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Roman Ingarden and the Realism/Idealism Debate

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Ontology and Metaphysics

"Ingarden held that philosophy divides into ontology and metaphysics. Ontology is an autonomous discipline in which we discover and establish the necessary connections between pure ideal qualities by intuitive analysis of the contents of ideas. This is an indispensable preparation for metaphysics, which aims to elucidate the necessary truths of factual existence. Each section of philosophy -

theory of knowledge, philosophy of man, philosophy of nature and so on - has ontological and metaphysical aspects.

Ingarden argues that every being is a triple unity of matter (contents), form (of the matter) and existence (in a certain mode). Accordingly, ontology as a whole is divided into material, formal and existential ontology. Existence is neither a property nor one of the material or formal moments of an object; it is always the existence of something and what exists determines by its essence a mode of being which belongs to it. Modes of being are constituted from existential 'moments', of which Ingarden distinguishes the following opposite pairs: originality-derivativity, autonomy-heteronomy, distinctiveness-connectiveness and independence-dependence. Taking into account the modes of being thus constituted, there are four basic spheres of being: absolute (supratemporal), ideal (timeless), real (temporal - it has the most numerous forms) and purely intentional (atemporal, sometimes seemingly in time). Ingarden also draws a distinction between three domains: pure ideal qualities, ideas and individual objects. Each individual object is formally a subject of properties whose identity is determined by its constitutive nature. Individual objects of higher order, such as organisms, may be superstructured on autonomous individual objects. Ideas and purely intentional beings have a two-sided formal constitution - besides their own structure they also have contents (in the case of ideas it is constituted by constants and variables, and in the case of purely intentional beings by places of indeterminateness).

Analyses of being in time, of the stream of consciousness and of the world show that their existence is derivative and depends on their relation to original (absolute) being. The foundation of being is placed either in its essence (and ultimately in the content of some idea) or is purely factual in its character. In his analysis of the controversy over the existence of the world, Ingarden first formulates Husserl's transcendental starting point, and then demonstrates and states precisely its assumptions concerning the two elements of initial relation: the real world and the stream of consciousness, together with a subject which belongs to it (pure ego). These considerations lead Ingarden to reject both Husserl's solution and his way of setting the question.

What is real appears in three temporal phases: the future, the present and the past. Objects determined in time include objects enduring in time, processes and events. A human being is an object enduring in time and constituted by a soul, which comprises an ego together with a stream of consciousness, and a body (with a subsystem constituting 'the gate of consciousness'). Living on the border of two spheres, the real (nature, animality), and the ideal (values), human beings create a third sphere of culture. Thus their need to transcend this fragility by a process of self-formation that is subordinated to values makes them prone to tragedy."From: Ingarden, Roman Witold (1893-1970) - by Antoni B. Stepien - Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy p. 790.

"Ontology, in Ingarden's sense, analyses the necessary structures of possible objects: it seeks to establish alternative possible structures of the world, where metaphysics would establish which of these alternatives is in fact realized. Ingarden distinguishes further between existential ontology, which investigates the modes of existence of different kinds of objects; formal ontology, which investigates the forms of objects (as contrasted with their material or qualitative aspects); and material ontology, which deals with these qualitative aspects themselves. The Controversy is divided up accordingly: Volume 1 deals with existential ontology, Volumes 2 and 3 with formal ontology. The Controversy contains extensive analyses of the modes of existence especially of temporal objects (events, processes, states), of the forms of individual objects, of ideas, states of affairs, relations, regions of being, worlds, and consciousness. Volume 3 contains an analysis of the causal nexus (cause and effect are regarded as simultaneous), of relatively isolated systems and of the problem of determinism.

The metaphysical (and concomitant epistemological) parts of the work were not written, but Ingarden's analyses of temporal existence (cf. 1983) and his stress on the reality of free human actions realizing values, seem to imply the possibility of a metaphysical investigation of man, and the final considerations of Volume 3 may be held to imply a certain priority of at least some metaphysical investigations to material ontology. Ingarden's last work (English translation 1983) is devoted to the ontological foundations of responsibility.

Ingarden is principally known, however, not for his investigations in general ontology and metaphysics but for his writings in aesthetics, and especially for his classic work on the ontology of literature (1931, English translation 1973). Even this, however, was undertaken in order to establish a radical difference of structure as between 'intentional objects' -- objects created by and dependent on acts of consciousness - and objects in reality.

Epistemology, for Ingarden, is divided into 'pure' epistemology - which investigates the ideas or essences of cognitive acts as revealed in "immanent eidetic intuition" and establishes ultimate principles of cognition - and 'applied' epistemology, which is partly empirical, and applies these principles to actual cases. In his epistemology, therefore, Ingarden initially embraces Husserl's notion of pure consciousness as the area where structures of mental acts may be indubitably cognized. Ingarden, however, rejects the necessity of any sort of transcendental reduction in philosophy and his analyses lead to a conception of consciousness not as something independent but as a merely abstract stratum in the real self. Ingarden thereby denies all the ontological features - irreality, self-sufficiency, and separateness - that had been ascribed to consciousness by Husserl. And he thereby undermines, in fact, the very notion of a 'pure' consciousness in the Husserlian mould." (pp. 396-397)

From: Andrzej Poliawski, "Ingarden, Roman" in: Hans Burkhardt & Barry Smith (eds.), *Handbook of Metaphysics and Ontology*, Munich: Philosophia Verlag 1991.

"For Ingarden, as for the other earlier phenomenologists, the decisive characteristic of phenomenology consisted in its program of an intuitive study of essences; as a matter of fact he devoted his habilitation thesis, *Essentiale Fragen*, to a careful analysis of the questions concerning the essence of a thing. To the resulting theory of 'aprioric' necessary truths he gave the name 'ontology.' Husserl himself had been talking in a similar vein of the different regional ontologies (i.e., of the apriori theories of different domains or regions of objects) and of a general formal ontology (i.e., of the apriori theory of the formal structure of any object whatsoever). But Ingarden admitted that he used the term 'ontology' in a somewhat wider sense, because for him ontology included the study of the essence of pure consciousness (*die Wesensanalyse des reinen Bewusstseins*). Husserl had once defined phenomenology as the study of the essence of pure consciousness, but he had never thought to call this investigation 'ontological.' For him phenomenology could not be a proper part of ontology, since on the contrary he conceived of ontology, the study of the objects of consciousness, as a proper part of phenomenology, the study of consciousness.

There was thus more than merely a terminological disagreement between them. What was at issue was the question whether ontology or phenomenology, namely the transcendental phenomenology of the process of constitution, had to come first. Ingarden was of the opinion that an analysis and evaluation of the constitutive processes involved in our knowledge of things presupposed as a 'guiding thread' the prior possession of a clarified notion of those things, while Husserl maintained that a clarified notion of the things could only be obtained on the basis of a prior understanding of the process of constitution. This difference between Ingarden and Husserl is, in fact, the one which separates the realistic from an idealistic approach to this problem.

However, Ingarden did not reject the program of a transcendental phenomenology as such. Already in his account of 1919 he had devoted a special section to the presentation of the phenomenological reduction and the immanent self-knowledge of pure consciousness, and, unlike most other members of the Göttingen and Munich groups, Ingarden had always accepted the transcendental reduction as meaningful and even necessary, namely necessary for the development of epistemology. To understand Ingarden's position one must know that in his Ph.D. dissertation, in his efforts to criticize the relativist and subjectivist claims made by Bergson, and in his struggle to clarify the issues involved in the idealism-realism controversy, he had been led to make a sharp distinction between epistemological and metaphysical assertions, which, together with his conception of ontology, resulted in a three-fold division of all systematic philosophy. The tasks of the three divisions are as follows: ontology investigates the necessary truths, i.e., delimits the bounds of sense, namely the range of the apriori possible (it covers what in Analytic Philosophy is the realm of conceptual analysis); metaphysics makes existence claims, i.e., it tries to decide what is the nature of that which in fact is the case;* finally epistemology, which for Ingarden emphatically is not first philosophy, has the task of certifying the validity of the results already obtained by scientific and philosophical investigations. Ingarden's conception of transcendental phenomenology can now be understood. For him the *raison d'être* of the transcendental reduction is epistemological, it has its rightful place in the program of a non-circular certification of all knowledge. And once the reduction is performed, then a new realm for ontological analysis is opened up (cf. the above mentioned study of the essence of pure consciousness). Furthermore, there are the facts of transcendental consciousness and other facts which might be inferred from them, all of which are part of the domain of metaphysics. Thus

transcendental phenomenology is for Ingarden a mixture of epistemological, ontological and metaphysical questions." (pp. 1224-1226)

From: Guido Küng, "Roman Ingarden (1893-1970): Ontological Phenomenology", in: Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement. A Historical Introduction*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1963 (Third edition).

"The ontological analyses of works of art affected Ingarden's entire ontology. Its best elaboration is contained in *Spór o istnienie świata* (*The controversy over the existence of the world*, 1947-48). A being, i.e., an object, can be considered in three different respects: (1) the material one, (2) the formal one, and (3) the existential one (modes of being). Ingarden understands ontology as based on eidetic insight and intuitive analyses of the contents of ideas, i.e., upon the eidetic method, which enables one to discover the necessary and purely possible relations between the pure ideal qualities. Ontology is for him the most general theory of objects. He distinguishes it from metaphysics, which fulfills the role of an applied theory of objects and which, being based on ontology, considers the nature and essence of factual beings. The eidetic character distinguishes metaphysics from the so-called real sciences.

Ontology aims at obtaining a general spectrum of eidetic possibilities and necessities with reference to any objects whatever. In the frame of an existential ontology, which has nothing to do with Martin Heidegger's fundamental ontology, Ingarden distinguishes and clearly defines four mutually exclusive pairs of moments of being: something can be (1) existentially autonomous or heteronomous, (2) existentially original or derivative, (3) existentially separate or not separate, and (4) existentially self-dependent or contingent. Considerations connected with the analysis of the second pair has led Ingarden to an original interpretation of the relation of causality. His analysis of time has brought some additional pairs of existential moments, such as actuality and non-actuality; persistence and fragility; and fissuration and non-fissuration. These differentiations enables him to distinguish and describe four basic modes of being (consisting of noncontradictory combinations of existential moments). These are: (1) absolute being (autonomous, original, separate, self-dependent); (2) temporal (real) being; (3) ideal (extratemporal) being; and (4) purely intentional (quasitemporal) being. We cannot experience any existing object without its mode of being. In epistemology Ingarden distinguishes: (1) the pure theory of knowledge, which is actually a part of ontology, because he describes it as an a priori analysis of the general idea "knowledge"; (2) criteriology, which researches such epistemic values as objectivity and adequacy; and (3) the critique of knowledge, which evaluates factually obtained results of scientific and philosophical cognition." (p. 349)

From: Andrzej Przylebski, "Roman Ingarden" in: Lester Embree et alii (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, Dordrecht: Kluwer 1997.

Ontology as a science of pure possibilities

"Ingarden begins with a purely formal ontological analysis, and builds towards an analysis of human being, and the possibility of human meaning. By examining existence in its various modes, he comes to consider the matter and form most readily accessible to cognition: ourselves. Plotting the multiple axes of our existence leads him to an understanding of the nature of our essence. So far, so good, Ingarden appears to be undertaking a classical phenomenological inquiry. But there are several surprises in store for the unsuspecting reader, particularly regarding a few key terms from both phenomenology and existentialism to which Ingarden gives entirely new meaning.

For example, each of his central concerns, essence and existence, turn out to be just the opposite of what we might expect. So too with his fields of inquiry; Tymieniecka's dissertation, *Essence and Existence* could just as easily have been entitled *Ontology and Metaphysics*, for from the outset, Ingarden begins to play with seemingly familiar terms. In his view, ontology is neither "a branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature and relations of being" nor "a particular theory about the nature of being or the kinds of existents." Rather, for Ingarden, ontology precedes metaphysics, and metaphysics is (and must be) grounded in ontology. Ingarden declares that ontology proposes to answer the question: "What is the essence of this thing which exists?"

According to Ingarden, three fundamental groups of questions form the basis for the distinction between ontology and metaphysics, corresponding to three distinct types of knowledge, and three distinct modes of inquiry:

- 1) Scientific knowledge focuses on facts contained within the limits of the real world, including the existence of the world as such, and all the objects found within it. This is the purview of the "particular sciences": chemistry, physics, and so on. Such sciences do not study the essences of things, but rather only the quality and quantity of the constituent elements of their factual existence.
- 2) Ontology entertains questions regarding what is "purely possible": ideas. Ontological questions establish the linkages between things, the constitutive structural network underlying the possibility of the existence of the world (for example, "if p, then necessarily q..."). In themselves, ontological questions do not study essences as such, but rather inquire into the conditions that must obtain in order for essences to result, as well as the links between essences.
- 3) Metaphysical questions, by contrast, study the essences of things. It is here that Ingarden reveals his existentialist side. Metaphysics explores the essential characteristics of things in their "pure incomprehensible facticity." Metaphysics also studies the effects of things on one another. Simply put, both the particular sciences and ontology are empty outlines of existence, which are, respectively, entirely composed of content or form. Metaphysics, on the other hand, is the vibrant canvas stretched on the frame of ontology and painted all over with data waiting to be interpreted. Metaphysics, Ingarden asserts, is dependent on ontology to supply a conceptual framework, but surpasses ontology in claiming to know the essences of things, beyond their constitutive physical elements, in knowing what constitutes the unique individual existence of any object." (pp. 185-186 notes omitted)

From: Nancy Mardas, "Essence and Existence in Phenomenological Ontology: Roman Ingarden", in: A. T. Tymieniecka (ed.), *The Passions of the Soul in the Metamorphosis of Becoming*, Dordrecht: Kluwer 2003, pp. 183-198.

"While it is difficult to find any radical turning points in the philosophy of Roman Ingarden, an inner tension can be detected. Ontology as a science of pure possibilities is set against metaphysics as a science of the essence of actually existing being. The philosopher did not build his metaphysics, he stopped at outlining its conception, as he believed that metaphysical considerations should be preceded by ontological investigations. Ingarden carried out ontological investigations on various levels: the meta- philosophical level (conception of ontology), systematic existential and formal-ontological investigations; the epistemological level (ontology of cognition); the aesthetic level (the ontology of the work of art and aesthetic object); the axiological level (the ontology of value); the level of the philosophy of language (meanings of words as inter- subjective intentional creations). The ontological perspective pervades almost all Ingarden's philosophical thinking, inclining his interpreters to ask the following question: is there a chance of leaving this magic circle of pure possibilities? Let us take into consideration whether the philosopher closed to himself the path leading to actually existing being. Why did Ingarden insist on the necessity of ontological investigations even though they were moving the metaphysical horizon away from him? For metaphysics was, aging the aim and ontology just an introduction to it. What is more, Ingarden's temperament and nature made him a metaphysician (he was interested in being) rather than a phenomenologist (he did not want to confine himself to how being was given to him). On the level of ontological considerations we observe the tension between intuition and discourse (direct and indirect cognition).

The *Controversy about the Existence of the World* is a systematic presentation of Ingarden's ontology. His earlier works constituted an introduction to it: *Essentiale Fragen* (1925), which offered the differentiation between an idea (*eidōs*) and essence (*Wesen*) and an outline of the theory of ideas; *Bemerkungen zum Problem Idealismus-Realismus* (1929), in which Ingarden distinguished three groups of philosophical issues (ontological, metaphysical and epistemological) and distinguished the modes of existence and existential moments as fundamental notions of existential ontology. The philosopher discussed more specific ontological questions in his other works: -- *Das literarische Kunstwerk* (1931, the ontology of a purely intentional object); -- *Vom formalen Aufbau des individuellen Gegenstandes* (1935, the formal ontology of an autonomous individual object). Ontology approached as a science on the possible ways of existence occupies a distinguished position in Ingarden's studies. It does not comprise existential assertions (it does not assert what actually exists). Ingarden distinguishes the following domains of existence: a domain of individual

objects, a domain of ideas, a domain of ideal qualities. He refers the notion of essence to individual objects (autonomous and non-autonomous). In various individual objects we observe the identity of certain moments which determine their range. This selection of identical moments, to which correspond many individual exemplifications, Ingarden calls an idea. We think about the existence of an idea only because in the world, which is experienced by us, we come across necessary connections between qualities. What is necessary speaks for the rationality of being and this rationality can be explained through the relations between ideal qualities in the content of ideas. Purely factual dependencies (for example, causal dependencies) or phenomenal dependencies are not enough to acknowledge the rationality of being. Therefore Ingarden presents the following argumentation: starting from the data of experience he asks a question on the conditions of the possibility of what is given in experience. He does not mean subjective conditions (what cognitive powers a subject should be equipped with in order to experience in the way he experiences) but objective, ontic conditions (what has being to be like in order to appear in such a way and not another way in experience). Thus experience suggests assuming a certain theoretical hypothesis--a hypothesis on the existence of an idea.

Ideas are characterized by their dual formal structure:--as ideas they have a characteristic structure which differentiates them from individual objects as well as ideal qualities; --they are ideas of something, i.e., they differ from each other by their content, determining the range of individual objects "subjected to them". This dual structure makes it possible to differentiate between the cognitive competence of ontology and metaphysics. Ontology investigates the content of ideas only (that they are ideas of something) and necessary connections between ideal qualities. It is only metaphysics that can formulate statements on the actual existence of ideas.

In the sphere of facts nothing can exist that would be contradictory to pure possibilities. Thus ontological investigations should constitute the beginning of all philosophical considerations. Theoretically they precede individual sciences and they are more general. Ontology eliminates problems and conclusions that are inconsistent with an idea of the investigated objects. Ideal qualities occur in the content of an idea in the shape of constants and variables--existential, formal and material. An ontologist employs an a priori analysis of the content idea (a prioric laws of connection and exclusion), but he does not lose the connection with experience broadly approached. The a priori cognition of ideal qualities is understood by Ingarden intuitively and this enables ontology to establish a wide range of studies." (pp. 186-187, notes omitted).

From: Zofia Majewska, "The Philosophy of Roman Ingarden", in: Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (ed.) *Phenomenology World-Wide. Foundations - Expanding Dynamics - Life-Engagements. A Guide for Research and Study*, Dordrecht: Kluwer 2002 pp. 184-199.

The controversy with Husserl

"Husserl was convinced that rigorous philosophy i.e., phenomenology must begin with a thoroughly elaborated epistemology and eventually develop from that starting point an ontology and metaphysics. Ingarden was equally convinced that any ontology or metaphysics that originated from an idealist epistemology was itself bound and determined to be idealist. His criticisms of Husserl's position bear witness to the legitimacy of that conviction: To attempt to 'defend' Husserl against the charge that his idealism is 'committed to' metaphysical idealism is vain, if for no other reason than that Husserl appears to have felt justified in making metaphysical assertions that he apparently considered to be sufficiently well grounded in his idealist epistemology (although he never explicated this foundational relationship). In the light of Ingarden's criticisms, it seems equally wrongheaded to suggest, as does Farber, that Husserl was committing some kind of transgression against the program of phenomenology as he initially conceived and described it. It appears, rather, that the 'subjectivism' Farber sees winning the day in Husserl's 'system of thought' is not at all the result of any fundamental change in the direction of his thinking but is instead the inevitable conclusion of a development of thought proceeding from his starting point of epistemological idealism. As we have seen, Ingarden found the position of metaphysical idealism impossible to maintain--indeed he appears to have been dissatisfied with idealism per se. Ingarden was convinced it was the very starting point of Husserl's phenomenology in epistemology that directed him toward the ontological solution of metaphysical idealism, and by restricting his own initial approach to the

problems regarding the existence of the world to exclusively ontological investigations he hoped to avoid a similar predetermination of the metaphysical position he would later proceed to establish. Ingarden systematically elaborated these ontological investigations in his magnum opus, *Controversy Over the Existence of the World.*" (p. 65)

From: Jeff Mitscherling, *Roman Ingarden's Ontology and Aesthetics*, Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press 1997.

The debate Realism vs. Idealism

"...the idealism/realism controversy was a central philosophical topic in the early decades of this century. With the subsequent reshaping of phenomenology along existentialist lines, primarily as a result of the work of Heidegger and Sartre, and with the increasing popularity of the 'analytic' concern with problems of logic, epistemology, and language, the interest in the ontological dimension of the idealism/realism controversy had greatly subsided before Ingarden finally published the first volumes of *Controversy*. Throughout his life, however, Ingarden remained committed to working out the ontological problems he had addressed so early in his career, sincerely believing that the idealism/realism debate concerning the existence of the world was of primary philosophical importance. The detailed analyses he presents in *Controversy* support his belief, and they do so in two respects. First, while his innumerable treatments of major historical figures, from Plato to Husserl, are generally offered for the purpose of either dispelling already existing confusion or clarifying his own use of terms—for example, he devotes the first section of the opening chapter of volume I simply to a detailed description of the manner and sense in which the term "idealism" has been variously employed over the centuries—these treatments at the same time indicate the central position the idealism/realism controversy has occupied throughout the history of Western philosophy, and thereby argue for the necessity of understanding this controversy and appreciating its centrality. But secondly, and more importantly, the excruciating rigour and thoroughness that he brings to his analyses render them compelling: the reader is indeed forced to grant Ingarden his claim that the problems he is dealing with do indeed warrant further investigation, and that our philosophical integrity demands of us that we pursue them further." (p. 80)

From: Jeff Mitscherling, *Roman Ingarden's Ontology and Aesthetics*, Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press 1997.

Excerpts from his publications (in progress)

Time and Modes of Being

From the Author's Preface:

"In 1946/47 my two volume work, *The controversy over the existence of the World* (Spór o istnienie świata Vol. I, 297 pages, Vol II 848 pages) was published under the imprint of the Polish Academy of Sciences and Letters.

The present volume contains the English translation of parts selected from volume I of this work: the Introduction, Chapter III (with its introduction), Chapter VI, and section 31 from Chapter VII. This selection covers my most important ontological analyses of modes of being and of time, as it is involved with these, which lead to the establishment of fundamental concepts of modes of existence. These investigations constitute the existential-ontological preparation for Volume II, which contains formal-ontological studies clarifying a number of basic formal concepts that are indispensable to an adumbration of prospective possible solutions of the controversy between idealism and realism. Volume II is in preparation.(...) I wish to express my great and sincere appreciation to Mrs. Michejda for her careful preparation of this excellent translation, which completely satisfies every demand of the author."

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