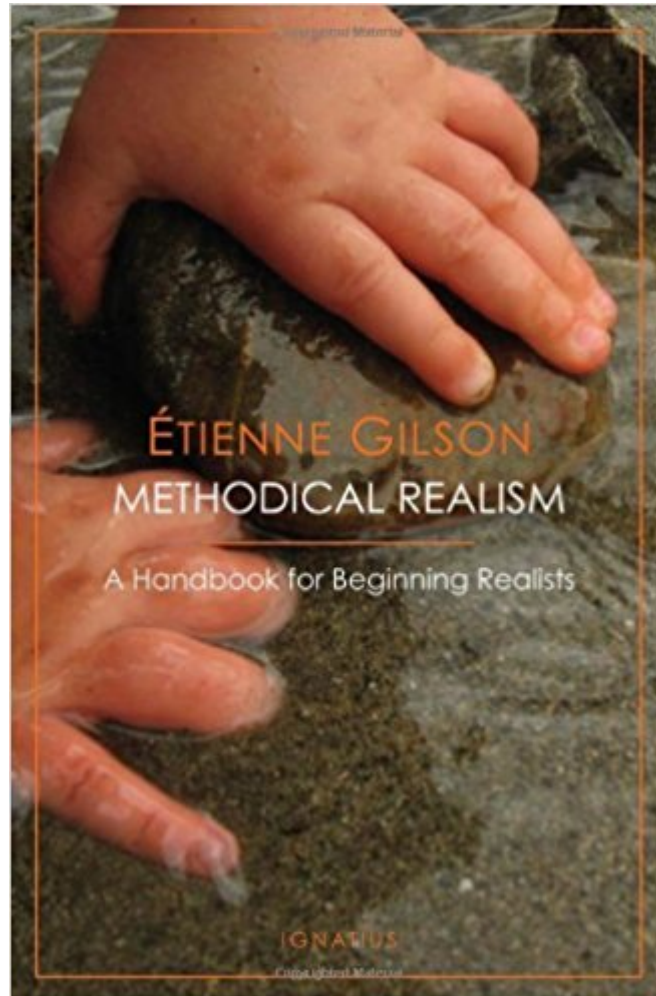




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Methodical Realism



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Synopsis

This short book is a work of one of the 20th century's greatest philosophers and historians of philosophy, Etienne Gilson. The book's title, taken from the first chapter, may sound esoteric but it reflects a common-sense outlook on the world, applied in a "methodical" way. That approach, known as realism, consists in emphasizing the fact that what is real precedes our concepts about it. In contrast to realism stands idealism, which refers to the philosophical outlook that begins with ideas and tries to move from them to things. Gilson shows how the common-sense notion of realism, though denied by many thinkers, is indispensable for a correct understanding of things -- of what is and how we know what is. He shows the flaws of idealism and he critiques efforts to introduce elements of idealism into realist philosophy ("immediate realism"). At the same time, the author criticizes failures of certain realist philosophers -- including Aristotle -- to be consistent in their own principles and to begin from sound starting points. To these problems, Gilson traces medieval philosophy's failure in the realm of science, which led early modern scientific thinkers of the 17th century unnecessarily to reject even the best of medieval scholastic philosophy. He concludes with "The Realist Beginner's Handbook", a summary of key points for thinking clearly about reality and about the knowledge of it.

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Customer Reviews

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Since the late Middle Ages, philosophy has spent more and more time convincing us of how little we

actually comprehend the world around us; of how deceptive our perceptions and assumptions are. Ultimately, a great deal (though, of course, not all) of modern philosophy can be described as contemplation of the human subject that serves only to isolate that subject from the world with which it ostensibly interacts. For those frustrated by this situation, or for those, like myself, who find the modern philosophical tradition interesting but exhausting, Gilson is a welcome jolt. His realism is truly a philosophy that can be lived. His treatment of alternatives and criticisms is fair and convincing. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, just because an idea has gone out of style doesn't mean it's wrong. Gilson's transformation and presentation of the West's medieval philosophical heritage as still relevant is a refreshing alternative to much of what occupies students in today's philosophy departments. Students of philosophy should give Gilson a chance. Physically, the book is tight and well-constructed, but it's what's between the covers that make this a good buy.

E. Gilson clarifies and criticizes philosophical idealism and its practical and logical inconsistencies) following Descartes, which has led to confusion regarding knowledge, mind, thought, the good (misconstrued as "values"): and explains how realism is hardly as naive as it has naively been thought to be.

Gilson is the consummate Thomist and this brief but powerful work is possibly his best in print. Gilson sets forth to establish a case that knowledge is not merely conceptual. Intellect, Gilson argues, is based upon an external reality. In other words, the possibility of the intellectual act is due to an external reality. This is crucial for the Thomistic philosopher especially when dealing with Kantian Idealism. Gilson compares Thomistic metaphysics and epistemology with other popular "brands" such as Cartesian and Kantian. Then Gilson delineates the proper starting point philosophically and where certain philosophers have missed the mark. This small book presupposes that the reader has a background in the issues at hand. Thus, if the reader is not prepared to understand the arguments he may get lost in the jargon. However, with the proper understanding of the terms and arguments at hand, this book is a powerful loaded gun. I cannot recommend this particular work enough!

My formal education (College Studies) is in Philosophy. I loved the book to the point where E. Gilson is now one the few authors I read regularly.

Great handbook for beginning realists. Also check out Thomist Realism, and Man's Knowledge of

Reality.

Excellent book!! Further investigations underway.

This little book is the best introduction to real philosophy there is. Gilson's "realism" grounds the reader firmly in reality. He disdains the philosophies that take us from reality, such as those of Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant. Read the short section at the end, "The Realist Beginner's Handbook," once a month for a year and you'll see the world as it is. It's 30 paragraphs of common-sense realism applied to philosophy. For years, used copies sold for \$60 or more. Now it's in print again, and on Kindle.

When reading this short book, I found myself needing to read it at a very slow pace. The content is highly philosophical and scholarly. Although I am a realist myself, I think Etienne Gilson does himself a disservice when he explains something in a very complicated way. He is extremely knowledgeable when it comes to intellect and gaining knowledge. He can pick apart Rene Descartes statement, "I think. Therefore, I am," to the millionth degree. The "starting point" to gaining knowledge seems to be a real big deal because apparently, some people are completely confused when it comes to learning things, but more importantly, some people do not know how to explain how it is that we learn things. In philosophy, it is easy to overlap topics, but overlapping can cause more questions than what was actually intended. In this short little book, I found myself wondering from time to time what Gilson meant by a statement he just made. Often times, when a philosophical statement is made, the observation is not clear because the explanation uses words that could very well possibly be interpreted in numerous ways. Overall, Gilson has presented the case for having a reality first as a starting point, and then the human being can learn facts and truth. But, for example, one needs to be clear about what they mean when they use the word reality. In philosophy, it is very easy to pick apart someone's words but often times, they have misunderstood the original point. I don't think Gilson was misunderstanding anyone. He just frequently explains simple things and complex things in a very difficult way. To me, as a realist, it is very clear. We have been given this universe so that we can know it through our senses. A child can touch water and experience it. An adult can shovel sand and know what it's like to build a sand castle. When we start to examine and try to explain how the intellect grasps truth, though, it can become a difficult task. When transferring experience through our senses into the intellect, it even becomes more difficult to examine and explain.

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