

Reports on Philosophy

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Contents

Preface	9
ELŻBIETA PACZKOWSKA-ŁAGOWSKA	
Wilhelm Diltheys Lebensphilosophie und der Irrationalismus	11

Axiology

ZDZISŁAWA PIATEK	
Environmental Ethics and the Moralistic Fallacy	27
MARIA GOŁASZEWSKA	
Aesthetics of Truth	37
KRYSTYNA WILKOSZEWSKA	
Der Ästhetische Wert zur Stunde Null	45
BEATA SZYMAŃSKA-ALEKSANDROWICZ	
The Problem of the Co-existence of Nations in the Light of the Theory of Values	57
MICHAŁ OSTROWICKI	
Ingarden's Concept of the Construction of the Work of Art on the Gro- unds of System Analysis	63
PIOTR MRÓZ	
The "Gothic" Novel: A Few Remarks on the Genre	71
ŁUKASZ TRZCIŃSKI	
Game, Chance, Necessity as Religious Concepts	81

Methodology and Theory of Knowledge

JAN WOLEŃSKI	
Logic as a Component of Theories	91
JÓZEF MISIEK	
Can Relativism Be Criticised?	99
TOMASZ PLACEK	
Wittgenstein and Intuitionistic Critique of Classical Logic	105
JAN WERSZOWIEC PŁAZOWSKI	
Metaphysics as Dynamic Element of Theories	117
JAN CZERNIAWSKI	
Reality of Relativistic Effects	127
MAREK SUWARA	
Metaphysics and Assessment of Theories in Scientific Practice	131

Reviews

JAN WOLEŃSKI	
<i>Hilbertsprogramm und kritische Philosophie</i> by VOLKER PECKHAUS	137
ANDRZEJ J. NOWAK	
<i>Aspects of Metaphor</i> edited by JAAKKO HINTIKKA	140

Notes on Books

G. PRIEST, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* – S. LAVINE, *Understanding of Infinite* – J. KÖNIG, *Der logische Unterschied theoretischer und praktischer Sätze und seine philosophische Bedeutung* – M. RATH, *Der Psychologismusstreit in der deutschen Philosophie* – G. POHLENZ, *Phänomenale Realität und Erkenntnis* – T. WYLLER, *Indexikalische Gedanken über den Gegenstandsbezug in der raumzeitlichen Erkenntnis* – Ch. RAPP, *Identität, Persistenz und Substantialität* – R. SCHAEFLER, *Erfahrung als Dialog mit der Wirklichkeit* – K.J. PERSZYK, *Nonexistent Objects* – W. LYCAN, *Modality and Meaning* – Th.A. BLACKSON, *Inquiry, Forms and Substances* – M. MARION and R.S. COHEN (eds.), *Quebec Studies in the Philosophy of Science* – JAMES D. DU-

BOIS, *Judgment and Sachverhalt* – J. LAMPERT, *Synthesis and Backward Reference in Husserl's Logical Investigations* – Ch. MORTENSEN, *Inconsistent Mathematics* – P. ØHSTRØM, P.V.S. HASLE, *Temporal Logic from Ancient Ideas to Artificial Intelligence* – M. PINKAL, *Logic and Lexicon* – N. RESCHER, *Satisfying Reason* – L. ALBERTAZZI, M. LIBARDI, R. POLI (eds.), *The School of Franz Brentano* – Ch. BEYER, *Von Bolzano zu Husserl* – M.J. CRESSWELL, *Semantic Indexicality* – M.L. SCHUBERT KALSI, *Alexius Meinong's Elements of Ethics* – A. SCHUTZ, *Collected Papers IV* – W. FLACH, *Grundzüge der Erkenntnislehre* – R. SCHWARZSCHILD, *Pluralities* – D. ZAHANVI, *Husserl und die transzendente Intersubjektivität* – R. FAGIN, J.Y. HALPERN, Y. MOSES, M.Y. YARDI, *Reasoning about Knowledge* – R. LARSON, G. SAGAL, *Knowledge of Meaning* – H. WANG, *A Logical Journey from Gödel to Philosophy* – A. EDMÜLLER, *Wahrheitsdefinition und radikale Interpretation* – J. PAFEL, *Subjekt, Prädikat, Objekt* – R.B. BOSLEY, *On Knowing that One Knows* – H.C.M. de SWART, *Logic: Mathematics, Language, Computer Science and Philosophy* – S. NIEBORAK, *"Homo analogia"* – A. BROSCHE, *Die Logik der Tractatus* – L.E. FLEISCHHACKER, *Beyond Structure* – J. PULKINEN, *The Treat of Logical Mathematics* – A. THOMMES, *Ludwig Wittgenstein über Wahrheit und Kunst* – W. KELLERWESSEL (ed.), *A Bibliography on Reference and Some Related Topics in Analytical Philosophy* – I. STEIN, *The Concept of Object as the Foundation of Physics* – H.D. EBBINGHAUS, J. FLUM, W. THOMAS, *Mathematical Logic* – A. KANAMORI, *The Higher Infinite Large Cardinals in Set Theory from Their Beginnings* – D. van DALEN, *Logic and Structure* – W. ESSLER, R. MARTINEZ-CRUZADO, *Grundzüge der Logik* – R. STOECKER (ed.), *Reflecting Davidson* – W. HEYDRICH, *Relevanzlogik und Situationsemantik*145–160

Announcements	161
Notes on authors	164

MICHAŁ OSTROWICKI

Ingarden's Concept of the Construction of the Work of Art on the Grounds of System Analysis

In Roman Ingarden's philosophical system we find the application of some elements of system analysis which is used especially for the description of human nature, which, in the light of his conception, is considered a system of partly isolated systems¹. In his considerations Ingarden distinguishes three types of systems²: 1) open, 2) closed and 3) partly closed. The first two types are in effect only hypothetical constructs. This is because open systems, for lack of borders, of delimitations from other systems or their environment would in fact become processes. On the other hand, even if we agree that these systems, closed in their very essence "to everything", really exist, they would equally or even first of all be closed to our intentional cognitive acts, and they would thereby be outside our cognition³. Hence only partly isolated systems become a proper object of study (partly open or partly closed; these terms can be used interchangeably because on the side of the analyzed reality they have one designation). Those systems, thanks to their borders may hold the identity of their essence; but at the same time, due to the fact that they are not fully closed (isolated), they can be influenced by other systems. This is because they have entrances and exits, in other words such border elements of their structure which, with respect to two systems, mutually identify themselves as entrances and exits, and which make it possible for feedback to occur between them.

The question which should now claim our attention is whether we can extend Ingarden's system analysis to questions of the ontology of the work of art? We can presume that Ingarden himself initiated and projected such considerations. Let us quote here a passage in which he writes about the work of art in such a context.

¹ R. Ingarden, *Man and Value*, München: Philosophia Verlag, 1983, p. 85.

² *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³ R. Ingarden, *Spór o istnienie świata*, t. II, Warszawa: PWN, 1987, p. 112.

"For the moment, however, we should note that this object, taken as an element of the state of affairs, *opens* itself to us in a remarkable way even though it still remains a delimited whole. From the beginning, it appears to us as something accessible 'from within', as something that is open to us. And as we develop the given state of affairs, we simply make use of its 'openness' and intentionally penetrate its interior. This 'openness' is, *in general*, not an ontic moment; it is not an ontic mode of behavior of the ontically autonomous object itself. In general, this object is insensitive to the differences between 'openness' and 'self-enclosedness', even though these differences have their basis in its ontic structure. In our case, it is only a question of the fact that we 'open' the object, so to speak, as soon as we apprehend the state of affairs. The sentence-forming operation – in all its various modifications, but primarily in the one which leads to a categorial assertive proposition – is precisely one way of 'opening' an object (and in particular a thing) which for the moment is given externally in its totality. When it appears to us as already 'opened', however, we are sufficiently prepared to develop or apprehend a state of affairs and thus deal with it as with an object that is 'opened'. At that moment it also ceases to be given to us in a purely 'objective' manner. For the self-enclosedness of the object belongs to a simply objective (nominal) manner of being given, not merely in the sense of demarcation, but also in the sense that the conscious subject to whom the object is given apprehends it or intends it only 'from the outside', in *one grasp*"⁴.

Naturally, Ingarden has not written anywhere that an object of cognition such as a work of art can be apprehended as a partly isolated system. Nevertheless, let us point out that the following two elements allow for the interpretation of the work of art as a partly isolated system: 1) system analysis, in which one of the most important assumptions is the hierarchical construction of reality, where the analyzed objects can be described as systems⁵, and 2) Ingarden's formalization of the elements of structure as well as his description of their relations in the case of the literary work of art⁶. The conception of a literary work of art presented by Ingarden has a highly structural character. The literary work of art is (in a sense) a closed whole which has a specific construction. It is composed of several strata built up out of many interrelated elements which constitute a definite state of affairs. There also exist definite interdependencies between the strata. The

⁴ R. Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, pp. 135–136.

⁵ E. Laszlo, *The Systems View of the World*, New York: George Braziller, 1972, pp. 10–15; L. von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory*, New York: George Braziller, 1973, pp. 102–103.

⁶ R. Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, *op.cit.*, pp. 29 ff.

work as a whole is, so to say, functioning in a given "environment". These facts point to a possibility of analyzing theoretically the literary work – and because it is a work of art – any work of art, as if it were a system. It should be mentioned that, according to the conception of the work of art presented above, we have the possibility of its model presentation, which makes us even more inclined to employ the methodology of the theory of systems.

Thus we can presume that the above cited passage is concerned with something prior to concretization, with something primary even in relation to the subject himself and the perception of the work (something outside consciousness) – something, that we may consider important with respect to the object itself. The (system's) openness discussed by Ingarden is in this sense a process which temporally would be primary with respect to concretization and interpretation. (1) It is the object which opens itself to the subject and which is opened by the subject. (2) The opening and closing of the system of the work of art has its basis in its structure.

Here we should draw a distinction between the subjective and the objective aspects of the analysis. As Ingarden writes "something happens from within"; the object opens itself, and this, in effect, is the condition for its cognition. In other words, the system of the work of art and the system of the perceiver define some border elements of their structures which make it possible for entrances and exits to appear in those systems. If a system "opens itself", we can conclude that some changes are taking place within its structure, that it undergoes modification, or, as we can put it, some border points are being "adapted" as the entrance and the exit to the other system. Such a modification has the character of real changes within the structure of a given system. On the ground of Ingarden's research, we can describe this process for a system such as a human being⁷. This problem becomes interesting when we discuss it with respect to the other aforementioned system – the work of art.

We think that from the quotation given above we can conclude that Ingarden initiates what we would like to describe as the modification of structure, or simply a change which occurs within the structure of the work of art.

Let us agree that the modification of the structure of the work of art is a process which allows us to describe the work of art as "open" or "closed". In this respect, I think, we can describe the work of art as a dynamic sy-

⁷ This kind of explanation can be found in *Man and Value* by R. Ingarden. Ludvig von Bertalanffy was also working in this field, constructing a conception of the organism as an open system.

stem⁸, that is one whose structure possesses the ability to change its relations and to adapt itself to other systems. In our context by "another system" we shall understand the perceiver.

We would like to state that the opening process of the work of art, a real change of its structure, can be called the dynamization of the structure of the work of art.

It must be emphasized that the dynamization process is essentially related to the sphere of the object. Dynamization takes place in the object, even though it is initiated by the subject. This is because the definitional description of the dynamization process should, in the first place, be distinguished from Ingarden's notions of concretization and interpretation.

1. The most important question to be determined here is whether it is possible to interpret the concretization process as the one which *de facto* is achieved in the subject, that is in the perceiver's consciousness, only referring to the object as a schema? What does it mean for a work of art to be concretized? What Ingarden calls a picture "has its own defining ontological basis on the one hand in a painted canvas as well as indirectly in the painter's creative acts, and, on the other hand, in the perceiver, that is in his perception process"⁹. In the concretization of the literary work of art the perceiver has at his disposal only quasi-judgements about which we can say that: (1) they are constitutive elements of the work of art, (2) they cannot fall under the categories of truth or falsity. Concretization relates here to filling out various places of indeterminacy in the work of art, to reading those things which lead to interpretation, to reading, as W. Stróżewski writes, "that which the work is able 'to say', what can be understood in it and by it, whether directly catching all the senses contained in it ('thoughts'), or 'making guesses' or even conjecturing them, reading – so to say – between the lines"¹⁰.

⁸ Discussing aesthetic qualities M. Mitias writes: "Aesthetic quality is the outcome of the dynamical interrelatedness of the formal properties which constitute the art work as a significant form; and it would not emerge unless one creates, i.e., enlivens, this dynamical aspect of the work in the activity of aesthetic perception. [...] What is given in it [aesthetic quality] as a potentiality is only a plan – a schema – that can guide the direction and substance of this realization. This plan, which is its fundamental structure, is relatively stable, mainly because it is, as I stated earlier, a function of a relatively stable form. But although relatively stable, i.e., structured in principle, the depth, richness, and extent of its actualization depend upon the aesthetic sophistication of the percipient, upon his knowledge, experience, and cultural refinement", M. Mitias, "Locus of Aesthetic Quality", in: *Aesthetic Quality and Aesthetic Experience*, Rodopi: Elementa, 1988, pp. 31–32.

⁹ R. Ingarden, *Studia z estetyki*, t. II, Warszawa: PWN, 1966, pp. 72–73.

¹⁰ W. Stróżewski, "O prawdziwości dzieła sztuki. Prawdziwościowa interpretacja dzieła sztuki literackiej", in: *Studia Estetyczne*, t. XV, Warszawa 1978, p. 154.

The problem of concretization leads us to the issue of representations that are constantly at work during the perception of the work of art, fulfilling the schema.

"On his own initiative and with his own imagination he 'fills out' various places of indeterminacy..."¹¹, and the choice of these places of indeterminacy and the way in which they are filled out is made unconsciously, in an act of fantasy. The perceiver himself can generate different concretizations of the same work of art, which may result in considerable differences among its successive concretizations.

Concretization refers to perception in the sense that the work of art demands three things from the perceiver (reader): (1) abstinence with regard to filling out places of indeterminacy, (2) agreement with the semantic stratum to which the perceiver must pay attention, agreement to create new connections between aesthetically valent qualities and agreement with the creator's intentions; here one writes about adequate perception and in consequence about right evaluation, (3) concretization may also be dependent upon a given historical epoch, its general cultural atmosphere, or its social environment.

Let us quote Ingarden here: "If the aspects are to be actual for the reader during reading and thus to belong to the stock of the work, then the reader must perform a function analogous to perception, since the objects portrayed in the work by means of the states of affairs are not in effect perceptible"¹². And next: "And this means simply that the reader must productively experience intuitive aspects in the material of vivid representation and thereby bring the portrayed objects to intuitive presence, to representational appearance"¹³.

The perceiver (reader) sees the work of art "in his imagination"¹⁴, he can construct fictitious aspects¹⁵, and, if he is unable to concretize, he perceives only "in a purely signitive fashion"¹⁶. The reader can imagine, represent and finally take advantage of being subjectively conditioned, for example by the degree of his concentration or emotional involvement.

2. Now let us take a closer look at the phases of the aesthetic experience pointed out by Ingarden, because they are of importance for the description of dynamization as a process which is primary in relation to concretization.

The aesthetic experience has three phases here¹⁷:

¹¹ R. Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, p. 53.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 188 ff.

I. Original emotions, aroused by the qualitative endowment of the object of perception – the assumption of the aesthetic attitude.

II. The process of perception of the qualitative structure of the work together with the completion of its schematization, that is a concretization which does or does not lead to the construction of the aesthetic object.

III. Experience of aesthetic values of the produced object in the form of emotional response to those values.

For us the most interesting phase is the first one, in which we can additionally distinguish: (1) passive and transitory perception of qualities, (2) state of being interested in and stimulated by the apprehended quality, (3) a desire to come into closer contact with the work.

This first phase attracts our attention because, as we think, it is a result of previous dynamization. It is connected with the feeling of "desire" in the perceiver's mind and with the desire to have full and intuitive intercourse with the quality. What caused such a state? We think, it is the existence of such a structure in the work of art, which after the opening of the system of the work of art, after dynamization, can be conceived as a schema. The successive phases refer only to contemplation of that which was produced in concretization, but we must stress the fact that it is preceded by the process of dynamization. We may understand this process as basic in relation to the remaining phases of the aesthetic experience discussed by Ingarden. As a result, dynamization would be the condition for the generation of the aesthetic object.

*

We think that the dynamization of the structure of the work of art leads to the transformation of an object such as a work of art, something strange in a sense, not belonging to the mind, to something comprehensible, having a sense, something modelled, schematic, rationalized and perceptible. In consequence, dynamization occurs when the perceiver extorts a comprehensible schema for concretization from the work of art.

Finally, dynamization should be understood to mean a process, which makes it possible for the borders of the system of the work of art to open, and which in effect leads to its cognition. In the latter understanding the process of dynamization can be considered the condition for concretization and interpretation. What belongs to the process of concretization is the activity of the subject's consciousness, while filling out places of indeterminacy, which leads to the generation of something that changes its essential features from "I am a work of art", to "I am the aesthetic object". *Differentia specifica* lies here in the activity of the subject, and the object always remains the same.

We can speak about essential changes of a work of art as a partly isolated system in relation to the work of art before dynamization, when it has potentialities for the opening of the structure, and after dynamization, when the perceiver has at his disposal a recognizable structure, that is a schema, which in turn can be concretized.

We must not identify the process of dynamization with concretization because the former can be called, according to the ontological order, the cause, and the latter – its effect. In this light, dynamization is a process which has its foundation in the structure of the work of art. Concretization refers to places of indeterminacy, but it has its source in the acts of the perceiver's consciousness (intentional acts). For the subject dynamization would be a non-temporal process, whereas concretization takes place in time. Concretization describes the hypothetical filling out of the places of indeterminacy, and dynamization makes such fulfillment possible. Dynamization enables the system of a work of art to open itself (and this is most important to us), and concretization is the filling out of a schema, realized in a particular aesthetic experience; dynamization therefore refers to essential, real changes of features of the work of art as a system, whereas concretization does not refer to them. Dynamization in its essence is neither recognizable, nor identifiable, while concretization is to a certain degree a rational process.

Finally, dynamization would be the condition for a comprehensible reception of the work of art, which is the preparation for concretization, and, in effect, the generation of the aesthetic object.

We should add that the recognition of some works of art, for example those of the avantgarde, becomes an object of controversy, in the light of R. Ingarden's system of aesthetics. *Ready-mades*, *object trouvés* or objects of conceptual art do not possess traditionally accepted artistic values, such as craftsmanship, one will not find in them aesthetic values such as beauty or sadness, one cannot seek deep sense in them or try to concretize them – to do so in the case of conceptual art would even be false. Admittedly, they are true works of art, although it would be difficult to justify this claim in the light of Ingarden's aesthetics. On the other hand these works enter the aesthetic situation, they are "chosen" by the artist – just they and not others.

The structure of all works of art comes through dynamization. However, the opening of "traditional" works of art by the perceiver is much easier because this process is connected with the history of culture and the development of art; this gives them their own place in social perception. The perception of avantgarde works of art often encounters obstacles because they frequently do not fit into the above mentioned categories. Nevertheless, they achieve the status of the work of art, have their own critics, enter the aesthetic situation. We must presume that it happens because of the dynamization of their structure (they are opened by the perceiver) not demanding anything else from the perceiver.