

# **A STUDY IN REALISM**

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A study in realism by John Laird

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**JOHN LAIRD**

**A STUDY  
IN REALISM**



# A STUDY IN REALISM

BY  
JOHN LAIRD



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To thee, O man, the sun his truth hath given,  
The moon hath whisper'd in love her silvery dreams;  
Night hath unlockt the starry heaven,  
The sea the trust of his streams:  
And the rapture of woodland spring  
Is stay'd in its flying;  
And Death cannot sting  
Its beauty undying.

ROBERT BRIDGES.

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TO THE MEMORY OF  
MY BROTHER  
HUGH BLACKHALL LAIRD  
SECOND-LIEUTENANT, YORKSHIRE REGIMENT  
WHO FELL IN ACTION  
AT TRONES WOOD  
DURING THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME  
8<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 1916





## PREFACE

WHEN I set out to write this book, I meant to give the reader a methodical, brief survey of some of the chief problems in philosophical realism (as I understood it), and to spend most of my labour on certain points in the theory which I found especially perplexing. I thought, indeed, that many of the cardinal features of realism had been investigated so minutely within recent years<sup>1</sup> that I could afford to omit some of them from my discussion and to be very brief in my treatment of certain of the others. *Per contra*, I considered that realists had commonly paid too little attention to certain varieties of knowledge in which, at the first look, other theories seemed better suited to the facts. The creative imagination of the artist, for example, the constructions of science, and even the meanings of perception, might seem to belong to a wholly different order from the simpler ways of apprehending which the realists dissect (I except Mr Alexander, whose *Space, Time, and Deity* had not appeared when I wrote) and I wished to examine whether contrasts of this striking kind were securely established in fact. In other words, I wished to search those other theories on the very ground they had chosen for themselves, feeling convinced that realism was strong enough to occupy it, and knowing, as a thing of course, that if realism were to fail in this enterprise, it could only be a provisional, departmental theory, and not (as it claims to be and as I believed) a final, catholic one.

<sup>1</sup> The theory of relation is an instance.

I never expected, I hope, to do more than an underling's work in so slight an essay upon so large a theme, but, even so, I wish that my confidence had not oozed so persistently as I wrote, and that I could have felt less like a child in chase of a rainbow. And now that the printer has put an end to my struggles with logic and my nibblings of the pen, I am better able to appreciate the yawning chasm between anticipation and achievement. I am doubtful, now, whether I should not have included much that I passed over of set purpose; and I sigh for the equipment which would have enabled me to deal more adequately with many of the problems that have sought me out. On the other hand, I think I may claim that I have faced any of the difficulties I was able to understand, openly enough and squarely; and that I have honestly endeavoured to keep objections in the foreground instead of attempting to gloss them over.

Be that as it may, I make no apology for the spirit of this adventure; and I should not wish to do so, even if such an apology could ever condone the offence. There can be no health in philosophy, I am sure, without continual discussion; and I still believe most firmly that realism is a truly philosophical theory of knowledge, by which I mean that the realists' point of view, literally interpreted and resolutely argued, may be sustained, consistently and without special pleading, throughout the whole wide territory of the theory of knowledge.

No part of this book has been published before; but I have contributed (copiously, I am afraid) to the philosophical journals during the past year or two, and these pages show traces of portions of this published matter and of certain comments upon it. To be more precise, two articles in *Mind* are connected with the subjects of the third and of the eighth

chapters in this book; an article in the *British Journal of Psychology* dealt in advance with some of the problems of the second chapter; the concluding pages of the sixth chapter are tinged with the remembrance of an article I wrote for *The Monist*; and the general argument of the book has a certain affinity with the contentions I put forward in a paper published in the *Proceedings* of the Aristotelian Society. In writing the eighth chapter I had to deal, in part, with the subject-matter of a former book; and I hope I have learned from my critics.

I am most grateful to my father for the pains he has taken in reading the book in proof, and for advising me of many of my mistakes.

J. L.

July 12, 1920