the same. Whence these three—“thing” [*res*], “being” [*ens*], and “one” [*unum*—in all ways signify the same object, but according to diverse rationales.

Here, we see the same points made about the significance of *res*, but with the added emphasis that *res* is imposed “from the quiddity **only**”. The existence of the being does not factor into the determination of the noun at all, which signification is left rather to *ens*; indeed, if the principal signification of *res* was

²⁶ 1270/71: *In Metaphysicæ*, lib.4, lec.2, n.6: “Patet autem ex prædicta ratione, non solum quod sunt unum re, sed quod differunt ratione. Nam si non differrent ratione, essent penitus synonyma; et sic nugatio esset cum dicitur, ens homo et unus homo. Sciendum est enim quod hoc nomen homo, imponitur a quidditate, sive a natura hominis; et hoc nomen res imponitur a quidditate tantum; hoc vero nomen ens, imponitur ab actu essendi: et hoc nomen unum, ab ordine vel indivisione. Est enim unum ens indivisum. Idem autem est quod habet essentiam et quidditatem per illam essentiam, et quod est in se indivisum. Unde ista tria, res, ens, unum, significant omnino idem, sed secundum diversas rationes.”

to be the existential dimension, then it would be entirely redundant to have both terms, *res* and *ens*.

And the third and final text here considered is taken from the *Summa theologiae*:²⁷

To the third it must be said that this noun “thing” [*res*] belongs among the transcendentals. Whence, insofar as it pertains to relation, it is predicated plurally of the divine, but insofar as it pertains to the substance, it is singularly predicated. Whence Augustine says, in the same place, that “the same Trinity is the highest of things.”

Thus, not only is the term *res* not confined to the concrete and existing, it is also not bound by the order of the substantial (*esse in*). Rather, as a transcendental, the extension of *res* comprises also that which exists within the order of the relational (*esse ad*). In other words, there may be a “relational thing”, not only because some relations may be “real”—a relation wherein each fundement has an effect on the other as a terminus—but because **relations themselves** are *res*, having unique intelligible dimensions.

Thomas indicates this intelligibility of relations when he says:²⁸ “some relative [names] are imposed for signifying the very relative habitudes themselves, such as ‘lord’, ‘servant’, ‘father’, and ‘son’, and other such things of this kind, and these are called relatives according to the existence of relation [*relativa secundum esse*].”²⁹ As Poinot argues, the distinction between *relationes reales* and *rationis* consists not in anything having to do with the relation itself (*secundum esse*), but in that *relationes rationis* lack the conditions necessary for being *relationes reales*.³⁰

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

²⁷ 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.39, a.3, ad.3: “Ad tertium dicendum quod hoc nomen *res* est de transcendentibus. Unde, secundum quod pertinet ad relationem, pluraliter praedicatur in divinis, secundum vero quod pertinet ad substantiam, singulariter praedicatur. Unde Augustinus dicit ibidem quod eadem Trinitas quaedam summa *res* est.”

²⁸ 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.13, a.7, ad.1: “relativa quaedam sunt imposita ad significandum ipsas habitudines relativas, ut dominus, servus, pater et filius, et huiusmodi, et haec dicuntur relativa secundum esse”.

²⁹ For more on the *relativa secundum esse* and *relativa secundum dici*, see Kemple 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum*, 282-320 or Deely 2010: *Medieval Philosophy Redefined*, 96-104.

³⁰ Poinot 1632: *TDS*, 90-91.

not only the cognition-independent, but the relational and the cognition-dependent, as well; for relation is equiprimordial³¹ with substance in our experience of reality, and relation in and of itself as an intelligible *res* is indifferent to cognition-independence.³²

2.2. The twofold importance of relations

This is not to say that cognition-dependent relations are realities, in a strict interpretation of that term; they do not have the “reality” found in absolute beings. It is, however, to say, that there is something real *concerning* or *about* these relations; namely, the effects they may have on the cognitive agents who perceive them. In other words, cognition-dependent relations may have real effects on cognitive agents.

To understand this, we need to see the specific nature of sign-relations’ causality. Causation between two distinct things is always located in the *terminus* of their relation; that is, in the place where the effect occurs. Now, not all real relations have an effect—as two corporeal things may be related through a formal similitude even though they have no corporeal contact (as the doors to the Cathedral at Amiens are really larger than the door to my bedroom)—but only those which are through the categories of action and passion. These relations are affected through the confluence of efficient, formal, and material causality: as when the stamp is pressed into the seal, leaving a similitude of itself in the wax, the one stamping is an efficient cause (and the stamp an instrumental efficient cause), the wax is the material cause, and the retained shape the adventitious formal cause resulting in the consequent similarity.

In such cases, the foundation of the relation is the acting of the agent (the one stamping), the terminus is the reception by the patient (the wax being stamped), and the relation itself—the *relativum secundum esse*—is the action (the transitive act of stamping): the action brings the one stamping and the thing stamped into a relation of efficient cause and material recipient of the effect. It

³¹ That is, in a way that both occur equally at the very beginning, such that if there exists one there necessarily exists the other. The genesis of this idea is found through Heidegger’s 1927: *Sein und Zeit*, but the precise formulation is found best in Ratzinger’s 1970: *Introduction to Christianity*, 132: “the undivided sway of thinking in terms of substance is ended; relation is discovered as an equally valid primordial mode of reality”.

³² Deely 2007: *Intentionality and Semiotics*, 115-36.

is by formal properties in the agent (putting in act the capacity to stamp) and the instrument (the shape and hardness) that a change is affected in the matter (the wax). But this is not the only way change is affected through a relation. In fact, any cause extrinsic to the substance of its effect is clearly a cause through a relation.³³

Among those causes, the most important for understanding the reality of relations and the meaning of *res* is the **objective** or **specifying cause**. This causality belongs to an object, which is a *res*, either *naturae* or *rationis*, precisely as it is the foundation of a relation with a cognitive faculty. This functioning of an object in acting as a specifying cause is distinct from the way in which an object may terminate a cognitive relation; that is, objects may have two distinct relations with cognitive faculties: one as *stimulative* and the other as *terminal*.³⁴

The stimulative relation is that relation whereby the object determines a faculty to receive an impression of the object as some specific *what*. To give several simplified examples: the wavelength oscillation of visible light at ~635-700nm specifies the normally-functioning human eye as seeing the color red; a pit bull's growl specifies the perceptual faculties of the cat (most likely) to perceive a threat; and a child's avoiding eye contact, stuttering, and fidgeting while explaining to a parent how the window was broken may specify the parent's intellect to grasp a falsehood.³⁵ Thus, the specificative objects are the particularly oscillating wavelengths, the growling, and the body language. Conversely, the terminal objectivity is the object as known by the cognitive agent; thus, in these examples, *this red thing* (say, a stop sign), *this threatening dog*, and *this false story being told by the child*.

Most important for our purposes, however, is that the interpretatively-constituted terminal object may become itself a further stimulus of **both**

³³ For a concise explanation of the different kinds of causes, see Kemple 2019: *Introduction to Philosophical Principles*, 45-62.

³⁴ Poinot 1632: *TDS*, 25/19-26/1: "Obiectum est res, quae movet vel ad quam tendit cognitio, ut cum video lapidem vel hominem" – "An object is a thing, which either moves or towards which cognition tends, as when I see a stone or a human."

³⁵ 1259/65: *SCG*, lib.2, c.73, n.36 [n.38 in the English translation]. Aquinas frequently speaks of the *obiectum movens* specifically in regard to the appetitive powers as well, albeit such stimulation always being preceded by apprehension (cf. 1256-59: *DV*, q.5, a.10, c.; 1259/65: *SCG*, lib.3, c.140, n.6; 1271: *ST Ia-IIae*, q.9, a.1, c.; *ibid* q.10, a.2, c.; 1271-72: *ST Ia-IIae*, q.145, a.2, ad.1, etc.).

apprehension and appetite. In other words, the relationship between a cognitive agent and its object is a recursive one. Thus, the stimulative object of future apprehensions is not simply the *res naturae*, but the *res naturae* together with a judgment about it.

This is not the explicit teaching of Thomas Aquinas; but neither is it adverse to his teaching, for in discussing the nature of relation, he makes very clear that what does not belong to an *ens naturae* may have a real effect on a cognitive agent:³⁶

But there are some relations in which one extreme is a thing of nature [*res naturae*], and the other is only a cognition-dependent thing [*res rationis*]. And this occurs whenever the two extremes are not of one order. As sensation and knowledge are referred to the sensible and the knowable, which—insofar as they are certain things existing in a natural act of being—are outside the order of sensible and intelligible acts of being, therefore in knowledge and sensation there is a real relation [*relation realis*], insofar as they are ordered to the known and the sensible things; but these things themselves, considered in themselves, are outside these kinds of order. Whence in those things there is not a relation really towards the one knowing and the one sensing, but according to a cognition-dependent being only [*rationem tantum*], insofar as the intellect apprehends them as the terminus of the relations of knowledge and sense.³⁷ Whence the philosopher says, in *Metaphysics V*, that those things are not called relative because they themselves are referred to others, but because the others

³⁶ 1266-68: *ST Ia*, q.13, a.7, c.: “Quandoque vero relatio in uno extremorum est res naturae, et in altero est res rationis tantum. Et hoc contingit quandocumque duo extrema non sunt unius ordinis. Sicut sensus et scientia referuntur ad sensibile et scibile, quae quidem, in quantum sunt res quaedam in esse naturali existentes, sunt extra ordinem esse sensibilis et intelligibilis, et ideo in scientia quidem et sensu est relatio realis, secundum quod ordinantur ad sciendum vel sentiendum res; sed res ipsae in se consideratae, sunt extra ordinem huiusmodi. Unde in eis non est aliqua relatio realiter ad scientiam et sensum; sed secundum rationem tantum, in quantum intellectus apprehendit ea ut terminos relationum scientiae et sensus. Unde philosophus dicit, in *V Metaphys.*, quod non dicuntur relative eo quod ipsa referantur ad alia, sed quia alia referuntur ad ipsa. Et similiter dextrum non dicitur de columna, nisi in quantum ponitur animali ad dextram, unde huiusmodi relatio non est realiter in columna, sed in animali.”

³⁷ Note here the *recursivity*—as they are apprehended by the intellect as the termini of these relations *after* being known and being sensed. Thus, being sensible and knowable they are stimuli; being sensed and known they are termini; being apprehended as termini of sensing and knowing, they are again stimuli (and potentially *ad infinitum* as the intellect may reflect on its reflection on its knowing, and reflect on that reflection, etc.).

are referred to them. And similarly “to the right” is not said of the column, except insofar as it is posited to be to the right of an animal, whence a relation of this kind is not really in the column but is really in the animal.

Just as “to the right” is not really in the column, “aggressive” might not really be in the dog, or “lying” really in the child’s actions—perhaps because he is afraid of being punished, either by the parent or by someone else—and so on with any other judgment we may make, some of which may be true and others false. Yet because these judgments form a part of the terminal object, they become part of the recursively-considered stimulative object, and therefore have reality not *in themselves* but *by their relational effects*. Being known is not anything in the object known, but it is to the one knowing; so, too, is being believed, being desired, and so on. Something need not be either absolutely true or unqualifiedly good in order that it produce by relation a real effect on a cognitive agent.

2.3. The complexity of the real

No one should be surprised by the claim that what in itself is “unreal” can have real effects—we often react in very real ways to falsehoods and fictions. But, understandably, many may be taken back by the claim that we can and often do in some way make the “unreal” *relationally* real. In other words, when the in-itself-unreal is made a terminal object of some cognitive act, it may further become a stimulative object such that, as recursively perceived or understood by the cognitive agent, it “contains” something other than what belongs to the *ens naturae*.

This intentional constitution does not replace or diminish the *entia naturae*, nor does it displace the intelligible meaningfulness of *entia naturae* into *entia rationis* or a merely referential frame. Rather, it shows that our understanding of *entia naturae* and *entia rationis* is continuous, complex, and potentially complementary. The *entia naturae* remain always primary, for their possession of existence independent of cognition marks a far greater actuality; yet the attendant *entia rationis*, though entirely dependent upon cognition for their existence, may enter into the suprasubjective cognition-dependent realm we call culture.

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 possible all that complexity: not only the development of culture, but its perversion; not only the revelation of truth but the diffusion of falsehood.

3. The Nature of Signs

The potential for falsity in the semiotic relations³⁸ whereby cognitive agents are ordered towards terminal objects follows in that these relations are not merely dyadic (involving two things), as between the object and the cognitive agent, but triadic (involving three), such that the presentation of the object to the cognitive agent is mediated by some third. Historically, this third has been called a “sign”, but is more accurately called a “sign-vehicle”.³⁹ To give an example of why this is a more accurate name: in seeing a picture of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City, my attention is directed by the photo to the cathedral as it actually stands. This directed attention might occur in any number of ways: I might think of my visit in 2016, or of the attempt someone evidently made to set it ablaze in April 2019 (shortly after the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris caught on fire), or even of associated memories, such as the sculpture of Atlas directly across the street, or the expensive shops up and down Fifth Avenue. But to someone who has never been to New York City, or to Fifth Avenue, or to St. Patrick’s Cathedral, the picture might simply evoke a notion of a church—perhaps not even with any notion of its Catholic identity.

³⁸ The terms “semiotic” and “semiotic” may be confusing: “semiotic” refers to the ability of a living creature to make use of a sign, such that goals of the creature are pursued through the interpretation of signs (and thus, all animals are semiotic, but vegetative living creatures are not; though the precise line of delineation between animal and vegetation is unclear). In contrast, “semiotic”—used as an adjective—refers to the human cognitive ability to not only use signs, but to have an awareness of signs themselves, to grasp signs *as signs*, from which follows a host of cognitive abilities not shared by any non-human animals, including language (as possessing semantic depth pertinent to the cognition-independent being of objects and thus as opposed to mere vocalization or speech).

³⁹ Peirce, at times, would use the term “representamen”—sometimes indicating that a representamen is a genus of which sign-vehicle is a species (a representamen requiring a mind), but at other times this distinction seems to fade. Conventionally, in semiotics literature, the two are now mostly used as synonyms (although “sign” is still often conflated with “sign-vehicle”). See Nathan Houser 2010: “Representamen/Sign” in *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics*, 307.

Show the same picture to a member of the isolated tribes of North Sentinel Island, and he or she would not even recognize it for that much.

In other words, for the vehicle to function as a sign, the cognitive agent to whom the vehicle presents the object must have the capacity for recognizing the vehicle's relation to the object. The vehicle does not *actually* signify unless the mind can be actually related to the object, for signification is a *relating* and if the relating is not accomplished, then neither is the signification. Showing a picture of St. Patrick's to a rock will signify nothing at all; showing it to a dog will signify only shapes and light (and whatever else the dog might sense, like the smell of the photograph).

In every sign, therefore, there must be a stimulative object (the significate) which is the fundament of the relation, a vehicle (the signifier) which is an intermediary of the relation, and an "interpretant" (to whom the object is signified) which is the terminus of the relation.⁴⁰ We can see this in the inverse direction as well, as that by some vehicle, the interpretant becomes the foundation of a relation to the object as a terminus. We therefore **define the sign** as the irreducibly triadic relation accomplished through a vehicle between a fundament and a terminus; that is, not one thing standing for or in relation to another, but the completed actuality of relating between two beings through a third.⁴¹

Put otherwise, the sign consists in the relation between an object and an interpretant accomplished through some vehicle: as the smoke (vehicle) seen by the animal (interpretant) indicates fire (object); or the stop sign (vehicle) signifies the law (stopping and ceding the right of way to other traffic before proceeding) to a driver (interpretant); or the word "Imprimatur" on the publication data page of a book (vehicle) signifies to a reader (interpretant) the approval of a Church authority (object). While each of these examples has the same essential tripartite structure, each vehicle is connected with its object in a

⁴⁰ Peirce coined this term, "interpretant" (as opposed to "interpreter") to expand the possibilities of semiosis beyond cognitive agents, so as to include plants and even inorganic being. See Kemple 2019: *The Intersection of Semiotics and Phenomenology*, 154-55; 166-68; 186-90.

⁴¹ This definition purposefully retains an ambiguity, in that it names neither object nor interpretant as the fundament or the terminus; for both object and interpretant are, whether we are considering the object as stimulative or as terminative, capable of being either fundament or terminus.

different way. The smoke relates to the fire by nature; the word “*imprimatur*” with the Church’s approval by stipulation; and the stop sign with the law by custom. While the distinction between natural and “artificial” (a word with unfortunate connotations) has often been made, this threefold distinction—by nature, by stipulation, and by custom—is more accurate.⁴²

3.1. Signs by nature

The universe is perfused with signs, Charles Peirce once said;⁴³ that is, everything is at least *virtually* a sign, signifying something other than itself. From this fact, implicitly recognized if seldom appreciated, arises all our curiosity about the natural world; and from our recognition of natural objects as signifying, we discover the truth about the natural world. By our sense perception, we discover entities independent of our cognitive activity. But through that sense perception—which is more than the merely passive reception of our sense organs, but an active consideration—we recognize a *something more* than the merely sensed; we perceive *relations*, both fulfilled and unfulfilled. Seeking fulfillment of the latter drives our inquiries into these cognition-independent activities: whether they are laws of physics, tendencies in evolution, or animal behavior.

Thus signification may occur through cognition, life, or even the inorganic; the dance of the spider signifies its desire to mate, the flowering of a plant signifies its fertility, and the rising of the tide signifies the gravitational pull of the moon orbiting the near side of the earth.

3.2. Cultural signs: stipulation and custom

Most of the signs with which we humans deal in our day-to-day operations, however, are *not* signs by nature, or, more accurately, not signs *purely* by nature. Rather, especially today in the electric, digital age, our lives are perfused by cultural signs, where the imposed signification follows a volitional act: in other words, someone—or more likely, a group—chooses to make such a vehicle stand for such an object. These are signs therefore either by stipulation (*ad placitum*)

⁴² Cf. Poinset 1632: *TDS*, 269-283.

⁴³ Peirce 1906: “Issues of Pragmatism” in *CP.5.448n*.

or by custom (*ex consuetudine*). Included among these cultural signs are all symbols, including all words.

A stipulated sign requires a voluntary agent: that is, a being capable of imposing on some vehicle the function of signifying a particular object. Such an imposition follows from the vehicle not having such a significance by its nature. Rather, the stipulated sign receives its order from an extrinsic denomination. For instance, every neologism—while it may draw upon etymology or previous works, or comparable words in different languages—is an attempt at creating a stipulated sign, as are any assignments of variables in mathematical proofs (“let X stand for...”), ciphers, and all signs we have accepted from some or another authority.⁴⁴

Many more signs in our experience, however, are by custom:⁴⁵

custom either can be the cause of a sign, as, for example, if a people by their customs introduce and propose some sound for signifying; or it can function as an effect which leads us to know its cause, as, for example, a dog frequently seen accompanying someone manifests that that person is its master, and the custom of eating with napkins manifests to us a meal when we see napkins set out, and universally almost every induction is founded on the frequency and custom whereby we see something often happen.

Customs establish signs by “the use and consensus of a people”,⁴⁶ unlike stipulated signs which come from an individual (and specifically one possessing the authority⁴⁷ to impose an extrinsic denomination), and therefore require a frequency of use among a multitude. Slang words, for instance, tend to come from custom rather than stipulation; no one says, “We’re going to use ‘sweet’ to

⁴⁴ As an example of this latter, Poinot frequently references the Sacraments.

⁴⁵ Poinot 1632: *TDS*, 278/19-29: “consuetudo vel potest esse causa signi, sicut si populus consuetudine sua introducat et proponat aliquam vocem ad significandum; vel potest se habere ut effectus, qui nos manuducit ad cognoscendam suam causam, sicut canis frequenter visus comitari aliquem manifestat, quod sit dominus eius, et consuetudo comedendi in mappis manifestat nobis prandium, quando mappas videmus appositas, et in universum fere omnis induction fundatur in frequential et consuetudine, qua videmus aliquid saepe fieri.”

⁴⁶ Poinot 1632: *TDS*, 279/20: “secundum usum et consensum populi”.

⁴⁷ Who possesses such authority, and how, is another matter altogether, more suited to questions of education and politics.

mean ‘cool’ from now on,” but one person begins doing it, others follow, and it quickly becomes a customary signification.

Something different occurs, however, in a custom arising as an effect that signifies its cause. For in such a case, the signification is itself something by nature: namely, that *every* effect signifies its cause. The wind blowing causes the vane to change direction, just as the messiness of eating causes the usage (and thus the placement) of napkins; “signification arising from custom is founded on something natural, to wit, on the procession of an effect from its cause and on its coincidence with that cause. Therefore custom as an effect founding signification is reduced to a natural cause.”⁴⁸ But here, just as within the *purely* natural signs, we may be deceived: as someone might associate, for instance, someone having many books with that person being intelligent or well-read when in fact they are only wealthy.

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.

⁴⁸ Poinso 1632: *TDS*, 279/33-38: “talis significatio fundatur in aliquo naturali, scilicet in processu effectus a sua cause et covenientia cum illa. Ergo consuetudo ut effectus fundans significationem reducitur ad causam naturalem.”

Likewise, even in free human actions which result in the establishment of customary signs, but still entails a certain naturalness: namely, the naturalness of habituation following frequently repeated acts. That the customary sign signifies as it does follows by nature. Since culture is constituted primarily by customary signs—stipulated signs retaining their cultural efficacy *only* when they become adopted customarily—the reduction of customary significations to a natural principle demonstrates that culture and nature are **not** separated essentially, but rather that culture as a potentially ever-growing suprasubjective web spanning not only multiple individuals but multiple generations develops on the basis of a natural property of the mind to discern patterns, both cognition-independent and cognition-dependent.

3.3. Pure signs

In all of the above instances, there is some cognition-independent thing which must itself first be grasped by a receptive power of the interpretant in order to accomplish a significant relation to the object: the blind see neither smoke nor stop sign, and the deaf do not hear insults, for the vehicles are imperceptible to them. Often, such sign-vehicles have been called *instrumental* signs, as opposed to *formal* or *pure* signs,⁴⁹ which are not grasped as objects themselves that intermediate between the interpretant and the object, but immediately accomplish the relation; which are, namely, the psychological states or cognitive means of percepts and concepts. These cognitive signs are *also* cognition-independently existing things—considered as accidents of the cognitive agent—but which need **not** be grasped in their cognition-independent being in order to signify.⁵⁰

As John Deely demonstrates in many of his works, it is a mistake common to modern philosophy that they believed our psychological states not to be pure signs, but instrumental ones. Rather, as was the common understanding of the scholastics, especially in the Thomistic tradition and most especially John Poinso

⁴⁹ We must keep in mind that such nomenclature refers less properly to the sign as a whole and more to the sign-vehicle

⁵⁰ Deely 2009: *Augustine & Poinso*, 44n20.

(and recovered by Charles Peirce),⁵¹ all our thinking is by means of signs. Thus, the question when it comes to the sameness of our cognitive means and the objects known by them—that question, I said earlier, which stands at the heart of the struggle for realism—is a question of how a sign can be the same as what it signifies.

What follows is an abbreviated answer to that question.

4. Cognitive Signs

There are two questions to be answered in this section: first, how are our cognitive signs formed? And second, what do these cognitive signs make known? In order to relate these questions to the proposal of semiotic realism as the solution to our problem of meaning, we will consider not only intellectual cognitive signs, but also the perceptual. Only thus can we get at the meaning of “meaning”.⁵² For, as Aquinas rightly claims in many places, the proper object of the human intellect is the *quidditas rei materialis*—the quiddity of a material thing.⁵³ Were it not for sensation and perception, we could not get any hold of material things at all; hence it comes as a prerequisite to arriving at an understanding of how we arrive at the quiddity, that we first arrive at an understanding of our relation to the material thing (which, as what is singular, cannot be known by the intellect).⁵⁴

⁵¹ Cf. 1868: “Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man” in *EP*.1.23-24.

⁵² Few topics, arguably, have received less attention but needed them more within Thomistic philosophy than the interior sense powers, or the faculties of perception as I prefer to call them. While some attention has turned there recently (e.g., Anthony Lisska 2016: *Aquinas’s Theory of Perception*; Daniel De Haan 2014: “Perception and the *Vis Cogitativa*: A Thomistic Analysis of Aspectual, Actional, and Affectional Percepts” in *ACPQ*, 88.3: 397-437; 2010: “Linguistic Apprehension as Incidental Sensation in Thomas Aquinas” in *Proceedings of the ACPA*, vol.84: 179-96, and some others), by and large the question of perception has been treated as little more than a necessary stepping stone between sensation and intellection, bypassing all the many nuances which have a profound impact on both the human intellectual and sensitive operations.

⁵³ 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.5, ad.3; *ibid*, a.8, c.; *ibid*, q.86, a.2, c.; *ibid*, q.88, a.2, c. *ibid*, a.3, c.; i.1256-59: *DV*, q.18, a.5, ad.6; c.1265-66: *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*, a.16; or *natura rei materialis*, 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.87, a.2, ad.2; a.3, c., and ad.2. See Kemple 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum* 163-70 for discussion.

⁵⁴ i.1259/65: *SCG*, lib.1, c.65, n.9.

4.I. Perceptual signs

Beyond the conventionally-identified exterior senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch), the impressed specification of a perceptual cognition requires what Aquinas calls the *sensus communis*, but which I interpretively translate as the “integrating sense”.⁵⁵ It is through this sense that the sensations of the exterior sense faculties are first collated into an objective whole—a perceptual *species impressa* or phantasm—which the interior senses subsequently form into a percept.⁵⁶ It is the percept which serves as the foundation of the relation by which we are cognitively united to the sensible things in our environments as terminal objects.

When we consider all the objects of the exterior sense faculties which may be collated into this whole—not just of particular things, but of the whole situational context in which that thing may appear—we realize that the perceptual objectivization is potentially infinitely complex. But more than this, the perceptual object includes intentions which stem purely from its particular relations to the cognitive agent. For instance, in perceiving a book on my desk, I not only perceive its shape, colors, parts, text, cover image (and all the countless details visible in that image, David Roberts’ 1859 *Interior of the Cathedral, Pisa*), but also its positioning—on the desk, to the left of *this* notebook, to the right of *that* pen, at a slight angle from the desk’s edge (and so on, potentially with regard to every other item sensibly present), how it reflects the light from three distinct sources—not to mention a vague sense of the time of day at which I perceive it, of the room in which it is perceived, of my own posture while perceiving it, and so on; as well as the tinge of guilt at not having yet read as much of it as I wish (compounded by the guilt of all the other books treated with the same neglect).

An obvious shift occurs with this last—the guilt—for this seems wholly interior; nothing having to do with the book itself at all, but only with my relation to the

⁵⁵ Cf. Kemple 2019: *Introduction to Philosophical Principles*, 76-77; 156-58.

⁵⁶ We here use the term “phantasm” as a generic term, including but not limited to the collated percept (which is a *species expressa*).

book.⁵⁷ The percept on the basis of which the book is perceived involves in its constitution a contribution from earlier experiences extrinsic to the book itself; something more than the mere *species impressa* as given to me by the object itself. The object, then, includes in its terminal objective constitution that which it receives *only* by my relating to it. Considered in retrospect however, *all* of the aspects in which the thing perceptually appears to me, both as a whole in itself comprising many parts and as itself a part of a greater context, rely upon relations, both of each part to all the others and of all the parts to myself.

When a phantasm is impressed upon us, therefore, it is impressed with a potential (and often actual) myriad of relations to other objects likewise impressed upon us. The formation of our perceptually mediated lives is not by an atomistic collocation of sensible object after sensible object, but a continual and multifaceted impression in which we attend to particular objects with varying degrees of awareness of their related objects, irregularly alternating between attending to parts and wholes. This attention to phantasmal objects includes not only the relations among the sensibles, but also the relations constituted by our own perceptual interpretation, i.e., by the collation of new and old perceptual objects through which we render our particular judgments.

This shows that all perceptual collation is discursive: which is to say that it moves from a prior to a posterior, and thus from something better known to oneself to something lesser known to oneself.⁵⁸ What, precisely is being collated at the level of perceptual cognition, how, and for what purpose are questions on which we could dwell for countless pages. To answer succinctly, however: we collate individual intentions for the sake of the operative good of ourselves. In other words, we discursively combine, separate, and evaluate both retained (in

⁵⁷ It is this grasp of oneself constitutes in part the meaning of an object that Heidegger denotes “phenomenological construction” as the intermediate stage in the application of the phenomenological method (1927: *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 26-23/19-23; cf. 1923: *Ontologie: Hermeneutik der Faktizität*, 90-91/69 and 99/76 for an example of this in practice).

⁵⁸ 1266-68: *ST Ia*, q.58, a.3, ad.1: “discursus quendam motum nominat. Omnis autem motus est de uno priori in aliud posterius. Unde discursiva cognitio attenditur secundum quod ex aliquo prius noto devenitur in cognitionem alterius posterius noti, quod prius erat ignotum” – “‘discursion’ names a certain motion. For every motion is from one prior to another posterior. Thus, discursive cognition occurs insofar as from something known prior one is brought to cognition of something known posterior, which was previously unknown.”

memory) and present (in sense) stimulative perceptual objects to form terminal perceptual objects upon which we may act: pursuing them, avoiding them, or ignoring them.

Through a variety of sign-mediated specifications of stimulative objects impressed upon the receptive perceptual faculties, and by means of collative operations belonging to the cogitative faculties, we form expressed specifications, *species expressae*, whereby we are ordered towards terminal objects which differ from the impressed specifications on account of those collative operations. We perceive as a terminal object not just the dog, but the threatening-dog-to-flee; not just the food, but the appetizing-food-to-consume. Through the composition of this expressed specification is worked out a **referentially-meaningful** terminal object.⁵⁹ By this phrase, “referentially-meaningful”, we indicate that the object’s meaning is constituted by its reference to the cognitive animal.⁶⁰ A piece of raw meat, for instance, has a different meaning as referred to a dog and to a human being, and a different meaning as referred to a meat-eating human and to a vegan, just as the crucifix has a different meaning to the Catholic than it does to the Buddhist. Referential meaning as such, though it may be perfused with a significance provenating⁶¹ from the intellect, is determined by the relation or set of relations between the cognitive agent and the object.

⁵⁹ Aquinas holds this view as concern human beings, but not other animals, whom he considered to be moved in their operations purely by “instinct” (cf. 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.82, a.2, ad.3). Greater observation of animal behavior has since revealed that animals have a discursive and collative consideration of the objects of their perception. Animals are nevertheless still determined in their “reasoning” operations, insofar as they are bound to pursue objectives according to a self-referential context of meaning, i.e., “what is good for me”, and never to the intelligible meaning of the good itself.

⁶⁰ Cf. Deely 2009: *Augustine & Poinsot*, 82-83: “Simultaneously with but logically posterior to the action of the stimulus revealing something of the physical surroundings (that is to say, partially objectifying them), the animal responds to this nascent objectification by adding to it relations based now not on the stimulating source as a part of the physical surroundings but based rather on the organism’s own nature and past experience.”

⁶¹ Cf. Deely 2010: *Semiotic Animal*, xiii for the origin of this word.

Because non-human animals and their cognitive objects are always materially individuated particulars,⁶² referential meaning is therefore always indeterminate—since both fundament and terminus of the relations constituting it are material—and thus subject to change. Not only may new impressions be made, that is, but so too the expressed specification given a new interpretation. Referential meaning for human beings, however, is permeated by meaning which originates with a different and subsequent impression, namely, the intellectual.

But the intelligible meaning grasped by the intellect does not appear *ex nihilo*. Rather, it comes from the objects that we sense and perceive, and the percepts we form of them. Thus, the *species expressae* of the perceptual faculties serve a twofold function: not only do they direct our cognition back towards objects as having a referential meaning but they may also allow us to discover the intelligible meanings of those objects. Provisionally, we can say that it consists fundamentally in the realization of meaning belonging to the object itself, beyond what is grasped referentially, such that the intelligible meaning of the object is irreducible to its referential meaning.⁶³ This intelligible meaning is what Aquinas designates in calling an object a “*res*”, a thing.

We must note that the percept or phantasm is considered, as the result of perceptual cognition, the “matter of the cause”⁶⁴ for the operation of the *intellectus agens* whereby the object is rendered intelligibly meaningful and thus

⁶² Notably, *particulars* but not *singulars*. There is generality and abstraction at the level of perceptual cognition, as evidenced in animals generalizing about singulars based upon particular characteristics (such as skin color, sex, height, etc.).

⁶³ In his description of [intellectual] “abductive inference”, Peirce states that (1903: “Pragmatism as the Logic of Abduction” *EP*.2.227) it “shades into perceptual judgment without any sharp line of demarcation between them”. That is, the two are so closely bound together in our experience that there are abductive inferences which seem very much like perceptual judgments, and vice versa, for very often we coningle intelligible and referential meanings—for better or worse. Entering into the nuances suggested by Peirce—and the struggle to interpret Peirce—is far beyond this article. See Kemple 2019: *The Intersection of Semiotics and Phenomenology*, 204-10.

⁶⁴ 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.84, a.6, c.: “non potest dici quod sensibilis cognitio sit totalis et perfecta causa intellectualis cognitionis, sed magis quodammodo est materia causae” – “It cannot be said that the cognition of sensible things is the total and perfect cause of intellectual cognition, but rather in a certain way is the matter of the cause.”

as the *obiectum movens* or specifying cause for the *intellectus possibilis*.⁶⁵ In other words, the phantasm from which the intellect grasps meaning must be one which is potentially intelligible, such that, once meaning has been grasped, the phantasm is adequate for the intelligible meaning to be realized as belonging to the object that phantasm signifies, either in itself or by analogy.

To take a very simple example, consider the intelligible meaning of a “cube”: a shape possessing six flat equally sized sides, with eight vertices, and twelve edges. A single instance of perceiving a cube—quickly, with minimal examination—would not likely divulge the full intelligibility of a cube, of the “cubeness” of it. One must, rather, examine it from many sides, turn it over, approximately compare the sides to one another, the corners, the angles, the size of the various aspects, until finally the percept is such that it may be grasped as what it is; a process which may occur quickly for some, but slower for others. To give a more complex example, consider the percept of both a single animal and of animals in general: naïve thinkers, like Descartes, look quickly at their operations and claim that they do not feel pain. An experientially-rich perceptual observation of animals leads us to grasp the truth—that they *do* feel pain—and moreover that they have particular reasoning and judgment about the objects in their environment, but only as to referential meaning.

The threshold of distinctively human curiosity—which goes far beyond the mere curiosity in pursuit of referential meaning found in other animals—is crossed at ages likely before our recollection: namely when first we recognize that the

⁶⁵ i.1259/65: *SCG*, lib.2, c.73, n.36: “Alio ergo modo se habet intellectus possibilis ad phantasma quo indiget, ante speciem intelligibilem: et alio modo postquam recepit speciem intelligibilem. Ante enim, indiget eo ut ab eo accipiat speciem intelligibilem: unde se habet ad intellectum possibilem ut obiectum movens” – “Therefore the first mode by which the *intellectus possibilis* has a relation of need to the phantasm is as prior to the intelligible specification and the second mode is after the reception of the intelligible specification. Before, it needs the phantasm as that by which it receives the intelligible specification; and thus the phantasm is related to the *intellectus possibilis* as a stimulative object.” Cf. Deely 1994: *New Beginnings*, 161: “This is the ‘causality’, that is to say, the dependency in being, that knowledge as such has upon the object known. The object *specifies* the knowledge as being of this rather than of that.” And 170: “This is the causality that enables the sign to achieve its distinctive function of making present what the sign-vehicle itself is not, regardless of whether the object signified enjoys a physical existence apart from the signification.”

objects we encounter are not mere objects, but things having a being all their own, beyond their practical relevance to ourselves.⁶⁶

4.2. Intellectual signs

The operation of the intellect—the *intellectus agens*—whereby this conceptual formation begins is twofold: *illuminare*, the illumination of the material object such that its form may be discovered in the light of intelligibility, and *abstrahere*, or the distinguishing of the specifically-intelligible form from the material whole in which it is found. This twofold operation results in the impression of an intellectual specification, a *species impressa intelligibilis*.⁶⁷ Upon this impressed specification, the intellect operates by composition and division and thereby constitutes a *distinct* intelligible specification, the *species expressa intelligibilis*.⁶⁸ This latter—and *this latter only*—is the concept properly speaking. Though our concepts begin relatively simply, as habitually retained means of knowledge pertaining both to intelligible *and* referential meaning, over time they become increasingly complex, both in their own constitution and in their relations.

Just as the perceptual objectivization is at first the grasp of a referential meaning not yet-worked-out, so too the intellectual objectivization is initially the grasp of some intelligible meaning made present through what is in perception⁶⁹—which

⁶⁶ That is, while the primacy of *ens* as the object of our intellectual cognition is a persistent truth—such that every intellectual realization has *ens* as the fundamental object in which all others are realized (1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.5, a.2, c.: “ens est proprium obiectum intellectus, et sic est primum intelligibile, sicut sonus est primum audibile” – “being is the proper object of the intellect, and is thus the first intelligible, just as sound is the first audible”)—there must also be some moment in time in the ontogenetic development of the individual human when *being* is first cognitively grasped.

⁶⁷ i.1256-59: *DV*, q.11, a.1, ad.16: “intellectus agens imprimit species intelligibiles in intellectum possibilem” – “the *intellectus agens* impresses the intelligible species in the *intellectus possibilis*”.

⁶⁸ This phrase—“*species expressa*”—does not appear in Aquinas, though it is common in the tradition by the time of Poinset. Thomas, rather, speaks of the *verbum mentis* or the *intentio intellecta*. See Kemple 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum*, 248-76 for a detailed discussion of the *species expressa*, as well as Maritain 1959: *Degrees of Knowledge*, 387-417.

⁶⁹ Cf. c.1252/56: *Super Sent.*, lib.2 d.20, q.2, a.2, ad.2: “perfectio intellectus possibilis est per receptionem obiecti sui, quod est species intelligibilis in actu. Sicut autem in obiecto

is as limited as is the prepared phantasm—and which has likewise not yet been worked out as to how it should be understood. It is that through which first contact with the intelligible meaning of the object has been made.

One should not therefore be lulled into believing there exists within the material, corporeal, mutable objects of sense perception an invisible albeit positively-self-existing intelligibility, which needs only to be extracted from the muddled concrete realities in which it is found; as though, within the “fleshy” reality of the natural world there exists an ethereal “skeleton” of intelligibility, made visible through an x-ray-like light of the *intellectus agens’ illuminatio* and separated out into the *intellectus possibilis* by *abstrahere*.⁷⁰ Rather, it is through the agency of the intellect that these objects are rendered intelligible at all; for their actual existence is not a hypostatic intersection of the intelligible and the sensorial-perceptible, of the immaterial and material, but is an actual confused existence of form and matter, such that the existence of the form necessitates simultaneous co-existence of the matter.

In other words, the intellectual discovery of intelligible meaning is the impression of the perceptual sign-vehicle of a stimulative object’s meaning *without* its material potentiality; it is through such receptivity that the soul is somehow *all* things, for while the collated percept involves an abstraction from *this* or *that* particular sensed individual (at the very least from the *hinc et nunc* moment of the sense observation), the impressed specification of the

visus est aliquid quasi materiale, quod accipitur ex parte lucis, quae facit visibile in potentia esse visibile in actu: ita etiam objectum intellectus quasi materialiter administratur vel offertur a virtute imaginativa; sed in esse formali intelligibili completur ex lumine intellectus agentis, et secundum hanc formam habet quod sit perfectio in actu intellectus possibilis” – “The perfection of the *intellectus possibilis* is through the reception of its object, which is the *species intelligibilis* in act. Just as in the object of sight there is something as the material, which is received from the intervention of light, which makes the potentially visible to be visible in act, likewise there is in the object of the intellect something as materially conducted or offered by the perceptual faculties [*a virtute imaginativa* – see below]; but the formal intelligibility [of this offering] is completed in existence from the light of the *intellectus agens*, and it is on account of this form that the *intellectus possibilis* has what is perfection in act”. Note that *vis imaginativa* here, as is often the case, is used as a generic term for the entirety of the perceptual faculties (the *vires imaginativa, memorativa, et cogitativa*).

⁷⁰ We see among Thomists a frequent struggle with the meaning of illumination and abstraction and the nature of their result; see Kemple 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum*, 171-88 and 198-203.

intellectually-stimulative object abstracts from *all* particularity, except insofar as that particularity may be a condition on the intelligibility of the object.

In other words, perceptual signs make the soul *some* things, which is to say that the reception of the *species impressa intelligibilis* makes present the essential *what* of the object but does **not** produce the concept whereby it is actually understood. The impressed specification is indeed how the cognitive means and the stimulative object as it is known have a sameness; for the impression is an immaterial likeness of that object's intelligible meaning. But, while it is accurate to say—as many Thomists of the 20th century did, in repudiating the nominalist philosophies of modernism and drawing on Thomas himself⁷¹—that the *species impressa* is a *quo*, or “that by which” the intellect knows a *quod*, “that which”, the *species impressa* alone is insufficient for explaining the full process of how the intellect is directed towards an object as the **terminus** of a cognitive relation. This terminal objectivization requires a **concept**, which itself requires *some* composition, which is to say a working-out of the meaning beyond what is made intelligible through any singular impressed specification of intelligibility.

That is, every concept is formed through the operations of composition and division, with the sole exception of the primordial concept of *ens*:⁷² 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* whereby all other objects are realizable as having a being beyond their referentially-meaningful constitution as related to the self. Thus illumined, as beings of a potential supra-referential significance, their specific intelligibility may be discovered as distinct from their unintelligible concrete mode of existence;⁷³ and the act of this discovery is what is signified by *abstrahere*. In that discovery is established a

⁷¹ Most especially 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.1-2; see also i.1259/65: *SCG*, lib.1, c.53, n.2.

⁷² Kemple 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum*, 248-36, especially 258-59; cf. Deely 2001: *Four Ages of Understanding*, 355-57.

⁷³ Some might fear that this gives rise to a nominalism: that the universal known by the intellect is not really in the thing. But this is a modal confusion; for the universal is really in the thing, only it is not in the thing in the same precise mode as it has in the intellect. To believe it is would be to confuse the causal principles at work: for there is a kind of equivocal causation that occurs in intellectual cognition, the power of the *intellectus agens* in forming the *species impressa intelligibilis* being in a more eminent mode than the matter upon which it works, such that its effect supersedes that from which it causes.

relation between the *intellectus possibilis*, as that-into-which the *species* is received, and the stimulative object, the percept, as that-from-which the *species* is derived. Subsequently, the *species impressa intelligibilis* is composed at the very least with the concept of *ens*, such that the “*quid*” is the “irreducibly intelligible *quid*”, a “what” beyond the referentially-estimated operative good. Only thus can the intelligible species—as elaborated by being composed with at least the notion of *ens*—result in a comportment of the *intellectus possibilis* (or, speaking more properly, the whole human person) back towards the object, for without such a composition, the intellect grasps only a *what*. This elaboration is the formation of an intellectual *species expressa*.⁷⁴

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*

⁷⁴ This intellectual *species expressa* requires some perceptual *species expressa*, which need not be the same perceptual *species expressa* from which the *species intelligibilis* was discovered but could be an entirely new one formed for the explicit purpose of giving a concrete realization to the intelligible meaning. See i.1259/65: SCG, lib.2, c.73, n.36: “Sed post speciem in eo receptam, indiget eo quasi instrumento sive fundamento suae speciei: unde se habet ad phantasmata sicut causa efficiens; secundum enim imperium intellectus formatur in imaginatione phantasma conveniens tali speciei intelligibili, in quo resplendet species intelligibilis sicut exemplar in exemplato sive in imagine” – “But after the *species* is received in it, the *intellectus possibilis* needs the phantasm as an instrument or fundament for its *species*; and thus it is related to the phantasm as an efficient cause, for the intellect commands the phantasm to be formed in the perceptual faculties to be fitting to the specific intelligible specification in which the intelligible specification is reflected as the light in a mirror, as the exemplar in the example or image.”

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.

Minerd, "The Analogy of Res-ality" [p.136-37].

But most of our intellectual elaborations do not end merely with a single act of composition between a simple *quid* and *ens*; just as the perceptual collation may proceed potentially *ad infinitum*, as there are always more perceptual intentions by which the object may be considered, so too conceptual elaboration has no definitive point of cessation. On the one hand, that is, we may have a relatively simple concept possessing few notes within its elaborated construction, such

that it signifies only vaguely.⁷⁵ On the other hand, we may have a concept with a very distinct, refined signification which may signify either broadly or narrowly but in either case precisely.

These elaborations, however—particularly as left vague—may suffer incoherencies. Someone may compose or divide what should not be composed or divided: as a concept of the human intellect which recognizes that it deals with apprehension and judgment of things in the world, but without noting the distinguishing mark of its recognition of the cognition-independent, and thus leaving the concept of “intellect” open to both human and non-human animals. On the one hand, this is a failure to compose the “apprehension of objects in a cognition-independent dimension of intelligibility” with that of “intellect”, and on the other, a failure to divide the “cognition-dependent limitations of non-human animal cognition” from that of “intellect”. Both possibilities, here, involve the attribution of something vaguely understood to an object with which it is irreconcilable.

It is this irreconcilability between the intention and the object as a thing that renders the conceptual sign false.⁷⁶ For the falsehood follows not simply from the fact that the terminal object comprises more than was found in the stimulative object; on the contrary, the elaboration of the intellect in composing and dividing may add in its consideration something to the object which does not belong to it from itself alone, but which is nevertheless fitting and true. All functions which do not spring into existence apart from the cognitive operations of human beings, from which operations culture is constituted, consist in such additions: the designation of offices and duties (judges, police officers, professors, students), contracts, neutral laws, the categorization of specific relationships, fictional characters, tales, myths, and so on. Whether such cognition-dependent designations do or do not cohere with the stimulative objects must be worked out by the labor of the mind: seeking not only to

⁷⁵ Consider the order of proceeding given by Cardinal Cajetan c.1493/95: *In de ente et essentia*, 3/41, from confused to distinct and virtual to actual. Cf. Kempke 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum*, 33-37.

⁷⁶ This is the distinction between a concept and an enunciation; an enunciation may signify a false composition, as a composition or division without assent, whereas a concept properly speaking presents an object as the terminus of an intentional relation of being.

compose or divide, but in so doing, to resolve what it composes or divides with the cognition-independent reality.

4.3. Signs of meaning

The *species expressa intelligibilis*, which Aquinas names either the *verbum mentis*, *verbum interius*, or the *intentio intellecta*,⁷⁷ and which we call the concept, is a sign of intelligible meaning shaped by the intellect to which it signifies that meaning. The *species impressa intelligibilis* is the principle of this *intentio intellecta* and thus the *species expressa* necessarily has some similitude to whatever thing has been impressed upon the intellect,⁷⁸ but this similitude

⁷⁷ i.1259/65: *SCG*, lib.1, c.53, n.3: “Uterius autem considerandum quod intellectus, per speciem rei formatus, intelligendo format in seipso quantum intentionem rei intellectae, quae est ratio ipsius, quam significat definitio. Et hoc quidem necessarium est: eo quod intellectus intelligit indifferenter rem absentem et praesentem, in quo cum intellectu imaginatio convenit; sed intellectus hoc amplius habet, quod etiam intelligit rem ut separatam a conditionibus materialibus, sine quibus in rerum natura non existit; et hoc non posset esse nisi intellectus sibi intentionem praedictam formaret” – “It must further be considered that the intellect—through the *species* of the thing by which it has been informed—by the act of understanding forms in itself a certain intention of the thing understood, which is the intelligible rationale of it, and which the definition signifies. And this is necessary: for the intellect indifferently understands a thing as absent or present, in which the imagination agrees with the intellect; but the intellect has this, moreover, that it understands the thing as separate from material conditions, without which [the object] does not exist in the nature of things; and this is not able to be unless the intellect forms for itself the aforesaid intention.” That the *verbum interius* and *intentio intellecta* are synonyms can be found *ibid*, lib.4, c.11, n.6.

⁷⁸ i.1259/65: *SCG*, lib.1, c.53, n.4: “Haec autem intentio intellecta, cum sit quasi terminus intelligibilis operationis, est aliud a specie intelligibili quae facit intellectum in actu, quam oportet considerari ut intelligibilis operationis principium: licet utrumque sit rei intellectae similitudo. Per hoc enim quod species intelligibilis quae est forma intellectus et intelligendi principium, est similitudo rei exterioris, sequitur quod intellectus intentionem formet illi rei similem: quia *quale est unumquodque, talia operatur*. Et ex hoc quod intentio intellecta est similis alicui rei, sequitur quod intellectus, formando huiusmodi intentionem, rem illam intelligat” – “This understood intention, since it is as though a terminus of the intelligible operation, is other than the intelligible specification which makes the intellect in act, which it is necessary to consider as a principle of the intelligible operation; although each is a similitude of the thing understood. Through this that the intelligible specification which is the form of the intellect and principle of understanding is a similitude of the exterior thing, it follows that the intention the

does not form the whole of its signification—which is clear, since there is no error in the intellect’s reception of an intelligibility, while the definition which signifies the *species expressa* may be false.⁷⁹

Notably, this potential falsity of *species expressae* is common both to those of the intellect and of the perceptual faculties. Our perceptual judgments are deceived regularly; a distinction, perhaps, that would have saved Descartes from some of his philosophical errors, for the senses are *not* deceived, but only the perception. Thus, we may by default trust the senses, the point of contact with the “exterior world” but need continual re-examination of our own evaluations of what is received by sense, just as we need to re-examine our compositions and divisions of what is received by the intellect.

We need to consider, therefore, precisely what the *species expressae* of the intellect is doing, and how: namely, signifying and, in signifying, attempting delivery to us of the meaning of the objects it signifies. It is a *pure sign*, which is to say, a sign that signifies without first itself being known as an object. It signifies the stimulative object which produced the *species impressa*, but as somehow composed or divided from other objects previously encountered and known through distinct *species impressae*; as, at the very least (as mentioned above), every specific intelligibility—which is to say, any intelligibility delimited against other intelligibilities and thus at least implicitly not only some *quid* but distinct as *non-aliquid*, “not some other ‘what’”—must be combined with the universal intelligibility of *ens primum cognitum*, being conceived as irreducible to meanings constituted by reference back to oneself. Ordinarily though, we compose and divide a multitude of specific intelligibilities beyond this basic combination. Let us very briefly consider three examples, one of a purely natural object, one of an object purely objective, and another of a mixed object, that is, part naturally-constituted and part objectively-constituted.

For a purely natural object, let us consider a sea creature. It is long and tubular, with no flippers and at least one dorsal fin. One might, therefore, think it is an eel; but closer investigation reveals that the fin is not spiny and there is no jaw, but concentric rows of teeth in a suction-like mouth. Thus, it is recognized as a

intellect forms likewise is of that thing: because *such as each thing is, so are the works it does*. And from this that the understood intention is like some thing, it follows that the intellect, in forming an intention of such kind, understands that thing.”

⁷⁹ 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.6.

lamprey; but how should this creature be classified? Lacking a jaw, it is not of the same family as eels—its evolutionary lineage is different. At some point in its life, it has a notochord, dorsal neural tube, and a few other characteristics in common that identify it as part of the phylum chordata. It has a skull (like the hagfish) and vertebrae (unlike the hagfish). Yet its classification remains disputed, and so the *species expressa* by which we know it remains yet vague; but what is signified to us is definitely this animal, the chordate phylum, of the disputed subphyla craniata and vertebrata (that is: it is disputed whether these are proper classifications, not whether the lamprey has a skull and vertebrae). Thus, even without direct experience of a lamprey, we may form a concept of it, signified by the word “lamprey”, which signifies to us this eel-like fish with a variety of distinct characteristics, not only known positively (e.g., dorsal fin) but also negatively (e.g., lacking a jaw).

For a purely objective object, let us consider a fictional character; say, Fyodor Dostoevsky’s Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov. He is intelligent, handsome, impoverished, isolated, dedicated to his sister and mother, driven to a moment of madness by the theory—resounded in Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*—of a man above all concerns, and consumed by guilt after committing a crime in the name of this theory. We picture a man gaunt and approaching emaciation, with perhaps active but wild eyes, dressed poorly, his hair perhaps a mess (psychological disturbance often inducing hands-in-hair activity). Or one might picture him as portrayed in several film adaptations (John Hurt, John Simms, or Crispin Glover, say—none of which fit the image I have myself). Though the particulars of the phantasm may vary from individual to individual, the *intelligibility* signified by the name Raskolnikov is the same. That the character is not a real person allows various irreconcilable images nevertheless reconcilable to the same signified intelligible meaning. In other words, while there is a definite pattern of characteristics and behaviors which constitute the character of Raskolnikov—such that, portraying him as a French dandy interested in chasing girls and partying would be entirely unfitting, and thus, not really a portrayal of Dostoevsky’s character at all—because the constitution is *purely objective*, meaning that it exists *only on the basis* of the *species expressae* held by a mind or several minds, there is a greater degree of indeterminacy in its ontological constitution than there is in that of a natural being.

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.

Minerd, "The Analogy of Res-ality" [p.128].

Finally, for a mixed object, one that is part natural and part objective, let us consider a professor. Here, without naming names, I am considering a real person under whom I studied as an undergraduate. Male, in his 60s, round glasses, goatee—always wore nice suits and favored the color purple—very talkative, giving lectures I often found murky, not because his explanations were

unclear but because they always led into greater mysteries. But while these characteristics belong to the person, the nature of the relationship, of student to professor, retained a formality; I never called him by his first name, but always “Doctor _____”. I did not grade his work, but he graded mine. I did not give him assignments, but the other way around. I did what he told me, in the courses, for, as he said, the syllabus was a kind of contract between us. None of these aspects—titles, obligations, the recognition of authority or of contractual restrictions and rights—exist purely in nature (however much they might be *based* on things existing in nature, such as his superior knowledge, experience, and so on), but require an addition; such that my concept of the human person is joined to the concept of the pattern which makes someone a professor, whereby I know an individual as not merely what he is naturally, but also objectively.

Worth mentioning again is the necessity for actually understanding the conceptual intelligibility signified by each *species expressa intelligibilis* of a perceptual *species expressa*, as a congeries of sensible qualities in which we see the intelligibly-meaningful exemplar particularly exemplified. To exemplify the intelligible meaning I need something which is referentially-meaningful to me as well, something encountered in a context of action in the world. Thus, by a confluence of signs—concept and percept together—the meaning of the real may become an object; not only terminative, but through the ever-recursive process of understanding, also stimulative. Even the natural object of the lamprey is not understood, unless precissively, in its pure nature alone, but in a relational and even referential context. That is: we naturally think of the lamprey not only as a chordate and so on, but as quite an ugly creature—the thing of nightmares, that is unlikely to but may attack a human being. These relationally-constituted objects are the **real**; that is, a reality which includes but reduces neither to its referential nor its intelligible meanings, but welds both together.

5. Conclusion: Semiotic Realism

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. To quote Deely:⁸⁰

“Reality” is more than a word, but it is also more than hardcore reality as well. In fact, “reality”, even in the hardcore sense [i.e., *ens naturae*], would not be accessible at all in awareness were it not for purely objective relations necessary for animals to orientate themselves in the environment, objective relations which provide, just as did the intersubjective relations of the physical environment in the first place, that further interface whereby semiosis in the human animal becomes conscious of itself, and semiotics begins to exist as a postmodern perspective on “reality” as involving social construction, yes, but involving the hardcore elements of the physical universe as well. This is the awareness that enables the semiotic animal to expand the objective world to the infinite, in a semiosis asymptotically assimilating the whole of reality to the level of human understanding, a “reality” wherein truth is an accomplishment, not a given, and where the human responsibility for finding what is true and making what is true go together.

The physical universe may exist in advance of the human animal, but the objective world as open to intelligibility and infinite semiosis does not. For the semiotic animal, once it has become conscious of semiosis, responsibility for the human shaping of that objective world within which the physical environment forms a part becomes inescapable, according to the saying of Aquinas that speculative understanding of being becomes practical by extension [1266-68: *ST Ia*, q.76, a.11, s.c.].

If we are to have a living, thriving realism, therefore, it must be a realism capable of dealing with the entirety of the real; not just the reality we engage directly through our senses, but the reality we experience perceptually and intellectually as well, a reality comprising the relations and *especially* the sign-relations which constitute so much of our experience. Only thus can we discover not only the

⁸⁰ 2009: *Purely Objective Reality*, 118.

intelligible meaning of the *entia naturae* constituting the physical world, but also the intelligibility of the referential context of our cultural world, and through both, discover, improve, and defend the teleological meaning of human life. In the words of John Deely, “We need, in short, at the outset of the postmodern era, a specifically semiotic notion of reality.”⁸¹

⁸¹ 2002: *What Distinguishes Human Understanding*, 63.

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The Analogy of *Res-ality*

Reflections in Response to Brian Kemple¹

Matthew K. Miner, Ph.D.
Byzantine Catholic Seminary of
Ss. Cyril and Methodius
Pittsburgh, PA

I have been asked to write a response to Dr. Brian Kemple’s essay, “Signs and Reality: An Advocacy 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.² 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.

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.

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:³

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, 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 *perseity* that exists in many domains, be they mind-independent or mind-dependent. Wherever there is *perseity*,⁴ 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."⁵ 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

³ Kemple 2019: "Signs and Reality" in *Reality: a journal for philosophical discourse* 1.1 (2020): 87-88.

⁴ That is, wherever there is an essential distinction which can be contrasted to that which is accidental.

⁵ 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*.

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*.⁶

Yet, for scholastics, the domain of cognition-dependent reality generally is a kind of *terra non-considerata*.⁷ 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.⁸ 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 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

⁶ For all of this, see John P. Doyle 2012: “Sprouts from Greek Gardens: Antisthenes, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics,” in Victor Salas (ed.), *On the Borders of Being and Knowing: Some Late Scholastic Thoughts on Supertranscendental Being*: 1-17.

⁷ See John Deely 1982: *Introducing Semiotic: Its History and Its Doctrine*, 26.

⁸ See Matthew Miner 2017: “Beyond Non-Being: Thomistic Metaphysics on Second Intentions, *Ens morale*, and *Ens artificiale*,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 91.3: 353-79 and 2019: “Thomism and the Formal Object of Logic,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 93.3: 411-44.

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:⁹

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

⁹ Kemple 2019: “Signs and Reality”, 87-88.

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 "cognitive 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.¹⁰ 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

¹⁰ Namely in the domains of biosemiotics, phytosemiotics, and physiosemiotics.

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 *ens reale* and *ens rationis*, a distinction that would better be articulated (as Kemple himself notes) as that of *ens naturae* in contrast to *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 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.

Kemple, “Signs and Reality” [p.84].

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**.”¹¹ 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

¹¹ Kemple 2019: “Signs and Reality”, 89.

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.¹²

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 reale* but *real* as 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.”¹³ 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*.

¹² 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 College, Latrobe PA. and may provide some insights on what the best of the Thomist tradition said in articulating these matters concerning extrinsic formal causality.

¹³ Kemple 2019: “Signs and Reality”, 90.

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 possible all that complexity: not only the development of culture, but its perversion; not only the revelation of truth but the diffusion of falsehood.

Kemple, "Signs and Reality" [p.91-92].

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 metaphysic). 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 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.¹⁴ 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

¹⁴ I would add, too, it is important to consider the debates over so-called intentional causality proposed by Fr. Cardinal Louis Billot, S.J.

sacraments. The followers of Deely would do well to consult, here, the text of Poinot, 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 Poinot 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* whereby all other objects are realizable as having a

being beyond their referentially-meaningful constitution as related to the self.

Kemple, "Signs and Reality" [p.106].

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.¹⁵ Indeed, the very abstraction of the sciences (and, hence, their distinction) depends upon the mode of defining.¹⁶

The first operation of the human intellect is of great importance.¹⁷ Here, in the search for definitions, we have a true operation of *vouç* (“direct intellectual

¹⁵ On objectively inferential syllogistic inference—which is not the only sort of inference that one can draw—see the lengthy explanatory note in Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange 1934: *The Sense of Mystery*, 28-9n41-42.

¹⁶ See Poinso 1632: *The Material Logic of John of St. Thomas* [*Cursus philosophicus, ars logica*, pt. 2], q.27, a.1 (p. 558-59): “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.

¹⁷ 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

insight”)¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ Yet such reasoning merely opens the door to the basic insights which themselves are not

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!

¹⁸ See *ibid*, 23n31: “It is understanding, *voûç*, 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 posteriorum 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.

¹⁹ For reflection on this point see Régis 1935: *L’Opinion selon Aristote*; Gardeil 1911: “La certitude probable,” *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 5: 237-66, 441-85; 1911: “La topicité,” *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 5: 750-57.

proven.²⁰ I have not said everything necessary here, but these remarks suffice for laying out the basic point about the first operation of the intellect.

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 *enunciabile statement*, on which a judgment is rendered.²¹ 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 to the domain of the second operation of the intellect. Our mind is doing something different than defining here. It is a new sort of intellection, and for this reason, a new kind of *verbum* is psychologically formed by the intellect.²²

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

²⁰ 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.

²¹ Regarding the distinction between enunciation and judgment see Maritain 1933: *Elements de philosophie, tome 2: L'ordre des concepts*, in the English translation by Imelda Choquette, *An Introduction to Logic*, 84–98; and Simon 1934: *Introduction à l'ontologie du connaître*, in the English translation by Vukan Kuic and Richard J. Thompson, *Introduction to Metaphysics of Knowledge*, 136–58.

²² On the earlier history of this point, see de Muralto 1991: "La doctrine médiévale de l'esse obiectivum" in *L'enjeu de la philosophie médiévale: études thomistes, scotistes, occamiennes*: 90-167 (esp. 127ff). Also see the next note.

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.)²³

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.²⁴ 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 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

²³ 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 1266-68: *ST Ia*, q.14, a.7. *However, it does not make one [concept / verbum] out of many propositions*” (my translation, italics added)

²⁴ 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*.

daunting. One understands why Maritain abandoned his attempt to write a contemporary material logic!²⁵

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.

Kemple, “Signs and Reality” [p.114-15].

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

²⁵ See Maritain i.1920-40: “Grande logique, ou Logique de la raison vraie,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2: 667-763.

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 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 advocacy 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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