

Rumination About Real Things

In English, we *reason* or *ratiocinate* about *real estate* and *reality*.

The Latin verb whence these words spring is **rerī**, *to count, or calculate, or think*.

The Latin **ratio** is derived from **rerī**, and bears the meanings: *counting, an account, the faculty of counting, method*; whence our *ratiocinate, rationality, reason*, and, of course, *ratio*.

(see Partridge, Origins)

The Latin **rerī** is one of a special class of verbs which use the passive forms to express an active condition: as though, in English, in order to express "I think", we had to say "I am thought". The passive forms used for such verbs as **rerī** are ultimately derived from an ancient verb tense known as the Middle Voice --- somewhere between subject and object --- almost non-existent in English. However we may assemble a variety of English expressions to suggest the background meaning of **rerī**: You think; you are thought; there thinks (with regard to you); you count; you count things; you are a thing counted; you are thinged; *you thing*. "Plato taught that sight was the result of a 'fusion of rays, the light of the eyes flowing out to some distance into the kindred air and the light from the objects meeting it.' (Onions: Origins of European Thought).

If we are *intelligent* we are able to choose among things (which is in Latin **intelligere**). The Latin verb underlying **intelligere** is **legere**, *to gather* (physically or mentally), *to assemble, to choose and assemble with the eyes, hence to read*. Underlying the Latin **legere** is the Greek **legein**, *to gather, to assemble, to count, to recount, hence to say or to tell*.

(see Eric Partridge, Origins)

A Greek word related to **legein** is **logos**, meaning variously *an account, counting, proportion, explanation, statement, rule, principle; and a reason, reasoning, reason.* From **logos** we derive of course many words, such as *logic*. The Gospel according to St. John starts out: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." In the (original) Greek this "word" is translated by **logos**. Heraclitus (ca. 500 B.C.) wrote, "We should let ourselves be guided by what is held in common. Yet, although the logos is common to all, most men live as if each of them had a private intelligence of his own." (Wheelwright, Heraclitus, p. 19)

The **Stortinget** of Norway is their parliament; the name means *the great (storr) assembly, or just thing (ting)*. In Old English **thingan** means to negotiate; and the Old English **thing**, like the Norwegian, means *assembly*.

The sum of things is reality, and reality is real estate. Our English *reality*, and *reason*; and the Latin **ratio** and **rerī**, are all derived from the Indo-European root **rē-**, denoting *property, or counting*. Knowledge is thus a byproduct of economics: what is intelligible is bound up with what is legal. Knowledge is also, as is said, power, the power of synthesis, and of the name. I have in mind an Egyptian god --- whose name I have forgotten --- who created himself, we are told, by naming the parts of his body --- his primal reality and original real estate, or property. *Property* is from the Latin **proprius**: private, or peculiar to oneself; property, the body, the private parts. **Res publicae**, the re-public, is *the public thing*.

To be logical is to be rational, reasonable; it is to be intelligent, and hence legitimate and legal. To be able to reason is to be able to put two and two together, to be able to account for things, to be able to add up, assemble together, an assembly of things. The Latin word for *thing* is **rēs**, from the Indo-European root **rē-**, *property, or a business affair*. We find a background to this in the Vedic **rām, rās**, meaning *riches*, and the Sanskrit **revān**, *rich*. The Latin **re-** appears in a somewhat different sense in words like *return, revert, recluse, retain*: "back (to an original place or state), backwards, or merely connoting '(to hold oneself) back from advancing or from

doing something definite.” (Partridge, Origins, p. 830). The notion of limitation, boundaries. Studies of the behavior of humans and of lower animals seem to indicate that the need to establish and maintain territory is instinctive.

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“All inquiry into antiquity --- all curiosity respecting the Pyramids, the excavated cities, Stonehenge, the Ohio Circles, Mexico, Memphis --- is the desire to do away with this wild, savage, and preposterous There or Then, and introduce in its place the Here and the Now. Belzoni digs and measures in the mummy-pits and pyramids of Thebes, until he can see the end of the difference between the monstrous work and himself. When he has satisfied himself, in general and in detail, that it was made by such a person as he, so armed and so motivated, and to ends which he himself should also have worked, the problem is solved; his thought lives along the whole line of temples and sphinxes and catacombs, passes through them all with satisfaction, and they live again to the mind, or, are now.”

R. W. Emerson, History