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THE ONTOLOGY OF EPISTEMOLOGY *

> The cognitive relationship, involving as it does the transcendent character of the relevant acts, is fundamentally an ontological relationship and, moreover, a real one. In fact it is only one among many real relationships connecting consciousness with surrounding reality.
>
> (Hartmann 1952, p. 136)

Ontology, as is well known, occupies a quite central position in the framework of Ingarden's thought, and there can be few philosophers who have awarded such importance to the discipline. Ingarden's method, in his metaphysics and aesthetics, as also in his general approach to phenomenology, can best be described as one of resolving problems by setting forth the available *ontological* options and eliminating those which prove inadequate. In his two early pieces on epistemology of 1921 and 1925, however, Ingarden is at pains to defend, in relation to the theory of knowledge, a much more traditional conception of what philosophy is about. In particular he is concerned to deny the thesis — otherwise so congenial to his thinking — that epistemology might most properly be regarded as a branch of ontology. The

* This article is the text of the lecture delivered on October 26th, 1985, during the conference devoted to Roman Ingarden's philosophy organized by the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

present essay deals successively with these two early German pieces, closing with some critical remarks concerning the unfortunate air of Cartesianism by which they are imbued.

The first of the two papers, *On the Danger of a* Petitio Principii *in the Theory of Knowledge* is a treatment of the question: how is epistemology possible? Ingarden begins with the claim that there is a certain essence *knowledge*, which can in principle be grasped in acts of essential insight. This essence is to serve as the most general measure against which the various determinately formed sorts of knowledge and specific concrete cases of knowledge would have to be gauged. That this essence exists stands beyond question, Ingarden argues, for as soon as one calls it into doubt, one sees that doubting is itself a necessary correlate of knowlegde and so would lose all its rational sense if the essence *knowledge* did not exist (PP 547f.). Already the Cartesian allusions are unmistakeable.

The theory of knowlegde, now, is the science which deals with the question: what belongs to the *essence* of knowledge? When we first embark on the theory of knowledge we cannot presuppose the validity of the various different supposed realisations of the essence in question. We have to neutralize the claim to validity that is incorporated in these realizations and take them merely as guiding ideas which prescribe for us a range of 'candidate' acts of knowledge about which we can orientate ourselves provisionally.

The problem, of course, is to specify how, without circularity, we can come to know the essence *knowledge*. What is the cognitive act which puts itself forward as a candidate for being that act in which we might best grasp the essence in question? This must, it seems, be an act of second-order reflection on a first-order (candidate) act of knowledge, for example an act of knowledge of the perceptual sort. Thus we are to imagine ourselves perceiving, say, an apple. Here we have act and object standing in a certain relation to each other. We now in a further act of reflection, make this relation into an object, and strive to apprehend this object as a realisation or instantiation of the essence *knowledge*. But how, on this basis, could we ever establish that we had indeed grasped this essence, and that this is indeed the appropriate essence? Now, surely, through a new, third-order act of reflection, for then we should be landed in a vicious regress.

Ingarden's idea is that this regress can be avoided if we deal not with a special act of reflection, in relation to which — as we shall see — doubt is always possible, but rather with a type of experience where doubt is ruled out. This will be the case if the experience in question is identical with its own object (in the manner of Brentano's theory of the evidence of inner perception) [1]. For it is not the case that in order to come to know an act of knowledge we need in every case a completely *new* act: there is a sense

[1] See Brentano 1925, Book II, Ch. III, and also PP 553.

in which the *knowledge of* an act of knowledge A can itself be seen merely as an abstract moment of the very act A.

The analysis of external perception can however help us throw some initial light on the problems with which we have to deal:

> We execute a concrete act of external perception and try, in executing this act, to reflect both on the perceiving and on the perceived object. We find that the perceiving is radically different from the perceived object, and intends and grasps the latter in a quite specific way. We ascertain further the 'real transcendence' of the perceived object, intended as real, in relation to the act of perception, and on the other hand we grasp the essence of the perceiving as an act of consciousness which is itself in its simple execution no longer perceived but rather '*lived through* (PP 553).

By imagining various possible cases, we can draw conclusions concerning the limits within which the perceiving act can grasp the perceived object in the given sense. It then turns out that there are various relatively independent dimensions of variation, both in the act and in the object. Above all we have the dimension of clarity and distinctness in the manner in which the perceived object presents itself to the perceiver, characters which rest on the nature of the prominent qualities of the object, on the surrounding circumstances — *the qualities of the act being assumed constant.* On the other hand we have differences in our act of perceiving, especially differences of attention and of visual acuity both in intending and grasping the object, and in intending and grasping what is given with the object but not in objectual form (e. g. sensations, aspects, etc. [2]) — *external conditions being assumed constant.* For certain of our perceiving acts are as it were lazy; they rely, in grasping their object, on the inertial residue of previous acts. Others however stand out as having an exceptional activity, as leading to clearer and more distinct apprehension even on the basis of constant external conditions; they have the capacity to grasp the kernel of the matter perceived as it were in a single glance [3]. This implies a family of peculiarities of the essence *act of perception*, according to whether we are dealing with a lazy or acute ('dead' or 'living') consciousness. 'One could almost say that the dead ego can bring about perception at all, only because it is subject to the pressure of previous experience' (PP 559). In *full* acuity the perceiving consciousness not merely

[2] On Ingarden's notion of aspect see his *Literary Work of Art*, chs. 8 and 9. The problem of the relations between object-directed consciousness and the consciousness of aspects or sensations is a separate problem of the theory of knowledge, which we shall not go into here. According to Ingarden, in experiencing an object we thereby also experience a surrounding stock of non-objectual moments, which are normally experienced only unthematically and which require special acts to be brought to direct objectual consciousness. Here too however experience allows different *levels of consciousness* — the elements in question can become ever more consciously experienced, ever more clearly and distinctly grasped.

[3] The differences here are perhaps to some extent rooted in special psychological capacities of the individuals involved.

grasps and understands the object and can form an appropriate idea; he can also bring this object itself immediately to fulfilment in his perception. That which is given receives its full weight, so that consciousness is freed from the ballast of previous perceptions.

There is, however, most importantly from our present point of view, a third dimension of variation in that total act-object structure which is perceptual experience. This, too, is a matter of variation on the side of the act, but it is a type of variation not in the act's relation to its object, but rather in the act's relation to itself: a matter of differences in the level of consciousness involved in our *living through* of our acts themselves, in the level of what Ingarden calls our 'intuitive' experience of our own acts (our consciousness of our own present acts being either 'light' or dark').

That this is a third, independent dimension of variation is seen in the fact that

> we can perceive in a wholly dark, unclear and inattentive manner... and yet live through the corresponding acts in a very 'conscious' way. And the same applies in the converse case (PP 562).

The existence of these three dimensions is learned from our original experiment of reflecting on the act of perception. We still do not have any *knowledge* of the structures involved, but we are not completely in the dark about them, since we have lived through the relevant acts — and it is indeed the dimension of 'living through' which will provide the key to what follows.

Consider, again, the process of reflection on external perception. Here our act of reflection is of the same species as our act of perception (both are, precisely, acts of consciousness). In it, the act of perception has itself been made into an object, although as an act in its own right it is still undergoing what we might call quasi-execution. And the object of perception has likewise been transformed into the meant object or '*Vermeinungssinn*' of the act-which-has-been-made-into-an-object. Consciousness is directed no longer to the object of perception but rather to the act, it lives properly in the process of coming to know this act. Here, however, the two acts — of perception and of reflection — are independent wholes, set over against each other. The act of knowledge is *added* to the act of perception as something completely new, as standing completely outside it; it could equally have stood, for example, outside an act of judgment or of love or hate (PP 555). Hence there is, in this externality, the ineradicable possibility of doubt and error.

It is not at all clear, however, that the structure we have described can in fact be realized. For can we really enjoy an act of perception — even one that is merely 'quasi-executed' — and at the same time carry out an act of reflection thereon? Or is it not much rather the case that in executing an act of perception we are fully given over to the job of perceiving itself, so that it is as if we have no time to concern ourself with any other matter?

These and other objections lead Ingarden to reconceive the matter by seeing the business of our becoming conscious of an act in a new light — not

terms of an extra, self-contained act of reflection, but rather in terms of the notion of 'intuitive living through' introduced above. As already suggested, one can order acts in such a way that one goes successively from almost completely unconsciously lived through acts to acts which possess the highest degree of consciousness self-awareness [4].

But now, a process of living through (a moment of any given act), when made maximally intuitive, can serve as the foundation of the idea of knowledge in general — just as the process of fulfilled sensing of red can serve as the intuitive foundation of the idea of redness. This, at least, is Ingarden's claim. In living through a given act, we have a situation in which *something comes to consciousness*, i.e. in which the subject grasps a certain object (the act itself) just as it is in itself — and it is precisely such grasping that we call *knowledge* in the widest sense of the word. Where in all other sorts of knowledge there exists a difference between that which is known and the knowledge in question, in the intuitive living through of an act,

> that which is known and the knowing of it are simply identical: knowledge is in this case a grasping of itself. And since this identity here exists, all possibility of illusion in the intuition of the living through is as a matter of principle excluded (PP 564).

The solution to the problem of knowledge cannot, of course, be quite so simple. It cannot be the case that we can identify, immediately and without further ado, a variety of experience which can serve as basis for an evident grasping of the essence knowledge. Thus one can raise the objection that, in the necessary move from an act lived through darkly to an act lived through with maximum intuitive fulfilment, *the whole act becomes modified.* We could object that the desire for knowledge that somehow becomes attached to intuitive living through must to a large extent destroy the naivety and involuntariness of the original act. And similarly, we could argue that each act is in and for itself unrepeatable — so that, given that the passage to complete intuitive fulfilment takes time, no act can be apprehended 'in its own original execution' (PP 566f.).

Ingarden's answer to these objections, in themselves quite familiar, is that there is no doubt that the given modification take place — but the theory of knowledge is not interested in knowing the act *in its individuality*, i.e. with all the original colouring of its real and intentional content. If it were, then certainly the only support for the theory of knowledge would be

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[4] Interesting light is thrown on this issue in the study of the notion of self-awareness by Harald Delius (1981), which attempts a linguistic treatment of the dimension of act-awareness. Either, Delius argues, there occurs at a given moment of experience a linguistic act of the form 'I am aware that I am experiencing such and such', or there does not occur such an act. Act-consciousness is to be understand simply as the occurrence of such a linguistic act. Hence such consciousness is not a matter of degrees, but an all or nothing affair, a matter of the presence or absence of a certain kind of linguistic articulation. For Ingarden, however, as for Brentano, there can be no total lack of self-awareness: 'An act which would be lived through in a completely unconsciousness fashion, is a nonsense'. (PP 562).

that degree of intuitiveness of living through by which an act is originally characterized. But the theory of knowledge is not identical with the history of a single consciousness. It deals only with the *essences* of acts on different levels of generality. And whether e.g. an act of external perception is executed darkly or purely intuitively is of absolutely no significance for its essence. This act remains what it is and does not, in becoming modified, turn into an act of will or imagination.

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Ingarden's second paper, *On the Place of the Theory of Knowledge in the System of Philosophy*, is his habilitation lecture of 1925. The very title of this work suggests an underlying *ontological* idea: the idea that philosophy is constituted by a system of sciences or disciplines, between which relations of various kinds would obtain, some disciplines being e.g. subservient to others. This idea will indeed form the basis of Ingarden's arguments in the present paper, arguments which are designed to show that there is, from the perspective of the system of the sciences in general, something special about the science of epistemology.

The job of the theory of knowledge Ingarden specifies more extensively in this second paper as being that of giving answers to questions of essence of the following sorts: what is knowledge as such? what is the knowledge act as such? what is the object of knowledge as such? what is the relation between act and object of knowledge?

Hence, we can say, the theory of knowledge has to determine what are the constants and variables in the regional idea of knowledge as such, and what are the relations between the various elements in the content of this idea. Once these have been determined it will be possible for us to make more precise the conditions which given individual objects (in the widest sense) must fulfil, and the relations in which they must stand, if the idea of knowledge is to be realized in or through them. This leads to the idea of '*applied* epistemologies' (SdE 5). These deal, e.g., with the question whether we human beings, constituted in such and such a way, can achieve knowledge through the execution of these given types of acts of consciousness in relation to these given types of objects.

Every science seeks to produce true sentences, but only the theory of knowledge, Ingarden argues, is in a position to *know* that its sentences are true (SdE 6). Any other science, in defending the truth of its sentences, has to point to its having used these and those cognitive means, and then it presupposes in dogmatic fashion that these means are precisely the appropriate ones. This is an inadequacy of science, the setting aside of which is precisely the (Cartesian) task of the theory of knowledge. This task is to be accomplished in two parts. On the one hand it is necessary to establish the value of the various cognitive means used by the different sciences, a task which is performed by the respective applied epistemologies. This can be achieved, how-

ever, only on the basis of an appeal to general and evident principles set forth by the pure theory of knowledge, principles relating to knowledge as such (SdE 7). Hence the relation between pure and applied epistemology is in some respects analogous to that between pure and applied mathematics.

Applied epistemologists will thus be called upon to measure ordinary science against that structure which is the essence of knowledge as established by the pure epistemologist. Note, however, that the theory of knowledge cannot add to knowledge, but only to the *security* of knowledge: it can help us to see whether we are approaching the ideal of knowledge in this or that particular sphere (SdE 7).

If epistemology is to stand above all sciences, however, then it follows that it cannot itself depend upon any other scientific discipline: otherwise there would result precisely that circularity which Husserl attacked in his critique of psychologism in volume I of the *Logical Investigations*. Here, as Ingarden points out, 'dependence' can mean one of two things:

(i) A is dependent on B when the subject-matter of B, or a part thereof, is a proper part of the subject-matter of A.

(ii) A science A is dependent on a science B when there are assertions of B, whose truth can be established only via the cognitive means of B, which serve as indispensable presupposition of the science A (SdE 11).

The first kind of dependence is harmless. Ingarden is prepared to accept without further ado that epistemology is dependent in this sense on both phenomenology and ontology, since it overlaps in its subject-matter with each. Moreover, if the non-philosophical sciences do indeed embody knowledge, then there is a sense in which epistemology would overlap in its subject-matter with these disciplines also.

It is the possibility that epistemology should be dependent upon some other science in the second sense that Ingarden wishes to rule out. Now, both the subject and the object of knowledge are entities whose being and formal and material determinations are studied by psychology, by the natural sciences, by metaphysics, and by ontology. Do we have a dependence of epistemology on these disciplines in the sense that epistemology would have as indispensable presuppositions propositions intrinsic to these sciences? Ingarden's answer to this question — which clearly, from his perspective, has to be in the negative — takes the form of a case by case treatment of the respective candidate sciences. I shall simply summarize what he has to say, leaving it to the reader to decide for himself whether his successive arguments do in fact suffice to make his point:

1. The theory of knowledge is not dependent on psychology:

Epistemology is not limited to the knowledge of *man*: knowledge (we might suppose) could in principle be possessed by animals or angels (or even by computers). Hence the theory of knowledge can be concerned

> not at all with psychological investigations. For it does not at all belong to the content of the regional idea of knowledge that knowledge must be executed in those real psycho-physical individual [acts]... which are factually given to us human beings in inner perception (SdE 19).

This, Ingarden suggests, is the real meaning of Husserl's attack against psychologism. The theory of knowledge does not investigate psychic states, but the ideas or essences of certain determinately constituted experiences of consciousness, i.e. acts of knowledge.

2. The theory of knowledge is not dependent on the natural sciences:

Ingarden offers here three arguments:

(a) It does not belong to the essence or idea of knowledge as such that it should relate exclusively to the real external world. Hence the science which deals with this essence could not have as its indispensable presupposition any proposition relating to this world.

(b) The relation between the act of knowledge and the object meant within it is not a real-causal relation between two real objects [5]. Hence the treatment of this relation must fall outside the scope of natural science.

(c) Our knowledge of the external world is not secure knowledge: it can give us no guarantee as to the existence of the objects in question: its results are always capable of further amendement and extension. Hence the region of the physical as such must lie outside the region of epistemological research. This, Ingarden claims, can occur without any sort of detriment to epistemology itself. For that moment in the content of the idea of knowledge which relates to the object of knowledge is a *variable* moment, only one of whose possible values is the further variable *real object* (SdE 25f.).

3. The theory of knowledge is not dependent on metaphysics:

Metaphysics, as Ingarden conceives it, is the absolute science of real being and its variants, a science which always deals with its objects as having being [6]. But being is a characteristic transcendent to every knowledge act, and is therefore precisely irrelevant to epistemology (S. 29). This is to conceive all acts of knowledge as conforming to a single structure, derived (as in Husserl's case) from our ideas of what is involved e.g. in mathematical knowledge, but extended by Ingarden to embrace also our knowledge of fictional objects.

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[5] This point can of course be attacked. For a discussion of causal theories of intentionality that is formulated in Husserlian terms see my "Acta cum fundamentis in re" (1984).

[6] Cf. volume I of his *Streit um die Existenz der Welt.*

4. The theory of knowledge is not dependent on ontology:

Ontology is the *a priori* science of ideas of the objects of the various regions. The ontologist asks: what belongs to the content of the essence or idea X and what relations can be disclosed thereby? The epistemologist, in contrast, asks: what conditions must a knowledge act fulfil if it is to grasp an object which falls under an idea with such and such a content? (SdE 30).

As already remarked, epistemology is thereby dependent on ontology in the first (harmless) sense distinguished above, i.e., the same objects which the different ontologies investigate also fall within the subject-domain of epistemology. But there is, Ingarden insists, no dependence in the second, harmful sense. The theory of knowledge does not need to accept any ontological judgments.

> For epistemology is interested above all in the correlativity between the structure of the act of knowledge and the structure and determinations of objects falling under given ideas. The epistemologist asks how an act of consciousness and its content have to be built up if e.g. knowledge of such thing as a real object is to be realized. The words "such a thing as a real object" relate here to the content of a certain idea, whose existence the epistemologist does not need to presuppose unconditionally. It suffices for his purposes if it allows certain states of affairs as merely possible ... (SdE 31f.).

Thus where ontology makes categorial, conditionless determinations of the existence of the relevant essences or ideas, these are precisely, Ingarden maintains, the assertions 'which epistemology, leaving aside of course the single idea *knowledge*, does not require at all' (SdE 31).

Ingarden is here, however, in making this single exception, giving away the game. For he is allowing that epistemology properly and necessarily includes at least one ontological question, namely the question concerning the idea *knowledge*. And once this has been accepted then it is clear that there is nothing to rule out the proposition that epistemology would deal also with a whole series of such ontological questions, with a family of ideas intimately related to the idea of knowledge — ideas such as *question*, *problem*, *sentence*, *assertion*, *communication*, *theory*, *proof*, *validation*, ect. — so that epistemology could then go on to ask ontological questions like: how is knowledge communicated? what is the relation between knowledge and expressibility in language? what is a questioning act? what is a theory? what is verification/falsification? and these epistemological questions will form just as much a part of ontology as does the question: what is knowledge?

An ontological conception of epistemology along these lines had in fact been developed already before Ingarden by other realist followers of Husserl, especially by Daubert and Reinach of the Munich school [7]. That Ingarden himself did not embrace it in his early writings is a reflection of the Cartesian aspirations by which he was at that stage infected. Such aspirations

[7] See e.g. Schuhmann and Smith 1985 and (forthcoming), and also Smith (forthcoming).

seem not to be present in his later writings, and they are certainly not present in his masterpiece, *The Controversy over the Existence of the World*, which in fact provides the theoretical basis for just that careful ontological description of the structures of knowledge which is required by an epistemology that has come to terms with the unrealisability of the Cartesian ideal.

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