Miscellanea Anthropologica et Sociologica 2019, 20(1): 82–97

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Roman Ingarden: Phenomenology, Responsibility and the Ontological Foundations of Morality

Even if Roman Ingarden did not develop an ethics *stricto sensu*, and although his philosophy cannot be immediately associated with a "practical turn" in phenomenology, his investigation of the essence of the real world brought him to consider the nature of man and the ontological conditions of possibility of his morally oriented actions. Without expressing normative prescriptions, and maintaining his observations in the field of eidetic description, the author felt the need to provide a *foundation* for ethics, inasmuch as he strived to both highlight ethical phenomenon evidence in material ontology contexts, as well as demonstrate the structural presuppositions of this phenomenon within the context of formal ontology. It is exactly this priority of ontological investigation that represents one of the most original contributions of the Polish philosopher on practical topics. The aim of this paper is to illustrate the way in which such a particular phenomenological-ontological metaethics takes shape through the theses expressed in Ingarden's articles on human nature and responsibility.

Key words: Phenomenological ontology, human nature, freedom, responsibility, structure of the world

1. Introduction

Roman Ingarden is undoubtedly the best-known Polish phenomenologist. He studied philosophy under Husserl both in Göttingen and in Freiburg, where he received his PhD with Husserl as director. The founder of phenomenology considered him as one of his best students and they stayed in close touch even when, after submitting his dissertation, he returned to Poland (see Husserl 1968). The philosopher, who remained faithful to the realistic approach of the Göttingen "circle" and did not share the presuppositions of transcendental phenomenology

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presented by Husserl in the first volume of *Ideas* (Ingarden 1998; Küng 1975), was one of the phenomenological *ontology* practitioners, i.e. his research was focused mainly on the application of phenomenological rigor to investigate various types of objects and the correlations between them. In *Controversy over the Existence of the World* (Ingarden's ontological *opus magnum* appeared for the first time in 1947–1948 and was published in Polish), the structure of the real world is indeed investigated through a "purely apriori analysis of the contents of ideas" rather than from the metaphysical assumption of its existence, according to the definition of ontological inquiry provided in the first pages of the work (Ingarden 1964: 45).[2]

It is in this ontological context that Ingarden offered his contribution regarding the question of practice and morality, writing papers dedicated to several topics related (directly or indirectly) to this issue. Even if he did not develop an ethics *stricto sensu*, and although his philosophy cannot be immediately associated with a "practical turn" in phenomenology (i.e., with a practical repercussion of the phenomenological method itself), his "journey" into the grammar of reality brought him to consider the nature of man and the ontological conditions of possibility of his morally oriented actions. Without expressing normative prescriptions, and maintaining his observations in the field of eidetic description, the author felt the need to provide a *foundation* for ethics, inasmuch as he strived to both highlight ethical phenomenon evidence in material ontology contexts, as well as demonstrate the structural presuppositions of this phenomenon within the context of formal ontology. As a consequence, the Polish philosopher cannot be forgotten when the space of dialogue between phenomenology and morality is investigated, inasmuch as he employed the former in order to define what a moral man and a moral world are, thus fixing the presuppositions of any ethics as such. With regards to this, it would not be incorrect to use the expression "phenomenological-ontological metaethics".

The aim of the present paper is to illustrate the way in which such a peculiar "metaethics" takes shape through the theses expressed in Ingarden's articles on human nature and responsibility; their theoretical implications, with particular regards to the practical sphere, will be highlighted in the conclusive paragraph. Provided that the essence of man requires practical and ethical possibilities, what is the formal constitution of a world in which these must be possible and not

[2] Ontology, divided into existential, formal and material ontology, is indeed considered by Ingarden as a preliminary step in orienting the unsolved metaphysical controversy between realism and idealism. See Ingarden 1964; Ingarden 1998: 21–54 (*Bemerkungen zum Problem Idealismus-Realismus*). While the first volume of Ingarden's *Controversy* addresses existential ontology and the second volume (divided into two parts) is dedicated to formal ontology, the third presents a specific formal study on the concept of causality (see Ingarden 1964, 1965a, 1965b, 1974). Hence, whereas existential and formal analysis is developed in the work, no material ontology is ever actually presented.

contradictory? And again: since moral conduct involves responsibility and free decisions, what is the structure of a world in which freedom is not in conflict with the laws of nature? And how can we describe the structure of man? As we shall see, these are some of the main questions which the philosopher asked himself while investigating man and reality from a formal and a material point of view, starting from the methodological assumption that each phenomenon (in this case the phenomenon of responsibility and morality) must be described both in its evidence and its ontological conditions.

2. Some remarks on human nature

Let's turn now to Ingarden's works, first of all to his reflections on the essence of man, published in 1983 in the volume titled *Man and Value* (Ingarden 1983).[3] Here we find a series of essays written in different years (*Man and His Reality* 1935/1939, *Man and Nature* 1958, *On Human Nature* 1961), from which we can reconstruct a unitary picture concerning the human position in the world. This picture can be synthetically subdivided into three decisive points.

a. Man's life swings between two different spheres of reality which are always underlined by Western philosophers while speaking of the peculiarity of humans: on the one hand the sphere of nature and, on the other hand, the sphere of spirit. As Ingarden states,

> man exists and lives on the boundary of two different essences, only one of which seems to comprise his humanity, and the other (…) stems from his animality, and conditions the first. Man finds himself on the boundary of two regions of being: nature and the specifically human world. … Man is forced therefore to live on the substratum of nature and within its framework, but owing to his peculiar essence he must cross its bounds; yet he can never fully appease his need for being human. Such is the tragedy of man's fate. (Ingarden 1983: 20)

Man belongs to nature and to the animal realm, *but*, as man, he also belongs to a specifically human, spiritual and cultural world, for which he has to fight incessantly in order to surpass the impassable limits of animality. Although Ingarden, unlike many authors belonging to the classical metaphysical tradition, does not deny the central role of the animal component, he adds that human specificity is due to the spiritual "side", for it is the essential autonomy of this side that makes

[3] As we read in the foreword of the work, "This book has come about as the translation of a collection of six of Roman Ingarden's essays which were issued in 1972, in Poland, in a volume entitled *Little Book on Man*, to which the translator attached three essays devoted exclusively to the problem of values" (Ingarden 1983: 11).

possible the creation of a *human reality*: "man is distinguished from the beasts in that … he creates for himself an entirely new reality or, one might say, *quasi*-reality" (Ingarden 1983: 25), "for which the realm of so-called 'nature' is just a necessary substratum" (Ingarden 1983: 29). For Ingarden man is man not only by virtue of his own spirituality, but also because of the realization of this in the world around him, in which a sort of second world, a "superimposed reality" (Ingarden 1983: 29), takes shape and develops on the basis of the "first", i.e. on the basis of nature. This is the reason why the context of human life is made up of two types of objects: not only natural things, but also spiritual formations (*Gebilde*) which could not exist if humans were not part of evolutionary history, such as "works of art, scientific theories, metaphysical or theological systems, (…) countries, public institutions (universities, for example); legal systems, money, etc." (Ingarden 1983: 25). These objects bear on the natural world but do not belong to it, inasmuch as they depend on a peculiar and unique animal being, characterized by the "ability" to transcend its animal basis in order to create a new, non-natural reality.

b. By explaining the relation of dependence which connects the natural and spiritual realms, the author insists on the *conflict* which inexorably persists between them. Although nature represents the necessary condition of humanity, it is not described as an original root or "mother nature", but rather as a cold and binding region in which man cannot recognize himself (Ingarden 1983: 19). Ingarden depicts humans as if they were slaves and not children of the natural world, dominated by its titanic force and too weak to construct a parallel and autonomous sphere of life. Indeed, if compared to their inorganic and organic substratum, cultural products "are nothing more than a certain sort of shadow of reality" (Ingarden 1983: 19), which cannot find in material things a secure support able to guarantee the existence of culture without the aid of human action and consciousness (Ingarden 1983: 23); otherwise put, spiritual being will never reach the ontological autonomy of (and from) nature.[4] The result is the description of two conflicting dimensions: on one hand the fragile world of spiritual contents, not able to completely transform and control its primordial basis; on the other the wild and natural world, which both supports and limits human realization, imposing its indifferent "rules" on man and not allowing him to forget their determining strength.

It is not therefore possible, given this picture, to read Ingarden's anthropology in the light of the reflections developed in the last decades within the context of environmental ethics, where the natural side of man, i.e. the fact that man is thought

[4] In fact, the objects of the spiritual world are depicted as *intentional*, which means that they are ontologically (both formally and existentially) different from the individual objects of the natural world (on this subject, see Ingarden 1964: 82, 254–255, 262; Ingarden 1965a: chapters VIII–IX; Thomasson 2005).

of as an organism depending on natural conditions, often acts as presupposition for extending the region of moral patients to natural beings (animals, human beings or ecosystems), which represents a necessary theoretical step to moderate the exploitation of environment (for an introduction see Jamieson 2008; Light, Rolston 2003). Though Ingarden admits that man is an animal among others and a member of the natural universe, he does not stress the importance of giving value to these roots. In the same way he does not take into consideration the possibility of conceiving the richness of nature as the perfect background for the full development of spiritual potentialities (for instance natural landscapes as the perfect setting in which to increase esthetic feelings). On the contrary, the unique relation between man and nature which is considered in the mentioned essays is a relation of frustrated *denial*, since man, as such, tends to subject the non-human world to his spiritual needs[5] and to even forget he belongs to it:

> Man lives in a world different from nature and forgets almost completely that at the basis of this whole, new reality is concealed a nature indifferent to every value, and insensitive to his happiness or discontent. He forgets also that his humanity consists of only a thin layer of his surface, and that it is this layer which changes the whole sense of his life and fortunes. (…) He forgets that his being and life depends on what happens in nature, and thinks he can exceed and vanquish nature itself. (Ingarden 1983: 19)

Provided that human spirituality has to transcend nature and animal life, this transcendence is not explained as a balanced "going beyond", but as the unsuccessful and desperate attempt to absorb and deny their conditioning completely. As we have read, such is the impassable "tragedy of man's fate".

c. It is in describing the peculiarity of the spiritual world that Ingarden emphasizes the strict relation existing between the nature of man and morality. Actually, as he explicitly states, what characterizes the above-mentioned "quasi-reality" as a *human* dimension is primarily the fact that its objects and products embody or attest a series of *values* disclosed and realized by man, among which the moral ones cover a central role:

> He first attains to his genuine stature as a human being because, and only because, he creates a reality which manifests or embodies in itself the values of goodness, beauty, truth and law; because in his life, or at least in that in it which is of sole importance, he remains in the service of realizing values within the reality he has created; only thus does he attain to the mission that tells of his humanity. (Ingarden 1983: 30)

[5] In stating that, we do not mean to affirm that Ingarden supports any indiscriminate forms of dominion on nature. As a matter of fact, as we will presently see, "spiritual needs" coincide first of all with the need to put values into practice, and not with an inconsiderate thirst for power and dominion.

> There is a certain set of special values which man fixes for himself and tries to realize, and even feels a calling to realize. (…) It is not in this case a matter of relative values, at least not primarily; neither those values that are relative with respect to his purely vital needs (such as nourishment, for example), nor those relative to his pleasure (such as, e.g., delight and rapture) are here at issue, but values that are absolute in their immanent quality, irrespective of the fact that their realization depends on man's creative power, in a word – moral and aesthetic values. (Ingarden 1983: 22)

Man differs from beast "because, and only because", he "feels a calling to realize" values whose validity is not related to his personal utility and pleasure. Unlike animals, he can transcend his immediate experience trying to actualize, for example, the "absolute quality" of beauty, truth and goodness, that is the absoluteness of aesthetic, cognitive and moral values in the narrower sense of the word (Ingarden 1983: 128–129, 132). In particular, concretizing the latter through a morally oriented conduct implies that man is available to "make sacrifices" and, in addition, to be seen as "morally responsible", i.e. worthy of praise or blame for *his* actions and their consequences. As Ingarden explicitly asserts in a lecture delivered in 1962, "there can be no question of any fact or behavior, in particular of any deed, falling under the category of moral values, without the presence of this accountability" (Ingarden 1983: 165–166).[6]

Consequently, moral responsibility and the attempt to bear it, in spite of man's natural needs, emerge as *essential* (and not contingent) moments in the constitution of humanity, moments without which man and the human world would not deserve this name.[7] Moral predisposition and the responsibility related to it are thus credited with being some of the features belonging to the *anthropological definition*: in Ingarden's perspective we cannot think of a man which is free from any moral feeling, any moral judgment, any reference to a moral hierarchy etc.; in parallel, we cannot think of a hypothetical state of nature whose peculiarity can be resumed through the well-known Latin phrases, employed by Thomas Hobbes, "*homo homini lupus*" or "*bellum omnium contra omnes*". For the Polish author, the *intrinsic* morality of man is one of the most unequivocal results of the pure description of the "thing itself" referring to the human sphere.

3. The structure of responsibility

Starting from these ethical implications which emerged through the analysis of the essence of man, i.e. taking for granted the evidence of responsibility, Ingarden

[6] The text of this lecture is published with the title *An Analysis of Moral Values*.

[7] As for the definition of essence and eidetic inquiry in Ingarden's thought, see Ingarden 2007; Ingarden 1965a: 229–278, 379–454; De Santis 2015.

feels the need both to deepen the presuppositions of this evidence and to investigate some of them in the context of formal ontology. In this regard, a significant source of information is the treatise *On Responsibility*, based on a paper read in 1968 (Ingarden 1983: 53–117).

After distinguishing "different situations in which the phenomenon of responsibility emerges",[8] the philosopher here indicates three of its necessary conditions (Ingarden 1983: 69 et seq.): 1) reference to values (according to the assertions made in the previous paragraph with reference to the strict relation between moral responsibility and the concretization of moral values); 2) identity of the subject or, to be more precise, of the *person* who acts responsibly; 3) presupposition of freedom. That is to say that a man can be said to bear responsibility for something, to assume responsibility, to be called to account for something and to act responsibly *only if*: 1) we assume a sphere of values as "reference background"; 2) we take for granted that the same man is a unitary person (and not, for example, a simple bundle of single experiences), which is the reason why I can say that *he*, exactly *that man*, is responsible; 3) we consider him as a *free* man, inasmuch as nobody can be responsible for choosing or doing something without free will (if the decisions of a person are conditioned by a mental disorder, for instance, it is obvious that such person cannot be said to be responsible for what he has decided and done).

On the basis of these observations, deepening the practical dimension from an ontological perspective entails, for Ingarden, three possible investigative directions: 1) the development of an ontology of values, which could be compared with the axiological reflections of other authors belonging to the phenomenological tradition, such as Max Scheler, Dietrich von Hildebrand or Nicolai Hartmann (Hartmann 1926; Scheler 1966; von Hildebrand 1982); 2) the detailed study of the identity problem referred to individual objects and – more specifically – to personal individuality; 3) the analysis of the concept of free person and its justification in the context of formal ontology, also assuming the theoretical results reached in *Controversy over the Existence of the World*. While the former task is pursued (at least partially) by the philosopher in a series of essays of which an English version is now available in the already mentioned volume *Man and Value* (Ingarden 1983: 119–178),[9] and while "the problem of the identity of a temporally

[8] "Someone 1. *bears* responsibility for something or, differently put, *is* responsible for something, 2. *assumes* responsibility for something, 3. is *called* to account for something, 4. *acts* responsibly" (Ingarden 1983: 53). With regard to the first point, Ingarden specifies that "that for which the agent is responsible is of a twofold kind: first, it is a certain behaviour; secondly, it is whatever is brought forth, in particular, realized, by this behaviour, i.e., the result" (Ingarden 1983: 56). Employing well-known ethical debate terminology, we can state that the author interprets the concept of responsibility in both a deontological and a consequentialist perspective.

[9] These essays presuppose and intend to support "a well-founded recognition of the existence of values as determinations of objects of a special kind", refusing any attempt "to reduce values to

conditioned individual object" is the title of chapter XIV of *Controversy* (see Ingarden 1965b),[10] the latter task determines the second part of the treatise *On Responsibility*. Here the author summarizes some theses also expressed in the last volume of his ontological masterpiece (Ingarden 1974) and illustrates a possible world-structure compatible with human freedom and responsibility itself.[11]

The theoretical proposal that emerges in this treatise, which I am going to describe in the next pages, is a complex formal model which could enter the contemporary debate on the compatibility of free will and determinism (see Beebee 2013; Kane 2005; *infra*, *Conclusion*). The illustration of this model must not be interpreted as a change of topic, but rather as a more accurate definition, from the point of view of formal ontology, of what we assume when speaking of a free man and a moral world. This philosophical operation plays a double role: on the one hand it intends to "dig up" and explain the structural presuppositions of such concepts, starting from the phenomenon and plumbing it; on the other hand, this procedure "downward" contributes to founding said phenomenon thus implicating a way "upward" as well, for freedom, responsibility and

certain subjective modes of human behaviour or even to the behaviour of entire human communities" (Ingarden 1983: 131). The examination of Ingarden's conception of value is a task that goes beyond the scope of the present paper (for this topic see Golaszewska 1976; Kocay 1995; Wegrzecki 1994). However, it is worth stressing the strict relation between the fact that values "call" man to realize them (as we read) and their ontological status, which Ingarden attempts to delineate in the essay *What we do not Know about Values* (see Ingarden 1983: 131–164), coinciding with a paper read in Cracow in 1964. The author here investigates the concept of value through ontological categories which are crucial in *Controversy over the Existence of the World* (from an existential, formal and material point of view), suggesting several paths of research and providing few definitive answers. Value is depicted as a peculiar objectuality which "is never something that exists for itself, but is always the value of *something*" (Ingarden 1983: 137), and whose form and mode of being (*Seinsweise*) are different from those of the types of objects analyzed in *Controversy* (real, ideal and intentional objects). As for its "valuableness" (*Werthaftigkeit*), i.e. its normativity, Ingarden supposes that it is the value-matter which plays the leading role (Ingarden 1983: 143), in a bidirectional connection context linking value and valuable object: "the value of an object (…) is determined in its matter and valuableness by the properties, or perhaps nature, of the object, but at the same time, once it has been determined as a positive value, it confers upon the object a particular dignity, a certain wholly new aspect, which this object could never manage to attain without this value" (Ingarden 1983: 143).

[10] Here Ingarden defines the single person and the single man as an "object persisting in time", different from both "processes" and "events" (which represent other kinds of temporally conditioned individual objects). The same distinction is already present in the first volume of *Controversy*, where it is considered in its existential implications: while the mode of being of events is characterized by the instantaneous coming-into-being of something (Ingarden 1964: 193–198), and processes consist of several temporal phases (Ingarden 1964: 198–215), objects persisting in time remain identical through the succession of instants and despite possible changes of their properties (Ingarden 1964: 215). As Ingarden specifies, these objects can be things (a stone, a mountain, a home etc.) as well as living and human beings (Ingarden 1964: 230–245).

[11] It is because of this crucial role of the ontic foundations of responsibility that E.M. Swiderski counts Ingarden among the exponents of "moral realism" (see Swiderski 2005).

morality cannot be thought of as compatible with whichever structure of the world, and certainly not with the deterministic structure that seems to conform to natural laws. The question Ingarden raises can be summarized as follows: taking for granted that responsibility requires freedom and freedom implies the possibility to deliberate autonomously without being determined by external causes, how are free will and responsibility possible in a world where any event has a cause and is part of a wider natural "chain", as sciences seem to teach? Starting from this phenomenal contradiction, the challenge Ingarden takes on in his treatise coincides with finding out a form of the world able to justify both the rigidly determined events of nature and the free decisions of man, namely what emerges from the faithful description of both the natural region and the spiritual domain of reality.

In this respect, the author proposes to substitute the deterministic conception of the world (according to which *every* event is necessitated by other events and is therefore inevitable)[12] with an alternative view that however cannot be said to be indeterministic (i.e. a view denying any kind of conditioning[13]), but is rather presented as a third option. The main concept of this new perspective is the notion of *relatively isolated system*:

> In place of radical determinism in the sense of Laplace, and of indeterminism, which are mutually contradictory and both very unsatisfactory, I propose a third conception. According to it this world would consist of an immense multiplicity of partially open, and at the same time partially isolated ("shielded"), systems, which despite their mutual partial segregation and shieldedness are "interlinked" through causal relations. In various systems of a world so structured there are then on the one hand factual states which are simultaneous but at the same time existentially independent, and on the other hand also factual states which are causally interdependent existentially. The former correspond to those aspects of two or more systems whose respective states are mutually and simultaneously shielded. (Ingarden 1983: 103)

[12] Ingarden explicitly mentions Laplace, whose famous definition of determinism is expressed as follows: "We ought then to consider the present state of the universe as the effect of its previous state and as the cause of that which is to follow. An intelligence that, at a given instant, could comprehend all the forces by which nature is animated and the respective situation of the beings that make it up, if moreover it were vast enough to submit these data to analysis, would encompass in the same formula the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the lightest atoms. For such an intelligence nothing would be uncertain, and the future, like the past, would be open to its eyes" (Laplace 1995: 2). Unlike other thinkers (see for example Popper 1972), Ingarden does not believe that twentieth century physics has essentially altered the presuppositions of determinism (see Ingarden 1983: 102–103). On this debate, see Pomian 1990.

[13] For the definition of determinism and indeterminism, see Butterfield 1998.

This view, according to which the world is a totality composed of systems that are partially open and partially closed,[14] is presented as appropriate to include and justify the different kinds of determinations observable in the variety of reality, inasmuch as any intramundane conditioning can be explicated as a case of particularization of this theoretical paradigm. Moreover, provided that any single man can be considered as a system among others, the same structure emerges as being suitable to account for human self-determination as well, whose concrete realization is independent from other conditions without being totally untied from the external context. Conceiving man as a system which is partially isolated thus enables Ingarden to explain freedom in its phenomenal complexity, namely both man's capacity to determine himself and, at the same time, his undeniable relation to the world: the former as corresponding to the "closed" side of the man-system, the latter corresponding to the "opened" side (Ingarden 1983: 84–86). It is quite evident that neither a deterministic nor an indeterministic conception would have permitted to explain this phenomenal diversification.

The same world-conception represents a useful instrument to explain the complex relation that connects the different aspects of man himself, depicted by Ingarden as a "relatively isolated system of a very high order", which "as such contains in itself very numerous, likewise relatively isolated, systems of lower and lower levels, which are hierarchically ordered (…), and are at the same time both partially interconnected and also partially segregated" (Ingarden 1983: 87). That is to say that also different human spheres are conceived as a number of systems partially independent and partially related to one another.[15] This makes it possible to legitimate differences and interrelations between them, as well as the resulting possibility of free will. More specifically, Ingarden speaks of three regions constituting the human being, namely the *body*, "the ego with the stream of experiences" and the *soul* (Ingarden 1983: 99).[16] He affirms that:

[14] Employing the concept of system, Ingarden expressly quotes von Bertalanffy's legacy, although defining it as "not wholly satisfactory" (Ingarden 1983: 87). On Ingarden's "relatively isolated system", see also Makota 1990.

[15] On the basis of these observations, we infer that the concept of "system of high order" is a relative: provided that it concerns the inner hierarchy and complexity of a system (the more minor systems constitute it, the higher is its order), it can change into a system of lower order when the same system is compared to more complex ones. The single man, for instance, is a very high order system if referred to the variety of his inner components, while it becomes a system of lower level when considered in the context of the community or society to which he belongs. Likewise, in *Controversy over the Existence of the World* Ingarden employs the phrase "object of higher order" (see Ingarden 1965a: § 43), stating for instance that "the real world appears to be an individual object of higher order, which is ultimately composed of a manifoldness of originally individual (autonomous) objects" (Ingarden 1965a: 144).

[16] We employ the word "soul" with reference to the German term "Seele". By doing so, we distance ourselves from the published English translation of the treatise, in which "Seele" is translated as "psyche". For this reason, when reporting whole quotes, we will slightly modify the published text.

> it [the stream of consciousness] is, so to speak, a surface of contact between the body and the soul of man. On the one hand it consists of data, conveyed to the ego by means of the bodily information system, about bodily happenings and properties, and further about the properties and processes of external things. On the other hand it contains from time to time manifestations and modes of appearance of changes in the soul, and of its properties. (Ingarden 1983: 97)

Immediately afterwards, Ingarden defines the soul as follows:

> it genuinely belongs to the essence of the soul to be conscious, to have experiences, but its manifestations must also pass the threshold of consciousness. But the soul itself is, in its properties as well as in the transformations occurring in it, nothing specifically "consciousness-like"; it is itself not experience, but it expresses itself in experiences. And not everything that happens in the soul must at once, or in general, attain to awareness. It seems that only acts of thought are consciousness-like, or consciously performed. Perhaps it is also the same with acts of the will, especially with volitional decisions. These are in both cases modes of behaviour, or better put, "deeds" of the ego, which is the organizational centre of the human soul and which "embodies" and "represents" it. It is whatever "speaks" on behalf of the human soul, performs various acts, assumes responsibilities, enters into obligations, etc. All this cannot happen unconsciously. (Ingarden 1983: 97–98)

In these quotations we discover the structural presuppositions for making *free* decisions and, among such presuppositions, the fundamental role of soul:

1) Firstly, we find out that soul and consciousness do not coincide: the German word "*Seele*", employed by Ingarden without any speculative or religious meaning, refers rather to that deep, original and partially hidden core thanks to which all moral and character traits of a person belong to that specific person and not to others. For instance, the being-generous or the being-brave of a man belong to his soul, as well as "occurrences" of which the same man is not aware yet, such as "an emerging love or some other emotion, internal collapse, despair, dawning hope" (Ingarden 1983: 98).
2) Secondly, the last words of the quotation declare that "volitional decisions" concern the expression of soul in acts that are "consciousness-like, or consciously performed". This means that the profoundness of soul has to be considered as the origin of self-determination and as the true source of free choices and actions, provided that this profoundness is "transformed" into a *conscious* content, thus permitting to elaborate a rational decision and to find the means to realize it.[17] Consequently, we can affirm that freedom, responsibility and morality have for Ingarden a *spiritual* origin, assuming the word "spirit" in

[17] Yet the author adds in a footnote: "'Perhaps', since it is questionable whether decisions are not sometimes made in the soul before a conscious decision is made" (Ingarden 1983: 115, footnote 30).

relation to a "system of lower level" within an holistic conception of human being. Evidently, Ingarden's view cannot be credited with being either a naturalistic or a metaphysical-theological conception, to the extent that the philosopher maintains concepts belonging to the platonic-Christian tradition (it is the case of spirit or soul), though depriving them of any speculative implication and relating their meaning to purely phenomenal fields.

3) Thirdly, what emerges from the above-quoted words is the ontological and anthropological structure that underlies the free expression of soul despite biological and bodily conditionings. How is it possible that man does not follow his "animal instincts" thus choosing to behave differently, to control himself etc? How is it possible that he is not wholly biologically conditioned? Also in this case, the concept of *relatively isolated system* helps to provide an answer: since – as Ingarden specifies – both soul and body are partially opened and partially closed in their relation to the conscious I, consciousness can become the "mouthpiece" of soul avoiding the immediate influence of body. This would explain the possibility of free will and of the free actions based on it, without denying that these actions however have to rely on bodily or "animal" bases. In other words, this view would *formally* support the "material" description of man emerging from Ingarden's essays dedicated to the human nature, where man is described as finding himself "on the boundary" of spirituality and culture on one side, and "animality" on the other.

The ontological concept of system permits thus to combine freedom with the legality of nature and, what is more, to found free will in its phenomenal specificity, which presupposes the constant compromise with concrete limitations, both external and internal. In effect, as we all know from our own experience, deciding freely does not mean being *absolutely* free, or being free from any form of conditionality, but entails that man can *also* acquire self-determination besides (and on the base of) natural conditionings, which is possible, for Ingarden, thanks to the relative independence of the soul-system. This is a clear example of the author's attempt to capture and ontologically "translate" the intrinsic shades and complexity of the phenomenal evidence of human reality.

4. Implications of Ingarden's ontology of freedom, with particular regards to the practical sphere

Ingarden's observations on freedom can be read and interpreted from several points of view.

1) First of all, they can be considered in the context of the development of the philosopher's thought, in relation to both the ontological investigation carried

out in *Controversy over the Existence of the World* and the debate on idealism and realism whose problematic aspects represent the starting point of the work. As Edward Swiderski supposes, the moral-anthropological investigation could have brought Ingarden to revise his philosophical method and to "relax his former steadfast commitment to essence-analysis as the *sine qua non* of philosophical work destined ultimately, according to him, to resolve the central metaphysical puzzle, that of existence" (Swiderski 1994: 185). Put another way, the description and foundation of the *practical* human dimension, even though eidetic, may provide a demonstration of the metaphysical "weight" of the external world and thus open a sort of gap connecting essence and existence, the same gap that Ingarden had looked for (and not found) in the existential and formal analysis carried out through his *opus magnum*.

2) Secondly, the same observations can enter the contemporary Anglo-Saxon debate on compatibility between free will and determinism. In this respect, Ingarden's position can be credited with being "incompatibilist", inasmuch as the philosopher expressly asserts that freedom is *not compatible* with a deterministic structure of the world, in which each event is predetermined within a natural causal chain. However, unlike other incompatibilist authors, he does not conclude that free will is impossible (see Wegner 2003) nor that its justification requests the intervention of contingency and chance, i.e., the indeterministic negation of determination (see Kane 1996; Balaguer 2010). As already said, Ingarden does not query the evidence of free choice, but founds its possibility by denying determinism and at the same time proposing a third, not indeterministic ontological alternative. This allows to "save" both free will and its phenomenal manifestation, in which no trace of indeterminateness is observable.
3) Besides, the description of man through the concept of *relatively isolated system* can be interpreted as the pivotal moment of an anthropological investigation which follows in the wake of the so-called "anthropological turn" of the first half of the twentieth century.[18] Ingarden offers in fact an interesting theoretical model according to which man is neither a "homme machine" (from a monistic-reductionistic perspective) nor "a whole composed of two heterogeneous and (…) disjoint factors" (from a dualistic-Cartesian perspective), but a unity that is constituted of many interrelated dimensions (Ingarden 1983: 86). As stated above, these do not belong exclusively to the biological sphere, but are both psychophysical and spiritual, provided that the domain of "spirituality" is thought of as a phenomenal region, without referring to extra-phenomenal, speculative or theological foundations. Such an articulated view, based on the dialectical relation between unity and plurality, allows us to count

[18] As it is known, this expression, when used with regard to the history of philosophy, refers first of all to the anthropological contributions of Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner and Arnold Gehlen.

Ingarden among those authors who have contributed to elaborate the traits of a "phenomenological anthropology" (see, for instance, Fink 1995; Hartmann 1949; Scheler 1976; Stein 2004), of which the conception of man as a relatively isolated system certainly represents an original version.

4) Last but not least, the conclusions reached in the treatise *On Responsibility* can be surveyed with regard to their ethical entailments, raising the question of whether such entailments are admissible and, if so, which is their methodological value. As already mentioned, free will and personal identity are preliminarily depicted by Ingarden as necessary conditions of responsibility, which is in turn indicated as a *conditio sine qua non* in order to concretize morale values. Therefore, since in the above-quoted treatise we found the justification of both presence of freedom in the world and unity of the person-system (by means of the relation among its lower level systems, such as body and soul), we can state that also morality is thereby justified, although indirectly: within the world-conformation described by Ingarden there is place not only for natural events, but also for moral decisions and moral actions, the same actions that contribute to characterize man and human dimension, as we argued in the second paragraph.

Of course, this does not mean that the author developed here a moral philosophy. On the contrary, whereas the above-quoted article on the *Analysis of Moral Values*, dating back to 1962, briefly fixes some principles in order to acknowledge and define moral activity, the inquiry on responsibility, carried out few years later, seems to distance itself from ethics, investigating the concept of responsibility in a more general sense.[19] Rather than deepening the ethical issue, Ingarden seems to prefer dealing with it indirectly, and including it in a wider field of research strictly linked with the ontology of the real world; otherwise put, he seems to prioritize ontology over ethical problems *stricto sensu*. However, despite this moving backwards of the moral subject, it is exactly in the priority of ontological investigation that we can identify one of the most original contributions of the Polish philosopher on the practical topic. Ingarden's gradual "distancing" is that which characterizes his approach towards the moral sphere: after deciphering the capacity to assume moral responsibility as an essential feature of man, and after indicating the conditions for some activity "to be able to fall under the category of a value in a moral sense" (as argued in *An Analysis of Moral Values*), the author takes a further "retrograde step" and asks how the world has to be for such conditions

[19] As Ingarden states at the beginning of the essay, "The problem of responsibility has heretofore been treated primarily as a special problem of ethics, without any more precise investigation of its wider contexts. (…) It also seems that responsibility comes up in realms other than the moral. Moral responsibility is only a certain special case. Thus, the range of cases and examples to be taken into consideration has to be expanded" (Ingarden 1983: 53).

(or some of them) to be realized and admissible. What emerges this way is a sort of "map" of the moral world, that is, the formal outline of a world in which responsibility, morality and – consequently – humanity are not contradictory, and the conceptuality of moral philosophy can acquire its meaning and justification. It is in this sense that we employed the word "metaethics" in the introduction of the paper. Instead of analyzing the universe of ethical problems, Ingarden comprehends the central value of this universe and puts ontology "at its service", arranging an image of reality where the objective domain of any moral definition and moral reasoning is guaranteed. We can thus conclude confirming that Ingarden's thought implies neither a practical turn in phenomenology nor a detailed description of the moral dimension, but rather, at the basis of both of them, a rigorous ontological foundation of the object and the possibility of ethics itself.

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