PREFACE

The most profound evil of our times consists in the lack of realism.

Gustave Thibon

At the beginning of his New York Times bestseller *The Greatest Show on Earth*, atheist biologist Richard Dawkins tells of a psychological experiment in which he participated. He and some others were to watch a short video clip of some young people passing basketballs to one another. While watching, they were to carefully count how many times the balls were passed during the duration of the video. After the video was over, the experimenter collected the individual tallies of the participants and asked the general audience the question: 'How many of you saw the gorilla?' Dawkins tells us:

> The majority of the audience looks baffled: blank. The experimenter then replays the film, but this time tells the audience to watch in a relaxed fashion without trying to count anything. Amazingly, nine seconds into the film, a man in a gorilla suit strolls nonchalantly to the center of the circle of players, pauses to face the camera, thumps his chest as if in belligerent contempt for eye-witness evidence, and then strolls off with the same insouciance as before. He is there in full view for nine whole seconds—more than one-third of the film—and yet the majority of the witnesses never see him.[1]

The point that Dawkins makes is that indirect evidence received through scientific instruments is often more reliable than eye-witness evidence. There is, however, another, bigger point to be made from this example: we often only see what we are looking for, and Dawkins is a prime example of that intellectual disposition.

On the other side of the scientific fence is Stephen Meyer's bestseller *Darwin's Doubt*. Interestingly, in chapter 19, he makes a very similar observation to that of Dawkins. He mentions his puzzlement at the mountain of evidence pointing to intelligent design in nature on the one hand, and the refusal of many brilliant scientists to accept that evidence on the other. In the midst of pondering on this question, he read a Chesterton short story entitled 'The Invisible Man.'

In Chesterton's tale, a murder has been committed in an apartment complex that is carefully guarded by four honest men. There is only one entrance to the room where the murder was committed and all four men swear that no one went up the stairs. Fr Brown, however, is not convinced. He sees a 'stringy pattern of grey footprints' on the snow covering the outside entrance. The four guards believe they were made by an invisible man, but Fr Brown realises they were made by the postman. The guards, who were on the watch for a suspicious looking man with an evil motive, did not think of reporting the harmless looking man with the ordinary motive. And so, they saw the postman without seeing him, that is, they did not consider him as a possible suspect. Consequently, they completely factored out his coming and going in the commission of the murder.

Meyer reflects, 'The theme is a favorite of detective-story authors: the obvious possibility missed by the experts, because their assumptions prevent them from considering what might otherwise seem to be an obvious possibility.'[2]

I must concur with this unexpected agreement between Dawkins and Meyer. The human mind is quite capable of falling short in its knowledge of reality by missing evidence, by not reasoning with sufficient care and effort, or by relying on false presuppositions. On the other hand, when it is correctly oriented in its relationship to reality, the mind's ability to learn about the world is simply astounding.

This book attempts to prove that there is only one 'reality mentality' that is sane, safe, and successful for the human mind.

It is called *realism* and it indicates the precise way in which humans know and so also the precise way in which they relate to reality. The reason that a case needs to be made for realism is that humans, by an abuse of their free will, can choose other reality mentalities than the one which is theirs. Doing so, they restrict and even break off their inherent ability to know the world around them. Reality becomes washed out, the mind's eye becomes feeble, gorillas and postmen pass by without being noticed.

When reason goes wrong, when an unhuman worldview is chosen to replace the human one, usually religion or science is at fault. Much ink has been spilled about the incompatibility of religion and science. Whenever they are incompatible, however, it is not because they are incompatible with one another, it is because one or the other of them is incompatible with reality.

This book will reconcile religion and science, but it will not do so through religion or science. It will do so by reconciling the human mind to reality. It will do so through the guidance of realism. If, as a realist viewpoint indicates, there is but one single source of the entire universe, then reality is a unified whole. Moreover, if that single source, in creating humans, gave them the capacity to grasp reality as such, then there is no reason why a person's perception of reality should not also be a unified whole. I aim to show that you can, and indeed should, have a single unifying vision of reality, where there is room for God *and* for God's creation, without the two of them coming into conflict, but rather with them co-existing in separate but not ontologically exclusive realms.

Perhaps more importantly, religion and science become *more* rational and hence more credible to the degree that they are harmonised. Since they are both needed to fill out a coherent, sane picture of reality, they mutually assist one another when they occupy their proper places in that picture. When science rests in the realm of empirical fact and religion in the fabric of reality underpinning empirical fact, they hold one another in place, as it were. On the other hand, when science is stretched into a religion

or religion is used to patch over science, reality's fabric becomes torn, leaving a void of contradiction and incoherence.

Thus, this book aims to detail a reality mentality wherein both reality and human reason are given their full rights and, as a result, religion and science co-exist in maximal harmony. Because my purpose is to achieve their union in the mind, based on my conviction that they cannot be opposed in reality, then I must make use of an arbitrator that stands outside of both of them. That arbitrator, as I have mentioned, is realist philosophy.

'Philosophical realism' in today's intellectual climate invariably conjures up images of mailed knights, pensive monks, dusty manuscripts, and Gothic cathedrals. It speaks of a world in which modern science cannot possibly seem to fit. The West has assumed for nigh on 500 years that the common sense philosophy of the Middle Ages was exceedingly naive, and so it is of no use for our advanced age. Wasn't all that philosophy completely overthrown by the subtle attacks of Hume and Kant?

On the contrary, not only has realism not been overthrown, it remains to this day the only philosophical mentality that can provide an account of human reasoning that does not fall into rank contradiction. It holds the modest position that *the things we perceive are really, objectively there*, that reality is real, *and* that our faculties of sense and intellect enable us to know it. While this would seem to be an obvious stance to take, unfortunately it has not seemed obvious to many cultures and thinkers in human history. On the contrary, as we will see, realism has been a minority position in human thought and currently has residence in the philosophical dog house, on a long term, self-renewing contract. It is high time that realism be restored to a world in desperate need of objectivity.

I do not hesitate to state that my inspiration came from the writings of the late, great Fr Stanley Jaki, physicist and theologian, herculean researcher, and prolific writer. From the early 1960s until his death in 2009, he applied his rapacious and capacious mind to exhaustive research into the history of science. The sheer

volume of first hand sources from the past as well as contemporary works that he read, assimilated, and synthesised seems to justify his magisterial tone, forceful invective, and adamant insistence, all wrapped in a sophisticated and obscure prose. Jaki packs a punch.

One of Jaki's main contentions is that realism is needed to do religion rightly and to do science rightly.[3] To do religion rightly means to provide it with a rational foundation, by means of realist philosophical proofs for the existence of God and His attributes. To do religion wrongly is to base it upon an irrational emotion or a sacred text read irrationally. To do science rightly is to require that its theories match empirical evidence and conform to the world as we know it, that is, that it be realist. To do science wrongly is to cook up theories which do not serve hard fast evidence, but rather serve some preconceived notion of the way that the universe ought to be. What is the mentality behind right religion and right science? Realism. What is the mentality behind wrong religion and wrong science? Either idealism or empiricism.

Such is Jaki's contention, and he threw the entire weight of his training into proving his point. As physicist and historian, he turned to the history of mankind, looking carefully to see how science developed or failed to develop in the various world cultures. What he found was that the 'mentalities' of which I just spoke were the single most important factor for determining whether or not cultures and individuals were able to make scientific progress or, for that matter, do science at all. Realism made for success; idealism and empiricism made for failure.

I myself will be taking up the same thesis, but I will broaden it and approach it from a different angle. I hope to provide a more solid philosophical foundation for the thesis, as well as make it clearer. In doing so, I am also seeking to solve two difficulties that readers might have with Jaki's approach and writing style.

The first difficulty is the density of Jaki's writings. Going through his books can be like reading by the light of fireworks, to adapt a comment made by A. R. Orage about G. K. Chesterton's works. Brilliant phrases, clever diction, and studied com-

plexity are the standard fare in Jaki's prose. In the words of one of his reviewers, 'Every sentence is so loaded with meaning that it is hardly possible to absorb it at the first or even the second read. Jaki tends to assume in his readers a breadth of knowledge similar to his own.'[4] Thus, while Jaki's work is stunning and impressive, it is also fairly inaccessible.

The second difficulty is that Jaki writes more as an historian than a philosopher. For this reason, he focuses much more on events and individuals than on ideas. Here too, his books resemble a fireworks show. An historical episode or detail flashes by with an apt quotation and a most incisive comment by Jaki. Then he quickly passes on. Your interest is piqued by your glimpse of the intellectual framework underlying Jaki's argument, but you are not allowed to enjoy it, for it was only a flash, and soon you are viewing the next Roman candle from Jaki's immense arsenal. Jaki's brilliant mind was often content to make a point, while seeing little need to develop it.

Fr Paul Haffner, who wrote an excellent overview of Jaki's writings, notes that Jaki did not give any systematic exposition of the philosophy underpinning his arguments: 'For the purpose he had set himself, Jaki did not have to go into minuter details of [realism]. His purpose was to uncover the major features of the intellectual landscape which is the philosophical interpretation of the history of science.'[5] Jaki himself admits that 'A speculative study of natural theology is not my specialty.'[6] He did not write as a scholastic philosopher, but as a scientific historian. For this reason, we easily miss the full weight of Jaki's arguments.

What I propose to do in this book, then, is to remedy both of these difficulties. On the one hand, I have aimed for clarity above all else. This book is meant to be a well-guided tour of realism's take on religion and science disputes. On the other, I have focused on ideas, more than on persons or events, as I want to display as fully as possible the rich and extensive backdrop that lies behind Jaki's fireworks show. I write as a philosopher more than a

historian, drawing from my own particular training and decade of experience in teaching various branches of Thomistic philosophy.

To accomplish its task, this book sets forth a general principle about human knowing, and then illustrates that principle by looking at the history of religion and science, as follows:

- **General principle**—realism is the human way of relating to reality and so is the default basis for all the knowledge of it that humans acquire
- **Religion as example of principle**—religion is reasonable when realist and becomes irrational to the degree it is not
- **Science as example of principle**—science is reasonable when realist and becomes irrational to the degree it is not

These three bullet points correspond to the three sections of the book. First, we have to know reality using realist eyes; second, we have to see how religion is reasonable when realist and unreasonable when not; third, we must do the same for science.

The first section, then, explains what philosophical realism is, then provides a picture of what the whole of reality looks like when you are a realist, and finally situates religion and science in that realist picture. These ideas are presented in three separate chapters:

- what realism is, in opposition to idealism and empiricism—chapter 1
- what realism has to say about the whole of reality, all that exists—chapter 2
- where religion, philosophy, and science fit in realism's view of reality—chapter 3.

The second section considers pre-modern cultures where religion set the tone of human thought. Among such cultures, there were instances of religion assisting science. Much more often, however, religion impeded it. The reason why religions were an aid or hindrance to intellectual progress, I claim, was their possession or lack of realism. Part two considers the following cultures and religions:

- pre-Christian cultures: the Indians, Chinese, and Greeks—chapter 4
- Catholicism—chapter 5
- Islam—chapter 6
- Protestantism—chapter 7.

The third and final section looks at the scientific perception of reality that developed after the Scientific Revolution. Scientists have made incredible discoveries in the past four centuries by effective use of the scientific method. Many of them, however, have fallen into irrationality by reducing the whole of reality to the scope of their discoveries. This would not have happened if they had remained realist, as I attempt to show in the four chapters of third part:

- The departure from realism in the age of science—chapter 8
- scientific findings about the universe—chapter 9
- scientific findings about life—chapter 10
- scientific findings about evolution—chapter 11.

In covering these topics, I have not wanted to over-simplify the issues at stake, and so I do not hesitate to delve into some intricacies of philosophy and science, in order to expose clearly whether a given reality mentality is either driving minds to a deeper understanding of reality or driving them to irrationality.

At the same time, I do not assume any previous knowledge on the part of the reader. Throughout, I seek to break down difficult concepts and illustrate them with concrete examples, as well as indicate sources that might be useful for further study. There are tables, flowcharts, and even a reality mentality meter that are gauged both to maintain the reader's interest and guide him in the understanding of the material. In this way, the book attempts to combine a popular style with academic content, so as to make the work accessible to as many as possible. Chances are that if you are comfortable with the content and style of this preface, you will find the rest of the work easily digestible.

I do feel the need to issue a caution, however. You might pick up this book and quickly turn to the controversial parts—those on creationism, evolution, and the Big Bang—just to see whether you agree with them or not. You might flip through to have a glance at the illustrations, flowcharts, and tables, while thinking that the book requires a bit more focus than you are willing to invest. But except you, dear reader, patiently read from start to finish, you will not pluck the real fruit which has been prepared for you: a single, unifying view of the universe—intellectually satisfying and coherent—wherein religion and science are in harmony without being mutually exclusive.

Is it really possible to have such integrity of mind in this day and age? Can we aspire to that wisdom so desired by the ancients, whereby one knows the highest things, and sees all other things in their light? Can the mind's eye be single, even in this fragmented twenty-first century?

You will see that we can answer 'yes' to those questions as you read. Any other answer would be one of despair. The realist is also an optimist.

Notes

1 R. Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth* (New York: Free Press, 2009), pp. 14–15.

2 S. Meyer, *Darwin's Doubt* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), p. 383.

3 This is the subject of his book *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Port Huron, Michigan: Real View Books, 2005). See also his words on this topic in *A Mind's Matter* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), p. 93; in *Bible and Science* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), pp. 199–200; and in *Lord Gifford and His Lectures* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986), pp. 31–32.

4 Cited in P. Haffner, *Creation and scientific creativity* (Leominster, England: Gracewing, 2009), p. 162.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 181.

6 *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Port Huron, Michigan: Real View Books, 2005), p. 324.