Realism

It must not be imagined that any notable realist of the thirteenth or fourteenth century took the ground that any “universal” was what we in English should call a “thing,” as it seems that, in an earlier age, some realists and some nominalists, too, had done; though perhaps it is not quite certain that they did so, their writings being lost. Their very definition of a “universal” admits that it is of the same generic nature as a word, namely, is: “Quod natum optum est praedicari de pluribus.” Neither was it their doctrine that any “universal” itself is real. They might, indeed, some of them, think so; but their realism did not consist in that opinion, but in holding that what the word signifies, in contradistinction to what it can be truly said of, is real. Anybody may happen to opine that “the” is a real English word; but that will not constitute him a realist. But if he thinks that, whether the word “hard” itself be real or not, the property, the character, the predicate, hardness, is not invented by men, as the word is, but is really and truly in the hard things and is one in them all, as a description of habit, disposition, or behavior, then he is a realist.

References: CP 1.27 n.
Date of Quote: 1909
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